
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Developing Intermediate School Students' Creative Thinking in (EFI) English for Iraq

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| ABSTRACT

Creativity is defined as the screen that shows the hidden ideas of the human mind. It is the product of deep thinking about a specific problem or thing, which has different faces, the most important of which is writing. Writing is a skill of producing creative texts without grammatical mistakes using an attractive style with poetic or rhetorical language, i.e. it translates students' imaginations and thoughts on papers. Iraqi Ministry of Education is one of the educational institutions that is interested in developing students' creativity using many techniques. Therefore, the ministry makes many changes to its educational programs, such as the English curriculum. The new curriculum is called English for Iraq (EFI). The current paper depends on qualitative methods of research to seek how the technique of EFI of the intermediate schools develops students' creative thinking by using writing skills as a creative means that produces three books: scrapbook, school magazine and collection of short stories. The researcher focuses on the three books of the intermediate stage, which are 1st, 2nd, and 3rd intermediate.

| KEYWORDS

Communicative approach, a project of writing, productive process.

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1. Introduction

Some Iraqi curriculums have been changed in recent years, such as the English language. It has been changed twice for all school levels. The last change started in 2014. The book is transformed from being restricted to grammatical rules based on the structural method in teaching into an interesting one concerning with communicative approach (CLT). It looks like a magazine that includes many entertaining topics such as stories, poetry, articles and TV—programs as well as scientific facts. The communicative approach is a method of teaching language by activating real communication among learners in the classroom. According to this approach, the learner is the center of the class, and the teacher is a director. It motivates students' creativity through developing learning depending on the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Zakime, 2018, para.1). One important technique that promotes students' creativity at the intermediate stage is the written project. Often, teachers focus on the goals that produce a perfect written text, and they restrict their students by choosing a specific topic according to specific rules. However, schools can free students by providing space to encourage self-writing, relying upon that writing can be a craft, an art, or both. People can be creative in writing using the acquired skills and the ability to group words together in a reasonable way. They can also consider writing as a creative art that makes the person a professional. Art or professionalism can lead to writing great literary text (Donovan, 2017, para.17). The magic of creativity in writing is a hybrid product of blending art with proficiency, so perhaps a person's imagination is captivated by a poem that transports him/ her from one place to another through reading. There is an ancient belief said that people are born as creative or that they gain it from their environment. For as long as persons can learn writing as a skill, they can learn creativity as an art. Just as some people have a natural inclination towards creative thinking, others tend to promote and familiarize this creativity (ibid, para.2). The study aims to investigate the development of creative thinking among intermediate school students on the project of writing in the new Iraqi English curriculum EFI for 1st, 2nd and 3rd intermediate classes. It sheds light on writing as a productive process of creativity, explains the writing projects for each class, discusses them to obtain results, and then produce a conclusion

2. Literature Review

When we discuss writing as creativity, we take up into consideration writing as a productive process in the curriculum. Writing across the curriculum is a movement that emerged at the end of the 1970s and has great importance today. It is designed to strengthen children's critical thinking by asking them to write with all their efforts. Writing is an essential skill in life. It does not only help learners succeed in school but also take an important and effective role in the world. It became necessary in the world of communication. Every day we communicate through a written word or text by email. When students enter primary or secondary schools in a specific field, they are expected to use their own computers and write strong texts without mistakes according to their chosen field. Studies have shown that writing helps to reinforce student's educational achievement in all aspects. It activates him\her to collect, classify and reorganize information on paper according to his\her perspective. Writing is one of the most comprehensive brain exercises for students, including reading, writing and motor coordination (Dalporto, 2014, para. 2, 2014). It is called a productive process because it focuses on the final pattern presented by the learner. The student will be productive by copying and transforming the samples found in their books or given by their teachers. They begin from the first stage, choose, write a draft and then conclude with correction. This develops students' knowledge, especially in terms of grammatical structures. The purpose of writing as a product is to emphasize the importance of the written text features, which must be produced by the writer; usually this type of writing company with the sample, must be analyzed in order to make a plan to write a similar or parallel text. This point is the most important as a useful source for correction; moreover, it is the most "effective learning tool" in the process of writing. Writing helps learner learns faster and more deeply and expresses his\her creativity by his\her own words (Likaj, 2015, p.2). Learners can produce a creative expression. It is an expression of ideas, beliefs and opinions combined with feelings in a beautiful rhetorical literary language mixed with elements of thrill and excitement to attract the reader. There are many who have the skill of creative expressions, such as story writers, playwrights, poets, and journalists (ToKnow, 2018, para. 1). Defiantly, it is not easy to be creative. Creativity is not something people are born with. It comes easier to some people than others (Donovan, 2017 para. 2). It must be practised as an exercise, just like the exercise of the muscle. Those who practice creativity more find it much easier to be more creative because they are used to it. Gradual writing keeps creativity muscle developing and working amongst all the other benefits it brings (Kenny, 2010 para.3). Therefore the project f writing takes developing form through three stages 1st, 2nd and 3rd intermediate. As if it does an exercise for students' brains.

