

Using News Articles for Developing Reading Comprehension and Creative Writing of Students

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ABSTRACT

One of the cheapest forms of mass media, newspapers plays a predominant role in developing language skills of people. It is popularly used by language teachers as an authentic material to teach language in a natural way connecting classroom with the outside world. English language learners experience challenging issues to learn and have insufficient vocabulary knowledge. This study investigates the use of English news articles by secondary school students to develop reading comprehension and creative writing skills. The test results showed that students differ significantly in their scores on these variables. Girls achieved significantly higher scores than boys attaining both the skills. Armed with the results, it could be inferred that instructors must use news paper articles to teach language to develop comprehensive understanding during the process of reading and boost creative writing skills.

Keywords: English as Second Language, News Articles, Reading comprehension, Creative writing

INTRODUCTION

Every one of us knows the fact that newspapers are a great resource to learn new words, ideas and information from the latest events and happenings in the world. As a treasure house of knowledge, reading them they not only help to develop good vocabulary but also improve basic language skills like reading and writing. It is one of the best methods to improve language and develop communication skills. In teaching English as a second language (ESL), most students face it difficult to learn. It is understood from experience that one of the easiest ways to learn English is to read news from a variety of topics or areas from a wide range of sources. This extensive reading helps to understand how language can be used contextually to suit needs in different situations. The purpose of using news articles as an innovative activity in English language teaching enhances vocabulary skills as students observe the correct and systematic structured language in proper order and sequence. Acquiring this phonological sense of grammatical structure enables them to use vocabulary in the right context and reuse information wherever necessary. Rao (2019) opines that since newspapers promote the second or foreign language learners' language skills enormously, language teachers' should use English newspapers in their regular classrooms to enhance language skills of learners using important news or relevant columns of text.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

- News articles for Language learning – As an invaluable source of information, news articles are used in classrooms as a teaching material and pedagogic resource. Teaching a news lesson is not simply cutting an article from a news paper and taking it to class but needs a structured approach to teach (Farmer, 2008). A well structured news lesson comprises six stages according to him: warm up, pre-reading/listening activities, reading/listening to the article, application/follow-up, feedback/correction and homework. The warm up stage raises awareness of the topic and activate pre-existing knowledge in a relaxed mood. Activities could be warm-up questions, quizzes, brainstorming, speculating on pictures, and agree/disagree statements. The pre-reading activities are directly related to the text serving to make students interested in the topic, build confidence and prepare for the task ahead. The selected article could be used to teach language through synonym matching, story or vocabulary speculation, fill in the blank, etc. Listening tasks enable to develop listening skills from extensive to more intensive activities like listening for gist, checking pre-listening ideas etc. reading tasks serve for building reading skills through general comprehension questions, skimming/scanning, student generated questions, sentence completion and summarizing. Application and follow-up tasks extend above the article giving students the chance to use new

vocabulary and knowledge in meaningful, less controlled and free environment. Teachers can use discussions, debates and role play as participatory methods in the learning process boosting effective communication. The last five minutes of the lesson should be reserved for feedback and correction to reflect upon what they have learned. This can be a review for reinforcement. Finally homework should be set to self study and revisit the lesson as well as enable retention of new information. Various activities such as research project, summarizing, creative writing and comparison tasks could be used.

- Reading Comprehension – Indeed a complex cognitive ability, reading comprehension involves linguistic, cognitive and metacognitive skills for higher order comprehension to construct meaning of the written text or oral intended messages. Readers construct meanings using background knowledge or schemata, analyzing words, identifying key information and inferring ideas. The comprehension ability can be differentiated into high, low and average reading performers depending on how well they could perform the comprehension tasks. The schema theory gives a direction on how readers retrieve and construct meaning from prior knowledge As a language skill, reading comprehension skills could be taught and applied to different learning situations to self question, sequence, infer, compare and contrast, summarize, problem solve, relate and build ideas. Garcia (2003) recommends the use of explicit instruction in authentic contexts by specific reading strategies like self questioning and inferring from contexts to understand the message of a reading passage. Understanding and respecting student differences is important in this regard to accommodate instruction effectively geared to students' varied constructive processes. The SQ3R strategy introduced by Francis Pleasant Robinson (1946) in his book '*Effective Study*' has been tested for improving reading comprehension in students.
- Creative Writing – Any writing of original composition that goes beyond imagination to express or portray a particular message creatively is what is called creative writing. It is quite different from technical forms of writing, it comprise a set of styles and genres across a wide range of fields that infuse invention through imagination and fun. The overall intention is to stir emotions and intellect and not merely to inform, the author creates characters, events, scenes and stories characterized by originality to entice readers. Poetry, speeches, biographies, stories, novels, playwright/scripts are all forms of it that make for good judgment and exposition. In language teaching, it focus on student self expression and more academic performance. Creative writing is a tool to inspire second language learners to write, play, enjoy and improve not only their writing but also their listening, speaking and reading skills (Thorpe, 2022). Journaling practiced in schools serves as a foundation for creative writing to create treasure trove of ideas, thoughts and deeds that stimulate other forms of creative writing useful for academic contexts. Use of visual thinking strategies and visual arts fosters creativity in writing and aesthetic awareness of learners meeting the call for differentiated instruction to address the needs of diverse learners (Habibi & Rahmanpanah, 2020). As creativity is a benchmark for learner-centered teaching practices, creative writing could be turned to creative speaking (Richards, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This study explored the effectiveness of using news articles to develop reading comprehension and creative writing of secondary school students. For this a single group pre-test post-test experimental design was formulated to test the outcomes in students of the treatment group. A sample of 45 students was chosen from a secondary school in Kollam district of Kerala.

