DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CREATIVITY WITH THE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM IN GHANA:
A REALITY OR MIRAGE?

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated whether the senior high school English, language curriculum had developed created in its graduates. Four hundred and seventy senior high school graduates were used. A questionnaire with responses organized in five-point Likert scale with few open-ended items was used for senior high graduates to express their opinions. Data was analyzed through the use of descriptive statistics and presented in mean and standard deviation. The finding is that the English language curriculum had not developed creative potentials in its graduates. Resultant suggestions include incorporating diverse methods of teaching English language by teachers of English to help develop creativity in students.

KEYWORDS: Students' Creativity, Senior High School English language Curriculum, Reality, Mirage

INTRODUCTION

Developing students' creative potential through the use of the English language is one of the major aims of the English language curriculum. Critical thinking, analytical capability, problem solving and originality are pivotal to the aims of teaching English language (Ministry of Education, 2002). The curriculum is so designed that integration, problem solving, creative and analytical thinking and knowledge application are fostered. Emu-Sekyi (2015) observes that the educational aim of fostering critical thinking and creativity in students may be widely valued because it is an enduring skill that adds value to education; it prepares students to handle the many challenges either academic or career they are likely to face.

Quality and relevant education depend on how the curricula are designed and the aims the curricula seek to achieve. A curriculum usually contains a statement of aims and specific objectives; it indicates some selection and organization of content; it either implies or manifests certain patterns of learning and teaching whether because the objectives demand them or content organization requires them. The curricula place more emphasis on application of knowledge and, as such, students should be encouraged to apply the knowledge they acquire in different situations. That is why students who are nurtured by the curriculum to be creative are expected to bring their creativity to bear in the use of the English language to be specific and other life situations in general.

Creativity, according to Cheon (2013), is a phenomenon whereby something new and valuable is created. Compton (2007) suggests that creativity involves inquiry, evaluation, ideation, imagination, innovation and problem

solving. Guilford (1950), on his part, has identified some processes that are involved in creating. These include sensitivity to problems, creative fluency of production, the ability to develop novel ideas, flexibility of mind, the ability to synthesize, the ability to analyze, redefinition of organized wholes, a high degree of complexity of the conceptual structure, valuation and divergent thinking. According to Guilford (1950), divergent thinking is the ability to produce various ideas. This divergent thinking ability is a comprehensive concept that consists of creative fluency-the ability to produce a number of ideas, flexibility-the ability to produce a wide range of ideas, originality-the ability to produce unusual or unique ideas and elaboration-the ability to develop ideas or more detailed ideas from a main idea. Guilford (1950) further argues that students who are creative in the use of language are able to use the language to solve problems independently and to reformulate ideas to form new ideas in that language.

Lubart (1994), on his part, sees creativity in two categories. The first is basic level abilities which constitute the ability to notice new information, compare and find relevant new information and combine that information to reach the solution to a problem. The second concerns high-level abilities such as discovering the problem, redefining the problem, choosing the representation of the problem, selecting the strategies for solving the problem and evaluating the generated possibilities of the solutions to the problem. Grigorenko, Sternberg and Ehrman (2000) see the above creativity processes as significant to language teaching and learning because these theories are closely related to language aptitude theory.

According to Lubart (1994) and Swain (1985), creative language practices enable students to engage in imaginative, unconventionality, risk-taking, flexibility, selection of strategies and the creation of different ways of expressing ideas. Divergent thinking is also emphasized by Lieven, Behrens, Spares and Tomasello (2003) who suggest that creative speech develops from simple substitution, adding-on, dropping, inserting and rearranging the production to reordering, reformulating, noticing, comparing, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating and reevaluating utterances.

Creativity is inevitable. Specifically, in terms of teaching stages in creative writing, some suggestions are made by Paul (2000). These suggestions are the sharing of stories, the placing of students together to create cooperative stories and the helping of students to 'spin off' story ideas to create original plots. These teaching stages in creative writing also involve having the whole class brainstorm ideas for various conclusions to a story, selecting words in students' stories and having them find synonyms for those words, dividing students into groups to create dialogues for the characters and then act out the story for the class, having students draw original artwork relating to each story written, and finally collecting each writer's own story in an individual creative-writing folder.

