



A Study on Psychological Flow and it's relation with Fantasy among Young Writers

Ritwik Swaraj Tripathi, *Postgraduate in Psychology, Department of Psychology, DAV College, Chandigarh, 160011.*

listen@refuelmind.org

Abstract: The written literature is known to be the footprint of the limitless human imagination through which we reflect on our present by understanding the past, whether poetry, prose, stories, shayris, historical or even theological records share one common link that there is always a writer behind them. To understand the emergence of the psychological flow and its relationship with fantasy among writers. The systematic review of literature showed that flow state and fantasy are not often studied and specifically on writers. Thus, this study was conducted to understand the relationship between psychological flow and fantasy among writers, which included 100 writers from different linguistic, cultural parts of India and abroad. The sampling was completed in hybrid form and the results reflected that Psychological Flow is not correlated to Creative Fantasy ($r = -0.128$) and Imaginative Fantasy ($r = -0.068$), Whereas Imaginative Fantasy is significantly correlated with Creative Fantasy at ($r = .0352$, $p < 0.01$) level of significance. This study concluded with psychological flow as a variable that is not solely bound by or related to fantasized creativity or imaginations rather than an active state of immersion. Further, more studies can be conducted on psychological flow and fantasy by focusing on the active dimensions of the fantasy beyond just imagination and creativity but something active, which could happen with the flow simultaneously, maybe.

Keywords: *Flow State, Creativity, Imagination, Fantasy, Writers*

1. Introduction

As I have written, *“Ink may dry, but words thrive”* This reflects a unique zone a writer enters where challenge and skills make a bridge to come together and the awareness of the background activity decreases with respect to the feeling that the clock is not moving anymore while writing or creating something that does not exist yet. Psychological Flow which is explained theoretically as the state of complete immersion in a task or activity while the subjective reference of time elapsed or temporal limit is subjectively paused, while in the performance of a task or an activity, when imaginative and creative fantasy pushes the boundaries of human imagination altogether.

Psychological Flow

Psychological flow which is also referred to as the “Flow State” is a conditional situation that makes a human become immersed in a task. The experience of deep concentration, enjoyment, sense of timelessness and often the feeling that time is not moving while in the zone, characterized by creating a balance between challenge of work with individual’s skill level, with a feeling of control and autotelic direction, where the task itself becomes the reward. Individuals enter flow while engaging in activities they are passionate about, such as sports, art, music, or any intrinsically motivated work.

The origin of the flow state comes from Csikszentmihalyi (1975), a Hungarian American psychologist, who first introduced it in 1975. Csikszentmihalyi's research focused on optimal human experiences and how individuals can achieve a state of deep engagement and enjoyment during various activities. His theory of flow emerged from people who become deeply involved in activities such as work, sports, and the arts, and how this involvement leads to a sense of fulfillment and peak performance.

Originator of the concept of Flow State, Csikszentmihalyi defined as a psychological zone in which people experience intense focus, effortless involvement, and intrinsic enjoyment in an activity. This state occurs when a person’s skills match the challenges of the task, he/she has to complete with immediate feedback, giving a sense of mastery with heightened concentration.

Characteristics of Flow State

Focus: Individual who is deeply concentrated in the activity, with all attention channelized toward it, reducing awareness of what is going on in the background.

Balance Between Challenge Level and Skill Level: Flow occurs with the condition that the difficulty level of activity is well-matched with the skill levels of the doer or performer. Tasks that are too easy lead to boredom, and those that are too difficult lead to anxiety. Flow happens if there is a congruence between the level of challenge and skill.

Clear Goals and Feedback: In flow state, individuals have a crystal-clear understanding of what they need to achieve and receive immediate feedback on their progress, which allows them to adjust their actions, efforts accordingly and keep their interest level engaged.

Loss of What is Happening in the Background: When in the state of flow, individuals feel a sense of congruence and absorption with the activity, often losing awareness of the background or passive activities and their surroundings. This absence of self-consciousness can lead to a feeling of being “one” with the task and spiritually could also be known as dissolution of EGO.

Time Stops: One of the most remarkable aspects of flow is the distortion of time perception. People in a flow state often report losing track of time, experiencing it as either speeding up or slowing down.

