

Increasing Secondary School Students' Creativity in Writing Skills: An Action Research

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ABSTRACT

Creative writing is one of the most significant and challenging skills for students to master and improve their writing skills in English. This action research aims to implement action plans in English classes to help students increase their creativity in writing. The study used action research as its design, with action learning theory serving as the framework for guiding the research. I employed observation and self-reflective notes as research instruments. Since it is action research, it was conducted by considering it practitioner research to improve my classroom practice. Forty students of grade 12 from the academic year 2022/023 were selected as the participants of the study. This took place through planning, implementation, observations, data gathering and reflection. It presents different writing activities for developing creativity in writing skills as an action plan. Information was gathered through observations as the students participated in creative writing activities. The behaviour of students was observed during their engagement in creative writing activities. The result of this action research reveals that writing stories and diaries, journals, biographies, reflection and engagement in group work tasks enhance their creativity in writing skills.

Keywords: creative writing, creativity, group work, journal writing, reflection

INTRODUCTION

Creative writing is a remarkable writing ability that is practised in specific circumstances by producing and reflecting students' creative work. It is a method of increasing learners' interest in writing by developing their cognitive abilities. Creative thinking may be a strategy for navigating the modern workplace because it is one of the soft skills that students need to communicate various strategies while working (Aboluwodi, 2018). In this regard, Bekurs and Santoli (2004) noted that if writing exercises are assigned to pupils, with their interest, and when the interest comes from the heart, the natural desire for learning may be satisfied. Creativity is necessary for innovation, uniqueness, and sustainability (Kaplan, 2019). If creative writing is more concentrated, it allows students to express their thoughts regarding topics related to their desires. Creative writing is the most effective approach to improving pupils' writing skills (Pawliczak, 2015). The teacher has to teach creative writing skills as a necessity for a variety of thinking tools such as journals, diary entries, and so on. Teaching is more than simply transferring knowledge from a teacher to learners.

Teachers must be conscious of giving high status to students' thinking processes when they write. They must be sensitive enough to bring forth the significance of writing. The more we support pupils, the more they will express themselves and develop their writing creativity which is often regarded as a vital ability among 21st-century students (Henriksen et al., 2018).

Teaching has become a deposit-based trend, with pupils serving as deposits and teachers serving as depositors. Our education system is based on the banking system as cited by Freire (1993). Here, the teacher regularly provides information and the students receive it. It is the process of filling and acquiring. Instructors nowadays still feel at ease pursuing the same route. They continue to believe that pupils are empty vessels that may be filled with knowledge. This specific belief limits their creativity. When done correctly, the development in writing is evident, since creative writing is the most effective technique to enhance writing abilities (Pawliczak, 2015). When given the opportunity, students may express themselves creatively. They can deliver a superior performance, often considerably above the instructor's requirements.

For this study, I followed the action learning theory. Applying this, I attempted to address the major issue raised in class. This theory looks at difficult issues and figures out how to solve them. It improves the quality of learning for both the individual and the team. Action learning has six important components: an issue, a group reflective research process, the formulation and implementation of strategies or actions, individual, group, or organizational learning, and an action learning tutor (Marquardt & Waddill, 2011).

In action learning, the instructor must be there to witness the issue in a group of pupils who must then go through a reflective inquiry process to formulate and carry out the action plan to have individual or organizational learning. Action learning is "learning by doing" (Gifford, 2005). It emphasizes issues that arise around a group of persons that occur when the facilitator implements the philosophy of practice, which is extremely situational. This ideology focuses heavily on overcoming current problems through specific actions. As I selected action research, this theory has emerged as the most important instrument for the investigation. Action learning occurs when some activities are planned, and then those actions are carried out. In the course of this stage, the impact of the activity is noticed and then replicated. As a consequence, the plan is reformulated, and the procedure is repeated. This action research aims to explore the problems faced by the students in developing creativity in writing skills in English and enhancing their creativity in solving the problems related to it.

Research Questions

This action research seeks the answers to the following questions.

1. What problems are faced by the students in developing creativity in writing skills in English?
2. How can teachers enhance students' creativity in writing skills in English class and solve the problems related to it?

