

## Teaching English through extensive reading and its impact upon the writing proficiency skills of ESL learners

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### Abstract

Creative writing is an approach of writing which has become more recognizable in modern era. The primary purpose of this study was to find out the effectiveness of teaching short stories on the improvement of creative writing skills of ESL learners. The tools used in this research for data collection were checklist, test and questionnaire. Checklist was used as pre-treatment evaluation tool to access learners' awareness and extensive reading habits. During treatment phase, two tests were administered to compare the difference of the results in the improvement of creative writing between control and experimental group. Furthermore, questionnaire was developed and administered among the experimental group students for the sake of manipulation check. Paired sample T-Test was used to compare the achievements of learners in Pre-Test and Post-Test. It was observed that experimental group showed better grades and higher motivation level when compared to the participants of control group. Findings reveal that teaching English through short stories put positive and encouraging impact not only on their writing grades but on the interest and motivation level of the learners as well.

**Keywords:** extensive reading, creative writing skills, ESL teaching, language learners' motivation

### 1. Introduction

Extensive reading is essential to develop the creativity of the learners to make them better in creative writing. Reading and writing has a close relationship which is elaborated by Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000, p 41) <sup>[1]</sup> in four types of shared knowledge used by the writer and reader: 'meta knowledge', (to know about goals and function of writing and reading) 'domain knowledge' (knowledge about substance and content) 'knowledge about universal attributes' (knowledge about words, grammar and rules for construction of sentences) and 'procedural knowledge and skill to negotiate' (questioning, predicting and recalling and to find analogies).

There are many types of writing and a writer's style is a reflection of ideas and through which a writer persuades his readers in different ways. Creative writing technique was introduced by University of Iowa in 1920. Creativity can be defined, as an act of turning new ideas and thoughts into reality. It is an artistic reflection of words in a written form artistically and creatively. Creative writing is, when a writer constructs something with new ideas, expression and thoughts for his audience and reader consider himself in a real life. Creative writing can be fiction or nonfiction which could be in form of novel, epics, short stories, poems, scripts, stages and plays. The National Association of Writers in Education (UK) defines creative writing which is further quoted, Bennett, *et al.* (2008) <sup>[1]</sup>, states about Creative Writing that it is a process of reflection and production in which study of writing (including fiction, drama, poetry and creative non-fiction) and its context are present. Writing does not mean that it should only be a printed material and books but also oral and recorded outputs, scripted

and unscripted performances and mixture of different items like digital, electronics and other new media.

The current study was significant to investigate the benefits of developing extensive reading habits among English language learners. However, the study was made delimited to observe its utility upon creative writing skills of learners. Most often, learners are found less interested and demotivated towards reading intensively and extensively. Similarly, reading being considered as passive skill is mostly given less importance in English language class. ESL learners were taught English through extensive material i.e. short story books in treatment phase. The results of experimental group were compared with the results of control group who were taught English through traditional way of teaching.

### 2. Literature Review

Writing skills is used to construct the idea and it helps to communicate the information to the reader. The certain subject topic or idea is addressed in such a way that it creates an impact on the reader. The use of writing in different forms is a great skill which creates a genre that is helpful for academic environment. A number of theories, discussions and researches have been done in this particular subject of creative writing in different areas. Extensive reading was first introduced by Michael West and Harold Palmer, after a pilot study in India (Loh, 2009) defined reading as large quantities of essay language materials for comprehension without performing any tasks after reading. In this specific type of teaching strategy, students are encouraged to read a material in given time for pleasure at their own level and without any pressure.

Furthermore, according to Hu and Nation (2000) <sup>[8]</sup> reading is a chance for learning through meaning focused, vocabulary learning and fluency can be developed through extensive reading. Extensive reading is a way to learn new vocabularies of target language and get knowledge about the use of known words. Extensive reading provides learners with vocabulary through meaning focused input and allows them to enhance and develop fluency with known vocabulary. Bamford and Day (2004) <sup>[4]</sup> concluded that when learners are exposed to the extensive reading, their attitude, their interest and their eagerness changed. Students change their attitude towards the process of language due to their extensive reading and automatically they become proficient and fluent. Extensive reading cultivates an encouraging attitude, due to which a learner can engage himself in reading. Benettayeb (2010) <sup>[2]</sup> declared that Extensive reading is an active process in which learners are involved in understanding the meanings, interpreting and digging out the information which is a fine approach to get in touch with English without any assistance and out of the class. He further elaborated that Extensive reading solves the difficulties associated with the knowledge of vocabulary.