Intrinsic Motivation: The activity itself becomes the reward. People in flow are not much bothered by external rewards or end results, like money or recognition, but rather by the enjoyment and fulfillment that comes from performing the task.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) highlighting depth of human focus and immersion that defines this experience. Flow is linked to high performance, creativity, and personal well-being. It can be experienced in a variety of situations, from artistic endeavors to athletic pursuits, to even work and everyday tasks. Importantly, achieving flow relates to greater zones of satisfaction or fulfillment, making it the key component of what the founder of this concept Csikszentmihalyi calls “optimal experiences.”

Fantasy

Sigmund Freud's Theory of Fantasy (Psychoanalytic), the one of the most influential figures in Psychology and father of psychoanalysis, discussed fantasy deeply in his works, particularly related and revolving around the unconscious mind. In Freud's point of view, fantasy represents unconscious desires, wishes, and repressed memories that surface in disguised forms if they are not given conscious expression. According to Sigmund Freud, fantasies were paths of the mind to satisfy forbidden or unfulfilled desires that couldn't be acted or expressed upon in real life, often having roots from childhood experiences (Freud, 1908).

The Role of Fantasy in Creative Thinking (Creativity Theories), Fantasy is related to creativity, as it can stimulate divergent thinking, the ability to think in novel, abstract ways. Psychological theories of creativity often put light on the importance of fantasy in the creative process, suggesting that engaging in fantasy helps individuals break free from conventional thinking and explore new possibilities through life (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007).

Daydreaming and Fantasy Proneness Theory, Watt (2000), explored the world of fantasy proneness, which refers to the tendency of the human mind to engage in vivid, immersive daydreams or fantasies. According to this theory, people who are more into fantasy could be more open to feedback and could also be turning to certain psychological states, such as dissociation or hypnosis (Watt, 2000)

Theories of Fantasy in Child Development

Piaget (1936), a renowned developmental psychologist, briefly discussed the role of fantasy in early childhood development. Piaget states, fantasy and imagination were seen as important in the preoperational stage (ages 2-7). He argued that children use fantasy to make sense of the real world and to practice newly assigned social roles, emotional responses, and cognitive structures. In this way, fantasy plays a key role in cognitive development and learning process. Piaget (1951)

Symbolism Play: Fantasy allows children to engage in symbolic play, where objects or actions represent something else, helping with cognitive growth and exploration.

Cognitive Development: with imagination and abstracts, the children turn the essential skills like solving problems, perspective-taking, understanding cause and effect and to make sense of the world.

Role Play: Fantasy allows children to explore different roles and experiment with different social identities through role play exposure.

Fantasy and the Socio-Cognitive Theory

The Socio-Cognitive emphasizes that fantasy plays an important role in modeling behavior and self-regulation. Fantasy allows individuals to rehearse social interactions or imagine different outcomes to real-world situations. Through mental rehearsal, individuals may strengthen their self-efficacy belief in their ability to accomplish goals.

Mental Rehearsal: Fantasy allows individuals to mentally rehearse behaviors or strategies in social situations or tasks, building confidence and readiness to prepare for the real-world situations even if it is not so real to ever occur.

Self-Efficacy: Through the process of imagining success in various situations, individuals may increase their belief in their own abilities, promoting self-efficacy and motivation to become stronger. Bandura (1986)

Vicarious Learning: Individuals can engage in observational learning by fantasizing about others' behaviors, thus learning new ways of acting or coping with challenges by observing others in similar situations.

2. Purpose

The purpose is the study Psychological Flow and its relationship with Fantasy in young writers

3. Hypothesis

H1: It is expected that Psychological Flow will be related to Imaginative Fantasy

H2: It is expected that Psychological Flow will be related to Creative Fantasy

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample

This study sampled 100 female and male writers aged between 20-30 years, from different geographical locations of Northern Indian States of Punjab, Chandigarh (Union Territory), Eastern and Central Uttar Pradesh and Non-residential Indians residing in Canada and Middle Eastern Countries. The sampling was done on hybrid mode, which includes both offline and online forms (traditional printed paper and google form).

4.2 Measures

Psychological Flow Scale (PFS): This scale is developed by (Norsworthy) and designed to measure Psychological Flow during an activity. The measuring in this questionnaire comprises total 9 items in three dimensions or sub-scales of Psychological Flow named as (Absorption, Effortless Control and Intrinsic Rewards), these sub-scales are divided based on items.

