

INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' CREATIVITY ON STUDENTS' CREATIVITY IN THE LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH CLASSROOMS IN LAGOS STATE.

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Abstract

The learning crisis in educating the Nigerian child is said to be 3-dimensional; lack of access to learning opportunities, inadequate foundational learning skills and absence of functional skills for quality living. One of these vital skills is creativity. Learners are expected, through effective modelling and guidance of the teachers, to think creatively, use diverse techniques to create new and worthwhile ideas and work together to develop and implement innovation. However, advances in research on creativity cautioned that the 'Mini-C', often associated with creativity in the learning process can be easily crushed through teachers' classroom practices if not carefully nurtured. The study examines how teachers' creativity affects students' creativity using senior secondary Literature-in-English classrooms randomly selected from an education district in Lagos State. Working with three research objectives and using descriptive design, two research instruments were administered to 15 teachers and 170 students also randomly selected from the schools. Also, four observations were carried out to ascertain the creative performances and interactions in the classrooms. These were further supported with analysis of lesson materials, notes, tests scripts and projects. Data collected were analysed statistically and qualitatively using measures of association and inference. The findings revealed that teachers' creativity significantly influence students' creativity but the effect is constraining. Therefore, urgent call is made for deployment of effective classroom and intervention strategies that can specifically nurture students' creative tendencies.

Keywords: teachers, students, creativity, skills, Mini-C, teaching techniques, classroom interactions, Literature.

Introduction

It is well established that the 21st century is characteristic of transformations in diverse fields of human endeavour powered by technology and globalization. Equally, it is acknowledged that these innovations are quite significant in education considering how education affects all other facets of the society and the long-existing nature of traditional obsequiousness within school practices. Favourably, literature has also experienced notable transitions in the areas of production, distribution, and reception.

One of three cross-cutting sustainability skills majorly ascribed to these changes by individuals, government, corporate and non-governmental bodies is creativity. From wide adoptions, creativity is viewed following the definition of Plucker, Beghetto & Dow (2004) 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". This definition recognizes both traditional and contemporary elements of various approaches arising in the holistic conceptualization and realization of creativity across cognitive, affective and socio-cultural constructs.

The most influential approach in educational research, vetted by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21, 2015), is the Four-C model developed by Kaufman & Beghetto (2009). It distinguishes four levels of creativity which address the interrelation and developmental processes achievable between the levels in the teaching-learning paradigm. These levels of creative accomplishment include: Big-C for eminent

creative geniuses (the most popular); Pro-C for professional-level creators who have not yet attained eminent status; Little-C for innovations experienced in everyday activities and Mini-C for the novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experiences, actions, and events.

According to Beghetto & Kaufman (2007), the Mini-C category “was designed to encompass the creativity inherent in the learning process” which is central to “the dynamic, interpretive process of constructing personal knowledge and understanding within a particular socio-cultural context”. Opined as the genesis of creativity, ‘Mini-C’ stresses the evolving nature of mental constructions which can be easily crushed if not nurtured properly.

Prior to this model, the creative insights experienced by students as they learn new concepts and make unique connections between old and new learning within or across various subjects has been unfortunately overlooked by most conceptualizations of creativity. The focus of creativity research was on clear-cut eminent and day to day innovations but advancements in early childhood as well as language research (Gupta, 2007; Chomsky, 2009 etc.) resonates earlier developmental psychological theories that creativity, often captured in imagination and child’s play in unique inventions, is richer in childhood than adulthood. Other theorists (Vygotsky, 2004; Holzman, 2009 etc.) opine that experience and maturity required for creative imagination is most fully enhanced in adolescence.

Consequently, the foregoing advances the assumption in cognitive psychological research that students, whether children or adolescents, are naturally endowed with creativity. More significantly, it also instigates the contention within educational evaluation research that students are educated out of their creativity as grow into adults. The implications thereof demonstrate that educational practices in schools and classrooms within the society should be critically scrutinized to identify and address factors militating against students’ creativity to facilitate favourable cultivation.