Some approaches to language teaching are clearly associated with creativity development (Maley, 1997). These language teaching approaches involve a wide range of experiences that stimulate students' imaginations. Maley suggests that creative texts may link the creative development of students with teacher's creative ways of teaching language. However, the texts should meet students' needs and motivations, interests and playful natures. They must provide them with the necessary enjoyment that can come from language learning. This is in agreement withKropley (1997) who suggests that creative teachers are most likely to foster creative students. Thus, if the teacher tends to be innovative and open to new ideas, the students will be inspired to behave in like manner. Baturay and Akar (2007) state that when English language teachers teach language skills in isolation, they do not support authentic creativity. Therefore, skill integration would potentially stimulate more genuine and lifelike creativity. Cheon (2013) also recommends that professional writers should be invited to talk to students about the idea of writing as a profession and how writing skills are applicable to all

Developing Students' Creativity with The Senior High School English Language
Curriculum in Ghana: A Reality Or Mirage?

55

professions. Cheon (2013) believes that students should be encouraged to write articles and stories on their own for publication. He also thinks that some of the periods in the class should be devoted to creative writing. Furthermore, he asserted that over concentration on external examinations prevents students from being creative.

The key assumptions that underlie this investigation are one, the students' creativity will manifest in their divergent ideas in the use of the English language. That is, they should be able to develop knowledge on their own by developing their acquired knowledge in English language and learning different ways of using such knowledge either in spoken or written form. Two, it is anticipated that certain practices in the English language class will help develop creative potentials in students.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND QUESTIONS

Every curriculum is developed with a specific set of general aims to be achieved. The senior high school English, language curriculum seeks to develop creative potentials in its graduates. In theories of English as a Second Language (ESL) /English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and research, many individual traits such as cognitive, motivational and social factors including anxiety, self-confidence and personality have been studied in order to explore the differences in the success or failure of English as a Second Language/English as a Foreign Language students in language learning, but learner creativity has not been thoroughly researched to this day because of the complex nature of creativity (Albert& Kormors, 2011). Creativity has been granted national recognition as one of the crucial aims of the national English language curriculum. It has also been supported by English language policy. The curriculum, therefore, should provide teachers with opportunities to enhance the creative abilities of their students, and to equip them for their future careers. The English language curriculum is taught by teachers in language classrooms, and the teachers' understanding of the concept of creativity has a large influence on the development of students' creativity and successful language learning (Cheon, 2013).

Research on the development of creativity suggests that creative potentials do not emanate from ad hoc practices. Rather, it is nurtured through appropriate language practices. Research into the development of creative potentials of senior high school graduates is relatively unexplored. This study attempts to fill this knowledge gap. The purpose of the study is to ascertain from graduates of senior high school, whether the English language curriculum has developed in them creative potentials and also to find out which practices exist in language class to enhance students' creativity. In line with the assumptions outlined earlier on, this study seeks to answer these research questions:

- What are the views of graduates of senior high school on how the English language curriculum has developed in them creative potentials?

- What do senior high school graduates say are the practices that exist in the English language class to enhance their creativity?

METHODS

The study used both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, according to Creswell and Clark (2007), provides a good understanding of research problems than a single approach. In an attempt to find out whether the senior high school English curriculum had helped to develop creative

potentials in its graduates, descriptive survey design was employed. A descriptive survey allows access to thoughts, opinions and attitudes of the population from which the sample is drawn (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Jeanne, 2011). The instrument for the study was a questionnaire. This was designed to gather views of senior high school graduates on how the English language curriculum had helped to develop their creative potentials. The questionnaires had both close-ended items and few open-ended items. Close-ended items on the questionnaire were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Participants were asked to rate what they thought about each item. Due to the relatively large sample size of the study, an interview was not conducted to get in-depth views of the participants. However, the open-ended items stood in for the interview.

The reliability of the instrument was measured at 0.75, indicating that the survey instrument was reliable. A total of 477 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the participants. Of the 477 questionnaires distributed, 470 were returned, for a response rate of 98.5 %. The 470 senior high school graduates, who answered the survey, were proportionately selected from university, polytechnic, college of education, nursing and midwifery training college as well as senior high school graduates working in private basic schools and micro finance company (282 males and 188 females). Graduates from senior high schools who were in the first year of the above tertiary institutions were chosen because they were taken through the current English language curriculum so they stood the best chance to assess the curriculum. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. The convenience and purposive sampling were employed to select participants. They were approached at the end of a scheduled lecture and the questionnaires were administered. The snowball sampling technique was used to select senior high school graduates working in private basic schools and micro finance companies. These people were surveyed because graduates from senior high schools, mostly get employed in the above mentioned institutions. Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS) version 20 was used to analyze the quantitative data from the Likert scale while common data from the open-ended items was "clustered" into themes from which conclusions were drawn.

