

Status of English Creative Writing in Public and Private Schools: A Comparative Study Based on Gender

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Abstract

The process of creative writing associated with teaching and learning has always been compromised in schools of Punjab, Pakistan. In educational institutions, creative writing plays an important role. Yet, it is ignored in Pakistani English Language Teaching Classrooms. This research project deals with the act of writing creatively, and it was designed to investigate the status of English language flair, especially the creative writing skills of 10th graders. The present research commenced with a literature review; several studies were identified which analyzed different features of creative writing in English Language Teaching Classrooms. A need was felt to be important to observe the status of the four levels of English creative writing, namely descriptive writing, narrative writing, story writing, and functional writing, among the secondary school level students. A sample of 250 students was selected from public and private male and female schools in the Punjab province of Pakistan. Twelve classes of grade 10 both from public and private schools were randomly selected as the sample of the present research. The study's major objectives were to explore the status of the four essential levels of English creative writing in teaching English at the secondary level. Four English creative writing assignments were taken from Cambridge School O-level examinations and were administered to a smaller sample of the students. The achievement tests were organized around these tasks. The writing tests were graded quantitatively by applying SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Science) and with the help of an analytical scoring approach. For inter-rater reliability, the results of English creative writing tests were reviewed and affirmed by the relevant English teachers. The results of the study revealed that the English creative writing skills among secondary school students are dissatisfactory. It was recommended that English teachers use a communicative approach while teaching English language skills in secondary level classrooms. It was also recommended that the examination papers have some unseen tasks to develop the inventive writing proficiency of secondary school students.

Keywords: Creative writing; English language skills; teaching methods; communicative approach

Introduction

Writing is one of the main language skills; it plays an important role in expressing one's ideas, thoughts, opinions, and attitudes. The writing that involves skill and imagination to produce something new

is creative. It is also an expressive art and intellectual activity. It involves the use of the mind for generating new ideas. It needs the involvement of the thinking skill of the individual for composition work. This kind

of writing aims to generate as many thoughts as possible. Those ideas should be creative and original. Even though English is taught as a second language, inventive writing is considered an essential skill in Pakistani educational institutes. During the whole period of school education, students face countless difficulties expressing themselves in simple and easy English. Such activities need the use of reasoning and intellect. According to (Ahmed & Rao, 2012), the process of English creative writing involves four essential phases. The four steps are 'Thinking about ideas, arranging ideas, writing ideas, and modifying ideas'. As a result, thinking and its application are required for writing creatively, even though our students cannot demonstrate creative thinking, and the teaching approach should be altered to address the issue. There is a scarcity of creative writing skills in Pakistan. The majority of students do not employ their critical thinking skills to compose any piece of writing (Muhammad, 2011). The vast majority of students rely on cramming. They are not taught how to write creatively in English. They are unfamiliar with creative writing strategies. They rarely write short tales, articles, and poetry. The major cause of this scenario is a poor teaching style. In this regard, Rahman (2007) went on to say that the approach utilized by instructors in Pakistan is not up to standard. Teachers do not provide adequate direction. There is no such thing as freedom of speech. They employ the Grammar Translation technique. Language and linguistics are not used in English language classes. They take a subject-centered approach rather than a learner-centered one. Because of the poor quality

of English instruction, creative writing abilities are not adequately developed, and the failure rate in English is highest at the secondary level. According to Arifa (2009), the level of English creative writing is higher in a few schools due to greater resources, yet Pakistani students are generally terrified of producing something original. They have been cramming practically all of their studies since initial stages to pass their examinations. They use guidebooks, exam sheets, and ready-made notes to do this. Another barrier to English creative writing is a lack of sufficient direction and practice. According to Rahman (2002), the approach utilized by instructors in Pakistani schools is inadequate. The material is provided to the students in an authoritarian way via cramming. Even in the classroom, there is no freedom to speak. The children pack the information into a chorus. Essays are reproduced directly from the blackboard; any originality in thinking or sincerity in interpretation is penalized in various ways because it deviates from the customary interpretation or knowledge. According to Siddiqui (2007), the creative power of the intellectual mind is not polished adequately in most institutes because of the emphasis on remembering notes and information. According to Arifa (2009), the level of English creative writing is better in a few schools due to better resources. Still, 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 English creative writing. In this regard, Mansoor (2009) stated schools that are dull places. There is a lack of competent and properly trained teachers; these semi-educated educators always appreciate their students cramming 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 the traditional classroom in Pakistan has been highlighted by Siddiqui (2007): it consists of teacher-centered activities. It has been observed many times that the most active participant in the classroom is the teacher; he is supposed to do all the classwork in which he is to give the instructions. The students are passive and silent listeners. It is a well-known fact that writing involves several complex rhetorical and linguistic capabilities. It also requires the writer's full attention and concentration (Aronoff & Rees-Miller, 2007). There are also some teacher related problems, such as teachers' focus on grammar and vocabulary rather than writing skills, lack of constructive feedback and explicit correction of spelling and grammar (Aqeel & Sajid, 2014; Khan, 2011). The current study results will be a supportive source of information for the English teachers and educators about English creative writing aptitude among the students at the secondary level. English language teacher training institutes will use the study's findings to provide suitable pre-service training to prospective secondary English teachers by emphasizing English language teaching methods. Because of the current

