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Effect of teaching practices on students' persuasive writing skills in subject of English at Secondary level

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English writing skill is challenging target for teachers at all levels of education in Pakistan. There are variety of teaching practices used by teachers for improving writing ability of their students. This study was based on teaching practices used at Secondary School Certificate and Ordinary level in English by using causal comparative design. Sample of the study comprised of all the schools of Lahore city offered SSC and O level simultaneously by using purposive sampling technique. Test and rubrics were administered to students at the same time to know their level of learning. Questionnaire was developed to determine the teaching practices used by teachers. To determine the interrater reliability of scoring Krippendorff alpha was calculated. Findings of the study showed that achievement of students differ significantly of students of both groups (SSC and O level). Teachers of SSC were in favour of using teacher centered practices, on the other hand, O level teachers frequently used student centered. It is suggested that teachers of SSC should use student centered teaching practices and rubrics should be given to students along with test for assessment of essay type questions for reliable scoring.

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Introduction

Due to growing demand in international market, English writing is important objective of curriculum of SSC and O level. Stage of secondary level is important due to preparation of students in job market and to enter higher education institution, therefore, much attention is needed at this level. Students of secondary level face lot of difficulties in writing from initial grades because of education system around the country which focus on achievement scores of students as the only criteria to measure success without judging the explanatory power to answer questions. There is apparently no difference in English writing learning outcomes of SSC and O level. Learning outcomes are well planned, structured and detailed in the curriculum of both streams that addresses the students' ability to write effectively. English language learners face difficulties due to ineffective practices of teaching used by teachers. There are practices sound more effective than others and teachers use them according to the needs and grade level of students. While teaching

students and teachers use both student centered and teacher centered approaches. Research shows that student centered approaches are more useful causing significant difference in students' achievement as compared to teacher centered approaches. Brainstorming and feedback (Hyland, 2007), and extensive reading (Harmer, 2007) were used for development of writing skills.

Various studies have been conducted to examine the impact of the styles of teaching on the examination system at SSC and O level in subject of English (Mirza, Nosheen & Nasir, 1999; Khan, 2011, 2012; Behlol & Anwar, 2011). Chughtai (1990) also highlighted how English language learners face difficulties in English at secondary level.

Examining the difference in learning outcomes and teaching practices at two streams of secondary education (SSC and O level) running parallel in private schools was still unexplored in Pakistan. It is generally assumed in Pakistani context that there is discrimination among students qualified from SSC and O level. To unfold whether difference exists, same test addressing similar learning outcomes was developed and administered to students of both streams. Private schools have high resources for children than Government schools. This study attempts to minimize the effect of students' socio-economic background on their achievement by selecting schools offering both streams concurrently, therefore, the sample included only private schools offering SSC and O level simultaneously having similar learning environment.

Research study done by Sunday, Deborah, Andokari, and Ereson (2014) done in Nigeria found that English language teachers at secondary level give emphasis on rote learning of content without following process of writing. Content is given to student by teacher to memorize it. The only emphasis is given to achieve high scores in examination. Difficulties faced by students in English writing are not identified by teachers therefore, they lie in students' writing products.

Constantinou, Chambers, Zanini, and Klir (2019) elaborated that content alignment with appropriate use of English is essential feature of students' writing. Without appropriate use of linguistic devices student is unable to produce adequate piece of writing. An effective text is free from linguistics errors and identify students' ability to write effectively.

Ahmed (2010) explored that English language writers at secondary level take English as tedious activity. The reason is that teachers do not teach students the process of writing and never engage them in this process, therefore, it becomes a passive activity where no interest is created in classroom. For these classrooms the key to achieve good marks is cramming and students realize that better they cram lead to higher scores.

Students face problems in writing English and finding it difficult to prepare assignments on a specific topic given by teacher. Limited proficiency creates hindrance for them to work accurately for this assignments or other tasks assigned by teachers. He recommended that classroom assignments may be completed under supervision of teachers so that students can get timely feedback to improve their writing proficiency.

