EXPLORING THE STRATEGIES USED BY LANGUAGE TEACHERS FOR URDU AND ENGLISH WRITING INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT: Writing skills hold a significant place in education; requiring years of schooling and proper training to be achieved by students. Urdu and English, regardless of being the medium of Pakistani education system and writing in these languages is inevitable, students go through troubles in developing a coherent piece of writing in either of the languages. There is a general perception that in Pakistan writing pedagogy devalues students' creative and communicative abilities by means of memorization and over dependence on teachers and books. This study explored teaching strategies used by language teachers (Urdu and English) at secondary level in developing writing skills of students. Using survey design twelve in-service language teachers of Urdu and English in semi- government schools were interviewed. The semi- structured and open ended interviews were scheduled with individual teachers and lasted for about 30 minutes regarding their writing instruction strategies. The recorded data were transcribed and thematically analyzed and divided into sub-themes, such as; types of strategies teachers follow, common strategies used by English and Urdu teachers, pedagogical strategies specific to Urdu and English teachers, language teachers' understanding and knowledge of writing pedagogy. The results revealed that Urdu and English language teachers are equally unaware of effective and standard strategies for developing writing skills of their students. Their writing instruction indicated lack of conscious planning for different stages of the writing instruction, absence of authentic writing tasks, and insufficient writing practice for learners. The study concludes with pedagogical recommendations that would be based on strategic and systematic writing instruction that caters to learners' needs.

Keywords: Traditional teaching method, Grammar translation method, Product approach, Communicative language teaching, Integrative approach.

1. Introduction

Urdu and English languages are taught simultaneously as part of the national curriculum in Pakistan where Urdu(L1) is the national language and acts as the local lingua franca for communication across different ethnic groups comprising the linguistic landscape of the country, and English(L2) as the international lingua franca. There are several commonalities in the way these two languages are taught and learnt beside their parallel introduction in the educational system. From the importance and need attached to the language education to the expertise and methods used to organize this activity, and from the attitude of the learners and other stakeholders to the outcomes achieved at the completion of the entire undertaking, both Urdu and

English languages offer similar patterns for applied linguists and others who are interested in studying the language education phenomenon especially with respect to Urdu and English.

Language education in Pakistan has been struggling to a great extent with the problems including a general lack of interest and awareness about its importance and scope, dearth of qualified teachers, outdated pedagogy that centers on content based instruction rather than treating language as a skill. Consequently, making dependent learners with zero motivation, lack of language awareness, confidence, ownership and creativity in both productive and receptive language skills. Considering the weaknesses in local education Mustafa (2011) calls for a 'sensible language policy and of enlightened education overall' while lamenting sixty years of neglect of language education, a situation, which she strongly believes, is affecting every aspect of Pakistani life.

Among four basic language skills, writing skill plays a crucial part for the three out of four skills, i.e. listening, reading, and writing are assessed through the medium of writing. Writing constitutes an essential component of early literacy development, literacy education, language arts and language education. To students, in academic settings, writing at the sentence and discourse level comprises core skill for conveying knowledge and ideas; and for professionals it acts as an instrument for their workplace communication and professional development (Crossley, 2013). Beside, being perceived as an indicator toward an individual's language proficiency, writing is also realized as knowledge construction within the academic contexts (Ryhshina& Byrnes, 2013). Paradoxically writing is the most neglected aspect of the education and language learning be it any native language, Urdu or English. It is a very common observation that most native languages that people acquired, as they were growing up, are

limited to merely speaking with very few capable of reading the script or writing in that language (Mumtaz, 2014).

Another significant challenge is added when the languages taught at schools are not spoken at home (Chen & Harris, 2009) or the children who are taught writing as part of literacy development come from parents, who did not receive education themselves. Consequently, there is a greater chance that writing skills will not be sufficiently practiced outside school for adequate development. Moreover the rampant plagiarism across all education levels and the low number of research publications in reputed journals (Mushtaq, Abid & Qureshi, 2012) are also pointing towards problems arising due to inadequate writing development and training.

