



Problems and Factors affecting students English writing skills at elementary level

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Abstract: The present study was conducted with the aim to investigate elementary students' writing problems and factors that hamper their English writing skills. It also illustrates some supportive suggestions on how to improve elementary students' English writing skills. Writing is regarded as one of the most prolific skills which sometimes seem very difficult for the learners to develop; it is considered an important skill for good language production. Writing well is professed as a significant art for students' successful academic achievement. Students' writing problems in English language have become a major issue for English teachers and learners. Writing in English is considered a very complex skill particularly in elementary classrooms where students encounter numerous challenges regarding this skill. In the study writing samples were randomly collected from 155 students of grade eight to find out the most recurrent writing problems in their English subjects. 32 English teachers were also interviewed in order to know their perceptions about students' writing difficulties and factors that hamper their English writing development. SPSS software was applied to compute and analyze the outcomes of the research. The results of the study indicate that the majority of the students at elementary level are unable to write grammatically precise English paragraphs. The findings of the study disclose that the main problems of students' English writing are due to poor command over English tenses, grammar, syntax and insufficient vocabulary. Lack of creative ideas, writing anxiety, weak structural organization and dependence on L1 are also the major cause of learners' poor writing in English.

Keywords: English writing skills, writing problems, elementary students.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Writing is considered an imperative skill for successful language development. Its importance increases when it comes to writing in English language which is widely used for international communication and comprehension of the required knowledge. English writing has a great impact on the entire system of education, because it is the primary source of world knowledge. According to Deane (2018), writing is the most significant development in human history. It is a way of exchanging knowledge, information, thoughts and opinions with other countries of the world from one generation to another. In Pakistan, English has been given the status of Lingua Franca, and as a second language, it is taught as a compulsory subject in educational institutions from grade one to graduation level. The role of English is very crucial in promoting quality education in Pakistani educational institutions, it has played a significant role in increasing the status of the economic zone, and even it has brightened the lives of people and the business community. With respect to English writing and reading comprehension, students in government schools are not so fast and well in these skills, and still they are facing complexities in this particular domain. The majority of the students at school level are unable to comprehend this writing skill properly. They are still facing numerous challenges in English language subjects particularly in writing skills (A. Ali, Javed, & Shabbir, 2017). The need and significance of English writing skills in the modern era cannot be denied. The basic motive of teaching English writing skills in Pakistani schools is to make the learners capable to correspond in English language

to cope with the challenges regarding English writing at national and international level. As the demand to communicate and correspond in English writing efficiently has enhanced, therefore, the need for effective English language teaching has also got more attention (Ahmad, 2016). Writing is considered an imperative skill for successful language development. Its importance increases when it comes to writing in English language which is widely used for international communication and comprehension of the required knowledge (Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal, 2016b). According to Cole and Feng (2015), performance in the development of language, success is subject to enhancement in writing skills. Writing is often seen as part of teaching and learning the grammar and syntax of English, which consequently undervalue the significance and nature of writing and influences its development. Writing is an incredibly complex cognitive task that demands its learners to have mastery of the different factors, and these factors differ from the learner's academic history and personal interest to particular linguistic, psychological and cognitive phenomenon (Mitchell (2018). According to Said (2018), writing is generally seen as an important skill in the acquisition of English language, because through effective writing English vocabulary and grammar can be strengthened and it assists the teachers and learners in the practice of teaching and learning English writing skills respectively. In Pakistani government schools, mainly at elementary level the English writing skills of elementary students are frighteningly poor and unsatisfactory. Writing difficulties occur because of poor command of English tenses and grammar, lack of inventive ideas, teachers' unproductive teaching methods, inadequate vocabulary, weak sentence structure, inexperienced teachers, inappropriate use of vocabulary and rhetorical convention. However, further research is needed to investigate and explore the various factors that negatively affect the abilities of English writing skills. This study particularly disclosed different writing problems and factors that hinder elementary students' writing skills as well as guidelines on how to develop these writing skills in the government schools. Students face a number of numerous challenges regarding English language skills and mainly in writing skills (Alvi, Haider, Aziz, & Rehman, 2020).