Teaching practices have significant role in developing students' English writing skills. There are certain practices found effective at specific group of students. Effect of practices varies from student to student according to capabilities, interests, grade and age level. Teachers of secondary level use variety of teaching practices to achieve intended learning outcomes. Although both SSC and O level have almost same intended learning outcomes but there is clear difference in the use of teaching practices. Some practices sound more effective than others. Teachers of O level use student centered approaches that tend to achieve learning outcomes. They involve their student in process of writing to make the product effective. Whereas, teachers of SSC prefer teacher centered approaches with little involvement of students in the writing process.

First step for developing any piece of writing is brainstorming. Brainstorming is concerned with listing all the points related to topic on paper. Hyland (2004) and Brandon (2001) elaborated that developing and connecting ideas to each other develop help writer to produce coherent piece of writing. During brainstorming teacher may give clues according to the need and help students to produce effective writing.

Writing skills help students practice paraphrasing, sequence opportunities for synthesis, and thus enhance their ability to develop writing skills. The technology helps students express themselves more confidently without worrying about handwriting and spelling mistakes. With the integration of technology in the classroom, the approach of teaching the reading and writing skills has changed meaningfully. The main advantage of technology is that when writing on a computer or other device, grammatical and spelling errors will be alerted immediately so that learners can make corrections immediately. It will enable learners to receive instant feedback from their teachers. However, in an abundance of technology, the students of English language can become best readers and writers of English. (Ismail, Al-Awidi & Almekhlafi, 2012).

Through the use of relevant strategies, students are given explanations or grammatical rules. They make phrases and sentences based on these explanations or rules. As in the teachers' explanation, students are able to memorize spellings and students will be asked to use the correct grammar to make a complete sentence (Setiawan & Wardani 2023). The technique of scaffolding can also be utilized in a diverse way. As a result, Students will complete their writing assignments collaboratively and also have opportunities for pair or group work. Windsor and Park (2013) found that using this scaffolding method for generating the language is useful to complete the writing task.

Group work is another strategy where students are given opportunities to discuss and collaborate with each other. In this way students get opportunity to share their ideas that results in increasing their knowledge. If group work is efficiently done by teacher addressing the planning, sequencing and editing then its productivity can be enhanced. Bibi (2002) discussed that when students are engaged in group work they become more active and get more opportunities for language learning. They work more for long without getting bored. Khabbazbashi, Khalifa, Robinson, Ellis, and Mifsud (2017) expressed that role of teacher becomes more important during group work. Teachers can attain intended learning outcomes through group work.

Feedback is another strategy used in classroom to teach writing. Khan (2013) discussed that with the help of feedback students come to know their problems and difficulties in English. Teacher can give oral and written feedback as both types facilitate students to improve their writing. Oral feedback is done by teacher in classroom verbally while written feedback is provided on students' piece of writing where errors in writing are pointed out by teachers.

Extensive reading strategy help the students to read extensively to broaden their vision. If students are given opportunities to read extensively it will help them to get ideas, organization of ideas, vocabulary, sentence format and mechanics. Teacher can provide material in the form of essays, newspapers, articles, magazines, stories, novels and other material related to it. Research done by Ahmed, and Rajab (2015) and Mosha (2014) shows that extensive reading develops students' writing with little involvement of teacher. The writing material given to students will help to improve all domains of writing.

Lecture is traditional method of teaching that is considered important to teach a large as well as small groups of students. This method is extensively used to explain, elaborate and clarify the content. Bolaji (2014) found that lecture method is not useful at low grade level. Teacher can't

maintain interest in classroom with the use of this strategy. However, this method is useful with large group of students to save time.

The use of right questions for students during teaching is effective strategy to develop writing proficiency. Chandio, Khan, and Samiullah (2013) discussed that to teach writing quality questions should be asked instead of just floating question without any purpose. Another strategy used by teachers in classroom is to teach writing is provision of clues to get ideas about specific topic. Clues help students to get ideas where they need any help about topic.

