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TEACHING OF CREATIVE WRITING IN PAKISTANI SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The paper discusses creative writing and its pedagogy in a Pakistani classroom. The quantitative and qualitative data collected from the postgraduate students of a large public sector university— who are also in-service school teachers – determines that English teachers in Pakistan do not teach to develop the creative writing of pupils. The findings confirm that English teachers are confused about strategies required for rousing learners' interest in creative writing. The teachers make their students memorise compositions from the textbooks to be reproduced in class. English teachers must be interested and trained to participate in activities that are vital for boosting creative writing in schools.

Keywords: Creative writing, teaching creative writing, textbooks.

INTRODUCTION

It is important to know the significance of creative writing in the western educational setting for appraisal of the situation in a Pakistani classroom. There are many perceptions associated with creative writing as it is an original composition, expressive art and intellectual profession (Evernett, 2005). The writers are involved in their imaginative world having a dialogue with their 'writerly' self (O'Rourke, 2005, p. 174). Therefore, in an educational scheme, there must be support for the dreams and visualisations of youth (Irfan, 2012). It should be remembered that creative writing cultivates where there is an organised plan to promote it (Robinson, 2001, p. 12). The primary focus of authentic writers is on expressing, communicating or some exploration of an idea or issue (Arnold, 1991, p. 9).

Bishop and Ostrom (1994), Moxley (1989), and Meyers (1996) acknowledged the emergence of creative writing as an academic pursuit. It is emphasised that teachers should stimulate the creativity of their students to share their ideas using language. The creative process of writing develops their literacy and critical thinking skills (Fay, 2007; Griva, 2007). The learners exhibit 'energy, vitality and authenticity which reflect their creative engagement' (Grainger, *et al.*, 2005, p. 7). Leahy (2005) perceives that the maturity and development of writing programmes lead to re-thinking of its pedagogy. Creative writing classrooms are articulating current practices and are suggesting new possibilities. The expertise of the teacher or of the students, in various ways is striving to accomplish things, as a set of mutually beneficial or agreed-upon guidelines for fostering success, as a set of evaluation criteria, as seemingly inherent forces in writing and teaching, and even as authorship itself. Ritter and Vanderslice (2007) also assert that creative writing's pedagogy is based on undocumented and naïve experience. The editors and authors examine this lore and argue for reframing the discipline and most importantly its pedagogy in relation to intellect rather than ego.

Bishop (2003, p. 234) argues that students 'should approach composition classes and creative writing classes in pretty similar ways. Overall, both types of classrooms need to encourage and reward risk taking and experimentation. As creative writing continues to define itself as a rigorous, academic discipline, teachers will need to take into account the technological and demographic changes taking place (Taylor, 2005, p. 104).

Carey (2005, p. 52) maintains that the evaluation of works of art is purely subjective and thus cannot be codified. Atkinson (2000/2001, p. 26) views that 'criteria for creative writing should be no more difficult to ascertain than for any other subject area, creative or not'. Harper (2003, p. 1) describes that more important is 'creative practice and an understanding of creative practice'. However, Newman (2007) discusses that a good assessment pattern can add variety to student's experience and will also allow him/her to recognise achievements, and monitor development as a writer. He further suggests that tutors need to establish criteria to refer to students' written and oral feedback. In addition, plagiarism should be made explicit in the student handbook.

The Place of Creative Writing in Pakistan

Pakistani students and teachers are perplexed about the term 'creative writing' as conventionally, in Pakistan, creative writing was known as literature including the variety of its genres; therefore, tensions arise in classroom (Irfan, 2012). The problems for English teachers are curriculum, examination, inefficient teachers, methods and techniques (Siddiqui, 2007). Irfan (2012) highlights that in Pakistan; it is really a professional challenge to support students to embark on an imaginative flight. The students need to listen, plan, and plunge into the unknown realm to compose a poem or a narrative composition. She further asserts that in Pakistani schools, teaching of creative writing takes place through traditional approaches, such as, Grammar Translation Method that requires replication and asking for words thus encouraging pupils to become dependent on the teacher. The consequences are that these traditional approaches impede pupils' inclination to write themselves, hence, fail to provide students sense of the communicative uses of writing. She asserts:

'Pakistani classrooms are teacher-centred but in order to captivate learners' attention, the teacher should adopt a learner-centred focus and forget his authoritative role so the usual power relations in the class are altered and the students take initiative to create something new. Above all, creativity is not an individual performance. It is an outcome of our interaction with other people. It can be called a cultural process. It involves risk taking and experimentation' (Irfan, 2012, p. 63).

Regarding assessment of creative writing, Irfan (2011 p. 116) notes that:

'Board Examination's prominent flaw is its failure to measure students' creativity. Furthermore, Board Examination lacks some qualities which should be in a good test such as construct validity, reliability, authenticity, interactiveness, impact and practicality' (Irfan, 2011 p. 116).