Therefore, writing being a complex phenomenon (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and being indispensable in any language education, calls for intensive training and proper teaching through such writing activities which demand active engagement of students in order to nurture among students self -assurance and love for writing in both L1 and L2 (Freeman & Freeman, 2006) which would help them improve their writing skills. However, Pakistani education system writing religiously follow traditional practices that fosters demotivation, an easy way out attitude among learners, and the inadequate understanding of language skills that inhibits their expression through writing (Ahmad et.al, 2011; Khan, 2011; Warsi, 2004).

The current study set out to reconnoiter the language instruction strategies that are prevalent in state-owned schools and to vouch for a holistic writing instructional model benefiting both learner and teacher at length in catering to the needs of language learners across the country; an instructional technique that should bring about active learning, increase students' engagement and collaborative learning in classroom to ensure success in developing writing skills in Urdu and English respectively.

2. Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

1. Which teaching writing strategies do the secondary school language teachers (Urdu and English) employ for developing writing skills among students of class VI - VIII?

2. To what extent, language teachers have the knowledge and understanding of various teaching writing approaches?

3. Literature Review

L2 writing pedagogy began in the late 1950s and the early 1960s to cater to the needs of students who did not have English as their first language. The field focused on teaching writing in L2 to ESL students who enrolled in North America for higher studies (Jun, 2008). Since then the writing pedagogy has received attention of many researcher. Some researchers have asserted that there is a difference in the L1 and L2 writing theories on psycholinguistic and pragmatic basis (Johns, 1986; Santos, 1992) whereas others have pointed out the similarity of issues in both L1 and L2 writing instruction (Jacobs, 1982). On one hand, Silva (1990) has opined that L1 and L2 writing composition processes differ to a great extent. However, there have been studies concluding that L1 and L2 writing strategies are not only similar (Berman, 1994) but students usually transfer their L1 writing strategies into L2 writing processes (Matsumoto, 1995).

Writing in second language (L2) has always been investigated through writing theories in the first language (L1); mainly by means of process and product (traditional) approaches to teaching writing since 1980s (Dyer, 1996). On one hand, language scholars posited the view that complications in writing faced by language learners in L1 and L2 compositions are identical (Jacobs 1982). On the other hand, linguists have emphasized greatly over the view that writing in L1 and L2 differ on psycholinguistic, cognitive, social, and philosophical basis (Silva &Matsuda,

2001; Santos 1992; Johns 1995; Flower & Hayes, 1981). It is important to study L1 and L2 writing processes and products to explain what it takes to write successfully and effectively (see Uzawa, 2002) since first language acquisition processes and competence are transferred to the second language as pointed out by Connor (1996),who discussed the role of first language on the second language usage particularly second language writing, and Wolfersberger (2003) who recommended L2 writing instructors to help their students in discovering their existing writing strategies in L1 and L2. Likewise, Keck (2006) and DeLarios, Marin and Murphy (2002) traced commonalities in LI and L2 writers; and Beare (2000) concluded that bilingual writers use similar strategies for L1 and L2 writing.

Teachers, in a writing class, are required to use some strategies to develop writing skills of the learners. Their chosen instructional strategy is presumably based on some language methodology or approach such as the product and process approaches, communicative language teaching methodology, genre and process genre approaches which are briefly described here.

3.1. Product Approach to Teaching Writing: The focus of product approach is on the end result of students' writing. Students are provided with standard writing guides by the teachers which they have to strictly follow, making it a teacher-centred approach (Badger and White, 2000; Brakus, 2003). According to Raimes (1983), the teachers following this approach first assign a writing task to students, then collect the written pieces, and finally return the writings to the students after assessing for errors. The product approach, also called "the current traditional rhetoric" (Matsuda, 2003) focuses more on error correction, and has been criticized on this ground as being a demotivational approach. Also, the product approach aims at students producing a perfect first draft by following the mechanics of a standard writing piece, which is

not realistic (Onozawa, 2010). The criticisms against product approach led to its replacement by process approach to teaching writing.

