



CREATIVE WRITING IN CLASSROOM: A REAL STORY

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Abstract

The article discusses the real story of creative writing in Pakistan creative writing in Pakistan lacks a big work both inside a class room and outside a class room. In Pakistan writing instruction still depends on a typical product oriented approach. That is why the trends in the pedagogical setting support product-oriented approach to writing. Pakistan possesses a rich heritage of all sorts of genres that are supporting features for creative writing yet lack of research in this area has pushed it at the secondary place. Teaching of literature is a much focused area in colleges but it lacks creative writing. The role of examination board(s) is also not so much effective .There is no any systematic program of evaluating the written product. Rather non standardized scoring guides are used to evaluate the written pieces of the students. That is why error is considered a mistake in spite of a way to learning. This condition can be made better if writing teachers start considering that ‘creativity flourishes where there is a systematic strategy to promote it. In addition, they must suggest approaches to teaching such as the genre approach or the process approach for developing creative writing.

Keywords: Creative writing; Process Model of Writing; Diversity in Writing Style; Assessment of writing

INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, although creative writing is widely recognised in schools and English literature is taught, the students are not being provided with sufficient classroom practice in various genres of creative writing. It is observed that the assessment system in Pakistan has marred students’ ability in creative writing. It is evident that in our schools, the pedagogy, the curriculum and the assessment system do not provide freedom for self-expression which is a prerequisite for creativity. It is important to establish why creative writing is being neglected in schools, despite such a great literary heritage and the need to move with changing times.

Writing process has become a difficult task for most of the students in Pakistan. Studies (Humaira, 2011; Warsi 2004, Siddiqui 2007 and Nadeem, 2007) show that in Pakistan a rich literary heritage possesses a huge share and people are creative in most of their daily chores, but where comes self-expression they lose creatively because writing in a second language is a difficult and complex skill and has to be learnt strenuously. Learning to write effectively is a fundamental component academic achievements and the ability to do so could be a great asset for students throughout their lives (Berdan, 2006). It is pertinent to know that ‘writing is not an innate natural ability but is a cognitive ability’ (Harris, 1993, p. 78) and has to be acquired through years of training or schooling. Despite the fact that English is taught as a second language and writing is a compulsory skill in Pakistan, during the whole academic sessions from class 1 to Graduation, students in schools and colleges face great difficulty with expressing themselves in simple English. Thus, the major lies in system in other words in Pakistan, the teaching of writing tends to maintain more focus on memorisation of ready made answers from help books, guides and so called notes rather than on the development of communicative and creative skills.



Table 1. Here a comparison of the meaning and purpose of creative writing in a Pakistani classroom and in the western educational setting, is presented for the sake of mere a compare and contrast .

Creative Writing in western educational context	Creative Writing in Pakistan
<p>Any writing of original composition, Everett (2005). creativity is the ability to create one’s own symbols of experience, creative writing is the use of written language to conceptualize, explore and record experience in such a way as to create a unique symbolization of it’ Marshall (1974, p. 10).</p> <p>Creative writing is a craft and a profession. O’Rourke (2005)</p> <p>In schools, the learners are taught to express their feelings, experiences and knowledge in various types of writing. For example in English classrooms in Scotland, ‘pupils commonly express their thoughts, feelings and imaginative ideas by writing poetry, prose and drama in ways that demonstrated their creativity with language and ideas’ (HMIE, 2006, p. 8).</p> <p>Situations under which creative writing is taken by students: As a class activity directly under a teacher’s control; as a group activity; as a self-motivated individual activity; as a regular subject or a skill to be practiced; or as the theme of a project (Marshall, 1974).</p>	<p>Creative writing was known as literature including the variety of its genres (Humaira, 2011, p.112). In Pakistan, creative writing is widely recognised in schools, but it is important to note that ‘creative writing has been reduced to a set of formulae taught through a series of exercises’ (Myhill, 2001, p. 19). Problematic issues in the Pakistani system of education which fail to promote imaginative writing in various genres in the classroom ‘are the shortcomings in the curriculum, examination, inefficient teachers, methods and techniques’ (Warsi (2004, p. 1).</p>

