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**Impact of Dramatics on Composition Skills of Secondary  
School English Language Learners in Pakistan**

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**Abstract**

This paper, a part of a Ph.D. thesis in progress, aims to compare the relative efficacy of the grammar translation method (GTM) and dramatics in developing composition skills of secondary school English language learners. Pre-test post-test control group design was used to collect data.

The sample consisted of 138 secondary school students, and was randomly assigned to the control and the experimental groups on the basis of a pre-test. After the treatment, a post-test was administered in order to measure the difference of achievement. The rating scale for measuring different components of composition was developed and validated before the actual test.

The t-test was used to find out the significant difference between the means of the two scores at the selected probability level i.e.  $\alpha=0.05$ . It was found that the students taught through dramatics performed significantly better than those taught through GTM. The study recommends that dramatics should be frequently used to develop creative and original writing among the learners of English.

**Key words**

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## **Introduction**

English has held sway in Pakistani linguistic scene for almost 150 years, a hundred years before the country came into being. It has the status of an official language in Pakistan. Though there was a provision in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973) for the adoption of Urdu as the Official language (Article 251), it has not yet materialized into a reality.

Granted that a dominant majority of people are not well versed in English, there is at least a wish to learn the English language “because it is an upper-class status-marker, and facilitates, or at least gives hope of, moving into the national or even the cosmopolitan elite” (Rahman, 1998:230).

The teaching and learning of this language has carried on since the British times. However, those who are fluent in it could not be more than three to four percent of the population (Rahman, 2002). These chosen few come mostly from the elite class, and thus English becomes a medium of stratification (Mustafa, 2009). Being cognizant of “social stratification of elite and non-elite”, emerging from the opportunities to learn English, Government of Pakistan (2009: 27) envisioned that “opportunities shall be provided to children from low socio-economic strata to learn English language”.

An important aspect of language learning/teaching is the choice of method for teaching a foreign language. In most of the Pakistani schools, English is taught through the traditional grammar translation method. It is in these schools that ‘children from low socio-economic strata’ learn English. These children have a lower level of proficiency in all aspects of English including composition. They are often seen lacking when required to write an original creative piece of composition. It remains to be seen whether a change in method of teaching the composition skills will improve the situation. However, it would be appropriate to see how composition is taught at Pakistani schools before venturing on to discuss a new method.

## **Teaching Composition in Pakistani Schools**

The Government of Pakistan (2006) set the standards for all the language competencies that it envisioned the students and teachers to meet.

The standard set for achieving the writing competency states that “all students will produce with developing fluency and accuracy, academic, transactional and creative writing, which is focussed purposeful and shows an insight into the writing process” (ibid:8). Contrary to this, most of the English learners in Pakistani government schools cram the composition units to get through the class exams.

Most of the classes in Pakistani schools are of a large size in which it becomes difficult for the teachers to pay attention to the needs of the students (Azhar, 2004).

Chughtai (1990) expresses his grief over the inability of the students in using the grammar of the language. He also observes that the students lack command over the structure of the language and with a majority of the students, vocabulary, in particular, is a big problem. The secondary level students lack understanding of the language and are unable to communicate properly in the language.

The present syllabus does not help in developing speaking and writing skills of the students (Azhar, 2004).

### **Position in Government Schools**

Many of the government schools teachers use the traditional Grammar Translation Method for teaching the second language (Warsi, 2004; Hussain, 2005). From the viewpoint of examinations, this approach has certain advantages for it tries to equip the children with sufficient knowledge to get through the examinations. Nevertheless, it fails to develop in the students the necessary competence required to communicate effectively in English (Rahman, 2007).

Mansoor (1993:182) recommends: “Learners need to be met by a course of functional communicative English which pays attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language”.

### **The Need to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Communicative Approach in Pakistan**

There was, thus, a need to estimate the effectiveness of communicative approach to language teaching to develop composition skills among the English language learners in Pakistan. Drama is one of the techniques associated with communicative approach. A brief description of the use of drama in language teaching ensures.

### **The Use of Drama in Language Teaching**

The use of drama is of one of the most prominent techniques among the various methods associated with communicative language teaching. Drama provides the language teachers with an opportunity to integrate various components of communicative competence (Goodwin, 2001). It has now been established that the teachers can benefit from the use of drama in all fields of language teaching because drama involves not only the body but also the mind. The incorporation of the body and mind results in the production of vocal symbols as well as the bodily gestures (Wagner, 2002).

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Wessel (1987) feels that a teacher can make use of drama games from the textbook and s/he can also enrich the syllabus by creating some of his own. He believes that introduction, interviews, Questions/Reporting, accusation, description and narration can all be taught through the active use of drama.

