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FOCUSING ON MULTIDIMENSIONAL ASPECTS OF CREATIVE WRITING SKILLS: CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN PAKISTAN

Abstract

This paper explores a wide range of issues related to the creative writing in schools and institutions in Pakistan. Main emphasis is given on the theoretical and practical usage of creative writing. This research is qualitative in nature, theories presented by David Crystal, Alan Maley and Regie Routman support this research as a theoretical framework. In Pakistan, conventional writing has very firm roots in the area of applied linguistics and educational field, this research will be helpful for the educational policy makers in the country to introduce these techniques of creative writing at school level to meet the standard set by the modern world.

Keywords: *Creative writing, skills, motivation, English*

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Introduction

Creative writing can be beneficial to both teachers and students. No matter which method is used or prevails in teaching English, creative writing tasks can be used along most of them (i.e. warm-ups, homework). It can be used for short warm-up exercises to review vocabulary of grammar from the last lesson or it can be stretched across the whole lesson in case of a more demanding task. At the same time it can be used predominantly as homework activity allowing students to spend as much time as they need on their writing or it can be used as filler. At the same time, English creative writing can be used in a separate course, taking place online on the Internet or at school as an extra-curricular activity. Taking all of the mentioned into account, creative writing as a truly versatile tool which offers a lot of potential for engaging and creative learning. Once we enter elementary school, we learn how to read and finally, when we master all of the above mentioned skills, we learn how to write. These skills can be further divided into two categories: productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading). Even though every teacher may have a different opinion on the importance of each of the language skills, to successfully and effectively learn a foreign language, all of the skills should be seen as equal and worth the same attention. As Harmer points out,

“It makes little sense to talk about skills in isolation [...] because when we are engaged in conversation, we are bound to listen as well as speak because otherwise we could not interact with the person we are speaking to.” (Harmer, 2007, p. 265)

It mentions all of the four language skills and their importance in communication. In the past decades, receptive skills were often called passive skills, because to scholars, students did not observably produce any linguistic output. Especially listening was predominantly seen as a pre-requisite to speaking. However, as Chastain (1988) explains:

“In more recent theoretical models in which the mind is viewed as an information processing system, listening is considered an active process. Listeners are thought to be involved actively in the communication process because they use their background knowledge of the world and of language to recreate the speakers' message.” (Chastain,1988, p. 193). Both of these types of skills can be further divided into extensive and intensive. The former is usually seen as more motivating, because it is often the learner himself who chooses the sources of materials (what to read and what to listen) depending on his or her interests. This type of reading and learning usually takes place at home in learners' free time and helps students acquire vocabulary and grammar. Intensive reading and listening, on the other hand, often takes place in classrooms with audio recordings played to students chosen by teacher. Fortunately, with more and more accessible authentic materials (such as movies in original languages, countless radio stations available on the Internet, audio books, podcasts, and music surrounding us almost all the time) teaching listening gradually becomes a vital part of language lessons. It is very significant for students to “learn to predict content, to sample crucial components of the message, to verify or reject their predictions, and thus to recreate the speaker's message” (Chastain, 1988, p. 198). It is at the same time a very necessary skill for learners, because it allows them to use it for their further independent language learning, possibly also in their free time. Various blogs, fiction literature as well as news and magazines are available on the Internet for free which is a perfect source for extensive reading and developing skills.

The remaining two language skills are probably the most 'visible' ones, as speaking is usually used to assess the level of student's knowledge of the particular language. Speaking allows us to directly communicate with our surroundings, no matter whether interactively or non-interactively. Mastering the speaking skill is actually a truly demanding process because as Harmer points out,

“if students want to speak fluently in English, they need to be able pronounce phonemes correctly, use appropriate stress and intonation patterns and speak in connected speech [as well as] speak in a range of different genres and situations” (Harmer, 2007, p. 343). Despite writing might seem a lot easier to master (in comparison with speaking), it is actually more demanding. At first, it might sound as a simple noting down of what has been spoken, but there is a lot more than that. Writing and written communication in general has many of its specific elements and mastering them takes a lot of time and practice. As demanding as learning writing itself, is also teaching writing. “It is a process during which teachers try to explain to their students the right use of characteristics of writing such as permanence, production time, distance, orthography, complexity, vocabulary and formality” (Brown, 2000, p. 341). At the same time, there are several other important issues of writing that students need to master such as spelling and punctuation which has a crucial impact on the meaning of the message. Last but not least, distinguishing between genres and paying attention to cohesion and coherence are issues that also need to be presented and acquired by students.

