

Assessing Creative Writing Skills of Secondary Students to Identify Weaknesses

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Abstract

This study attempts to identify the present status of the secondary students' creative writing and identify the creative writing skills in which the students are weak. The study is based on the findings of the preliminary phase of an ongoing doctoral study. 194 secondary students studying in Maharashtra State Board English Medium schools in Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) area, Pune, India were selected using stratified random sampling method to take a survey using a standardized creative writing test. The test helped to identify the present status of the creative writing of the students as well as the particular creative writing skills that the students are weak in. Shapiro-Wilk normality test was employed to check the normal distribution of the data. The test responses were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis. The findings of the study indicated that students are the weakest in plot building and vocabulary and in the creative aspects of flexibility and fluency.

Keywords: creative writing, secondary students, challenges, plot building, vocabulary, fluency, flexibility

Introduction

The National Education Policy of India 2020 lays significant emphasis on the importance of creativity and innovativeness of the students to adapt to today's rapidly changing world and become good, successful and productive human beings.

Creativity is creating something different, something new and useful. Good observation and uninhibited imagination are key to creativity.

Creative writing promotes creativity. According to Harmer (2007), creative writing includes "imaginative tasks, such as writing poetry, stories, and plays". According to some creative

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writers, all forms of writing can be creative writing when it is characterized by imagination and novelty. Story writing, poetry, descriptives, dialogue writing, travelogues, personal essays are some popular forms of creative writing. They involve skills such as theme, plot building, dramatic content, language style, vocabulary, diction, imagination, empathy, emotionality, picturesqueness etc. It is helpful to know the creative writing skills in which the students are weak so that the teacher can focus special attention towards those skills.

Review of Literature

Among the language skills, writing is considered the most challenging skill to learn. Writing well involves good knowledge of grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, diction etc.

According to Levine (2019), some of the difficulties that the children encounter while writing are lack of vocabulary, unconventional grammar, difficulty with sentence structure and word order, awkward phrasing, improper use of colloquial language, incorrect spelling and meanings.

According to eltweeklyeditor (2013), the major hindrances to creative writing in English experienced by the high school students included less exposure to the English language, mother tongue interference, lack of time in trying and exploring English language, inadequate mechanics of writing in English, insufficient vocabulary and grammatical fluency.

Chowdhury(2015) conducted a study to investigate the secondary students' writing problems. Students of class 6th and class 7th aged between 13 and 14 years, and teachers teaching English to these classes comprised the sample of the study. Data was collected through class observation, students' interviews and assessment of students' writing. The study found that lack of vocabulary, grammatical mistakes, improper feedback from the teachers are some of the biggest challenges that the students faced when writing.

A study by Cetinkaya(2015) found that students' lack of expression skills and insufficient vocabulary were key obstacles in creative writing.

A case study undertaken by Pratiwi (2019) at Ganesha University of Education, Indonesia, tried to analyse the problems faced by students while writing a short story. Data was collected from 13 students of a creative writing course using semi-structured interviews. The study found that the students faced difficulties in the skills of plot building, characterization, grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary and word choice.

A study by Sharma & Dhingra (2018) on the students in Jammu region, India found that the teachers believe the elementary level children are not yet capable of divergent thinking and hence do not emphasize the importance of developing divergent thinking.

Another study by Ulu(2019) investigated fourth grade students' creative writing. 182 students studying in a school in Afyonkarahisar, Turkey participated in the study. The study found that the students scored low in fluency of thoughts and flexibility of ideas, originality, organization of stories, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and writing style.

A research study by Sarwat et al. (2021) attempted to find out the problems faced by elementary students in English writing. The sample of the study comprised of 155 students of grade eight and 32 English teachers teaching at elementary level in the government boys' elementary schools of Tehsil Khanpur, Pakistan. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. The study found poor grammar, insufficient vocabulary, lack of creative ideas, writing anxiety and weak structural organization to be the main problems encountered by the students in English writing.