Despite the conceptual richness in creativity research, extensive studies reveal teachers’ misconceptions of creativity. They affirm good disposition towards creativity in self-reports but when observed they not only underperform creatively but also object students’ creativity in areas of independence, risk-taking, expressiveness etc. Although, others like Kwang & Smith (2004) and Beghetto (2007) further observed that new and prospective teachers encourage creativity, these teachers still demonstrated preference to expected rather than unexpected (potentially creative) students’ behaviours. In an earlier study, Adeosun & Adelabu (2019) revealed similar issues within Nigerian literature classes such that they question if literature teachers really understand the creative dimensions of literature and how to execute it in classroom practice.

In unravelling this paradox, scholars urge the systematic investigation of these assumptions to determine how teachers’ creativity might be influencing students’ creativity. The literature classroom represents a significant background for such investigations. The very nature of creativity (aesthetic, imaginative, nonconformity, emphatic etc.) is pragmatically expressed in every way literature is being experienced: writing, reading, performing, critiquing etc. (Sternberg, 2009). Alongside, creativity is a function of literary education in diverse curriculums around the world. Therefore, the study was executed as a critical

observation and assessment of teacher-student interaction patterns and teachers' teaching techniques in order to find out if and how teachers' creativity affect students' creativity.

Objectives

Specifically, the study:

1. Determines the relationship between teachers' creativity and students' creativity
2. Examines the extent to which teachers' teaching techniques influence students' creativity in the literature classroom.
3. Investigates how teachers' creativity affects students' creativity within classroom interactions.

Literature Review

A significant venture which has advanced creativity research revolves around the conceptualization of creativity. Initially, these investigations reveal problematic beliefs about the 'intellectual' nature of creativity as high, elusive and only achievable by accomplished a gifted few (Craft, 2001). Subsequently, the affective stance which involves self-perceptions, values, motivations and emotions were discovered to generate high creative potentials achievable in school and ordinary daily life. However, this was also linked to previous inadequacies for its excessive focus on externally judged creative products reinforced by product-oriented methodological approaches (Plucker et.al, 2004).

These necessitated broader re-conceptualizations which unravelled complexities in theorizing creativity within meaningful contexts such as learning; focusing on process-oriented methods. Explored long independent and dependent dimensions, creativity and learning gave inconclusive results but interdependently, both elements thrived as a system within classroom learning (Beghetto, 2016). This was inspired by the 'Mini-C' concept can be successfully utilized to identify and examine the dynamic genesis of micro level changes in the process of discovery and transitions between lower and higher levels of creative competence.

Educational research over the past thirty years has established that teaching any subject requires an interrelation between: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. A similar scaffold has been developed for teaching with creativity and teaching for creativity which includes pedagogical creative-domain knowledge, pedagogical creativity enhancement knowledge and creative pedagogical domain knowledge (Beghetto, In Press). Studies showed that teachers were able to teach creatively with techniques that stimulate students' imaginations, emotions, interests, critical and possibility thinking using hands-on materials, technology, play and experience-based activities, etc. (Jeffrey & Craft (2004). Creativity pedagogy also focused on learners' attainment and performance of creativity where they participate actively in the classroom through open-ended inquiry which not only involves solving problems but also finding problems amongst others (Cremin, Burnard & Craft, 2006).

These scholars posit that the implication of this (whether to teach creativity or creatively) for classroom practice should focus on constructive activities and resources which can engage both students and teachers actively within and outside the classroom. Within the classroom, the central engagement patterns of teacher-student interaction have proved productive in observation and assessment. These patterns include

instructional talk, instruction time, direction and organization of classroom activities, questioning, differentiation and inclusion, feedback and evaluation etc. Also, the implication of our technological inundated world in the affairs of creativity, although previously misunderstood, has been validated by successful integration of technological tools to empower more creativity through provisionality, interactivity, capacity, range and speed (Shneiderman et.al., 2006).