status of English creative writing abilities, teacher training institutions may provide training sessions for in-service English language instructors to help them enhance their ways of teaching English creative writing skills. Furthermore, the study's findings will be useful to scholars interested in researching the fields of English language instruction and creative writing skills.

Literature Review

Language is the most effective means of communication, making it necessary for human connection. Many people in today's globalized society speak many languages. Apart from the numerous other languages taught in Pakistan, English is extensively used for personal and professional purposes. In all forms of communication, it is regarded as a lingua franca. Likewise, English enjoys the status of a second language in Pakistan as it is used extensively for many purposes in society. To acquire and use any language effectively and efficiently, it is essential to master four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is used as a medium of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities. Writing is not a natural activity, and it requires specific instructions to learn. Writing is the most difficult talent in the English language. There is a significant relationship between student writing and classroom instructional techniques (despite the importance of writing, English language teachers devote less time to writing practice). Academic success in any part of the world is directly related to the ability to read and write well. All over the world, exams are conducted in written form and assignments, projects, etc. The education system of Pakistan is not unified. Students mainly attend three

types of schools with different languages as medium of instruction; private schools, public schools and religious schools. When compared with other fundamental skills such as listening, speaking and reading, writing is the most difficult skill because it requires writers to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic knowledge, as well as principles of an organization in L2 to be able to produce good writing (Tangpermpoon, 2008). It is indeed a fact that language difficulty increases when writing is not proper. Writing is a key skill in learning the English language as it offers a way of communicating one's thoughts and feelings. Pakistani secondary school students require writing skills for several educational purposes, including writing tasks given by the teachers and taking tests and final examinations (Dar & Khan, 2015). The examination system adds to the problem by encouraging and facilitating knowledge cramming; students can obtain good grades, but the habit of English creative writing dies; examinations can play a significant role if certain items connected to thinking ability for writing creatively are included in the tests. Teachers' attention would eventually be drawn to preparing such tests, with the students reaping the rewards. In this regard, Harmer (2004) stated that the teacher's role is to prepare students for creative writing examinations because teachers are thought to play a significant role in determining what happens in the classroom in terms of what and how teachers teach. Students learn, and they can impact both teaching and learning. Similarly, if instructors believe it is vital to develop the habit of writing creatively, it can improve the status of English creative writing in Pakistani classrooms. According

to Siddiqui, the teacher is revered as an authoritative figure in most Pakistani schools (2007). Teachers maintain strict supervision of students and give grammatical structures, concepts, and regulations. There is no natural or conversational context available to the student in such ELT situations. Instructors ignore creative writing skills and focus on the teacher-centred method due to large class sizes, a lack of resources, unskilled teachers, external assessment bodies, predetermined syllabi, and time constraints. Rahman (2007) also discovered that while students do better in memory-based disciplines, they score poorly in fundamental comprehension and knowledge of any topic. Furthermore, textbook notions do not correspond to the children's cognitive or intellectual abilities. Students have no choice but to cram in this circumstance. Furthermore, the current examination system is predicated on a summative assessment of just knowledge level, not understanding or application. According to Rasool (2009), a long syllabus and a negative attitude from the school administration are other obstacles to developing creative writing. The instructor must deal with the issue of completing the course in line with the school administration's demands and expectations. When there is a period of around 40 minutes during which roll is called, and organized teachings are provided, that is, the course content is presented while creative writing is ignored and set aside since the instructor is the most active participant in the classroom. Students are mute and passive listeners. Students' typical activities include listening to the instructors, taking notes, copying things off the whiteboard, and