Dewi & Siregar (2022) explored the challenges faced by the students in writing fiction in EFL classes. Data was collected from 43 college students studying at the English Department of the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, using questionnaires and interviews. The study found that the students face difficulties in finding a topic, plot development, characterization, vocabulary and dialogue writing.

A study by ELBashir (2023) examined the problems faced by the General Foundation Programme (GFP) students studying at A'Sharqiyah University, Oman while writing. Data was collected from 36 GFP students through paragraph writing on given topics. The study found that the students lack in diction, structure of sentences, punctuations, spellings and verb tenses.

Furze (2023) has indicated that the teachers rely too much on formulaic structures and prescriptive writing conventions. Lack of the students' vocabulary, sentence structure skills and insufficient English mechanics are some of the other challenges that the teachers face in teaching creative writing.

A study conducted by Vivolet al. (2024) tried to find out the impact of an educational programme on the development of creative writing skills of primary school students studying in a school at Bacau, Romania. The study comprised of 146 students and used a quasi-experimental control group design. The study found that the students' performance was low in the areas of plot

building, dialogue and narrative, image, setting, mood and atmosphere building, narrative voice, characterization as well as linguistic and technical aspects of writing.

To summarize, most of the research studies that have investigated the writing problems of the students have found the students' proficiency low in grammar, vocabulary, diction and plot building.

The present study concluded that poor vocabulary and poor plot building skills are among the biggest hurdles faced by the students while writing. This is in agreement with the findings of the aforementioned studies. The present study also found that the students performed better in areas of originality and elaboration as compared to divergent thinking and expressional fluency. Studies by Sharma & Dhingra (2018) and Ulu, H. (2019) support this finding. This finding, however, is in contrast with the findings of a study conducted by Fauziah et al. (2019) on 5th grade elementary school students in Surakarta, Indonesia, that found that the students performed better in expressional fluency and divergent thinking (flexibility) as compared to originality and elaboration.

Problem Statement

The present study assesses the creative writing skills of the secondary students studying in State Board English Medium Schools in Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) area, Pune, India. It examines the present status of the students' creative writing as well as attempts to identify the creative writing skills in which they are weak.

Research Questions

The research paper aims to answer the following questions:

- i) What is the present status of the secondary students' creative writing?
- ii) What are the creative writing skills in which the secondary students are weak?

Population and Sampling Procedures

The population of the survey is all the secondary students studying in Maharashtra State Board English Medium schools in PCMC area. The Maharashtra State Board English Medium schools in PCMC area are organized into two distinct clusters. Hence stratified random sampling technique was used to select 194 secondary students for the survey.

Research Methodology

Type of Research:

The study is a descriptive research and uses survey method

Research Design:

The study is a quantitative research.

Tools used for Data Collection:

The standardized Language Creativity Test (LCT) developed by Dr. S. P. Malhotra and Ms. Sucheta Kumari was used to collect the data. LCT is based on Guilford's factor-analytic study of creative thinking. The test is an elaborate test comprising of 27 items testing five areas of creative writing: plot building, dialogue writing, poetic diction, descriptive style and vocabulary. Each of the five areas are scored on the factors of fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration out of a total of 1020.

Tools used for Data Analysis and Representation

MS Excel was used to analyse the data. Z-scores and Percentage statistic were used to present the results.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The standardized Language Creativity Test by Dr. S. P. Malhotra and Ms. Sucheta Kumari was administered to 194 secondary students selected from six State Board English Medium schools in PCMC area, Pune, Maharashtra in the month of June and July, 2023. The test scores of LCT were checked for normal distribution using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results of the test are presented in the Table1 below.

Table 1. Shapiro-Wilk test results for Normality check

Parameter	Value
P-value	0.32
W	0.99
Sample Size	194
Average	360.75
Median	371
Sample Standard Deviation	98.88
Skewness Shape	Potentially symmetrical
Kurtosis Shape	Potentially mesokurtic

The Normality test results as seen in Table 1 above indicate that the test scores are normally distributed.