3. Method

The researcher uses a qualitative research strategy, which is based on interpretation. The study limits to explain the development of intermediate students' creative thinking through the project of writing in the three books: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd intermediate of the curriculum "English for Iraq". The used information is collected from the internet as well as books of English for Iraq. The procedures are general information about creativity, information about writing as a productive process across the curriculum, information about the project of writing at the three intermediate stages: 1st, 2nd and 3rd, discussion for the project of writing; how it develops students' creative thinking and then a conclusion.

3.1 The project of writing at an intermediate stage

One of the most important topics that help students to develop their creative imagination is the project of writing at Iraqi intermediate schools. 1st intermediate project is taking a gradual form. Unit 1 is the starting point for the year project, which is called "Scrapbook". It provides students with a few steps to make a scrapbook. Then they select photos or cut some from newspapers and magazines. If they do not have, they can draw pictures according to their interest. After that, they paste them into their scrapbooks. Finally, they write the names of their scraps (O'Neill & Snow, 2014, [SB]: p.10). This unit is preparation for (choosing ideas) and writing (spelling). Unit 2 is more specific; it teaches students to make a scrapbook about the weather. Students here choose photos about Iraqi weather. Then they must write the names of seasons, months, temperature, and the adjectives that belong to each season. They can also write a few sentences describing seasons and weather, for example, about Iraq or anyone else, depending on news or weather forecast. They can also find poems about seasons (p.15). In unit 3, students find out pictures of people illustrating moods and feelings. Then they write mood adjectives for their pictures and think of reasons for a specific feelings. Here students can be encouraged to draw speech bubbles and write what the person is saying about the cause of his/her mood (p.23). Unit 5: each student or group of students collects pictures of famous sights from around the world and finds out the English names with a short descriptions. They can write about historical sites in Iraq, such as Ur (p.38). Unit 6 is about a penfriend. The student collects information about his/ her pen friend in different countries or imagines that he/she has a pen friend. He / She can depend on the information in unit five about four countries and he\ she also can collect pictures from newspapers or magazines about a certain country. Then he\ she writes a short paragraph in his/her scrapbook. Students can write about themselves as Iraqi and find out pen friends from their country or other countries (p.44). In Unit 7, Students write instructions on how to be safe: at the street, at the house and at parks. They can draw or collect pictures. They can also write the instructions in English and translate them into Arabic. Students can use the instructions on his\her textbook (p.58). In each unit, there is a sample that resembles the project of the unit.

2nd intermediate project is more developed than 1st intermediate. Students here must write paragraphs in different subjects: cartoons, interviews, jokes, letters, poetry, problems, puzzles, school events, sport, stories and town events. Then they organize them all in one project, which is called "the school magazine". Students have to work as a team. From the first unit, the teacher selects four students with him\ her to be a team. Students from different classes write and put their writing in a box. The job of this team is to choose from this box the best articles to be published in the school magazine. Unit 1 shows the details of the magazine; the team, the items and how to print and publish. It is an introductory unit for starting a magazine. This work continues to the end of the year. Students should choose topics with suitable photos and headlines, write a draft then correct the final sample. They can get benefits from articles in the *Student's Book*. (O'Neill & Snow, 2015, [SB]: p.4).

