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Development of Creative Potentialities in Urdu Writing Skills for Grade 6

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Abstract



The development of Urdu creative writing skills through creative activities was examined in the present study at elementary school level. 21 students were the sample for this study. Only by applying random sampling technique were the respondents selected by researcher. Having applied an action research design, the data was collected through observational and documentation analysis from researchers' self-thought activities. In traditional classroom practices, students (participants of this study) rarely get any opportunities for bringing to light their creative thoughts as they are supposed to do nothing but copy from blackboard onto their worksheets. The researcher facilitated these students that are used to traditional classroom practices by giving them guidelines on creating and nurturing creative ideas in writing. This inevitably lead in resulting activity based learning as the most preferred learning style by students (participants). Throughout this study, participants were highly active in developing their creative Urdu writing skills through activity based learning. This study, henceforth, suggests that these innovative techniques needs to be carried on regular basis to help students in developing their Urdu creative writing. It can easily be stated that this study supports the importance of creative Urdu writing skills, and promotes it equally well.

Keywords: Creativity, Writing Skills, Creative Activities.

Introduction

In last few decades, automatic natural language processing (NLP) in English, European and East Asian languages have been the focused of many researches. South Asian languages, Urdu especially, have received lesser attention than what they deserve (Imad & Ibrahim, 2004).

Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, has more than 60 million first language speakers. It is also one the state languages of India and has more than 100 million total speakers in more than 20 countries. Basing on Perso-Arabic script, Urdu is written in Nastalique writing style (Iqbal et al., 2020).

Urdu

The vocabulary for urdu consists of several languages including Arabic, English, Turkish, Sanskrit and Farsi (Persian) etc. Urdu's script is right-to-left. In Urdu, form of a word's character is context sensitive, means the form of a character varies in a word in accordance with its position in that word (start, end, medial, independent) (Platts, 1874).

Orthographic features of Urdu

In accordance with Malik et al. (2008), Urdu alphabet consists of 35 simple consonants. In these 35 consonants, 15 are aspirated consonants, 10 are vowels, 15 are diacritical marks, 10 are digits and other symbols.

Consonants

Consonants are further classified into two groups i.e. aspirated consonants and non-aspirated consonants. As stated before, there are 15 aspirated consonants in Urdu alphabet. These consonants are shown by a grouping of a simple consonant to be aspirated. A special letter called Heh Doachashmee (ہ) is used as ہ، مہ، گہ، کھ، ڈھ، جھ، ٹھ، پھ، تھ are and consonants are aspirated (Khalil, sardar, Gull, Aslam & Ahmad, 2020).

As addressed by Khalil, Sardar, Gull, Aslam, Ahmad, & Martinez-Enriquez (2020), 35 non-aspirated consonants are there in Urdu alphabet. These, non-aspirated consonants, are the signs that represent 27 consonant sounds. Various scripts are employed to show the similar sound in Urdu, For example: Saad (ص), Seen (س) and Seh (ث) all represent the sound of "s".

Vowels

There are 10 vowels in Urdu, seven of which contains nasalized forms. Of these seven vowels, four long vowels are represented by Alef Madda (اَ), Alef (اِ), Choti Yeh (ی) and Vav (و), and three short vowels are represented by Arabic Kasra (Zer), Arabic Fatha (Zabar) and Arabic Damma (Pesh). It must be acknowledged that in Urdu language, the Vowel demonstration is context sensitive. For example, the Urdu Choti Yeh (ی) and Vav (و) can also be used as consonants (Malik, M. G. Abbas & Bhattacharyya. 2008).

Diacritical marks

The marks that are added to a letter to help in changing its pronunciation and to differentiate among similar words are called diacritical marks. Another name for these marks is accent mark. In Urdu, there are 15 diacritical (or accent) marks (Malik, Abbas & Bhattacharyya. 2008). These diacritical marks (Zabar, Zer, Pesh, Ulta Pesh, Do-Zabar, Do-Zer, Do-Pesh etc) that we are talking about represent vowel sounds. In Urdu script, these diacritical marks, depending on the need, are placed either above or below a word. These diacritical marks are rarely used by Urdu writing people these days. As stated before, changing the diacritic of a character in a word changes its entire meaning. For example, the word "بیل" has two meanings. One of its meanings is a "creeping plant branch" and the other is "bull". To remove the doubt between these two words, whether what's written is a bull or a creeping plant branch, there should be Zabar over Beh (ب) that would help in deducing the meaning of word as "bull" (Saleem, 2017).

