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Investigating Schools' Role in Enhancing Creative Thinking Skills in the English Curricula from Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

Research on creative thinking has a long tradition. This study seeks to investigate the degree of enhancing creative thinking skills in the English for Palestine curricula from ESL teachers' perspectives. It also aims at proposing possible solutions to enhance the creative thinking skills in ESL classrooms. To accomplish this aim, the researchers developed a questionnaire that includes a 20-item and semi-structured interview that includes 4-question interview questions. The two instruments are aimed at collecting qualitative and quantitative data comprehensively to answer three main questions. Findings of the research showed that the degree of using creative thinking in schools and curricula is low and inadequate. In the light of these findings, the researchers recommended divergent methods of teaching, adequate training for teachers and students on different techniques, and the inclusion of activities in the curricula to improve students' creative thinking. It also strongly recommends teachers to employ Bloom's Taxonomy in their teaching method.

Keywords: Creative thinking skills • Palestinian english curricula • ESL classrooms • Teachers' perspectives

Introduction

In the past several decades, creative thinking has played an important role in honing the teaching quality offered for learners. Learners are changing rapidly towards the digital era weaned on video games and Web 2.0, and other forms of technology that march towards schools, forcing learners to carry a transformational change in their pockets in the of powerful multimedia handheld devices [1].

The Palestinian educational system has gone through hectic phases characterized by being restricted and governed by occupation starting from the British Mandate up to the Israeli Occupation. However, the Palestinians supported by determination and insistence to build up their state and infrastructure, they first started by developing and upholding the educational system. Thus, they jumped over all the challenges which could have stopped them forever, build up the Palestinian educational system, planning the future of education and put up solid pillars and plans, adopted new curricula based on research, and updated the criteria needed to judge, assess, and fulfill achievements. Therefore, many achievements are now on the ground expanding the number of Palestinian schools, adopting new educational methods and curricula [2].

These digital technologies have changed the traditional pedagogical paradigm, bypassing the educator to reach the student directly and revolutionize their learning experiences that require a lot of challenges in the way of thinking both critically and creatively. Thus, it is time to reflect if the Palestinian curricular and pedagogical approaches are congruent with the learning styles of this generation. Learners will not be working on routine information seeking and routine problem solving, but rather, they will forge new dynamic relationships and tackle novel challenges with sophisticated technology [3]. Therefore, the main challenge for educators is to move beyond the convergent thinking tasks of multiple-choice and recall assignments that are dominating educational practice.

To meet 21st-century expectations, educators, therefore, need to depart from the ideas and pedagogies of yesterday and become bold advocates to develop the sorts of learning dispositions needed for our learners and their work futures. This means spending less time explaining through instruction and investing more time in experimental and error-tolerant modes of engagement. This situation, Freire would have us believe, necessarily involves a process of inquiry. According to Freire, the teacher should not think for her students, nor can she impose her thoughts on them, for "the teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking".

Through the implementation of a curriculum that integrates design thinking and academic content, educators can help students develop a skill set that includes ideas generally not fostered within traditional school settings. This process would contribute to different levels of creative knowledge, creative skills, and creative mindsets that can be achieved by design thinking education, culminating in a capability that

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is called “creative confidence” [4,5]. Additionally, Friesen and Jardine showed that learning is the core business of schools – and today should be strengthened by classroom instruction that works for the 21st-century learner [6]. Schools whose curriculum and pedagogy fail to engage our younger generation as active learners and meaning creators are thus not doing justice to a nation’s development, especially when knowledge has become the power in a globalized world.

In the area of neuroscience, where much research interest has been cast on creativity, it is also now commonly accepted that activities associated with creative thinking produce differentiated patterns of activity across multiple regions of the brain [7]. The co-activation and communication among brain regions that are not ordinarily strongly connected during noncreative activities can now be stimulated by immersing the learner in processes that encourage them to demonstrate divergent thinking [7]. These findings thus augur well for design thinking as a learning approach in the 21st-century classroom.

Creative thinking is an important aspect of the educational process. It empowers students’ knowledge and facilitates learning. Teaching students’ creativity enables them to process situations’ inputs in innovative ways. It also allows for multiple representations of the material. Besides, it frees them from being constrained to memorize books and to adhere to teachers’ instructions. Unfortunately, Palestinian schools diminish the degree of enhancing creative thinking. The current curriculum and teaching strategies are reluctant to give up rote memorization and spoon-feeding.

