

A Survey of English Writing Competencies of Secondary School Students

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Abstract

English also has four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading & writing. Writing is the productive skill in written mode. Among four basic skills, writing is the hardest of the skills even for native speakers of a language as being more complicated than that of other language skill. The study aimed to assess the English writing competencies of secondary school students. It was descriptive study conducted in secondary schools of district Attock. Sample of the study consisted of 360 students (180 male and 180 female). Tool of study consisted of an achievement test for students consisting five areas of English writing competencies (vocabulary, sentence making, hand writing, comprehension, tenses) and a questionnaire for teachers. The data was analyzed using t-test for the purpose of measuring difference between the students' performance. A test of correlation was used to find relationship between students' competencies in sub skills of English writing competencies and their teachers' usage of different strategies and techniques in class in teaching of these skills. The findings of the study showed that the use of multiple teaching techniques has a positive impact on development of English writing skills of students.

Keywords: *vocabulary, sentence making, hand writing, comprehension, tenses*

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Introduction

Language is the trustworthy, proper, systematic and important source through which humans trade their feelings & thoughts to others in society. According to a reliable calculation, among 3500 languages spoken in the world, some languages exist in written & spoken mode while some other do not occupy their written form.

Language has its essential existence in our daily life for communicating with people, officials, administrative & in educational circles; helping society to carry out its multi dynamic activities, representing the heritage & culture . At times, language was considered to be limited to a specific country or nation as being the single language of that particular area; but now there is hardly a nation in the world with single language. English speakers all around the world use different tongues depending upon their geographical locations, the tone of an individual from New York is not similar with that of Sydney, London or Islamabad.

Ghani (2003) pointed out that English is considered as the status symbol in Pakistan; as English movies & English songs are more favorable among youth than any other language. Similarly, General public in colleges & universities like to talk in English.

It described that exclusive & white collar class families wish to speak their children in English. English is acknowledged as a language of supporting the cutting edge world, thus it is taught as a second language in Pakistani educational institutes; however, as a subject of study, it is taught as compulsory subject from primary to the graduate level of studies. Nonetheless, now English is mandatory in all educational institutes of Pakistan & it is expanding day by day.

Like other languages, English also has four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading & writing. Listening is the receptive skill in oral mode. Speaking is the productive skill in oral mode. Reading is the receptive skill in written mode. Writing is the productive skill in written mode. Among four basic skills, writing is the hardest of the skills even for native speakers of a language as being more complicated than that of other language skill.

In writing, a writer has to write first by planning choosing a topic with its purpose & finally organizing all information. Then in drafting, he has to write his ideas in sentences or paragraphs by following pre writing plans to write. Before editing mistakes of grammar, spelling, punctuation in proof reading, he edits his writing by making changes to improve writing.

The last stage of writing is when the writer decides how to present his writing to the readers (Cohen, 2014). So writing skill is one of the foundation for a successful academic performance and in writing presentations. Brown (2000) added that a successful writing consists of grammatical and stylistic features, sentence structure, linking ideas coherently, correct use of spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and finally the appropriate presentation of information in front of readers. Wren & Marton (2006) presented their views that learning English as a language needs a remarkable level of competency to demonstrate a satisfactory performance. Competencies are features or characteristics that can be used by learners to achieve success; it is a capability to perform a task successfully. Likewise, language competency is a defined level of skill in listening, speaking, reading & writing. Language competency is developed or obtained during the process of learning by the learner, representing a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities. However, Lundin (2010) also mentioned another factor that uplifting state of mind of learner has a strong relation with the effective language learning. An inspiration has an essential role in the arrangement of state of mind disposition that has an impact on learner's accomplishments.

Literature Review

Sitthipron (2012) concurred that language is the most helpful & practical source to communicate & correspondence among people, societies, countries etc. Among all languages, English as being the most broadly perceived global language, stands in the principal class on worldwide level. Van (2011) is of the view that English is the main & winning language, opens doors in global market & regions & plays an imperative role in our day to day existence.

