English Language Teaching; Vol. 9, No. 4; 2016
ISSN 1916-4742 E-ISSN 1916-4750
Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education

Do Saudi EFL Teachers Promote Creativity in Their Classrooms?

Abdulaziz Ali Al-Qahtani[1]

[1] School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Correspondence: Abdulaziz Ali Al-Qahtani, School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, United Kingdom. Tel: 44-744-727-0032. E-mail: a.al-qahtani@newcastle.ac.uk

Received: January 17, 2016 Accepted: February 26, 2016 Online Published: March 1, 2016

doi: 10.5539/elt.v9n4p11 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n4p11

Abstract

Despite the efforts made by the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia, there is still much to be done in order to nourish creativity in schools. According to a number of studies, there is an urgent need to reconsider the role of creativity in the current educational programmes because there is an increasing gap between the reality of the classrooms and the expectations that students and others, such as parents, might have. Studies have shown that Saudi public school students lack the necessary creative thinking skills, especially in language classrooms. In fact, as claimed by some researchers, Saudi students' low level of achievement in English is mainly a result of the approaches and methods practiced in schools that do not promote creativity. The current study explores whether or not EFL teachers promote creativity in their classrooms in Saudi Arabia, while also taking into consideration their own perceptions and attitudes towards this important concept.

The sample in this study included 45 Saudi EFL teachers and six EFL supervisors. After teachers responded to a creativity questionnaire that explored their attitudes and the extent to which they promote creativity in language classrooms, eight of the teachers and the six EFL supervisors were interviewed. The results revealed that most Saudi EFL teachers put little effort into fostering creativity in their teaching practices. Also, their attitudes towards creativity seem to be divided. The study identified a number of factors as being responsible for these results. They highlight the need to familiarize textbook designers, EFL supervisors, and teachers with the importance of creativity and its various applications. The study concludes with important practical recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: EFL, creativity, Saudi language classrooms

1. Introduction

In addition to fundamental language skills, creative thinking is crucial to education. Modern life is becoming increasingly complex and demanding for individuals as they go through many changes and encounter various challenges. To complicate things even further, modern societies do not only revere the informed learner, but more so the autonomous and resourceful thinker. As Lin and McKay (2004) point out, "It is not what pupils learn that makes the difference, but it [is] how they learn" (p. 4). Therefore, the development of students' thinking skills empowers them with the necessary tools to both seek knowledge and become independent learners.

Enhancing creativity as a part of the critical thinking process is one of the main goals of education. It is an essential tool for problem solving and overcoming future challenges. Creativity in this context can be defined as the awareness of one's own self and surrounding conditions while engaging the imagination in order to reach a quick perspectival solution to a problematic situation (Zai-toon, 1987). Indeed, fostering creativity in the educational system creates valuable contributors to societies' future development who are responsible, well-equipped, and optimistic about encountering risks, challenges and new opportunities (Morris, 2006). This necessitates the urgency for educators to move from employing methods of rote learning towards creating a classroom atmosphere that fosters creativity (Özcan, 2010).

Several national governments have initiated programs to stimulate the creativity of their country's citizens, including Canada, the United Kingdom., the Netherlands, and the European Union (Rietzschel, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2009). The Saudi government has also realized the importance of creativity and decided in June of 2000 to establish King Abdul-Aziz & His Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity (reffered to as

Mawhiba) which aimed to achieve three major goals: (1) improving and expanding what is being offered to educate gifted individuals; (2) promoting awareness and appreciation of creativity in society; and (3) supporting sustainable development in the Kingdom. The foundation primarily focuses on: (1) developing public and higher education; (2) nurturing creativity in the fields of science and technology; (3) cooperating with other organizations that serve its purposes; (4) exploring and identifying talent and creativity regardless of social, economic, or other background differences; and (5) communicating *Mawhiba*'s message to Saudi society.

Despite *Mawhiba*'s efforts and the recommendations of several studies in Saudi Arabia that support fostering and developing creativity (e.g., Suliman, 2007; Zaidi, 2008; Al Inizi, 2006; Zarnoqi, 2007), there is much to be done in order to nourish creativity in the Saudi school system. Al Khadra (2005) emphasizes the need to reconsider the role that creativity occupies in current educational programmes because there is a widening gap between the reality of the education system and the expectations that people have of it. In fact, studies have shown that Saudi public school students lack essential creative thinking skills (Ambusaidy & Al Baluchi, 2005; Al Otaibi, 2009). With respect to language teaching, Filimban (2010) adds that the students' low level of achievement in English is mainly because the approaches and methods that are actually practiced in schools do not encourage creativity.

The interest in conducting this study was based on the regrettable situation concerning the lack of creativity among Saudi EFL learners and the general lack of research on the topic of creativity in EFL classrooms. More specifically, exploring whether or not EFL teachers promote creativity as well as their perceptions and attitudes towards this important concept have been largely ignored in previous studies in EFL contexts. The current study attempts to investigate these issues in detail and, therefore, the following research questions have been developed:

1) To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers promote creativity in their classrooms?

2) What are the attitudes of Saudi EFL teachers towards creativity?

3) What are their perceptions of creativity within the EFL context?

This study contributes to understanding the issues surrounding the lack of promoting creativity in Saudi EFL classrooms from the point of view of EFL teachers and by considering their attitudes towards this particular concern. To be more specific, this study examines how EFL teachers perceive the concept of creativity and its potential value in language classrooms. It also offers crucial suggestions to Saudi educational policy-makers, course designers, educators, and parents in an effort to nurture learners' creative thinking in EFL classrooms and assist all those concerned with realizing the importance of creativity in education in general, and in language teaching in particular.