Curricula don’t include creative materials and questions. Moreover, Schools don’t give teachers autonomy in their classes to decide what to teach. They are obliged to follow schools’ systems, specific textbooks, and lesson plans. There is no place for creative activities that allow students to deal with situations in new effective ways. Teacher-centered education in our schools limit the extent of students’ creativity. Teachers supply the student with exams’ possible questions and answers leaving no space for students’ creativity in answering them and dealing with new authentic situations. Students are turning into robots. They are expected to give predetermined defined answers to certain questions. This restricted the systematic educational process suppresses creativity, imagination, and innovation. Teaching policies that allow multiple answers, analysis and representations of material must be developed instead of seizing students’ abilities to merely memorize paragraphs, rules, and techniques.

Gebhard offered in his book methods to improve teachers of EFL classes’ skills to enhance students’ creativity [8]. He focused on communicating teaching English. His method depended on teaching students to comprehend spoken English and to conduct open dialogues among students. Additionally, he emphasized that these activities must not be separated from cultural situations. There is a consensus with Raba regarding the integration of cultural situations in enhancing students’ thinking. In this regard, Copeland illustrated that students are surrounded by a certain type of exam and expected to give defined predetermined answers [9,10].

But minimum creativity development endeavors facilitating students’ evolution are carried out. Copeland suggests Socratic circles as a technique to guarantee interlocutors and discussions managed by students. Moreover, the open dialogue circles strategy develops students thinking skills to become more effective individuals. Students will respect differences among them and work harmoniously. The study also discusses the effects of bringing classroom play activities on empowering creativity. On the other hand, play should be governed by rubrics to bring the desired results. As Anderson identified that “play depends on two rudimentary ingredients: safety and stimulation” [11].

Statement of the problem

During the researchers’ knowledge of teaching English for different academic levels, they have noticed that students don’t seem to have characteristics of creative thinking when dealing with English. They cannot think out of the box. This is because our educational system limits the extent of using creative thinking. Moreover, the curricula used in the Palestinian schools depend heavily on rote memorization and predetermined syllabi i.e. lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

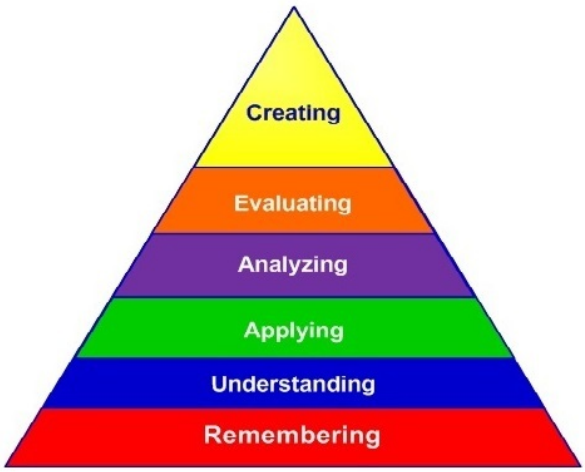

Figure1. lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Furthermore, schools and teachers neglect important creative activities as they are time consuming and hectic. This turns out to be even more problematic because the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education stated that one of the goals of the 2020 educational view is having high standard education. In essence, this research illuminates aspects that restrict creativity in the teaching process and seeks to propose solutions.

Significance of the study

Due to the importance of creative thinking in teaching, the researchers investigate obstacles that limit the extent to which creative thinking is practiced and the elements that lack creativity in our schools. Moreover, it aims to give recommendations to many parties to deal with these obstacles. As a result, teachers and those in positions i.e., policymakers and curriculum designers to make a change in the learning process could benefit from this study as a reference. The number of studies concerned with creativity in Palestinian schools is not adequate. Since we have a low level of creativity in our schools, studies like this should minimize the gaps that prevent the creative thinking elements in curricula.

Questions of the study

- To what extent do schools enhance the creative thinking of English learning?
- Are there any significant differences at (a=0.05) in the degree of teachers' opinion about the extent of schools enhancing creativity concerning specialization, gender, qualification, and years of experience?
- What are the possible solutions to enhance creative thinking skills in ESL classrooms?

Literature Review

A great number of studies were conducted dealing with creative thinking and the methods which could be applied to increase creativity. The literature review was arranged and categorized to be familiar with these previous studies. Creative thinking was defined as the skill to come up with "original, inventive and novel ideas" [12]. His definition of creativity revolves around authenticity and innovation. Not much different to Cropley, Sternberg referred to creative thinking as the ability to manage situations and solve problems in multiple various ways, to formulate new solutions without neglecting the original appropriate ones [12,13].

