

# STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE WRITING SKILL (THE CASE OF DISTRICT BANNU)

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## ABSTRACT

*This research study examined the application of innovative strategies for improving writing skills of Secondary level students. It also examined the steps taken by Secondary level teachers for the improvement of writing skills of their students. Effective written communication is the problem faced by all the ESL students at secondary level. The objective of the study was to help the secondary level students to overcome this problem. More specifically, this research study aimed to guide the teachers, teaching at secondary level, to bring innovation in their teaching by showing the results of innovative strategies. In order to know about the practices of the teachers, inside the classroom, data was calculated through rating scale questionnaire. After that experimental study was carried out. No improvement was observed in the writing skills of the students, belonging to Control group. Thus this research study proved to be a great contribution by guiding the teachers to bring a significant change in the writing skills of the students.*

**Keywords:** *Writing skills, Innovative Strategies, Teachers, Students, treatment, control group*

## INTRODUCTION

Emergent writing is considered a child first experience with writing (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). According to these writers this practice appears during the pre- school years and “continues during the school age years and beyond.” In order to be a good writer one must be a good reader as well. Kroll (2001) also holds the same opinion and contends that it is highly unlikely to expect someone to be a very good writer who is not a proficient reader. According to some prominent researchers like Cope and Kalantzis (1993, 2000) and Johns (1997), social access and inclusion through a facility for learners is possible with language and writing. In order to achieve proficiency in

writing, a learner needs pedagogy in grammar and lexis. Same opinion is held by some other experts as well like Celce-Murcia (2001), Christie (1998) and Martin (1992).

According to them, it is a matter of great disadvantage for L2 learners who have a lack of instruction in L2 grammar and lexis. Due to this disadvantage these learners face difficulties in their vocational, academic and professional careers. According to these researchers, language quality in L2 writing is important as L2 writers are judged and evaluated on the bases of their control of language and text construction in their written discourse. For meaningful and appropriate communication in L2, grammar and vocabulary plays a very important role. This view is also supported by researchers like Frodesen (2001), Brich (2005), Byrd (2005), Byrd and Reid (1998), and McKay (1993). They are of the opinion that while designing curriculum for L2; writing instruction has to include grammar and vocabulary.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Teaching L2 writing to school-age children needs proper attention and it must be based on certain fundamental needs. Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000) are of the opinion that in the modern approach of teaching L2 to children of school-going age, children need to get proficiency in spelling and in letter and recognition of word. In the second step attention is given to the syntactic parsing of morphemes, phrases and sentences. With the passage of time for the development of writing skill of the learners, they are introduced to some more complex tasks. Instruction then starts to move to school-based writing. This process of writing is combined with reading as well as with grammar and learning of vocabulary (Adger, Snow, & Christian, 2002; Birch, 2005; Schleppegrell, 2004).

Psycholinguist Eric Lennenberg (1967), as cited in Brown 2002, is of the opinion that human beings universally learn to walk and to talk, but it is not the case with swimming and writing. Swimming and writing are learned behavior. One learns swimming only when a body of water and tutor, to teach the skill of swimming, are available. For writing, too, the rule is the same. Learners learn to write if they are the members of a literate society and they are also guided and taught by a teacher.

Fife MacDuff, Khadija AlHayki, and Caroline Linse (2010) argue that there are many challenges for teachers to teach writing and encourage students to write. One of the most difficult issues, with which teachers are confronted, is the behavior of the students where they show reluctance to write in any language; even in L1. Thus students feel double burden when they are asked to write in English, when English is second or foreign language for them. Learners of English language more often lack confidence about the basic writing skills. According to Coombe and Canning (2002),

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in the field of self-assessment much developmental work has been performed that supports the use of ability statements very strongly.

According to Carol Haddaway (2011), one of the most effective ways to learn writing is to...read, read, read. Many ESL/EFL students are not highly skilled readers. It is highly unlikely to expect that such readers would develop into a highly proficient writer (Kroll 2001).

### **Hypothesis**

The study was based on the following hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: Innovative strategies do not play a significant role in improving the writing skill of English language of Secondary level students.