Following this introduction, the methodological approach adopted in this study will be presented. The major research instruments (creativity questionnaire and semi-structured interviews) are identified and the procedures followed in collecting and analysing data are described. Finally, key results from an analysis of the research data are presented and discussed along with implications and recommendations for future research.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The sample in this study was comprised of 45 EFL teachers from public schools in the city of Jeddah as well as six EFL supervisors. After administering the questionnaires to all of the teachers, eight of them and the six supervisors took part in semi-structured interviews. They were selected based on the level that they teach, their work experience, and their willingness to participate. The interview objectives were to further the understanding of their responses to the questionnaires and to find out more about their thoughts and perceptions of the topic of creativity in Saudi public schools. Interveiws with supervisors also contributed to the understanding of teachers' responses and comments by providing their own perceptions based on their first hand experience with teachers and their teaching practices in EFL classrooms.

Table 1. Participants' teaching level and years of experience

Participants	***Level/ Stage***			***Years of experience***		
	elementary	*Intermediate*	*Secondary*	*0-9*	*10- 15*	*16 and over*
Teachers	15	14	16	17	12	16
Supervisors	6			2	3	1

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 Teachers' Creativity Questionnaire

The teachers' creativity questionnaire was made up of two parts. The first part consisted of 11 items focused on the extent to which EFL teachers promote creativity in their language classes. The objective of the second part of the questionnaire (an additional 11 items) was to identify EFL teachers' attitudes towards creativity in their EFL classes. In constructing the questionnaire, the items of the section on the instructional activities that facilitate the development of creative thinking and the formation of creative habits were developed in accordance with the findings and recommendations provided by both the leading authors in the field of creativity in general and those who were specifically interested in fostering creativity in foreign language classrooms (e.g., Lee, 2013; Ong, Hartzell, & Greene, 2009; Runco, 2007; Renzulli, Smith, White, Callahan, Hartman, & Westberg, 2002; Daiute & Dalton, 1993).

The first part of the questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale. Participants indicated their opinions of the statements by marking one of the following: *always*, *most of the time*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, or *never*. As for the second part, participants also responded using a five-point Likert scale, but the responses themselves were different (*strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*). The items were presented in English, and the language was reviewed by two native speakers of English who work in Saudi Arabia as English instructors. Some items, such as items 3 and 4 in the first part and item 4 in the second part, were modified based on the instructors' comments. The questionnaire was piloted online on 25 middle school EFL teachers. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire as a whole was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, generating an excellent score of 0.93. The reliability coefficient of each separate section is as follows:

Table 2. The reliability coefficient of each part of the questionnaire

Section	***Cronbach's alpha***
1	0.81
2	0.88

2.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

After administering the questionnaire, eight EFL middle school teachers and six EFL supervisors were interviewed. The interviews were held at The Southern Office of Educational Supervision in Jeddah. The duration of each interview session ranged from approximately 30 to 45 minutes, and they were administered in the participants' first language in order to bypass any concerns regarding foreign language proficiency or miscommunication. The questions considered "general" and "easy" to answer were asked at the beginning of the interview in order to engage respondents and put them at ease. Each interview was digitally audio-recorded to help gather as much relevant data as possible and remain attentive to the interviewee during the sessions. The interview content attempted to capture Saudi EFL teachers' and supervisors' conceptualizations and opinions of creativity in language classrooms. This included whether or not creativity could be incorporated into EFL teaching, and if so, how it could be included. Teachers were also asked about the specific classroom practices that could promote creativity.

2.3 Procedures

Initially, all 45 EFL teachers responded to the creativity questionnaire via SmartSurvey™ online suervey platform. Invetations were sent to all the participating teachers and the survey was live for approximately two weeks to give teachers ample time to read and respond as well as revise and edit their reponses if necessary. All responses were then collected in the form of Excel files and analyzed through SPSS statistical analysis programme. After answering the questionnaires, eight EFL teachers and six EFL supervisors were interviewed. The aim of these interviews was to allow them to express their understandings of the concept of creativity, their attitudes towards it, and how they felt about the application of this concept in the Saudi EFL context. The interviews with teachers took place in the Teaching Resouces Centres of the schools they work at whereas the interviews with supervisors were held at the Office of Education. Each audio-taped interview was conducted in the particpants' first language (to allow them more freedom of expression) with the help of an interview schedule. This is followed by the process of translating and transcribing the interviews, which was verified by two translation experts from Umm Al-Qura Univeristy in Makkah City who are native speakers of Arabic. Then, the interviews were thematically analyzed to generate the data needed to answer the main questions of the study.

3. Results

3.1 The Extent to Which EFL Teachers Promote Creativity

In this section of the questionnaire, teachers were surveyed about their behaviours and beliefs that facilitate the development of creative thinking and the formation of creative habits in their students. The five-point Likert scale questionnaire (See Table 3) was made up of 11 items to measure how frequently teachers exhibit behaviours that promote creativity in their language classes. In general, the results in the table clearly show that Saudi EFL teachers make little effort to foster creativity in their teaching practices. More than 70% of the teachers never or rarely involve students in problem-solving tasks, vary their teaching strategies, accommodate different styles of learning, or use open-ended questions. The majority of the participants (85%) seldom incorporate activities that stimulate students' imagination. and more than 60% of them hardly encourage students to evaluate what they read or allow for debating views and ideas. However, although most teachers do not tolerate mistakes in class (83%), more than half of them still recognize students' emotions and motivations as well as encourage them to read different types of text.

