Moroccan Instructors' Perception of Creative Teaching Practice

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Abstract

Creativity has become a major factor and key resource in post modern educational thought. Though its critical importance, creativity is alienated and maligned in most teaching practices.There is little information on the practice of creative teachers. Indeed, the purpose of this paper is to explore instructors' perception of creativity and its practices. Understanding teachers'attitude toward this practiceis significantly importantto deciding how educators respond to creativity in classrooms and whether this practice is being nurtured and promoted. Findings showed that instructors' value creativity in their classrooms, but they still doubt its implementation in the Moroccan context.

Keywords: Creativity, creative teaching practice, teachers & creativity, creativity in Moroccan schools, creative pedagogies

Introduction

Being in a world dominated by technological innovations and rapid change, creativity has become a critical factor and key resource in a knowledge-driven economy (Robinson, 2006). Organizations and governments across the world are now more concerned than ever to endorse innovation (Craft, 2011) and promote creative thinking. Education certainly is an influential medium for development and growth. Providing an education placing creativity at the heart of its goals is fundamentally necessary today. Education is not only meant to cater the needs of society but also to shape and transform it for the common good. Generating creative minds in societies is rooted in a model of education that promotes creative thinking (Hartley & Long, 2016).

There has been much talk and debate about advancing creative and innovative teaching methods, with the potential to transform teachers and empower learners. Thus, there is an urgent need to advance a teaching discourse that perceive creative students' actions not as destructive or misconduct threatening the school norms and regulations, but more as dispositions imbued with active learning and positive energy. Ambrose (2005) explained that creative teaching is a highly complex enterprise and influenced by a wide range of contexts and conditions, and hence requires a constellation of skills and dispositions deemed to transform teachers to excel this craft.

Although creativity is perceived as a necessary tool for developing students' character and agency, creative thinking practice is neglected by most instructors (Harrison et al., 2022) and it is often discouraged in school (Freund & Holling, 2008). However, academic explorations of creativity in teaching are on ongoing development (e.g. Cremin & Barnes 2018) and educators still search for novel ways and solid approaches to shape the curriculum, with the hope to respond to this era's expectations.

Teachers are at the heart of the educational experience hence any understanding of their perceptions towards this variable can assist in bridging the gap between school and societal expectations.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to look into teachers' perceptions of creative teaching with a focus on creativity among high school instructors. Modern education systemis still inimical to creativity and creative thinking dissemination. Therefore, it is vital to develop a framework guiding creative discourse in classrooms to encounter the growing vacuity of contemporary education. Understanding teachers' perception is momentous in finding how this phenomenon is perceived and manifested in Moroccan schools, with the potential to develop a guiding informed practice contributing to promoting creative teaching.

Review of Literature

The concept of Creativity

A major factor limiting any rational implementation of creativity in the education sphere is merely the lack of a widely agreed-upon and an articulate definition of creativity (Plucker et al., 2004). Creativity is a complex construct and scholars are far beyond to agree upon a coherent definition of the term.

Creativity can take various forms; it draws on a more diverse range of human functioning than linear, logical and rational patterns of behavior (Claxton, 2006). Creativity cannot exist in a vacuum or isolation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Starko, 2013) rather it is constructed in the consolidation and the cooperation of numerous ideas of different individuals. Plus this ability is not only limited to a single person (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) or entity so to speak. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) wisely suggested that creativity simply does not happen inside people's heads, but in the interaction between an individual's thoughts and the socio-cultural context. Besides, creativity is not restricted to an individual domain, or specialized area, but it can be manifested across all fields with no exception (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Gardner, 2011). In other words, one person may be creative in a single field and not necessarily in another.

Bjersdet (1976) in a study to explore teachers' attitudes towards creativity found that most teachers in Sweden defined creativity in terms of independent work, richness of ideas, originality and ability to consolidate. Thus, qualities of creative people manifest through different sets of behaviors including risk-taking, curiosity, openness, adaptation and independence (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Gardner, 2001). For Torrance (1977) creativity is based on four main skills namely fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality. Fluency refers to the generation of many different ideas and solutions to a certain problem. Flexibility is related to the ability to generate ideas that have multiple possibilities and different approaches. Elaboration refers to the aptitude to clarify and provide details about ideas or solutions to a problem. Originality is advanced by exploring many unusual solutions to a problem and generating a new one (Guilford, 1967; Guilford & Christensen, 1973).