H<sub>1</sub>: Innovative strategies play a significant role in improving the writing skill of English language of Secondary level students.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Experimental research design was adopted in this study. In experimental research design, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2010) participants are placed in groups randomly. They pass through different treatments imposed on them by the researcher. In order to check the effects of the treatments; observations are made in the end (p. 108). According to Campbell & Stanley, 1963 as qtd in Yair Levy and Timothy J. Ellis 2011, the pretest-posttest design is the most commonly used experimental design. For the collection of data 10th grade class of a government high school was selected and its 40 students were divided into two groups randomly on the bases of pre-test. These groups were termed as Treatment group and Control group respectively.

In order to check the validity of the questionnaire, it was given to 10 language and research experts. Their valuable suggestions and recommendations were incorporated. As a pilot study the questionnaire was administered to 10 English Language teachers. The data thus collected was analyzed through SPSS 16. The reliability of the questionnaire found was 9.1 which was reasonable. Another tool, which was used for the collection of data in the study, was Pre and post tests. These tests were developed on the bases of ideas taken from the strategies suggested by Fife MacDuff (2010). The data required in this research was primary data. Primary data was obtained through questionnaire and pre and posttests. Clarke, R.J. (2005) is of the opinion that primary research is a study of a subject through first hand observation and investigation. Secondary research, on the other hand is the examination of studies of other researchers.

The secondary data was collected from research journals and books available in the libraries and on internet. Population of this study consisted of all the secondary level teachers and students at district Bannu. Out of 88 high schools in the public sector; 16 schools, 8 urban and 8 rural, were randomly selected. A questionnaire was distributed among the teachers, two teachers from each school. Thus out of the population 32 teachers, 16 male and 16 female, were taken as a sample in this study. For this purpose stratified sample followed by proportion allocation technique was followed. As experimental study was conducted in the second part of the study, a sample of 40 students was taken which was randomly divided into Treatment group and Control group.

Two types of data were collected in this study. One was the data collected from questionnaire and the other was collected from pre and posttests. For the analysis of data, collected from questionnaire, percentage was used. Similarly for the analysis of pre and posttests, independent sample t-test was used.

## DATA ANALYSIS

In order to find out the reason for the poor written communication of the secondary level students and know about the practices of teachers inside the classroom, a survey was conducted. For this purpose questionnaire was distributed among the teachers, teaching English to the secondary level students. The details are given below:

**Table 4.1.1encouraging creative writing in English among students**

Statement		Urban				Rural			
		Frequency		Percentage		Frequency		Percentage	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Encouraging creative writing in English among students.	SA	03	02	37.5%	25 %	02	02	25 %	25 %
	A	02	03	25 %	37.5 %	03	02	37.5 %	25 %
	UD	02	0	25 %	0 %	02	01	25%	12.5 %
	D	01	02	12.5%	25 %	01	01	12.5%	12.5%
	SD	0	01	0 %	12.5 %	0	01	0%	12.5 %
	Total		08	08	100 %	100%	08	08	100 %

The table 4.1.1 shows that in the urban area 37.5 % male and 25% female teachers encouraged creative writing in English among their students. In the rural area 25 % male and 25% female teachers encouraged creative writing in English among their students.

**Table 4.1.2 Discouraging memorization of essays, paragraphs, stories etc. through rote learning**

Statement		Urban				Rural			
		Frequency		Percentage		Frequency		Percentage	
Discouraging memorization of essays, paragraphs, stories etc. through rote learning in students.		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	SA	02	02	25 %	25 %	02	01	25 %	12.5 %
	A	02	02	25 %	25 %	02	02	25 %	25 %
	UD	0	0	0 %	0 %	0	0	0 %	0 %
	D	02	02	25 %	25 %	02	02	25 %	25 %
	SD	02	02	25 %	25 %	02	03	25%	37.5 %
	Total	08	08	100 %	100%	08	08	100 %	100 %

The table 4.1.2 shows that in the urban area 25 % male and 25% female teachers discouraged rote learning in memorization of essays, paragraphs, stories etc. In the rural area 25 % male and 12.5% female teachers discouraged rote learning in memorization of essays, paragraphs, stories etc.