Paine (2014) while describing the historical background of the English language stated that English was initially spread around the world by the British through colonialism from 1600 to the 1900s. Much of the time, English wins as a helpful basic language among populaces with various local tongues by setting itself as the language of instruction & government. The quality of being phenomenal in spoken & written English procures a bigger number of chances for winning smart jobs, to travel all the world more effectively, to speak on culture & religion with everyone in the world & many more (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013). Morrison (2002) figured out that with a normal 350 million neighborhood speakers & 1900 million proficient speakers, English has been spreading around the world relentlessly & fast. Weston (2013)

affirmed that English is spoken in more than 100 nations; hence he suggested we must attempt to speak English regardless of the possibility of committing errors to meet the most extensive reach of this language in science, governmental issues, business, innovation etc. Hargreaves and Fink (2012) highlighted that English depends on a letter set, contrasted with Chinese, can be adopted rapidly; by giving us better opportunities to speak with business accomplices & giving us boundless access to information on web or internet in our studies or researches. Crystal (2012) and Sitthiprom (2012) are of the opinion that English, as being taught as the second language & as an official language in almost 90 countries, increases the chances of getting a suitable occupation in both government offices & multinational companies enabling the individuals to talk with non-locals un-hesitantly. Similarly, Eagleton (2013) and Ball (2012) confirmed that English is recognized as a travel permit to better training & work openings. Likewise, Beatty (2013) elucidated that English has turned into a worldwide language of current science & advances, important & critical examinations, PC information & newspaper.

In essence, it can be concluded that English is the language of global issues, universal correspondence, international business & exchange, a language of status & image, a window to the world, most broadly acknowledged language on the planet, an essential language utilized as a part of worldwide undertakings, prevailing part in the media; hence it can be said that effect of English is proceeding as well as expanding (Finnegan, 2014).

English Language Skills

A learners' useful wellness is underlined in the estimation of learning language skills of listening, speaking, reading & writing (Powers, 2010). Dash & Dash (2007) confirmed that it is vital to winding up particularly skilled at these attitudes for introducing a language in ones' habits thoroughly. It has been transformed into the key need of all the European countries even to learn English by and large with its four competencies: listening, speaking, reading, writing (Pan 2008; Playdon, 2013). Davies & Peares (2000) explained that listening & reading are responsive & receptive competencies; while speaking & writing are productive competencies. Moreover, Aljawi (2010) stated that listening & speaking are called aural competencies; while reading and reading and writing are called productive competencies. More or less, Benzinger (2014) concluded that phonetic perspective is the basic thing in language which covers accentuation, vocabulary, enunciation, structure and so

forth. Nearby those perspectives, the learners furthermore need to do well with the language abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In any case, the learners of English language should ace those competencies completely and thoroughly.

Importance of Writing Skills

Writing is demonstrative procedure to organize symbols into words & sentences. Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt (2011) stated that writing is a fundamental & vital competency to gain since it is being utilized widely in advanced education and in work place; essential to express ones' thoughts, considerations and perspectives to others. Rayner, Pollatsek, Ashby & Clifton (2012) told that writing as an approach to utilize words in a composed shape in order to express one's thoughts or suppositions for out of a wide range of purposes.

According to Capobianco (2014), writing is a correspondence media of somebody to himself or herself & other individuals in an alternate time and place. In like manner, Purcell, Buchanan & Fried (2013) elucidated written work is a source to show thoughts on a bit of paper. In addition, Monk (2001) confirmed that writing being a gainful and expressive action, requires the writer to get command over graphology, language structure and vocabulary. Likewise, Swarts (2017) mentioned that writing as a procedure divided into arranging and writing a draft, reacting, reviewing, altering, assessing and distributing. Willis (2008) believed that spelling, syntax, comprehension, handwriting and vocabulary as segments of writing. A ten year investigation of the writing abilities of 95000 students were appeared in 2008 by the national appraisal of instructive advance, demonstrated that 62% of the 17 years and 97% of the 9 years of age composed inadmissible useful writing.

The significance of writing as a means of learning is a supposition shared by Gould (2010) stating that students news coverage is a surprising probability for students to develop their writing abilities. Goleman, Boyatzis & Mckee (2013) explored that youngsters learn composed language similarly as Piaget stated that they develop their insight about the world through investigation and experimentation. Goff (2012) and Hart (2013) confirmed that written work competencies are more essential today than any other time in recent memory. Wagner (2014) unfolded the fact that English writing is vital for achieving worldwide business.

Bok (2009) added that writing must have clearness, depth, compactness, accuracy and certainty. Masella (2005) considered the impressive writing competencies as the 'ticket' to better school evaluated

and more prominent scholarly accomplishments. Conley (2010) considered writing process as a self-reflection by distinguishing the objectives and being in charge of the assignment. De-Roock et al (2010) remarked that writing is a method for building familiarity and a method for creating precision in punctuation and vocabulary and so on; by declaring four sorts of writing , narrative that tells or narrates a story, Descriptive that describes something in such a way that it appears readers' sense of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste; Creative writing comprises personal and social activities with the aim of generating, communication and expository writing presenting facts and explains ideas in front of its readers.

