Creativity of Teachers in English Language Classroom: Profits and Constraints

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Abstract

Teachers bring various experiences to the classroom, and their beliefs about 'creative teaching' or 'good teaching' practices are frequently influenced by various factors, including their own teaching experiences, individual motivation, and organizational constraints. This context frames their early efforts to develop creative practices, and recognition of influences further affects the level of creativity displayed by teachers. This study aims to ascertain the factors that affected teachers' creativity in English language teaching (ELT) in contemporary higher education. The author identified three factors which influenced teachers' creativity: their knowledge and teaching experiences, their motivation, and the role of technology. These three factors served as a guide for teachers regarding how they might integrate creativity into their teaching practice. Additionally, many EFL teachers believed that their creativity was necessary to assist students in learning, create an enjoyable learning experience, and encourage students to be creative. This belief appears to be partially due to the affordance of the rapidly changing digital environment which enables student-centered and self-directed learning. Finally, this study indicates that creativity is not instinctive to teachers; however, they can nurture their creativity by accepting their innovative ideas through developing their abilities to teach creatively.

Keywords: EFL classrooms, higher education, teacher, student, language acquisition, motivation, creativity

1.0. Introduction

Understanding teachers' creativity is pivotal as they are the ones who engage students, present them with challenging ideas, and expose them to the language in meaningful contexts. It is also interesting to learn about the factors motivating teachers to be creative in their teaching to understand their attitudes and activities in their work environment. One key aspect that may influence teachers' creativity in this study is motivation, as it is a basic need for individuals to achieve 'self-actualization.' The findings of this study will portray a comprehensive view of the essential elements necessary for teachers to maintain their creativity and the actions they take to keep their creativity current.

2.0. Literature Review

For over two decades, there has been a growing global recognition of '21st century skills' in which 'creativity' is recognized as a core competency for students to develop and is embedded in school curriculums. Beyond the curriculum, it is routinely described as one of the '4Cs', along with communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. There has been broader interest in the concept of creativity in recent years, and the term is frequently used as an educational imperative for both students and teachers to develop (Aikhenvald & Storch, 2019; Alves et al., 2021; Kettler et al., 2018). Of specific relevance to this study, numerous studies have also examined teachers' creativity in language teaching and learning (Artini & Padmadewi, 2020; Fitriah, 2018; Masadeh, 2021). In this literature, two factors contribute to the growing interest in creativity at schools: students' fulfillment and their future success as knowledge-based economy participants (Craft, 2003; Kampylis et al., 2009).

Raising educational achievement coupled with '21st century skills' inevitably secures increased employment opportunities and maintains economic performance. Creativity is seen as a strong driver for developing new products or services, solving new problems (Chua et al., 2014), enhancing personal success, and resolving conflict positively (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). As a result, over the last few decades, an increasing number of policy statements have been made to incorporate creativity into the curriculum to nurture students' and teachers' creativity. However, the definition of creativity in educational settings varies according to the context in which it is viewed (Chan et al., 2019; Larraz-Rábanos, 2021).

Generally, we can recognize creative acts or efforts when we see them, but defining them remains challenging as creativity is expressed in diverse ways (Maley, 2015). Consequently, much of the research mainly focuses on creative practices, creative processes, the concept of creativity, and the creative pedagogy of technology use (Mejia et al., 2021). In contrast, there is a dearth of research that focuses on resources for teachers' creativity development. To fill this gap, this study is intended to provide an answer to the topic of what factors influence teachers' creativity in the classroom within the context

of education. The research question for this study is: What factors affect the creativity of English language teaching (ELT) in higher education?

3.0. Teachers' Creativity

Definitions of creativity vary from one context to another in the literature. Csikszentmihalyi (1988), for example, is known for using creativity as a key construct in articulating his 'flow theory' within positive psychology. In focusing on teacher creativity, this study is informed principally by two key definitions of creativity: one proposed by Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education as a 'democratic definition' that distinguishes between teaching creatively and teaching for creativity, and Craft (2003) proposing 'little c creativity' (LCC). According to the democratic concept of creativity, everyone can be creative in their relevant knowledge and skills. In a complementary way, Craft (2003) describes creativity as daily creativity associated with one's ability to cope, identify, and make decisions. These two ideas of creativity are more relevant for understanding teachers' creativity in classroom practices since they both see creativity as a natural ability that all instructors (potentially) have.

While creativity is viewed as a natural ability shared by all teachers, it does not occur automatically. Teachers must possess specific characteristics to teach creatively, and we propose a three-element framework fostering creativity in teaching. Creativity results from the interaction of three pivotal components, namely knowledge, creative thinking, and motivation. The first component, knowledge, encompasses pertinent information that serves as the basis for developing innovative products (Renzulli & De Wet, 2010). Creativity occurs when teachers have absorbed sufficient knowledge to ponder, generate connections, and produce new ideas. It requires a level of domain competence, and if they have assimilated the information, they may be able to develop something innovative. A study on the factors influencing teachers' self-efficacy in creative teaching found three key conclusions (Huang et al., 2019). First, school support, the practicality of creative teaching, teacher perceptions of their own creative behavior, and student expectations affected teachers' intentions to teach creatively.

Second, a teacher's self-assessment of their creative behavior has a significant impact on their confidence in adopting creative instructional strategies and student engagement. The students' expectations are significant for the dimension of student engagement, whereas the expectations of colleagues are significant for the self-efficacy dimension of creative teaching strategies. Thirdly, teachers in suburban and rural schools are more influenced by the school environment, whereas teachers in urban schools are more influenced by student expectations. Even though this study's finding does not specifically mention knowledge as a contributing factor to creative teaching, teachers' knowledge is critical for their creativity. For example, when they adopt creative strategies, they need a solid knowledge base to modify what they do in the classroom. By sharing information and creative ideas with others, people can foster creativity and create new angles on the same problem.

