

Investigating Creative Writing Difficulties Encountered Sudanese Secondary School Students

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Abstract:

This study aimed at investigating creative writing difficulties encountered EFL Sudanese secondary school students. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method, the researcher collected data by using a diagnostic test for (30) Sudanese secondary school second year students .To analyze the data the researcher has used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings of the study revealed that EFL Sudanese secondary school students encounter some creative writing difficulties; they cannot write a good paragraph that contains aspects of creative writing skills (fluency, flexibility, originality and accuracy), moreover, when it comes to doing exercises based on creative writing skills, they perform very poorly, in addition, they find it difficult to use appropriate vocabulary. In light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommended that students should be aware about the importance of creative writing skills in the process of foreign language learning, teachers should use creative writing materials that suit the level of the students, needs, interest and background knowledge. Furthermore, teachers should be well-trained and experienced.

Key words: creative writing skills, aspects of creative writing, foreign language learning.

المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة لتقصي صعوبات الكتابة الإبداعية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى طلاب المدارس الثانوية السودانية . استخدمت الباحثة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي و جمعت البيانات بواسطة الاختبار التشخيصي الذي أجري لعدد (30) طالبا و طالبة بالفرقة الثانية بالمدارس الثانوية السودانية. استخدمت الباحثة برنامج الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية لتحليل البيانات. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن هنالك بعض الصعوبات التي تواجه طلاب المدارس السودانية الثانوية في الكتابة الإبداعية فهم لا يستطيعون كتابة فقرة جيدة تحتوي على جوانب مهارات الكتابة الإبداعية (الطلاقة والمرونة والاصالة والدقة), علاوة على ذلك عندما يتعلق الامر بالتمارين القائمة على الكتابة الإبداعية, فإن أدائهم سيء للغاية. بالإضافة الى ذلك فهم يجدون صعوبة في استخدام المفردات المناسبة. بناء على تلك النتائج فإن الباحثة توصي بأن يجب ان يكون الطلاب على دراية بأهمية مهارات الكتابة الإبداعية في عملية تعلم اللغة الأجنبية. يجب على المعلمين استخدام مواد الكتابة الإبداعية التي تناسب مستوى الطلاب واحتياجاتهم واهتماماتهم ومعرفتهم الأساسية. علاوة على ذلك يجب أن يكون المعلمون مدربين جيدا و ذوي خبرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهارات الكتابة الإبداعية, جوانب مهارات الكتابة الإبداعية, تعلم اللغة الأجنبية.

Introduction: Writing is an important productive language skill in the process of foreign language learning, Rost 1(1994: P.45) pointed out that writing is vital in language classrooms because it enables learners to make use of language hence it

plays a crucial role in language teaching and learning. Buck 2(1995: P.65) argued that language learning should start with teaching writing and providing learners with large amounts of writing skills is the best way to teach a second or a foreign language.

Morley 3(2001:P.87) declared that writing is used for more than any other single language skill in students' academic life ,on average , students communicate their ideas through writing.

Mendelson 4(1994:P.98) stated that creative writing was not given its importance in language teaching for the following three reasons: first of all, writing in general was not accepted as a separate language skill to be taught explicitly for a long time. Secondly, teachers felt insecure about teaching creative writing skills and finally, the traditional materials for language teaching were not efficient enough to teach creative writing skills.

Morley 5(2001:90) asserted that creative writing is neglected in the curriculum at many schools and universities because teachers and students are more interested in teaching grammar and reading skills and do not consider creative writing an important part of their courses.

EFL learners tend to have some creative writing difficulties ; they consider creative writing the most challenging and demanding language skill. Ja'fr 6(2013) stated that" Many learners see themselves less successful in creative writing skills than in other language areas due to inadequate grammar knowledge, insufficient writing time, limited knowledge of vocabulary, lack of practice, lack of ideas related to the writing task, punctuation and English sentence structure".

Badawi and etal(2020) idiomatic expressions pose many difficulties to Sudanese (EFL) learners at Sudan University and the students were totally unaware of the meaning of some idiomatic expressions in context, besides their inability to use the contextual clues to guess the meaning of unfamiliar idiomatic expressions.

In this paper the researcher tries to investigate creative writing problems among EFL Sudanese secondary school students and propose some suitable solutions to overcome them.

Statement of the problem :

From her observation and experience of teaching EFL ,the researcher has noticed that most EFL Sudanese secondary school students face numerous serious deficiencies in creative writing skills; they cannot write a good paragraph that contains aspects of creative writing skills (fluency, flexibility, originality and accuracy), in addition, they find it difficult to grasp the intended message of the writing task. Furthermore, when it comes to doing exercises based on creative writing such as writing free composition, summary or a short story, they are observed to be very poor performers, resulting in comparatively poor achievements, too.