Scoring is done on a Likert Scale of (1-7), in which 1 denotes Strongly Disagree and 7 denotes Strongly Agree. The scale reflects a range of scores from 9 to 63. There is no reverse scoring in this scale, and all the items are summative, the scores of all the items must be added to get the total score. Reliability and Validity- Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.88$

The Fantasy Questionnaire TFQ: Given by Weibel et al. (2018), The measuring in this questionnaire comprises 27 items in two dimensions or subscales of Fantasy named as (Intuitive Fantasy and Creative Fantasy), these sub-scales are divided based on items. Scoring is done on a Likert Scale of (1-5), in which 1 denotes Strongly Disagree and 5 denotes Strongly Agree. The scale reflects a range of scores from 27 to 135. The subjects were expected to answer honestly about their experiences. There is reverse scoring for item number 13 in this scale, and all the other items are summative, so after reverse scoring item no 13, all the items were added to get the total fantasy score. For Imaginative Fantasy score, items 1-16 (after reverse scoring 13) were added, and for Creative Fantasy score, items 17-27 were added. Reliability and Validity- Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.80$

4.3 Procedure

The study began with a literature review of the selected variables and proceeded to collect the necessary tools for data collection. Hypotheses were formulated and expected outcomes were defined. The purpose of the study was briefly explained to participants, and any questions about the questionnaire were addressed. Data collection took place after providing instructions to the participants. Informed consent was obtained from participants through signed agreements, and those who chose not to participate were acknowledged. Demographic variables collected included participant name, age, gender, state of residence, writer classification, duration of writing experience, sources of inspiration, preferred writing language (including bilingualism), mother tongue, and financial resources. Participants completed the required assessment scales as part of the research. Upon collection of responses, participants were thanked for their participation.

5. Analysis of Data

Results

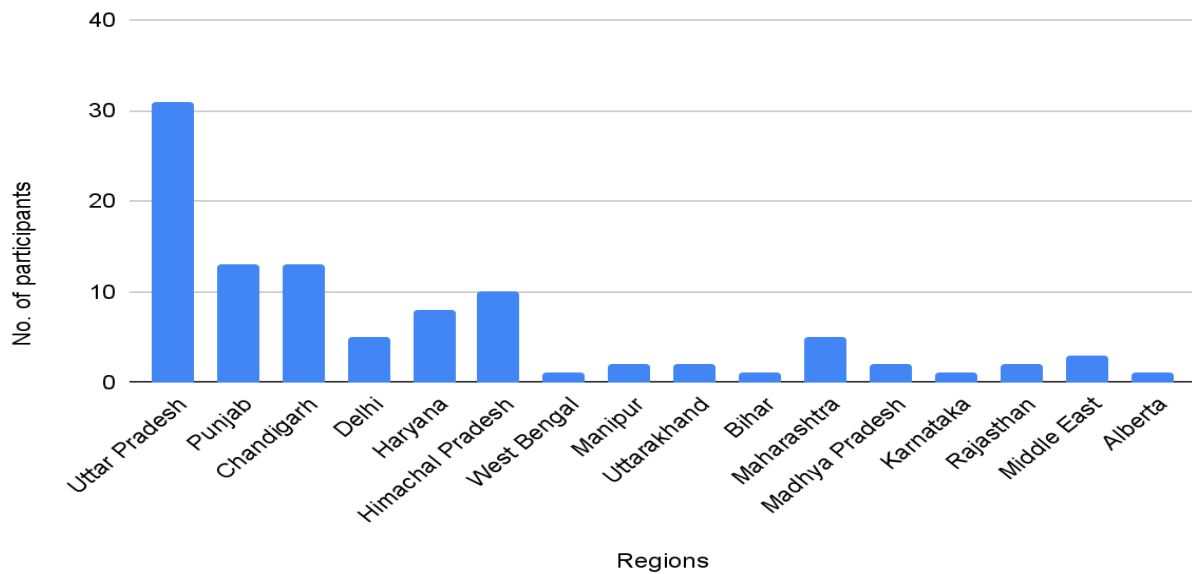


Figure 1. showing regions from where the participants come from, total sample is 100.

