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Investigating Integration of Writing Skills in Grade VIII English PTBB Textbook

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore the integration of writing skills competency in the Grade VIII English textbook prescribed by the Punjab textbook board. A content analysis was carried out in the backdrop of a checklist based on the competencies and students' learning outcomes provided in the latest English National Curriculum (2006), Pakistan. The writing competency was proposed to improve learners' writing skills. The study employed a qualitative research design, and findings were analyzed thematically. In accordance with the curriculum, students are expected to write keeping in mind transactional and interactional purposes as well as descriptive, expository and narrative texts of language. But the findings are otherwise and unfolded that the textbook understudy does not provide students with adequate opportunities to improve their writing skills. Rather, writing skill was only found in the form of comprehension question exercises in which students merely have to answer the questions.

Key Words: Writing Skills, National English Curriculum, Competency, Student Learning Outcomes, Grade VIII and English Textbook

Introduction

The study conducted a thorough examination of the English textbook of grade VIII prescribed for public sector schools of Punjab province in Pakistan. The investigation was carried out under the framework of curriculum second competency- writing skills developed by Curriculum Wing Pakistan in the National Curriculum for English (2006). The curriculum was developed in four stages (Baig, 2020). It further elaborates stage-wise standards, benchmarks, standard learning outcomes, and students learning outcomes.

Standard of the English curriculum was conceived to acquaint learners' with writing skills to help them produce fluency and accuracy, academic, transactional and creative writing, which is focused, purposeful and shows an insight into the writing process. At the same time, the first benchmark aims to prepare learners for written discourse to use in their own compositions and techniques for effective paragraph (Government of Pakistan [GoP], 2006). The second benchmark of writing skills competency aims to prepare

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learners' to write descriptive, expository and narrative texts for different purposes and audiences. At the same time, the third benchmark aspires learners to use a variety of interpersonal and transactional texts, e.g. informal and formal letters, simple forms, dialogues (speech bubbles, cartoon strips, role play) using vocabulary, tone, style of expression appropriate to the communicative purpose and context (Ministry of Education, 2006). The fourth and last benchmark aims to enable learners to plan and draft their own writing; revise and edit for paragraph unity; write clear central topic sentence, relevant and adequate supporting details; develop an effective style, appropriate transitional devices, punctuation and vocabulary. The current study is a part of a larger project.

Need to Launch National Curriculum

National Curriculum provides a comprehensive guideline for textbook developers to develop textbooks and teachers to better equip their learners with language skills (GoP, 2006). The holistic goals of the curriculum were kept in mind for developing learners' academic and social communication to prepare students to become autonomous, life-long learners and representing themselves on global platforms (Baig, 2020).

Writing Skills

According to Ariyanti (2016), writing skill has been one of the major skills in English language acquisition since times unknown. The most suitable way to teach writing is by using progressive activities. Ariyanti (2016) also highlighted the idea of progressive writing originally conceived by Oshima and Hogue

(1997), which explains the meaning of progressive in writing as "when we want to start the first step to write about a certain topic, actually we have already known what we are going to write and how we explore it" (Baig, 2020, p. 28). This is followed by the reading of the writing, which leads to making corrections and changes. In a nutshell, in order to improve writing and become good at that, one should never stop at one step. The more specific and particular necessity in writing is how to develop the academic writing style, which is what most college students are faced with in their writing tasks, such as essays and final projects, which are a mandatory requirement for finishing the university study program successfully. It is therefore very important to develop students' writing skills at the school level so as to prepare them for academic writing skills required at the university level.

This study explores the integration of writing skills in the English textbook of Grade VIII. The findings will contribute to the reforms of English language textbook/course material in the context of Pakistan. Furthermore, the study holds implications for curriculum developers, material developers, teachers, students and future researchers in Pakistan, particularly. The findings may also open new arenas for further researches in the field of textbook development and reforms.

The study is delimited to writing skills - the second competency of the English Curriculum 2006. The other four competencies have been published separately by the researcher (Baig, Siddiquah, & Javed, 2020; Baig, Javed, & Siddiquah, 2020; Baig, Javed, & Altaf, 2020). These are reading and thinking skills, oral/aural skills, formal and lexical aspects of language and appropriate

ethical and social development. The current research only focused on content analysis and did not cover any survey or other tool.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study was carried out through a structured checklist developed by the ministry of education in 2006, which was used for the content analysis. The second competency- writing skills were being used for meticulous evaluation of the English textbook of grade VIII. The exhaustive study was carried out and presented in the form of columns, and themes were generated.

