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EMPOWERING STUDENTS' CREATIVITY IN MAKING SENSE OF ENGLISH TEXTS WITH THE USE OF HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS

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Abstract

The essence of the 2013 curriculum is to trigger students to be creative learners in the sense that they are encouraged to be the agent of change rather than the object of change. This implies that students of any level of education serve as a centre of teaching and learning practices in order that they could optimally gain the target language (English). With the use of their creativity, they are able to make use of English in some communicative events both in the spoken and written form. In other words, students' creativity becomes one of the learning devices to construct and deconstruct English language as rendered in the form of texts on the grounds that students' creativity serves as a determinant factor to gain success for acquiring the target language. In reference to this issue, empowering students' creativity should be highlighted by English teachers of any level of education. To do so, English teachers are encouraged to promote the use of high-order thinking skills when students are involved in a series of English language teaching and learning as creativity is closely related to thinking skills. Students should be facilitated to use their higher order thinking skills when they are involved in making sense of English texts. In reference to this issue, this paper then presents some theoretical justification and practical ways to empower students' creativity with the use of higher-order thinking skills to engage in making sense of English texts.

Keywords: *higher order thinking skills* *creativity* *receptive language skills*

INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning process of secondary schools tend to give an emphasis on memorisation, form-focus, testing practices, and the like (Margana, 2009). This means that students are imposed to memorise the systemic knowledge of language such as phonological knowledge (about the sounds which consist of segmental and supra-segmental elements), morphological knowledge (about part of speech like nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, preposition, and the like), and syntactic knowledge (about subject-verb agreement; functional analysis such as subject, verb, object, adverb; type of sentences like simple sentence, complex sentence, compound sentences).

Besides, in teaching receptive skills, namely listening and reading, English teachers tend to apply testing practices. In this case, students are asked to read texts followed by answering questions with regard to the texts provided and discussing the answers of the comprehension questions classically. Also, the process of English

language teaching is dominated by English teachers. In other words, they tend to apply teacher-centred model which assumes that students serve as the objects of learning. This means that English teachers should provide the linguistic input as much as possible so that students could memorise and imitate what their teachers express. Added to this, the concept of the English language teaching and learning is habit-formation.

The above practices are frequently found in any level of education such as junior high school, senior high school, vocational high school, even university levels. Margana (2009) states that English teachers of senior high schools tend to apply teacher-centred as the English teachers dominate the process of English language teaching and learning. Added to this, they focus on the language form rather than the function of language. Also, English teachers tend to apply a lecturing method as the most dominant method used in the process of English language teaching and learning. Only do some English teachers use media and various techniques. English teachers give an emphasis on developing lower order thinking skills which are concerned with identifying and memorising the systemic knowledge. As a result, students of senior high schools do not acquire the target language optimally. In addition, students of secondary school levels are not creative in learning target language because students are driven to be engaged in lower-order thinking skills, namely receiving, reciting, or participating in routine practices. Very rarely are students engaged in simple reproduction of knowledge. Most of students tend to only depend on their English teachers.

As a matter of fact, creativity is necessary for students of secondary school levels on the grounds that creativity is of great importance to maximally acquire the target language. Creativity is an essential factor to determine the success of second language learning as it can drive second language learners to establish their autonomous learning. Once the second language learners have autonomous learning, they could develop themselves to be successful language learning (Margana, 2009).

In reference to above issue, this paper attempts to provide a theoretical justification of the importance of students' creativity in making sense of written texts with the use of higher order thinking skills. It aims at raising awareness on the part of students of secondary schools to establish their own creativity, which is fruitful for them to successfully grab the intended meaning as performed in written texts. Added to this, some practical ways to raise students' creativity are also explored. The establishment of students' creativity is in line with the essence of the 2013 curriculum which highly advocates that the English language teaching learning process should be devoted to raise students' creativity.

THE NOTIONS OF CREATIVITY

The term *creativity* is considered as one of the internal factors, which seems to be a determinant factor in second language learning. Torrance (2004) claims that a creativity refers to establishment of being intelligent, imaginative, original, curious, artistic, energetic and open minded. It refers to learners' intelligence (Robinson, 2001, p. 7) and the creative potential in learners which deals with transforming their modes of thinking, acting and expressing otherwise they would be impoverished and lead limited lives (Bell, 2001, p. 87). In support of the definition, Plucker, Beghetto, and Dow (2004, p. 90) define 'creativity as the interaction among aptitude, process and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context'. Kartasidou (2004) adds that creativity is 'a complex human behaviour based on the interaction between creative thinking and creative production and encompasses knowledge, ability, perception, understanding, acceptance, interaction and communication'. In reference to the explored definitions, creativity is closely related to thinking skills of the learners.