Thus, the dynamics of a Pakistani classroom should be changed from passive to active learners who are inquisitive to unravel things rather than asking only technical questions (Shamim & Qureshi, 2009, p. 2).

RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher collected data from a large public sector Teacher Education University located in Lahore, Pakistan. She used the questionnaire and the focus group interview. The participants were in-service English teachers and were also doing Masters in English language and literature. The questionnaire was filled in by 70 teachers and focus interview of six participants was audio recorded. These teachers expressed their views about creative writing and teaching creative writing (see Appendix A).

FINDINGS

The findings show English teachers' perceptions of creative writing and teaching of creative writing and their views about approaches to writing and feedback.

Participants' Profile

The evidence manifests that 37 female (53%) and 33 male (47%) English teachers had responded to research questions (see Figure A.1). Most of the participants' age ranges between 30-35 years.

Participants' Perceptions of Creative Writing

It is interesting to read the respondents' perceptions of creative writing. A teacher reports that *'creative writing is an original outcome'*. Others perceive that it *'leads to novelty of ideas'* and *'involves imagination'*. A respondent views that it deals with *'social problems'*. Significantly, it is also reported that creative writing is *'drama, poetry and novel'*. Hence, a question arises; is literature used as a model for teaching creative writing in classroom? However, these teachers offer some practical and coherent explanations of creative writing which illustrate that they appreciate the purpose of creative writing genuinely and would like to develop it in classroom.

Teachers' Own Interest in Teaching Creative Writing

The participants' perceptions about teaching creative writing are: *'pupils also learn different skills'*, *'it helps the students to think differently'*, *'gives students opportunity to discuss social problems'*, *'it is the real purpose of learning English'*. The findings represented in Figure A.2 show that more female teachers (41%) have tendency to express themselves creatively in writing as compared to male teachers as only 14% are interested in creative writing. It is undoubtedly significant for teachers from both streams to work imaginatively and creatively on their own and pupils' writings.

Choosing Topics for Practice of Creative Writing

The evidence supports that English teachers select topics for practicing compositions from text books as *'topics from textbooks are selected for classroom practice'*. In fact, they encourage pupils to cram essays, stories and letters to obtain satisfactory marks in external examinations. The findings show that creative writing is not practised in classroom as it should be. Moreover, uninteresting topics do not motivate pupils to write creatively. The evidence indicates that creative writing can make *'learning the language interesting'*.

Teaching Approaches to Develop Creative Writing

The participants report that they use various classroom approaches to teach creative writing (see Figure A.5) but their perceptions discover that they are confused about strategies required in arousing learners' interest in creative writing. It is evident from qualitative data that these teachers have adequate knowhow about techniques, such as, discussion method and brainstorming as they comment: *'I use discussion method'* and *'I build up the interest of my students in the topic by using brainstorming'*. However, these teachers have knowledge of modern pedagogy because they are enrolled in Masters in English language and literature but it is noted that neither in questionnaire nor in focus group interview they perceive other tactics such as genre approach which could be used for practising creative writing in classroom. It is important to mention that nobody suggests that creative writing needs audience, purpose and style.

Teachers' Views about Feedback on Writing

The evidence derived from focus group participants is: *'I correct some mistakes of spelling and grammar'* and *'I write suggestions for improvement'*. It is explicit that teachers correct students' mistakes instead of responding to what they have written and encouraging them to develop this. Moreover, they do not comment that peer feedback is also an essential aspect of pedagogy and considered fundamental for refining the writing skills.

CONCLUSION

It is discovered from research findings that English teachers have their own unique perceptions of creative writing. They perceive that creative writing consists of originality, imagination, and novelty of ideas. Their responses show creative writing is artistic and also involves free thinking. But, none uses words like experimentation, risk taking, problem solving and intuition which are used for creative writing. Moreover, it is reported that neither teachers nor students have freedom to decide

upon the topics for creative writing. The topics are suggested in the prescribed textbooks. As far as, teaching of creative writing is concerned, the teacher directly or indirectly dictates the form. Most of the writing is carried out in the form of exercises which are assigned in the textbooks. Finally, the teacher assesses the learners' works as the finished products. It is deduced from focus group interview that English teachers prefer to teach creative writing using brainstorming and discussion techniques. However, none suggests approaches to teaching, such as the genre approach to develop creative writing.