So, the researcher finds it important to explore these creative writinghurdles with the intention of suggesting the appropriate rectifications.

Objectives of the Study:

This study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1.To shed light on creative writing difficulties that face EFL Sudanese secondary school students.

2. To suggest some suitable solutions to overcome these creative writing problems.

Questions of the Study:

The following questions formed the basis of the study:

1.To what extent do EFL Sudanese secondary school students have difficulties with creative writing skills?

2.How do EFL Sudanese secondary school students perform when they are asked to do exercises based on creative writing?

Hypotheses of the Study : The following hypotheses are postulated:

1. Most EFL Sudanese secondary school students face some difficulties with creative writing skills.
2. EFL Sudanese secondary school students perform poorly when they are asked to do exercises based on creative writing.

Significance of the Study : This study is significant for a number of reasons:

It contributes to the existing literature in the field of teaching creative writing skills. Teachers will have a better understanding of their students' creative writing difficulties and examine their own teaching techniques and materials, accordingly.

Learners can identify their problems and be aware of the factors that contribute to their difficulties and can apply the right strategies and techniques of creative writing skills.

Methodology of the Study : A diagnostic test which was administered to (30) Sudanese secondary school students. Then the data has been analyzed statistically by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS.

Creative Writing : According to Virginia 7(1986) creative writing is defined as the ability to originate with free imagination in regard to a particular topic in any form of writing. It involves going beyond without deviating from normal values. It is further defined as specific abilities which help the students put their thoughts into words in a meaningful and logical form based on creative writing skills dimensions namely authenticity (the ability to produce unique ideas), proficiency (the ability to generate ideas), flexibility (ability to have a variety of ideas) and elaboration (the

ability to develop ideas and produce relevant details) 8 (AbdelFattah, 2020).

Creative writing means creating new ideas that are different from everyone else's ideas using our own imagination, achieving originality and writing fluently while taking pleasure in the act of composing 9 (Diab, 2019).

Developing students' creative writing skills is essential in the acquisition of certain features of the language (particularly grammar and vocabulary) and develops their language competence, this is due to the fact that EFL students should move beyond the beginner stage of acquisition through multiple motivated tasks 10 (Smith, 2013).

Furthermore, teaching creative writing means helping students to write by using their imagination. Sheir and Alodwan 11 (2010) remarked that all learners have creative abilities which takes a wide variety of forms as each individual has different ideas, perceive things in a personal way and, at times, shows insight and inventiveness.

Carper 12 (2004) stated that creative writing can be considered as a piece of work that expresses thoughts, ideas and feelings in an imaginative way. It also refers to any writing that goes beyond the normal professional, academic, technical forms of literature typically identified by an emphasis on narrative craft, character development and the use of literary tropes. In EFL contexts creative writing is essential hence it provides students with abilities to write effectively as it focuses on students' self-expression. Creative writing is a valuable tool for students which can stimulate imagination 13 (Carper, 2004).

Ur 14(1996) argued that students should get the chance to increase their curiosity and ambition. Even if they make mistakes while they are writing freely, teachers should encourage their learners. While giving feedback teachers should draw students' attention in what they have written, that can be both right and wrong.

Features of Creative Writing

Creative writing is distinguished from the other types of writing such as academic and journalistic writing as it is highly subjective, even though it describes real events; real people and real issues of human life, its interpretation is unique 15(Kramsch,1993).

The creative writer's perception is always unique as the same event, the issue is looked upon by ordinary people in mundane ways but a creative writer's perception is usually transcend into something else. For example, a flower will be looked at by the majority of people as a beautiful thing but a creative writer might visualize it as God's signature; creative writers have the power to transform the readers into an entirely different world.

Starko 16(2005) stated the following features of creative writing, they are:

1. Fluency:

Fluency refers to the ability to generate a large number of ideas .The more ideas learners have, the more likely it is that at least one of them will be a good one.

2.Flexibility:

Flexibility means the ability to change the opinion of someone hence it involves an openness to check ideas or thoughts in unexpected way.

3. Originality:

Originality refers to thinking of unusual ideas and solutions to a problem and the

way the ideas are joined together.

