The need to engage students' creative thinking in language learning classes

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Abstract: There is a growing body of literature that emphasizes the significance of creative thinking in the globalized and interconnected world of 21st century. Developing the ability to think creatively helps enrich our lives, achieve success and have a prosperous society. Therefore, the development of the skill should be a fundamental part of education throughout all levels and across all subjects. Language education is no exception. Language learning classes that encourage creative thinking help learners develop not only intellectually but also emotionally and socially. The main purpose of this paper is to present the implications of engaging students' creative thinking in language learning classes with reference to English language. We discuss a new perspective about the process of language learning and focus on how engaging students' creative thinking can make learning other languages meaningful, enriching and engaging.

Keywords: Creative thinking, Language learning classes, meaningful learning, imagination, motivation, joyful environment

1. Introduction

Creative thinking is the key to personal growth and social development in the 21st century. It is an important skill to achieve progress and solve the major annoying problems facing humanity (Guilford, 1967; Jones & Richards, 2016; Runco, 2018). A society that does not create or at least adapt to the new challenges and circumstances can be stagnant. This is because communities sustain themselves through constant self-renewal (Dewey, 2001). Creative thinking has also been an important factor in having life-changing inventions that contribute to the advancement of civilization and lead to societal progress (Glaveanu et al., 2020; Kaufman, 2009). Besides, people are being replaced by robots in many jobs. However, jobs that require creative thinking are unlikely to be automated in the present era (Frey & Osborne, 2017). That is why, World Economic Forum (2018) lists creative thinking as one of the major skills that people need to be successful in today's world.

The need for creative thinking necessitates countries to reform their educational systems so as to develop the creative potentials of their students. Recently, there has been a growing interest, reflected in educational policies and teaching practices, to foster learners' thinking skills (Wegerif et al., 2015). Language learning classes are no exception. Language teachers are required to train students to think creatively in order to prepare them for the unforeseen challenges of the future and also improve their language learning performance. Language learning classes that encourage students to think creatively promote meaningful learning, curiosity, imagination, collaboration and willingness to take risks. These elements contribute to improving students' academic performance and their achievement in second language learning. A language learning classroom that fosters creative thinking differs from the one that emphasizes merely communication. To illustrate this point, let's start with these scenarios of two teachers of English.

Teacher A is trained to use the communicative approach which is one of the dominated approaches in English language teaching practice (Alamri, 2018). The teacher encourages students to communicate and express meaning using the target language for a certain purpose. He gives students information or opinion-gap tasks and asks them to fill the gap using information through communication. This information is often linked to familiar topics. The students wait for instructions regarding what to do. The teacher gives directions and provides guidance on how to do the task. Learners complete the tasks using simple, safe and known information and meaning to self even if they are not known to the interlocutors such as the superficial 'self-talk' about family members and interests. Such classes which focus more on language functions such as making requests and offers do not encourage communication especially among children and young learners who are not yet aware of the importance of learning a language (Darwish, 2016; Kalanzadeh et al., 2014; Nguyen, 2021). In addition to that, Swan (1985) argues that the communicative language approach does not take into consideration students' knowledge, skills and their experience of the world.

Teacher B is trained to engage students' creative thinking while teaching English. The students are encouraged to do tasks using unexpected information. The teacher gives students opportunities to identify problems, find unusual solutions, construct and communicate new meaning. He encourages learners to create, discover, imagine and search for new connections between disparate ideas. The tasks such as 'what if' put students in hypothetical situations and motivate them to explore, think and challenge themselves. Learners are encouraged to be creative thinkers, problem solvers and communicators. The teacher is playing the role of problem setter, problem seeker, coach and audience. He encourages students to give as many solutions as they can without any judgment or evaluation. He also gives room to so much curiosity and imagination in the classroom. The tasks are open-ended and all the answers vary from one learner to another (Davies et al., 2013; Read, 2015; Sternberg, 1995). Many studies showed that such classes in which creative thinking is encouraged increase motivation and improve students' language learning performance (Liao et al., 2018; Toroujeni, 2020; Yang & Zhao, 2021).