Data collection Instruments

- 1) News Articles from English Newspapers: News articles were collected from leading English newspapers considering the elements of proximity, prominence, immediacy and progress to humanity for betterment. The articles had their own importance in the social, economic, environmental, philosophical, psychological and developmental concerns of society.
- 2) Reading Comprehension Test: Students read the news article in silence at their own pace. There was no time limit and students could re-read the articles if necessary. After that a test containing multiple choice questions were administered to assess reading comprehension of students.
- 3) Creative Writing Exercises: Exercises to express freely the creativity of students were prepared based on the news articles. These represent variety of circumstances to think in a variety of perspectives and act creatively. A rubric was prepared to assess the creative writing ability of students pertaining to the narrative techniques, writing style, mechanics, sentence structure, word choice and creativity. The assessment level of scoring was done as: advanced level (4), proficient level (3), moderate level (2) and low level (1) respectively.

Data Collection procedure

The reading comprehension and creative writing of students were assessed before the experimental treatment as pre-test to understand the initial behaviour. The selected news articles were then presented to students to read and comprehend. Sufficient instructions and directions planned were given along with the administration of news activity to keep students in tune with the elements to be assessed based on the dependent variables of the study. Care was taken to make students relaxed and accept reading activity as a pleasurable exercise. The reading comprehension test was administered to assess the comprehension skills. Creative writing exercises were given to examine the level of creativity of students after the treatment. Students were given specific time to complete the writing exercises in smooth manner. The assessment of reading comprehension and creative writing were done to compare the performance of students.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The preliminary analyses showed that all the examined variables met the assumptions of normality. The pre and post test scores of Reading Comprehension and Creative Writing were subjected to statistical analysis. The details are presented below.

Table 1: Data and results of test of significance of pre-test and post-test scores in Reading Comprehension* and Creative Writing of students**

Tests	No. of students	Mean	SD	Critical Ratio	Significance level
Pre-test*	45	12.09	2.285	26.99	0.05
Post-test*	45	22.47	2.332		
Pre-test**	45	12.20	2.332	24.24	0.05
Post-test**	45	18.62	2.259		

From table 1 it is evident that the critical ratios obtained for both the variables are greater than the value of ‘t’ at 0.05 level of significance. The significant difference between the means of pre-test and post-test scores indicates that Reading Comprehension and Creative Writing of students has increased after the use of News articles.

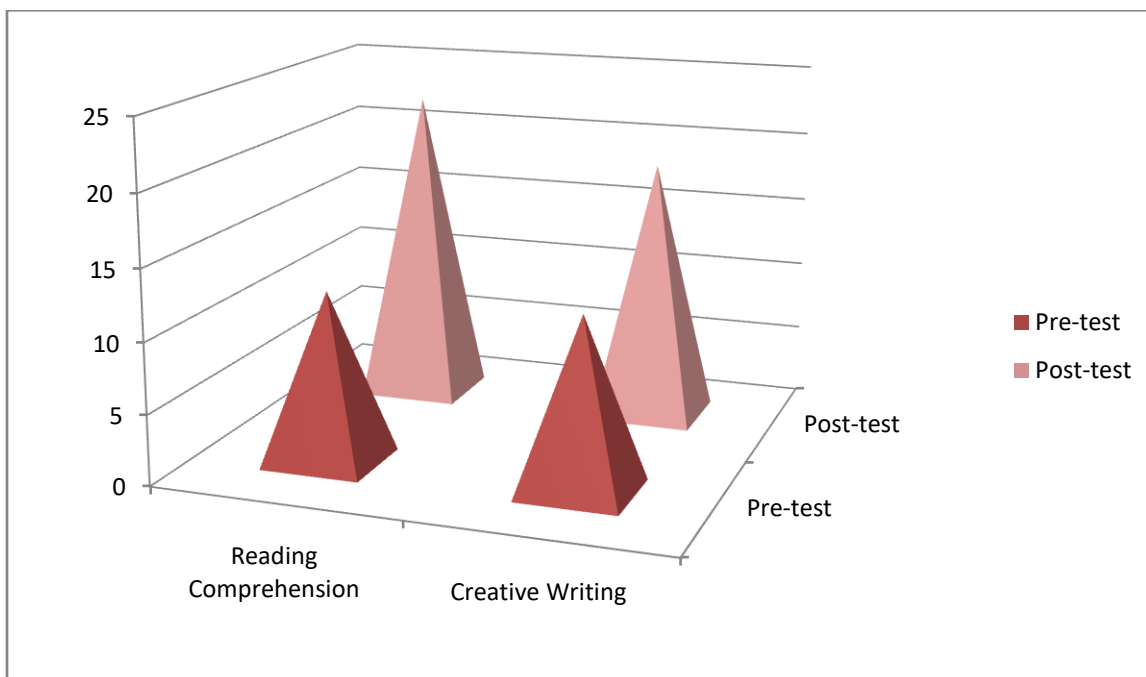


Figure 1: Graphical representation of mean scores

Table 2: Comparison of mean pre-test and post-test scores based on gender

Variable	Tests	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Level of significance
Reading	Pre-test	Boys	21	11.52	2.462	1.578	0.05