The scores of the LCT were analysed using percentage statistic. The results of the analysis are presented below:

Present Status of the Secondary Students' Creative Writing

The standardized LCT has prescribed norms based on Z-scores for the interpretation of the level of language creativity. Based on the norms, the Table 2 below shows the present status of the secondary students' creative writing.

Table 2. Levels of language creativity of the students

S. No.	Grade	Level of Language Creativity	No. of Students	% of Students
1	A	Extremely High	2	1.03
2	B	High	17	8.76
3	C	Above Average	43	22.16
4	D	Average/Moderate	72	37.11
5	E	Below Average	35	18.04
6	F	Low	20	10.31
7	G	Extremely Low	5	2.58
Total			194	100%

As can be observed from the Table 2, 37.11% of the students exhibit average/moderate level, 22.16% exhibit above average level, 18.04% exhibit below average level, 10.31% exhibit low level, 8.76% exhibit high level, 2.58% exhibit extremely low level and 1.03% of the students exhibit extremely high level of language creativity.

Creative Writing Skills in which the Secondary Students are Weak

The standardized LCT scores the creative writing skills of plot building, dialogue writing, poetic diction, descriptive style and vocabulary on four factors of creativity, namely fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. This allows analysis of the performance of the students according to

the creative writing skills and also according to the four factors of creativity considered. This analysis is presented in the sections below.

Analysis of the Students' Performance in the Creative Writing Skills

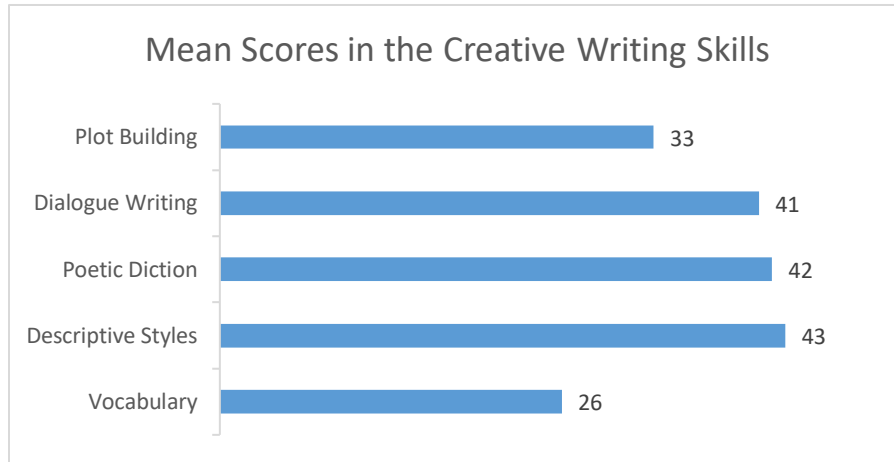


Figure 1. Mean Scores in the Creative Writing Skills

As can be observed from the Figure1, the students find vocabulary and plot building to be the most challenging skills.

The sections below present in detail the performance of the students in the different creative writing skills. Table 3 shows the classification of the proficiency level according to the percentage of marks.

Table3. Proficiency level according to the percentage of marks

Percentage of Marks	Proficiency Level
< 25%	Weak
25%-50%	Average
51%-75%	Above Average
>75%	Proficient