3.2. Process Approach to Teaching Writing: The process approach focuses on the construction of text, following certain steps, rather than the final product of writing. It helps students in thinking, and is therefore considered a student centred approach, as students easily grasp the process of writing (Hyland, 2003). The writing process has four stages, where students do some prewriting, write a draft, revise it, and finally edit it (Tribble, 1996). As students revise their writings based on the received feedback, they produce multiple drafts (Yan 2005; Nordin& Mohammad, 2006; Onozawa 2010). Nunan (1991) has mentioned another benefit of the approach, as it increases the amount of interaction in classroom, which in turn helps students develop better language skills. Further, the approach requires students to produce multiple drafts of writing, which is not possible during an academic exam due to time constraints (Horowitz, 1986).

3.3. CLT Approach to Teaching Writing: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach based on Vygotskian notion of "Zone of Proximal Development" which believes that students can learn more through communication and interaction. There have been numerous studies highlighting the benefits of collaborative writing (e.g., Storch, 2005; Kessler, 2009; Elola&Oskoz, 2010; Kessler &Bikowski, 2010). It has also been shown that writing through collaboration can improve writing abilities in not only L1, but L2 contexts as well (Storch, 2005). Students get a chance to learn more through collaboration, as they cooperate with each other with the help of all four language skills (Harmer, 1991). Students help each other in their weaker areas, and thus learn and improve their writing skills (Hirvela, 1999).

3.4. Genre Approach to Teaching Writing: Genres classify the various academic or literary texts according to their use within a specific context (Hammmond&Derewianka, 2001) by a speech community (Sabouri, Zohrabi&Vafa, 2014). The genre approach to writing has been termed "English for Academic Purpose Approach" (Silva, 1990, pp. 16-17) and "English for Specific Purpose Approach" (Dudley-Evans, 1997, pp. 151-152) as there is a great emphasis on socially constructed writing in both the approaches. According to Cope and Kalantzis (1993), genre approach involves modeling of genre, teacher and students reproducing the genre model, and lastly, each student writing his own piece. But criticism has been raised against the approach, as it does not give any importance to the process of writing, hence making students passive learners (Badger & White, 2000).

3.5. The Process-Genre Approach to Teaching Writing: The varying approaches to teaching writing highlighted the need of an eclectic approach that would integrate effective pedagogies from product, process, and genre approaches to writing (Badger & White, 2000). The process-genre approach is one such approach which fills the gap in all the three approaches. The best methodologies are taken from product, process, and genre approaches, and are adapted according to the needs of learners (Badger & White, 2000). Teachers employing process-genre approach are more often facilitators than guides, and help students in using their own understanding of language and structure to draft their writings. These students are encouraged to write multiple drafts in order to come up with an appropriate socially constructed text.

Hillocks between 1984 and 1986 went for analysis of more than 500 experimental studies in L1 writing pedagogy done in 1963-1982 and concluded three possible ways in which learners' writing skills can be improved. First, duration of instruction, mode of instruction, and focus of instruction. It is commonly viewed that since writing skills development is comparatively slower

process than speaking, therefore it requires huge amount of time on the part of instruction and learner (Burton, 1973). Hillocks, on the contrary established from his analysis that the quality instruction can bring improvement in the writing skills of language learners.

Thus, Hillocks classified modes of instruction into four categories: presentational mode, natural process mode, environmental mode, and individualized mode. The presentational mode can be best explained as a product approach to writing pedagogy emphasizing over the imitation of teacher provided samples to the passive recipients. The natural process mode reflects process approach to teaching writing where students produce multiple drafts after getting peer reviews on their write ups. Individualized mode fosters individual and independent learning on the part of the learner. Finally, environmental mode follows process- genre approach where instructions are structured around clear objectives, student interaction, peer reviewed multiple drafts, and overt teaching and assessment criterion.

Hillocks examination included the focus of instruction as a viable variable. It includes various classroom based writing activities, such as; grammar and mechanics, analyzing models, sentence combining, and working with rubrics (established criterion against which students assess theirs as well as their peer's written drafts).

4. Methodology

This exploratory study uses interpretive study method to collect information from language teachers of grade VI - VIII at state owned schools in Karachi to answer the posed research questions. The selection of the state owned schools was made on two reasons. First, the access and convenience of data collection that involved interviews with teachers. Second, the state owned schools are prestigious and leading institutes that follow uniform curriculum across Pakistan. For data collection, all teachers who were teaching English and Urdu course to classes

VI - VIII at two state owned schools were interviewed. The study was limited to VI - VIII grades only since it is assumed that being the significant years of school education before high-stakes board exam years, investigation of writing pedagogy followed by language teachers would allow valuable insights into the writing instruction practices at state owned schools.