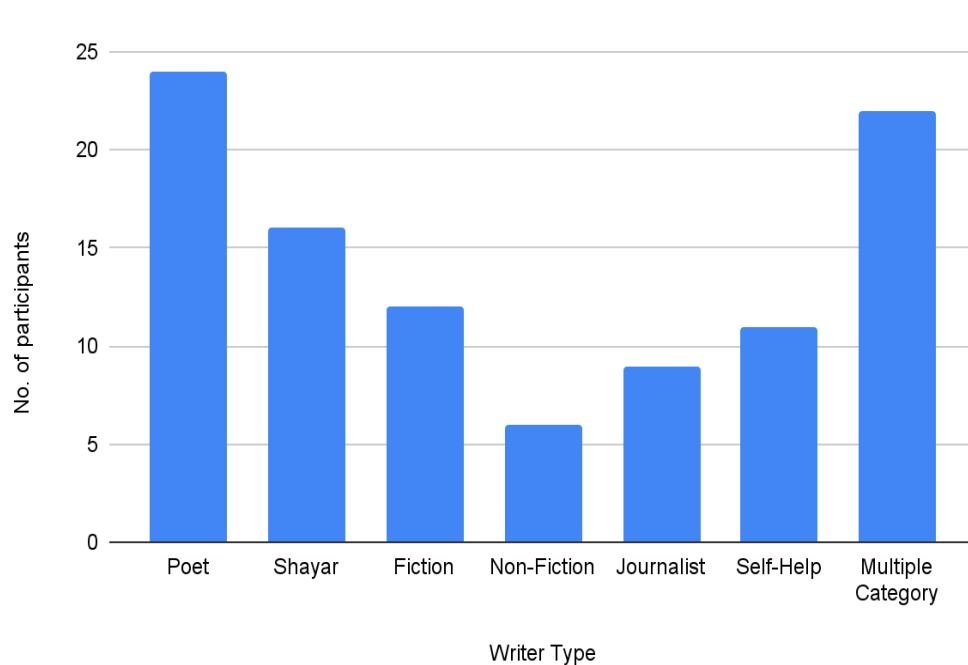


Figure 2. showing writer type, total sample is 100.

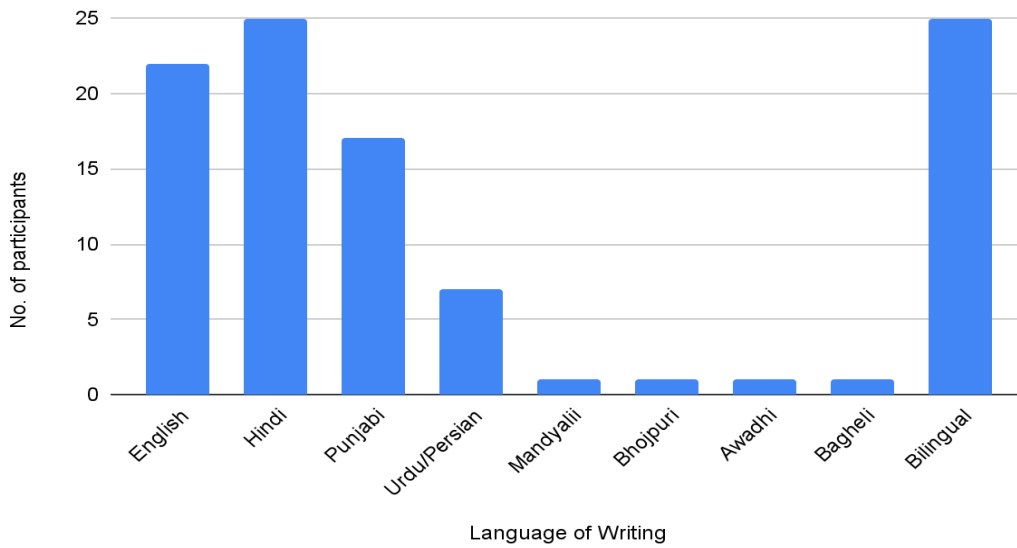


Figure 3. showing Language of writing preferred by participants, total sample is 100.