The first scenario is a reality for learners in our schools. Most of us experienced having classes similar to those of teacher A. The encouragement of creative thinking is almost absent in the language learning classes we took as students. Teachers were in a rush to finish the prescribed curriculum and prepare students for passing the exams. This is understandable because schools are evaluated on the basis of their students' performance on standardized tests. Learning foreign languages such as French emphasize drills, repetition of content, focus on grammar and memorization of vocabulary. Learners do not think about creative thinking because language lessons do not encourage them to produce their own creative ideas. Language syllabus focuses on what can be considered as trivial such as teaching the language required to get a train ticket or describe one's room (Graham et al., 2020). In fact, language learning classes should go beyond the production of pre-fabricated phrases and the perspectives of others to the production of learners' own thoughts (Graham et al., 2020).

Recent calls in English language teaching focus mainly on providing students with communicative tasks that align with the communicative approach. The communicative approach to language teaching focuses on the use of language rather than learning about the language (Thamarana, 2015). However, merely using the language is not enough. We believe that learners can succeed in language learning if they could exhibit creative thinking through the language and the production of creative ideas. In modern culture, the best students are those who are extroverts, charismatic speakers and outgoing talkers (Stein-smith, 2018). Silence and thinking alone should not be underestimated. Great

thinkers and writers spend long hours working and creating alone (Stein-smith, 2018). Even in language classrooms, many successful language learners spend long periods of time reading and absorbing new views and producing complex thoughts and ideas in addition to internalizing the grammar and vocabulary of the target language (Stein-smith, 2018).

Therefore, language learners are required not only to remember language in its abstract form but also to think creatively so as to internalize the language (Li, 2016). Porter (2022) adds that what is important for language learners is not necessarily knowing the most frequent words of the target language but instead ideas they want to articulate using that language. The incorporation of creative thinking in language learning classes fosters meaningful learning, increases motivation, encourages students to use imagination and provides a joyful environment in the classroom. All these elements can help improve students' language learning performance (Liao et al., 2018; Toroujeni, 2020; Yang & Zhao, 2021). The present paper discusses these implications in more detail.

2. The definition of creative thinking

Steve jobs once described creativity as the simple task of connecting things. He indicated that creative people feel a little guilty because all they did is getting something new from connecting ideas that already exist. This is relevant to the meaning of creative thinking because humans are unable to create something out of nothing. Creative thinking is the process of associating existing ideas to produce a creative idea or a product. According to the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, creating is described as the process of connecting elements or parts to form an original product not present before (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). There is a general agreement among scholars that the outcome of such connections has to be new and useful (Amabile, 1996; Plucker et al., 2004; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). For example, to replace chocolate by rocks in a recipe is not creative because it is not appropriate though it is new (Gube & Lajoie, 2020; Kaufman, 2016). If an idea or a product is merely appropriate or useful but not new, then the idea is not different from what others have produced before (Gube & Lajoie, 2020; Kaufman, 2016). In the classroom, the ideas that are produced during learning can be new or old, appropriate or inappropriate. However, only ideas that are new and appropriate are to be judged as creative (Beghetto & Plucker, 2006).

It is noteworthy that the terms creativity or creative thinking can be used to describe several different levels of the skill. 'Big-C' creativity changes disciplines such as the world changing efforts of Davinci, Beethoven, Shakespeare and Einstein (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007; Craft, 2001, 2002, 2003a; Gardner, 1993). Their accomplishments, which are groundbreaking in originality, not only contributed to their disciplines but transformed them. This kind of creativity is not possessed by everyone and cannot be developed through training (Simonton, 1994). 'Little -c' creativity refers to everyday creativity that improves and enriches our lives but does not lead to groundbreaking accomplishments and fame. This kind of creativity which is accessed to most people is used to solve daily problems in unfamiliar ways but does not contribute to the advancement of human knowledge (Craft, 2003b; Hernández-torrano & Ibrayeva, 2020; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009).