Since the study was set to reconnoitre the writing practices of state owned schools of Karachi, the semi structured interviews were scheduled with the language teachers (Urdu & English) of classes VI – VIII to answer the posed research questions. The interview protocols were observed during the interview including; prior consent, significant details of the study, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

Using personal contacts to gain access to teachers in schools, after formal consent with school and teachers, appointments were sought. The interviewers were the second and third author of this study, who had adequate and conscious training in conducting interviews based on formal training in research methods. The interviewers also maintained a shared list of do's and don'ts at the start of the study. The stages of interviews ensured interwoven ideas about respect and concern for the participant, creating a fear free environment by explaining to them at the very outset the purpose of the study , telling them they can withdraw or finish at any point during the interview, choice to be recorded or not. Each interview was thirty minutes long with 20 minutes recording time. The interviews were conducted in L1& L2 both. Every question after being asked in English was translated in Urdu for English teachers and Urdu teachers respectively. The recorded data was transcribed and coded around the themes. Thematic analysis of the obtained data was followed by logical and matrix analyses to compare the trends across L1 and L2.

5. Findings and Discussion

The data collected from the analysis of teachers-interview was analyzed thematically. The themes were derived from the review of literature and the data collected explained the on-going writing practices. The major themes include; writing skills and strategies targeted, writing activities or tasks focused during writing instruction, and language teachers' understanding and knowledge of writing pedagogy. The findings and interpretation of the analyses are presented below, and have been organized under the two questions raised in this study.

1. *Which teaching writing strategies do the secondary school language teachers (Urdu and English) employ for developing writing skills among students?*

The thematic analysis of the interview brought out three themes: writing skills and strategies targeted, writing activities or tasks focused during writing instruction, and language teachers' understanding and knowledge of writing pedagogy. The most notable finding of the interview data is that both English and Urdu language teachers acknowledge the significance of developing writing skills among students for future prospects, however these teachers were resistant in trusting students with their writing skills. Consequently, students are made to copy the answers provided to them by the teacher. These findings endorse the observations about Language Teaching in Pakistan which is still an activity undertaken using a traditional and content- based approach since the Pakistani students are required to score in final exam. The analysis of data reveals that very little opportunity for students to practice and develop advanced writing skills.

Kausar (2010) argued that Pakistani teachers "struggle with large group of learners to cover the content with few textbooks or resources to help them with little reward or recognition" (256). During this struggle, language teachers, owing to the scarcity of time, opportunity, and the

cooperative learning environment, remain neglected about learners' needs and their capabilities. "Teachers rely on Lecture Method and as a result students depend upon memorization to pass the examinations. There is no peer-group discussion or student-teacher interaction which could help construct a conducive environment where actual learning can take place" (Kausar, 2010, p 256).

Table 1: Thematic Analysis Findings

Themes	Urdu (L1)	English (L2)
Language skills targeted	Reading comprehension so that students can read, memorize, and then reproduce (write) the answer (N=6)	Speaking and writing skills are focused (N=6)
Elements of writing focused	Parts of speech and sentence structure (N=6) and handwriting (N=1)	Parts of speech and sentence structure, and grammar (N=6)
Instructional strategy	Copy answers from board and books, memorize definitions, and grammatical structures are taught deductively (N=6)	Copy answers from board and books, memorize definitions, and grammatical structures are taught deductively (N=4) Pre and post reading activities along with writing to prompt type activities with a greater emphasis on vocabulary building as well (N=1)
Problems faced by language teachers	Curriculum (N=6), Incompetence of students (N=2), administrative pressures (N=4)	Curriculum (N=4) Incompetence of students (N=4), administrative pressures (N=2)
Sources utilized	Course Books (N=6)	Internet (N=1), self- made handouts (N=1), YouTube tutorials (N=1), Course Books (N=3)

On account of Teachers' responses, it would not be erroneous to state that the traditional teaching methodology, these teachers follow limit them to adhere to the prescribed books which are timeworn and do not align with the current requirements of the students (Warsi, 2004). Also,

the authentic material, claimed to be a necessity for language acquisition in both L1 and L2 in view of social learning theory and ZPD (Tomlinson, 2013) is missing in the language classrooms in Pakistani context. Warsi (2004) concluded that inefficient books, the traditional teaching methodology, the stale examination system, and focus on information retention are the root causes of backward education system in Pakistan.