In relation to creativity, Amabile (2012:3-4) documents four components of creativity. They include (1) domain-relevant skills, (2) creativity-relevant process, (3) task motivation, and (4) social environment. Domain-relevant skills deal with 'knowledge, expertise, technical skills, intelligence, and talent in the particular domain where the problem-solver is working'. Creativity-relevant process comprises 'a cognitive style and personality characteristics which are conducive to independence, risk-taking, and taking new perspectives on problems, as well as a disciplined work style and skills in expressing ideas'. These cognitive processes include the ability to employ broad, flexible categories for constructing information and the ability to deconstruct perceptual and performance "scripts." The personality processes embody self-discipline and a tolerance for ambiguity. Task motivation deals with the employment of the intrinsic motivation to carry out a task or to overcome a problem on the grounds that it is interesting, involving, personally challenging, or satisfying – rather than undertaking it out of the extrinsic motivation arising from contracted-for rewards, surveillance, competition, evaluation, or requirements to do something in a particular way. Therefore, creativity is concerned with individual intrinsic motivation to create something new. The social environment deals with social aspects, which could stimulate or even block the individual creativity.

More specifically, Sharp (2004) proposes some components of being creative which include (1) imagination, (2) originality, (3) productivity, (4) problem solving, and (5) innovation. Imagination is the base of creativity as it deals with the use of high-order thinking skills to create something. Originality refers to the ability to generate ideas and

products which are novel and marked. Productivity means the ability to produce a variety of distinctive ideas through divergent thinking. Problem solving refers to the utilisation of knowledge and imagination with regard to a given context of a situation. Innovation is concerned with the ability to generate a novel outcome of value and worth.

According to Blagg (1999), creativity should be designed to bring new, different and unexpected responses to a situation and to enhance fluency, flexibility and originality in students. In support of it, Moony (1999) describes creativity as a creative product produced by a creative learner under particular conditions. This implies that being creative refers to making some thing new with the use of thinking skills that exist in learners' mind. In other words, creativity deals with the activation of thinking skills. Irfan (2012) states that creativity has become much more general and linked to effective learning and thinking generally. Added to this, Khan (2011) states creativity motivates second language learners to maximally learn English as a second language. That is why the aim of the English language teaching and learning at secondary school level in particular, should be directed to making efforts to develop students' creativity through the development of critical thinking as a national endeavour.

The term *thinking skill* refers to the activation of the mind to cope with any tasks. It should be recognized as an important competence for students to acquire in academic language (Connolly, 2000). This implies that the use of thinking skills is a must for students in order that they could optimally gain the target language. This is in line with Kabilan (2000) who states students need to be able to think creatively and critically when they use the target language because the use of language as a communication device does not really facilitate students to become proficient in the target language. In this context, students should be able to use their critical thinking to gain success in second language learning on the grounds that critical thinking deals with the use of information, experience, and general knowledge in many ways which stimulate students to search alternatives, make inferences, pose questions, and solve problems, thereby signaling understanding in a variety of complex ways (Liaw, 2007).

Theoretically, thinking skill can be classified into two types, namely lower-order thinking skills and higher-order thinking skills (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The former is defined as a type of thinking which requires a receptive skill. The latter is concerned with productive skill. Higher-order thinking skills involve the transformation of information and ideas. This transformation occurs when students combine facts and ideas and synthesise, generalise, explain, hypothesise or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation. (Department of Education Queensland, 2002, p. 1).

Bloom in Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) identifies lower-order thinking skills into two categories, namely remembering and understanding. Remembering skills consist of some thinking skills which include (1) recalling, (2) informing, (3) recognising, (4) listing, (5) describing, (6) retrieving, (7) naming, (8) finding ideas, (9) explaining ideas or concepts, and the like. Understanding skills embody some skills such as interpreting, summarising, paraphrasing, and classifying. On the other hand, higher order thinking skills consist of some thinking skills. They include (1) applying (using information in another familiar situation, Implementing, carrying out, using, executing), (2) analysing (breaking information into parts to explore understandings and relationships, comparing, organising, deconstructing, interrogating, etc), (3) evaluating (justifying a decision or course of action, checking, hypothesising, critiquing, experimenting, judging, etc), and (4) creating (generating new ideas, products, or ways of viewing things, designing, constructing, planning, producing, inventing, and others).