Performance of the students in Plot Building

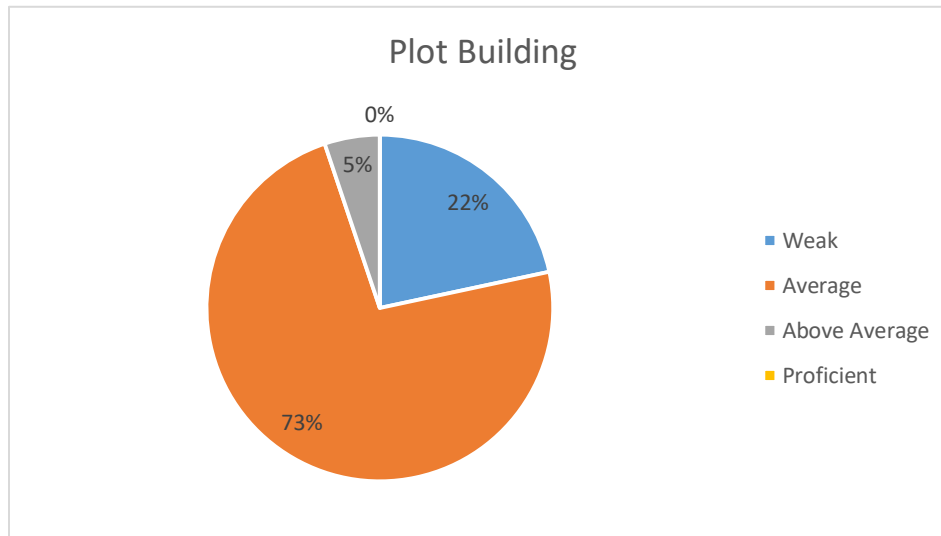


Figure 2. Performance of the students in Plot Building

From the Figure 2, it can be seen that maximum (73% of the students) are average in plot building skill. 22% of the students are weak, 5% of the students are above average while 0% of the students are proficient in plot building skill.

Performance of the students in Dialogue Writing

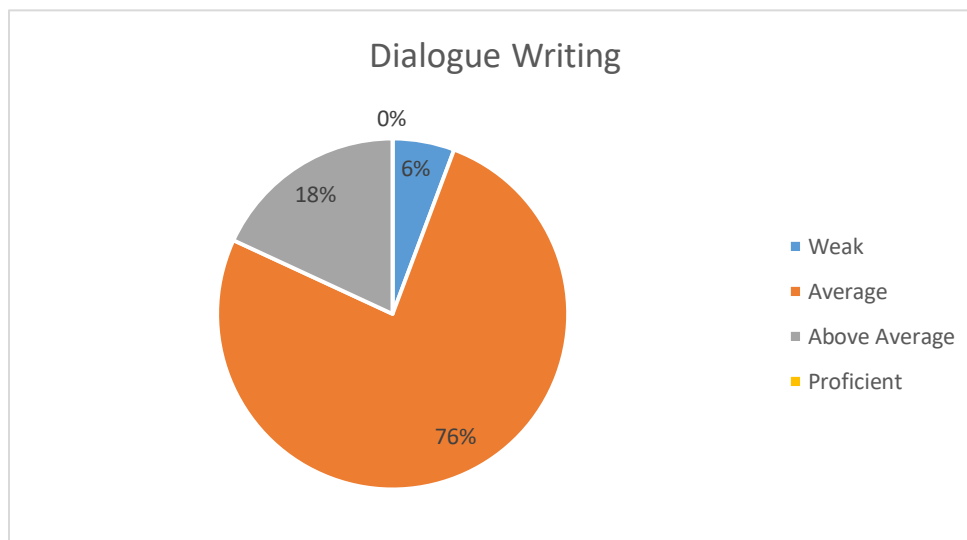


Figure 3. Performance of the students in Dialogue Writing

From the Figure 3, it can be seen that maximum (76% of the students) are average in dialogue writing skill. 18% of the students are above average, 6% of the students are weak while 0% of the students are proficient in dialogue writing skill.

