

Developing Creative Writing Skills through a Short Story-Based Program

Marwa Mostafa Abbas El-Mahdy

Dr. Aly A. Qoura

*Professor of TEFL, Faculty of Education
Curriculum & Instruction Dept*

Dr. Mervat El Hadidy

*Associate Prof. of TEFL, Faculty of Education
Curriculum & Instruction Dept*

Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of a program based on short stories to develop EFL secondary school students' creative writing skills (fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration). To achieve the purpose of the study, two instruments were constructed; a questionnaire of creative writing skills to determine the most important creative writing skills for first year secondary school students and a pre-post creative writing test. The participants of the study consisted of 60 girls divided into two groups; experimental group and control group from first year secondary school students of Sinbellawein secondary school for girls. The results of the study indicated that the use of short story enhanced the creative writing skills of first year secondary school students. It was recommended that EFL course designers include creative writing skills and train teachers on using creative writing activities.

Key words: *Creative Writing skills, Short Story, Egypt.*

Introduction

One of the biggest challenges teachers have faced in the classroom has to do with writing. Usually students do not want to write, because they have never been encouraged to do it or to enjoy it (Serra, 2013). According to Brown, Morrell & Rowlands (2011), pleasure in writing is something children bring with them to school on the first day. However, when they arrive in their first classrooms, things change dramatically. The way

writing is taught in schools not only denies these young writers their identities as authors, but also it kills the pleasure of self expression. Almost the same lack of engagement and motivation continues today. In fact, students' attitudes toward writing generally worsen as they move from grade to grade. Randolph (2011) indicated three major problems that face EFL students when they come to write. First, they are asked to write in a style that they are not necessarily comfortable with. Second, many topics on which they write are unfamiliar. Third, they have difficulty in developing their ideas in paragraphs and how to build these ideas coherent, clear, and organized. With the help of creative writing, these three difficulties are addressed and students look to overcome their former issues with writing stylistics, critical thinking and the development of ideas. Also with creative writing, students discover a number of ways to translate their thoughts and to express their own originality in different forms of writing: poetry, short stories, creative articles or essays, peer reviews, and formal critiques. The importance of creative writing in developing students' cognitive and communication skills cannot be underestimated (Cristopher, 1996).

Creative Writing

Creative Writing can be defined as the writing that expresses the writer's thoughts and feelings in an imaginative, often unique, and poetic way. This type of writing is guided more by the writer's need to express feelings and ideas than by restrictive demands of factual and logical progression of expository writing (Lukiv, 2006).

The present study focused on fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration as creative writing skills that needed for EFL first year secondary school students.

1. Fluency

Tuan (2010) defined fluency it as the learner' s capacity to produce language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation. Also Isbell and Raines (2013) defined fluency as the generation of many different ideas. The emphasis here is on the number of ideas produced.

2. Flexibility

As stated by Starko (2010), flexibility in thinking generally denotes the ability to look at a situation from many points of view or to generate many categories of responses. While Isbell and Raines (2013), defined flexibility as the ability to change direction or think in another way.

3. Originality

Baer and kaufman (2012) suggested that originality refers to how unusual are the ideas one produces. Also Isbell and Raines (2013) claimed that originality is the generation of truly unique ideas. These ideas are not like any other products; they are one-of-a-kind ideas.

4. Elaboration

Shively (2011) explained that elaboration involves adding details, filling in the gaps, embellishing, and completing a creative idea. While Baer and kaufman (2012) mentioned that elaboration refers to the richness of detail in the ideas one produces.

Short Story

Short story is a kind of fiction that can be presented in a few pages (between 7,500 and 20,000 words) and can be read in one session. As any kind of fiction, it contains; **Theme** (what is the main idea?) **plot** (What happens?), **characters** (Who acts?), **narrative perspective** (Who sees what?) and **setting** (Where and when do the events take place?). Concision is everything in a short story in which it is more pointed and more economically detailed as to character, situation, and plot than novel (Morley, 2007). In this study the researcher decided to use short story as

a model for developing creative writing skills of EFL first year secondary school students.

