



ENHANCING STUDENTS' CREATIVE WRITING SKILLS: AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract: This research aimed to improve written expression (composition) skills of 5th grade students of an elite private school. The research was designed under the paradigm of action research. A total sample of 39 students' from the same grade was chosen for the study. The baseline assessment was carried out to explore the pre-intervention writing skill score of the students prior to the intervention cycle one. Later, intervention and writing skill support strategies were carried out for eight weeks. In the end, post-test was carried out to explore the differences occurred in the writing score of the students as a post intervention effect. The findings obtained from the quantitative data showed the improvement in the written expression skills of the students. It was observed that through taking the above mentioned measures, the teachers can help students improve their writing skills.

Key words: creative writing skills, giftedness, creativity, improving writing skills, composition writing

1. Introduction

Language is considered is one of the most substantial elements of education and literacy. Its efficiency and commands come with the mastery in receive and productive skills. Conventionally and even today in the eastern world productive skills of language are given significance of which writing is the most preferred outcome expected of students. This standing is justified in the school where the students are required to master good writing compositions.

2. Literature Review

In the language learning field, the researchers have shown interest in the area pertaining to writing composition. Richards (1990) found that the students' interaction helps in developing the cognitive skills that involves generating ideas. Results from various language studies have shown that the teacher who emphasizes and focuses on the writing skills on the study can bring about a change. The students become efficient at generating and organizing creative ideas as a result. The most adopted teaching model that helps in developing writing skills in the balanced literacy approach is the method of writing process (Zampardo, 2008).

Being an ability, writing can be improved by learning through repetition. If the teachers would be aware of the writing process, this would help in teaching appropriate strategies and that would also improve the writing abilities of students in education environment (Oberman and Kapka, 2001). Accordingly, studies conducted in Karachi at primary level shared the view that young students are lack writing skills and the teachers don't seem to using a proper writing process too. Therefore, this study aimed at describing the difficulties pertaining to composition writing and strategies to develop writing abilities of the students to write creatively.

Mainly, there are five stages of writing process, any stage can be skipped and returned to later. These are: Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Editing and Publishing. Learning the writing process is important for the students as it enables students to express their thoughts, knowledge and feelings efficiently. The more the students learn the writing process, the more they will be able to express themselves efficiently (Casewell, 2008; Ozbell, 2006 & Smith, 2005).

According to Brookes and Marshall (2004) imagination and originality are valued more than the standardization of thought and truthfulness while characterising creative writing. While assessing the student for creative writing, they are given space to fabricate the content. The main purpose is always to evaluate their creative writing and cognitive skills. In order for the students to write creatively, it is essential that their thoughts should not be restricted in any way (Sharples, 1996). Planning, organization and discovery of thought are prerequisites for creative writing. If the students are restrained they will not be able to maintain the originality of their work and the creativity might be compromised as well (Reichards, 1990)

The most appropriate variety on study is narration, speaking in terms of creative writing (Basaran, 2007). He further elaborates that this genre encompasses the factual and fictional text created by the students. In order to motivate the students to engage in creative writing exercises the facilitator should provide sufficient opportunities to the students to involve themselves in high order thinking and a regular habit of reading (Kucuk, 2007).

Recently, it has been observed that researchers in language learning area are intensely interested in the area of learning strategies. According to Bajarano et al (1997), small group helps the students to devise their own learning strategies. Even after this point had been established, a small number of researchers looked into the effectiveness of these learning strategies- one of which was brain storming- in the field of teaching creative skills such as writing (Zagreb 1987).

Tompkins (2004) says that writing process resembles a road map, through this the students, actions and thoughts can be monitored right from the beginning till the end. He further says that a stage from this process can be skipped and reached to later on but cannot be skipped altogether. In order to make the students think creatively, they should be given opportunity to see world through windows and observe it and they can write creatively without any fear.

All the educational schools place great importance on writing. Whilst teaching, the teachers often find that some students are able to articulate their thoughts quite well while the others are not. This is mainly because writing is a skill that some students are more proficient in than others. As we all know, writing is an important skill especially in settings where English is taught as a foreign language. In classes where students are required to master certain genres of writing, the importance of writing as a skill is highlighted (Hun & O'Donnell, 1970).

It becomes vital for the teachers in the educational settings to pay concentration on the growing needs of the students, their parents' expectations from their children to write in English and the requirement of the schools. Hence, this study was established with an aim of enhancing the creative writing skills.

