Utilizing Activities Based on the Cognitive learning-Centered Approach to Develop Al-Azhar Model Primary Institute Pupils' EFL Creative Writing

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Benjamin Nour El-Din Attyia Ghonim, Azza Ahmed Hamdy El Marsafy, Ahmed Abd El Salam Edries
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, And Technology of Education, Faculty of Education, Zagazig University
*Corresponding author: Benjamin Nour El-Din Attyia Ghonim
Email: Mobile:

Abstract

The current study aimed at developing Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' EFL creative writing via activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach. The experimental design was adopted in the study. Forty EFL pupils enrolled in the sixth year of Al-Safwa Model Primary Institute in Zagazig, Egypt during the first semester of the academic year 2023/2024 were selected to be the participants of the study. They were specified equally into two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group was taught using activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach, whereas the control one received regular instruction. Data were collected through the EFL Creative Writing Test designed by the researcher. These instruments were pre-and post-administered to both groups. The results revealed that a) the experimental group pupils outperformed the control group ones in the post-administrations of both the EFL Creative Writing Test, b) the experimental group did significantly better in the post-administrations of the EFL Creative Writing Test than in the pre-administrations, and c) the effect size of utilizing activities based on the approach was found to be high and positive. Consequently, it is recommended to use activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach to promote EFL creative writing of EFL learners.

Key words: EFL creative writing, cognitive learning-centered approach.

Introduction

Creation is the ability to create pupil's own symbols of experience and generating new ideas. It is the productive imagination fully secularized and divested of any ambivalent connotations. Creative writing is the use of written language to conceptualize, explore and record experience in such a way as to create a unique symbolization of it.

Ibnian (2011) asserted that writing can be divided into two main types:

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1. Functional writing: the type of writing which aims to convey a specific, direct and clear message to a specific audience.
2. Creative writing: the type of writing which refers to the pupil's ability to express his/her feelings, opinions, reactions and ideas.

Creative writing is stronger and more focused when the pupils learn to think of a specific moment in time or a specific impact or image that they need to utilize to concern and amaze their readers. Creative writing shows the competence of pupils' creations in the cognitive stage to reveal ideas in order to output their writing. In creative writing, the writing process helps pupils explore ideas before creating a written work (Monis and Rodriques, 2012).

The creation of competency is the highest cognitive competence where pupils try to realize ideas to produce a product. Creative writing is an important part of any language program because it is a unique way which can turn inspiration into visible words when it depends on creative mind and imagination (Rini and Cahyanto, 2020). Creative writing is the study of writing (involving poetry, imagination, drama, and creative non-fiction). It can utilize any shape or style of writing as an ideal subject of study, but the productions of creative writing tend not to be informational, but imaginative interpretations of the world that invite the complex participation of the audience or reader (Bennett et al.2008).

Freiman (2015) emphasized that creative writing is rooted in the pupils' world and broader environment and is an indication of their responses and feelings to that world. Pupils are always in creative writing as they live through their experiences, even though these processes are internalized in their cognitive mind. They eventually express these thoughts and feelings on paper through writing.

According to Maley (2012), creative writing includes four sub-skills as follows:

1. Originality refers to pupil's ability to generate new ideas by utilizing his/her imagination while writing;
2. Fluency refers to the pupil's ability to express his/her ideas, feelings, and emotions easily and articulately;
3. Flexibility refers to pupil's ability to change his/her ideas or adapt them accordingly and to look at things or topics from different angles; and
4. Elaboration refers to pupil's ability to explain his/her ideas with more details (facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, and informative examples)

Creative writing is a powerful style of learning and promoting of language linguistic features (grammar; vocabulary; phonology; and discourse). Students can not only integrate target language learning in a more natural way, but they can also manage to become more fluent in the target language thanks to the many benefits it brings through it. So, it is a significant form of communication that allows students to clear their ideas, thoughts, and feelings freely by utilizing their conception without any restriction on paper (Temizkan, 2011).

Rini and Cahyanto (2020) added that creative writing helps pupils

- Be developed in cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects. So, cognitive aspects of the students are also important and should be

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carefully considered while teaching them how to write creatively.

- Explore their ideas before creating a written work.

- Use their linguistic capabilities and go deeper and further that they cannot do in oral expression.

- Increase their fluency, spontaneity, and speed with which they write;

- Develop their oral language skills as well as their written language skills.

- Examine aspects of their current grammatical knowledge;

Several studies asserted the importance of developing creative writing. Abu Hussein and Al Jamal (2020) investigated the effectiveness of online reflective journals on Birzeit University students' creative writing. The results indicated that students' creative writing skills and the creative writing components were developed via the implementation of the proposed instructional strategy.