Table 3. Teacher behaviors that promote creativity

Item	***Always***		***Most of the time***		***Sometimes***		***Rarely***		***Never***	
	N	***%***	***N***	***%***	***N***	***%***	***N***	***%***	***N***	***%***
1. I provide my students with problem-solving tasks in my language classes.	2	4%	4	9%	7	15%	28	61%	5	11%
2. In my language classes, I use activities that inspire students' imaginations	1	2%	3	7%	2	4%	39	85%	1	2%
3. Mistakes are tolerated in my language classes.	1	2%	1	2%	6	13%	27	59%	11	24%
4. In my language lessons, I try to facilitate different learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal).	3	7%	3	7%	5	11%	32	70%	3	7%
5. I encourage students to read a wide range of texts.	16	35%	18	39%	7	15%	4	9%	1	2%
6. In my language classes, I am aware of students' motivation and emotions	13	28%	13	28%	6	13%	14	30%	0	0%
7. I vary my teaching methods in language lessons.	4	9%	0	0%	4	9%	38	83%	0	0%
8. I use open-ended questions in my language lessons.	3	7%	3	7%	7	15%	30	65%	3	7%
9. I ask my students to evaluate the texts they read (asking about source, author, audience, and purpose).	7	15%	5	11%	5	11%	19	41%	10	22%
10. I encourage my students to express their views and differences.	4	9%	2	4%	3	7%	33	72%	4	9%
11. I encourage my students to use any newly learned English expressions and constructs.	2	4%	5	11%	16	35%	17	37%	6	13%

Given these quite negative findings about EFL teachers' behaviours that actually seem to hinder creativity in language classes, it was important to investigate them further through conducting a number of interviews with EFL teachers and EFL supervisors. The interviewees were asked about their understandings of creativity, its application in L2 learning, and their reasons for not promoting creativity in English language classes. Some of the most common themes were as follows:

- *Unclear concept of creativity:* Most of the interviewees believed the concept of creativity to be quite confusing. Some teachers, such as Mohammad (Note 1), claimed that they had never heard of this concept. Abdulaziz also agreed with Mohammad by confessing, "I have never thought about creativity or ways in which it could be employed in my class. To think of it now, I think it is difficult to define creativity." Other teachers held to different definitions of creativity, such as "generating new ideas" (Mansouri), "the ability to come up with unusual answers" (Hameed), "applying ideas in new situations" (Hisham), "giving different opinions" (Abdullah), "creating something unthought of" (Ahmad), and "generating new ideas" (Noor).

- *Creativity is inappropriate in language teaching*: Some teachers associated creativity with other school subjects such as science and mathematics. Abdullah, for instance, commented as follows:

I think creativity is more appropriate with subjects like physics, chemistry, and other scientific topics. Creativity is about generating new ideas and inventing new things. I cannot see this as possible in language classes.

Ahmad agreed with Abdullah's comment by saying, "I do not see how students of English could create something unthought of previously in my class." To Noor, an EFL teacher's goal is to "help students improve their language skills, not to teach them how to be creative." It seems that these comments were based on the teachers' own interpretations of the value and application of creativity.

- *Lack of support for creativity in textbooks:* Most teachers felt that the available English textbooks do not promote creativity. Noor, for instance, noted, "I cannot find but a few, if any, activities which develop students creative thinking and allow them to generate new ideas." Hisham added that "these textbooks do not pay much attention the actual needs of EFL learners and teachers. Developing creativity and thinking skills in general is one of these needs." He asserted the need for major reforms to textbooks in order for them to successfully assist in teachers achieving important goals such as developing creativity.

- *Saudi students lack the cognitive abilities to be creative:* Some teachers pointed out that incorporating creativity in Saudi schools is not feasible. One of the main reasons was the idea that students' cognitive abilities are not developed enough to manage creative thinking processes. For example, Noor said, "I do not think creativity is suitable for our students. Their abilities are way below doing creative activities and tasks." Hisham went further in describing students as not having "what it has got to take to be creative." He believed they are "not that type of student for whom creativity activities work well." Furthermore, Abdulaziz felt that creativity activities "suit older and more advanced students" if they were to be successfully implemented. It seems that teachers' negative opinions of their students as well as their own understandings of the concept of creativity have a huge influence on how suitable creativity activities are deemed to be in their language classes.

- *Lack of teacher training in fostering creativity:* Almost all teachers who were interviewed indicated that they were not involved in any training which valued the importance of creative thinking in language classrooms. Ahmad, for example, reported, "Most of our training at the university was focused on teaching English language skills." As for in-service training, Hameed complained that English teachers' training is not sufficient and is limited to language teaching methods and classroom management strategies.

- *Constraints:* Some teachers believed that involving students in creativity activities in class would prevent them from doing other important things. Mohammad complained that "we do not have time to do the tasks in the textbook, let alone [time for] preparing and implementing creativity activities." He emphasized the need for students to "take more English classes than what they are taking at the moment," which would give teachers the time to work on developing students' creative thinking skills. Hisham also indicated that students usually "do not take these activities seriously." He believed that students are not used to creativity activities and they need to be introduced to them gradually.

Saudi EFL supervisors had their own interpretations of the concept of creativity. Some of them included "thinking outside the box" (Sa'ad), "achieving goals with little time and effort" (Khalid), "looking for unusual solutions" (Jamal), "looking at issues from different perspectives" (Anwar), and "breaking boundaries" (Osama). Moreover, the majority of them believed that, in theory, creativity could be incorporated in EFL classes but, in reality, most teachers do not employ creativity activities.

In addition to teachers' unfamiliarity with the concept of creativity, supervisors believed that teachers' old-fashioned ways of teaching hinder the promotion of creativity in language classes. Sa'ad, for example, noted, "Most of our EFL teachers adopt the grammar translation method in their teaching, so you would naturally expect that most the class time is spent on teaching grammar points and translation into Arabic." Hence, he believed that there is no time left in class for fostering creativity or critical thinking skills in general. Anwar also pointed out that "most English classes are teacher-centred." In his opinion, this type of class does not provide

students with the necessary opportunities to develop their creative thinking as "teachers spend most of their time lecturing while students take notes."