Provision of model text to students help them to improve all the three domains of writing. Text is provided to students in the form of stories, novel, magazines, essays and work done by a student in the same class to motivate others. Widiningrum (2013) discussed that model text help students to improve their writing fast. This method can be used with learners who have low proficiency in English writing.

Peer review is related to the work reviewed by class fellows or peer group who give comments used in classroom. Elftorp (2007) found that this strategy helps teachers to save time and building students' confidence. It also makes active involvement of students to become efficient learners.

Purpose of the Study

Increasing demand of English as a second language in Pakistan, has been a great task for teachers to develop language proficiency among students. The reason is that it is international language, therefore considered the status symbol, and importantly in examination almost all subjects require English to enable students to get the marks and achieve success in examination. It means due to good proficiency in English, student may obtain high scores in other subjects as well. This study was conducted because there is apparently no difference in framework of English writing learning outcomes according to the curricula of SSC and O level systems in terms of intended learning outcomes. General aims of English writing curriculum of both streams are almost same that particularly focus on students to communicate effectively in English and will clearly seek out differences on persuasive writing skills.

Research Questions

This study intended to answer the following research questions:

1. Which teaching practices are used to teach 'developing ideas' to the students of SSC and O level?
2. Which teaching practices are used to teach 'sequencing ideas' at SSC and O level?
3. What is the difference in the use of teaching practices to teach mechanics of language?
4. Which differences exist for the overall mean scores of students on persuasive writing?
5. What is the difference of mean scores of students' achievement for developing ideas on persuasive mode at SSC and O level?
6. What difference exists between students' mean scores on sequencing ideas at SSC and O level?
7. Which differences exist between mean scores of students on language conventions?

Methodology

This Causal comparative design was chosen for the study as the groups were already formed due to non-manipulation of independent variable. Sample comprised of students and teachers of private schools of Lahore city that offer SSC and O level concurrently. English writing test based on persuasive writing handed over to students and questionnaire was given to teachers to determine teaching practices.

Test for students

English writing test (Appendix A) was administered to students of both streams to know their achievement in English. Essay type test based on persuasive writing was developed addressing intended outcomes mentioned in curricula of both streams. Under persuasive writing three domains of writing such a developing ideas, sequencing ideas and mechanics of language were assessed (as discussed in curriculum of SSC and O level). Scoring rubric (Appendix B) was given to raters and students to avoid complexities in scoring.

Each marking script was marked by three scorers. Training of scorers was done for one week through an expert from the field of educational assessment. Scorers marked students' script on three domains included in the scoring rubric (e.g. developing ideas, sequencing ideas, and mechanics of language) for writing task. Weigle (1999) examined that trained raters can identify differences in students' writing than untrained raters and thus increase the reliability of scoring rubrics.

Krippendorff's alpha was calculated to determine the interrater reliability of scores after initial administration of the test for pilot study to assess the extent of agreement among multiple raters Artstein & Poesio (2008); & Krippendorff (2011). It is a statistical measure and its value range is from '0' to '1' with '1' for perfect reliability and '0' indicates that there is no reliability (Gwet, 2010).

Reliability of Question was $\alpha = .7696$

Development of Questionnaires for Teachers

Questionnaires developed from 5 (always) to 1 (never) was administered to teachers in brief and simple language.

Validity of the Questionnaires

Relevant experts in the field of English language testing, teaching practices and evaluation were determined for consultation. Experienced English teachers of secondary level were given questionnaire for clarity, relevance of the items, time taken to complete it and other relevant feedback (Cohen, 2007). Improvement was made by incorporating the suggestions. After completing the validation process, questions were improved before finalization of questionnaire.

Reliability of Questionnaire

Questionnaire was given to 24 teachers to identify the use of teaching practices in English writing classes. Cronbach alpha for measuring internal consistency was used to determine the reliability of questionnaire.

$\alpha = .84$

Findings

Following findings were drawn from analysis of test.

Teaching practices for development of ideas: teachers' responses

Research question 1: Which teaching practices are used to teach 'developing ideas' to the students of SSC and O level?