Performance of the students in Poetic Diction

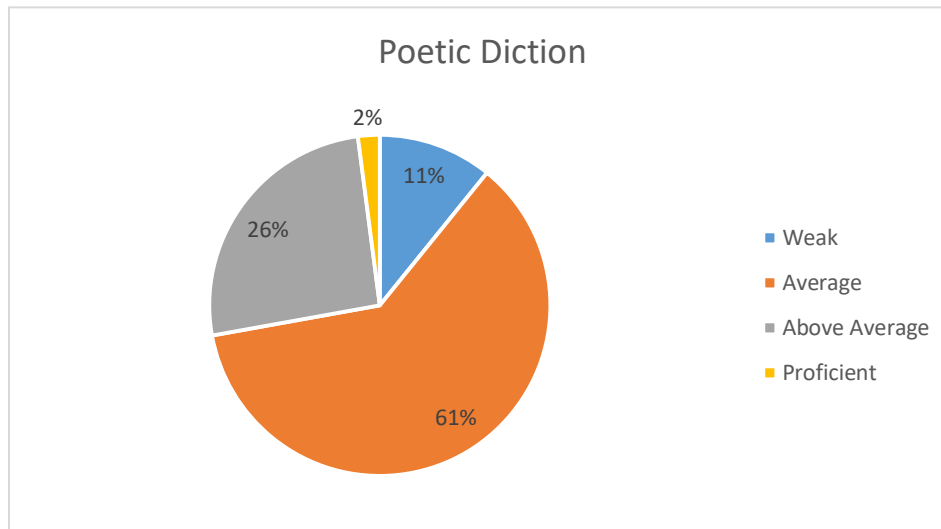


Figure 4. Performance of the students in Poetic Diction

From the Figure 4, it can be seen that maximum (61% of the students) are average in poetic diction. 26% of the students are above average, 11% of the students are weak while 2% of the students are proficient in poetic diction.

Performance of the students in Descriptive Style

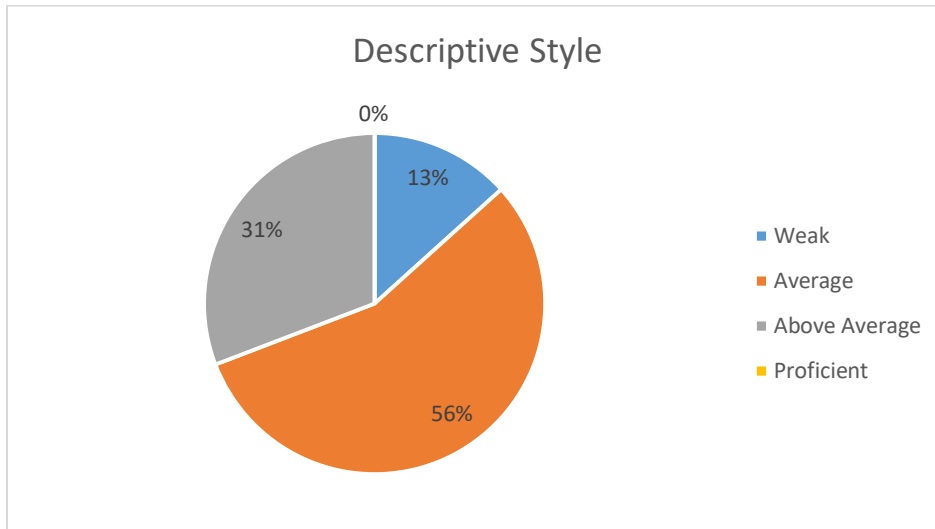


Figure 5. Performance of the students in Descriptive Style

From the Figure 5, it can be seen that maximum (56% of the students) are average in descriptive style. 31% of the students are above average, 13% of the students are weak while 0% of the students are proficient in descriptive style.