O’Gara (2008) undertook an experimental study to gauge the effectiveness of using drama to teach verb tenses to English as foreign language Italian school students. Though the results are hardly replicable due to very small class size and an enviable socio-cultural background of the students, the study concludes that the use of drama to teach tenses is more effective compared to the use of traditional methodology. O’Gara found that the students taught through drama were more enthusiastic than their counterparts in the control group.

Berlinger (2000) explored the possibility of using drama to develop expression in English. Taking a class of twenty five students, and devoting half an hour, two days a week, Berlinger shows how meaningful communicative activities could be created out of script-based improvisations.

During the activity, the stage is made up of only the available resources, desks and chairs. A pair of students, comes up to the stage and begin the activity with lines about any situation. The situations, as well as the lines, are elicited from the class.

Once begun, the activity continues for half an hour or so with every pair of students participating. Berlinger concludes that drama “motivates them (the learners) to generate imaginative and detailed ideas, greatly expand their vocabulary, actively practice language skills and attain far greater fluency” (2000:3).

The teachers can read stories for the students that contain some new vocabulary items. The teacher can also demand of the students to act out the action that is related to the new vocabulary item in order to make it more meaningful (Ping-Yun, 2003).

Another way could be making the students write a few vocabulary items and then asking them to prepare a skit using these words. A rather challenging situation might also emerge if the students are divided into groups and one of them writes vocabulary items whereas the other makes a skit.

Borge (2007) comes up with findings from an action research carried out at a German classroom. It was found that the first year students of German had the least interest in learning through drama whereas the use of drama was quite successful with the second and third year students. Borge feels that one of the reasons may be that the students in the second and third year were familiar with one another.

Pin-Yung (2003) refers to Crumpler and Schneider (2002) who conducted a cross study analysis of children's writing from five classrooms using process drama. The teacher and the students read "Where the Wild Things Are" written by Sendak. After the reading, the teacher put the students in the wild settings assuming wild roles. Then the teacher and the students discussed their feelings about the activity, jungle and journey, and the new things they had learnt. Having done that, the teacher asked the students to pen down their experiences. The activity revealed that the students took a great interest in the writing activity. All the other classes responded in the similar manner.

### **Advantages of Teaching Language Through Drama**

Heldenbrand (2003:29-32) reviews the research on using drama in teaching English and highlights several advantages of teaching language through drama which include

1. Drama is fun.
2. Drama is a relaxed and informal way to learn English.
3. Drama helps to learn new vocabulary and expressions in their proper environment.
4. Drama helps in proper pronunciation and intonation in English
5. Drama builds confidence in the learner's ability to speak English.
6. Drama builds a better understanding of culture
7. Drama motivates the student of English
8. Drama removes the focus from English textbook
9. Drama involves the whole person as a total physical activity

The use of drama also helps in lowering the affective filter among the English language learners (Dodson, 2000). There is an increased chance for the students to participate in the classroom discussions, to be responsible for their learning and to give vent to their expressions through body movements and gestures which ultimately results in low anxiety language learning. As learning through drama is fun, "drama lightens the academic mood but enlightens the learner" (Heldenbrand, 2003:29).

### **Psycholinguistic Perspective of Drama for Language Teaching and Learning**

Stern (2006) in her study tried to lay a theoretical basis of the psycholinguistic perspective of drama in L2 learning. Starting with an assumption that drama helps in developing communicative competence, Stern concluded that the use of drama resulted in heightened self-esteem and advanced levels of motivation. It logically follows that drama helps in lowering the affective filter.

Miccoli (2003) investigated the effects of drama on the students of English as foreign language in a Brazilian University. She used drama in an oral skill class and claims that it brought about changes in the perspective and behaviour of not only the learners but also the teacher.

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Cheng (2007) undertook a study to investigate the students' perception of drama activities in an advanced university English major class. Students' feedback was solicited after drama activities. Majority of the students felt that drama was useful for oral skills development. Moreover, the students appreciated the fact that they could work with peers who acted as scaffolding for their learning. Drama was also found to be a motivating agent for interaction. The study concludes that through the drama activities, the students get extensive speaking practice.

### **Reluctance on the Part of the Teachers**

There might be some instances where the teachers are fearful of using the drama activities in their classes. Quite a number of reasons might account for such a fear some of them may be lack of knowledge about "how to use activities, limited resources, time constraints, a fear of looking and feeling foolish....." (Royka, 2002:1).

### **Methodology**

As the study was designed to compare two different teaching methods, pre-test post-test control group design was considered appropriate to collect data for the study. Moreover, observation of the two groups during the treatment was also used to collect data. The data from the quantitative and qualitative research tools were triangulated to compare the two teaching methods. This paper, in particular, deals with the comparison of drama and grammar translation method in developing composition skills among the secondary school English language learners.