Teachers 'attitude about creativity

A few studies have discussed teachers' perceptions about creativity. Although teachers claimed to encourage and value creative behaviors in classrooms (Torrance, 1963), students often lose their sense of creative thinking once they enter fourth grade. This may raise questions about whether school kills creativity in children. However, the level of teachers' education, years of experience, school

environment and school leadership may be all a major contributor to the attitude of teachers towards creativity. Teachers for example with a high level of education may understand the importance of creativity in classroom implementation more than those with lower qualifications. Still, a teacher with a low level of education, but with a high level of experience may also favor creativity amongst students (Harrison et al., 2022) and promote it. Also school leadership and environment may endorse and encourage this element in classrooms or perceive it merely as a menace or a behavior problem that must not be tolerated.

Nevertheless, Shuaibu (2012) argued that the negative beliefs associated with creativity by some instructors may not tolerate some students' creative acts and dispositions in the classroom. These dispositions are not understood and often misinterpreted, forperceived as a behavior problem (Beghetto& Kaufman, 2010) to be seriously responding to. Souza (2000) in an attempt to understand teachers' attitudes towards this element in British classrooms found that even if teachers claimed that they have enough occasions to promote creativity in the classroom, their responses reflect a lack of training concerning how to inspire creativity in their students.

In an educational context where priority is given to conventional teaching methods, understanding teachers' attitudes on creativity must indeed precede attempts to develop and design pedagogy of creativity (Skiba et al., 2010). Cultivating an accurate understanding of teacher perceptions of creativity is essential to inform practice on how to incorporate creativity efficiently in the classroom (Skiba et al., 2010). When educators understand the nature of creativity, they are well equipped to stay away from negative myths and stereotypes that may be linked to creativity (Beghetto& Kaufman, 2010).

Creative teachers

Several studies illustrated the qualities that creative teachers possess (e.g. Fryer, 1996; Beetlestone, 1998). Csikszentmihalyi (2014) noted that emotional intelligence is one of the major qualities that make creative people; thus teachers cannot champion this art without developing this influential quality. Nonetheless, other elements that can be also included in this context are: enthusiasm, passion, commitment, risk-taking, curiosity and being reflective. Sternberg (1999) suggested that creative teachers are self-motivated individuals and professionals who make connections between their personal responses to experience and their teaching.

On the other hand, (NACCE (1999) reported that creative instructors continually improve themselves and adapt their teaching styles and strategies to different situations as required, with the ability to (Ireson et al, 1999) leave the structured lessons behind and adjust them accordingly. Creative teachers' pedagogic practice is regarded to be highly productive when they help students find relevance in their work either through practical application or by making emotional and personal connections (Abbs, 2003).

Creative teaching best practices

Davis and Rimm (2004) acknowledged that personal creativity can be enhanced suggesting that it can be nurtured and trained via implementing different approaches. Rinkevich (2011) argued that any progress in creative teaching understanding practice should begin in teacher education and continue through professional development. Creative thinking in class for example can be advanced through inquiry based

teaching, finding connections between content material and real life, fostering a safe environment with the hope to invoke curiosity and collaborative and experiential learning along with the use of technology (Cachia& Ferrari, 2010; Rinkevich, 2011).

NACCCE (1999) split creative teaching into two dimensions: teaching creatively where teachers use "imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, exciting, and effective" (p. 102), and teaching for creativity, with the potential to advance learners' creative thinking. Creative teaching might be described as an "invigorating, exciting, innovative, and engaging pedagogy" (Craft, 2011, p. 129), and a unique form of "disciplined improvisation" (Sawyer, 2010) where teachers employ novel ways of imparting knowledge, with the potential to empower and transform learners (Jeffrey & Craft, 2004).

Joubert (2001) on the other hand observed:

Creative teaching is an art. One cannot teach teachers didactically how to be creative; there is no fail-safe recipe or routine. Some strategies may help to promote creative thinking, but teachers need to develop a full repertoire of skills which they can adapt to different situations (p21).

Ayoub et al, (2000) argued that a certain style of teaching is claimed to be creative when instructors consolidate the existing knowledge to a new practice with the aim to nourish cognitive abilities able to transform the learner. A study from Hong Kong classrooms to promote creative teaching revealed that unleashing this ability requires a lot of risk taking, planning, experimentation, and problem solving, which in turn require a great deal of intrinsic motivation on the part of the teacher engaged in creative teaching.