Another type of creativity called 'Pro-c' creativity is linked to professions or expertise in a certain domain. It focuses on the ability to be creative without being a genius or reaching 'Big -C' creativity such as a professor finding a new solution to a mathematical problem (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). Beghetto and Kaufman (2007) added 'Mini-c' creativity level which differs from 'little-c' (everyday) and 'Big-C' (eminent) creativity. 'Mini-c' creativity is defined as the ability of the individual to interpret experiences and actions in novel and meaningful way (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). The smaller categories namely little 'c' and small 'c' creativity apply to the classroom because attaining

larger levels require many years of intensive training and expertise (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2011; Beghetto & Plucker, 2006).

In language learning classes, any connection between existing ideas that results in original and useful ideas or products can be described as creative. This includes linguistic creativity, creative problem-solving or a new strategy for learning an educational content. Language learners are able to recreate language the same way individuals connect two irrelevant ideas into a new creation (Liao et al., 2018). We should bear in mind that creative thinking is not for special students. Research has indicated that everyone is creative and everyone's creative thinking can be developed (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012; Guilford, 1967; Torrance & Torrance, 1973). The development of the skill depends on various environmental factors (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Kampylis & Berki, 2014; Miller, 2015; Sawyer, 2006; Wilson, 2009). Educational environment plays a crucial role in encouraging students to combine elements of a language to produce unfamiliar and valuable thoughts that are truly theirs, solve familiar problems using their original and useful solutions and communicate ideas that are worth sharing.

3.   The importance of creative thinking in 21st century education

The oldest idea of education is that students should be socialized to the norms, values and beliefs of society (Judson & Egan, 2013). Therefore, all the elements of the curriculum are included on the basis of their future social utility and usefulness (Judson & Egan, 2013). Having said that, it is important to note that not everything that is taught through education is needed or even right. Plato argues that the aim of education should not be about the accumulation of information and knowledge but rather about training the mind to search for the truth, goodness and beauty (Plato, 1941). Jean-Jacques Rousseau also emphasizes that the role of education is to develop a character that is eager for enlightenment and facilitate the fullest development of the mind and the potential of each individual student (Rousseau, 1762). John Dewey (2001) points out the goal of education is to help students grow, link their interests to intellectual development and construct experiences that provide meaning.

Rote memorization of a certain amount of information is no longer sufficient. The information we have today may be outdated tomorrow as new knowledge keeps replacing the existing one (Lau, 2011; Soh, 2017). Students need to make use of the stored and the new information to generate creative ideas to solve problems and cope with the new challenges that emerge on a daily basis. They need to be trained as producers of creative ideas rather than consumers of ideas produced by ancestors (Masadeh, 2021). The practice of asking students to merely listen so as to learn everything required to be successful in the future is no longer valid because teachers do not know the information or the questions the future communities will face (Treffinger, 2007). Unfortunately, in today's classrooms, students still sit in rows, like an assembly line in a factory, listening to their teacher. This practice that encourages teachers to be controllers and assumes that all students learn in the same way resulted in having uniformity in products and process (Senge et al., 2000). Robinson (2011) argues that the current educational systems still aim at meeting the needs of the 19th century industries that do not require employees to be creative thinkers. Students are still regarded as products rather than creators of learning. That is why, policy makers and teachers need to shift their vision to preparing students for a future that is unpredictable and unforeseen.

4.   The need for creative thinking in language learning classroom

Creative thinking in language learning classes is supported by various language learning theories and pedagogical advice. The development of the skill is involved in most of the main theories of

language learning namely cognitive, humanistic and socio-cultural theories. Piaget (1964) and Vygotsky (2004) assert that creative thinking needs to be developed by the education system. In Maslow's hierarchy, creativity is placed at the highest category of self-actualization (Maslow, 1968). It is also placed at the highest level of learning in Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, 2002). Besides, there is a relationship between learning and creative thinking. Guilford (1950) asserts that any creative act is an example of learning because it reflects a change in behavior due to a stimulation. Dörnyei (2005) explains that contemporary language teaching methodologies which tend to favor student-centered learning, interaction-based methods and the use of open-ended tasks are ideally suited to fostering creative thinking in the classroom.