Studies Related to Creative Writing Skills and Short Story

Oster (1989, as cited in Pardede, 2011) suggested that literature helps students to **write more creatively**. **This was obviously affirmed in the following studies:**

Arif (2010) carried out an action research to improve teaching skills of creative writing using short stories. The study was conducted in an English Language class of grade VII in a private secondary school in Karachi. The research had qualitative paradigm of action research. For this study, students were taught to write creatively using short stories as prompts for their writing. The data of the study was collected through classroom teaching sessions, observations, field notes, document analysis and semi-structured focused group interviews. The findings of this research revealed that stories have very powerful effect on students and can be used for numerous teaching strategies.

Kirkgoz (2012) investigated how short stories can be integrated into an English language curriculum in order to consolidate students' knowledge of the English language - grammar and vocabulary - and to promote their creative writing skills. The study was conducted with 21 Turkish university students receiving an English language preparatory program. In order to obtain students' opinion concerning the use of story, each student was asked to keep a diary in which to reflect their views following the study of each literary text, and a portfolio where they could keep their writings. The data collected through the diaries and student writings were complemented by administering an end-of-the year story perception questionnaire in order to have an overall evaluation of the course. The findings of the study indicated that the use of short stories contributed to students' reinforcing effectively and meaningfully their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary while it helped students to be more creative and imaginative in their writing in a way to

free the students from the routine procedures occurring in the classroom.

Ibrahim (2016) designed a program based on science fiction stories for developing creative writing skills of first year preparatory stage pupils. He selected a group of first year preparatory pupils as the participants for the study and divided them into experimental and control group. Tools of the study included a list of creative writing skills (*fluency, flexibility, originality* and *elaboration*) needed for first year preparatory pupils and a pre-post creative writing skills test. The results of the study offered an evidence on the effectiveness of the proposed program based on the science fiction stories in developing creative writing skills of first year preparatory pupils.

Statement of the Problem

Based on the results of the two pilot studies the problem of the study can be stated as follows: "many students feel frustrated when they are asked to write in English. They don't know how to express their feelings and thoughts. Besides, they have difficulties in generating new ideas related to the topics they are asked to write about".

In other words, EFL first year secondary school students don't enjoy writing and if they write, their writings are usually poor and lack imagination and creative ideas.

Questions of the Study

The study aimed to investigate the impact of a program based on short stories to develop EFL secondary school students' creative writing skills. It sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the creative writing skills necessary for EFL first year secondary school students?
2. How far do EFL first year secondary school students master these skills?
3. What are the components of a short story based - program for developing creative writing skills of EFL first year secondary school students?

4. What is the impact of the program on developing creative writing skills of EFL first year secondary school students?

Aims of the Study

The present study aimed at:

1. Identifying the creative writing skills needed for EFL first year secondary school students.
2. Determining how far first year secondary school students master these skills.
3. Identifying the components of a program based on short stories to promote creative writing skills for first year secondary school students.
4. Investigating the impact of the program on developing creative writing skills of first year secondary school students.

Hypotheses of the Study

The study tried to test the validity of the following hypotheses:

1. There is a statistically significant difference at the .05 level between the mean score of the experimental group and the control group students on the writing post-test in favor of the experimental group.
2. There is a statistically significant difference at the .05 level between the mean score of the experimental group students on the writing pre-post test in favor of the post test scores.

Significance of the Study

For students, the significance of the present study fell under the following points:

1. Encouraging students' imagination and creativity in writing.
2. Supporting students' self-confidence and allowing self-expression.
3. Finally, for those who are serious about pursuing a career as a literary writer or novelist, this program may be an

excellent way to develop their craft and thereby starting on the journey of becoming a published author.

For teachers, the significance of the present study fell under the following points:

1. Helping teachers to explore other facets of the language than the ones they normally teach.
2. Directing the attention of EFL teachers to the importance of using short stories as a means for improving not only creative writing but also other sub skills of writing.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the study were first year secondary school students of Sinbellawein secondary school for girls (60 girls).