In elementary schools, particularly the students of grade eight are not capable of writing a precise English paragraph. The majority of the students are not competent and well-organized in their English writing. Therefore, observing these issues, the researcher conducted this study to investigate the factors and problems that hamper students' effective writing skills at elementary level. The literacy rate in the government elementary schools of Punjab province concerning English language skills and mainly writing skills is not encouraging (Awan & Nawaz, 2015). According to Deane (2018), English writing has a great impact on the entire system of education. According to Awan (2016), expertise of effective writing is valued a lot and it is considered mandatory in all walks of life. No cohesion and coherence among the sentences is found in their English writing (Asif, Bashir, & Zafar, 2018). It is clear that in spite of the enormous value of English writing skills in academic and social life, a significant percentage of Pakistani school learners mainly at elementary level have poor writing skills in English subject (S. Ali, Ahmad, Manzoor, & Naseer, 2014). Creative writing in Pakistani schools is widely acknowledged as the main tool to increase the academic writing skills of the learners. It has been examined that the condition of creative writing ability is not satisfactory among elementary school students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Writing is a medium of communication that involves the depiction of a language with written symbols. It is assumed to be a very productive skill; different writers put their creative ideas and thoughts in writing forms. Writing provides learners with numerous opportunities to seek modern ways to compose their different ideas and thoughts in a foreign language (Rao, 2017). English language skills have equal importance and are interconnected in the environment of language learning. Although all the four language skills have their own significance, but writing skill is the most vital skill among them because it plays a significant role in all facets of life. Writing is the process of human interconnection. Writing is considered an imperative skill for good language production. It is thought of as a significant skill mainly in the content of English as a second language and the majority of the learners face numerous challenges while writing. Learners, especially students of elementary level, get confused in English writing due to a lack of strong vocabulary and suitable reading comprehension of the English language passages. This skill demands very close attention for its effective learning and teaching from the very initial stage of imparting education at school level (Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal, 2016a). According to PUSPA ANINDHITA (2016), usually elementary learners of English language

encounter more difficulties to cope with writing skills than the rest of the three skills. Writing is only considered a part of learning and teaching syntactic and grammatical components, poor command over this skill underestimates the worth and importance of students' creativity. Writing gives proper shape and structure to the ideas and thinking of men. Not only it is valuable for the people to write down their thoughts, facts, creative ideas and experiences on the paper, but it also assists to maintain the past of every country in written form. Writing is perceived as a blend of the process and product, and this writing process produces a collection of different thoughts and ideas in learners' minds. Setiawan, Rohayati, Sari, and KUSUMA (2014), argue that writing is a perception of the abilities that involve the rules of grammar, vocabulary and different concepts of sentence formation. Successful writing demands the writers to explore and classify previous knowledge. Writing brings the individual from ignorance to the luminosity of knowledge. It explains the essence of writing as a man who doesn't know how to read and write is called illiterate and ignorant (Khan & Khan, 2020). According to Andrew (2019), students face a number of writing difficulties at different levels of their study, these challenges can usually be categorized into cognitive, psychological, linguistic and pedagogical problems.

Elementary Students' English Writing Problems:

Various types of learning problems students encounter at school and particularly in elementary classes. The majority of the students face numerous problems of English writing at their different learning stages. These major problems can be classified as linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and pedagogical problems. Students at school level encounter numerous writing problems regarding the correct use of grammatical rules. Inappropriate knowledge of grammatical rules affects the results of learners' effective writing. Such writing problems produce embracement among the various students at their academic level. By using good and grammatically correct English students bargain their educational needs effectively (Adams & Keene, 2000). Students of elementary level face a number of problems while writing something in English. They make many grammatical mistakes in their exams and class tests. This creates hurdles in their effective writing and getting good grades in the exams. Novariana, Sumardi, and Tarjana (2018), argue about the same issues of the students they encounter while writing in a second language. Students' grammatical and syntactical mistakes can be observed easily through their writing content at various levels in the class. Sentence structure mistakes are also the major mistakes students commit in their writing. The use of appropriate words in writing seems very difficult for elementary-level students who write in a second language. Due to limited vocabulary, the majority of the learners are unable to use proper words in their writing and these issues slow down their writing expertise in their academic learning of writing (Z. A. A. Ahmed, 2018). According to Abdul Karim (2014), punctuation marks are assumed to be very essential in academic writing. The role of punctuation marks is perceived as very crucial to comprehend the meanings of the written text. Capital letters are used before the beginning of any important topic, words, and even before important headings. Yet, elementary learners face problems while using capitalization appropriately (Hajar, 2019). Spelling is considered a very important component in reading and writing. According to many researchers, spellings help in learning to read and write properly, this practice is useful especially for young children. Spelling problems are also assumed major problems for the students to learn writing skills particularly at school level (D. A. I. Ahmed, 2017).