Comprehension	Pre-test	Girls	24	12.58	2.041	0.05	
	Post-test	Boys	21	21.14	2.242		4.175
	Post-test	Girls	24	23.63	1.740		
Creative Writing	Pre-test	Boys	21	10.76	2.166	4.71	0.05
	Pre-test	Girls	24	13.46	1.668		
	Post-test	Boys	21	16.95	1.687	6.41	0.05
	Post-test	Girls	24	20.08	1.586		

The table shows that the obtained t-value for the pre-test of Reading Comprehension is 1.578 is less than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is no significant difference between Boys and Girls in their Reading Comprehension before the intervention. The t-value obtained as post-test scores is 4.175 which is greater than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is significant difference between Boys and Girls in their Reading Comprehension, the scores of girls were found to be more than boys. In the case of Creative Writing, the t-value of pre-test was 4.71 is greater than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance which shows there exists a significant difference between Boys and Girls in their Creative Writing before the intervention. In the case of post-test, the obtained t-value is 6.49 is greater than table value, which shows that there exists a significant difference between Boys and Girls in their Creative Writing.

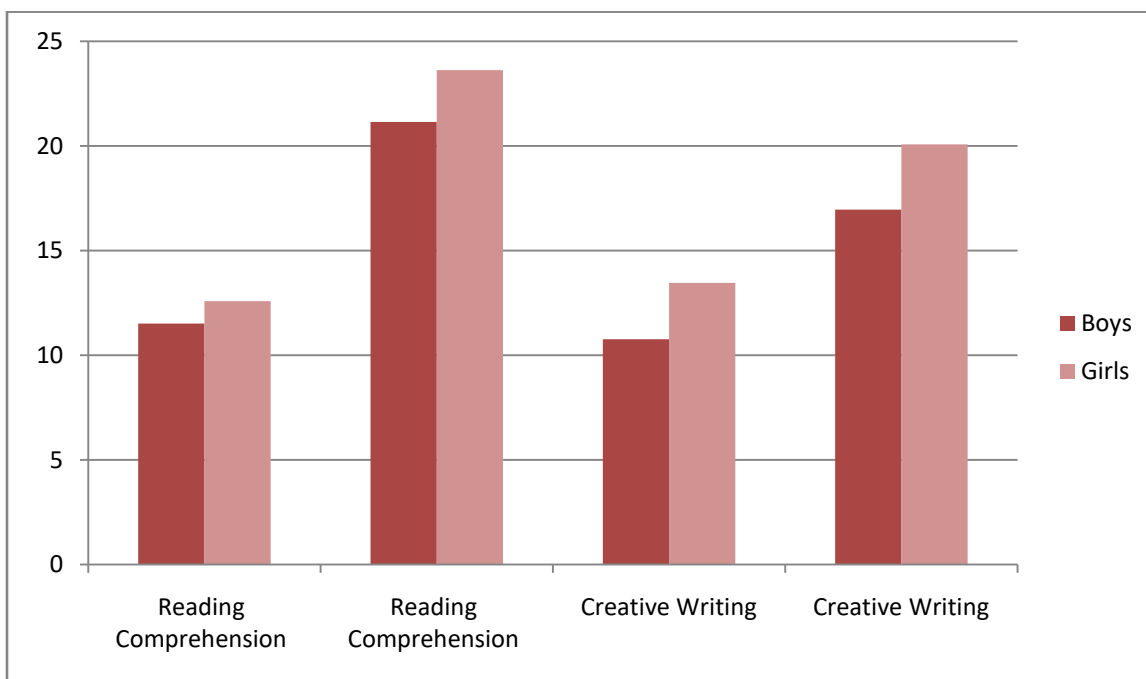


Figure 2: Graphical representation of comparison of mean scores based on gender

CONCLUSION

The results sketched in this study notifies language teachers that using news articles in language classrooms helps to increase the abilities of reading comprehension and creative writing in school students. It also points that boys and girls vary in these abilities and that girls made much more progress than boys. News articles are thus regarded as the cheapest means of acquiring information to all people if used in the right place and time. They can be a great teaching resource if structured well and used with definite purpose to open new windows for language learning. It provides an excellent canvas to explore a wide variety of subjects providing students chances to ask intriguing questions and initiate discussions to strengthen language skills and spinoff activities in subsequent classes. It offers a wide range of possibilities to enliven dull classroom into active, engaging ones feeling a newfound sense of satisfaction and freedom.

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