4.0. Creativity from Three Types of Knowledge

In probing the knowledge component, creativity can draw from three types of knowledge: procedural, declarative, and conditional knowledge (Anderson, 2014). Procedural knowledge, or 'knowing-how', describes both the knowledge and skill of doing things (Anderson, 2014) and explains how to carry out an activity within well-defined processes (Yilmaz & Yalcin, 2012). The emphasis is on cognitive abilities such as decision making, mathematical problem solving, computer programming, and language production. It is frequently associated with changes in knowledge, skills, and task performance. Declarative knowledge or 'knowing-that' is conceptual knowledge or knowing about something (Anderson, 2014). Conditional knowledge is often more complex in combining aspects of 'knowing-when', 'knowing-why', and sometimes 'knowing-if' (Rahmat et al., 2022). Conditional knowledge represents people's comprehension of why a method works or whether or not a technique is accepted. Anderson (2014) asserts that knowledge begins with declarative acts, the awareness, and control; this control paves the way for the procedural process. Declarative knowledge is the foundation of knowledge transfers. On the other hand, procedural knowledge plays an important role in the conceptual structure and attaining declarative knowledge. Alternatively, creativity is also conceived as emergent, sometimes spontaneous and associated with 'mindset' (Pretz & Nelson, 2017).

The second term 'creative thinking skills' refers to an individual's capacity to combine previously unrelated pieces of knowledge and comprehend it in novel ways. The more experienced a teacher is, the more likely they are open to new methods of instruction. They may teach the same topic several times, but they are different each time, for example, in how they improvise in dealing with the materials. As previously said, creativity emerges when people have enough knowledge to ponder, discover connections, and produce new ideas. Thus, thinking in this context aims to mix and link what instructors know to create a new understanding of information.

The next consideration concerns motivation which, in this context, refers to a desire to solve problems or discover new approaches in creative productions. Creativity occurs when teachers have an access to sufficient information to think, combine, and connect what they have already known. Moreover, it is also stated that passion, enjoyment in learning,

eagerness to help people, and satisfaction motivated teachers to be creative in teaching. According to Hennessey and Amabile (2010), motivation is critical for creative production. It indicates the distinction between what creative people are capable of accomplishing and what they will accomplish in any particular scenario. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivational orientations can motivate people to be creative (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

Extrinsic motivation, such as monetary rewards or status and recognition, may have a limited effect on individual performance. However, people will continue to engage in uninteresting activities regardless of such incentives. This is in contrast to intrinsic motivation. Individuals will perform various tasks and employ a variety of strategies if they are motivated, interested, and enjoy doing so. It is clearly stated that motivation significantly impacts the direction of an individual's behavior and actions. By being motivated to complete tasks and accomplish goals, people may be driven to the desire for success or the pursuit of excellence by exploring their creativity. That is why Hennessey and Amabile (2010) asserted that motivation is critical to an individual's ability to be creative. It is also supported by the investment theory of creativity, which includes six critical resources for developing individual creativity: intelligence, knowledge, intellectual style, personality, motivation, and environment. It explains why some people are more creative than others. Again, motivation is a considerably significant part of building teachers' creativity as it encompasses the 'why' creative teachers should be creative teachers.

The ongoing development of the digital environment also provides important context as a stimulus of creativity (Bruno, 2022). Innovations in digital technology and advancements in specialized fields such as human computer interaction and user experience provide specialist perspective, as they contribute to understanding usability, user appeal and acceptance. Moreover, the increasingly pervasive nature of digital technology means that it is a feature of the environment and more than 'just a tool' to be used. An important caveat, however, is that depending on context digital technology can be experienced as enabling or frustrating. Thus, for teachers there may exist both a need for professional development as well as stimulus to be creative. Among the affordances of the rapidly changing digital environment is that it enables self-directed learning which requires that teachers 'keep up' with developments and arguably compete for students' attention (McVaugh & Robinson, 2022).

5.0. Conclusion

This study found three key aspects in driving teachers' creativity to accomplish their tasks: knowledge and experience, motivation, and technology. They could perform at a high level of creativity if they had the necessary technical knowledge and skills. Attending academic courses and reflecting on previous classroom practices were critical for their personal development as they gained valuable insight into what constitutes effective teaching. Additionally, when a teacher was willing and motivated to continue learning, they could improve their knowledge, competency, and creativity in education. The finding emphasizes the critical nature of teachers' motivation, enthusiasm, and dedication to their profession. Their performance and attitudes did not only assist students in comprehending cognitive information, but their vitality also enabled them to inspire students' enthusiasm. Another point made in this study is that teachers used technology to assist them in actualizing their creativity meaningfully and excitingly. However, technology could not do all of the work on its own, and it needed to be used with other factors, like teacher creativity, student participation, frequent interaction, and cooperation.

The study's findings have three significant implications for EFL educators and researchers. First, this study established that for the cohort studied, intrinsic motivation is the primary factor influencing teachers' creativity. However, as a limitation, there is no information about how these teachers teach in their classrooms. As a result, future research should include classroom observation to understand teachers' creativity better. Second, teachers emphasized the critical role of technology in bringing their ideas into their classrooms. Future research should therefore also concentrate on the creative pedagogy of technology integration in classroom practices and how teachers incorporate technology into creative classroom activities. Third, there is insufficient information about teachers' creativity from the students' perspective. Thus, future research could examine students' attitudes toward creative pedagogy.

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