Motivation and Creative Writing

Motivations is necessary in learning process especially in learning new skills, creating writing also demands to follow these certain norms.

“Not only it entertains students, but it also fosters their artistic expression, explores the functions and values of writing, clarifies thinking, stimulates their imagination, helps them in their search for identity and last but not

least it enables them to learn to read and write.”
(Tompkins, 1982)

Its engaging nature allowing students to express themselves and present their world views also helps teachers to raise students' motivation. Motivation itself is quite a complicated issue which is hard to define in simple terms. There have been many psychological studies during the past century aimed at explaining human motivation. However, their conclusions differ considerably, depending on the particular school, its researchers and their beliefs. One of the possible definitions is provided by *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which states that motivation can be seen as

“Forces acting either on or within a person to initiate behavior. The word is derived from the Latin term ‘Motivus’ (a moving cause), which suggests the activating properties of the processes involved in psychological motivation” (Petri, 2014).

Dornyei simplifies it a bit which results in the following definition: “motivation explains why people decide to do something, how hard they are going to pursue it and how long they are willing to sustain the activity” (Dornyei , 2001, p. 7). To provide a definition of creative writing at the very beginning of this chapter. Ken Hyland argues that “We can see [creative writing as] any writing, fiction or non-fiction that occurs outside of everyday professional, journalistic, academic and technical forms of writing. Most typically we think of novels, short stories and poems in this category, but it can also include screenwriting and playwriting, which are texts to be performed, and creative non-fiction such as personal and journalistic essays” (Hyland, 2002, p. 229).

This shows us that creative writing covers a broad area of texts serving many different purposes. However, Hyland also points out that contrary to academic writing which is focused on rhetorical conventions and discourse expectations of disciplinary communities, the main focus of creative writing is on self-expression. Students usually enroll to particular creative writing courses, choose between fiction, poetry, screenwriting or playwriting and further develop their writing and editing skills in

the particular area. Finally, at the end of their studies, they earn either bachelor or master's degree, depending on their study program. Despite opening creative writing programs and courses at the world's major universities, it has become quite popular in recent years also in terms of its usage in EFL teaching. Just to illustrate the popularity of the phrase, it mentions the number of hits when "creative writing" is typed into Google search. In an instant, about 39,000,000 results emerge which proves it to be a topic of great interest. According to *Google Trends*, "the issue is currently mostly searched in Trinidad & Tobago, Australia & New Zealand, Ireland, United Kingdom, Pakistan, Singapore, United States and South Africa" (Google Trends, 2018). This also reflects the countries from which professionals publishing articles and books about creative writing come from or the regions where they work. One of the leading figures in the area of using creative writing in teaching English is Alan Maley, who published numerous articles concerning creative writing in teaching English on well-known teaching-related websites and journals. As an example of the websites, I would like to mention *Teachingenglish.org.uk* powered by British Council and BBC. His article based on a short-scale survey can serve as a guide for "those who are just at their beginning with using creative writing in their classrooms" (Maley, 2009).

Research Objectives

- To highlight the major traits of creative writing on different levels.
- To present the performance of teachers and students in the whole process of learning in the classrooms with special reference to creative writing.
- To project the gray area of learning process of creative writing, which can be important for the better performance in learning process.

Research Questions

Q. 1: How the issues of creative writing have remained challenging in teaching of English in Pakistan?

Q. 2: How creative writing can be used as a tool with positive effects for the development of students and learning process at the school level in Pakistan?

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The first of the two major parts of my paper provides theoretical background to creative writing as well as its possible use as a tool in teaching English. Right at the beginning, the attention is paid to provide characteristics of the four language skills which allow us to communicate with our surroundings as well as share and receive information. Subsequently, It pays attention is paid to creative writing as a form of writing, its definition, its impact on motivation of students as well as It provides information on possible benefits resulting from its use as a tool in teaching and practicing English. In the middle part, the attention is paid to the areas of language where creative writing can be helpful and how it should be used in English classroom. It also describes the benefits of using both prose and poetry in practicing English through creative writing, how the tasks should be presented in the classroom, why it is important to establish a democratic atmosphere in the classroom and what possible obstacles might occur. Last but not least, the issue of evaluating students' creative texts discuss as well as the advantages of the development of ICT (Information and communications technology) and its benefits for creative writing as a tool in language teaching and learning. Main objective of this paper is:

(1) Describe the issue of creative writing and explain its possible contribution as a tool for teaching and learning English and to find out through a questionnaire survey among teachers of English.