3.2 Teachers' Attitudes towards Creativity

This attitudinal questionnaire, which consisted of 11 items, incorporated the three common aspects of an attitude: the affective (feeling), the cognitive (thinking), and the conative (intention). It was based on a five-point scale (ranging from full disagreement = 1 to full agreement = 5). The objective was to determine teachers' attitudes towards creativity and its promotion in their language classes. Again, the same procedure was followed, and the interviews were aimed at explaining some of the results that were obtained from the questionnaire as well as allowing teachers and supervisors to have their say regarding their attitudes about creativity.

Table 4 below shows the descriptive statistics as well as the mean score of the attitudes towards creativity exhibited through the questionnaires that were answered by the 45 EFL teachers. Teachers' attitudes, in general, were slightly positive towards creativity (Mean= 3.65). However, an in-depth analysis of the responses revealed some interesting observations, which will be discussed in the next section.

Regarding teachers' feelings towards introducing creativity activities in language classes, almost two thirds of the respondents (61%) liked the idea of employing creativity in their classes. However, approximately one quarter of them (24%) had negative feelings towards the idea, and 15% were undecided. Similarly, more than half of the teachers felt that creativity activities in language classes would improve students' attitudes towards language. However, 24% of teachers disagreed with this idea, and 20% of them remained neutral.

Looking into teachers' beliefs about creativity, only 22% of teachers believed that creativity is a clear concept while more than half (54%) thought the concept of creativity is ambiguous, and the remaining 24% were not sure. Moreover, almost half of the teachers (48%) maintained that creativity is not applicable to language lessons while slightly lower percentage (41%) thought that it could. Similarly, when teachers were asked about the usefulness of creative thinking, more than half of the teachers did not believe in its benefits and 34% thought it is not important. Yet, 24% of responses believed that it is useful and 32% of teachers thought it is worth the time and effort.

In addition, teachers' responses seemed to be divided regarding the suitability of creativity activities for large classes. One third of the responses were in favour of their implementation, another third were opposed, and the final third was undecided. Furthermore, just 2% of teachers thought that incorporating creativity in their classes would improve their teaching skills, while most of them (81%) did not think it would make a significant contribution; another 17% held a neutral opinion. The final observation about teachers' beliefs pertains to whether the current language lessons fostered creativity. When teachers were asked about this point, more than half of them believed that their language lessons do not improve creativity. One third of the respondents were undecided and only 9% thought that their language classes could actually develop students' creativity.

With respect to the conative domain of teachers' attitudes towards creativity, more than half of teachers did not feel the desire to incorporate creativity activities in their language classes. Still, more than a quarter of them (26%) were uncertain and only 19% did wish to use this type of activity in their teaching. Similarly, when asked whether or not they had plans to implement creativity activities in language lessons, more than half of respondents expressed that they do not have the intention of using these activities in the future. Only 20% of the teachers have plans to introduce creativity in their classes, while one third of them held neutral opinions on this idea.

Table 4. Teachers' attitudes towards creativity

Item	***Strongly agree***		***Agree***		***Neutral***		***Disagree***		***Strongly disagree***	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
1. Creativity is a vague concept to me.	8	17%	17	37%	11	24%	5	11%	5	11%
2. The current language classes can improve students creativity.	1	2%	3	7%	15	33%	13	28%	14	30%
3. Creative thinking skills are useless in language classes.	14	30%	11	24%	*10*	22%	5	11%	6	13%
4. Creativity activities in language classes are a waste of time.	7	15%	8	17%	15	33%	8	17%	8	17%
5. I intend to use creativity activities in my language lessons.	4	9%	5	11%	12	26%	13	28%	12	26%
6. Using creativity activities improves my teaching skills	0	0%	1	2%	8	17%	15	33%	22	48%
7. I want to incorporate creativity activities in my language classes.	2	4%	7	15%	12	26%	12	26%	13	28%
8. Creativity activities are applicable in language lessons.	7	15%	12	26%	5	11%	15	33%	7	15%
9. Creativity activities in language classes have a negative influence on students' attitudes.	6	13%	5	11%	9	20%	13	28%	13	28%
10. Creativity activities are inappropriate in large classes.	6	13%	11	24%	15	33%	9	20%	5	11%
11. I dislike the idea of using creative thinking exercises in my language lessons	5	11%	6	13%	7	15%	13	28%	15	33%
TOTAL	**60**	**12%**	**86**	**17%**	**131**	**22%**	**121**	**24%**	**120**	**24%**
OVERALL MEAN	**3.65**									

The findings about teachers' attitudes towards creativity expressed in the questionnaire that were presented above seem to support the factors identified in section 3.1 above, which were derived from interviews with EFL teachers and supervisors. These factors include an unclear concept of creativity, its inappropriate application in language teaching, the lack of support for creativity in textbooks, its unsuitability for Saudi students, a lack of teacher training on fostering creativity, other constraints, and an old-fashioned or teacher-centred approach to teaching English.

An important conclusion that could be drawn from the factors mentioned above is the need to clearly define the concept of creativity as well as explain its importance and possible application in language classrooms. The obtained results in this study clearly indicate that many teachers, and even supervisors, do not seem to have a clear understanding of creativity. For instance, some of them associate creativity with outstanding "inventions" and major "breakthroughs," which did not make sense to them in the context of language classes. Familiarizing teachers with creativity and its applications can have a huge influence on addressing the misconceptions they may have about creativity, which can lead to an improvement in their attitudes. The change in teachers' attitudes towards the concept of creativity could reflect positively on their behavior in language classes even if the textbooks do not support creativity. For instance, teachers might willingly work on improving their teaching methods and design their own activities and questions that foster creativity.