Factors involve in creative writing in Pakistani educational system

In Pakistan, teaching of writing is dependent on a number of factors such as curriculum and assessment. In addition, teachers are not autonomous; they cannot teach independently without permission from the authorities, Humaira, 2011, p.112). Notably, the imposition of a prescriptive curriculum and tightly defined assessment system has challenged teachers’ professional autonomy and reduced their creativity (Burgess et al, 2002; Fisher, 2004). This fact is reiterated by Hanke, 2002, cited in, Humaira, 2011) so that if the curriculum and assessment system do not give opportunity to teachers to act independently, their professional and intuitive potential is definitely constrained.

This situation mentioned above is applicable to teaching creative writing in a Pakistani classroom. There is a vast magnitude of literature available on the effective teaching of creative writing in the classroom. The role of English teachers can not be neglected, as Grainger et al. (2005, p. 178) assert that ‘creativity in students’ writing does not occur independently of the skills, talents, motivations, knowledge and understanding of teacher’, and that the creative teachers of writing are ‘autonomous, competent, reflective and critical and work towards a vision of children who can think and act for themselves’ (Moss, 2001, p. 36). Those teachers, who give the learners topics of their own choice, help the learners to become engrossed in their writings. Thus, ‘the meanings of words and ideas are felt more strongly and deeply and their voices ring with conviction’ (Laevers, 2000, p.24). Interestingly, Wilson and Ball (1997) describe risk-taking as an important characteristic of creative writing teachers who have the disposition to remain open to new ideas and strategies which may benefit the learners. Grainger et al. (2005, p.183) believe that ‘research in the field of creativity indicates that creative teachers adopt a learner centered focus’. They make creative writing fun while stimulating their imagination and encouraging their criticality. Barnes (2007, p.27) remarks that ‘it is



clear teachers need to be geared towards individuals, their passions, capabilities and personalities'. It is seen that learners' 'creative abilities are developed if teachers' own creative abilities are properly engaged' (Grainger et al, 2005, p.5). It is one of the central themes of the present study that those teachers, who are themselves creative and write creatively, are better teachers. In Pakistan, it is urgently required that teacher education programmes should work in this direction.

There are many other factors which are also responsible for the decline of creativity in schools. For example; unmotivated faculty and students; a curriculum divorced from real problems faced in teaching and the heavy reliance on rote memorization, large-size classes, lack of resources, untrained teachers, fixed syllabus, forty minutes duration for English and external examination bodies' Siddiqui (2007, p.161).

According to (Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Brown and Pickford, 2006), a number of different qualities can maximize the effectiveness of an English language test. A good test should have:

- a. construct validity,
- b. reliability,
- c. authenticity,
- d. interactiveness,
- e. impact and practicality

all the above listed qualities help to foster creativity and independent learning. One major problem in the evaluation of writing in Pakistan is that it tends to lack many of these factors. In Pakistan, it is seen that assessment has a direct relationship with teaching in the classroom (Humaira, 2011). According to Siddiqui (2007, p. 187) , 'in Pakistan the impact of assessment is conspicuous. It is an assessment system that has emerged as an omnipotent force that is calling the shots in the educational scenario of Pakistan. Each new government claims to realize its significance but hardly takes any practical, meaningful, holistic, and sustainable steps towards streamlining the system'.

Despite the fact that English language evaluation has failed to measure students' creativity and critical thinking, and that this has also been realized, no significant efforts are being made to improve the situation. The teachers' attention is focused on stereotypical questions set in the board examination; as a consequence, they do not practice creative writing sufficiently in the classroom (Humaira, 2011). Siddiqui (2007, p. 164) rightly says that 'the students memorise ready made answers of short stories, essays, plays, poems etc because the assessment system encourages rote learning and the examination requires the students to reproduce what they have learnt by heart'.