(2) What their attitude is towards using creative writing exercises in their lessons, whether they see creative writing as a tool with positive effect on developing their students' language skills.

(3) How frequently they actually use it in their teaching practice. To be able to reach the goal this paper is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. In the theoretical part I, attention is paid to three main areas:

- a) Language skills, creativity and motivation.
- b) Theoretical aspects of using creative writing in teaching English.
- c) Practical aspects of using creative writing in English classrooms.

Characteristics of using creative writing in teaching English, approaches to creative writing, its benefits as well as obstacles will also be described. In the practical part I, it provides the actual research based on a questionnaire survey performed among English language teachers in Pakistani schools by means of an online survey in order to achieve diversity and as much data as possible. The aim of the research has described in detail, followed by the description of participants, methodology, questions used in the questionnaire.

Analysis and Discussion

According to Sharples, "Great creativity is usually the product of a long apprenticeship and considerable effort" (Sharples, 1999, p. 37). A large part of the considerable effort can be done at school by using numerous challenging and creative activities. They can be used effectively in many classes especially the language ones. Even though it may seem to be widely believed that creative writing activities might be time consuming and not for everybody, many leading figures in the field agree that using them can enrich all of the students, help them with clarifying their thinking and also help them become more creative. In English classes, there is usually hardly any time left for unusual and out of

ordinary activities, since practicing all four skills takes all of the available time. Fortunately, using creative writing in teaching English allows students to practice not only writing as a skill, but also practice grammar and vocabulary, acquire new vocabulary, stretch imagination, develop creativity as well as boost self-confidence and self-expression. Main difference is here the motivation and a sense of informality and playfulness which goes hand in hand with allowing students to express themselves freely, not in the previously marked out borders. Its contribution can also be seen in its introduction to a world of literature and books. If learners find their way towards their own creative writing, they are also likely to become gradually interested in literature and reading, which has unfortunately been in decline recently.

1- Theoretical Aspects

This part of research shows the characteristics of creative writing, which can be analyzed with the help of theoretical framework.

(i) Taking Initiative of First Story Project

As an example of a successful usage of creative writing in education and developing learners' skills, I would like to mention the *First Story* project, taking place in the United Kingdom. It first launched in London in 2008 and then spread to other parts of the country. Its main focus is on "schools in which more than 50% of pupils are considered deprived according to the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index and/or [General Certificate of Secondary Education] results fall in the lowest third of the national distribution" (First Story, 2015). As described on the official website of the project, it "strives to support and inspire creativity, literacy and confidence in challenging UK secondary schools and their communities" (First Story, 2015). During an academic year, First Story provides creative-writing workshops led by writers-in-residence, publishes the works of students in a professionally produced anthology and hosts book-launch events.

Concerning the outcome and benefits of these workshops, Jess Summers, regional coordinator for First Story, explains —partly it's about giving the students a chance to really express themselves, but it is wider than that. By developing their imagination and their creativity it feeds back into all their other lessons. Time after time, teachers tell us that the work of those pupils who have taken part in *First Story* improves right across the board. Supporting using creative writing in teaching foreign language, Gill James argues that:

“A learner can be creative with their language when they only have a little to play with. If they do that at the start, when they know more they will also make better use of that. [...] Less can in fact become more.” (James, 2006)

In her article, she proposes several activities which can be used in classrooms as well as provides several examples of works created by her students. I would like to use one of the examples she provides to illustrate that even on the level of beginners, creative writing can be used to practice newly acquired vocabulary through writing poems. As an example, she provides the following haiku poem:

“From Norway, in Wales,
Blond hair, blue eyes, tall and slim,
My name is Sandra” (James, 2006)

From the example above it is apparent that there is no need of complicated language structures and advanced vocabulary to begin using new language in a creative way. In this way, students can learn various forms of poetry, try to write them themselves as well as to explore and practice numerous literary styles.