Context of the Action Research

There were 40 students in grade 12 in the academic year 2022/2023 and they were given assignments and provided feedback on their work. They were expected to write on the assigned tasks to find out their creativity and the tasks that needed to be improved and implementation of the strategies for improvement; monitor the progress and gather the data; and modify practice based on the evaluation of the progress. The main problem faced by students was not having creativity in writing skills. To address this problem, the reasons why they were unable to write creatively and I wanted to improve their weaknesses in creative writing skills in English. Writing is a productive skill, however; the students either copy from Googling, their friends or memorize the readymade answers provided by the teachers. After examining the collected data, I noticed that the pupils intended to improve their writing abilities but found it challenging owing to a lack of vocabulary and uninterested and unfamiliar topics. I based writing activities on students' interests, familiar topics and needs as teaching is not a banking system (Freire, 1993).

I employed the action learning theory as a framework for my study. I have attempted to address the primary issue of students that was seen in the field. This idea looks at difficult issues and formulates ways to resolve them. It improves the standard of learning for both the team and the individual. According to Marquardt and Waddill (2011), action learning has six essential elements: an issue, a group, a meditative inquiry process, the formulation and implementation of action plans, learning for individuals, groups, or organizations, and an action learning instructor. To construct an action plan and put it into practice to have individual or organizational learning, an action-learning teacher must observe the challenge being faced by students as they engage in a reflective inquiry process.

Action learning is a method of learning via action (Gifford, 2005). It emphasizes difficulties affecting a certain group of individuals. The concept of practice is put into action when the facilitator does so, and this is very situational. Its main goal is to address the issue at hand by taking specific steps. This idea has served as the main resource for the study as I have selected it to perform an action study. Action learning occurs when certain activities are planned. The strategy is then put into practice. The action's effect is first perceived during this step then it is reflected. As a consequence, a new version of the plan is created, and the procedure is repeated. The purpose of this study was to improve students' creativity in writing skills in English classrooms using action research to demonstrate the effect of creative writing on their learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I conceptualize students' creativity in writing and the role of creative writing in enhancing students' writing skills with related literature.

Conceptualizing students' creativity in writing

While teaching writing, unique ideas and strategies keep learners interested in the current lesson and attention to what they are doing. Their attention is important since innovation in writing may be viewed as beautiful, and students are typically attentive in

presenting it as such (Hesse, 2010). It provides a platform for students to express their thoughts in the form of writing and exhibit them elegantly. He went on to say that creative writing must have an aesthetic objective. Because creative writing satisfies the writers, in this instance 'the pupils', it should be employed in the same manner. It should focus on the emotion rather than the precision. Creative writing increases students' interest in writing and boosts their creativity (Kirmizi, 2015). Creative writing is a unique approach that allows individuals to convey their ideas and imagination through various mediums such as fiction, nonfiction, poetry, plays, scripts, and articles. Participating in creative writing helps students enhance their creativity, expand their imagination, and improve their English proficiency. To develop these skills, students should practice writing regularly, experiment with different styles of expression, utilize writing prompts, and embrace constructive feedback. Proficiency in these areas strengthens self-expression, enriches vocabulary, and improves communication and creativity (Fitria, 2024).

Role of creative writing in enhancing students' writing skills

Creative writing fosters students' imagination, self-expression, and creativity while enhancing their writing skills and encouraging a deeper engagement with learning. Usually, instructors assume their pupils' writing to be good. I led this study to see the outcome of creative writing application in class. Whatever the expression, it is due to their desire to communicate their emotions. I believe that pupils should have the ability to speak their thoughts without anxiety. Therefore, in my intervention, pupils will write and express themselves for the sake of enjoyment and desire. Creative writing is a feature that incorporates active imagination, aesthetic and intellectual exploration, as well as a taste for diversity, as seen by an eagerness to explore unfamiliar things (Forgeard et al., 2013). It creates the imagination of students. It is related to beauty as they imagine the most beautiful aspect of life through creative writing. It has a direct link with students' interests. Writing offers numerous benefits. It fosters curiosity and sensitivity to reality, encourages seeking references to enhance knowledge, and trains logical and systematic thinking for effective communication. Writing also reduces stress by allowing emotional expression, provides inner satisfaction and financial benefits when published, and enhances the writer's popularity when widely read. They get a chance to try new things and get the experience of writing something with their willingness. So, it generates full curiosity in them.