3. Methodology

The desired and suitable research design for this research was Action Research as the subject for this research was the creative writing skills of grade five students after observing that the students' performance and result was not as expected.

Design

The researchers determined action research for this study. During the research, interventions were made consistently. These interventions included the use of flash cards for reinforcing the vocabulary of the students. Furthermore, the students were given a list of words on a regular basis through which they were able to learn more words. The students were also provided with the opportunities to use the new words which they had learned.

Sampling

A sample of 39 students was selected from the population of four sections of grade five of two elite private schools. The age group of these students varied from 9-11. Though the students were able to talk fluently in proper English, but they were not able to write according to the required standards of both the schools. Since the performance of the students was measurable, pre test and post test were conducted in the classrooms.

Measures

Learning achievement test for English language composition was designed to collect the data about students' baseline status of composition proficiency and another similar genre paper was designed to explore the impact of intervention on the students, which was given at the end of the cycle completion as a post-test. Composition test consisted of "A traffic accident" for pre-test. Whereby, for the post-test composition exercise consisted of "An unforgettable Experience."

Procedure

Initially, situational analysis was carried out, which was based on the problems faced by the two teachers. The teachers planned to work on the incompetent writing skills of their students. Later, the research outline was shown to the management of both schools, the research was conducted after their consent. Furthermore, a few strategies were laid down as intervention which consisted various creative writing exercises, providing list of vocabulary, having a library in the class, updating the class word bank, maintaining a vocabulary journal and recommending students to use dictionary and thesaurus frequently. Then, the material required was listed down. The intervention was being followed during the research and a writing composition pre-test was taken too, which included a list of vocabulary, so that the students could write better compositions. The pre-test identified the current level of writing skills of the students. After a month, a post-test was taken to see what changes had taken place in the writing skills of the students. When the scores of these two tests were compared, the difference was visible. A few students had improved their writing skills; those who did not improve even after interventions were weak and could only work within their capability.

Data Analysis

The data collected by the two teachers in two different sections was analysed by T-test, as the scores were compared so that the difference could be seen. Another approach was descriptive statistics, which was used to find out the gender ratio. There were 18 girls and 22 boys.

4. Results and Discussion

The data analysis of pre test and post test revealed that the children mostly improved their vocabulary as the difference between the scores of pre and post tests was of 38%. Improvement was shown in all areas, in some not as significant as others. In spellings and creativity of the students, the grand total of the post test increased by 6% each, the text organized was upgraded by 26% marks whereas grammar structure increased by 24%. The overall improvement after the intervention was 13% as compared to pre-test. This was because of the reason that the teacher had focused on a regular intervention and children when given vocabulary are seem to have shown prominent progress (Nakata, 2006).

Table 1. Comparative Score Chart of Students Vocabulary Comprehension Tests

Criteria	Pre Test	Post Test	Δ	%
Spelling and Punctuation	49	51	2	6
Vocabulary	43	56	13	38
Organization and coherence	48	57	9	26
Grammar and structures	39	47	8	24
Content Quality and Creativity	52	54	2	6

As the data revealed 29 students have shown improvement which is 75% of the total number of students. The greatest improvement was shown in the areas of vocabulary and grammar and structures, this was due to the reason that a lot of reinforcements of new words were done. Children were made aware of the correct use of the words that were introduced by the teachers on regular basis. As a special interest was shown by the teachers in creative writing, the students were much motivated by it and tried to put in their extra efforts as well. The rules for sentence structure such as the subject, object and verb agreement were also verbally taught to the class which contributed to the better results in the area of general English grammar and the text structure of the students (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Table 2. Consolidated Comparative Chart of Students Vocabulary Comprehension Scores

Number of Students	Pre Test (Σ) Total	Post Test (Σ) Total	Δ
39	231	265	34

5. Conclusion

As can be seen from the findings, there has been a difference noted in the participants of the Action Research. The intervention has been proved to be fruitful where as reflection is required for those who did not progress. The intervention proved to bring out significant improvement in enhancing the composition writing skills of the students. The research findings can be beneficial for the other researchers as well, especially those who face issues pertaining to EFL. This research also provides guidelines to the teachers as to which pedagogies should they adopt to improve their students' creative writing skills. It would be enjoyable and beneficial for those teachers who have direct contact with the students and they would be excited to witness a change. According to the empirical observations of the action research, the following might be suggested: every stage of the writing process should be studied and demonstrated by both, teachers and the students in order to develop the writing abilities (Calkins, 1986; Mak & Conium, 2008 & Walker et al, 2005).

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