(Horng et al., 2005) found in a study related to creative teaching from the Taiwanese context that creative teachers use several salient strategies in their classroom, specifically student-centered learning, the use of multiple teaching aids, and class-management strategies. Besides, those creative teachers tried to draw connections between teaching content and real life, along with the use of open questions for stimulating creative thinking.

Challenges of creative teaching

Different studies explored teachers' perception of creativity, with the aim to cultivate creative thinking in classrooms. Robinson (2011) ; Turner (2013) argued that overemphasizing grading and testing make creative thinking hard to achieve. Also, the need for rote learning to pass exams (Alnouh et al., 2014) makes the teaching task, by and large, targeting high grades and passing formal tests with less time given to creativity and meaningful learning (Cheung, 2012). Plus, some teacher's attitude towards students with creative dispositions in class is often interpreted as destructive or lacking the ability to think productively which results in perpetuating non creative modes of learning (Souza, 2010).

Other challenges confronting creativity implementation in classrooms may also include large class sizes (Tümen&Çelik, 2020), overloaded curriculum (Cremin, 2009; Tümen&Çelik, 2021), lack of time (Tümen&Çelik, 2021), lack of training and professional development (Masadeh, 2021), students' attitudes towards the subject matter (Tümen&Çelik, 2021), textbooks lacking creative thinking dimensions (Al-Qahtani, 2016), lack of school support (Aldujayn&Alsubhi, 2020; NACCE, 1999),

unsupportive social culture (Wang &Kokotasaki, 2018), perpetuating traditional teaching methods (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Al-Qahtani, 2016), lack of materials, resources and facilities (Alnouh et al., 2014). In a nutshell, a variety of issues can hamper the implementation of creative teaching in classrooms.

Research Design

This study adopted qualitative research design. Qualitative study is the preferred methodological paradigm in research, as the data are to be examined in depth within their natural environment. Basic qualitative research focuses on how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and make sense of their lives (Merriam, 2015). Maximum variation sampling was employed in order to reveal the common or different aspects and patterns between different situations which show alignment with the purpose of the study and research problems (Creswell, 2004). To represent diverse dimensions of the problem and clarify varying perspectives, the study group includes 87 high school Moroccan teachers from different teaching disciplines. 35 of the teachers who participated in the research are female.

Research questions

What is creative teaching?

What makes creative teachers?

What hinders creative teaching in Moroccan classrooms?

How can creative teaching be promoted in Morocco's teaching environment?

Data Collection

An online semi-structured survey was used to obtain teachers' views on the issue. While forming the survey protocol, we aimed at locating an intentional and necessary variety of questions considering the research questions and the purpose of the study (Meriam, 2015). Indeed, 2 senior teachers were consulted to review the questionnaire in terms of its content and appropriateness for the aim of the study and research questions. For piloting, the questionnaire was sent to 3 participants in order to test the validity of the questionnaire content and hence no problem was observed or reported. Teachers who participated in the piloting test were not included in the main study, indeed.

For ethical considerations, the questionnaire integrated an introduction about the purpose and significance of the research and fully supported the required information concerning the confidentiality issues. The questionnaire was delivered online. The data received on teachers' perspectives were organized via certain codes, categories, and themes (Creswell, 2012) for further analysis.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was conducted to find relationships and explain the data in depth (Kalekin-Fishman, 2001). During the analysis of the data the systematic procedure of content analysis was employed, which involves coding of the data, finding the categories and then the themes, organizing and defining the data according to the themes for meaningful interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2012). In the next stage, the findings were described and interpreted by comparing them with the existing literature.

Findings and Discussion

What is creative teaching?

For the question about creative teaching most participants (75%) indicated that it is the craft of being innovative and creative by seeking novel methods that increase learner's motivation and engagements while improving the quality of instruction. Some participants (15%) related creative teaching with technology integration. They argued that ICT integration in the classroom is what determines a creative teaching from non creative one. Indeed, few participants (10%) connected creative teaching to experiential learning and finding solutions to facilitate learning inside and outside class.

The findings for this question are in line with most of the studies reviewed which defined creative teaching as the implementation of a variety of mechanisms and techniques which may include safe environment, encouraging curiosity, independent collaborative and experiential learning along with the use of technology (Cachia& Ferrari, 2010; Rinkevich, 2011; Cheung, 2012; Joubert, 2001). It is also noted that the participants used different words and expressions to describe creative teaching meaning that the participants understand what makes creative teaching and how it might be fostered.