Teaching Writing to the Secondary Students in Pakistan:

Depdiknas (2006) pointed out the importance of teaching writing to the secondary school students for enabling the students to achieve the useful level of writing competency by creating useful content or short papers as techniques, story expressive, description or collection of an incident. Becker (2000) highlighted the objectives of writing is to promote the oral communication & written expression of thoughts by utilizing various language styles for secondary school students. Sadosk & Paivio (2013) described the perspectives of vocabulary, linguistic use, spelling, accentuation, written expression, making of sentences and sections, and content models in writing to retell a progression of occasions. Richard & Renandya (2002) and Langan (2001) asserted that writing is considered as the most difficult domain for majority of the students among the four language competencies of listening, speaking, reading & writing; while Paul & Norbury (2012) considered it normal for students to have issues in writing their thoughts and in this regard teaching learning material is vital that assumes a noticeable part in the learning process of learners. Herr (2007) inferred that by using blog based companion amendments strategy may uplift the on the sentence structure and word selection of student's written work.

Hoiem (2013) emphasized that instructor can utilize drawings or signals for teaching complex visual information which can help students a lot in composing a valuable writing. Polanyi (2015) described writing as a consecutive procedures; while Nowak et al (2011) considered writing as an individual demonstration involving thoughts, change and subjects. However, Langan (2001) mentioned four essential rules for successful writing; start with an unmistakably expressed point, provide supporting details for point, arrange the supporting material, finally

reexamine that sentences are blunder free. Procedure of writing consisted of following stages:

- Pre writing
- Composing
- Revising
- Editing

However, Albesher (2012) explained that procedure of writing as per following stages:

Pre Writing: This is a task of planning, collecting data and making notes.

Rough Draft: This is a stage where students write their thoughts on a piece of paper without paying much attention on grammatical mistakes or beautification of writing.

Peer Writing: Students work in groups with their unfinished writings by asking who, when, what, where, why and how addresses by looking better words selection & expressions.

Revising: proposals are inculcate or exclude and input is added by the educator to make writing more successful.

Editing: Mistakes in vocabulary, grammar and so on are rectified in this phase under the supervision of instructor. **Final Draft:** The educator exhibits the last proposals for improving the nature of writing at this stage.

Publishing: This is the completion phase of writing in portfolio, story or class book.

Stackman et. Al; (2002) explained the stages of learning writing as shown in figure:

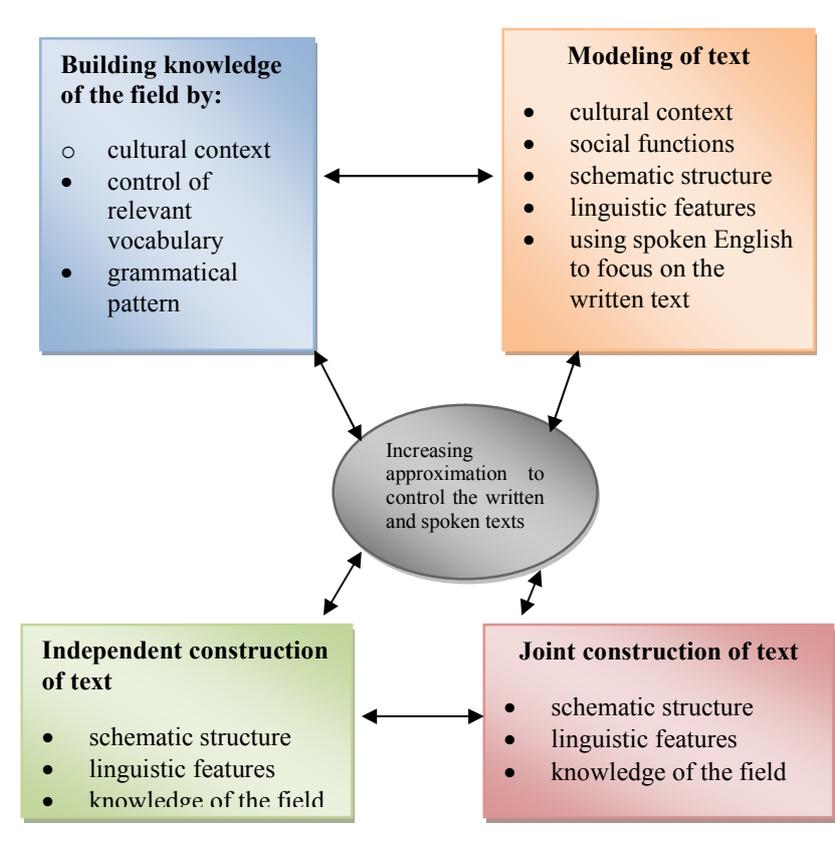


Figure 2.3: Stages of Learning

Richards & Renandya (2002) described ten stages constituting a successful teaching process for inculcating writing among students at their secondary level. The first stage is finding out objectives; the 2nd stage is settling on hypothetical standards. The 3rd stage is arranging content; and the 4th stage is weighting the components. Similarly, the 5th stage is drawing up a syllabus; and the 6th stage is choosing material.