Table 1 compares the use of twelve teaching practices for developing ideas as per teachers.

Table 1: Teaching Practices for ‘Development of ideas’

Teaching practices	SSC(12) Mean Rank	O level (12) Mean Rank	z	p
Brainstorming	9.38	15.62	-2.427	.016
Group work	9.00	16.12	-2.584	.010
Clues	10.57	14.41	-1.454	.146
Assignments	11.27	13.83	-.969	.333
Presenting in front of class	9.00	16.00	-2.584	.010
Lecturing	14.63	10.38	-1.609	.108
Q/A method	11.71	13.20	-.665	.506
Extensive reading	13.50	11.50	-1.445	.039
Gives model text to produce similar	13.38	11.63	-.627	.531
Role play	11.55	13.47	-.705	.481
Written feedback	13.55	11.47	-.744	.459
Oral feedback	13.09	11.93	-.507	.614

Mann-Whitney statistic was calculated to determine whether there was any statistically significant difference between teaching practices for developing ideas. Statistically significant difference was found between four teaching practices of SSC and O level. There is more use of brainstorming questions asked by the teachers, group work, extensive reading in the form of newspapers or magazines and presentation by students in front of the class at O level than SSC. Teachers of O level give more emphasis to these practices and consider it important for development of ideas as compared to SSC. However, in case of remaining practices, no significant difference was found.

Teaching practices for sequencing ideas: teachers’ responses

Table 2 compares the use of teaching practices at SSC and O level related to sequencing ideas.

The use of these nine practices depends upon its usage given by teachers of both streams.

Research question 2: Which teaching practices are used to teach ‘sequencing ideas’ at SSC and O level?

Table 2: Comparison of teaching practices for ‘Organization of ideas’

Teaching practices	SSC(12) Mean Rank	O level (12) Mean Rank	Z	P
Group work	11.71	13.29	-.613	.535
Jumbled words/sentences	16.29	8.71	-2.765	.006
assignments	11.24	13.74	-.841	.361

Presentation	11.25	13.75	-.900	.368
Lecture	13.14	11.97	-.382	.685
Questioning	12.13	12.88	-.273	.785
Read extensively	10.96	14.04	-1.111	.281
Feedback (Written)	15.75	9.25	-2.363	.018
Feedback (Oral)	12.58	12.42	-.061	.951

Mann Whitney statistics was calculated to determine if difference exists between teaching practices at two streams. Table shows that there is significant difference was found for the use of particularly two practices such as jumbled words and to organize sentences and feedback given on students' notebooks as well as verbal comments. These practices are highly used at SSC classrooms to improve writing. No difference exists for the use of other practices used in classrooms.

Teaching practices for language conventions: teachers' responses

Following table presents the use of teaching practices at SSC and O level for developing language conventions.

Research question 3: What is the difference in the use of teaching practices to teach mechanics of language?

Table 3: Teaching practices for 'language conventions'

Teaching practices	SSC(12) Mean Rank	O level (12) Mean Rank	z	P
Editing	11.92	13.08	-.420	.675
Group work	12.29	12.71	-.156	.876
Written feedback	13.04	11.96	-.407	.684
Oral feedback	11.38	13.63	-.828	.408
Sentence completion	16.46	8.54	-2.897	.004
Drill	16.88	8.13	-3.123	.002
Matching exercises	15.46	9.54	-2.106	.035
Peer review	12.79	12.21	-.215	.829
Self-review	13.46	11.54	-.728	.467
Grammar	13.50	11.50	-1.445	.149
Assignments for practice writing	13.50	11.50	-.749	.454
Presentation	8.79	16.21	-2.644	.008
Lecture	12.50	12.50	.000	1.000
Question answer	12.00	13.00	-1.263	.206
Extensive reading	10.58	14.42	-1.385	.166
List of words for vocabulary learning	13.54	11.46	-.743	.458
Practicing Punctuation	13.50	11.50	-1.048	.294
Memorization of spelling	16.29	8.71	-2.695	.007

Table 3 presents data for developing language conventions to improve writing. Mean rank values indicated that there is more use of five practices at SSC such as sentence completion exercises, matching exercises given in book, drill for memorization of vocabulary. They also use presentation

and dictation for spelling to teach writing. Teachers of SSC consider these practices important for improving writing skills related to language conventions. On the other hand, presentation of the students in front of the class is the only strategy having significant difference is compared to SSC highly used at O level.