In reference to those types of thinking skills, English teachers of secondary school levels should encourage their students to maximally use their thinking skills when they are involved in the process of English language teaching and learning as manifested in the given tasks generated from macro-language skills and micro-language skills. In other words, those thinking skills should be explicitly established in the process of teaching listening, reading, speaking, and writing practices with regard to students' characteristics and the level of education.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVITY

It is evident that creativity plays an important role in second language learning on the grounds that having creativity facilitates students to easily capture both systemic knowledge and schematic knowledge which become the determinant factors to the success of second language learning. This implies that second language learners who have high creativity seem to be successful in acquiring the target language. For example, when they want to make sense of written texts, they could use their creativity to deconstruct the texts by looking at the language aspects such as lexical and grammatical words used in the texts and analysing the functions of the lexical words existing in a series of sentences which build the paragraphs. Added to this, with the use of their creativity, they could analyse the texts in reference to the schematic knowledge which comprise four aspects, namely general knowledge, thematic knowledge, genre knowledge, and socio-cultural knowledge.

With the use of their creativity, second language learners could activate their general knowledge to grasp the meaning of the difficult words found in the texts by linking

their prior knowledge to the texts that they read. They also could make use of their creativity to activate their knowledge of the thematic knowledge in the sense that the use of a particular lexical item is restricted according to its domain. The second language learners' creativity facilitates them to employ the knowledge of genre in the sense that English texts could be categorised according to their text types such as narrative, recount, exposition, description, and the like. By classifying the texts according to their genre, the second language learners could identify the characteristics of each type that facilitates them to easily make sense of the texts. With the utilisation of the creativity, second language learners could make use of the socio-cultural knowledge to grab the message of the texts on the grounds that texts are constrained with socio-cultural issues. In conclusions, the creativity of the second language learners becomes the key factor to the success of second language learning, in making sense of text in particular.

HOW TO RAISE STUDENTS' CREATIVITY

As clearly explained above, second language learners' creativity serves an important role in making sense of texts. It is of great importance to raise students' creativity on the grounds that having high creativity could facilitate them to deal with second language learning. In reference to this, the following presents how to raise students' creativity with the use of high order thinking skills.

There are many ways to raise students' creativity. To do so, English teachers have to activate high order thinking skills with the use of some various ways of teaching because creativity is closely related to thinking skill development. Fisher (2011) documents some ways to promote higher order skills which include the application of collaborative learning, experiential learning, problem-based learning, outcome-focused learning, interdisciplinary and multi-context learning, systems of thinking, high level discussion, interactive questioning, action based research, and peer reflection and challenge. In line with the statement, Prentice (2000:154) urges that students' active involvement is a key feature to develop their creativity. This suggests that students should be driven to be actively involved in the process of their own learning.

The application of collaborative learning offers students to be actively involved in the process of English language teaching and learning. This also happens with other models of teaching and learning such as experiential learning, problem-based learning, outcome-focused learning, interdisciplinary and multi-context learning which accommodate students' involvements. Margana (2013) states that students' involvement in the process of English language teaching and learning should be highly prioritised on the grounds that it can leads to deep learning which is of great importance to deal with a

“complex personal development process which involves the change of perceptions, learning habits and epistemological beliefs” (Wingate, 2007: 395). Added to this, it confers “student meaningful involvement in English tasks, accentuating underlying meanings, main ideas, themes and principles, refining ideas, using evidence and applying that knowledge across contexts” (Biggs & Tang, 2007; McCune & Entwistle, 2000). With the employment of experiential learning model as a part of deep learning approach, students serve as the agent of the change not the object of change.

Beside those models, English teachers are encouraged to apply the scientific-based teaching as advocated in the 2013 curriculum. The approach comprises six steps which include observing, questioning, associating, experimenting, networking, and creating. In the first step, students are encouraged to observe the given texts which are seen from different angles. In other words, students are guided to observe the text with the use of systemic knowledge and schematic knowledge. In the second step, students are guided to create questions about the given texts. In the third step, students are encouraged to make a link between the given text and the relevant issues that they have captured in their mind. In the fourth step, students are assisted to analyse the texts. In the fifth step, students are encouraged to make a discussion with other friends. In the last step, students are encouraged to create a similar text.