Maley and Kiss (2018) argue that without creative thinking, the quality of learning will be seriously damaged. Learners of a language need to use the target language creatively and move beyond the basic and rudimentary levels (Hadley, 2003). Hawkins (1996) also asserts that the path to fluency includes using the language actively for goals that matter. Sotto adds that an understanding of creative thinking is the key to 'learning all learning'(1994, p. 200). In addition to that, second language learning classes are described as a 'nest' of creativity where students can enjoy tasks that encourage creative thinking and sustain them to leave their comfort zone (Piasecka, 2018, p. 89). Noteworthy, limited knowledge of second language is never a hindrance as far as there is a supporting environment and a caring teacher who motivates students to think creatively (Markova, 2015). Moreover, a classroom that encourages creative thinking promotes meaningful learning, imagination, curiosity and intrinsic motivation. This kind of classroom conforms to the natural way of learning and provides an environment that values freedom, exploration and independence which are the major goals of natural education that Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) advocated long time ago.

One of the main goals of the educational systems is to help learners attain success. Creative thinking is of one of the factors that impacts learners' level of academic achievement. Many studies indicated that creative thinking in language learning classroom increases language learning performance and improves learners' academic achievement (Chen et al., 2018; Pishghadam et al., 2011; Ševečková, 2016; Zhang et al., 2018; Zokaee et al., 2020). It is worth noting that creative thinking does not have to be taught as an isolated entity but should be integrated across all school subjects and embedded in the curriculum (Kampylis & Berki, 2014; Mirman & Tishman, 1988). The subsequent sections discuss how engaging students' creative thinking in language learning classes fosters meaningful learning, increases motivation, encourage students to use imagination and creates a joyful atmosphere in the classroom.

5. Providing meaningful learning

There is an interesting saying in the Confucian analects which states that 'learning without thought is labor lost'. The saying implies that learning without any mental processing of the new information is a waste of time and effort. This is relevant especially in language education as thinking is of paramount importance. It is true that language is for communication and teachers in some language learning classes tend to favor those who talk a lot. Having students communicating and producing the language is crucial. However, as Cain (2012) point out, there is no relationship between being the best talker and producing the best ideas. Furthermore, meaningless activities such as memorization, repeating uncontextualized grammar and vocabulary drills are unlikely to promote learning. Also, language learning tasks that are based on known meaning result in the absence of desire to explore complex language (Tin, 2011). That is why, teachers should help students communicate original ideas that are worth sharing. They have to encourage learners to be creative and practice the language for a real purpose instead of repeating and memorizing pre-fabricated phrases. As Tin (2011) asserts, language learning tasks have to integrate some important aspects of

creative tasks to help learners use the language to form unknown meaning and facilitate the creative language use.

Learning takes two forms: rote learning and meaningful learning (Ausubel, 2000). Rote learning involves memorizing isolated entities that can be linked to cognitive structure in arbitrary ways (Novak, 2002). This kind of learning leads to failure as it does not build a cognitive structure. This is because students do not make an effort to link new knowledge with relevant existing one in cognitive structures (Hung, 2019). Students need to process cognitively the new knowledge in order to make sense of the new input through the mental storage of target items in relation to exiting cognitive structures (Ausubel, 2000). Meaningful learning allows students to look for a way to associate or integrate the new concepts or ideas with relevant ideas in the cognitive structure (Novak, 2002). In other words, meaningful learning encourages students to acquire input by connecting prior knowledge to new situations and constructing a mental model (Mayer & Moreno, 2003). This kind of learning involves selecting the information, activating prior knowledge and making a connection between the new information and the existing knowledge. This facilitates learning and allows students to present their thinking in concrete methods, visualize and test the results of their reasoning (Land & Jonassen, 2000).