being silent throughout the class. This circumstance makes it difficult for kids to recognize their creative abilities. These inborn powers gradually fade away as if they were not employed. The teaching style in Pakistani schools is based on a grammatical approach; the conventional grammar-translation method emphasizes rote memorization of grammatical patterns and structures (Yaqoob & Zubair, 2012). While teaching writing skills, the major problems encountered by the teachers include students' lack of command over grammatical patterns and vocabulary, lack of interest, motivation and less time for writing practice (Almubark, 2016).

Similarly, in the same context Hussain (2009) said that the teacher's academic responsibility is to take a class in the 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 the learning process, kills student talents instead of polishing them. The main responsibility of the teachers' job is to explore, channel and polish the talent of the students, whereas, in Pakistani culture, there is seldom such an opportunity of exposing one's qualities. If it happens, once in a blue moon, it is by mere good luck or by chance. Lack of proper guidance and practice is another hurdle in English 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 a chorus. Essays are copied verbatim from the

blackboard; any originality in thoughts and genuineness of the interpretation is punished in many ways as this deviates from the traditional interpretation or knowledge. In the 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 can secure the good marks, but the habit of English 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 teachers' focus ultimately would be on the preparation for 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 the 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 English creative writing in Pakistani classes if teachers consider it important to build the habit of writing creatively. In most schools in Pakistan, the teacher is revered 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

factors also lead the teachers to ignore creative writing skills and rely on the teacher-centered approach. 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 in the memory-based disciplines, but their performance is very poor in basic comprehension and understanding of any subject. Moreover, the 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 examination system is based on a summative evaluation of only knowledge level rather than 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 to developing creative writing. The teacher is to face the problem of completing the course by the demand and expectations 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. The students do activities commonly are listening to 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. If the ability is not used, it ends automatically. The teaching methodology in Pakistani schools is based on the grammatical approach; the traditional grammar-translation method focuses on the rote-memorization of grammatical patterns and structures. Bajwa (2004) narrated that through this approach, communicative competence is not produced, which is why the Pakistani learners cannot express themselves properly. Most students feel difficulty writing something of their own, according to Harmer (2004), but it is important to build the habit of writing. In this regard, Coombe (2009), believes that the teachers, administrators and the school should be responsible for developing the writing skills among the students. Graham (2003) stated 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 writing skills. Similarly, Khan (2009) observed that the communicative approach might be useful for developing creative writing skills as it combines the functional and structural aspects of the language. In classrooms, more importance is given to putting grammatically correct sentences on paper. In contrast, Fatima and Zubeda (2009) think that writing is best learnt in an interactive and communicative environment.

5. Research Methodology

In this section of the study, the methods and techniques of the research are explained in terms of subjects, data collecting tools, various methodologies of

data analysis and overall general research pattern. For analyzing the quantitative data, SPSS was applied to provide comprehensive results of the acquired data. This study involved a survey to observe the status of English creative writing skills. There were twelve sections of 10th class students involved in the study. The creative writing test comprised the four levels of English creative writing skills, namely descriptive writing, narrative writing, story writing, and functional writing. The scoring rubrics were used to examine the compositions written by the research participants quantitatively. Factors namely, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, fluency, and form were also used to evaluate writing skills. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results were mean scores for each sub-skill specifically and an overall mean score for creative writing talent. The writing tests were graded quantitatively by applying SPSS (Statistical Program for social science) and with the help of an analytical scoring approach. For inter-rater reliability, the results of the English creative writing examinations were reviewed and affirmed by the relevant English teachers. Due to time and financial constraints, the study was confined to the 10th graders of girls and boys high schools of district Multan, Punjab. This research only looked at the issue of the English language. The four stages of English creative writing were determined, namely descriptive writing, narrative writing, functional writing, and tale writing.