FINDINGS AND TABLES

The data on participants indicates that the majority, 60% (n=282) were males and 40% (n=188) were females as shown in Table 1:

Table1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic	No.	%	
Male	282	60	
Female	188	40	
Total	470	100	

The findings are discussed in line with the research questions

What are the Views of Graduates of Senior High School on How The English Language Curriculum has Developed in them Creative Potentials?

The results from the study revealed that the senior high school English, language curriculum had not developed creativity in its graduates (represented by MM=2.77 and MSD=. 99). The graduates say they cannot really pinpoint what has really made them creative. This is consistent with Kropley (1997) and Cheon (2013) findings that graduates of our institutions are not creative at all. Most students believe that the English language curriculum had not developed their creative potentials as seen Table 2.

Table 2: Graduates' Views on how the English Language Curriculum had Developed Creativity in them

Statement	Mean	SD
I identify problems and deal with them independently in English Language.	2.94	1.09
I am able to reformulate ideas to form new ones using English language	3.01	1.00
I depend solely on other people's views/ideas.	2.02	82
English language helps me to think fast to tackle issues	2.85	98
I adjust my language to meet a particular demand.	3.04	1.08
Mean of Means=2.77 MSD =.99		

What do Senior High School Graduates Say are the Practices That Exist in the English Language Class to Enhance Their Creativity?

Graduates say that enabling environment is not created in the English language classroom by teachers to enhance their creativity (represented by MM= 2.28 and MSD= 1.14) as seen in Table 3. The results from the table show that practices that exist in the English language class are not adequate to enhance their creativity. The graduates see that their English language teachers are themselves not creative enough to inspire creativity in them. This is also very consistent with Robinson-Pant's (2005) assertion that teachers' own academic practices do not inspire creativity in their students.

Table 3: Practices that Exist in the English Language Class to Enhance Creativity

Statement	Mean	SD
My English teachers encourage me to write stories on my own	2.4	1.3
My English teachers are themselves creative	1.9	9
Time is allotted for creative writing	2.0	1.1
Professional writers come to coach us on creative writing	2.5	1.4
Over concentration of external examination did not allow me to be creative	2.6	1.0
Mean of Means=2.28MSD=1.14		

Findings from the Open-Ended Items

Respondents were asked to give evidence that indicates that the English language curriculum had developed their creative potentials. Graduates explained that they do not really have evidence that the senior high school English, language curriculum had developed their creative potentials. Participants explained that they only reproduce what they are sometimes taught without any change in idea, structure and style.

This confirms findings from the quantitative data that they cannot actually use English language in novel situations. On the issue of practices and opportunities that exist in the English language class to enhance students' creativity, graduates explained that practices in the language class do not offer students the opportunities to be creative. These were the responses given;

"English language teachers themselves are not creative to enhance our creativity.

All that is taught in class are ideas and issues from textbooks or other people's books"

"Teachers do not incorporate other perspectives into their own experiences"

"Teachers are restricted from being creative, teaching is always geared towards them

Final examinations"

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that the senior high school English, language curriculum has not really developed creativity in its graduates. English language teachers are constrained by prevailing circumstances of the curriculum and educational system in fostering language learners' creativity. Non-allotment of time for creative writing and over concentration on external examination do not allow teachers to enhance creativity in their graduates. Creativity is a multifaceted trait. It is not based on single trait, but on several independent components: creative writing, reading and listening (Albert & Kormors, 2011). If English teachers are to be able to teach creatively, they must be aware of and believe that creativity and creative thinking can be a part of the language class. Students should be personally involved in their writing and speaking. They should be encouraged to think about ideas that they personally have not thought about before.

There needs to be a change in language education policy if we are to foster students' creativity. The Ministry of Education should find a way to encourage language teachers to truly engage in fostering language learners' creativity by providing the appropriate environment. Time should be allotted as part of the curriculum for creative activities in the English language class. The study has gone some extent to add to existing knowledge in the field of creativity through the learning of the English language.

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