4.Elaboration:

Elaboration is the ability to add more details and to develop and enhance ideas in a clear way. Moreover, creative writing uses the same words from the dictionary and same grammar but the language is used in such a way that it conveys unique meaning and evokes specific emotions in the readers. For example, in one of Shakespeare's plays a man who repairs shoes on the roads says 'I mend broken sloes'here 'sloes' has two meanings 'sole' and 'souls' ,thus, he is using this word deliberately to imply dual meanings.

Furthermore, Walker 17(2013) suggested that when creative writing is used to respond to the texts as well as to expand beyond the text read, students should be able to:-

- Interpret and critique creative work in writing.
- Use skills of analysis and reasoning.
- Express ideas concisely and clearly.
- Revise and edit literary work.
- Read and write critically.
- Produce and value creative and original forms of thought and expression.

Main sources of Creative Writing Difficulties

Learning creative writing is essential to EFL learners since writing is a tool used for effective communication of ideas. However, when students write they face various creative writing problems at different stages of their learning , generally , these problems can be classified into linguistic, psychological, cognitive and pedagogical categories32(Haider,2012).

According to Hayland¹⁸(2003) writing is the most challenging area in learning a foreign language as it is based on appropriate and strategic use of language with structural accuracy and communicative potential.

According to Rafidee¹⁹(2010) EFL learners find the structural component of English difficult because an inappropriate structure complicates the content and comprehension of the passage, which a reader deciphers through the involvement of a mental process.

It has been believed that poor writing skills originate from two factors: the teacher and the learner; the teacher may lack appropriate pedagogic approach to teach creative writing appropriately thus he/she will not be able to motivate the students.

The learner may find writing skills difficult due to effects of L1 transfer , lack of reading , practice and motivation and students' lack of self- confidence.

According to Pineth²⁰(2013) there are numerous factors that affects students' creative writing skills , these factors are associated with the motivation of the learner who are generally nuclear about the purpose and significance of their texts in their L2 learning, moreover, social media, inconsistent feedback from teachers, teachers' lack of analytical and evaluative approach, large and unmanageable class size also negatively affect creative writing skills of EFL students.

Kalikorha²¹(2008) argued that most of the students find it very challenging to obtain sufficient and relevant source information, paraphrase or summarize information, and use an appropriate writing style.

Similarly Haider²²(2012) observed that outdated textbooks that neither promote the importance of writing skills ,or give the

students the opportunity to practice writing , overcrowded classrooms, traditional pedagogy and students' weak academic backgrounds are some of the factors affecting students creative writing skills.

Berene ²³(1998) suggested the following facts about creative writing difficulties:

1. Familiarity with the content of the writing task makes it easier for learners to understand.
2. Weakness of students in lexis, semantics and syntax can lead to some writing difficulties .
3. Pre-writing activities allow learners to write effectively.
4. The use of authentic materials rather than pedagogical ones improves students' creative writing abilities.
5. Learners should apply strategies to be effective writers.

According to Teng ²⁴(2002) the main problems of creative writing skills come from the students' proficiency level; lower-level students tend to have more writing problems besides task clarity and students' concentration.

Lynch ²⁵(2003) believed that lack of background knowledge can cause great difficulty in creative writing skills since language is used to convey beliefs ,facts ,opinions , cultures and rules ; when EFL learners are unaware of the culture of the target language they encounter some problems about how and what to write.

Psychological and physical features can also affect effective writing skills ; students may feel tired and lose concentrations when they are asked to do very long tasks. Hassan ²⁶(2000) stated that when there is distraction, students fail to concentrate and that students do not concentrate when they are not interested in the topic of writing.

Motivation is another factor that can contribute to EFL creative writing difficulties, it plays a crucial role in the learning process and should be put into consideration when teaching creative writing. Lack of motivation from the side of the teacher leads to poor achievements in language learning; the teacher can motivate the students by being cooperative, friendly, respectful and smart, he/she should encourage the students to work hard and by reinforcing students even when errors occur.

Furthermore, there are some creative writing problems that arise from the teachers themselves because they are second language learners of English and face or have faced similar conditions toward writing as students do. So, some teachers will only focus on errors and ignore the strategies of how to compose simple short paragraphs as a result of the lack of knowledge of the second language.

Creative writing is a skill students will need for the future, that is why it is crucial to develop it to its proper level, unfortunately, the majority of students still fail to develop their creative writing skills even after finishing school, according to Butler²⁷(2006) there are numerous reasons for that including the following:

a. Improper development of analytical and cognitive skills

Students need to develop their cognitive and analytical skills in order to improve their creative writing skills, this includes learning to understand and think better, which is something rarely implemented in high school education.

b. Lack of writing practice

In order to improve their creative writing skills, students need to practice as without sufficient practice students can never develop their creative writing skills.

c. Insufficient word stock and writing mechanics

Even the most talented students need to learn how to understand complex sentences, differentiate between different nouns and different word class, use proper punctuation and proof reading their writing for errors.

d. Lack of feedback on their writing

Many teachers assign writing tasks to students but fail to provide them with comprehensive feedback; giving students grades for their writing is simply not enough if a teacher wants to teach students to write better.