4. Discussion

This study attempted to explore the extent to which Saudi EFL teachers promote creativity in language classes. To address this question, a two-part questionnaire was administered to 45 middle school EFL teachers. The questionnaire was followed by 14 interviews with EFL middle school teachers and supervisors. The first part of the questionnaire explored whether or not creativity is promoted in their language classrooms, while the second part examined their attitudes towards creativity in the EFL context. An overview of the key findings with respect to this research question will be provided in this section, and further detailed discussions and recommendations will follow.

4.1 EFL Teachers Do Not Promote Creativity

Participating teachers in the current study were surveyed for their behaviours and beliefs that facilitate the development of creative thinking and the formation of creative habits in their students. The results show that

Saudi EFL teachers, in general, make little effort to foster creativity in their teaching practices. The majority of the teachers never or rarely involve students in problem-solving tasks, vary their teaching strategies, accommodate for different styles of learning, or use open-ended questions. They rarely incorporate activities that stimulate students' imagination; they hardly encourage students to evaluate what they read or allow for debating their own views and ideas. Consequently, Saudi students lack problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, and creativity, which is confirmed by this study as well as other studies such as those of Althaqafi (2011) and Alnofaie (2013).

To investigate the unsatisfactory findings about EFL teachers' behaviours that seem to hinder creativity in language classes, a number of EFL teachers and EFL supervisors were interviewed about the reasons for not promoting creativity in language classes. One of the most common reasons was the unclear concept of creativity for EFL teachers and supervisors as well. Most teachers believed the concept of creativity to be quite confusing. Some claimed that they had never heard of creativity while others held different views of creativity; for instance, some believed that it referred to "generating new ideas," "the ability to come up with unusual answers," 'applying ideas in new situations," "giving different opinions," or "creating something unthought of." The different definitions of creativity that were obtained from this study support the conclusion of Wilson (2005) who described teachers' definitions as wide-ranging and that creativity has different meanings for different people. Furthermore, it has also been argued that having personal ideas about what creativity means can affect teachers' approaches to teaching strategies, classroom attitudes, and the assessment of activities that develop creativity (Odena, 2001).

In addition, the current study revealed that EFL teachers believe that promoting creativity is inappropriate in language teaching and that it is more suitably associated with other school subjects such science and mathematics. To these teachers, the main goal is to simply help students to learn language skills and not to be creative. It seems that this view was based on the teachers' own understanding of the concept of creativity as well as their own individual language teaching philosophies. It is quite common among EFL teachers to treat *language* in language classrooms as a subject matter, including aspects such as lexis, structure, and phonology. They often do not treat it as a tool to communicate and construct meaning, where being critical, open to other ideas, collaborative, imaginative, and independent would then be valuable (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

According to the participating teachers in this study, the available EFL textbooks are not supportive of creativity. Most of them noted that the number of activities that develop students' creative thinking are extremely limited and that textbooks do not pay much attention to the actual needs of EFL learners and teachers, one of which is developing creativity and thinking skills. This view is supported by Shaheen's (2010) conclusion that "school textbooks contain very little material which is actually geared towards developing creativity, despite increasing calls for this." This gives an indication that the implementation of such policies is not quite as advanced as the statements declared by the Saudi Ministry of Education, and that there is a need for major reforms to textbooks in order to successfully achieve important goals such as developing creativity.

Moreover, there is a common perception among a considerable number of EFL teachers that Saudi students are not well prepared to be creative in the language classrooms. Some teachers believed that creativity is not suitable for Saudi students as their abilities are way below that required for carrying out creative activities. Some of them even described students as not having "what it takes to be creative." Other teachers mentioned age and experience as factors having a huge influence on students' creative thinking, pointing out that creativity suits older and more advanced students. Again, as explained earlier, it seems that teachers' somewhat negative opinions of their students' linguistic abilities (Al-Mansour & Al-Shorman, 2011) as well as their personal perceptions of the concept of creativity (Wilson, 2005) greatly affect their views of how suitable creativity activities are in their language classes.

Lack of teacher training on how to foster creativity is considered one of the crucial factors that affects Saudi EFL teachers' views and behaviors towards promoting creativity in their language classrooms. Almost all interviewed teachers indicated that they were not involved in any training for fostering creative thinking in language classrooms. According to them, most of the pre- and in-service teacher training is limited to teaching English language skills and classroom management strategies. This finding is in line with the results of several other studies (e.g., Puccio & Cabra, 2010; Al-Silami, 2010; Sen & Sharma, 2004; Sarsani, 1999) that emphasize how a lack of teacher training on creativity can impede the development of students' creative skills. In fact, a lack of knowledge and training in this respect can negatively affect teachers' attitudes and motivation, both of which are needed to foster creativity in classrooms (Sen & Sharma, 2004). This is why some researchers (e.g., Fleith, 2000; Runco & Johnson, 2002; Sternberg, 2003; Al-Silami, 2010) highlight the important role of trained teachers who have experience and knowledge of the value of creative thinking so that they are able to encourage and improve

creativity in students to a greater extent.

A related issue that was raised by many EFL supervisors as one of the major reasons for not promoting creativity is teachers' inappropriate pedagogies and teaching practices. They believed that teachers' teacher-centred approaches and their reliance on the grammar translation method hugely hinder the promotion of creativity in language classes because most of the class time is spent on lecturing, including directly teaching grammar points and translation techniques. Hence, it is quite difficult to provide students with sufficient opportunities to develop their creativity in this kind of context. This view about Saudi teachers' teaching competency is shared by researchers such as Fareh (2010) and Al-Aqeel (2005) who echoed these concerns as well as other issues such as teachers' emphasis on rote learning and evaluation. These teaching practices and behaviours inhibit creativity, as students are constantly under control and are given restricted choices and opportunities that actually limit their creative potential, consequently undermining the diversity of students' ideas (Johnston, 2005; Shaheen, 2010).