The 7th stage is preparing learning activities & exercises; and the 8th stage is picking sorts & techniques for criticism. In addition, the 9th stage is assessing the course; and the 10th stage is mirroring the instructors; involvement. These ten stages are utilized to make a powerful instructing of writing and these should be adopted by every English teacher for effective teaching in English writing (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Brown (2004) elaborated different types of writing tasks that may be applied in the teaching learning process of writing. These are imitative writing, intensive or controlled writing, responsive & extensive writing (Brown, 2004). Donough & Shaw (2003) elucidated five sorts of writing tasks that can be carried out by a teacher in the classroom such as: i. Personal writing, for example, journals, shopping list, pressing rundown, formulas, diaries, an update for oneself, and address. ii. Public writing, for example, letters, frame filling, and applications. iii. Creative writing, for example, lyrics, stories, rhymes, dramatizations, tunes, and collection of memoirs. iv. Social writing, for example, solicitations, notes, and phone messages. v. Study writing, for example, making notes while reading, taking notes while attending a class, writing summaries, book-review, a biography, an essay or a report etc. In addition Yousaf & Ahmed (2013) pointed out English written work abilities possesses remarkable significance in the Pakistani education system; and the English language is incorporated into the syllabi as a mandatory subject from early phases of learning to graduate level. The research stated that English is the main medium of direction in various instructive foundations all over Pakistan; being the official language of Pakistan, English is being utilized as a part of all current procedures and the matters ideal from the high experts to the workers. Khan (2013) pointed out the linguistics issues, cognitive issues & psychological issues confronted by the Pakistani students in writing English; therefore they commit errors in sentence making, vocabulary and feeling hesitation in speaking English.

Methodology of the Study

This was a descriptive research. It attempted to assess the English writing skills of the male and female students. The study also compared English writing competencies of male and female students.

Sample of the Study

Thirty students of 10th grade with their teacher were selected randomly from high schools of six tehsils of Attock district. However, twelve high schools were selected by convenient sampling to conduct the research. In this way, total sample of students comprised of 360 students and twelve teachers.

Research Instrument

Two research instruments were developed for the purpose of data collection. An achievement test (for students) & a questionnaire (for teachers) prepared. The achievement test consisted of 5 sections namely as vocabulary, sentence making, handwriting, comprehension & tenses. The questionnaire on Likert scale pattern consisted of 35 items related to strategies & techniques teachers used to employ in classroom while teaching vocabulary, sentence making, handwriting, comprehension & tenses.

Validation of Instruments

The validity of instrument was tested by language experts' opinions, followed by a pilot study on a small scale. The items of the instruments were improved in the light of language experts' opinions. Moreover, Cronbach alpha was used to measure the internal consistency and reliability of the instruments. Internal consistency of the instrument was 0.9.

Procedure of Data Collection

The process of data collection was carried out by visiting the government high school (six male and six female) of six tehsils in the Attock district according to a specific scheduled task. During this process, 180 male and 180 female students of 10th class were given an achievement test. Before administering test, the researcher briefed them the purpose and the instructions of the test. The students were supposed to do this test within 45 minutes. The students behaved solemnly and tried to complete their test in time.

Later, the researcher distributed the questionnaire among the teachers of these students (who were teaching them English) in order to know about those strategies and techniques, they used to employ in the class in order to enhance writing skills of their students. Teachers were requested to respond to every item responsibly. Therefore, they did it vigilantly while showing every responsibility of their trustworthiness and fidelity toward their teaching in English. They were supposed to take plenty of time (45 minutes) for doing the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The results were recorded and tabulated orderly, systematically and carefully. t-test was used in order to measure mean difference between male and female students. Whereas, the data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed through the use of correlation in order to indicate the relationship between teachers' opinion to every item of the questionnaire and their students' scores on the achievement test for measuring English writing skills (vocabulary, sentence making, hand-writing, comprehension and tenses) in classroom.