Performance of the students in Vocabulary

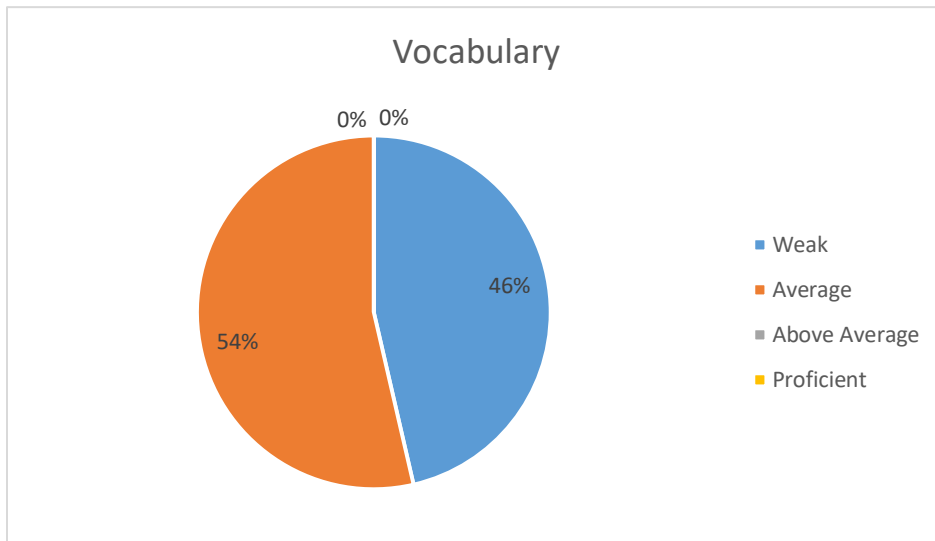


Figure 6. Performance of the students in Vocabulary

From the Figure 6, it can be seen that 54% of the students are average and 46% of the students are weak in vocabulary. 0% of the students are above average or proficient in vocabulary.

Analysis of the Students' Performance on the Factors of Creativity

The LCT tests the students on different factors of creativity within the creative writing skills. The factors that are considered are of fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. A comparison of the performance of the students in these factors of creativity is presented in the Figure 7 below:

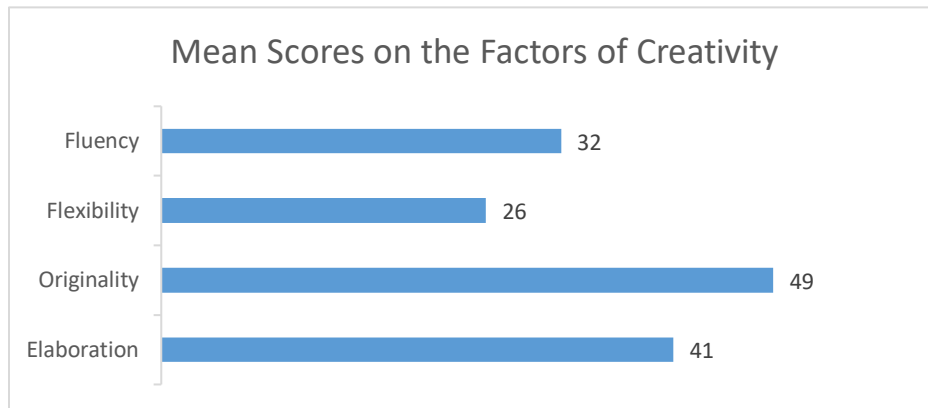


Figure 7. Mean Scores on the Factors of Creativity

As can be observed from the Figure 7, the students find flexibility and fluency to be the most challenging factors in creative writing.

The sections below present in detail the performance of the students on the different factors of creativity within the creative writing skills.

Performance of the students in Fluency

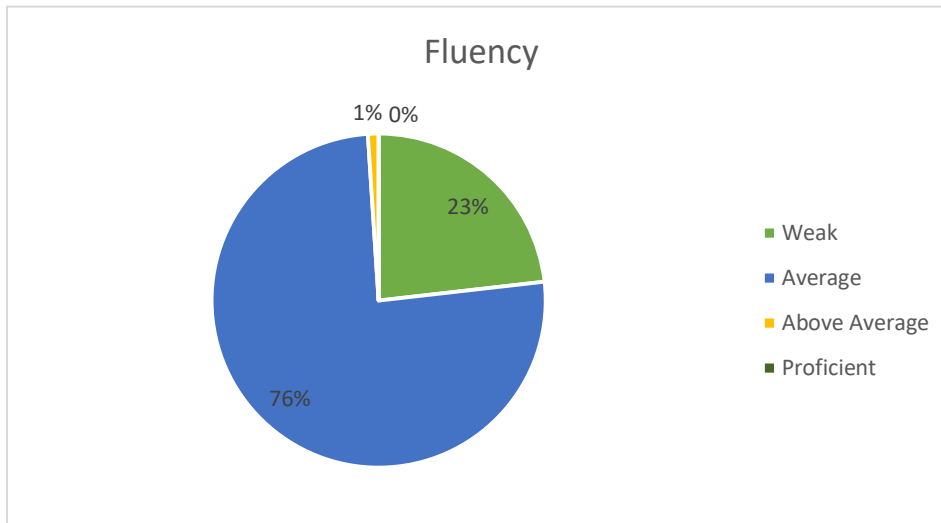


Figure 8. Performance of the students in Fluency

From the Figure 8, it can be seen that maximum (76% of the students) are average in fluency. 23% of the students are weak, 1% are above average while 0% of the students are proficient in fluency.