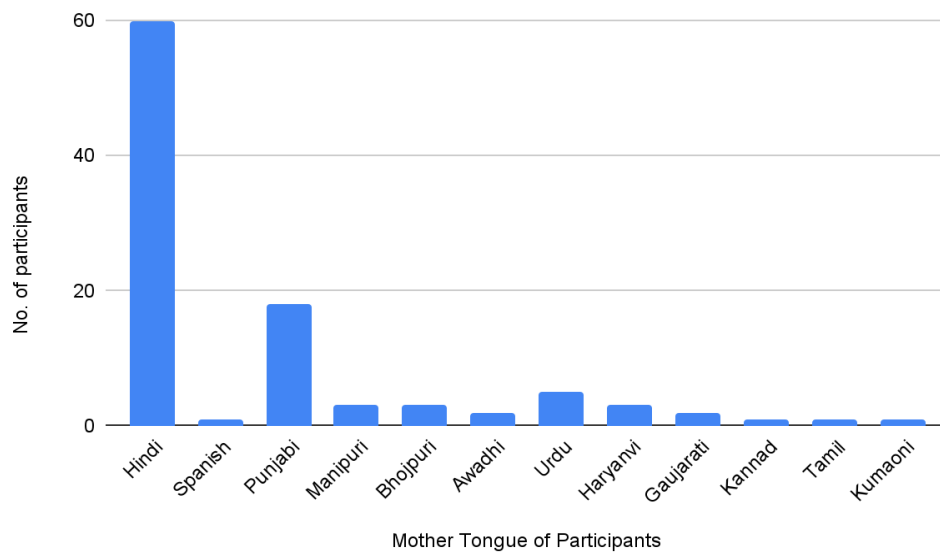


Figure 4. showing the mother tongue of the participants, total sample is 100.

Table 1. Descriptives (N, Mean and Standard Deviation)

	Psy Flow	Imaginative Fantasy	Creative Fantasy
N	100	100	100
Mean	48.1	55.9	41.4
Standard Deviation	9.15	8.07	7.26

Table 2. *Correlation Matrix*

	Psy Flow	Imaginative Fantasy	Creative Fantasy
Psy Flow	-		
Imaginative Fantasy	-0.068	-	
Creative Fantasy	-0.128	0.352***	-

6. Discussion of Results

Our findings indicate that, among young adult writers (20–30 years old), Psychological Flow is not correlated to Creative Fantasy ($r = -0.128$) and Imaginative Fantasy ($r = -0.068$), Whereas Imaginative Fantasy is significantly correlated with Creative Fantasy at ($r = .0352$, $p < 0.01$) level of significance.

The null association of Flow with creative fantasy and imaginative fantasy dimensions aligns with theoretical distinctions. Flow is classically defined as a goal-directed, autotelic state of deep involvement requiring clear feedback and balance between skill and challenge. While Creative Fantasy has a constructive quality, it lacks the real-time performance conditions—task clarity, external goals, immediate feedback—that facilitate flow. Imaginative Fantasy, by contrast, is even further from flow, representing stimulus-independent, task-unrelated cognition. Mind-wandering research shows that such unregulated fantasy can fragment attention and impair both task engagement and mood, explaining why Imaginative Fantasy was unrelated to Psychological Flow.

7. Conclusion

H1- It is expected that Psychological Flow will be related to Imaginative Fantasy. Hypothesis rejected, this can be interpreted as Psychological Flow is not correlated to Imaginative Fantasy at any degree of significance.

H2- It is expected that Psychological Flow will be related to Creative Fantasy. Hypothesis rejected, this can be interpreted as Psychological Flow is not correlated to Creative Fantasy at any degree of significance.

This investigation was aimed to study and understand the relationship of Psychological Flow with Imaginative Fantasy and Creative Fantasy among writers (aged between 20-30 years), the sample was purposive and was collected from different geographical locations across Indian States and International participation was also welcomed, the size of total sample was 100. The

research findings support the occurrence of Psychological Flow in writers. So, it is concluded that Psychological Flow is present in individuals who write either professionally or for hobby.

So, be it an elite athlete playing a decisive match, a high end artists creating his/her great art piece or music album, or a dedicated mechanic fixing an internal combustion engine, a passionate individual leading a revolution for a cause, or an individual shooting targets from a pistol, a little girl playing catch-catch with her dog, two lovers dancing unbothered in the rain, a man creating an origami love letter for the lady he has been pursuing out of craft sheets, people jamming in a band with the challenge of remembering the next lines as well the thrill and fun feeling of singing altogether, and of course a writer happily writing and creating a new universe in abstracts.

The FLOW happens, yes!! The FLOW happens.

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