Factors Affecting Elementary Students' English Writing Skills:

According to Hasani (2016), a number of factors create hurdle in developing elementary students' English writing skills, as lack of learners' motivation, inadequate time for writing, lack of reading and writing practice, no proper feedback and comments on students' written work, lack of teaching resources and facilities, overcrowded classrooms, unproductive teaching methods, and students' social background. All these factors are the main cause of elementary students' English writing problems. Lack of free writing opportunities affect learners' creativity of writing, but unfortunately, the majority of the instructors do not practice this habit in their classrooms and hence the results are unfavorable for the various learners improving their skills of academic writing (Alfaki, 2015). Proper writing activities require sufficient time to accomplish the writing tasks as the nature of writing tasks is different at various stages. Students need plenty of time for proofreading, rewriting, assembling the scattered thoughts, proper organizing of different ideas, and composing the specific writing drafts. They cannot get mastery in their English writings if they are not

given appropriate time for their academic writings. Due to insufficient time students are unable to communicate their self ideas in their writings, this decreases their inventive writing skills properly (Carson, 2001). Proper appreciation and giving good grades to the learners is not a tough job for any school teacher, but most of the English teachers ignore this strategy while teaching English writing and reading skills at school level. They do not give proper guidance to their students on how to write well (Graham (2008).

III. METHODOLOGY:

A methodology is a scientific and logical process after the selection of a problem and it is based on the selection of sampling and data collection to get the required results of the study. A mixed method approach has been used in this research that involves assembling and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the questions of interest. Useful suggestions have also been described to improve the creative writing talent of grade students in the government elementary schools. Questionnaires for students and semi-structured interviews for English teachers were the main sources for data collection. The population of the present research was all the government boys elementary schools of district of Rahim Yar Khan, Province Punjab, Pakistan. And only grade students of government boys' elementary schools were kept into focus for the target population. The researcher has used a random sampling technique while conducting the present research. The samples of the study were 155 students and 32 English teachers of elementary level in the government boy's elementary schools of Tehsil Khan Pur. These randomly chosen samples represent the whole teachers' and students' population of the government elementary schools of district Rahim Yar Khan who are teaching and learning respectively. Sixteen government boys' elementary schools were randomly chosen for data amassing. Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were the research tools of the study. To assess the grammatical competence of the students of grade eight, a paragraph of English writing of learners' own choice was given to them. Both open-ended and close-ended type questions were used in this investigational research and SPSS software was used to compute and analyze the results of the present research.

Data Analysis:

Descriptive and statistical analysis of students' English writing problems

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
i. Due to a lack of vocabulary, English writing is very difficult for me.	155	3.581	1.1158
i. I frequently face problems in composing correct spellings of the new words.	155	3.794	.9307
i. I prefer creative writing tasks in English writing skills rather than cramming traditional stories or essays	155	2.994	1.1481
i. I often get confused while using punctuation marks in English writing	155	3.858	.8331
i. Right use of tenses is the most recurrent problem I encounter while writing English essays and stories	155	4.019	.7427
i. I cannot communicate well in English writing as my English sentences are not well structured.	155	4.039	.8731
i. Frequent mistakes of grammar affect my effective writing expression.	155	4.065	.7445
i. Incorrect use of passive voice and conditional sentences create hurdles in my efficient writing.	155	4.058	.6765
i. While writing I usually face difficulties connecting different ideas.	155	2.750	1.2700
i. I often face problems to comprehend English sentence structure.	155	2.844	1.2728
i. I always awarded low grades due to poor English writing.	155		

i. I usually feel difficulty while using conjunction and preposition in English writing.	155	2.750	1.2952
	155	2.719	1.3255

Table reveals that grade eight students face difficulties in their English writing due to insufficient vocabulary (mean 3.581), spelling difficulties (mean 3.794), punctuation problems (mean 3.858), tenses problems (mean 4.019), problems due to sentences which are not well structured (mean 4.039), frequent problems of grammar (mean 4.065), difficulties in writing passive and conditional sentences (mean 4.058), difficulties of connecting different topic related ideas (mean 2.750), problems of sentence structure (mean 2.844), problems of conjunction and preposition (mean 2.719). These are the statistical description of elementary students' English writing difficulties they encounter in their writing. Poor vocabulary, spelling and sentence structure problems, difficulties in using conditional and passive sentences and mainly problems regarding right use of tenses are the most prominent writing challenges for elementary students they face while writing in English language.

Interpretation of English Teachers' Semi-Structured interviews:

Following are the English teachers' perceptions regarding students' writing problems in English language.