Creativity is a psychological feature. Creative writing can be fiction or nonfiction which could be in form of novel, epics, short stories, poems, scripts, stages and plays. Hyland (2002) <sup>[9]</sup> gives reason that creative writing can be seen as any writing strategy or genre, it may be fiction or non-fiction that can be outside of everyday academic. Creative writing is a writing of aesthetic rather than instrumental or pragmatic. For a good writing one must have a command over language. As Crystal (1998) <sup>[5]</sup> states "Reading and writing do not have to be a prison house. Release is possible and maybe language play can provide the key". Moreover, Brookhart (2010) <sup>[3]</sup> thinks about the creative student's primary characteristics, as those who set things in unique ways, use more original imagination to make points, develop more novel stuff, and discover something wondrous by observing ordinary things.

### 2.1 Principles of Creative Writing

To become an expert writer it is compulsory to be expert reader. In creative writing classes students should know about the essential techniques of how to give literary expression to creative writing, including aesthetics, genres and narrative strategies. Creative writers should become more self-critical, self-aware and self-conscious. The student should know how to revise; as important as learning how to write is the ability to rewrite and evaluate. Students should be aware of this thing and they must realize it that creative writing is never simply imaginative or descriptive rather it involves themes, ideas arguments and question.

Use of figurative language is one of the valid characteristics of creative writing. Figurative language adds something additional measurement to writing, giving richness and depth to a simple writing (Giroux, & Williston, 1974, p. 10). These figures of speech enhance the creativity of the writer and sensory comprehension of the reader. The purpose of figurative language is that reader must perceive and visualize about the author's saying. As far the structure of short stories is concerned, figurative devices like metaphor and simile are used to give some particular effect. Either it is fiction or nonfiction, if you want to get the attention of the readers you have to be fully aware of how to use figurative language in your writing.

It is used so that the reader should think and compare the things. Elder, (2004) <sup>[6]</sup> writes that people are unaware of this fact that they are using figurative expression so frequently from their daily life. "The year roll by" or another idea comes is "Boil with anger" (ibid, p.294). Figurative language means to make readers aware of the words which are not normally used, it makes writing different so that people may imagine and think about the difference. However, the use of figurative language of metaphor is used either by experienced or inexperienced writers. Metaphor is more used by experienced writers to express their feelings.

### 2.2 Difficulties in Creative Writing

Students may come across a lot many difficulties in developing creative writing skills. Some difficulties are mentioned as follows:

#### 2.2.1 Appropriate Vocabulary

Creative writing students have less vocabulary, so usually students repeat the same words, which is not good for creative writing, we can say that limited vocabulary create hindrance in creativity. Pardede (2012) <sup>[17]</sup> clarifies this point by saying that due to lack of appropriate vocabulary students thoughts remain voiceless.

#### 2.2.2 Use of Punctuation

The use of punctuation in writing is to give different impressions as well as to point out the natural pauses in a writing to give clearer picture of a scene Students could not use it properly to explain the meaning of a sentences. It is an artistic expression which is not commonly used. Punctuation is music of language which brings out the best if used in proper way. With the punctuation approach you give a new possible world of potential to your creativity that allows you to write and think in a new way.

#### 2.2.3 Organize Ideas and Thoughts

Students need to generate new ideas and then, how to communicate them in an organized way on a piece of paper. The problem is that they don't plan for it and start writing. Generally students do not think what they want to write and when they jump up in writing, they are slow and take a time. So, it is necessary that students should be taught to plan, to think and should know how to organize ideas.

#### 2.2.4 Structuring Sentences

A big problem of student is sentence structure. Construction of sentence problem is common in students due to lack of reading and poorly constructed sentences shows that students need a lot of practice. Sentence structure describes that how sentences different parts are put together in word order. For a good and correct sentence students should have a good perception about a sentence. Students usually don't care and put problem sentences in their writing which is very awkward. Good writing always consists of correct and well-constructed sentences.

#### 2.2.5 Cohesiveness

Students should understand the importance of cohesiveness. In cohesion, text are referred to each other and how the ideas are linked and how are expressed through the words. Well-constructed sentences and connection of sentences shows cohesiveness. It is that prose which is easy and clear to

understand in which the ideas and thoughts are presented in an organized and logical way in which every component is connected orderly and stream of ideas are rational. When reader reads a logical and orderly writing he feels it natural and he'll be more fluent and interested in reading and moves from one part to the other enjoyably.

### 2.2.6 Emotional Touch

Students are not relevant with emotional touch and they don't know how to engage themselves in creative writing by giving emotional touches. To win readers heart you need to give an emotional touches to your writing, you just not even to touch their emotions but you also have to awaken and stimulate their emotions. A writer should give such a touch of emotions that a reader should engage himself emotionally and his feelings should also become a part of the writer. In emotional touch all the elements of story are given. A high-quality story absorbs emotions at numerous levels and in countless ways i.e. hope, concern, struggle, challenge, anxiety, resolution, relief and appreciation.