Results of Analysis

The achievement test used to assess the English writing competencies of male and female students. The test comprised of five sections (section I: Vocabulary. section II: Sentence Making. section III: Hand Writing, section IV: Comprehension and section V: Tenses) in order to evaluate five skills of writing. Difference between mean score of the groups on the achievement test was measured using t-test, while relationship between students' score and their teachers' responses was measured using Pearson correlation test. Results of analysis is as:

Table 1
Mean score of students on vocabulary

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal t-value	sig	Table t-value
Male	180	4	1.27	358	-19.38	0.00	1.96
Female	180	7	1.51				

Table 1 indicated that female student's competency in vocabulary was higher than male students. It concluded that female teachers were using the strategies and techniques more successfully than male teachers; therefore, female students have shown better results in the skill of vocabulary.

Table 2
Mean score of students on sentence making

Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>df</i>	Cal t-value	Sig	Table <i>t</i> -value
Male	180	7	1.51				
				358	8.38	0.02	1.96
Female	180	6	1.90				

Table 2 showed that male students' competency in sentence making was higher than female students. It concluded that male teachers were using the strategies and techniques more successfully than female teachers; therefore, male students have shown better results in the skill of sentence making.

Table 3
Mean score of students on hand writing

Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>df</i>	Cal t-value	sig	Table <i>t</i> -value
Male	180	7	1.55				
				358	31.42	0.00	1.96
Female	180	3	0.89				

Table 3 revealed that male students' competency in hand writing was higher than female students. It concluded that male teachers were using the strategies and techniques more successfully than female teachers; therefore, male students have shown better results in the skill of hand writing.

Table 4
Showing the mean score of students on Comprehension sub scale

Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>df</i>	Cal t-value	Sig	Table <i>t</i> -value
Male	180	5	1.12				
				358	-15.19	0.00	1.96
Female	180	7	1.49				

Table 4 indicated that female student's competency in comprehension was higher than male students. It concluded that female teachers were

using the strategies and techniques more successfully than male teachers; therefore, female students have shown better results in the skill of comprehension.

Table 5
Mean score of students on tenses

Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>df</i>	Cal t-value	sig	Table <i>t</i> -value
Male	180	7	1.49				
				358	13.46	0.00	1.96
Female	180	5	2.08				

Table 5 showed that male students' competency in tenses was higher than female students. It concluded that male teachers were using the strategies and techniques more successfully than female teachers; therefore, male students have shown better results in the skill of tenses.

Table 6
Relationship between students score and teachers responses

Sub scale	Results
Vocabulary	A moderate correlation ($r = 0.41$) found between female student's scores and female teacher's responses. However, there was a weak correlation between male student's scores and their teachers' responses.
Sentence Making	A moderate correlation ($r = 0.40$) found between male student's scores and male teachers responses. A weak correlation found between female students score and female teachers responses.
Hand Writing	Moderate correlation ($r = 0.38$) found between male student's scores and their teacher's responses. However, there was a weak correlation between female student's scores and their teachers' responses.
Comprehension	Moderate correlation ($r = 0.40$) was found between female student's scores and Female teachers' responses.
Tenses	Moderate correlation ($r = 0.37$) existed between male and female student's scores and their teacher's responses.

The analysis of the data from table 6 revealed that the male students performed better in achievement test in the competency of sentence making, hand writing and tenses; while female students showed better competency in vocabulary and comprehension.

Discussion

The study was descriptive in nature. It attempted to compare the English writing skills of the male and female students. For the purpose of data collection, it involved 360 students (180 male and 180 female students) of the class 10th in the public schools at six tehsils of Attock district. The study used an achievement test and a questionnaire as its research tools. The data was collected through the survey technique. Afterward, the data was analyzed using various statistical techniques and the difference between the students' performance in the achievement test was measured through the t-test; the relationship between the students' scores in test and their teachers responses in questionnaire was analyzed through correlation. It was found that female student's competency in vocabulary was greater than male students. Male student's competency in sentence making, hand writing and tenses was higher than female students. On the other hand, female student's competency in comprehension was higher than male students. The study concluded that the use of multiple teaching techniques has a positive impact on the development of the English writing skills among the students. Moreover, every English teacher must pay heed to the development of the five sub-skills of the English writing skills in order to enhance students' competencies in writing correct English. Furthermore, the teachers should design interesting learning activities according to the interest and needs of students for inculcating the English writing skills among them. Besides, the teachers should rely upon the practical and workable use of teaching methodology in order to make their students achieve high academic success.

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