**Table 4.1.3. The examination system encourages rote learning among students**

Statement		Urban				Rural			
		Frequency		Percentage		Frequency		Percentage	
The examination system encourages rote learning among students.		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	SA	05	05	62.5%	62.5 %	04	05	50 %	62.5 %
	A	01	02	12.5%	25 %	02	02	25 %	25 %
	UD	01	01	12.5%	12.5 %	01	01	12.5%	12.5 %

	D	01	0	12.5%	0 %	01	0	12.5%	0 %
	SD	00	00	100 %	0 %	0	0	0 %	0 %
Total		08	08	100 %	100%	08	08	100 %	100 %

The table 4.1.6 shows that in the urban area 62.5 % male and 62.5% female teacher agreed that examination system encouraged rote learning among the students. In the rural area 50 % male and 62.5% female teacher agreed that examination system encouraged rote learning among the students.

### **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The above data shows that students are not provided with appropriate opportunities to improve their writing skill of English Language. Data also shows that no systematic approach is followed by the teachers to improve the writing skill of the students. One of the major factors, responsible for the practices of the teachers; seems to be the examination system. Majority of the teachers agree that the examination system is encouraging rote learning among the students. Students memorize few essays, paragraphs, stories, letters, and applications for the examination and easily get through. They continue with this practice till their Bachelor level. At Bachelor level the paper of English is set in such a manner that no student with the habit of rote learning can attempt it. Thus majority of the students are failed in the paper. Rote learning does not play any role in improving the writing skill of the students.

Most of the teachers agree that they value original work rather than copied work, but no proper steps are taken by them to develop in them the habit of producing original work. According to H. Douglas Brown (2002), meaningful learning leads towards better long-term retention than rote learning. In such an atmosphere where there are minimum opportunities for the students to improve their writing skill, students are very much afraid of writing something from their own in L2. According to Brown, students must take risk in order to make themselves efficient writers. According to him, successful learners must be willing to become “gamblers” in the game of language to attempt to produce language that is a bit beyond their absolute certainty. Thus it is the responsibility of the teachers to prepare the students for risk taking. As told earlier, they take risk at Bachelor level but that is too late for them. What the students of the area are lacking is confidence and it is the duty of a teacher to develop confidence in them to write in L2.

The responses of the teachers in the above questionnaire clearly indicates that one of the main reasons, responsible for the poor writing skill of the students, is the flaw in the teaching methodology of the teachers. No systematic approach is adopted by the teachers to improve the writing skill of the students. In order to help the teachers improve the situation, an experimental study was conducted. The purpose of the study was to see whether there comes any improvement in the writing skill of the students or not.

### **5.1. Testing of Hypothesis**

A 10<sup>th</sup> grade class of a government high school was selected and the strategies suggested by Fife MacDuff, Khadija AlHayki, and Caroline Linse (2010) were applied on them for one month. The procedure and results of the study are discussed below

#### **5.1.1. Participants**

The participants involved in this study were 40 students of 10<sup>th</sup> grades in a government high school of District Bannu. All the participants were studying English as a second language.

#### **5.1.2 Data Collection and Analysis**

For the collection of data the 40 students were divided into two groups randomly on the bases of pre-test. These groups were termed as Treatment group and Control group respectively. The Treatment group was taught for one month by applying the strategies suggested by Fife MacDuff, Khadija AlHayki, and Caroline Linse (2010). The Control group, on the other hand, was taught by using the method which was in use of the teacher in normal days. After a month both the groups were re-examined with the help of post-tests.

#### **5.1.3. Treatment group**

Hypothesis:

$$H_0: \mu_d = 0$$

$$H_1: \mu_d \neq 0$$

In order to check the improvement in the writing skill of the Treatment group, both its pre and post-tests were compared and the result was calculated using t-test. The scores of students, belonging to Treatment group, are shown in the table No 5.1.