Methods

This study adapted a quasi-experimental study. The study was designed to investigate the impact of short story based program on developing creative writing skills of first year secondary school students. The participants of the study were two groups; experimental and control group.

Instruments

1. A questionnaire of creative writing skills (CWQ) to determine the most important creative writing skills for first year secondary school students.
2. A creative writing test used as a pre-post test to measure the creative writing skills of first year secondary school students before and after treatment (CWT).

Results

The results of this study are reported in terms of its hypothesis.

First Hypothesis: "There is a statistically significant difference at the .05 level between the mean score of the

experimental group and the control group students on the writing post-test in favor of the experimental group."

To investigate this hypothesis, the researcher used T- test for independent measures for homogeneity and heterogeneity to indicate the significant differences between the mean scores of the two groups of post creative writing test. The following table shows the results:

Table 18 comparing the writing performance of the experimental and control group in the post administration of the creative writing skills test

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
					F	Sig.				
Post_fluency	CON	30	29.0000	6.97285	.126	.724	6.650	58	.001	11.43333
	EXP	30	40.4333	6.32828						
Post_flexibility	CON	30	13.4333	4.80433	1.126	.293	7.859	58	.001	8.80000
	EXP	30	22.2333	3.81181						
Post_originality	CON	30	41.6000	17.06297	7.281	.009	5.547	50.154	.001	31.43333
	EXP	30	73.0333	25.92627						
Post_elaboration	CON	30	6.6667	2.30940	.069	.794	4.75	58	.001	2.63333
	EXP	30	9.3000	1.96784						
Post_Total Creative Writing	CON	30	90.7000	25.98826	4.175	.046	6.724	52.930	.001	54.30
	EXP	30	145.0000	35.78865						

Based on the above table:

Table (18) reveals a significant difference between the experimental and control group in the CWT sub skills (fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration, respectively) in favor of the experimental group. The mean score of experimental group was (40.43, 22.233, 73.033, 9.30) while the mean score of the control group was (29.0, 13.433, 41.60, 6.67), and the t value was (6.65, 7.859, 5.547, 4.75, 6.724) which is significant at the .01 level. The mean difference between the two groups was (11.433, 8.80, 31.43, and 2.633).

Post-Total Creative Writing Test:

As shown in table (18), the significant differences of the two groups in the total creative writing test was in the favor of the experimental group in which the mean scores of the

experimental group was 145.0 while the mean scores of the control group was 90.70 and the mean differences between the two groups was 54.30 (greater than 1).

Estimating the Effect Size:

In order to determine the effect size of the proposed program on the post creative writing test for the experimental and control groups, the square of eta was calculated. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 19 Level of effect Size of the proposed program on the performance of the Experimental group

group	Variable	Effect size "Partial Eta Squared"	Level of effect size
Cont.	Post_fluency	0.433 (43.3%)	High
Exp.			
Cont.	Post_flexibility	0.516 (51.6%)	High
Exp.			
Cont.	Post_originality	0.347 (34.75%)	High
Exp.			
Cont.	Post_elaboration	0.280 (285%)	High
Exp.			
Cont.	Post_Total_ Creative_Writing	0.438 (43.8%)	High
Exp.			

Table (19) illustrates a high effect size of proposed short story based program on the experimental group in the form CWT sub skills and in the total CWT score. The effect size was the highest for the flexibility sub skill (0.516) followed by fluency sub skill (0.433) and originality (0.347). The elaboration sub skill was in the last rank (0.280).

Second Hypothesis: "There is a statistically significant difference at the .05 level between the mean score of the experimental group students on the writing pre-post test in favor of the post test scores."