6. Sample and Population

The purpose of sampling is to collect information about the population with a specific goal of drawing some conclusions. The simple random technique was used for

the selection of the research samples. Random sampling meets the assumptions of various statistical procedures. The government male and female high schools of district Multan were the populations of the present research, but due to time and financial constraints, only twelve government high schools were preferred. The participating schools and students were chosen with the proper school administrators' permission and teachers' willingness to give up their classes for the test. Based on the said criteria, the research participants were selected as a study sample. A total of 250 students in grade 10 participated in this study as research participants. There were 100 girls and 150 boys in the study. These students were chosen from twelve male and female public and private High Schools. One section from each campus was selected respectively.

7. Research Instruments

Four tasks were modified and adapted from the former O-level English examination papers administered by the School of Cambridge. The first assignment was to evaluate descriptive writing abilities. The second assignment was to evaluate narrative writing abilities. The final assignment was evaluating the ability to write stories. The fourth assignment was to evaluate functional writing abilities. The experts' view was confirmed before conducting these task items, which were altered and incorporated into the test for creative writing skills. Faculty members from the Institute of Education and Research University of Punjab in Lahore's Department of English Language Teaching and Linguistics were the experts. The Punjab University Laboratory High School in Lahore conducted the test. The test was

conducted for secondary level students of public and private schools in Multan, Punjab. These students were taught the Punjab Textbook Board's Lahore syllabus. The information was gathered and evaluated using Hughes' approach of 'analytic scoring,' which he describes in his book 'Testing for Language Teachers.' The scoring rubrics were used to examine the tests. The reliability coefficients were obtained independently for the boys and girls in a 'Reliability Analysis.' Cronbach's Alpha stayed at 0.965 in the case of males and 0.961 in the case of girls. The test was given to the sample once the appropriate amendments were made.

8. Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the research data. This strategy is classified as descriptive research. When we look at the research statistics, we can see that girls have higher mean scores in creative writing skills than the boys, and the students in private schools have better creative writing skills than the students in public schools. There are four types of creative writing: descriptive writing, narrative writing, tale writing, and functional writing. Therefore, the data of the current was represented in accordance with these writing skills.

Table 1: Statistical analysis of English creative writing between public and private students

Writing tasks	Public male students		Private male students		Public female students		Private female students	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Descriptive Writing	6.42	3.54	8.07	3.36	7.97	2.82	10.46	3.80
Narrative Writing	6.30	3.82	9.42	3.64	7.95	2.72	9.07	3.70
Story Writing	4.18	3.14	5.04	3.70	3.72	3.10	8.04	3.36
Functional Writing	0.82	2.62	4.42	3.82	3.64	3.58	5.46	3.64
Overall(Creative Writing)	17.72	13.12	26.25	14.52	23.28	12.22	33.03	14.5
	N=75		N=75		N=50		N=50	

Table.2. Comparative analysis of rural and urban area students regarding the condition of creative writing skills

Sample schools	Urban area schools			Rural area schools		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Females schools	15.96	9.37	50	11.18	12.37	50

Male schools	13.61	7.45	75	9.93	10.32	75
Total	29.57	16.82	125	21.11	22.69	125

9. Findings of Table 1 and 2

Mean scores of overall and sub-constructs of English creative writing show that students of private schools perform better (mean score $M=26.25.72$, ($F 33.03$) as compared to public schools M (mean score 17.72) and $F (23.28)$. Results of Table 1 indicate that the status of creative writing is much better in private schools than in public schools. The higher level of SD reflects greater individual differences among students. These differences are equally present in both streams of schools. The boys of one public school section perform slightly better in narrative writing only than private students. The data reflects that government schools contribute more in numbers but lesser to the quality of English creative writing for boys and girls in Punjab. Gender wise comparison of students from the city shows that girls are performing better than boys (mean score = 33.3 & mean score = 26.25). Girls from Urban areas perform better than boys in the same city ($SD,14.05$) and ($SD,13.12$). 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. There is a statistically significant difference in the overall scores of students. Urdu and Punjabi speaking majority of area, and the students from saraiki speak majority. There are greater individual differences among the students of the Urban area with a mean score (29.57 and Rural area (mean score 22.69). A similar overall number of students are studying in a similar type of schools, i.e. more students are studying in government schools and smaller in private schools.