(i) Usage and Understanding of Lexis

To be able to use a particular lexical item correctly and distinguish between its various meanings (i.e. phrasal verbs), it is necessary for students to begin using it in its natural context as soon as possible. As already suggested above by Gill James, students can begin using language creatively even as beginners. Even the limited amount of words they know can serve well to create a poem or a very short story. Creative writing tasks can help with both practicing newly acquired lexical items as well as using those already known. Sometimes students have strong vocabulary, however, they do not know how to use all of the lexical items in their appropriate contexts and thus limit themselves on using only the basic ones. Creative writing can help them to learn new contexts for those lexical items, begin naturally using phrasal verbs, collocations and idioms as well as master their meanings and the differences between them. When asked to create a text on their own, students can learn how to work with dictionaries, especially English-English dictionary which is very beneficial in learning the language. Working with dictionaries and using lexical items in their written form is beneficial also for practicing correct spelling. Teachers might create exercises asking students to write a poem using words such as bed/bad, hat/head, etc. to practice their correct spelling and meaning in context. The outcome may subsequently lead to a better remembering of these words. Creative writing tasks can also be used to practice nouns with irregular plural number, thematic vocabulary (by giving students a particular topic, a set of lexical items from that topic), synonyms and antonyms. For some students it is actually more beneficial to create a sentence containing the word on their own than to read an example in a course book. Struggling with creating a sentence and using a particular lexical item appropriately might have a positive effect on remembering it, especially when it is problematic. There are numerous tasks that a teacher can prepare as well as modifications of already existing tasks which can be exploited using creative writing. Students might be for example

given word webs and then asked to use a certain number of the items and write a short poem or a story. They can be asked to create a poem or a story beginning only with certain letters as well as they can be asked to use as much vocabulary from a last lesson or only some parts of speech - to practice any of them (i.e. adjectives, numerals, verbs, adverbs, etc.). Teacher might also decide on using creative writing techniques to pre-teach several lexical items that will be a part of the following exercise or unit. As well as practicing already known lexical items, reading their stories, poems or any other created texts aloud, students also practice their correct pronunciation. Advanced learners can then practice also stress and rhythm and voicing and linking.

(ii) Importance of Grammar and Its Practical Procedure

Like practicing lexis, also grammatical structures can be practiced by the means of creative writing. Learning grammar is according to Scrivener, "a complicated process where learning the rules does not necessarily mean that the student is able to use them himself and actually understand them" (Scrivener, 2011, p. 157). As Scrivener (2011) points out, there should be "some way that students can transfer this studied knowledge into a living ability to use the language" (Scrivener, 2011, p. 157). Creative writing can serve as this means of practicing the newly acquired grammatical structures as well as the language patterns that students learned in the past. Poems, stories, jokes, articles, fairytales etc. can be focused on practicing various aspects of grammar - be it tenses, participles, articles, parts of speech, passive constructions, conditionals, etc. In this context, using creative writing tasks as homework can give students an opportunity to write as much as they need without being limited by the amount of time available in the classroom. The more writing students do and the earlier they develop a writing habit, the better for their English language practice. Concerning the possible exercises, students might be given a picture or a set of pictures, with the teacher asking them to

use only particular tenses or participles. They can be given various words in a sack (past participles, nouns, and adjectives, auxiliary verbs) to draw from a hat and subsequently write a story, poem or a joke containing all these words. There are countless modifications that can be used to practice students' writing this way.

(iii) Sentence Structure

Hand in hand with lexis and grammar goes sentence structure. The ability to create sentences in English is crucial because of its fixed word order. Students whose mother tongue is a synthetic language need to accept it and understand that changed word order also changes the meaning of the sentence. Especially with students who are used to translate for themselves this might be complicated and a cause of problems. Again, creative writing can help these students because of providing a guilt free surroundings allowing them practicing language in a creative way without a fear of failure. Forming sentences – affirmatives, negatives and questions can be practiced as well as active and passive voice, etc. In creative writing it is common for students to read pieces written by their fellow students. This allows them not only to read what their colleagues have written, but also discover their style, realize differences between their writing and the writing of other classmates. It also allows them to think about the texts critically, realize mistakes that fellow students do and last but not least, practice understanding of a written text. By reading other people's work, student might realize that what he or she tries to convey through his or her writing does not necessarily have to be conveyed by the text. Sometimes people think that what they have written is an apt description of a situation, however, when read by anyone else, they may find out that they failed to transfer the exact thought which they attempted. Writing creatively may help students realize this and thus help them succeed next time. At the same time, this practice of expressing oneself may lead to a better

understanding between students themselves as well as help them communicate with their surroundings more openly and successfully. As an exercise, students may be given pieces of their fellow students and asked to provide a short summary or rewrite it to convey the same meaning using different words or transform it into a poem, etc. depending on the particular level of learners and other instructions given.