3rd intermediate project takes a narrative mode. It sets students' freedom to choose and express themselves. At the end of the year, each group's ideas are blended with the help of the teacher in the form of the short story. The teacher has a great role in the first three units in explaining the elements of the story and gradually preparing his students' imaginations for creativity. He\she clarifies the story, its devices, and how can they use words to write stories? In unit 1, the teacher focuses orally on the plot devices to stimulate his\her students' attention. This way create an enjoyable atmosphere attracts students' volition to discuss many programs and explain their plots. In unit two teacher reads the story of the "stork" as a sample to show structural devices and illuminate where the beginning, middle and end should be. Then he \she gives students a chance to divide different stories by themselves as groups according to beginning, middle and end. Unit 3 focuses on the language. It shows how words are very important to construct sentences. How (adj.), (adv.), (v.), (pron.) and (n.) are important. Teachers can use the spider diagram for explaining and asking their students to form sentences from these words. Finally, he \she asks them to fill the table of ex 1. At this point, students become ready to write what they imagine. The teacher helps them to choose titles or suggests some by him\herself. Students are prepared orally to write a story in the previous three units. In units 5 & 6: students are planning, writing and checking. Unit 7 is the time for students' creative production, which is called "storytelling" (O'Neill & Snow, 2015, [SB]: ps. 82-85).

4. Discussion

Teachers usually ask their students to write topics that are found in their books to help them develop their writing abilities. Their writing may be influenced by their cognitive abilities, behavior, and teamwork (Foong, 1999, p.1). In order to help students develop their writing skills, a suitable learning curriculum must be chosen. The writing should be based on helping the student choose how to use the topics and arrange them in a way that shows their creativity (Ionescu, n. d. p.5). Writing in 1st intermediate stage enables students to get more vocabulary and reinforce sentences syntax in order to develop their ability to write a short text through a series of sentences. The project of this stage includes teaching students how to collect pictures of certain subjects and organize them in a scrapbook (O'Neill & Snow, 2014, [TB]: p.22). They are prepared orally, then planned and finally written a draft. They must know the correct dictation, grammatical rule and spelling during writing (O'Neill & Snow, 2014, [TB]: p.23, 2015). There is a new subject in each unit with a sample to help students make parallel ones. This project activates students' minds, which is called brainstorming. They begin thinking, choosing photos and words, planning then organizing everything in their scrapbook. The teacher has a great role in encouraging students, explaining ideas, helping them to choose and finally correcting the final drafts. The teacher must not punish his students for a bad products. He/she must also create a fresh atmosphere to help them think well. Researchers have found that the level of creativity of an individual differs according to the things that have negative or positive effects on his/ her mood. For example, a person will be creative in his/ her work if he\ she was happy the day before and vice versa. Feelings of fear, anger and sadness reduce his\her creativity, while feelings of happiness, joy, and comfort increase it (Kenny, 2020, p.2). The process of writing multiple copies of a student's project in order to reform sentences and correct the grammatical mistakes gives him\her more skillfulness than the student who copies any subject as it is. This is simply because the latest does not do much research or any research at all. The exchange of views among students as a group helps them to understand their subjects and write the final draft skillfully (ibid).

Magazines are natural sources of language learning, as they consist of many words of various linguistic connotations. It contributes to enriching students' vocabulary and cultural information. Moreover, magazines and newspapers are changed daily with new topics and headlines (Laureta, 2009, P.3). They are not limited to fixed subjects as books. These topics also differ in writing styles, such as scientific, news or literary articles, and stories and poetry. This, in turn, helps students to be creative by showing them different samples of texts. It also creates an atmosphere of entertainment and breaks the routine that is found in schoolbooks (p.4). 2nd intermediate project of writing is designed as a magazine. Therefore, each student can search different magazines and choose a topic that fits his\ her favorites. He\ she can make use of the styles and vocabulary to write parallel text with a different subjects. The students work independently without the teacher's directions (O'Neill & Snow, 2015, [TB]: ps. 28-29). They are free to choose the information according to the magazine items. They have the ability to promote real communication to get an opportunity to develop their language skill, especially writing. They are free to go to collect information as reporters; for example, doing interviews with famous people or writing articles about specific events in their country, town or school. Defiantly, there are talented students who need an opportunity to prove it. Many ideas and meanings are inherent in the minds that need to be generated or explored. Writing is the way to show ideas and solve problems. As it is considered the third space, in which the views