Urdu verb

Verb (فعل) is a term that corresponds to occurrence. It corresponds that a task is being done, that something is performed. Verbs that need an object are called intransitive verbs (الزم فعل) -And, verbs that do need a direct object are called as transitive verbs (متعدی فعل). A morpheme of Urdu verb that is not altered among many morphological forms is a root form, also known as base form (Thabet, 2004). From a verb's infinitive, lexicon, form removing a suffix (نا) leaves a part that is the "root" (ماده). Now, contrarily, addition of suffixes (وا) to the root results in the formation of causative stem form of verb (Ijaz & Hussain, 2007).

The verb that has suffix "نا" in it is called as the infinitive verb (مصدر). This, infinitive verb, can easily be placed in noun's stead. The masculine suffix for this verb is "نا", the feminine suffix is "نے", and suffix is "نی" for oblique infinitive form.

The habitual or imperfect form of verb, better known as repetitive form (استمراری), is formed by appending suffixes "تا", "تے", "تی", "تیں" to the root form (Naseem & Hussain, 2007).

Urdu noun

Noun, in simple words, is the name of anything. This anything can refer to literally anything, for the say, a name of a person, place, object, animal, time, or a situation even. Proper noun "ہعرفہ اسن" and common noun "اسن نکرہ" are the two initial classifications of noun. Proper noun is the name of a particular person, thing or a place e.g. Amina, HP Laptop, Lahore. Common noun, goes without saying, is the common name for any person, thing or a place e.g. man, laptop, city (Platts, 1874). Common nouns are even further branched into state, group, spatial, instrumental and temporal nouns. The four fundamental properties that are in relation with the Urdu nouns are "gender, form, number and case" (Rizvi & Hussain, 2005). Singular and Plural are the two possibilities that exist in Urdu nouns for number.

Nominative form of noun is listing an Urdu noun in dictionary in its normal form. However, when a noun is listed followed by a postposition then it is known as oblique form. And Urdu nouns that are for human beings, that are used to address a person, are called as vocative nouns (Anwar & wang, 2006).

Urdu adjective

Adjective is used to highlight the status, quality or action of a noun. For example, pious man, fresh banana or busy city.

The most common and significant type of adjective is "Descriptive adjective" (Butt & King, 2007). It, descriptive adjective, highlights the attributes of a noun in terms of its shape, size, dimensions, colour, sound, personal trait, time and quality. Attributive adjectives are descriptive adjectives directly leading a nominal head as modifiers. For example, cruel king or white ball. The possessive adjectives, as the name suggests, show the ownership of a noun. For example, hafsa's blue veil or city's busy traffic (Butt & King, 2002).

Writing and creativity

Writing, a human communication medium, represents language and conveys even emotions using signs and symbols. It can be said that writing is a complement to spoken language.

To be creative is to be imaginative and inventive. Creativity can be defined as going off main track and finding new (and better) ways of reaching any goal. It means to be open towards different experiences and ideas (Bartlett, 1958). Creativity, to put in simple words, is a person's ability to create or discover new possibilities. In accordance with Saleem (2018), it is highly important to foster creativity because creativity makes room for questioning ability, helps in establishing connections, outlines innovations, help to develop better problem solving skills, and tends to remove obstacles that we found in communication and collaboration.

Relationship between Writing and Creativity

The primary focus of the study of relationship between writing and creativity is writing as means of personal expression and imagination. Writing has always been hiding behind the creation of childhood worlds outside school in the form of personal diaries, home-made comics or scrapbooks (Memon, 1983).

With Anne Haas Dyson's work on demonstrating how children age-appropriate, the role of culture in children's school-based writing has become majorly significant focus of studies in recent years (Khan, 2012). Children, when immersed in a culture, rework and reshape the media. This results in a heady mix, an intertextuality product where a piece of writing will reference a specific media that is familiar to the children. For encouraging creativity in children, help should be provided in innovative ways (Al-Khuli, 1991). This help doesn't mean triggering children's imagination with forced ideas. Children are more than capable of creating not only their own characters but also their own worlds. Creativity, needless to say, like many other things, need practice to be perfect. So, it is highly important that you give children different opportunities to practice their creativity (Khan, 2011). Language is what allows children, or anyone for the say, the ability to express themselves. It allows communication. Mother tongue is the most comprehensive and important medium of expression to every existing individual. Children learn through connecting individual words with ideas, actions and objects. When allowed freedom to express themselves in writing, children write their thoughts and ideas in very clever and creative ways. The most preferable learning method for children is when they are taught in creative ways by their teachers or parents and not memorizing is totally taken out of the picture (Haider, 2012).