### **Population and Sampling**

Population of the study consisted of the secondary school English language learners learning the Punjab Text Book Board Syllabus in District Khushab of Punjab province in Pakistan. 138 students from the Government Technical Model High School Jauharabad (Khushab) were considered as sample for the study.

### **The Experiment**

The group was administered a pre-test before the treatment. The test was validated by a panel of experienced teachers. The groups were then randomly assigned to two groups i.e. the experimental group and the control group. After the random assignment, the students were taught for a period of 10 weeks. During this period, the students covered not only the composition section of the syllabus but also the textbook. It was ensured that both the groups were taught by teachers with almost equal qualification and experience. After the treatment, a post test was administered to the whole group.

The difference of achievement, if any, between the two groups was assessed by administering a post-test. The t-test was used to compare the means of the two groups to find out whether there was a difference in achievement of two groups.

Great care had to be taken in the selection of the course content for the study because it might have had an adverse effect on the end-term performance of the students. This was perhaps the most important ethical issue of this study. So only those composition items were selected that were relevant to the end-term assessment. The composition section, during the treatment, included two letters two paragraphs and two story writing activities. Each class consisted of sixty nine students which is quite usual in the Pakistani perspective. There was a possibility to pick a relatively smaller class. Nevertheless the idea was dropped in lieu of the fact that it could not have been replicable in large classes.

### **Observation**

During the treatment, observation data was collected from both the classes to record whatever was obtaining in the classrooms. The method of non-participant observation was chosen so as not to interfere in the normal class proceedings.

### **Results**

In this section, results of the study will be described in two portions. The first portion describes the results from observation whereas the second portion describes results from the post-test comparison of the two groups.

#### **Results from Observation**

In the control group, the prescribed Grammar, Translation and Composition book was used for the development of composition skills. The teacher asked the students to prepare their essays, paragraphs and stories from the book. The students memorised the given composition. Every fortnight, the teacher asked the students to reproduce a paragraph or story that he had asked them to prepare. Almost all the students reproduced identical paragraphs or stories. The teacher marked all the papers and returned these to the students after pinpointing the lexical and grammatical mistakes.

As against it, students from the experimental group were required to knit up the stories that were to be enacted as dramas. They were more enthusiastic in writing the dramas than in enacting them. This was primarily due to the fact that usually the students are engaged in writing more than in speaking. As the teacher was well aware of the situation, the enthusiasm did not surprise him. He directed his attention to the grammatical aspect of language. The teacher visited all the groups that were involved in writing. He encouraged them to ask questions about the problems they were facing. The teacher explained the grammatical complexities involved in the writing and suggested measures



to improve these. Once the final draft of the stories was prepared it was handed over to the concerned group so that they could write their dialogues.

After the first two weeks, the students were asked to write the material at their homes and give it to the teacher the following day.

### **Results from the Post-Test Comparison of the Experimental Group and the Control Group**

Data collected through post-test scores of the two groups was analysed through applying the independent sample t-test. T-test for independent samples was computed through SPSS XVI.

The questions on composition were marked in accordance with a rating scale developed specifically for the purpose. The rating scale was helpful in negating the rater bias and ensuring reliability in marking. Five dimensions were developed for raters' consideration while marking. These dimensions included grammar, vocabulary, organisation and unity, ideas and development and mechanics. Credit was awarded to the students whose writing was either grammatical correct or acceptable, who had no or very few errors of vocabulary, who composed well-knitted pieces or digressed a little but were mostly logical, who expressed the ideas clearly or were able to get their message across, and who had no or very few errors of mechanics.

The scores were analysed in terms of three categories i.e. the Whole Group, the High Achievers and the Low Achievers. The purpose was to estimate the relative effectiveness of each method in developing composition skills with different academic abilities. Given below is a description of the three hypotheses and the results.

**Hypothesis 0 No. 1: There is no significant difference between the achievements of the experimental group and the control group in post test in the Composition.**

**Table 1**  
**Whole Group Post-test: Composition**

<b>Groups</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>P</b>
Control	69	6.55	2.180	.262	-2.206	136	.029
Experimental	69	7.35	2.064	.248			



The results revealed, as evident in Table 1, that was a marked difference between the post test scores of the control and the experimental group. The experimental group had a higher mean score than the control group. The difference between the two means is significant at the selected probability level i.e.  $p=.05$ . So, the null hypothesis “There is no significant difference between the achievements of experimental group and the control group in post test in composition” is rejected and alternate hypothesis that, “There is a significant difference between the achievements of experimental group and the control in post test in composition” is accepted in favour of the experimental group.