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APPENDIX A

Findings from the Questionnaire

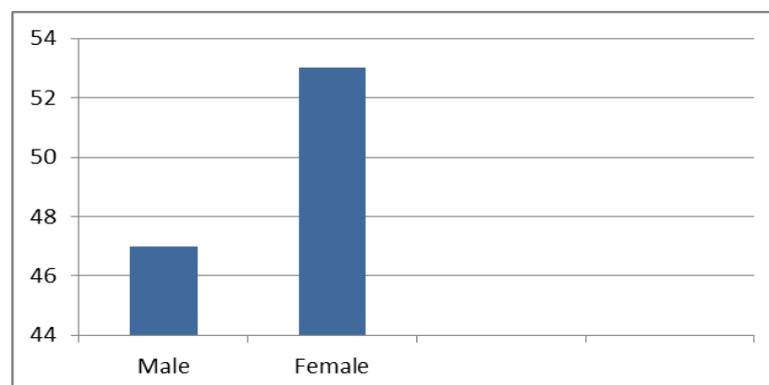


Figure A.1. Distribution of participants.

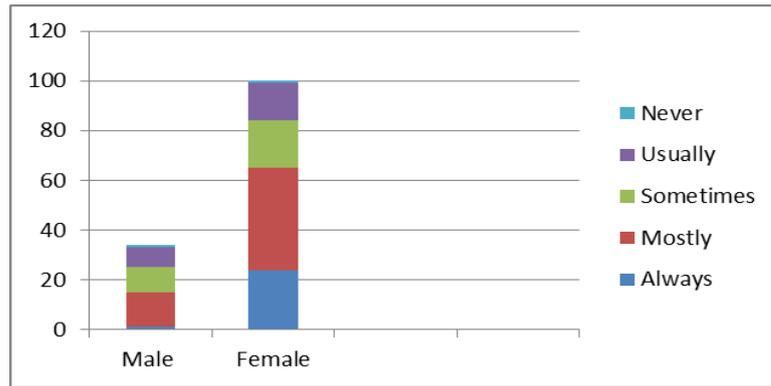


Figure A.2. Teachers' own interest in creative writing.

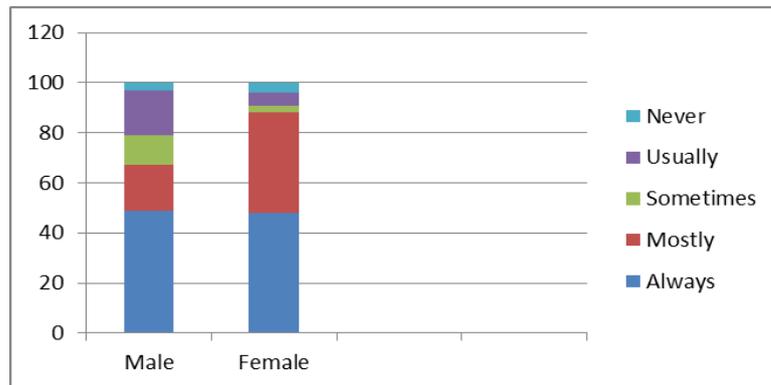


Figure A.3. Selection of topics from textbooks.

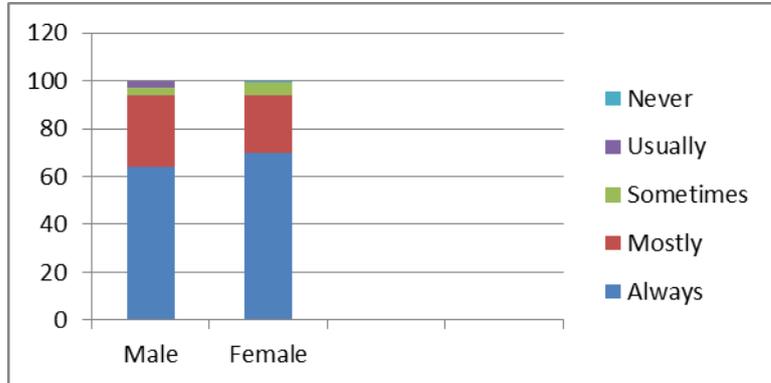


Figure A.4. Motivation for learning creative writing.

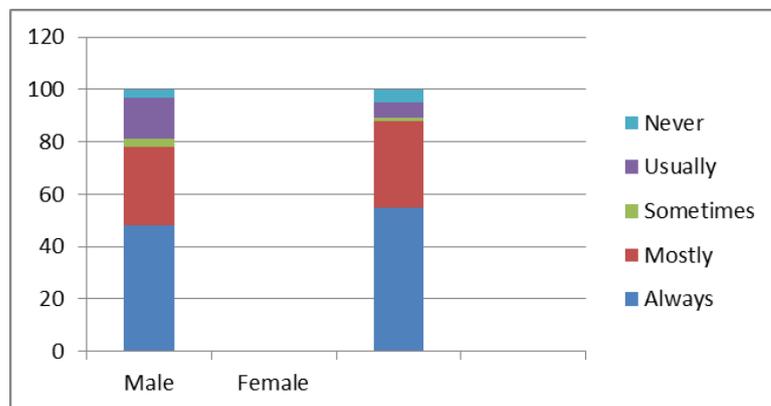


Figure A.5. Using techniques for teaching creative writing.