Students’ writing skills on persuasive writing.

Task of students’ writing skills regarding persuasive contained 30 marks . t-test was determined to find out overall mean scores.

Research question 4: Which differences exist for the overall mean scores of students on persuasive writing?

Table 4 Mean difference on students’ persuasive writing skills at SSC and O level

SSC(n=157)		O level(n=150)		t	df	Sig.
\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD			
17.15	4.92	20.12	3.51	6.27	322	<.001

$\alpha=0.05$

Table 4 illustrates that t322 was significant beyond $\alpha .05$. Mean difference shows that skills of students at O level was found advanced (20.12) over students of SSC (17.15). This was in favor of O level students in terms of their achievement. It shows that students of O level possess high ability to attain English writing skill.

Persuasive writing learning outcomes (By domain)

Table 5 shows the level of English writing skills of students on persuasive writing domains (10 marks were specified for each domain).

Research question 5: What is the difference of mean scores of students’ achievement for developing ideas on persuasive mode at SSC and O level?

Research question 6: What difference exists between students’ mean scores on sequencing ideas at SSC and O level?

Research question 7: Which differences exist between mean scores of students on language conventions?

Table 5 Mean Scores Difference in Domains of Persuasive Writing

Dimensions of writing	SSC (n= 167)		O Level (n=157)		t	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	t (322)	Sig.
Developing ideas	5.68	1.68	6.65	1.12	5.48	<.001
Sequencing ideas	5.65	1.63	6.77	1.08	7.27	<.001
Language conventions	5.68	1.98	6.68	1.32	5.16	<.001

$\alpha=0.05$

Table 5 demonstrates that t value (5.48) with df (322) was found significant showing difference on development of ideas at SSC and O level. It demonstrated that students of O level have a better tendency to develop ideas as compared to students of SSC.

For sequencing ideas, it was evident that a significant t value (7.27) with df (322) showing that the mean score of writing in this domain was higher at O level. It exhibits that the students of O level have better ability of sequencing than students of SSC.

t-test on mean scores for language conventions with t value (5.16), df (322) showed significant difference. It showed that better writing skill was found for students of O level to produce writing as compared to students of SSC. Hence, O level have better ability to present effective piece of writing in all the three domains.

Student's script with band 2: Scorer's comment (Appendix A)

Writing was generally addressing the question with loosely connected content. There were few reasons for issues and arguments with less elaboration. Events moved quickly without sufficient development. Although reasons were provided, yet they were not much convincing of persuading the argument. Slight organizational pattern was visible throughout the essay without logical progression with lacked cohesion. Although persuasive text included in beginning and at the end but there were weaknesses in logical connectivity. In addition, student does not know how to develop consistency and logic among them. Paragraphs comprised of a single sentence with grammatical mistakes. There were errors in basic sentence structure and the use of punctuation marks that impede the flow. Word choice and vocabulary were also limited. There were spelling mistakes in commonly used words, however, communication was not hindered to understand the purpose (e.g. tellicommunication (telecommunication), famly (family), ralitavies (relatives)). Overall Errors in mechanics and its usage occurred occasionally in student's writing.

Comments on students' script having band 4 (Appendix B)

The writer discussed the usefulness of mobile phone with relevant information to support the opinion (e.g. sources of communication, internet, use of social apps, games, pictures and songs). Various arguments and opinions were also used for having mobile phone to make learning favorable (modern source of learning, use of dictionary, scientific calculators, time saving). Comprehensiveness with convincing ideas was presented. Ideas were coherent where student demonstrated a clear proper start and end. The writer developed relationship among various ideas that provides reasons for the use of mobile phones. Sentences were connected logically within the paragraph to provide a sense of how to proceed ideas. A variety of sentence structure could be seen, which gave a sense of clarity in word choice. In addition, the paper clearly followed the conventions of mechanics, usage, and spellings. Although the writer was not able to present some of the ideas appropriately due to missing transitional links but the text reflected a mastery of writing. All aspects of the task were sufficient showing a logical progression throughout the writing. On the whole, the writing seemed complete with minor weaknesses in the writing.