A critical evaluation of the Lahore Board Examination's Past Papers exposes that the topics are repeatedly taken from the textbooks (prescribed books) of Matriculation. To quote Siddiqui (2007, p. 103) 'in Pakistan, the textbooks are supposed to occupy a central position in the process of teaching and learning to the extent that the assessment system and classroom teaching seem to revolve around the textbooks' . One noteworthy fact is that for the past 10 years, the textbook of Paper B (English Grammar and Composition) has not been revised or updated. The textbooks have model essays and stories which students memorise for tests. For example, writing a story is a recurrent question. The type of question can remain unchanged year after year.

- a. Year 2008: Write a story with a moral 'The boy who cried wolf' .
- b. Year 2007: Write a story with a moral 'union is strength'.
- c. Year 2006: Write a story with a moral 'a friend in need is a friend indeed'. (Humaira, 2011).

These stories are prescribed in the syllabus. The question of story writing is easy and the learners need not think critically and imaginatively. In the test, the students have to remember the logical sequence of the events or paragraphs as they are given in the textbook, otherwise they would lose their score, because the examiners would keep the model compositions in view. The students do not write the stories themselves (Humaira, 2011). They are not taught to develop the plot, characterization or



dialogue. The research therefore asks, what is the purpose of such an examination? Does it measure originality of ideas, language and organization? The students' creative writing does not possess these characteristics. As Siddiqui (2007, p.189) believes, 'in Pakistan, the assessment system excludes creativity and critical thinking out of its legitimate boundaries'. It is stated in the National Education Policy (1992, p. 69) that 'we are caught in a vicious circle; the cycle begins at a badly constructed syllabi and ends at a rag bag system called examination'.

In this entire situation the role of the examination system especially Lahore Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education which has failed to measure students' creativity. It is worth mentioning that whoever crams things more efficiently, even without proper comprehension, can secure good marks in the examination. The teacher in the Pakistani education system is always under pressure to achieve a good result. Those who manage to gain a maximum number of *As* in their class are appreciated more than the one who promotes creativity in learners. Furthermore, the Lahore Board Examination lacks some qualities which should be in a good test such as construct validity, reliability, authenticity, interactiveness, impact and practicality.

Further it has been supported by studies that the English teachers perceive that the topics for creative writing are taken from textbooks. This fact can be further reinforced by comparison with the textbooks prescribed by the Punjab Textbook Board. Topics such as 'My Neighbours', 'My School' My National Hero, A Cricket Match or 'A House on Fire' are specified in the textbooks for Paper B. The same topics are repeatedly given in the examination. Students prepare these topics from guide books for the examination. In addition, the examiners cannot give unseen questions in case the students may fail. Some time if unluckily it ever happens that an examiner set some content of the paper out of prescribed text book, masses come out on roads against this "unjust". With all these elements considered, the Board Examination does not serve its purpose of assessing students' creativity. It is also fact that most of the teachers are not satisfied with the way topics are presented in textbooks and assigned to students for writing. So it is important that topics should be interesting, in order to help promote pupils' self- expression.

In this regard the following measures can be taken to avoid this entire malady and to help promote pupils' self- expression.

- I. Both the teachers and students should promote words in their treatment with writing for example; 'experimentation', 'risk taking', 'problem solving' or 'intuition' which are commonly used for creativity in a western educational context.
- II. Writing teachers must consider that 'creativity flourishes where there is a systematic strategy to promote it' (Robinson, 2001, p.12). In addition, they must suggest approaches to teaching such as the genre approach or the process approach for developing creative writing.
- III. The pupils do not themselves decide the topics; instead, the teacher presents a topic or a theme. The teacher is the only audience for whom the students write. The teacher implicitly or explicitly dictates the form. So the learner must be facilitated to decide the topic wherever possible.
- IV. The teacher judges the pupils' writings as the finished product. I believe that the teacher must change their attitude towards the writing of the learners.
- V. They must consider the process despite of the product. Error free writing should not be idealized and they must make difference between error and mistake.
- VI. English teachers must be encouraged to engage in activities that are essential for creativity, such as risk taking and viewing of their own learning.
- VII. English teachers can also arouse the learners' interest in creative writing, so that their works will be published in a school magazine; it is potentially futile to continue writing unless there are intrinsic rewards in the process.



VIII. Finally, the school timetable should give importance to creative writing.

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