There was a disparity in participants' responses concerning the factors that hamper students' English writing skills. Almost 80% of the English teachers consider that effective English writing problems are due to a lack of strong vocabulary, spelling problems, punctuation and prepositional issues, and the right use of tenses. The semi-structured interviews of the English teachers (75%) indicated that the majority of the government schools do not have enough teaching resources and facilities to educate English language skills, mainly creative writing skills. The deficiency of teaching facilities and resources generates numerous problems both for the English teachers and students in teaching and learning English writing skills respectively.

During the semi-structured interviews, 88% of the English teachers argued that overcrowded classrooms are the major issues to teach English writing skills efficiently. In overcrowded classrooms, due to limited time of the lecture, it is very difficult for the teachers to give proper feedback and comments on students' writing performance in the class. 70% of the English teachers responded that society and social circumstances do not support and provide opportunities to the students to learn English as a language rather than a subject and to develop their English writing skills more effectively. Furthermore, English is not spoken and used properly in our society. Hence, students do not get a chance to learn English from their social surroundings. The majority of the English teachers (84%) responded that in elementary schools most of the teachers are techno-blind. Teachers are not fully aware of the use of modern teaching methodologies and strategies regarding English language. Due to this, teachers do not reform and modernize their teaching skills.

IV. DISCUSSION:

The present research was designed to identify elementary students' writing problems and factors that hinder their writing development in English language. Grade eight was focused particularly as it was the most senior class in elementary schools for data collection. In light of the research aims and objectives, questionnaires for students and semi-structured interviews for English teachers were designed to find out students' problems regarding English writing skills at elementary level. Most recurrent English writing problems of grade students were also investigated through conducting this study. Factors that affect students' creative writing expressions were illustrated via this research. Possible solutions to enhance students' writing capabilities as well as supporting teaching techniques for English teachers were suggested through this unique research. Likewise, semi-structured interviews of English teachers were conducted to get their perceptions about students' inventive writing problems and challenges in English language. The second language learners in government boys' elementary schools of Punjab province face numerous challenges regarding creative writing due to insufficient and poor knowledge of grammatical rules and inappropriate methods of teaching

English subjects teachers use while educating the English writing skills. These outcomes were supported by Dastgeer and Afzal (2015), which indicate that English teachers do not try to improve writing difficulties of grade eight students, they do not teach and explain English writing techniques thoughtfully due to overcrowded class size.

V. CONCLUSION:

The study concludes with pedagogical implications for the development of students writing skills in English. It suggests that the majority of elementary students do not have adequate knowledge and exposure about English writing skills; as a result the numbers of students who are good in effective English writing skills are too limited. Considering learners' writing problems, factors and supportive suggestions the research has investigated, it can be concluded that students of elementary level encounter various problems concerning effective English writing; however, students' writing proficiency can be developed by considering the main causes of those problems. The literature concerning English writing difficulties and the factors behind these problems were reviewed in detail. The relevant literature of the research provided an insight regarding writing problems students encounter in English language and different reasons about those writing difficulties. Positive feedback on students' performance motivates the learners in their learning. Teachers must give encouraging comments on learners' written work. The practice of writing on different unknown topics may enhance the effective writing aptitude of the students. English teachers should assign creative writing activities in the class consistently. English teachers should arrange various learning activities concerning writing skills in grade eight classrooms. In the same way, students' differences in learning should be observed consistently.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS:

To develop English writing skills of elementary learners, the respondents recommended a variety of solutions. To start with, reading was recommended with a view in learning better writing and enriching vocabulary. Teaching of conscious vocabulary was also recommended to enhance effective writing aptitude of the students, as extensive practice of reading enriches learners' vocabulary. Daily twenty to thirty minutes for writing can improve elementary learners' writing expertise. From early grades, we must at least promulgate the practice of extensive writing as we do in speaking skill. For this purpose, some reformations are needed in our present examination system. According to the participants, our education and examination system should not encourage plagiarism and rote learning. Likewise, the significance of good teachers cannot be overlooked and denied. Some extra writing courses should be included in English textbooks for elementary classes, and particular courses based on only English tenses will be helpful for the teachers to teach writing skills to the students. Likewise, competitions of creative writing among the students will be fruitful in developing their English writing skills. Daily sessions regarding reading and writing activities produce positive outcomes for the learners in learning creative writing talent. Reading has great importance in developing writing skills. Many critics argue that regular reading is considered a stepping stone for better writings and it helps the students to reinforce their writing ability at their academic level. Graham and Perin (2007), Strong vocabulary makes the students confident in describing their inventive ideas in writing form. Motivation changes the learning style of the learners, as it is considered a basic element to groom the learning power of the learners. Motivation proves more effective especially for elementary-level students because they need proper guidance in their learning practice, particularly in learning English language skills (Hwang, Hung, and Chen (2014)

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