(iv) Expressions Based Properties and Practices

Creative writing proves invaluable also in terms of self-discovery, self-expression and developing self-esteem. Being able to express oneself freely, present One's own thoughts, beliefs and ideas is not always easy and it is not always desired (in regular classes and majority of subjects). In fact, an overwhelming majority of subjects does not create conditions for expressing oneself in a creative and freeway. Teaching languages has the capacity of allowing students to present their world views, thoughts, emotions and feelings through i.e. creative writing. It is a challenging and at the same time stress-relieving activity raising students their intrinsic motivation and allowing them to believe in themselves and their abilities. This view is also supported by Maley, who states in his article that "the dramatic increase in self-confidence and self-esteem which creative writing tends to develop among learners leads to a corresponding increase in motivation" (Maley, 2012). Learners generally do not have enough opportunities to be creative in their mother tongue classes, in schools they are usually taught the skills of expository writing and thus they might actually believe that they are not talented or skilled enough; that creative writing is predominantly for gifted people. Usually in schools students learn how to write essays, letters and other rather formal writings such as curriculum vitae; however, poetry is scarcely written. Using it in teaching English (and teaching foreign languages in general) might thus lead to self-discovery of students who have never actually tried to find out how great writers they

can be. Creative writing thus can help students reveal and discover their skills and develop them.

2- Practical Aspects

It is explained how beneficial creative writing might be in terms of language learning and practicing, It pays attention to its actual use in classrooms and its possible obstacles. In the following lines, it discusses the role of the teacher, the relationship between the teacher and students, approach to creative writing, language play, poetry and prose as well as possible topics. Last but not least, it describes possible obstacles that might occur in the classroom, the issue of evaluation and assessment of creative writing, the importance of democratic surroundings and the outcome of creative writing and its publishing.

Teacher's Role in Creative Writing

At the basis of each relationship are its participants. In language teaching, there are students (or learners) on one side and a teacher on the other. In regular classes, they usually have different positions - students should try to learn as much as possible and the teacher should guide the students and provide them with enough opportunities to practice and use the language themselves. In terms of creative writing, however, both of the participants share their goal - to practice their writing skills, stretch their imagination, use their creativity, play with language, express themselves and share their feelings, emotions and texts. One might object here that the teacher is not in the classroom to practice, however, as Maley points out in his article, "there is little point in exhorting learners to engage in [creative writing] unless we do so too. The power of the teacher as model, and as co-writer is inestimable" (Maley, 2009). The more the teacher writes and shares with students, the better connection might be created between them, and the better outcome it can bring in terms of practicing English. This gradually suggests that as much as the

teacher can give to his students, he can also gain back from his students, which makes it an activity worth the time and effort. Not only students, but also teachers can experience its benefits. According to Maley, “teachers of [creative writing] tend also to be better teachers of writing in General” (Maley, 2009). However, apart from role-modelling, there are more benefits that teachers can get. By sharing various texts with students, the teacher can sooner understand personalities of his or her students, their struggles and relationships which can later have positive effect on the development of their relationship and creative classroom atmosphere.

Language Usage and Literary Forms

At the very beginning, it is necessary to point out that all of the activities, poems, stories, etc., can be used along with the language syllabus. Teachers can choose either from already existing exercises available in books, articles, and on blogs by authors such as Jane Spiro, Alan Maley, Regie Routman, Jayakaran Mukundan and others or they can easily prepare their own, depending on their creativity, the language area they would like to practice with their students, and according to their needs. Generally, when preparing an activity, teachers can choose between two basic literary forms – poetry and prose. Both of them offer many genres to explore and both of them have their characteristics which can help students in the development of their language skills.

(i) Use of Poetry

Despite poetry being often left out of classrooms, writing it can be truly useful in learning English. Many leading authorities in ELT agree that poetry “stimulates and wakes us up to see things in new ways, think of things in new ways” (Scrivener, 2011, p. 366). Poetry offers numerous options to become creative – short and long poems (using fixed meter or free verse), song lyrics, acrostic poems, haiku, limerick, drama or rhymes, with all of them

allowing students to play with language and discover themselves and their abilities. For these and many other reasons poetry should not be overlooked in teaching language, "it ought to be presented to all children as a natural expressive medium as soon as they walk into school" (Crystal, 1998, p. 220). In introduction to her book where she presents numerous exercises for writing creative poetry, Jane Spiro explains that communicative approach is not enough in teaching. She believes that "When language learners are invited to speak more fully, experimental.

They can be many things there is no room to be in the functional classroom. The progress made by humanistic and communicative teaching and by the different pedagogic approaches to language can combine to take us further as learners and teachers" (Spiro, 2004, p. 5).