A study by Trisnarningsih (2016) on increasing students' creativity and writing skills through project-based learning (PjBL) showed that the use of interesting PjBL learning activities has a direct impact on enhancing the students' creativity in writing skills. Pérez et al. (2021) propose that teachers can improve students' creative writing abilities by utilizing authentic writing formats. These formats might include providing a starting point for students to expand upon, offering the beginning and middle of a story for them to conclude, or giving a complete text for them to analyze and express in their own words. Furthermore, assigning topics that encourage students to reflect on various aspects of life can stimulate creativity. Since creativity is an essential personality trait, it demands a structured and sustained process in the classroom, with every stage playing a

key role in its development. This method equips students to work independently beyond the classroom environment. Similarly, a recent study by Pokhrel (2022) on developing creative writing skills in EFL students revealed that creative writing skills in students developed as an action plan involving them in writing tasks by launching different writing activities. The exercises used and their specifics served as representations of the classroom environment that show how creative writing may be used as an effective tool to help students improve their writing skills in English.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I identified students' problem in the first week that they had inadequate creative writing abilities, so an action plan was established to improve their originality. I employed observation and self-reflective notes as research instruments to collect information. Since it is action research, it was conducted by considering it practitioner research to improve my classroom practice. Forty students in grade 12 were selected as the participants from the academic year 2022/023. They were less creative, less engaged in the learning process, and frequently produced writing projects in English that they copied from Google and their classmates. I gained real-world experience and steps were made to ensure that the action plan execution went well. Action research is a method of operation that assists us in identifying the beliefs that are essential for our lives and living in the context of these values, that is, using them as the guiding principles of our lives (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the activities for developing students' creativity in writing skills. The exercises were created to include an action plan and were implemented with grade 12 students studying English. The following six activities were implemented in class to develop their creativity in writing skills.

Writing a story

Writing a story is one of the best ways of increasing students' creativity. It engages students in imagination, cognitive abilities, and emotions. I made my students **develop a readable story with the help of the given outline. Be imaginative and develop a readable story in about 100-120 words with the help of the beginning sentence. For example**, once upon a time, a poor woodcutter was cutting trees in a forest. While cutting trees, one day an axe fell into the river.....

It was the first intervention of action research. I found that the pupils could conceive the scenarios for the incomplete story and give it an ending. Initially, pupils utilized storybooks. Martinez (2007) believes that storybooks teach students various things, including attempting subjects, acquiring vocabulary items, grammar, and the power of engagement, which helps them break out from the usual pattern of merely following the course book. Additionally, the storybooks assist teenagers in strengthening their linguistic skills. It is always crucial to include pupils in the creation of engaging stories

since stories are the most effective medium for breaking the monotony and developing creativity. Stories have an important role in brain development, not just for enjoyment. They have a crucial role in cognitive development. Storytelling helps children learn about the world and reflect on their understanding. Creating tales helps youngsters understand themselves and transmit their identity to others. It's a vital part of being human (Engel, 1999). In a day, I allowed two to four stories to present in the class. The other students had to comment and share their ideas. The next day, the students presented their stories in front of the class which made them very creative and interactive.

Writing a diary

Diaries are kept to preserve certain occasions in our lives. There are some extremely joyous moments, but there are also sad times throughout. As human beings, we go through many experiences. Some memories are worth remembering, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. Writing a journal allows individuals to express their feelings and emotions as well as develop creative writing abilities (Didion, 1968). Diaries produced by students serve as a helpful tool in the discovery process since they demand self-reflection (Kir, 2012). Students tend to disclose their inner feelings in their diaries, which allows teachers to better grasp their situation. I requested my pupils to create a diary each day and the next day, they presented their writing. I asked them to comment on their friends and then I also commented on their writings. I encouraged them to write diaries with positive remarks. Then they were assigned to write a journal every evening before going to bed. I personalized my comments to their diary entries. So, the feedback was good and encouraging, motivating students to express themselves more artistically.