**Hypothesis 0 No. 2: There is no significant difference between the achievements of the High Achievers of the experimental group and the control group in post test in the Composition.**

**Table 2**

**High Achievers Post-test: Composition**

<b>Groups</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>P</b>
Control	35	7.71	1.363	.230	-3.340	63.871	.001
Experimental	35	8.69	1.051	.178			

As findings tabulated in Table 2 suggest, there was a noticeable difference between the performance of the high achievers of the control group and the experimental group. High achievers from the experimental groups had a high mean than that of the control group. The difference in the mean scores of the two groups was significant at the selected probability level i.e.  $p=.005$ . So the null hypothesis i.e. “There is no significant difference between the achievements of the High Achievers of the experimental group and the control group in post test of Composition” is rejected and the alternate hypothesis i.e. “There is a significant difference between the achievements of the High Achievers of the experimental group and the control group in post test of Composition” is accepted in favour of the experimental group.

**Hypothesis 0 No. 3: There is no significant difference between the achievements of the Low Achievers of the experimental group and the control group in post test in the Composition Section.**

**Table 3**

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### Low Achievers Post-test: Composition

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	T	Df	P
Control	34	5.35	2.228	.382	1.218	66	.228
Experimental	34	5.97	1.946	.334			

The results indicate that the low achievers of the experimental group had a higher mean score than the low achievers of the control group. However, this difference was not significant on the selected probability level i.e.  $p=5$ . So, the null hypothesis i.e. “There is no significant difference between the achievements of the Low Achievers of the experimental group and the control group in post test of Composition” is accepted.

### Discussion

The primary aim of conducting this study was to estimate the effectiveness of dramatics in developing composition skills among the English language learners in Pakistan. Another objective was to find out whether there existed a significant difference between the achievements of the two groups taught through grammar translation method and drama. To achieve the desired end, three hypotheses were tested.

It was found that the use of drama resulted in astounding success. The learners showed more interest in learning and that was manifest in their performance. The results are similar to those obtained by McNaughton (1997). Earlier on, they simply memorised the essays and the stories but during the treatment they had a chance to live through the language and come up with original, creative language.

A good number of students acquired the present and past simple tense unconsciously. They had been unable to grasp these tenses for a long time. A change of method helped them acquire what might have seemed improbable. They made the maximum use of the opportunity afforded to them for performing the stories that they had earlier on been cramming. This endorsed the findings drawn by Crumpler & Schneider (2002)

The fact that the low achievers of the experimental groups did not perform significantly better than the low achievers of the control group may be due to the fact that in large classes the teachers cannot pay due attention to all the students. Those who were active participants in the activities were always the high achievers.

It was, no doubt, difficult for the teacher to fully satisfy the demands of such a large class in a short time. A class of about sixty students would require at least five days completing

a composition unit through drama. A class of forty students would have suited the purpose and made the task of the teacher much easier.

Nonetheless, this difficulty in coping up with a large class amounts to nothing when compared with the achievement of the students and the interest they showed in learning. The teacher, though he had volunteered to teach the experimental group, was always complaining that the class size was too large for drama activities. This was in line with the results obtained by Azhar (2004).

It was also found that dramatics aroused more interest among the students than the grammar translation method. The students in the control group were supposed to memorise pieces of composition which they reproduced when required by the teacher. As against it, the students of the experimental group were involved in creative writing.

Though the high achievers of the experimental group performed significantly better than their counterparts in the control group there was no significant difference between the low achievers of the two groups. The finding that there is no significant difference between the achievements of the low achievers of the control and experimental group is contrary to the findings of Robertson & Good (2003) who found that students with low literacy levels improve their writing ability in role play environment.

The teacher, in a typical Pakistani classroom, will not find electronic gadgets or even flannel boards and charts to improve his/her teaching techniques. However, s/he should not feel handicapped if s/he is not provided with all the A.V. aids. Teaching through dramatics does not demand a lot of aids. S/he can make an effective use of the blackboard for writing stage directions.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the success of the drama method in teaching composition, it seems opportune to concede that most of the Pakistani government school classrooms are overcrowded. There is very little space for movement because the rooms are full of desks. Smaller classes could make the use of drama more effective.

However, the teacher can change the English language learning situation for the better if s/he accepts it as a challenge. S/He has no control over the textbook selection, curriculum development or physical facilities but s/he can change his/her method of teaching to get better results from his/her students.

A necessary pre-requisite for learning and teaching through drama is keeping the affective filter lower. If the anxiety level is high, the students will be unable to learn and perform.

Getting the best out of the students is the ultimate aim of the use of drama in teaching a foreign language and for that the teacher has to continuously encourage the students to come up and shoulder the responsibility for their own learning. S/He has to convince the students that they are not supposed to act like professional actors. The students must enjoy their performance and language learning should be made a pleasurable rather than a tedious and mind-numbing experience.

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