The revised taxonomy also highlights a broader vision of learning that does not include only acquiring knowledge but also being able to use it in different new situations. In other words, learning should not target only remembering and understanding but should be expanded to include higher cognitive processes like creative thinking. Thinking creatively transcend the boundaries of prior knowledge (Morar et al., 2020). It involves putting together and reorganizing elements into a creative pattern or structure. Therefore, by taking part in activities that aim at promoting creative thinking, students are simultaneously engaged in meaningful learning. They are encouraged to make a connection between new information and stored knowledge; unlike rote memorization that fails to build such a connection (Mayer, 2002). When thinking creatively, students engage in meaningful learning when they try to transform the known and the familiar into the unknown or unfamiliar in an attempt to solve a problem or complete a task (Russ & Fiorelli, 2010). In language learning classes, teachers are encouraged to teach meaningful learning to help students connect the new input with their existing knowledge in order to build a cognitive structure (Brown, 2000). Furthermore, Read (2015) argues that the incorporation of creative thinking in language classes enhances the promotion of cognitive and metacognitive skills such as questioning, imagining, hypothesizing and evaluating which are required in all areas of the curriculum.

b. Using imagination

Imagination is important for knowledge since the productions of Edison, Einstein, Mozart, De Vinci and Picasso are all the result of their imagination. Also, children invent imaginary friends and adults make plans of success in their career or travelling around the world (Böttger & Költzsch, 2019). Imagination is considered the greatest gift of consciousness to humans which enables them to explore the future and invent tools that improve their well-being (Damasio, 2010). These inventions have facilitated and advanced humans' lives to a great extent. Imagination is also the source of great power that pushes people to create new ideas by using images in their mind (Egan, 1992). Therefore, education should not be just about socializing, raising good citizens and preparing them for academic pursuits but also enabling learners to use the cognitive tools they have including imagination (Klottrup & Egan, 1992).

There is a strong relationship between creative thinking and imagination. Creative thinking is defined as the application of imagination to generate ideas (Kampylis & Berki, 2014). Robinson

(2011) argues that creative thinking is a mental process that requires taking actions and applying imagination. The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (1999) emphasizes that one of the main characteristics of creativity is imagination. Vygotsky (1967; 2004) also considered imagination as one of the major elements of creative thinking. Egan (1992) defines imagination as the creative ability to shape ideas and images without having a direct external sensory input. Additionally, the widely used idiom 'thinking outside the box' implies that people should get rid of social conventions, restrictions and assumptions in order to produce creative ideas (Hanson, 2015). This indicates that a classroom that encourages creative thinking also promotes imagination.

Wenger (1998) explains that imagination in the classroom is not about withdrawing from reality. Rather, it is the process of generating novel images of possibility and methods of comprehending one's relation to the world. It is also a process of creating new images of the world by going beyond time and space. As Wenger (1998) illustrates, imagination is about looking at an apple seed and imagining a tree. Learners have a physical and a metaphorical space that allows them to solve a given problem creatively and imaginatively (Robbie & Warren, 2019). In language learning classroom, students must have something to say in order to be able to speak and write. When teachers focus on the practices of engagement rather than students' practices of imagination, students might ultimately withdraw from their language learning class (Norton, 2001). Consequently, the teacher has to encourage learners to use their imagination in a completely personal way to excel in productive tasks such as speaking and writing (Morar et al., 2020). Learners can also use imagination by imagining themselves speaking a different language. When language learners enter the classroom, they do not just see walls and tables but they imagine a community that go beyond time and space. The realm of their community extends to an imagined world outside the classroom or what Norton (2001) calls their imagined community. Norton (2001) adds that when learners speak the target language, they continuously shape and reshape their identity and how they relate to the outside world.