What makes a creative teacher?

Most participants (75%) draw on a number of features to describe a creative teacher such as 'passion', 'flexibility' and 'enthusiasm'. They argued that those traits are fundamentally important to champion creative teaching. Hence teachers who lack the passion and flexibility would perceive creativity in teaching as useless and just a waste of time and energy. A number of participants added that a creative teacher is someone who enjoys a high level of social and emotional intelligence, with potential to detect the learners' problem while trying to reflect in them. Some participants (15%) stressed the notion of 'willingness to learn' as a determining factor for being a creative teacher. Indeed, the findings for this question are in line with the review as most studies described creative teachers (Sternberg (1999; NACCE (1999) as individuals who enjoy a high sense of passion, flexibility and risk taking.

What hinders creative teaching in Moroccan classrooms?

Most participants (80) claimed that the schooling environment and regulations make it hard for teachers to advance creative teaching in classrooms. This might include school leadership mindset, limited autonomy in decision. Some participants (15%) indicated that the lack of professional development and training are among the barriers that make it hard for instructors to excel creative teaching in Moroccan classrooms. Also limited time, large classes and overloaded curriculum were among the factors that hinder a teacher's journey to outshinethis pedagogical practice as noted by (5%) of the participants.

The findings echo the literature as the school environment and lack of support are among the major obstacles to any better implementation of creativity in classrooms (NACCE, 1999). Also the findings revealed the lack of training, or resources are chief factors that hamper teachers to excel this art which has already been highlighted by previous studies (eg, Al-nouh et al., 2014; Shaheen, 2011). The element of overloaded curriculum, time and large classes were also detected in the findings which still mirror the literature as large classes or limited time can contribute to pushing teachers adopt non creative teaching (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Cachia& Ferrari, 2010; Shaheen, 2011; Tümen&Çelik, 2020).

How can creative teaching be promoted?

Most participants (65) insisted on professional development and ongoing training to enhance teachers' creative skills. Changing pedagogical practice was also noticed in the data as a good number of participants (30%) see that any creativity practice in the classroom should start with changing old methodologies. Some teachers stressed that teacher's support is critical to promote creativity in Moroccan schools. This support can be manifested through financial and psychological incentives. A few participants (5%) argued that there is a need to rejuvenate teaching by replacing old teachers with young teachers imbued with more motivation and enthusiasm.

Davis and Rimm (2004) acknowledged that personal creativity can be enhanced suggesting that it can be nurtured and trained via different strategies. Unlike the literature which emphasized on notions of technical and instructional ways to promote creativity, the findings for this question insisted mostly on supporting teachers with the necessary incentives as a prior condition to endorse creativity in classrooms. Teachers in other words are arguing that any creativity implementation in school should start first with motivating teachers at different levels, as the lack to motivate or satisfy their needs would make this practice unfeasible.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of creativity in schools through focusing on teachers' attitude towards this pedagogical practice. Teachers develop their own slightly different versions depending on their past experiences, current working context and teaching. The findings showed that teachers understand what makes a creative teacher or teaching and this was detected in their rich responses, drawing on different strategies and approaches. Yet they assume that creative teaching is hard to foster in Moroccan classes for the lack of necessary tools to champion this craft namely the unsupportive school environment, the textbooks, the curriculum, large classes, and more.

Regardless of this, it is worth noting that creativity emerges from difficult situations. It is the aptitude to reflect on your reality and create alternative solutions to the problem or the learning situation. Though previous studies including this study found out that various factors that may hamper creative teaching such as large classes or lack of time, creativity in simple terms is to challenge this status quo and trouble by finding novel ways and approaches to meet learner's needs. Difficult working conditions are the place where creativity is born to disrupt the status quo and create new hope guiding meaningful learning and pedagogical practice or life in general. Creativity should be perceived as a panacea to learning gaps or a remedy to connect the dots and enrich teaching practices.

In short, this study cannot be generalized as limited to only one data collection instrument; thus it is a call for future researchers to tackle this issue from a mixed method study for understanding the phenomenon in-depth. Certainly the findings of this study can contribute to developing informed practice on creative teaching not only in Morocco but across the globe.

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