My students were encouraged to write more creatively since keeping a journal is a great method to involve them in creative writing. This finding is consistent with Taqi et al.'s (2015) research. They asserted that diary writing integrates pupils' sentiments, attitudes, vocabulary acquisition, and expressiveness, all of which contribute to their writing expertise. This indicates that creating a diary can greatly help pupils enhance their creativity. It even teaches children to be analytical and rational in diverse situational contexts. This allows them to improve their academic writing skills while also teaching them grammar, vocabulary, and language in general. Thus, diary writing is a creative writing practice that may be implemented in English classes.

Example: Finally, the moment came. My best friend gave me a beautifully wrapped gift, and when I opened it, I discovered that it was a ticket to my ideal location, Hawaii! I was ecstatic and couldn't believe what I saw. I'll never forget this moment of complete delight and contentment. That was the best day of my life, and it was an event I will always treasure. It showed me the value of cherishing positive memories. Looking back, I can see how that day changed my life in so many great ways. It serves as a reminder to keep working toward my goals and to never give up on the things that make me happy.

Writing a biography

Writing a biography involves narrating the life story of an individual, focusing on their achievements, challenges, and contributions, to provide an insightful and engaging account of their journey. Biography writing requires accurate facts about the individual. Biography is apprehensive with a remarkable person's entire life process and the life that led to his or her successes (Zinn, 2004). At the same time, this might be called creative writing since it gives students the freedom to select how to deliver the story. They might showcase their creative writing abilities by recounting the events in their personal life. I got pupils to write a biography about their favourite comedian, friend, and singer, in the beginning, they introduced the person then they talked about his/her life and contributions.

Literary journal writing

Journal writing has been recognized as a means of expressing one's sentiments. It helps children improve extensive abilities such as creativity and critical thinking. Literary diaries let writers adopt the characteristics of a fictional character and reflect on the events of the story in that character's life. The writers of the literary journal consider that the story's events occurred in their own lives, and they attempt to delve deeply into their environment and experience it from their perspective.

Following the narrative, the pupils are requested to remain silent and play out the story's characters. Then they are urged to experience the characters' joy and grief, ups and downs. This is a really strong and effective technique to help them grasp the entire story. My pupils were able to show their grasp of both the character and the plot while writing the literary journal. I also discovered that pupils may get the hidden meanings of the narrative by becoming involved in the emotions of the story character. One of the pupils maintained a journal. They spoke the narrative from the heart and communicated their emotions while imagining themselves as the story's characters. The literary journal is thus an excellent practice for developing pupils' creative writing skills.

Writing reflection

Reflective writing allows students to think thoroughly about something they've learned or an experience they've had. I asked the research participants to write reflections about their learning experiences in their everyday class. Reflection helped them to recognize and appreciate great experiences while also identifying opportunities to enhance their profession and service delivery. Writing down their views can help them obtain a better comprehension of the lesson and how to apply it in future courses. Reflection also allows students to admit their faults and weaknesses and learn from them privately. Reflecting on their experiences after the fact frequently results in "aha!" moments.

Engaging students in group works

Providing a topic of their writing interest, I separated the class into five groups and allocated them a writing task. 'My First Day Experience in School' was the topic of writing. The students worked in groups to build mind maps that they could refer to

while writing. Then they worked together to write a paragraph on the assigned topic. In the meantime, I strolled around the classroom addressing students' questions. What struck me was that the majority of my pupils enthusiastically participated in the writing exercises. I could see everyone giving their views and participating in the activities. It was fascinating that even after the lecture, people wanted to add extra information to their paragraphs. I noticed an improvement in their writing as a result of their active participation, and I was both impressed and encouraged.

This finding harmonized with that of Davidson et al. (2014). They discovered that group work may be an excellent way to inspire students, promote active learning, and build critical thinking, communication, and decision-making abilities. However, without appropriate preparation and management, group work can annoy students and instructors and seem like a waste of time. So, I separated the students into two groups and set them responsibilities. The first group read a text, while the second group listened to it. I served as a facilitator and encouraged participation; I noticed improvements in their writing; I was impressed and encouraged at the same time while writing. To manage the classroom and time, time limitations were fixed so they had to finish their work on time.