At the same time, reading and hearing poetry in our everyday life is more common than we might realize. Just when we turn on the TV or a radio, various jingles and advertisements try to catch our attention by (many times) alliterative slogans, rhyming, word plays and sometimes using unusual grammatical structures. Jane Spiro also supports this, stating that "poetic language is more and more part of modern English. It is the way we make people, places and products, feelings and experiences memorable" (Spiro, 2004, p. 11). Poetry forms offer learners several features that are especially useful in practicing their language skills. Spiro talks predominantly about repetition, pattern and length of the poem. Repetition may be seen as working in the same way as language drills where the structure is the same and lexical items change. Like repetition, also patterns can serve for practicing various language structures as well as spelling and rhyming. Last but not least, while being creative, students also learn about terminology, poetry types and authors which otherwise might be easily forgotten. Creating verses on their own as well as reading poetry can thus help students to understand it, think about it and become interested in it outside of the classroom. For all of the possible

benefits, using poetry writing in teaching English is definitely worth trying.

(ii) Applicability of Prose

Many of the details presented about poetry in the lines above, can be pinpointed also when describing the features of writing prose. Whether we realize it or not, stories make a large part of our daily life. Whether we talk to our friends, children or family members and share our experiences with them or watch a movie, news broadcasting on TV or reading magazines, we constantly come across stories. They can be both entirely made-up as well as true, depending on context, nevertheless, its basic features and purpose does not change. According to Jane Spiro:

“Stories practice all kinds of language. In a good story, we need to describe places and people, write dialogues using different voices, make things happen, show the results and causes of things: we can discuss and argue; we can use parts of letters or diaries. Some writers even include recipes and menus in their novels” (Spiro, 2007, For this reason, writing stories can be seen as a beneficial activity for language learners “who can serve specific language practice of tenses, descriptive adjectives, reporting verbs, for development of extensive writing that includes narrative, description, dialogue and character development, prepare students for the written narrative components of exams [and] encourage learners to read more appreciatively” (Spiro, 2007, p. 6). As well as writing poetry, also prose offers various subgenres that students can find interesting. Short stories, fables, fairy tales, mysteries or horror stories can be chosen, depending on the topic and season (Halloween is for example a perfect opportunity for practicing writing horror stories as well as fairy tales can be written before Christmas). By writing stories, students gradually learn about preparation, drafting and editing which are important issues that should have enough attention in both mother tongue lessons as well as the foreign

language ones. Story writing also offers students the opportunity to practice both formal and informal writing because short stories can have many different settings and plots. By composing a story, learners also train the memory and in case of writing a longer piece they practice also clarity. In brief, using prose writing leads to writing both imaginative and real stories and their complexity depends only on the level of students, their enthusiasm, interest in a subject, etc.

(iii) Language Play

Humor, writing, fantasizing, imagination, fun and language play leads to, or is a direct outcome of creativity. Closely connected to using poetry and prose in developing writing skills is thus language play. Since being small children people have appreciated the playfulness that language offers by learning various nursery rhymes as well as creating their own ones. Language play has also been an area of interest of well-known linguists such as Guy Cook and David Crystal. Language play has been present in people's history probably since ever. Both Cook and Crystal agree that language play is common for both children as well as adults. Cook argues that as much time as children spend imagining other worlds, about the same amount of time adults spend fantasizing. All of us are used to watching movies, both in TV and cinema, listening to music as well as reading books and magazines. Crystal argues that "ludic language exists in hundreds of different genres and adds enjoyment to our daily lives in many routine ways" (Crystal, 1998, p. 6). For this reason it is very useful to incorporate language play also to teaching. Moreover, Crystal adds that "any aspect of linguistic structure is available to become the focus of language play" (Crystal, 1998, p. 9), which supports the view that using creative writing in teaching and learning languages is actually unlimited. "Language play is natural, spontaneous and universal. [...] It is not solely a matter of humor, after all, but involves notions of enjoyment, entertainment,

intellectual satisfaction and social rapport” (Crystal, 1998, p. 93). The same way as everybody enjoys it, also students generally enjoy writing, creating and playing with language. It is a natural way of learning while playing. Using elements of a language play in teaching English, especially with creative writing, can be a helpful tool, allowing students to enjoy the moment of creativity, share their feelings and emotions as well as practice their language skills.