Development of the Checklist

A checklist was adapted for the present study originally developed by the ministry of education for evaluation of the English curriculum launched in 2006. The evaluation of the content was based on the second competency, i.e. writing skills. The checklist was validated by three experts in the relevant field. A thorough examination was carried out in the first column demonstrating Student Learning Outcomes; evidence from the textbook was presented in the second column, and other remarks were given in the third column.

Data analysis

Table 1. Benchmark I

S. No	Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Instructions are given in the textbook
1.	Develop focus to write a paragraph for a given purpose and audience.	Ch 2. 'Note of thanks', (p.9). A note of thanks includes the date, proper salutation, body, closing and signature. Context	Note of thanks is given in chapter two: A Dialogue. The whole chapter consists of dialogue and the intended outcomes mentioned at the top of the chapter; write a note of thanks and other

Grade VIII English textbook was analyzed and evaluated to check whether the student learning outcomes (SLOs) given in the National Curriculum for English have been incorporated in the textbook or not. All Competencies, along with their specific standards and SLOs, were examined as shown in tables. Three columns were used in which the first column demonstrates a particular SLO, the next column demonstrates evidence given in the textbook, and the third column demonstrates the instructions given for the teacher. Finally, the findings are analyzed separately competency wise.

Results and Findings

Competency 2: Writing Skills


Standard 1

All students will produce the English language with developing fluency and accuracy, academic, transactional and creative writing, which is focused, purposeful, and show an insight into the writing process.

Benchmark I

Analyze written discourse to use in their own compositions, techniques for effective paragraph organization and development such as a clear topic sentence and supporting details.

S. No	Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Instructions are given in the textbook
		One of Qasim's friends prepared notes for him in the subjects of Maths and English while Qasim was on leave. Qasim should write a note of thanks to him. Help Qasim in writing a note of thanks.	grammar areas like use of having and have. The format and layout are acceptable, but the sample given is too brief. And while giving free writing, it has again become a controlled activity because of giving a sample, and students will again memorize it and will copy the format. They should be known the criteria on which they will be assessed and evaluated. Like the salutation, beginning, main body, conclusion, lexical items, coherence.
		Ch.4, 'An Exhibition', (p. 23) Write a letter to your friend telling him about the exhibition that recently held in your school.	The chapter is on an exhibition recently held in the school. This activity is better and can be effective for students to improve their writing.
2.	Use a variety of pre-writing strategies such as brainstorming, mind mapping, outlining etc.	Ch.5, 'Magic Show', (p.30) D: Writing Activity Write a paragraph of about 100-150 words on 'Magic Show' you have ever seen. Make a mind map first. Your paragraph should comprise the given points. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where was it held? • How many magicians were there? • What magic tricks did they show to you? • What was the most interesting thing about the show? What do you feel about the show and the magicians?	Help students write a paragraph using a topic sentence and supporting details.
		Ch. 7, 'Clever Mirchu', (p.45). Exercise: E. Write a character sketch of 'Mirchu'. Focus on the following points in the mind map.	

S. No	Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Instructions are given in the textbook
		<p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p>Role- Accomplishment, physical appearance, challenge/problem and Personality</p> <p>play:</p>	
		<p>Review of chapters 5-8: (P. 52, Exercise C).</p> <p>Write a paragraph of about 100-150 words on 'puppet show' you have ever seen. Make a mind map first.</p> <p>Ch. 14, (p.85, Exercise C):</p> <p>There are many road accidents that we see on different news channels daily. Mark one of them and find out the reasons for that accident. Propose some suggestions to avoid accidents. Take help from mind map—injuries, treatment, remedies, causes and scene.</p>	<p>(P. 57) <i>For teacher:</i></p> <p>Ask students to read the theme of the poem and pick out important points of the poem and help them develop a mind map to summarize the poem.</p> <p>Help them in doing activity C.</p>
3.	<p>Write a simple unified paragraph on a given topic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a clear topic sentence using specific words, vivid verbs, modifiers, etc. 	<p>Ch.3, 'On the Ocean', (p.18, Exercise. G)</p> <p>Write a paragraph of about 50-60 words on 'Journey by Bus'. Keep in mind the topic sentence and supporting details in a paragraph. You may help from the given vocabulary.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p>Bus stand, travellers, drivers, conductor, tickets, hawkers, hot/rainy/stormy/windy day/ pleasant, horrible, feelings etc</p> </div> <p>Review of Ch. 1-4, (p.26, Exercise. H).</p> <p>The activity mentioned above is again repeated in the review.</p> <p>Ch.7, 'Clever Mirchu'. (p.45, Exercise. G).</p> <p>Only sequence is seen:</p> <p>Read the story and complete the given timeline of the story.</p> <p>Beginning Middle end —</p> <p>Pg.23-E:</p>	<p>No instruction/rubric given.</p>