Abdel Fattah (2020) investigated the impact of literature circles on enhancing secondary stage students' EFL creative writing. Results indicated that the participants' creative writing skills were developed through the implementation of the suggested program based on literature circles.

Cognition is a set of intellectual processes that encloses awareness, perception, reasoning, and judgment. The cognitive learning-centered approach focuses on how pupils answer the tasks, and why some pupils are better than others at answering tasks.. It is approach-driven: It begins with a model of how cognition

works, and seeks to explain individual differences in intelligence via individual differences in the ability to perform the processes specified in the model (Anderson, 2015).

To Robinson and Ellis (2008), cognitive learning-centered approach depends on two modern theories which give a better insight to clear the relationship between mind (cognition) and language (verbalization):

1. Cognitive linguistics theory that describes how

- language interacts with cognition; and

- language forms our thoughts and the evolution of language parallel with the change in the common mindset across time.

2. Cognitive psychology theory. Marton (1976) emphasized that cognitive learning-centered approach (CLA) depends on two levels:

- Deep-level processing which aims to comprehend the meaning of what students' study; and

- Surface-level processing which focuses on the reproduction of the contents from textbooks.

Elhilali and Omar (2012) clarified that cognitive learning-centered approach (CLA) involves four significant areas:

1. Phonemic awareness;

2. Fluency;

3. Vocabulary; and

4. Comprehension.

The cognitive learning-centered approach (CLA) premised that learning is an active process involving pupils' participation

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in knowledge acquisition. It aims to discover what might be the better way for the acquisition of language in pupil's mind. It highlights how mental process greatly influences behavior and the disparity of learning effects (Davidko, 2011).

Eggen and Kauchak (2010) indicated that understanding cognitive learning-centered approach (CLA), its principles and applying them in EFL classrooms has several benefits: it helps pupils

1. be active in their tasks to understand the world, new understanding depends on prior learning.

2. process knowledge mentally and subconsciously.

3. be capable of passing on complex culture that includes values, symbols, beliefs and norms.

4. be the most important person in the classroom.

5. create new knowledge structures by themselves.

6. be active in the learning process, using various mental strategies in order to sort out the system of the language to be learnt.

7. be overexposed to content with context, submerged in learning, involved in talking, listening, and discovering .

8. have a meaningful learning task.

9. bind the new learning task to what they already know .

Accordingly, several studies asserted the importance of using cognitive learningcentered approach in TEFL. Suyitno et al. (2017) explained the cognitive-learning approach used by

foreign students in learning the Indonesian language. The results revealed that cognitive learning strategies have important benefits for language teaching especially for BIPA (Indonesian for foreign students) teaching as they can be used as a basic reference to design language learning processes for BIPA courses.

Aloufi (2015) examined the cognitive theory-based approach for the evaluation and enhancement of internet security awareness among children Aged 3-12 Years. Participants were 60 children. Results revealed that cognitive approaches have to shed light on the tight link between cognition, language, education and security awareness.

Context of the Problem

The problem of the present research has been emphasized through the following ways:

a) Working as an TEFL Teacher in Al-Safwa Model Primary Institute, Al-Azhar, Egypt, the researcher observed that pupils lack EFL creative writing.

b) Reviewing the previous studies that tackled EFL creative writing (Abu Hussein and Al Jamal,2020; Abdelfattah,2020) These studies revealed that there is a profound weakness in EFL creative writing among EFL pupils.

c) Conducting a pilot study on a group of (40) EFL sixth year pupils of Al-Safwa Model Primary Institute for Boys, Sharkia Governorate, Egypt. The pilot study (Appendix 1)

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consisted of an EFL creative writing test.

Table (1)

The EFL creative writing pilot test

Skills	N	Maximum mean	Mean scores	St. deviation	Mean Ratio
Creative writing skills	40	25	6	5.5	30%

Results of the pilot test illustrated in Table (1) revealed that the mean scores of the participants were 6 (30%) which indicated that most pupils had a remarkable weakness in EFL creative writing. In the light of the current pilot study results, it came clear that the test in sixth year of model primary institute pupils had problems in creative writing skills in EFL classrooms.

The cognitive learning-centered approach can be employed to develop learners' EFL creative writing (Aloufi, 2015; Suyitno et al. 2017). Therefore, it would be important to use the cognitive learning-centered approach to solve pupils' problems in EFL creative writing in EFL classrooms.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the current research is that sixth-year pupils enrolled in primary model institutes have low levels in EFL creative writing. Addressing such a problem, the current research investigated the effect of activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach on developing Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' EFL creative writing.

Questions of the Study

The present study attempted to answer the following main question:

"What is the effect of utilizing activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach on developing Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' EFL creative writing?"