Furthermore, several creativity constraints which can be personally or externally imposed have being identified but the unexpected discovery is that these constraints exist in such a puzzle where both lack and availability of opportunities affect creative performance (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2010). In education, creativity is observed to be appraised based on school administrations' and teachers' prescriptions of what ought to be: this alone limits creative expressions to standardized formulas. In fact, various studies (Runco & Johnson 2002; Kaufman, Davis & Beghetto, 2012) show substantial disconnections between teachers' self-reported perceptions of creativity and how this is applied in practice. Instructionally teachers are seen as modellers, guides and facilitators, hence it is speculated that where a teacher's own creativity is stifled, pupils' creativity is unlikely to blossom and more significantly, teachers' creativity may even escalate to crush students' creative instincts and performances. Nevertheless, these researchers further argue that constraints do not necessarily harm creative potentials as they are built into the construct of creativity itself.

Methodology

Using the descriptive research design, the study's participants comprised 15 Literature/English teachers and 170 Literature students who were randomly selected from five schools in Akoka, Yaba Local Government Area in Lagos State. Two research instruments were utilized to collate data:

- a) Teachers' Creativity Observation Rubric TCOR
- b) Students' Creativity Observation Checklist SCOR

These were adapted from Woods' (1995) creative teaching framework and Lucas' (2016) five dimensional model of creativity in conjunction with other relevant resources. TCOR and SCOR were designed in accordance with the objectives of the study for non-participant classroom observations. They were subjected to face and content validity by experts in the field of test and measurement while their reliability were established using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation with coefficient ranging between 0.78 and 0.83.

Findings and Discussion

Following Beghetto and Karwowski (2017) recommendations for blended methods and data sources, the researchers extended their investigations with inferential statistics, hypothesis testing and review of other instructional outputs such as lesson plans, students' scripts and projects. Data derived were statistically and qualitatively analysed using measures of association and inference.

1. Relationship between teachers' creativity and students' creativity

In comparing the two groups, the null hypothesis -there would be no significant relationship between teachers' creativity and students' creativity- was formulated and tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation.

Table 1: Relationship between teachers' creativity and students' creativity

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	d.f	Correlation Coefficient	Set Significance Level	Calculated Significance Level
Teachers' creative skills	12	5.83	2.89	22	0.663	0.01	0.009
Students' creative skills	12	4.58	2.58				

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Statistical results from Table 1 were derived from a synthesis of the TCOR and SCOR (see table 2). The null hypothesis is thereby rejected because the calculated significance level of 0.009 approximately equals the set level of 0.01 with the correlation coefficient of 0.66. This implies that there is indeed a significant, positive relationship between teachers' creativity and students' creativity. The result thereby substantiates earlier assertions by Plucker et.al (2004), Beghetto & Kaufman (2007) amongst others that teachers' and students' creativity are significantly connected.

2. Extent to which teachers' teaching techniques influence students' creativity

Following the results on Table 1, the extent of influence of the teaching techniques (captured via the teachers' creative performances, see table 2) on the students' creativity is 66% at the extreme signed level of 0.01. This indicates a strong magnitude of influence with a very strong 99% reliability. It supports various findings such as Jeffrey & Craft (2004) and Cremin et.al. (2006) which acknowledge that the role of teachers is pivotal in creativity pedagogy: whether as facilitators in teaching creativity or models in teaching creatively.

Furthermore, a synthesis of the teachers' and students' creative performances revealed that the influence which the teachers' teaching techniques have on their students' creativity is negatively charged: the students performed poorly where the teachers performed poorly. The major technique observed across the lessons -lecturing- has been repeatedly criticized across educational research as a constraint on the effectiveness of teaching, learning and creativity as well. The extended data sources from lesson plans and students' scripts revealed a similar dilemma where instructional assessment covering what was done right or wrong and how to improve on these was totally missing. Unfortunately, these validate on-going contention in creativity research (Kaufman, Davis & Beghetto, 2012; Beghetto, 2013a) that students are educated out of their natural creativity by uncreative teachers and school systems; thus questioning the need for schooling towards sustainability in the 21st century and beyond.