Table. 3: Comparative analysis of creative writing difficulties on the basis of gender

Writing factors	Gender	N	Mean	Df	t-v
Vocabulary	Male	150	15.48	241	-6.011*
	Female	100	12.99		
L1 Interference	Male	150	11.91	241	-5.229*
	Female	100	9.58		
Spelling	Male	150	11.98	241	-5.492*
	Female	100	13.58		

Grammar	Male	150	16.80	241	-6.414*
	Female	100	11.48		
Punctuation	Male	150	11.00	241	-3.209*
	Female	100	9.85		

Results of table 3 indicate the comparison of male and female students' creative writing difficulties faced in the English language. It shows that t-values are significant at a .05 level of significance. Further, the mean value for writing difficulties of male students (15.48) is greater than the mean value of female students (12.99) on the difficulties relating to vocabulary. It shows a significant difference in the difficulties of vocabulary faced by male and female students while writing English compositions. It is, therefore, can be concluded that male students are facing more difficulties in English vocabulary than female students. It is also clear that the mean value for male students (11.91) is greater than the mean value for female students (9.98) in case of problems faced due to first language interference. It is, therefore can be concluded that male students encounter more problems than female colleagues in L1 interference. The analysis of spelling difficulties reveals that female (9.58) students are facing more problems in spelling than male students (11.98). The difference in mean values for male and female students in the case of grammar, rhetorical and punctuation problems indicates that females face more problems than male students of higher secondary school level. It can be inferred from the analysis that male students are facing more diffic

ulties in writing English as compared to female students at secondary level in public and private schools.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Pakistan's existing educational system does not encourage students to write creatively. The status of English creative writing skills of secondary level students in public and private schools is not satisfactory. One explanation for this is a large number of students in each class. When the findings were examined by class size, it was shown that students in smaller classrooms progressed better. Overall, girls did better in the tests of creative writing skills in English. The total scores of students from Urban speaking majority areas and students from rural areas differ statistically significantly. The status of English creative writing may differ in different parts of Pakistan, so the researchers believe that the study is necessary to examine the status of English creative writing skills among secondary school students in the English language and compare it to various demographic variables. As a result, the ultimate purpose of this study was to look at the differences and similarities in students' capacity to write creatively in English in saraiki and Punjabi-speaking communities in rural and urban areas. It has been observed that most Urban and Rural area students rely on cramming to pass their exams. Because the

test procedure is equal in both regions and the students' abilities are comparable. If a discrepancy is discovered, it might result from differing teaching approaches. Students in both urban and rural area schools seldom compose any English creative writing work. The rote-learning approach is encouraged and promoted by the existing examination system. The preparation of such tests is the primary emphasis of teachers in the classroom. The learners' capacity to write creatively is not effectively fostered in this environment. The purpose of this study was to assess the status of students' English creative writing skills at secondary school level. Individual disparities are more pronounced among students from the Saraiki-speaking majority areas in Multan district. Overall, many children attend similar types of schools, with more students attending public schools and fewer attending private schools. The availability of better teachers, instructional methodologies, and the freedom to pick better schools are the main reasons in Punjab. Urban area students fare higher on this test due to the area's general environment and socioeconomic characteristics. Because English may be observed in the atmosphere of Multan city, students from urban areas appear to be more used to the language. Students are also not given enough opportunities to create something new, and creative writing is often discouraged; thus when functional writing was evaluated, it was found to be in the worst possible state. To conclude, there was no statistically significant difference found in the performances of girls and boys and in urban and rural area schools of district Multan, Punjab. In this regard

d, only the teachers and social environment can make a real difference.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the data analysis, findings, and The following recommendations were made based on the data analysis, findings, and conclusions:

- Teachers should give proper feedback on the writing tasks as the students learn more if they receive more feedback.
- Teaching style affects students' learning and test performance; current teaching methods such as the communicative approach can be employed in place of traditional methods in English Language Teaching, especially creative writing skills in classrooms.
- It is suggested that the number of students in a class is reduced, particularly in public secondary schools.
- It is also suggested that in the final examinations, certain additional creative activities linked to creative writing skills should be included.
- Cultural differences among the cities of Punjab may be reduced through students' interaction with one another. For this purpose, study tours may be arranged.
- The social environment of the school area influences students' creative learning. Therefore, the school's walls should be adorned with English quotations and learning material.
- Teachers should encourage students to write down and convey their fresh ideas to their classmates.

- Different teaching strategies should be practiced to cope with the creative writing challenges at the school level.

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