DISCUSSION

Creative writing is a means for expressing one's ideas creatively via writing. It allows students to use their imaginations and other creative processes, which motivates them to write and, as a result, improves their writing abilities. Creative writing serves as a medium to express ideas imaginatively and innovatively. It encourages students to tap into their creativity and imagination, fostering their ability to write while ultimately enhancing their writing skills (Barbot et al., 2012). Writing activities boosted their creativity in writing abilities. I discovered an incredible shift in my students' creativity in writing skills after applying the action for change. Whether it's fiction or a biography, the writer must delve deep into their imagination and create impossible stories and biographies with creative enthusiasm, describing them as if they were true. Creative writing can improve students' academic discipline by guiding them to get information on writing abilities, which may also aid them with subject-specific skills. Creative writing also helps students develop writing in a traditional style of elaboration in a creative manner. I, too, have witnessed my students improve their academic performance as a result of their creative writing advancement.

When pupils are given free writing prompts on areas of interest, their writing originality grows. They must be taught to write in both a quiet atmosphere with a free attitude and in a group setting with teamwork, as action learning theory suggests. Certain characteristics of the action-learning process include the group's pleasure in the task (Cropper et al., 2000). Action learning is a methodical approach to carrying out actions. The participants appear to be asking a lot of questions, and they all have various points of view during the discussion. Action learning also includes the phase in which the group of individuals concludes. The crucial point is that this method educates people to view failure as a learning experience. They are not frightened of being mistaken. The fascinating part is that active learning promotes collaboration among individuals. When

a thought occurs, it is instantly implemented, and learning is formed as a result of that activity.

Students should be given the sensation of writing happiness that comes with creative writing. Students need a forum where they may comprehend the importance of creative writing and the enormous delight it provides. Creative writing is appropriate not just for school classrooms but also for teacher education programmes since it provides a viewpoint on how creative and expressive arts may be incorporated into classroom teaching (Anae, 2014). Both teachers and students gain from creative writing workshops. The implementation of the action plan, which focused on improving students' creative writing skills, also helped me improve my skills in incorporating creative skills into the classroom. They learned many vital life lessons, such as respecting others' thoughts, bringing their ideas to the group, and much more. Students learned that writing projects may be entertaining and that they needed to be self-sufficient to improve their creative writing skills. This study supports the concept that creative writing improves not just learners' writing skills but also their overall language skills (Akhter, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This action research has sought some activities to boost students' creativity in writing. The study reveals that teachers can develop creative writing skills in students by engaging them in interesting writing activities. Action research has suggested techniques to improve students' creative writing skills in English language classes. I implemented six distinct interventions. The study found that writing exercises used to build creative writing abilities had a favourable impact on students' writing. The activities were less active during the first cycle. It then grew more active in the second and third cycles. It was discovered that the students' inventiveness improved with each cycle. There is a significant impact that creative writing has on student learning. When students get interested in creative writing, they apply that expertise to their academic writing, which eventually helps them with all types of writing skills. The difficulties are frequently related to the student's interest, learning capacity, and debate on the issue of collaboration. These problems may be solved progressively over time, but only with a disciplined approach.

The diagnostic stage of this research helped students to solve problems, while the helpful stage provided real-world experience of action plan execution in the field. To improve students' creative writing skills, exercises must be chosen in such a way that they serve as assignments for developing their writing skills. We may provide a variety of exercises to help students strengthen their creative writing abilities. These strategies, when implemented methodically throughout the action plan implementation phase, serve as a remedy for the current issue, gradually bringing about change. It suggested that incorporating writing exercises boosted students' inventiveness in writing skills. They demonstrated tremendous progress in their writing. The teacher may track their development and encourage them regularly. To address them all, numerous actions, once launched, provide a solution to the overall pedagogical challenges. Students'

interests and teachers' consistent efforts are essential for achieving the intended outcome. Finally, this study may contribute to the current discussion that English language teachers have the potential to create activities that encourage students' creativity. Teachers should involve students in a variety of fascinating writing exercises to improve their creativity in writing skills.

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