Generally, it is assumed that children are actively imaginative and are highly creative. They learn best when they learn through risking, exploring, manipulating, modifying and testing ideas. This, without doubt, is the reason Educationists and Psychologists all around the globe are focused on creativity (both in writing and thinking). Hence, the main aim of present study is to find the creative potentialities and development of Urdu writing skills

The Five Creative Habits and their Components

Inquisitive:

- Questioning and wondering about something that has so much more to do than just simply being curious. It is about posing questions that are concrete and would help in thinking things through to develop new ideas. Creativity can never be fuelled by simply asking questions because you have nothing else better to do with your time. Creativity is fuelled by questioning about something to understand it better and then following up on those questions by actively going out and seeking more (Costa & Kallick, 2009).

Persistent:

- Creative people are persistent. They never give up easily. Daring to be creative, be persistent about it, demands a level of self-confidence as prerequisite for risk-taking (Henrikson, 2016). It is important to stick with difficulty persistence in the form of tenacity because it helps an individual in getting beyond familiar ideas and coming up with new ones that are more creative.

Imaginative:

- Coming up with different possibilities of a situation, developing an idea, can only be done when you have a positively active imagination. You need to be able to see the different outcomes of a situation and imagine your way through ideas that you've been manipulating inside your head (Costa & Kallick, 2009).

Disciplined

- Maintaining even the smallest details in your work and taking pride in it is yet another form of being creative. People that have the highest creative minds are known to be constantly improving their work. They self-evaluate their ideas all the time (Mishra, Koehler & Henriksen, 2011).

Collaborative:

- One of the main points of being creative is to be able to collaborate with others. You must be able to convey your ideas to others and get a thorough understanding of their ideas. Giving and receiving feedback helps in improving ideas and being more open towards new experiences (Costa & Kallick, 2009).

The Importance of Method Selection

Teachers, nowadays, focus only on the result, the outcome, they want from their students. They give little to zero importance on selecting a working strategy, an efficient teaching method, that will help their students in achieving their goals. Traditional method of teaching is the only method of teaching that's ever been applied to many students (Alvi, 2004). Teaching process is a complicated process of conveying concepts, making models and abstraction using strategies, to emphasize problem solving. The main point of teaching is to give students enough confidence and knowledge that they become capable of resolving problems, reflect critically and collaborate with others (Zaidi & Malik, 2018). Therefore, it is vital for the teachers to be able to come up with effective teaching methods that would help their students in their learning and mental growth. It was addressed by Memon in 1983 that many of the Pakistan's elementary students get chance to express their thoughts and inventive considerations only once in a while. They, those students, are taught to copy from the chalkboard onto their worksheets.

Saleem (2017) came forward and said that only a few schools guarantee experimental creative writings for the students. They are allowed to compose on subjects given by their teachers. For example, an essay on a stormy day, my school or my friend. This controlled subject in creative writing doesn't do well for even the students that are exceptional storytellers. They, even those creative students, end up stating nothing satisfactory in these essays. By controlling the subject, the freedom of creative writing is taken away from the students. They write next to nothing in their compositions.

Objectives

Following are the objectives of the study:

- Coming up with many creative activities to improve Urdu creative writing skills of grade 6 students.
- Developing a relationship between cognitive skills and writing skills.
- Developing and inculcating the five habits of mind in students of grade 6.
- Enabling students in word usage and making them see and understand the connection between words.
- Enabling students in using their writing skills in comprehension tasks.

Methodology:

In this part, needless to say, the detailed outline of research design is highlighted along with the variables and instruments that were used. It keeps on highlighting the data collection and data analysis methods that were used for this study.

Research Design:

Action research was the research method that was employed in this study. It is a powerful tool for improving the quality of research work. To put in simpler words, in action research, actions are taken on developing solutions and monitoring how well those actions (that were taken) worked after the data to diagnose a problem is collected by the researcher. In the present study, action researched was used to sort out the problems that students face in Urdu creative writing by coming up with creativity enhancing activities. Bringing to light the areas where students were facing difficulties in writing was the main goal of the researcher.

It can also be said that the action research is a process that is largely based on making assumptions and investigating whether those assumptions were right or not. This systematic inquiry, action research, works best when conducted by teachers, researchers or any other stakeholder in Education for the say.

Procedure of the Study

First thing that was observed by the researcher was the fact that many students were from backward areas with illiterate parents. Some of these students had literate parents but their parents were not able to teach them at home because of their extremely busy working schedule. Second, it was observed that the students of grade 6 were unable to comprehend words, the meaning behind them, and form sentences. Judging from their grade, 6 that is, their performance was extremely depressing. So, it was under these observations that the researcher attempted to explore how teachers were teaching creative Urdu writing skills in a door of awareness school. Needless to say that the students of grade 6 were selected to develop creative writing skills under different creative activities that were introduced by the researcher. During this study, it became evident to the researcher that students were getting confident and clear in their responses. They became keener to share their new experience of learning to write in the classroom the way they willed it. Various activities were introduced by the researcher i.e. writing haroof on student's tummies, making words by joining letters, letter tasking, dialogue writings, alphabetical madness, complete and incomplete story, cups of tasks, watch and write, word play, puzzling box, colour your idea etc. All these activities had the same purpose in their core. That purpose, needless to say, was to encourage and develop the creative Urdu writing skills in students. Researcher kept on observing how young children learned and responded to various creative activities that were introduced to them.