The power of imagination lies also in activating emotions when learners imagine future states (Macintyre & Gregersen, 2012). Obviously, positive emotions broadens an individual's perspective and facilitates the absorption of language whereas negative emotions limit the range of possible language input (Macintyre & Gregersen, 2012). Imagination triggers a sense of wonder at the achievement (Judson & Egan, 2013). When students' creative and imaginative ideas are valued and appreciated by others, they develop self-confidence in their own abilities and their own strengths (Robbie & Warren, 2019). This kind of environment that encourages creative thinking and imagination is similar to the job of a sculptor who takes a natural stone to find out what is hidden in it. In the same way, learners think deeply about the given situation or problem, discard unnecessary details, ask questions and try to find answers or what athletes call 'the white moment' when everything becomes clear (Robbie & Warren, 2019). Therefore, imagination, which is an essential part of creative thinking, should not be regarded as an additional activity that can be done after the hard work of learning is finished but should rather be something that can make basic instruction more engaging and stimulating to teachers and students (Egan, 2015).

c. Increasing motivation

Motivation is defined as an internal emotion or desire to do something (Brown, 2000). There are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, which refers to the state of engaging in an activity because of enjoyment, interest and getting personal meaning out of it and extrinsic motivation which refers to doing something because of external rewards such as grades, money or praise (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Kaufman, 2009). Motivation is regarded as one of the important variables influencing success in second language learning (Piniel & Csizér, 2013). It is also one of the key factors in creative productions. The most successful scientists are not the most gifted but they are the ones who are

driven by curiosity (Steele & Mcintosh, 2017). In the classroom, teachers often wonder why certain students are motivated to learn a second language while others in the same learning context show indifference or carelessness. Starko points out the need to awaken students' creative thinking in order to motivate them and enjoy their learning (Starko, 2010). If the subject does not interest students, they will have a negative attitude towards it (Morar et al., 2020). In addition to that, learning has to make sense to learners and they have to be convinced that they will reach the learning objectives (Morar et al., 2020). These learning objectives must be meaningful and interesting to the students and linked to their life context (Morar et al., 2020). Motivational intensity varies to a great extent depending on a person's thoughts and emotions (Schunk & Usher, 2012). Therefore, teachers must awaken students' creative thinking in order to make learning meaningful, interesting and engaging.

Creative work emerges most often when individuals really love what they are doing and when their focus is on the work rather than on a reward (Amabile, 1983). Therefore, encouraging intrinsic motivation is vital to the development of creative thinking (Amabile, 1996; Kaufman, 2016; Zhou & Shalley, 2003). Kaufman (2016) emphasizes that when an individual wants to do something creative, it is preferable to let them be led by their passion and joy to think creatively rather than by giving them rewards. Generally, intrinsic motivation encourages students to take risks, be curious and cognitively flexible (Zhou & Shalley, 2003). In addition to that, students' intensity of motivation is partly dependent on their ability to generate mental imagery (D'ornyei & Chan, 2013). In the classroom, one way to enhance learners' motivation is to provide them with activities that stimulate their creative thinking. Stimulating creative thinking in language learning class increases learners' motivation and improves their language learning performance (Chen et al., 2018; Ševečková, 2016). Amabile (1990) argues that individuals will be most creative when they feel motivated mainly be the interest and the challenge of the task. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) adds that when learners are involved in doing something they love and enjoy, they find themselves in the ideal state of motivation, concentration and absorption.

d. Creating a joyful environment

Every one of us remembers the joy and the pride we feel whenever we produce something creative and show it to others be they parents, teachers, friends or even strangers. Making new things and sharing them with others is joyful. In the classroom, moments of working creatively can trigger focus, interest, enthusiasm and joy. Creative thinking helps create an environment that is stress free and encourages students to assess problems, make plans, encounter challenges and promote self-confidence (Onyinyechukwu et al., 2021). Students, in their learning journey, experience different emotions which have a great impact on their learning performance. Positive emotions such as enjoyment and pride have a positive impact on achievement while negative emotions such as boredom and disappointment exert negative effects (Pekrun, 2006). Besides, teachers often wonder how they can get their students to pay attention in class, we believe creative thinking is the key. Creative thinking has a positive impact on the personality of learners as it develops their communication skill (Sayadian & Lashkarian, 2015), strengthen their self-confidence and self-worth (Maley, 2015) and helps them be engaged personally and socially and feel more satisfied (Robinson, 2011). Creative thinking activities can trigger the interest of learners and also teachers who have been turned off by an environment characterized by control and obedience (Fisher, 2004). In such an environment, students feel motivated and happy when they know that their ideas are important and worthy to be heard in the classroom.