3. Pattern of teacher-student interactions and how it affects students' creativity within the literature classroom

Table 2 below presents how the observed students and teachers interacted under matching creativity indicators which was quite poor.

Table 2: Synthesis of TCOR and SCOR

S/N	Teacher /student	CREATIVE SKILLS	EVIDENCE	DEGREE/SCORE			
				Hig h (15)	Fair (10)	Low (5)	Nil (0)
1	T	Relevance	Use varied, up-to-date, technological tools			√	
			Make connections to life experiences and other subject areas		√		
	S	Inquisition	Mastery of literature pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)			√	
			Wondering, questioning, connecting			√	
			Exploring and investigating			√	
			Challenging assumptions/prescriptions				√
2	T	Ownership	Differentiate instruction and allow student autonomy				√
			Collaborate with students			√	
	S	Interdependence	Leadership by modeling		√		
			Confidence in personal style				√
			Receiving help appropriately			√	
			Giving help appropriately			√	
3	T	Control	Use diverse effective classroom management strategies			√	
			Confidently engage students with questions, prompts, activities			√	
	S	Discipline	Ensure students are rightly positioned and guided		√		
			Improvising, reflecting and strategizing			√	
			Thorough active participation			√	
			Respect class engagement instructions		√		
4	T	Innovation	Improvise materials and techniques			√	
			Find, solve and pose life-related problems			√	
	S	Imagination	Deviate from norms, experiment, take risks			√	
			Playing with different possibilities			√	
			Tolerate probes and challenges			√	
			Use intuition and trying to be different			√	

As an adolescent class level noted for creativity at its peak Vygotsky’s (2004), the lessons were filled with several direct and indirect opportunities for multi-dimensional interaction patterns: teacher-student, student-teacher and student-student to engage students with varied, personally meaningful activities and tools. Nevertheless, the observation exercises revealed an unfavourable predominant one dimensional pattern: teachers as the active participants and students as passive spectators.

The focus was on what to teach with little consideration of how the learners can contribute. Teachers asked and answered questions themselves without providing students with adequate time, diverse options, high-order prompts, constructive feedback, formative assessment, collaboration, instructional aids, etc. that stimulate ‘thinking’ which is at the heart of both creativity and Literature instructional processes (Langer 2000; Appleman 2009). Consequently, the students were engaged in little or no class activity such that they barely expressed imagination, inquisition, self-motivation, challenge or personal style safe for a few

in their take-home projects. Many were greatly distracted showing disturbing signs of disinterest in the teachers and/or subject. Although this dilemma is often associated with the learner-passive instructional approach preferred by Literature teachers, judging from the counter-intuitive importance of constraints as triggers and advancers of creativity (Sternberg & Kaufman 2010; Saleh, 2015), this study underlines that students are not playing their part in consolidating or reflecting on their learning during and after lessons.

Conclusion

As recent research position creativity as the core business of education, constraining instructional practices discovered in a creativity centered subject like Literature is very disturbing. The implications stems beyond students' poor results and enrolment in the subject to a general insecurity about their capacity to survive, perform, contribute and lead outside school in our highly peculiar world. Hence, there is urgent need to reinvent instructional strategies to overhaul the literary and creative development of learners at risk following the recommendations below:

1. Curriculum designers should give optimal consideration to educational policies and projects that nurture, motivate, evaluate and overhaul creativity in schools.
2. More research should be carried-out to investigate, explore and document creative practices in different subject areas; these should be systematic and longitudinal using a wide array of measurement tools and response scales.
3. Schools as well as educators should also keep records (lesson plans, class recordings, students' work etc.) of creative practices for training purposes and mentorship programmes for teachers and student teachers.
4. More importantly, school administrators should organise continuous reorientations, trainings and appraisals of Literature teachers in 21st century learner-centered pedagogy. Literary projects like competitions, clubs, school shows, book exhibitions, etc. should also be organised to inspire, motivate and reward creative students and teachers. This should involve vibrant partnerships with individuals, commercial, governmental and non-governmental organisations.
5. Similarly, parents should support students' engagement in creative activities in and outside the school as a continuous life-long process.

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