Some EFL teachers and supervisors in this study considered issues such as a lack of resources, distinct learning habits, and different home environment to be influential constraints to creativity. These problems can and do prevent the fostering of creative thinking because they include shortages of staff, time, support, equipment, and/or information that is needed for the proper implementation of creative activities. These findings are in line with those of Davis (1999) who believed that such problems could interfere with new ideas, activities, and possibilities, thus hindering creative thinking.

4.2 EFL Teachers Do Not Hold Very Positive Attitudes towards Creativity

When teachers were surveyed about their attitudes towards creativity, the results showed that they generally had a slightly positive attitude. It might seem confusing as to how teachers could have positive attitudes towards creativity and yet not promote it in their actual teaching practices. However, as Plucker, Beghetto and Dow (2004) and Runco (2007) have explained, teachers might appreciate and preach about creativity as a theory but they do not practice it in reality for various reasons, and a lack of clear understanding of creativity is the most crucial.

Data obtained from the questionnaire on attitudes towards creativity showed mixed results. With respect to teachers' feelings towards encouraging creative thinking in language classes, more than half of the teachers liked the idea of employing creativity activities in their language classes. However, most of the other half either had negative feelings towards the idea or were undecided. Similarly, more than half of the teachers felt that creativity activities in language classes could improve students' attitudes towards language, yet the other half of the teachers either disagreed or remained neutral.

As for teachers' beliefs about creativity, many of the surveyed teachers thought that the concept of creativity is quite ambiguous. Moreover, while a considerable number of teachers believed creativity is not applicable in language lessons, a similar number of them thought it could be. When teachers were asked about the usefulness of creativity in language lessons, more than half of them did not believe in its benefits. In addition, teachers' responses seemed to be divided regarding the suitability of creativity activities for large classes: one third of the responses were in favour of using such activities, another third was opposed, and the final third was undecided. Furthermore, very few teachers thought that incorporating creativity in their classes would improve their teaching skills, while most of them did not think it would make a significant improvement to their teaching skills. Regarding whether the current language lessons promote creativity, more than half of the teachers thought that their language lessons did not foster creativity.

With respect to conative domain of teachers' attitudes towards creativity, more than half the teachers did not express the desire to incorporate creativity activities in their language classes. Similarly, when asked whether they had plans to implement creativity activities in language lessons, more than half of the respondents did not show any intentions to use these activities in the future.

These mixed results seem to support the factors discussed in the previous section. These factors highlight the need to familiarize textbook designers, EFL supervisors, and teachers with the proper definition of creativity and its applications. This can have a huge impact on addressing the lack of knowledge and misconceptions that they may have about creativity; hence, a general attitude improvement could be achieved. The change in teachers' attitudes would reflect positively on their behavior in language classes even if textbooks do not support creativity, as they would be motivated to modify their teaching practices to adopt techniques and strategies that promote creativity.

4.3 Recommendations and Future Studies

With respect to promoting creativity, it seems that issues such as teachers' beliefs that creativity is irrelevant to language learning or that creativity activities do not suit Saudi students all stem from teachers' unfamiliarity with

this concept and its applications in EFL contexts. In addition, other factors such as the established curriculum, textbooks, teaching environment, and teaching practices need to be considered if creativity is to be successfully promoted. Therefore, recommendations can be offered on two levels: the policy/curriculum level and the practical level. As for the policy/curriculum level, insufficient emphasis is put on creativity in the existing Saudi educational policy documents. Although the Saudi Ministry of Education's (2005) list of general goals and standards for teaching English in schools in Saudi Arabia mentions the importance of using language to enhance students' thinking skills, including creative thinking, previous studies show that this goal fails to materialize (Alfares, 2014). It is recommended that a clear and consistent operational definition along with precise guidelines need to be provided for textbook developers along with proper orientation and training to ensure achieving the set objectives. To achive this recommendation, the Saudi Ministry of Education probably needs to intiate nationwide workshops and conferences that represent all those who are involved such as students, teachers, parents and course designers. The resulting suggestions, expectations and recommendations would create the foundation upon which the understanding of creativity and the best approaches to promote it could be organized and improved.

As for the practical level, some recommendations can be made regarding teachers, textbooks, and parental support. First, it is obvious that without teacher support (the implementer), the curriculum and textbooks are not enough to ensure the promotion of creativity in EFL classes. Therefore, it is important that EFL teachers and supervisors are informed about creativity and how it can be promoted and utilized in language classrooms before (e.g., in teacher education programmes) and after they are recruited. These training programmes should encourage teachers to support and value creativity on a practical level, and to reflect these ideals in their attitudes and teaching philosophies. Another suggestion is for the local directorates, EFL supervisors, and school administrations to advocate classroom teaching practices that are conducive to fostering an attitude that creativity is valuable among teachers. Some of these practices involve modeling creativity activities, encouraging risk taking, promoting collaborative learning, initiating self-evaluation, establishing personal relationships with students, stimulating imagination, prompting students to evaluate content by asking questions, making students learn by practice and discovery, drawing out student's ideas, and giving students real choices (Burnard, Craft, & Cremin, 2006; Woods, 2004; Jeffrey, 2005; Claxton, 2006; Fryer, 2003).

Second, for teachers to successfully implement the above mentioned practices, the EFL textbook needs to be supportive of creativity, as it is a very strong tool that can help modify teachers' teaching habits. Therefore, it is recommended that textbook developers ensure that activities and questions that have the potential for developing creativity are added, and to include more creativity-conducive content, exercises, and questions in the textbooks. This process should go hand in hand with practical teacher training and enrichment courses whose main objective is to inform, motivate, and refine teaching skills in this respect.