This main question can be divided into the following sub-questions:

1. What are the EFL creative writing skills required for (sixth-year) Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils?
2. What is the actual level of the pupils in the EFL creative writing of (sixth-year) Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils?
3. What are the features of utilizing activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach for developing Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' EFL creative writing?

Purposes of the Study

Fundamentally, the present study aimed at:

1) Developing Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' EFL creative writing via activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach.

Significance of the Study

Basically, the present research would hopefully be beneficial to:

1) EFL primary institute pupils in helping them;

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a) create meaningful learning experiences ;

b) increase comprehending, motivating and problem solving; and

c) understand their own strengths and preferred learning styles.

2) EFL teachers in:

(a) providing them with a practical description of the influential theory that might be effective in enhancing pupils' EFL creative writing and

(b) helping them determine some problematic areas that the Arab speakers of English encounter in learning the EFL spoken aspects of language and find solutions for them.

3) EFL curriculum designers in:

(a) drawing their attention to adopt new methods of teaching that aim at changing the role of the pupil from a passive recipient to an active positive learner who is willing to participate in the EFL classroom.

(b) motivating them to conduct training courses for EFL teachers to raise their awareness of the cognitive learning-centered approach.

4) EFL researchers in opening new research avenues for them regarding

(a) cognitive learning-centered approach; and

(b) creative writing.

Delimitations of the Study

The present research was delimited to:

a) Forty pupils enrolled in Al-Safwa Model Primary Institute, Zagazig, Sharkia governorate, Egypt.

b) The first semester of the academic year (2023-2024).

c) some components of EFL creative writing according to the jury selection

Method of the study

1. Design

The current study adopted the experimental design. Forty pupils were assigned to two groups, experimental and control, (20) pupils each. The experimental participants received instruction through utilizing activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach for developing EFL creative writing. On the other hand, the participants in the control group received regular instruction. A pre-post EFL creative writing test was administered to both groups before and after the experiment.

2. Participants

The participants were forty pupils (n=40) EFL sixth year pupils at Al-Safwa Model Primary Institute in Zagazig during the first semester of the academic year 2023/2024.They were specified into two groups: an experimental group (20) pupils and a control one (20) pupils. It was supposed that these participants formed a symmetrical group. So they were expected to have a lot in common and would not differ much regarding the quality of experience or their age.

In order to make sure that developing of EFL creative writing was attributed only to the effect of utilizing activities based on

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the cognitive learning-centered approach, some variables were controlled before the experimentation. These variables were:

- Age: all participants' age ranged from 10-11 years.
- Grade: all participants were in the sixth-year at Al-Safwa Model Primary Institute.

1. Instruments

The following instrument was designed:

For "**the EFL creative writing** "variable

1. The EFL creative writing Skills checklist.
2. The EFL pre-post creative writing test.
3. The EFL rubric of creative writing test.

4. Material of the study

The cognitive learning-centered approach that would consist of:

1. The components of the approach. It presents its rationale, aims, objectives, content, description, sources, activities, aids and materials, teacher's role, pupil's role, and evaluation.
2. The framework of the approach. It presents the way through which the approach components are implemented in each session.
3. Utilizing the approach activities through sessions.

5. Procedures

To answer the research questions, the researcher adopted the following procedures:

1. For identifying the features of the cognitive learning-centered approach for developing Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' EFL creative writing, the researcher would

a) survey literature and previous studies related to the cognitive learning-centered approach .

b) identify the theory 's rationale, aims, objectives, content, instructional methods, activities, aids, teacher's and pupil's roles, and assessment techniques.

2. For identifying the effect of utilizing activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach for developing Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' EFL creative writing, the researcher would

a) design an EFL creative writing checklist, submit it to the jurors for validity purposes, and modify it according to their opinions and suggestions.

b) design an EFL creative writing test and a rubric for scoring it, submit them to the jurors for validity purposes, and modify them according to the jurors' opinions and suggestions.

c) pilot the test to a group of the sixth-year primary pupils other than those that would participate in the research for its reliability.

d) select the research 40 participants from Al-Safwa Model Primary Institute for boys, Zagazig, Sharkia Governorate and divide them into two groups: experimental and control.

e) pre-administer the test to both groups.

f) teach the experimental group applying the cognitive learning-centered approach and the control group utilizing regular method.

g) post-administer the test to both groups.

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3. Analyzing the data statistically utilizing the appropriate statistical techniques.
4. Comparing the results of both pre-post administrations.
5. Discussing and interpreting the results.
6. Drawing conclusion and providing recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Terms of the Study

EFL Creative Writing

Greyling (2011) defined creative writing as a process which includes technical skills that depend on cognitive abilities, thinking skills which include the generation of ideas and motivation to do the project and the attitude towards it.