The utilisation of systems of thinking, high level discussion, interactive questioning, action-based research, and peer reflection and challenge also establish the creativity of the students as those activities drive students to perform their meaningful involvements, mutual interaction and cooperation among the students so that the students have opportunities to express and share their ideas, to deconstruct and construct texts, to evaluate the texts, and others with the use of different angles of the text analysis. This could enrich students’ learning experience which is applicable to undertaking other language tasks.

USE OF STUDENTS’ CREATIVITY IN MAKING SENSE OF WRITTEN TEXTS

As previously explained, making sense of English written texts requires two types of knowledge, namely systemic knowledge and schematic knowledge (Hedge, 2008; Margana, 2013). To maximally activate the two types of knowledge, second language learners need creativity to gain the intended meaning owned by the writers. To do so, they have to activate higher-order thinking skills in order that the understanding of the texts could be stored in the long-term memory which can be recalled any time when needed. This implies that second language learners do not only rely on literal comprehension as performed in every word of a text but also on the other types of comprehension which

include inferential, evaluative and applicative comprehension which deal with implied meaning. Those comprehensions require high-order thinking skills. In relation to this, the following presents the application of the creativity in making sense of written texts with the use of higher-order thinking skills.

Human beings struggled against weeds since the beginnings of agriculture. Marring is one of the milder effects of weeds – any plants that thrive where they are unwanted. They clog waterways, destroy wildlife habitats, and impede farming. Their spread eliminates grazing areas and accounts for one-third of all crop loss. They compete for sunlight, nutrients, and water with useful plants.

The global need for weed control had been answered mainly by the chemical industry. Its herbicides are effective and sometimes necessary, but some pose serious problems, particularly if misused. Toxic compounds threaten animal and public health when they accumulate in food plants, groundwater, drinking water. They also harm workers who apply them.

In recent years, the chemical industry has introduced several herbicides that are more ecologically sound. Yet new chemicals alone cannot solve the world's weed problems. Hence, scientists are exploring the innate weed-killing powers of living organism, primarily insects and micro-organism.

The biological agents now in use are environmentally benign and are harmless to humans. They can be chosen for their ability to attack selected targets and leave crops and other plants untouched. In contrast, some of the most effective chemicals kill virtually all the plants they come in contact with sparing only those that are naturally resistant or have been genetically modified for resistance. Furthermore, a number of biological agents can be administered only once, after which no added applications are needed. Chemicals typically must be used several times per growing seasons.

Taken from Rogers (1999)

In reference to the above texts, students are asked to handle the tasks which activate higher-order thinking skills. The tasks are exemplified below.

No.	Steps of Teaching	Tasks
01.	Observing	Observe the texts in terms of the purpose, generic structure, and topic of the texts.
02.	Questioning	Make 5 questions based on the text given.
03.	Associating	Make a link between the topic and the real life.
04.	Experimenting	Analyse the main ideas and supporting details of the given text.
05.	Networking	In group of threes, share your understanding with your friends.
06.	Creating	Make a short version of the text.

The above tasks provide students with a lot of opportunities to be actively involved in the process of making sense of the text with the use of higher-order thinking skills. This relies on the theory that students should be the center of the learning practices or the agents of change. In other words, students are encouraged to perform meaningful involvement in handling the task. This directly or indirectly establishes the creativity on the part of the students.

CONCLUSIONS

In reference to the above discussion, it is evident that creativity plays an important role in the process of English language teaching and learning on the grounds that it could facilitate them to maximally acquire the target language. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to select some appropriate teaching and learning models to trigger their students to apply their critical thinking, particularly higher-order thinking skills as those skills could establish the creativity of second language learners. Some appropriate learning models include collaborative learning, experiential learning, problem-based learning, outcome-focused learning, interdisciplinary and multi-context learning, systems of thinking, high level discussion, interactive questioning, action-based research, and peer reflection and challenge. Those learning models provide students with active involvement in the process of English language teaching and learning, for example in making sense of written English texts with the use of higher-order thinking skills as discussed above.

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