To investigate this hypothesis, the researcher used T- test for correlation measures to indicate the significant differences between the mean scores of the pre-post creative writing test. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 22 comparing the writing performance of the experimental group on the pre-post creative writing skills test

Measure	variable	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
fluency	Pre_fluency	25.7667	60	3.99307	9.213	59	.001	8.95
	Post_fluency	34.7167	60	8.76451				
flexibility	Pre_flexibility	10.4500	60	3.56739	10.794	59	.001	7.38
	Post_flexibility	17.8333	60	6.17860				
originality	Pre_originality	30.3167	60	13.89121	8.507	59	.001	27.00
	Post_originality	57.3167	60	26.92015				
elaboration	Pre_elaboration	5.4667	60	2.53428	7.315	59	.001	2.516
	Post_elaboration	7.9833	60	2.50756				
Total_Creative Writing	Pre_Total_Creative Writing	75.9333	60	21.64914	11.642	29	.001	69.07
	Post_Total_Creative Writing	145.0000	60	35.78865				

Table (22) shows that the significant difference of the two applications was in favor of the post-application of CWT in which the mean score of the post CWT sub skills (fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration, respectively) was 34.7, 17.8, 57.3, 7.98 while the mean score of the pre-CWT sub skills (fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration, respectively) was 25.76, 10.5, 30.3, 5.5 and the mean difference between the both applications was 8.9, 7.38, 27.0, 2.52.

Creative Writing Test:

The significant difference of the two applications in total creative writing test was in favor of the post-application in which the mean score of the post-creative writing test was 145 while the mean score of the pre-creative writing test was 75.93 and the mean difference between the both applications was 69.07 (greater than 0.1).

Estimating the Effect Size:

In order to determine the effect size of the proposed program on the post creative writing test in comparison with the pre-creative writing test, the square of eta was calculated. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 23 Level of effect Size of the proposed program in the two applications on the performance of the Experimental group

measure	Variable	Effect size "Partial Eta Squared"	Level of effect size
Pre.	fluency	0.590 (59%)	High
Post.			
Pre.	flexibility	0.664 (66.4%)	High
Post.			
Pre.	originality	0.551 (55.15)	High
Post.			
Pre.	elaboration	0.476 (47.6%)	High
Post.			
Pre.	Total_ Creative_Writing	0.824 (82.4%)	High
Post.			

Table (23) illustrates a high effect size of proposed short story based program on the experimental group in the form CWT sub skills and in the total CWT score. The effect size was the highest for the flexibility sub skill (0.664, means 66.4%) followed by fluency sub skill (0.590, means 59%) and originality (0.551, means 55.15%). The elaboration sub skill was in the last rank (0.476, means 47.6%) while the effect size of the proposed program on the total score of creative writing test of the post application in comparison with the pre-application was (0.824, means 82.4%).

Conclusion

With reference to the results mentioned above, it was concluded that the present study offered evidence for the effectiveness of using short stories in developing creative writing skills (*fluency, flexibility, originality* and *elaboration*) of first year secondary school students. Also using short stories in teaching is very enjoyable to students in all stages.

Recommendations

In the light of the results and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were suggested:

For Teachers:

1. Teachers should train students on how to write creatively and provide them with the opportunity to use their imagination in writing.
2. Teachers should allow students to express themselves and express their opinions freely without exercising pressures or providing specific written models to follow.

For Students:

1. Students need to be aware of both writing and creativity skills in their writing to increase their fluency and help them to write flexibility. Teacher should evaluate students' writings not only on accuracy but also creativity.

For Course Designers:

1. Developing creative writing skills should be among the objectives of the programs of EFL pre service teachers.
2. Developing creative writing skills should start from the beginning of learning English.

For Curriculum Designers:

1. Curriculum designers and planners should design an appropriate curriculum that includes methods and techniques for developing creative writing skills.

For Ministry of Education:

1. Ministry of Education should provide in service teachers with training sessions on how to use short stories in developing all language skills.
2. Ministry of Education should provide pre and in service teachers with training sessions on how to develop creative writing skills of students in different stages.

Suggestions for the Further Research

The following studies are suggested:

1. Using short stories for developing writing skills of learning disabilities.

2. Using short stories for developing creative reading skills of first year secondary school students.
3. Using short stories for developing critical thinking skills and critical reading of first year secondary school students.
4. Using short stories for developing critical writing skills of EFL secondary school students.

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