Performance of the students in Flexibility

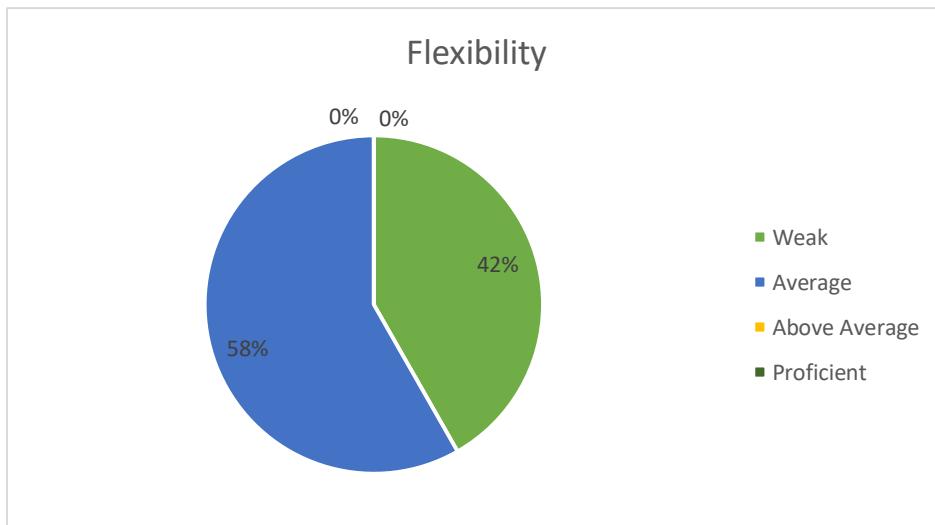


Figure 9. Performance of the students in Flexibility

From the figure, it can be seen that 58% of the students are average and 42% of the students are weak in flexibility. 0% of the students are above average or proficient in flexibility.

Performance of the students in Originality

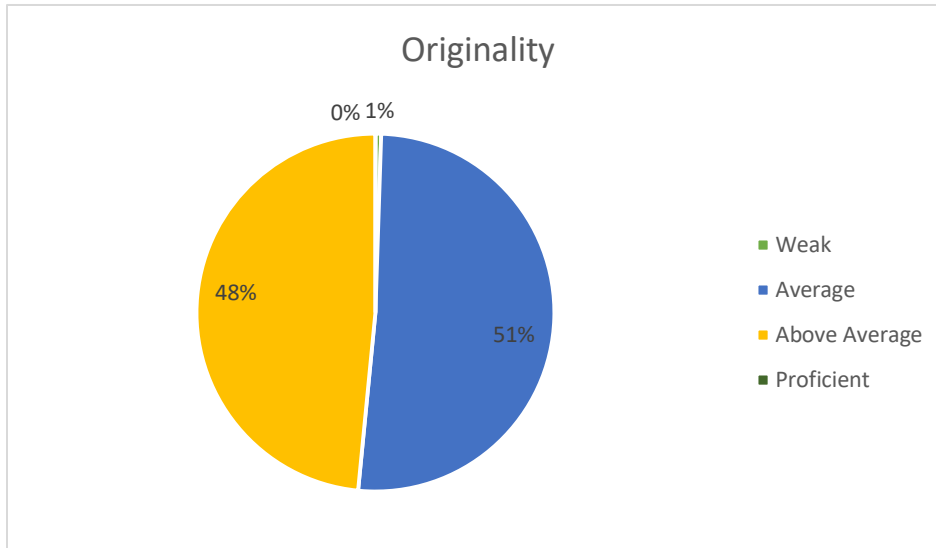


Figure 10. Performance of the students in Originality

From the Figure 10, it can be seen that 51% of the students are average, 48% of the students are weak, 1% of the students are above average while 0% of the students are proficient in originality.