2. *To what extent, language teachers have the knowledge and understanding of various teaching writing approaches?*

In order to answer this question the transcribed interview data was analyzed against the themes in the questions that appeared on the interview. The findings of the data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Profiles of language teachers

Subject	Participant Code	Qualification	Pre-Service Training	Teaching Experience	Teaching Methodology
Urdu (L1)	RR1	MA (Urdu)	✕	15	Deductive grammar
	RR2	MA (Urdu)	--	12	Traditional method
	RR3	MA (Urdu)	--	13	Traditional method
	APR1	MA (Urdu)	--	10	Traditional method
	APR2	MA (Urdu)	--	15	Traditional method
	APR3	MA (Urdu)	--	15 and above	Traditional method
English (L2)	RR4	MA (English)	✕	10	Process and product approach
	RR5	MA (English)	--	12	Traditional method
	RR6	MA (English)	--	15	Traditional method
	APR4	MA (English)	✕	15 and above	Process approach
	APR5	MA (English)	✕	10	Process and product approach
	APR6	MA (English)	✕	12	Traditional method

Findings of the study revealed that only 40% of the sample (i.e. secondary school language teachers of state owned schools) received pre-service training. Whereas, the teachers so far could not participate in in-service training. The findings of the study are in the line of study conducted by Bashiruddin and Qayyum (2014) on Pakistani English Teachers' profile concluded that there is a dearth of appropriate qualification in Pakistani teachers; attempts should be made to promote pre-service teacher education and on in-service teacher development.

RR2: *I did not get any formal training. I don't know about theories you are talking about. I love teaching English and I enjoy it. I don't follow any ideology …….Most of the time, I prepare my own material. I rarely take help from internet*

APR1: *I prepared myself for teaching writing in English through Montessori course in which language tools were taught to me, then in masters' in teachers' training . I used to prepare mostly my own material and definitely side by side through internet.*

RR1: *yes… yes…. I completed the entire course of Education… but there are some things in life that books cannot teach you…and I believe that my way of teaching guarantees success for my students [Translated]*

The results also highlight a marked difference between teaching methodologies adopted by teachers with pre-service training and teachers with no formal training. Teachers with pre-service training are more informed and structured than their counterparts, also they have an idealistic and optimistic attitude towards teaching learning process (Seo & Moon, 2013); serving as a motivation factor for such teachers against any odds they face in the course of their teaching.

Teachers in school in Pakistan still happen to be what Hargreaves calls the pre professional stage of teacher development when the educational system in most part of

the world are moving towards what Hargreaves describes as the post-professionalism. Teachers are still struggling with large group of learners to cover the content with few textbooks or resources to help them with little reward or recognition (Kausar, 2010, p, 254)

6. Conclusion

The study intended plotting writing instruction at state owned schools through in depth study of two schools for approximation of the targeted writing skills' development among students of grades VI – VIII. In the line of the local studies language teaching (Urdu/English) is still happening under the traditional pedagogy. The writing practices, as conveyed by the interviewees, conform to the conventional methodology; lacking in communicative approach and language-skills focus, placing more emphasis on content based learning of language. Hence, writing instruction stressed on enabling students to know the content given in the textbook to be able to retain and reproduce in the final examination which clearly deviates from the way writing instruction is explained in earlier works. A significant conclusion of the study is the fact that despite adequate in service teacher education, the teachers continue teaching through the old-fashioned ways and ignore their responsibility towards their students in not preparing them to brace the future language challenges, and towards the education department in not enabling them to induce desired academic changes through teacher development. Writing is a complex activity that requires critical cognitive skills in both L1 and L2. Writing, being complex in its core, demands teachers to be more creative and eclectic in their approach, i.e. they should not limit their teaching practices to one factor alone. They should relatively understand, analyze, synthesize, and criticize the theory or the method considering the context before implementation in their writing classrooms (IPEK, 2009).

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