Third, parental support is also critical for the promotion of creative thinking (Vong, 2008; Al-Aqeel, 2005). Parents are influential in fostering and encouraging the creative thinking abilities of their children. Hence, it is suggested that parents are familiarized with the concept of creativity, its importance, and ways in which they can contribute to teachers' efforts to foster creativity. Of course, this highlights the significance of the parent-school relationship, which needs to be reinforced and maintained so that parents become more involved in the development of their children's education and personality.

With respect to teachers' attitudes towards creativity, it is quite clear that teachers lack a clear and common conceptualization of creativity. This finding was also confirmed by other researchers (e.g., Al-Silami, 2010; Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2007). Consequently, it is quite difficult to value the importance of creativity and develop a positive attitude towards it given that there is no clear understanding of the concept. Therefore, an additional recommendation would be for the Ministry of Education to adopt creative thinking in its programmes through including and emphasizing the topics of teaching creatively and teaching for creativity in pre-service teacher training programmes as well as in in-service EFL teacher workshops. One purpose of this training is to enhance teachers' understanding and attitudes towards teaching creatively and teaching for creativity; hence, some of the most prevalent myths about creativity can be addressed (Plucker, Beghetto & Dow, 2004; Plucker & Dow, 2010). This step allows teachers to discuss their own perceptions about creativity and correct any misconceptions they might have with existing evidence from up-to-date materials on creativity in psychology and education (Grohman & Szmidt, 2013). Involving teachers in such discussions should also help them understand how those misconceptions affect their attitudes towards creativity and how that in turn affects the success of their students.

The other purpose of the training is to engage teachers in in creative thinking techniques that are applicable across domains. Grohman and Szmidt (2013) suggest techniques that belong to three general categories:

inquisitive (e.g., generating questions and speculations); combinatorial (e.g., making associations); and transformative (e.g., idea improvement or transforming objects). Learning about these techniques and the various ways to adopt/adapt them should help teachers appreciate creative thinking skills and develop a positive attitude towards their implementation. However, it is important to understand that shaping creative attitudes is not an easy task, and changes in attitudes require time and effort. Therefore, continuous engagement with teachers through various opportunities such as mentoring, coaching, online forums, blogs, and meetings could contribute in shaping positive attitudes towards developing creative thinking skills in teachers, and in turn, in their students as well.

Suggestions for further research include replicating this study in other EFL contexts (within the same region or beyond) in order to compare and contrast the findings, and to develop a useful and practical framework for improving creative thinking skills in the field of EFL in general. Another suggestion is to evaluate the efforts of organizations and institutions concerned with creativity, such as *Mawhiba*, in relation to enhancing creative thinking in the social sciences in general and in language education in particular. Moreover, the learner plays an important role in this respect, and therefore it is necessary to explore learners' perceptions and views on creative thinking skills and the means of improving them at this level. A further suggestion is to examine the effectiveness of a creative thinking skills development programme on students' creativity and attitudes in language education. Such study can be very useful in promoting creativity in EFL contexts, addressing misconceptions about creativity and providing practical solutions and further recommendations for educators.

References

Al Inizi, M. G. (2006). *The effect of using brainstorming in teaching science on the development of creative thinking among second grade intermediate students in the Arar city* (Unpublished M.A. thesis). College of Education, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah.

Al Khadra, F. A. (2005). *The development of creative and critical thinking:an experimental study*. Amman: De Bono Printing, Publishing and Distribution.

Al Otaibi, M. M. (2009). *The ability to think inferentially and creatively and problem solving and their relationship to achievement in science subject among a sample of sixth grade students in Makkah* (Unpublished M.A. thesis). College of Education, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah.

Al-Aqeel, A. A. (2005). *Education policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. (In Arabic) Riyadh, KSA: Al-Roashd Library.

Alfares, N. (2014). *Using the textbook to promote thinking skills in intermediate school EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia: An analysis of the tasks and an exploration of teachers' behaviours and perceptions* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). The University of Glasgow.

Aljughaiman, A., & Mowrer-Reynolds, E. (2007). Teachers' conceptions of creativity and creative students. *Journal of Creative Behaviour, 39*(1), 17-34. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.2162-6057.2005.tb01247.x

Al-Mansour, N. S., & Al-Shorman, R. E. A. (2011). The effect of teacher's storytelling aloud on the reading comprehension of Saudi elementary stage students. *Journal of King Saud University - Languages and Translation, 23*(2), 69-76. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jksult.2011.04.001

Alnofaie, H. (2013). *The implementation of critical thinking as EFL pedagogy: Challenges and opportunities* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis). Newcastle University.

Al-Seghayer, K. (2014). The four most common constraints affecting English teaching in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 4*(5), 17-26. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v4n5p17

Al-Silami, T. (2010). *Comparison of creative thinking and reflective-impulsive style in grade 10 male students from rural and urban Saudi Arabia* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis). Victoria University.

Althaqafi, T. (2011). Institutions of higher education lack analytical skills: Critical thinking curricula. *Al Sharq Alawsat*. Retrieved from http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=55&article=653843&issueno=12066

Ambusaidy, A., & Al Balushi, M. (2005): Obstacles to creative thinking in physics in classes (10-12) of public education from the standpoint of physics teachers. *Journal of the Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University, 4*(29), 149-182.

Burnard, P., Craft, A., & Cremin, T. (2006). Documenting 'possibility thinking': A journey of collaborative enquiry. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 14*(3), 243-262. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09669760600880001

Claxton, G. (2006). Thinking at the edge: Developing soft creativity. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 36*(3), 351-362. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057640600865876

Daiute, C., & Dalton, B. (1993). Collaboration between children learning to write: Can novices be masters? *Cognition and Instruction 10*, 281-333. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532690xci1004_1

Davis, G. (1999). Barriers to creativity and creative attitudes. In M. A. Runco, & S. Pritzker (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of creativity 1* (pp. 165-174). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Fareh, S. (2010). Challenges of teaching English in the Arab world: Why can't EFL programs deliver as expected? *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *2*(2), 3600-3604. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.559

Filimban, N. H. (2010). *The effectiveness of the 4mat system in the achievement and creative thinking of the second female students at secondary schools in the English*. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis). College of Education, Ummal-Qura University, Makkah.