(iv) Intensive Writing Sessions

Writing session can take place both in the classroom as well as at home as homework. The length of the writing session can thus vary according to the surroundings. It partially depends on students, their enthusiasm and their language level. It can be expected that writing at home will take longer as there is no time limit. In case of classroom writing sessions, some professionals suggest the following scheme. Routman, who teaches predominantly children (creative poetry writing), recommends the following: “Poetry writing follows the structure and procedures of writing workshop. The whole-class session includes: demonstration (5-15 minutes), sustained writing time and conferencing (20-30 minutes) and sharing and celebrating (10-15 minutes)” (Routman, 2000, p. 18). The same format can be used in prose writing as well. Crucial is also the frequency of using activities to develop writing skills. As much as students need to practice other language skills in the classroom, such as listening, speaking and reading, also writing should be practiced regularly.

(v) Usage of Digital Technologies with Competence

To practice creative writing with students, there is no longer the limitation of practicing it in the classroom. If the teacher and students are interested in using ICT, an online community can be easily established. Creative writing can be practiced as e-learning

with much or all of the writing created at home without being limited by time. If there are no surroundings for creating a course in e-learning surroundings, a common email account can be created where students and the teacher can post their writings. At the same time, students can take advantage of using various tools available online, ranging from countless dictionaries to various rhyming tools. It provides almost interesting online tools, which can prove helpful and enrich students writing as well as lead them towards independent learning.

Apparent Complications in Creative Writing

As well as I have mentioned benefits of creative writing on practicing English and developing writing skills, it is inevitable to discuss also various obstacles that might occur in the classroom. It can be anticipated that there will be a certain number of students who are shy, less open and self-confident than the others as well as less willing to share their feelings and emotions in a creative way. Teachers should always think about that and be prepared to encourage those students in a friendly way. Large classes, mixed ability groups, special interests of girls and boys, and notcollaborative students can also be seen as a possible cause of obstacles. However, from my own experience, I believe that creative writing has a capacity and power of removing barriers between both students themselves and a teacher and students. It may and probably will happen that there will be some students who do not wish to participate in creative writing tasks for various reasons. Teachers should nonetheless bear in mind that no student should be forced into any creative task. Luckily for them, it is highly probable that these students will become interested later after seeing and hearing their fellow student's works and after being motivated by a teacher. The teacher should ask them several times to join the rest of the students as well as encourage them, but definitely not force. The best outcome is only when students participate voluntarily, with their own will to create,

write and share. As another obstacle which might occur one can see teachers' unwillingness to take part in creative writing activities. Even though a teacher might believe in creative writing as a tool for practicing English and developing writing skills, he or she might not feel comfortable with producing his or her own texts and sharing it with students.

Findings

From the previous discussion and analysis, it is evident that creative writing can be used as a tool for developing students' skills on all language levels. Beginners can create short poems using only lexical items, whereas advanced learners can practice more complicated syntactic structures and advanced vocabulary. Using newly acquired structures and lexical items in a creative way increases chances for their remembering, as well as brings the opportunity to actively use constructions and lexical items in such surroundings that would normally only scarcely occur or would not occur at all. Writing creatively can also lead to an independent language use on the side of students, which is also desirable. As Spiro points out, "the activities [do not] require special slots in the timetable designated 'creative writing'. They can be integrated into the course book and can support the language syllabus, whether it is functional, notional, situational, grammatical, humanistic, all of these or none of these" (Spiro, 2004, p. 6). The atmosphere in the classroom is another factor which influences the effect creative writing will have on students. As William C. Dell (1964) noted "the greatest part of writing creatively is believing that [students] can do it. A relaxed atmosphere of acceptance in the classroom can foster such a belief within students by building their confidence" (Dell, 1964, p.501). With establishing inspiring classroom environments goes hand in hand presentation of the task. The role of the teacher is crucial here because he or she can strongly motivate students as well as

discourage them. Giving students reason and purpose thus should not be neglected.

The practical part was subsequently focused on the actual research based on an online questionnaire survey performed among teachers of English. To be able to answer my research questions, I have collected the data by using the snowball method of sampling. I addressed several teachers of English via email and social media and asked them to spread the link to the form to other teachers of English, teaching in Pakistan. The subsequent analysis of the collected data was done in six research areas. Analysis of the area focused on geographical and background data helped me to describe the participants. The participants of the survey are primarily from language schools, teaching in Pakistan, their average experience is about five years and their qualification is predominantly Master's degree in teaching English.