Data Analysis and Discussion

In this study a diagnostic creative writing test was given to (30) Sudanese secondary school second year students to collect the data, the main purpose of this test was to investigate the creative writing difficulties that the students encounter.

Hypotheses of the study:

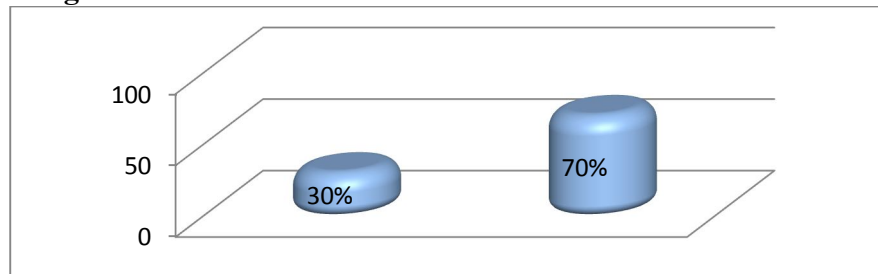
1. Most EFL Sudanese secondary school students face some difficulties with creative writing skills.

2. EFL Sudanese secondary school students perform poorly when they are asked to do exercises based on creative writing.

The following table shows the frequency distribution for the respondents' answers of the overall diagnostic creative writing test.

Answers	Frequencies	Percentage
Pass	9	30%
Fail	21	70%
Total	30	100%

Table No (1) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of overall creative writing test.



From the above table and figure. It is obvious that only (9) students in the sample of the study (30%) have passed the diagnostic creative writing test, while (21) students (70%) failed the overall test.

Table No. (2) The Frequency Distribution and decisions for the Respondent's Answers of all the sections of the diagnostic creative writing test:

Sections	Pass		Fail		Decision
	frequency	Percentage	frequency	Percentage	
Section 1	6	17%	24	83%	Acceptable
Section 2	7	23%	23	77%	Acceptable
Overall	9	30%	21	70%	Acceptable

The abovetable shows the summary of the results of the study. For sectionone and two, it's clear that the percentage of students who failed in both sections of the test is greater than the percentage of students who gave correct answers (83%) and (77%) respectively.

Table (3) one sample T-TEST for the questions of the study:

Sections	No.	SD	t-value	DF	P-value
1	30	7.2	11	29	0.00
2	30	9.81	17	29	0.00
For all	30	8.03	15	29	0.00

The calculated value of T -TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in theoverall test was (15) which is greater than the tabulated value of T -TEST at the degree of freedom (29) and the significant value level (0.05%) which was (6.54). This indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents. On the basis of these findings we can conclude that the two hypotheses of this study are verified.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the study revealed that the highest percentage of the students faces the following serious creative writing problems:

- EFL Sudanese secondary school students encounter many creative writing difficulties ;they cannot write a good paragraph that contains aspects of creative writing skills (fluency, flexibility, originality and accuracy), they find it difficult to understand writing instructions' tasks , moreover, they find the topics unfamiliar due to their weak grammar, vocabulary and syntax skills ..etc as they possess limited knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures rules.
- Grammar, understanding and applying the English grammatical rules was not easy for the students because verbs are usually formed differently to have subject-verb agreement according to the tenses. Besides, it was hard for them to learn how to use articles, prepositions, pronouns, and connecting devices appropriately
- They find it difficult to write the necessary information.
- They feel distracted and worried as they are writing because they fail to understand the meaning of every single word or phrase related to the writing task.
- They are unable to infer meanings of unfamiliar words and make predictions using their personal knowledge and experience.
- They lack knowledge of contextual and cultural aspects of English.
- They have poor awareness of the features of written English.
- They face the problem of lack of concentration.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following points:

- Students should be aware about the importance of creative writing skills in the process of foreign language learning.
- Students should learn and practice new vocabulary and expressions.
- Teachers should use creative writing materials that suit the level of the students, needs, interest and background knowledge.
- Teachers should be well-trained and experienced; applying good teaching techniques helps to improve students' creative writing skills.
- Teachers should raise the students' awareness about the importance of creative writing skills in foreign language learning.

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