According to these definitions, creativity would help overcome the dominant way of teaching seeking to develop one answer and one way of thinking from students. These definitions encourage the multiplicity of opinions and solutions. When dealing with creativity as Lubart stated that both Creativity products and processes are distinguished mostly [14]. There is a tendency to separate and differentiate these aspects. Concerning creativity products, Magno considered "creativity is a product of an executed imagination" [15].

Imagination and innovation developed and enhanced to produce distinguished final results from learners. A creative product is judged by its genuineness and benefit (advantage) [16,17]. They consider the creative product to be a surprising and unexpected result. A result which no one has ever concluded before, Csikszentmihalyi mentioned that creative product is the result of analyzing information concerning the social and cultural surroundings [18]. Discarding the social and cultural facts wouldn't give applicable and reasonable solutions. Creative thinking requires imagination and to think out of the box in different ways, but that doesn't mean being illogical.

Regarding the creativity process, Torrance and Myers illustrated that the creative learning process is being able to identify problems, weakness, incompetence in knowledge, absence of elements, inconsistencies, and then; gathering available information; identifying deficiencies; searching for solutions, testing and retesting these solutions until reaching the perfect ones; and in the end having the results [19,20]. On the same principle depended Taylor when he identified the creative process as the elaboration of creative actions that will eventually lead to the production of creativity? Wallas defined four steps of the creative process: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification [21,22]. This consciousness led to the development of the Creative Problem Solving Model. This model dealt with teaching individuals to find and determine the problem, then gathering the necessary information and developing creative ideas about the possible solutions [23,24].

Moving toward another aspect which is bringing playing activities into the classroom. Many researchers promoted play strategies as a tool for enhancing creativity. Craft mentioned, "play is necessary to creativity, not all play is creative" [25]. As a result, teachers should set the purpose of play techniques and their effect in promoting creativity. Such activities aim to empower and develop students' imagination and to have novel perspectives toward situations. The ability to receive information from multiple perspectives and reconstructing the current knowledge is fundamental for those creative thinkers to accomplish their achievements [26]. Besides, Torrance that creativity growth includes both cognitive and affective characteristics [19]. If an effect is merged with imagination, the creativity will increase. "The ability to think imaginatively in a free-association style and to be open to thinking about affect-laden material being related processes".

What kills creativity accordingly using restricted situation choices? When students abide by the choices offered by the teacher to deal with situations they encounter, this means no space for creative thinking is allowed. Besides, much surveillance over students' work would make them hesitate to try new ideas. Also, they argued that focusing students' attention on expected evaluation or expected reward would minimize their motivation. If students put in mind that they are learning to perform an exam, this would strip the joy out of the learning process and replace it with anticipation and fear. All of the previously mentioned practices would paralyze students' imagination and their motives to try and experiment with new things.

According to Shehadeh and Dwaik teaching English in Palestine is influenced by many factors that would limit the extent of creativity [26]. For instance, a large number of students in each class, the limited class period time, and the few numbers of classes each week. All of them would limit the teachers' ability to deal with students individually. Also, the lack of technological resources to be used in classes would decrease the activities used creatively to teach the language communicatively instead of depending on textbooks.

On the same idea wrote Dajani and Mclauplin ascertained that students don't get enough attention due to their large number in each class which leaves them no opportunity to practice the language or communicate it [26]. Due to these reasons, creative thinking teaching is diminished and neglected. The teacher-centered approach in the process of teaching remains the only possible approach. They depend on textbooks as the only tool of teaching and students do the books exercise dully and routinely without any effort for creativity in the absence of a challengeable atmosphere. As Fennel noted English classes are designed to suit the standardized tests to pass [27].

Some suggestions could be practiced by EFL teachers to develop creativity consciousness among students and to seize the boundaries diminishing its effectiveness. Many researchers developed studies to find out possible methods to enhance creativity in teaching. Myers and Torrance focused on rewarding creative thinking in children [20]. This behavior would bring marvelous results in creative thinking and information processing enhancement. In the same context, supplied teachers with some tips to enhance creative attitudes in the classrooms: students are most creative when they enjoy what they are doing avoid using tangible rewards; don't construct competitive tasks; encourage children to keep track of their work; encourage children to develop their self-esteem and to concentrate on their strengths; let students feel the value of creativity [1-6].