### 2.2.7 Colorful Setting

When you bring characters to life and describe them with their eye color, their skin tone, looks and hues of clothing, and also when the reader capture all the imaginations and bring himself on the place what the writer has described in his writing, that we call a true picture of colorful setting. Setting is enhanced with colors. For example, moonlight sparkling on a lake, a jungle on fire, blue as a bird's wing, the sea stretched like a silk carpet. Crafting colors and textures give a new life to your writing. Colorful setting gives a vibrant effect in your work.

### 2.3 Impact of Short Stories on Creative Writing

One of the ways to increase creativity is reading short story and short stories have a great impact on creative writing. King (2001) <sup>[11]</sup> comments that stories activate and motivate and help students to merge and practice language and to promote positive principles and attitude. Furthermore, Pardede (2012) <sup>[17]</sup> used short stories for Indonesian students and he found that stories are helpful in enhancing students' proficiency and language. In adding up, Murdoch (2002) <sup>[15]</sup> says that short stories are useful for learners to improve their four language skills and as well as for improving students' grammar, knowledge and vocabulary. (p 9). Using short stories help students in various aspects. It is a source of input in many activities. Students write according to their objectives and proficiency level. According to Oster's (1989), point of view literature broadens the idea and fosters critical thinking of students by enhancing the different ways like a situation. (p. 85). Moreover, stories are a source of support and inspiration and a student-centered learning. Students are interacted in activities and finally, stories are stretches for all of the students.

Yilmaz (2011) <sup>[20]</sup> conducted an empirical study which was based on three months long study in which he used short stories via computer in teaching and learning English language. The objective of the study was how short stories could be used to teach students. Finding showed that students had very positive reaction towards this study. Student's opinion was taken and they reported that the impact of using short story via computer has a positive effect on their creativity and that short stories enable them to improve their creativity and vocabulary.

Yasemin (2012) <sup>[19]</sup>, investigates in her study how short stories be capable of integrated into English Language to strengthen knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and to improve their creative writing skills. In this study short stories were selected according to the requirement of the students and their active participation was a part of learning process. Finding proved that the short stories contributed effectively and meaningfully and helped students to be more imaginative and creative when they write freely. Laraib *et al.* (2013) <sup>[12]</sup> did a research to improve written expression, and the subject for that research was creative writing skills. In an Action Research a writing skills strategies were carried out for eight weeks. Flash cards were used to enhance the vocabulary and as well as list of words on regular bases was given, through which they learn more words.

## 3. Research Methodology

To organize this experimental study, the data collected in the research was quantitative in nature. In this study researchers have checked the writing proficiency, interest and motivational level of students through conducting an experiment and manipulating independent variable. Both the groups i.e. experimental and control groups consisted of 30 students each who were selected through random sampling technique and were distributed into homogenous groups through random assignment technique. The use of extensive reading strategy through providing story books was independent variable whereas students' writing grades were taken as dependent variable.

### 3.1 Participants

Participants of this research study were sixty students of intermediate level of a public school in district Bahawalpur. Students were selected though non-probability random sampling technique. Two groups were made homogenous on the base of students' previous school test results. Active participant consent was taken from the selected sample and further ethical measures were adopted to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity.

### 3.2 Data Collection Tools

After understanding the nature of creative writing the material was developed. Short stories were used to inculcate extensive reading habits among students of experimental group. In total, three data collection tools were used to gather data from the selected sample. Checklist was used at pre-treatment phase to collect data from participants of both control and experimental group to get students' awareness and practice about extensive reading habits. Secondly, test was used as data collection tool to examine students' creative writing proficiency skills. Two tests were developed through split half method of a single test and named as pre-test and post-test. Finally, questionnaire was developed to get manipulation check from the students of experimental group. The tools were pilot tested to ensure validity and reliability factors before using them in actual experiment.

## 4. Data Analysis Results

The results obtained from data collection tools have been analyzed and interpreted below. Their statistical significance and narrative interpretations have been discussed in the light of data obtained from SPSS analysis.

**Table 1:** Significance of difference between the mean scores of Pre Control and Post Control overall

Paired Samples Statistics							
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	DF
Pair 1	pre_control_overall	18.4000	30	3.42002	.62441	-1.041	29
	post_control_overall	19.2667	30	3.23700	.59099		

Table 1 shows the statistics about mean score of control group. A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean score of the students' grades at pre-treatment and post-treatment level. The data shows that there is low difference between the scores of post-test. The result shows the mean score

of control group overall in pre-test is 18.4000 and in post-test is 19.2667. The difference between them is not highly significant; though there was little improvement found in the results of the posttest in control group.