Laing (2014) defined creative writing as an activity that requires student to be interested within the language as the writer seeks ways to find the most precise word, description, or feeling for a certain image which he or she wishes to create.

EFL creative writing can be operationally defined as the sixth year Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' abilities to use their linguistic capabilities in order to create a project that reflected their ideas, feelings, attitudes and emotions via imaginative situations.

Cognitive learning-centered approach

Morita (2000) defined the cognitive learning-centered approach as approach of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thoughts, experiences, and senses.

Suyitno et al. (2017) defined a cognitive learning-centered approach as an approach that can be used by pupils to get, store, remember, recall, and utilize new information for solving problems.

Cognitive learning-centered approach can be operationally defined as an approach which clears the procedures/steps that can be used by the sixth year Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' to be active in interpret, understand, evaluate and create new events, situations, and information that depends on their prior knowledge for solving a problem inside and outside EFL classroom.

Results and Discussion

Results of the current study were discussed in the light of related literature and the cognitive learning-centered approach classroom environment.

4.3.1. EFL creative writing

Results confirmed that the experimental group gained a significant progress in the sub-skills of the EFL creative writing skills after participating in the cognitive learning activities. Whereas, the means of score of their originality, fluency, flexibility, elaboration, vocabulary and grammar in creative writing test was 0.43 before the treatment, it became 6.46 after the treatment. This indicated that the cognitive learning activities have had a positive large effect on developing the sixth year Al-Azhar model primary institute pupils' EFL creative writing skills.

The cognitive learning activities promoted the experimental participants' EFL creative writing skills through sharing ideas with their classmates that allowed them to enhance their tasks and collaborate with others. The cognitive learning activities improved the experimental participants' ways of thinking.

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Recommendations

In the light of the results of the current study, the following could be recommended:

a) EFL teachers are recommended to adopt the cognitive learning-centered approach in teaching English language skills in general and EFL creative writing in particular to learners at different stages, taking into consideration their ages and interests.

b) In adopting the cognitive learning-centered approach, EFL teachers should hold collaborative and discussion groups with their EFL learners as a way of helping them share their reflection about topics and contexts at hand and enhance their understanding of what they listen and write.

c) Learning by doing is highly recommended to be activated at the different stage of learning.

d) EFL learners should be given opportunities to watch video scripts about the topics and stories that they study. They help them interpret the inner feelings, facial expressions, and body gestures of the characters.

e) EFL creative writing should be given more attention in EFL classrooms as they are vital skills for the 21st century.

f) EFL teachers should provide their learners with proper feedback whenever needed as doing so is the indispensable techniques for improving EFL creative writing.

g) EFL learners ' emotions, responses, and points of view should be respected in order to increase their EFL creative and willingness to speak in the class.

h) Pairs and group work are recommended in EFL classrooms as they help EFL learners communicate, interact, listen to each other and gain confidence.

i) For enhancing EFL creative writing , EFL teachers should create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere inside classrooms in order to grab learners ' attention, especially the shy ones, and motivate them to express their opinions, interact with each other, and participate positively in classrooms.

Suggestions for Further Research:

Based upon the results of the present study, the following areas of research can be suggested:

a) Investigating the relationship between activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach and developing learners' EFL oral performance.

b) Investigating the relationship between activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach and promoting EFL speaking skills and self-confidence among learners with learning difficulties.

c) Investigating the relationship between activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach and promoting EFL proficiency and self-esteem.

d) Examining the relationship between activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach and reducing reluctance to communicate in EFL.

e) Probing the relationship between activities based on the cognitive learning-centered approach and developing EFL communication skills.

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Appendix
The EFL Creative Writing Test

Name: ……………………………. **Class: …………………………… (20marks)**

1)Write a story that begins with the sentence: "When I woke up,…	**(5 marks)**
2)Write a paragraph based on the following image.	**(5 marks)**
3)Imagine that you got lost with your team in the sea	**(5 marks)**

Describe how can you solve this problem in a paragraph.

4) Write as many ideas as possible concerning one of the following topics. (5 marks)

- The role of modern technology in education system.
- How can we face the pollution problem?

5) Underline the mistakes included in the passage and correct them. (5 marks)

Robots

A robot is a machine. But it is not just some machine. It are a special kind of machine. it is a machine that moves. It follow instruction. The instructions comes from a compuder. Because he is a machine, he does not makes mistakes. And he does not got tired. And it never complains. Unless you tell it to! Robots are all around us. Some robots is used to makes things. For example, robots can help makes cars. Some robot are used to explore dangerous places. For example, robots can help explore volcanoes. Some robots are used to cleans things. They robots can help vacuums your house. Some robots can even recognize words. he can be used to helped answer telefone calls. Some robots looks like humans. But most robots does not. Most robots just looks like machines.