S. No	Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Instructions are given in the textbook
		<p>You went with your school teacher on a school trip to a park. Write in sequence what you did on your visit to the park in a paragraph. Use the sequence markers: first, next, afterwards to write about your visit.</p> <p>Ch.5, '<i>The Magic Show</i>', (p. 31, Exercise. F).</p> <p>Describe the sequence of events in the lesson '<i>Magic Show</i>' in a flow chart.</p>	Not found
4.	Add adequate supporting detail (example, illustration, definition, evidence, comparison, contrast, cause and effect) to develop the main idea.	<p>Ch.13, '<i>The Telephone</i>', (p.79, Exercise. H).</p> <p>Give step by step instructions to your friend to make a telephone. Write down these instructions.</p>	<p>Not found</p> <p>Here the meaning of telephone is not clear.</p> <p>Whether students are instructed to give instructions to make a call or to make an imaginary telephone device.</p>
5.	Use appropriate pronoun-antecedent relationship and transitional devices within a paragraph. Use chronological /sequential/ spatial order of arranging detail.	Not found s	Not found
6.	Write a composition of three or more paragraphs following conventions of essay writing; introductory paragraph, body paragraphs and concluding paragraphs.	Not found	Not found
7.	Recognize introductory paragraph carries the main idea of the essay, each one of the body paragraphs develops the main idea through key ideas. These key ideas are developed through supporting details, the concluding paragraph contains a summary of the body paragraphs, and a general concluding statement, and paragraphs are linked through various transitional devices.	Not found	Not found
		Review of Ch. 1-4, (p.26, Exercise. H).	

S. No	Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Instructions are given in the textbook
		The activity mentioned above is again repeated in the review.	

Benchmark II

Write Descriptive, Expository and Narrative Texts for Different Purposes and Audiences.

Table 2. Benchmark II

	Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Instructions are given in the textbook
8.	Analyze written texts to use in their own writing, features of a simple expository composition showing cause and effect of an event or an action- logical order of events or activities, appropriate connectives of cause and effect.	Ch.14, ' <i>Let's make our Roads safer</i> ', (p.85, Exercise. C). But we have not seen specifically for the said purpose. Cause and effect relationship is not found; order is found only in a sequence of events. No logical order is found.	Not found
9.	Analyze to use in their own writing criteria for classification in a simple expository composition.	Not found	Not found
10.	Analyze written texts to use in their own writing, features of a simple descriptive composition about people, objects and places: Persons • Finer details of the physical description of face, build, clothes etc. of a person, personality traits e.g. habits, attitudes, values etc.	Not seen in any form of writing specifically for this outcome. Personality traits are given as Ch. 1, 'The Tolerance of the Rasool (SA)',(p.1-5) Ch.7, 'a clever Mirchu', (p. 38), ch. 10, Hazrat umer, ch. 11, a great virtue but only for reading bt not for writing.	Not found
11.	Objects and Places Sufficient general details and finer details of size, color, shape and texture, defining characteristics of an object/place, atmosphere of a place, correct verb form, appropriate adjectives and adverbs for vivid effect, details in appropriate order.	Not found Not specific to vivid (only adjective/adverb given) Adjectives are seen only in sequence	Not found

Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Instructions are given in the textbook
12. Write three paragraphs of comparison between persons, objects or places- use appropriate similes for comparison, use correct connectors of comparison.	Not found	Not found
13. Write a narrative in the first or third person which describes events /incidents- use sequential order, use specific adjectives and adverbs, use appropriate tense, use appropriate transitional devices, include quotations (actual words spoken) and thoughts and emotions of the participants in the incident.	Not found	Not found
14. Write a paragraph of free writing for fluency, creativity and pleasure.	<p>Ch. 9, 'Prayer', (p.59, Exercise. F). Suppose you are praying to ALLAH, write a few sentences what you would like to pray for.</p> <p>Ch.10, 'Hazrat Umer (RA)', (p.63, Exercise. C). Write a paragraph on Importance of Justice.</p> <p>Ch. 11, 'A Great Virtue', (p. 69, Exercise. D). Write down a few good deeds which you can do in your everyday life. Example: I can help someone cross the road. Write the story on the moral 'Do good have good'. Exercise H. Write a story on the moral 'Do good, have good'. Pg.79-F Write a few lines on uses and abuses of mobile phone.</p> <p>Ch. 13, 'The Telephone', (p. 89, Exercise. F). Suppose you are praying to ALLAH; write a few sentences of what you would like to pray for.</p> <p>Review of chapter 9-14, (p.90, Exercise. J). Write a paragraph on 'importance of Justice'.</p>	
15. Analyze questions to write effective and focused answers of required length by marking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not found • No specific word limit and length are given. 	

Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Instructions are given in the textbook
keywords, identifying verbs and tenses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognizing question types such as literal/ textual/ factual, interpretive, inferential, evaluative, personal response and open-ended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are merely comprehension question and answers. Not found 	
16. Apply summary skills to familiar/unseen passages and poems to write summary/ précis of simple passages. And summarize poems.	Ch.12, (p. 70). LO: Analyze a poem for the main idea and summary. The only summary is given précis is not given in the whole book, to write a summary is asked but the skill to write a summary has not been taught. Ch.3, 'On the Ocean', (p. 18, Exercise F). Write a summary of the poem. 'On the ocean'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No activity given, only mentioned in the learning outcome No exercise of précis in the book. No instruction found.
17. Use paraphrasing skills to paraphrase/stanzas: Mark thought groups in the stanza/ restate the message in simple prose/ replace poetic words with simple ones.	Ch. 6, 'The Twins', (p.35, Exercise. B). Rewrite the following lines in simple sentences. Ch. 8, 'Hockey', (p.54, Exercise. G). Rewrite the following lines in simple sentences. Review of chapter 9-14. (p.88, Exercise. C). Paraphrase the given lines in your own words of the poem.	Not found

Benchmark III

Write a variety of interpersonal and transactional texts, e.g. informal and formal letters, simple forms, dialogues (speech bubbles, cartoon strips, role play) using vocabulary, tone, style of expression appropriate to the communicative purpose and context.

Table 3. Benchmark III

Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Analysis
18. Analyze and compare various informal and formal letters to note differences in conventions, vocabulary, style and tone.	Ch. 2, 'A Dialogue', (p.9, Exercise B). Only one letter was asked to write, which was a vote of thanks. Except that neither any letter was asked to write nor any difference of conventions, vocabulary,	Help students understand a note of thanks and also tell them how to write it. Give them more situations for writing a note of thanks.

Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Analysis
	style and tone were presented.	
19. Write formal letters to people in immediate and extended social and an academic environment for various purposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow conventions of the formal letter with respect to layout, salutations etc. Recognize and demonstrate the use of appropriate vocabulary, style and tone in formal letters. Write the address on the envelope clearly and in a proper format. 	<p>Not found.</p> <p>No formal letter was explicitly asked in the textbook. The difference between the different environments, purposes was not mentioned.</p> <p>Not found</p>	Not found
20. Write applications to people in an extended environment.	No concept of extended environment is given, and hence no practice	
21. Revise for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the correct format, layout. Appropriate vocabulary, style, tone. 	Not found	Not found
22. Analyze and compare various informal and formal dialogues to note differences in features, vocabulary, style and tone.	Only dialogues are given, and one role-play give for students to play	Only dialogues are given, but again focus has deviated; the intended prime focus of the SLO was to know the differences of features, vocabulary, style and tone to compare informal and formal dialogue, but here in the textbook, the prime focus was only to write dialogue in the form of 'oral Communication' students were not asked to differentiate between various informal and formal dialogues.
23. Write and revise short formal dialogues.	No drafting of writing and revision is given.	The main purpose is to let the students draft and revise their writing but, in actual only short dialogues were already given in the textbook and student were asked to write dialogues which are of the same tone, length and style.

Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Analysis
24. Fill in correctly and legibly, forms requiring various kinds of simple information.	Not given	Not given

Benchmark IV

Plan and draft their own writing; revise and edit for paragraph unity, clear central topic sentence, relevant and adequate supporting details, effective style, appropriate transitional devices, punctuation and vocabulary.