**Table 2:** Significance of difference between the mean scores of Pre Experiment and Post Experiment overall

Paired Samples Statistics							
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	DF
Pair 1	Pre experimental overall	17.5000	30	4.01506	.73305	16.427	9
	Post experimental overall	32.1000	30	2.60437	.47549		

Table 2 shows the statistics about mean score of experimental group in both pre and post-test. A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean score of the students' grades at pre-treatment and post-treatment level. The data shows that there is high difference between the scores of pre & post-test.

The result shows the mean score of experimental group overall in pre-test is 17.5000 and in post-test is 32.1000. The difference between them is of great significant. The data shows that the group has a strong effect of the treatment given to them and they showed a remarkable improvement in the overall skills.

**Table 3:** Significance of difference between the mean scores of Pre Experiment and Pre Control overall

Paired Samples Statistics							
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	DF
Pair 1	Pre control overall	18.4000	30	3.42002	.62441	.949	29
	Pre experimental overall	17.5000	30	4.01506	.73305		

Table 3 shows the statistics about mean score of overall pre-test of both groups. A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean score of the students' grades at pre-treatment and post-treatment level. The data shows that there is no difference between the scores of pre-test of both groups. The

result shows the mean score of control group in pre-test is 18.4000 and experimental group in pre-test is 17.5000. The data shows that students of control group achieved slightly better grades in pre-test as compared to the grades of experimental group students.

**Table 4:** Significance of difference between the mean scores of Post Experiment and Post Control overall

Paired Samples Statistics							
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	DF
Pair 1	Post control overall	19.2667	30	3.23700	.59099	-17.570	29
	Post experimental overall	32.1000	30	2.60437	.47549		

Table 4 shows the statistics about mean score of control group and experimental group overall in post-test. A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean score of the students' grades at pre-treatment and post-treatment level. The data shows that there is high difference between the scores of post-test of both groups. The result shows the control group means score in post-test is 19.2667 and experimental group in post-test is 32.1000. The difference between them is highly significant. The data shows that the group has a strong effect on the treatment given to them and they showed a remarkable improvement in the writing grades.

comprehension enrichment, and a well acquaintance and preparation of grammar and spelling.

The results divulged that the participants had problems with the punctuation, use of figurative language and elements of creative writing and ideas. This shows participants' lack of extensive reading skills. The post-test results show that participants developed incremental confidence and conspicuous writing improvement throughout the experiment sessions. They were able to create complex sentences and cohesive paragraphs and it displayed a positive effect on the participants' particularly in the area of language use, vocabulary, grammar, elaborating on main ideas, using examples and cohesive tools, and enhancement of several writing techniques.

The data collected from the post-treatment questionnaire shows that students learned sooner and their remembering enhanced when they were being taught through extensive reading. As they come across multiple times new words which they start to comprehend and utilize in their everyday life. Moreover, context of the story help them to enhance their visualization and

**5. Findings and Discussions**

The extensive reading treatment was flawlessly carried out with the help of participants. Nevertheless the time frame of the experiment, it yielded extremely valuable results with respect to the effects of extensive reading on creative writing, especially in terms of writing perfection, structural awareness, and expansion of thought, vocabulary progression, reading

conceptualized their frame about creating short story. They quickly grab the gist of story without translating the story. Extensive reading is helpful in evoking feelings, emotions, memories, and past and present experiences that the reader finds interesting, and hence it arouses in them a sense of curiosity and adventure. The manipulation of independent variable confirmed that extensive reading is capable of adding a lot of benefits to students' creative writing, and it is an effective and stimulating way to teach reading compared to the traditional approaches of reading.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the present study suggest that language teacher can motivate learners to learn creative writing by using short stories through extensive reading. Short stories arouse the interest of learners and solve their problems in the areas of creative writing skills and develop new innovative ideas and story elements. Language teachers can get best output from the students by using extensive reading. Extensive reading technique work best for the teachers. Furthermore, teachers can make their classes more interesting by assigning creative tasks, open ended questions, group activities and individual achievement tasks and different new and innovative methods were also used. The role of creativity and extensive reading on achievement in English is found significant in the present study. Love of reading should be inculcated among children right from the beginning of education and it inspires the creative mind. It is also recommended that Students should read short stories regularly so that the language subconsciously acquired is then encountered repeatedly and transferred systematically to both the short and long-term memory.

Teachers should be widely read and should motivate children by narrating stories from classics in simple English. Students should be given reading assignments. Best summary should be read aloud in the class. Parents have a major role in molding the reading habits of children. They could help children to select appropriate reading materials. Interesting reading material and story books should be provided to the students as token of gifts and appreciation. A good library with enough reading materials should be maintained in the school. Every week, at least one hour should be kept aside as library period. Furthermore, similar type of studies should be carried out to see the impact of extensive reading upon lexical and grammatical competence of the ESL learners.

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