**Table No 5.1. Students' scores in pre and posttests**

Pre(x <sub>1</sub> )	Post (x <sub>2</sub> )	d <sub>i</sub> = x <sub>2</sub> - x <sub>1</sub>	d <sub>i</sub> <sup>2</sup>
12	16	4	16
10	13	3	9
8	12	4	16
10	15	5	25
12	14	2	4
9	12	3	9
6	9	3	9
10	12	2	4
4	8	4	16
13	15	2	4
15	18	3	9
5	9	4	4
10	10	0	0
11	14	3	9
6	9	3	9
7	8	1	1
14	16	2	4
11	10	-1	1
9	12	3	9
10	14	4	16
		Sum= 54	Sum=174

$$\bar{d} = \frac{\sum d_i}{n} = 54 / 20 = 2.7$$

After that the values of Test Statistics t and critical region were calculated using the following procedure

The Standard deviation is

$$s_d = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n-1} \left[ \sum d_i^2 - \frac{(\sum d_i)^2}{n} \right]}$$

Putting values we get,

$$s_d = \sqrt{\frac{1}{20-1} \left[ 174 - \frac{(54)^2}{20} \right]} = 1.21828$$

Now the standard error is

$$s_{\bar{d}} = \frac{s_d}{\sqrt{n}} = \frac{1.21828}{\sqrt{20}} = 0.27241$$



$$\text{Test Statistics } t = \frac{\bar{d}}{\frac{s_d}{\sqrt{n}}} = \frac{2.7}{0.27241} = 9.91153$$

$$(v) \text{ Critical region } t_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}(v) = t_{\frac{0.05}{2}}(20 - 1) = 2.093 \text{ (Searched from table)}$$

## 5.2. Control Group

In order to check the improvement in the writing skill of the Control group, both its pre and post-tests were compared and the result was calculated using t-test. The scores of students, belonging to Control group, are shown in the table No 5.2.

**Table No. 5.2. Students' scores in pre and posttests**

Pre(x <sub>1</sub> )	Post (x <sub>2</sub> )	d <sub>i</sub> = x <sub>2</sub> - x <sub>1</sub>	d <sub>i</sub> <sup>2</sup>
10	8	-2	4
12	10	-2	4
7	6	-1	1
9	8	-1	1
13	10	-3	9
7	6	-1	1
8	8	0	0
9	7	-2	4
6	6	0	0
14	13	-1	1
13	11	-2	4
3	2	-1	1
12	9	-3	9
8	8	0	0
8	6	-2	4
5	4	-1	1
11	10	-1	1
9	7	-2	4
7	5	-2	4
9	8	-1	1
		Sum= -28	Sum=54

$$\bar{d} = \frac{\sum d_i}{n} = -28/20 = -1.4$$

After that the values of Test Statistics t and critical region were calculated using the following procedure

The Standard deviation is

$$s_d = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n-1} \left[ \sum d_i^2 - \frac{(\sum d_i)^2}{n} \right]}$$