Table 4. Benchmark IV

Student Learning Outcomes	Evidence from Textbook	Analysis
25. Plan their own writing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify audience and purpose/ develop focus for their own writing/ use a variety of pre-writing strategies such as brainstorming, mind mapping, outlining etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not given Not focused, only brainstorming mentioned above. 	<p>The concept and importance of audience and the very purpose of writing was not developed at all. The focus was not given importance only mind mapping is seen.</p> <p>Brainstorming should be enhanced through elicitation of student's ideas.</p>
26. Draft and revise writing to ensure that it has a main idea stated in the topic sentence/has relevant, specific, and substantial supporting detail for each paragraph/has reference and transition words that contribute to a sense of cohesion and cohesiveness/ has varied sentence structure and length/has an effective introduction and conclusion.	Not found. Only identification of topic sentence and supporting details is asked but not given specifically for each paragraph.	Not found
27. Proof read, edit texts for errors of sentence structure/Subject / verb agreement, noun / pronoun agreement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reference words, connectives. Punctuation and spelling. 	<p>Not found</p> <p>Not found</p>	<p>Grammar is seen in various chapters as a part of Learning Outcomes. But, it is not taught nor practiced to apply in students' writing.</p> <p>Not found</p>

Discussion

The second competency of the English Curriculum (2006) writing skills is also one of the most important skills of any language. It helps to produce and developing a language, fluency and accuracy academically as well as personal and keeping in mind that the curriculum aims at the process approach and discourages production-based approach to teach language. Learners are not only expected to produce a good piece of writing but are also expected to undergo a process of effective writing through effective writing techniques and strategies.

At the same time, the writing competency expects learners to keep in mind, register context and pragmatics. The writing process involves pre-writing, while-writing and post-writing strategies, paragraph techniques, conventions of essay writing, features of simple descriptive compositions about people, objects and places, first-person and third-person narration, free writing for fluency, accuracy and enjoyment, effective answering to questions, and paraphrasing skill.

Whereas referring to research findings, clear topic sentences are asked to be identified in reading, but in writing, such writings are not given and practised. Very simple compositions have been given which are not workable because of the provision of ambiguous instructions. Answer key and follow up is also not provided, which indirectly supports students' learning and helps them evaluate their learning.

Higher-order skills, logical order of events or actions are not given in the textbook. No activity has been given in which students could describe a person, his appearance, and traits.

Specific or general details have also not been given to comparing the size, color, shape and texture. There is nothing related to ask about the characteristics of an object or place. The students are asked only to identify adjectives and adverbs, although no teaching is done on the said area.

The narration of the first and third person is also not covered, the only sequential order is asked, and the other orders are not explicitly covered in the course. Summaries have been asked to be written a number of times, although the main outcome was to enhance the summary skill of familiar or unfamiliar text, which is not covered. Only a few but very controlled activities are given for paraphrasing, which lacks practice, and no précis writing is found. Reiterations of dialogues, speech bubbles, and cartoon strips, formal and informal settings have not been covered to write a letter. Vocabulary, which denotes formality and informality (register), is also not clarified.

Benchmark four is related to the process approach of writing starting from thought processes, towards thinking, jotting down points, planning, making numbers of drafts, revising, editing the content. While writing, a writer should be clear about the main themes/sub-themes, relevant and supporting details, style, linking words, discourse markers, transitional words and punctuation are equally important. But, nothing pertinent has been found. The exercises are merely comprehension exercises, and all consist of controlled activities. Hence, something substantial needs to be done and activities

engaging students' higher-order skills are required to be added in the textbook.

So, by and large, it is found that the English textbook understudy does not provide learners with ample opportunities to improve their writing skills and has not integrated SLOs of the fourth competency that is writing skills. A lot of work needs to be done to enhance the writing skills of the students. The gaps can be covered if realistic and creative activities are added to fulfil curriculum goals through textbooks as well as through digital media ([Baig, 2014](#)).

Conclusion

It is concluded that the English textbook VIII could not comply with C-2 writing skills SLOs and benchmarks. Therefore, steps need to be taken to design an encouraging, less challenging, but very effective textbook that can help learners' usage of language-related real-life situations. The SLOs are extremely effective and are catering to the requirement of the time but need to be executed and imparted to students with their original spirit.

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