Creative thinking fostering activities can lead to genuine cooperation and interaction in the classroom. Creative ideas are rarely the result of isolation but the outcome of interaction with others'

ideas (Wilson, 2009). Even great creative thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, or Marie Curie and Picasso worked together, supported and learned from each other (John-Steiner, 2000). It is also no surprise that creative individuals often tell stories of their supportive family members, friends or individuals of the same field (Wilson, 2009). Researchers advocate the integration of cooperative learning when encouraging creative thinking. Working cooperatively increases creative thinking and boost creative ideas among learners (Ibán et al., 2020; Kim & Song, 2012; Marashi & Khatami, 2017; Siew & Sombuling, 2017). Cooperative work encourages learners to support each other and become actively involved in the task. Students do not come to class with the same background of experiences and knowledge. Therefore, working collaboratively allows them to learn from each other as they make active relations between their knowledge and that of others (Robbie & Warren, 2019). Therefore, the teacher is required to create a non-judgmental environment where students are not allowed to dismiss an idea or language on the basis of its absurdity or inadequacy so that ideas and language can be produced freely without inhibition or limitation (Robbie & Warren, 2019). Moreover, it is well documented that cooperative learning has a positive impact on language learning performance (Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2014; Azizinezhad et al., 2013; Berzener & Deneme, 2021; Munawar & Chaudhary, 2019; Ning & Hornby, 2014). Therefore, cooperative learning can enhance both language learning performance and creative thinking at the same time.

6. Conclusion and recommendations for practice and further research

Creative thinking is a significant part of language learning process. The engagement of students' creative thinking enhances and facilitates language learning through providing meaningful learning, using imagination, increasing motivation and creating a joyful environment in class. To promote creative thinking, teachers should provide their learners with tasks that are unconventional, appeal to students' imagination and stimulate their curiosity. They are also required to create a cooperative environment that is non-threatening and values all ideas produced by students. The integration of creative thinking in the classroom can also benefit the teacher because they get enormous satisfaction when all students are engaged and accomplish all their classroom tasks. Therefore, it does not take much to turn a regular class into a class that fosters creative thinking. We just have to believe that we need to shift our visions as teachers and policy makers and focus on the development of learners' creative thinking if we want to have an education that meets the needs of 21st century.

To translate creative thinking theory into practice, educational policy makers should set the development of creative thinking as one of the basic learning goals for students. They also have to provide guidelines of how to incorporate creative thinking into language learning classes. These guidelines may benefit not only teachers but also textbook designers who will be oriented to include questions and tasks that encourage learners to think creatively. Ongoing training for language teachers is also of paramount importance. May studies such as Masadeh (2021), Tümen and Çelik (2020), Aldujayn and Alsubhi (2020), and Hamada (2017) revealed that though there is a general agreement among teachers on the importance of creative thinking for students, the concept is confusing and ambiguous to them. Consequently, teachers would not have the courage to integrate the skill in their classes if they do not have a clear idea about it. Teachers' dilemma of valuing creative thinking yet feeling they cannot develop it in their classes can be addressed by offering trainings on how to develop the skill. Specific courses, workshops and trainings for language teachers should focus on reinforcing understandings of how creative thinking could be integrated into language learning classes and equipping teachers with the necessary theory and practical tools to enable them to promote their students' creative potentials.

As far as research is concerned, there is a need to explore teachers' perceptions, attitudes and practices regarding the development of creative thinking in language learning classes. Research could also investigate the contextual factors including cultural and educational factors which influence the development of creative thinking and suggest possible ways to overcome the obstacles that hinder the development of the skill in a certain context. Research could also compare teachers' conceptions and practices in different school systems, including public and private school systems in various urban or rural areas. There should also be a review of the curricula content and textbooks to help ensure they do not hinder the promotion of learners' creative potentials. Research can also target teacher training programs and explore the extent to which they facilitate teachers' understandings of creative thinking. It is noteworthy that research should focus on all educational levels including primary, secondary and higher education as creative thinking is a life-long process.

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