are blended, ideas are converged, beliefs are discussed, and experiments are laid out. Writing enables people to discover hidden minds and feelings. It is a kind of creation and novelty (Carter, 2016, p.6). It is considered a social activity whether it is an individual or collaborative effort; because it is produced within a web that links the writer to the reader, "the audience" (para.24). According to *Teacher's Book* of 2nd intermediate, some students have the role of a committee of the magazine. They work as editors to the rest class' contributions. The committee makes a decision on what inclusion and exclusion in the presentation is. Students can collect information from various magazines, even Arabic, and translate them into English. This is a good opportunity to develop their ability of translation (O'Neill & Snow, 2015, [TB]: ps. 28-29). To get creative writing, there must be a creative writer. Here comes the role of the teacher in establishing a community of students as authors. Where students live the experience, follow the news, search for topics, exchange ideas and work as groups with the help of the teacher and their other colleagues, they are being more creative (Carter, 2016. para.24). Some believe that writing an article about a specific topic is a "waste of time". On the contrary, it is an exercise that helps to flow the individual's creative juice. This activity can help to improve the writing techniques and methods (9+ *Article Writing Examples*, n. d., para.1). 2nd intermediate project is based on developing student creativity by writing various articles for the school magazine as an exercise to improve their writing skills and develop their creativity. It is not easy for students to write essays. However, their skills will develop little by little. Writing articles helps them develop and improve their communicative skills and harness their creativity. As such, the student is the one who sets the starting point for writing a specific topic, and this may encourage him/her to pursue journalism or any other course that provides the opportunity to write about his\ her favorite subject (para.9.) In addition showing students' names in the published magazine is a matter of encouragement to stimulate them to develop their English writing that will be seen publicly (O'Neill & Snow, 2015, [SB]: p.33). The success of learning is measured by students' responses and the quality of the works that they will produce (Carter, 2016, para.28).

The project of 3rd intermediate is "telling the story". It is built on collaborative work. Students work as groups to develop their ideas through critical thinking to make their stories more interesting. There is a list of titles and some sentences to help them begin their stories in different scopes such as mystery, science fiction, horror, comedy, human endeavour and adventure (O'Neill & Snow, 2016, [TB]: p.8). Writing the short stories as group work in the classroom contributes to developing student's interest to be successful authors in the future. It grows their self-confidence to express the things they like. It has an important impact on the student's creativity. It enables them to present their personal creativity inaccurate linguistic structures and motivates them to develop this creativity in various aspects of life. Moreover, they can practice "self-discipline" and improve their language skills. Therefore, they will produce new ideas that enhance their thinking critically and broaden their understanding of imaginary and real things (*The Advantages of Short Story*, 2016, para.1). The story is considered the heart of the English language. In a broader sense, teacher's story or students' stories and the endless flow of others' stories and all types of writing are a reflection of stories regardless of the method and quality of their narration and times. A news article, scientific report, or diary are types of communication for conveying ideas to a specific audience through narration for several purposes. To tell a story means you are alive. Therefore, the story has a vital role in life as the Italian philosopher "Umberto Eco's" (1932-2016) sentence: "to survive you must tell stories (Carter, 2016, para.5). An English lesson gives learners an opportunity that cannot be found in other lessons, as it enables students to learn and get new vocabulary, as well as broaden their perceptions and understanding to others through authoring their own stories in the English language. Students are free in choosing the subjects of their writing. They will be more creative when they write about events from their real-life (para.6). This means they can write their life story or any ideas that touch their feelings from their daily events. It will also be an opportunity to discover new little authors.

5. Results

1st intermediate: At the end of the year, students have little proficiency in creative writing by practising thinking, choosing, organizing and writing throughout the study year. Consequently, they can produce various types of scrapbooks according to their thinking and writing.

2nd intermediate: The students will be creative in publishing their own magazine at the end of each year, which includes their own ideas and contributions.

3rd intermediate: Students will be creative in producing a collection of different short stories that are colored with their own thoughts and imagination

6. Conclusion

The previous discussion concludes that developing creative thinking for intermediate school students according to English for Iraq (EFI) gradually develops. It sequences from easy to difficult, as it qualifies students' thinking and creative expression systematically. This form also strengthens students' grammatical rules and punctuation marks. Consequently, three types of books that reflect students' creative thinking are produced at the end of each study year. The first intermediate class present a different set of scrapbooks. They contain short paragraphs, short sentences and some phrases and items with colorful photos and pictures. The product of the second intermediate is more complex. A magazine includes various topics and ideas that students write and select by themselves. They can be proud of their publishing contributions: articles, poetry, stories and interviews. Third intermediate students write a collection of short stories with advanced language and fruitful ideas. The schools can get benefits from these

books in the school library as sources and incentives for next year's students to do their projects. Therefore, EFl is a good curriculum to explore students' ideas and develop their language and styles in a creative way if it is applied accurately.

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