The analysis of the area focused on views on the importance of language skills showed that writing is seen among the teachers who took the survey as the least important skill. The majority of the teachers had thought about using the tool in their lessons before, but unfortunately for various reasons they have not used it yet. It also showed that the teachers often believe that creative writing activities can help with practicing writing only. However, the activities can be used for practicing all skills if prepared accordingly. The views and beliefs about creative writing in teaching English proved to be rather positive. The teachers mostly see creative writing as a beneficial tool, despite the fact that they hardly use the tool themselves. The majority of them have not heard about any project using creative writing yet as well as most of them do not know any other teacher using creative writing activities on a regular basis. It was in this research area where it was proved that the teachers tend to see the tool as too time-consuming. Creative writing activities can however be adjusted to be used along the syllabus as well as they can be used as

homework to save time. Electronic tools can also be helpful and using them can lead to teaching students to become more independent in their learning. The majority of the teachers also expressed their belief that creative writing activities are not aimed at gifted students only, which is positive. Concerning the views on using creative writing activities in classrooms, the research proved that the teachers would be willing to use creative writing activities in their lessons, but they would need a proper formal introduction. In terms of sharing the teachers' creative writing with their students, teachers are not willing to share their outcome, which is rather negative as the power of role-modelling is in this case very important. The teachers also admit to have enough time for using the activities, especially if they plan ahead, which also supports my presumption that the teachers would be willing to use the tool if they were better informed about it and knew the right resources. The majority of the teachers also prefer using creative writing as homework, however, many of them do not see it a problem to use the activities also as a pre-task, main task or a post-task. Concerning the form preference - storytelling was the most checked option. As the source of activities the teachers choose websites or they prefer to create their own ones. Only a few teachers are self-confident enough to begin using creative writing activities in their lessons immediately, another half of them feel that they could begin immediately, but there is something that they would need to do or learn beforehand. As the ideal frequency of using the tool they believe is using it frequently too occasionally.

Conclusion

The strength of creative writing activities is in their versatility. In fact, many of regular reading/writing exercises featured in course books and workbooks can be easily modified to serve the purpose.

Moreover, teachers can develop their own materials with exercises and share them with other teachers as well as books and websites of leading figures in the field of using creative writing in teaching can be consulted. As it is already mentioned, Jane Spiro, Alan Maley, Regie Routman have produced and gathered a wonderful collection of creative writing activities, suitable for learners of all levels and ages. They also provide commentaries to many of the activities as well as their purpose in English language learning. Collections of valuable materials can be also found by authors paying attention to using creative writing in practicing English as a mother tongue. After adjusting these exercises to the EFL surroundings, these activities can also be used successfully. It is however important to choose topics according to students interests. The outcome will be probably the best if students feel that what they are doing is important, beneficial, useful and truly leading towards their development. They not only need to know why they are doing a particular task (with a high level of authenticity), but also the atmosphere in the classroom as well as the way the task is presented to them has its impact on their success. Creative writing is a versatile tool that can help students with developing language skills on all language levels. In this paper, It has explored the potential of using it in classrooms in order to develop students' English language skills as well as it describes the issue and explained its possible contribution as a tool for teaching and learning English.

Trying to find out various possible obstacles, it has discovered that instead of pinpointing the problems themselves, the teachers agreed on having only a little experience and lacking information concerning the resources. Generally, these problems reflect my presumptions and can easily be solved if the teachers decided to explore the possibilities offered by creative writing. As their main weakness in connection with using the tool the teachers see evaluation. What is rather positive is the fact that they mostly feel somewhat competent to use the tool. Taking into consideration all

the obstacles revealed by the research, most of them can be overcome easily by consulting the right materials. Teachers' own experience with using the tool as learners of English is also positive, one third of the teachers experienced using the tool during their studies and they found it beneficial. Many of the teachers had not experienced it during their studies, but they would have liked to. The majority of the teachers also write creatively themselves (even though only irregularly and from time to time) which is positive. Taking into consideration all these findings, all my presumptions were proved. Teachers in Pakistani schools are aware of the fact that creative writing might be beneficial for the development of their students' language skills. However they believe they do not have enough time to exploit the tool themselves with their own students and thus use it rarely. They are not aware of available literature concerning creative writing activities that can be easily obtained from the Internet and book stores but they would be willing to use creative writing as a tool for teaching English if the issue was introduced to them beforehand. I believe that the topic will be further explored in the future, as it gradually receives more and more attention among teachers of English and educators worldwide. A long-term research paying attention to a particular group of students and their development might be an interesting area to explore as well as further investigation of each of the subchapters discussed in the theoretical part might bring interesting results.

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