Discussion

This study was conducted to determine the influence of practices of teaching in English writing skills of students of SSC and O level. There were certain practices used by teachers to teach English writing at both streams. Findings showed that teachers of O level found effective student centered approaches to involve their students whereas teachers of SSC prefer teacher centered approaches. Teachers of both streams use variety of practices to develop ability to generate ideas. Practices highly used at O level were brainstorming, presentation, group work, extensive reading whereas teachers of SSC prefer written feedback, matching exercises, sentence completion, drill and dictation for spelling.

Findings of the study indicated that brainstorming is frequently used strategy at O level for teaching writing. Brainstorming is first process in the process of writing where writer lists all the arguments linked with the topic. By comparing other studies of the world, Elftorp (2007) found that this strategy helps the students to jot down all the points related to topic to produce piece of writing as proved from the current study.

Group work was found effective at O level to engage learners in classroom where they collaborate with each other in the form of groups to discuss all the steps from planning to editing. Evidence of the relevant research showed that this strategy helps learners to produce adequate piece of writing (Kemboi, Andiema and Mbone; 2014).

Another findings of the study indicated that presentation is effective strategy to be used at O level in terms of attainment of learning outcomes. Oral presentation is useful where students present their work in front of the whole class. This sharing is useful for students to listen to each other's ideas. Findings of Tompkins (1990) and Munch (2004) conformed this strategy to be followed at SSC to teach writing effectively.

Extensive reading is highly used at O level in writing classrooms. This strategy found helpful for students of English language to make their writing effective. Students of O level showed good performance. This strategy found useful to teach various dimensions of writing through extensive reading. Related research shows that extensive reading strategy found effective for developing English writing skills (walczak, 2017; Ahmad and Rajab, 2015). Tolbert, Lazarus, Killu (2015) discussed that teachers bring newspapers, magazines, pictures and story books to give their students a broader exposure to teach writing in a broader context.

Finding of the research observed that lecture is extensively used by teachers of SSC to teach writing. Relevant literature shows that lecture is traditional method of teaching to teach English writing. Naeem (2011) found lecture is important strategy at secondary level but it leads to memorizing the content. It is considered for students of limited as well as higher proficiency. Ahmed (2010) also found this strategy is useful for learners with limited proficiency. There is highly use of jumbled words for arranging complete sentences at SSC. Literature shows that this strategy is useful for learners with low proficiency. It is basically used at lower levels to make complete sentences.

Test used in this study comprised of essay type question. Writing skills of students were assessed on dimensions of writing named generating and sequencing ideas; and mechanics of language. Achievement of O level students was comparatively better than students of SSC. This finding is in accordance with Naeem (2011) and Ahmed (2010).

Conclusion

This study concludes that student centred approaches are being used at O level where active involvement of students is considered -necessary. On contrary, teachers of SSC prefer product oriented teaching where the focus of both teachers and students is on the finished piece of writing instead of involving students in the writing process.

Present study found that persuasive writing skills of O level students are better than SSC. Mean scores of O level students were better in developing and sequencing ideas; and correct use of language conventions on persuasive mode as compared to SSC students.

This research has been gone through meaningful conclusion that how teaching practices affect students' writing skills having same environment of schools as well as similar intended learning outcomes. It can be recommended that if teachers of SSC use students centered approaches as preferred by teaches of O level such as brainstorming, group work, presentation and extensive reading, their English writing skills can be improved. For future research, academic motivation of teachers and students may be explored under the same school systems. In this research this element was not included due to lack of time. In curriculum of SSC instead of mentioning general practices some specific practices may be suggested to teach writing only.

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