Performance of the students in Elaboration

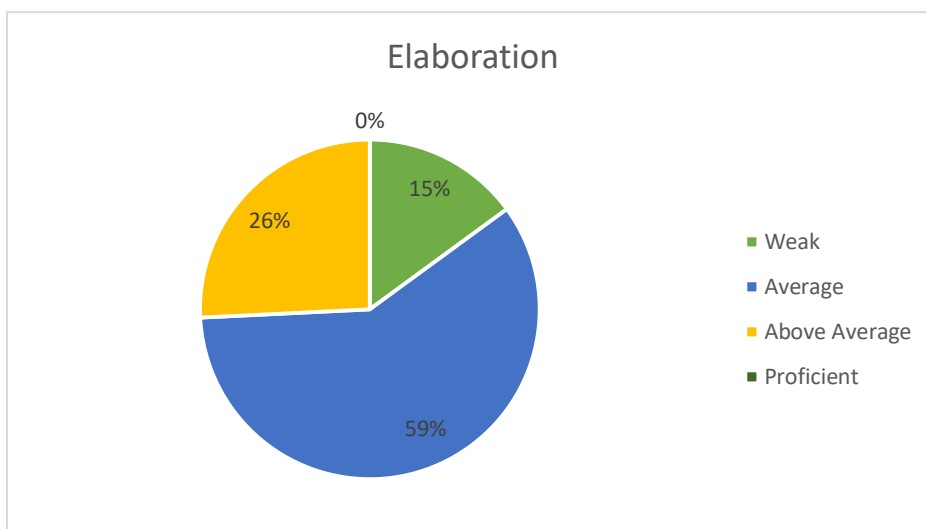


Figure 11. Performance of the students in Elaboration

From the figure, it can be seen that maximum (59% of the students) are average in elaboration. 26% of the students are above average, 15% are weak while 0% of the students are proficient in elaboration.

Conclusions/ Major Findings

The present study led to the following findings:

Research Question 1:

What is the present status of the secondary students' creative writing?

37.11% of the students exhibit average/moderate level, 22.16% of the students exhibit above average level, 18.04% of the students exhibit below average level, 10.31% of the students exhibit low level, 8.76% of the students exhibit high level, 2.58% of the students exhibit extremely low level and 1.03% of the students exhibit extremely high level of language creativity. Thus, most students exhibit language creativity that falls within the average and above average level.

Research Question 2:

What are the creative writing skills in which the secondary students are weak?

The least mean score (26%) was obtained by the students in vocabulary, followed by plot building (33%) suggesting that the students find vocabulary and plot building to be the most challenging. Mean score of 41% was obtained in dialogue writing, 42% in poetic diction and 43% in descriptive style.

The least mean score (26%) was obtained by the students in flexibility, followed by fluency (32%) suggesting that the students struggle with flexibility and fluency. Mean score of 41% was obtained in elaboration and 49% in originality.

Discussion of Findings/ Educational Implications

Understanding the present status of the students' creative writing is important to understand the need to focus our attention to improving their creative writing. The last few years have seen a

rise in research in the field of creative writing throughout the world. However, there is much research in this field that needs to be done in the Indian context.

There is increased awareness of the importance of developing the creative potential of the students. The most recent National Education Policy (2020) of India has highlighted the need of producing creative individuals for the society. The present study has found that most students have average level of creative writing. There are very few students with high or extremely high level of creative writing. This suggests that enough efforts haven't been taken to tap the creative writing potential of the students and more focused efforts are required in this regard.

The present study has also identified the students' weaknesses in creative writing. The students have been found to be facing the most difficulties in vocabulary and plot building. Hence more efforts need to be taken to develop these skills through varied and interesting activities that focus especially on these skills. The present study has identified that the students are weak in flexibility and fluency. Thus, it is important to engage the students in activities focusing on developing their divergent thinking ability and expressional fluency.

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