Fleith, D. S. (2000). Teacher and student perceptions of creativity in the classroom environment. *Roeper Review*, *22*(3), 148-153. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02783190009554022

Fryer, M. (2003). *Creativity across the curriculum: A review and analysis of programmes designed to develop creativity*. London: QCA.

Grohman, M., & Szmidt, K. (2013). Teaching for creativity: How to shape creative attitudes in teachers and in students. In M. Gregerson, H. Snyder, & J. Kaufman (Eds.), *Teaching creatively and teaching creativity.* London: Springer Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5185-3_2

Jeffrey, B. (2005, July). *The redress of creative teaching and learning through specialist programmes and strategic partnerships*. Paper presented at the Creativity in Education Seminar Series, University of the West of England, Birmingham.

Johnston, J. (2005). What is creativity in science education? In A. Wilson (Ed.), *Creativity in primary education: Theory and practice (achieving QTS cross-curricular strand)* (pp. 88-101). UK: Learning Matters Ltd.

Lee, B. (2013). Suggestions for language learners: Creativity development in EFL classrooms. *Primary English Education, 19*(3), 87-109.

Lin, M., & McKay, C. (2004). *Thinking through modern foreign languages*. Cambridge: Chris Kington Publishing.

Morris, W. (2006). *Creativity: Its place in education.* Retrieved from http://www.jpb.com/creative/Creativity_in_Education.pdf

Odena, O. (2001, September). *How do secondary school teachers view creativity? A report on educators' views of teaching composing skills*. Paper presented at the BERA Annual Conference, University of Leeds, UK.

Ong, E., Hartzell, S. A., & Greene, M. T. (2009). Fostering creativity in the classroom: Effects of teachers' epistemological beliefs, motivation, and goal orientation. *The Journal of Creative Behavior, 43*, 192-208. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.2162-6057.2009.tb01314.x

Özcan, D. (2010). Contributions of English teachers' behaviours on students' creative thinking abilities. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *2*(2), 5850-5854. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.956

Plucker, J. A., & Dow, G. T. (2010). Attitude change as the precursor to creativity enhancement. In R. A. Beghetto & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Nurturing creativity in the classroom* (pp. 362-379). New York: Cambridge Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511781629.018

Plucker, J. A., Beghetto, R. A., & Dow, G. (2004). Why isn't creativity more important to educational psychologists? Potential, pitfalls, and future directions in creativity research. *Educational Psychologist 39,* 83-96. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep3902_1

Puccio, G. J., & Cabra, J. F. (2010). Organizational creativity: A systems approach. In J. C. Kaufmann, & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* (pp. 145-173). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511763205.011

Renzulli, J. S., Smith, L. H., White, A. J., Callahan, C. M., Hartman, R. K., & Westberg, K. L. (2002). *Scales for rating the behavioral characteristics of superior students* (Rev. ed.). Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.

Rietzschel, E., De Dreu, C., & Nijstad, B. (2009). What are we talking about when we talk about creativity?

Group creativity as multifaceted, multistage phenomenon. In E. Mannix, M. Neale, & J. Concalo (Eds.), *Creativity in groups* (pp. 1-28). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/S1534-0856(2009)0000012004

Runco, M. A. (2007). *Creativity: Theories and themes: Research, development, and practice*. Burlington, MA: Elsevier Academic Press.

Runco, M. A., & Johnson, D. J. (2002). Parents' and teachers' implicit theories of childrens' creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, *14*(3-4), 427-438. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15326934CRJ1434_12

Sarsani, R. (1999). *Exploring the promotion of creative thinking among secondary school students in India* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis). University of London.

Sen, R., & Sharma, N. (2004). Teachers' conception of creativity and its nurture in children: An Indian perspective. In M. Fryer (Ed.), *Creativity and cultural diversity* (pp. 153-169). Leeds: The Creativity Centre Educational Trust Press.

Shaheen, R. (2010). *An investigation into the factors enhancing or inhibiting primary school children's creativity in Pakistan* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis). University of Birmingham.

Sternberg, R. J. (2003). Creative thinking in the classroom. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *47*(3), 325-338. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00313830308595

Suliman, S. M. (2007): *The effectiveness of using computer in correction misconceptions in the unit of substance properties and in the development of creative thinking and attitudes towards physics of first year secondary stage students in Taif* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis). College of Education, Umm Al Qura University, Makkah.

Vong, K. I. (2008). Developing creativity and promoting social harmony: The relationship between government, school and parents' perceptions of children's creativity in Macao-SAR in China. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 28*(2), 149-158. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09575140802065599

Wilson, A. (2005). *Creativity in primary education: Theory and practice (achieving QTS cross-curricular strand)*. Great Britain: Learning Matters Ltd.

Woods, P. (2004, March). *Creative teaching and learning: Historical, political and institutional perspectives.* Paper presented at the ESRC Creative Teaching and Learning Seminar, University of Exeter, UK.

Zaidi, F. K. A. (2008). *The effect of active learning in the development of creative thinking and achievement in science among third grade intermediate students in public schools in Makkah* (Unpublished M.A. thesis). College of Education, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah.

Zai-toon, A. M. (1987). *Developing creativity and creative thinking in science teaching*. Jordan: University of Jordan, Amman.

Zarnoqi, N. N. (2007). *The effect of using computer in the development of creative thinking and achievement in physics among second grade secondary stage students in Jeddah* (Unpublished M.A. thesis). College of Education, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah

Note

Note 1. All of the names of interveiwees have been changed for anonymity.