Methodology

In this section, the researchers elaborate on the methodology that is adopted in this research paper. To enhance the quality of this study, the researchers use both qualitative and quantitative methods through two main instruments. It is also considered exploratory research because it seeks to uncover opinions and facts. This kind of research can be the baseline for further research.

Study population and sample

The study population consists of all English language teachers and math teachers in Nablus City schools. The study sample which was randomly selected consisted of male and female teachers of English [14]. Table shows the sample distribution according to the study's independent variables which are gender, qualification, and years of experience (Table 1).

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	5	35.7
	Female	9	64.3
Qualification	B.A	8	57.1
	M.A	6	42.9
Years of experience	Less than 5 years	10	71.4
	From 5-10 years	4	28.6
Total		14	100

Table 1. The distribution of the sample according to the independent variables.

Instrumentation

To serve the purpose of the study, the researchers carefully developed a 20-item questionnaire to tackle the study problem. These items were sent to experts in the field to take remarks and comments [5]. The four-question interview was also written carefully to understand the teachers' insights to achieve the study questions. The data will be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Statistical procedures

The researchers used frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages, Chronapach Alpha formula, T-test for two independent samples, and One Way ANOVA test.

Definition of terms

Creative thinking is the ability to deal with the situation and solve problems in novel (new) ways. Sternberg referred to creative thinking as the ability to manage situations and solve problems in multiple various ways, to formulate new solutions without neglecting the original appropriate ones [13].

Results of the Study

Results of the first question

Results of the first question "What is the degree of teachers' attitudes towards the extent that schools enhance creative thinking skill in EFL classes according to EFL teachers' perspectives? (Tables 2 and 3).

No	No. in the questioner	Item	Mean	Standard deviations	Percentage	Estimation Level
1	1	School encourages everything new in the teaching-learning process	3.07	0.73	61.4	Moderate
2	10	Class management develops creative thinking among students	3.07	0.47	61.4	Moderate
3	6	Creativity in schools is concerned	3.07	0.73	61	Moderate
4	9	School library is rich in books that enhance creative thinking	3.02	0.91	60.4	Moderate
5	5	Content limits teaching; still methodology is up to the teacher	3.01	0.66	60.2	Moderate
6	7	School has clear strategy about creative teaching	3	0.8	60	Moderate
7	2	School supports students' activities	3	0.75	60	Moderate
8	8	Teachers are free to teach creative ideas	2.35	1.21	47	Very low
9	4	School gives	2.35	1.08	47	Very low

		teachers autonomy in their own classrooms				
10	3	School gives creative homework	2.07	1.07	41.4	Very low
Total degree of the first domain (School)			2.71	0.42	52.4	Low

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, percentages, and estimation level.

No.	No. in the questioner	Item	Mean	Standard Deviations	Percentage	Estimation Level
11	11	Objectives have creative outputs	3.37	0.82	67.4	Moderate
12	12	Content is in line with creative thinking skills	3.22	0.67	64.4	Moderate
13	14	Curricula challenge the students' abilities	3.2	0.8	64.06	Moderate
14	20	Curricula encourage intelligence	3.18	0.82	63.6	Moderate
15	15	Contents is rich in high knowledge skills	3.14	1	62.8	Moderate
16	13	Contents meets the students' real life situations	3.14	0.84	62.8	Moderate
17	16	Content is more theoretical than practical ones	3.1	1	62	Moderate
18	18	Curricula motivate students to think rather than to memorize	3.07	1.34	61.4	Moderate
19	17	Curricula make the learning student-centered	3	1.15	60	Moderate
20	19	Curricula concentrate on creative questions	3	0.85	60	Moderate
Total degree of the second domain (Curricula)			3.11	0.55	62.2	Moderate

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, percentages and estimation level.

Table 1 show that the total degree of teachers' attitudes towards the extent that schools enhance creative thinking skills in English classes was 52.4 which is a low level of attitude. The highest percentage was given to the items "School encourages everything new in the teaching-learning process which was 61.4 and the same percentage was given to "Class management develops creative thinking among students and "Creativity and innovation in schools are concerned ".On the other hand, the lowest percentage was given to the item "School gives creative homework activities" which scored (41.4).

Table 2 shows that the total degree of teachers' attitudes towards the extent that schools enhance creative thinking skill in EFL classes according to EFL teachers' perspectives for the second domain (Curricula) was (62.2) which suggest a moderate level of attitudes. The highest percentage was given to the items "Curricula objectives have creative outputs "which scored (67.4), but it is still a moderate level. On the other hand, the lowest percentage was given to the item "Curricula concentrate on creative questions" which scored (60.0) and this means that the textbooks lack effective questions that enhance learners' thinking skills.