Putting values we get,

$$s_d = \sqrt{\frac{1}{20-1} \left[ 54 - \frac{(-28)^2}{20} \right]} = 0.88257$$

Now the standard error is

$$s_{\bar{d}} = \frac{s_d}{\sqrt{n}} = \frac{0.88257}{\sqrt{20}} = 0.19735$$

Test Statistics

$$t = \frac{\bar{d}}{s_{\bar{d}}} = \frac{-1.4}{0.19735} = -7.09399$$

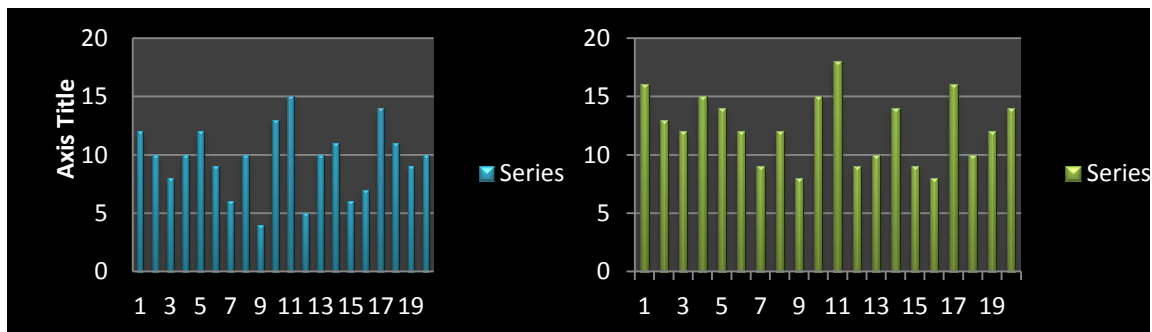
(v) Critical region

$$t_{\frac{\alpha}{2}} (v) = t_{\frac{0.05}{2}} (20 - 1) = -2.093 \quad (\text{Searched}$$

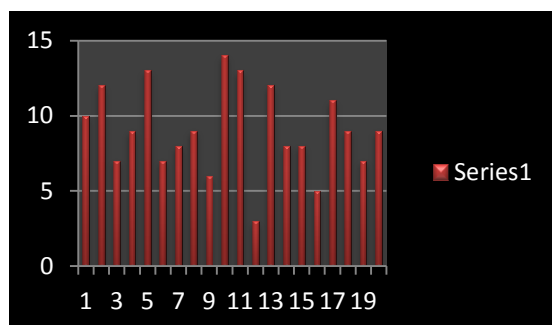
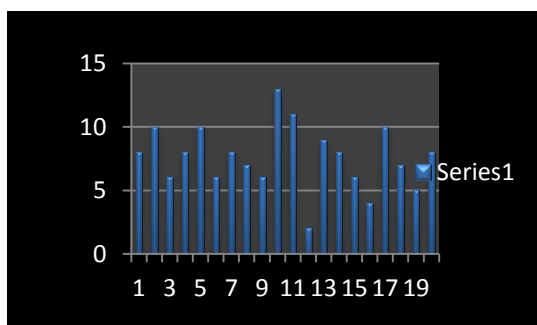
from table)

## RESULTS

The value of Arithmetic Mean of Treatment group (4.7) shows that there is significant average improvement in the writing skill of the students belonging to Treatment group. Overall improvement in the writing skill of the Treatment group students is also indicated by the difference in the values of Test Statistic  $t$  and Critical region ( $9.91153 > 2.093$ ). The difference between the two values shows that the value of Test Statistic is significant. As the calculated value of  $t = 9.91153$  is greater than the tabulated value of  $t = 2.093$ , so  $H_0$  is rejected and it is concluded that the pre and post data set have different averages, and the application of innovative strategies play a significant role in improving the writing skill of the students. Thus the application of strategies does make a difference and gives positive results. Similarly the values of Test statistical and Critical region for the Control group were calculated and were noted as  $-7.09399$  and  $-2.093$  respectively. (The scores of pre and posttests of students of Control group are given in Table No 4.46.6). The difference of values of Test Statistics and Critical region shows that the value of Test Statistics  $t$  is insignificant ( $-2.093 > -7.09399$ ). This shows that no improvement occurred in the writing skill of the students of Control group. The graphical representation in the improvement of the students of the Treatment group is given below.

**Pre Data****Treatment Group****Post Data**

Graphical representation of the pre and posttests of Control group is given below

**Pre Test****Control Group****Post Test.****CONCLUSION**

Students of secondary level at district Bannu have very poor written communication in English language. The main objective of the study was to find reason for this poor communication of the students and come forward with workable solution. In order to find reasons for this poor written communication of students, a questionnaire was distributed among teachers. The purpose was to find out steps taken by them for the improvement of English language writing skill.

The practices of the teachers show that they do not adopt any proper approach to make their students skilled writers of English language. Very few teachers encourage in their students the practice of creative writing in English language. Majority of the students are in the habit of memorizing essays, paragraphs and stories through rote learning and majority of the teachers do not discourage this habit of their students. Very few teachers encourage the students to write essays not copying material from guide books. With the aim to help teachers improve the situation, an experimental study was conducted in which some innovative strategies for improving the writing skill of the

students were applied in the classroom. The results of the study were very encouraging as a significant change was observed in the writing skill of the students.

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