Population of the Study

Students in an NGO based door of awareness school were the population for this study.

Sample of the Study

For research sample, the population was lessened to 21 grade-6 students from that NGO based door of awareness school.

Data Collection

All the data was collected personally by the researcher. Data was collected through classroom observations, lesson plans, documentation analysis, judging student's writing pieces in classroom situations before and after the study was done and activities were introduced to help students in developing creative Urdu writing skills.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed through observations and documentation analysis. The correction in use of words, implication of grammatical rules and neatness in the handwriting were major keys in analysing data. These keys were the focus to mark student's understanding and progress in creative Urdu writing.

Results

In Pakistan's schools, rarely does young children get opportunities to express their ideas writing. They are exposed only to traditional ways where they are supposed to be copying from the blackboard, tracing letter formations and filling worksheets. Some schools that claim they allow their students the freedom to express themselves in creative writing only ever let the students write on subjects given by the teachers. The main ideas and key words are provided readily by the teachers in this so called creative writing freedom. And because teachers are the ones in control of these creative writing sessions, students unconsciously channel teacher's expectations in their work instead of channelling their own thoughts and ideas. The result of this, needless to say, is devastating. It doesn't gives student the freedom to explore and learn from their ideas. It makes them lean on teachers harder than ever, and results in the destruction of their creativity.

After this study, however, it was observed that the students were able to make proper sentences with ease. They knew how to comprehend sentences. And, more than anything, they were able to cooperate with each other by sharing their own ideas and understanding other's ideas. Their interest was evident in every task that they performed. Everything they learned in this activity induced creative Urdu writing session, they learned by heart and effectively. Students easily developed the five habits of mind (imaginative, disciplined, inquisitive, persistent and collaborative) during this study. Other elements that are in major relationship with effective learning and writing were also glimpsed evidently in the students. For example, cognition, organisation, expressions, clarity and creativity.

The activities that were introduced during this study are stated below in short details along with the improvement they caused in participating students:

- Harroof on Student's tummies It was designed to improve student's understanding of word connection. They learned how to make connection between words by performing this activity.
- Making words by joining letters It was designed to improve student's cognition to help them in generating new ideas in writing. Students had to pick different chits of letters and make words by using those chits. They first generated different words in their minds and then focused and wrote them by using five creative habits of mind.
- Letter tasking
It was designed to enhance their critical thinking. During this activity, the discipline, collaboration and persistent nature of the students were checked. Their imagination and inquisitive nature was also marked with the help of this activity.
- Dialogue play
This activity was introduced to help instil confidence among students. They were made to perform dialogues with each other and they ended up learning how to interact with others in a fun way through this activity.
- Watch and write
This activity was designed to improve students' writing through imagination. They were made to watch different pictures in this activity and write something by focusing on the ideas or words that jumbled inside their heads.
- Cups of tasks
It was a group based activity in which students were divided into groups and each group was given cups of different tasks. Groups had to collaborate for solving tasks. This activity helped in developing critical thinking.
- Alphabetical madness
The aim of this activity was to check the mental capability of students. This activity greatly enhanced students' cognitive skills because students had to make sentences that started with particular words or harroofs.
- Puzzling boxes
This was yet another group based activity in which students were divided into two groups. They had to collaborate with each other for solving their puzzles.
- Colour your ideas
Trickier, yet fun all the same, this activity was based on giving colours to students' ideas. They were then given different pictures for colouring and were generating different ideas about the pictures. Then, students had to write about the pictures. This helped in enhancing their cognition and showed the relationship between cognition and writing.
- Word play
This activity was formed to highlight the learning capabilities of students. Incomplete words were given to students and students had to complete them by writing the missing letters (harroofs).
In the end, needless to say, the writing styles of students were greatly enhanced by these activities. They learned all five of the creative habits of minds and started channelling them in their work. The goal that researcher had in mind was achieved. The creative Urdu writing skills were greatly and effectively developed in the students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, under the implication of creative methods of teaching, students had better and effectively developed writing skills. Students learned to comprehend sentences and use words properly. They were able to understand and make connection between letters, words and sentences. With the help of fun-based creative learning activities researcher was able to help students in overcoming the difficulties they had in writing and learning. Hence, creative activities and creative habits of mind are important if you want a better outcome from students. It widens the understanding, learning, capabilities of students and makes the content that's given to them much more vibrant and interesting.

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