Results of the second study question

"Are there statistically significant differences at (α=0.05) level about EFL teachers' attitudes towards the extent that schools enhance creative thinking skill in EFL classes attributed to the variable of specialization, gender, qualification, and years of experience? To answer this question, the t-Test for Independent Samples and One Way ANOVA tests were used show the results (Tables 4-6).

Total Degree	Gender	N	Mean	S. D	T	Sig.*
	Male	5	3.07	0.31	-1.78	0.1
	Female	9	3.25	0.41		
The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Table 4. Independent sample t-test result of EFL teachers' attitudes due to gender.

Total Degree	Qualification	N	Mean	S. D	T	Sig.*
	B.A	8	3.04	0.47	0.297	0.772
	M.A	6	3.17	0.36		

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5. Independent two-sample t-test result of EFL teachers' attitudes due to qualification.

Total Degree	Experience	N	Mean	S. D	T	Sig.*
	01-May	10	3.11	0.43	1.423	0.18
	06-Oct	4	3.17	0.24		

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6. Independent sample t-test result of EFL teachers' attitudes due to experience.

The above tables show that there are no statistically significant differences at (α=0.05) level about the extent that schools enhance creative thinking skills in English classes due to the study independent variables: specialization, gender, qualification, and experience.

Results of the second study tool (The Interview)

Five teachers were randomly chosen and interviewed about the extent of schools enhancing creative thinking skills in EFL classes; they agreed that schools don't encourage everything creative and new in the teaching and learning process. They also agreed strongly curricula lack strategies for developing creative thinking among the students. These results are in line with the questionnaire mainly about the role of school in enhancing creative thinking among students. The same result about curricula objectives in the field of creative thinking is following the questionnaire results. Moreover, the interviewees supported the questionnaire results about the question of the suitability of the curricula with the students' creativity needs. They agreed that curricula don't meet the needs of the students in the teaching-learning process. Additionally, they agreed that the role-play technique could be used in the classroom to enhance imagination, students' roles, and self-esteem in the classroom. Also, some of them suggested discussion groups and debate discussion among students to make their participation more prominent. They reinforced their responses by mentioning that training sessions could be conducted for the same subject for both teachers and students to ensure success.

Discussion

According to the teachers, schools don't encourage everything new; class management restricts creative thinking development. Students are not given the chance to think out of the box in different ways. The researchers attributed the lack of these applications to the ministry and school regulations in regard to covering the material. They don't have enough time to apply strategies such as role-play; problem-solving and brainstorming that enhance students thinking skills. Teachers are in a real race to finish the heavy and overloaded content. The researchers think that both the English and the math curricula lack activities the challenge students' high thinking skills, so as a temporary solution for this, could be the inclusion of supporting materials deriving from the real-life situations and the appropriate selection of homework items to complete the missing link of the curricula [28-33].

Special attention should be directed to the selected content of the subject which has a magnificent role to attract the student's attention and encourage them to think more creatively, fantastic ones could make a great deal to the thinking process. The teachers' responses show no statistically significant differences in their attitudes towards the extent that schools enhance creative thinking skills in EFL classes attributed to the variables of specialization, gender, qualification, and years of experience. The researchers attributed these results to the fact that the lack of new methods of teaching, particularly, in the field of teaching and learning languages. The researchers predicted that any study about the use of modern methods of teaching or any new method in the field of teaching might reveal the importance of these new approaches.

Conclusion

- Based on the study results, the researchers recommended the following:
- New teaching trends that create creativity should be included in the curricula.
- Extensive lessons with new teaching methods should be designed in a way that increases the students' motivation and participation in the classroom.
- Teachers and students whether males or females should be trained well to master the new developments in teaching-learning about creativity.
- New activities and homework assignments that suit the students' levels and needs should be the most important in the teaching process. For example, play a strategic role in increasing imagination and creativity.

This research also recommends the faculty members to use Bloom's Taxonomy in their teaching. It helps them to overcome the inflexibility of the curriculum. Adopting new effective teaching styles and evaluates students based on higher levels of the taxonomy i.e. analyzing, evaluating, and creating which can lead to successful learning. It also helps students to go out of the traditional environment of teaching. A good teacher can use this method to attract all students to the curricula especially those who have poor memorizing skills. This paper supposes that students with poor memorizing skills might achieve better results if the teacher evaluates them using the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

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