

Investigating EFL Students' Perceptions towards the effects of Creative Writing on Reading Motivation and Cognitive Potentials:

The Case of EFL Master One Didactic Students at Oum El Bouagui University

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Abstract

This paper aims at investigating EFL students' perceptions towards the effects of creative writing on reading motivation and cognitive potentials. A questionnaire was addressed to ٣٠ EFL Master One Didactic students at Oum EL Bouagui University. The findings obtained revealed that most students have a low level of cognitive potentials and disfavour to practice reading because this last may take time and involves effort and energy. Hence, the need to engage the students into tasks and activities that motivate them to read and make them active learners became crucial for their cognitive development and overall success. For this reason, the target students agreed that creative writing may develop their motivation to read and boost their cognitive potentials as well. Consequently, engaging them into creative writing tasks would be beneficial.

Key Words: creative writing, reading motivation, cognitive potentials, EFL learners.

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Introduction:

It is worth mentioning that reading is a fundamental skill that contributes in expanding EFL students' knowledge and gain insights into multiple subjects and perspectives. However, many EFL teachers notice that a large proportion of their students lack interest towards reading, considering reading as a secondary skill and giving much importance to other skills instead. Moreover, their lack of motivation towards reading may weaken their academic achievement and classroom performance as well.

Additionally, their cognitive abilities like focusing attention, comprehension thinking and memory seem to be feeble since the majority of them do not like to make efforts and engage themselves into brain- functioning activities, their interest is limited to academic subjects only, and this last may not really boost their abilities and skills.

Thus, it would be beneficial to create a supportive atmosphere of learning that strengthens their motivation to read and fosters cognitive abilities by adopting creative strategies that would engage the students and make them active learners instead of being passive recipients only as creative writing for instance.

An attempt to dig deeper on the effects of creative writing on the EFL students reading motivation and cognitive abilities is the main focus of the present research.

I. Literature Review

I. Creative writing

Creative writing is defined as a type of writing that is characterized by imagination and originality; it is different from academic writing as it goes beyond its conventional boundaries and it requires writers' feelings, interests and beliefs. According to King, Neilsen and White (٢٠١٣) creative writing is "the use of crafted writing for purposes of personal expression in communication with an actual or potential readership." (p. ٤٤٥). That is to say, creative writers attempt to express themselves by exploring their imagination and visualization and convey their thoughts and emotions in a unique and artistic way as claimed by Burroway and Stuckey (٢٠٠٦) "creative writing is the art of expressing oneself through the use of imagination, originality and emotion." (p. ٤).

I.١. Genres of Creative Writing

Creative writing encompasses different genres as maintained by King et al (٢٠١٣) "creative writing might take the form of prose or poetry, and might be fictional or non-fictional." (p. ٤٤٥). That is to say, creative writing can take different forms and genres such as, short stories, poems, plays, novels, and also non fictional pieces that have imaginative and creative characteristics. Creative writers adopt descriptive or narrative styles, vivid images and literary skills in an engaging manner that would stimulate readers' attention and motivation to read.

I.٢. What is Reading Motivation?

A great deal of investigation and research has been done to scrutinize second and foreign language learning reading motivation by many scholars (Gardner and Lambert, ١٩٥٩), (Guthrie & Wigfield, ٢٠٠٠) (Gladstone, Turci and Wigfield, ٢٠١٦) depending on theoretical frameworks and theories of motivation as the expectancy-value theory and the psycho-analytical theory that explain the complexity characterizing the concept of reading motivation.

Reading motivation is then defined as the students' growing enthusiasm that engages them into reading activities. Correspondingly, Schaffner, Philipp, and Schiefele (٢٠١٤) consider it as "the enduring readiness of a person to initiate reading activities". Moreover, Guthrie and Wigfield (٢٠٠٠) hold that "reading motivation is the individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading" (p. ٤٠٥). This means that there are multiple factors which shape and direct students' reading motivation. According to Wigfield and Guthrie (١٩٩٧) "it is multi-dimensional concept that encompasses ١١ elements that affect readers' ability and willingness to read."

I. ٢.١. Components of Reading Motivation

Theorists in the field of motivational psychology and language learning classified reading motivation into three categories: Competence and reading efficacy, achievement values and goals and social aspects of reading (Mori, ٢٠٠٢). The initial category focuses on an individuals' confidence and beliefs regarding their capabilities. It includes reading efficacy, challenge and reading work avoidance. Reading efficacy refers to the belief students have about their abilities in reading. Reading challenge refers to the enjoyment readers get in comprehending complex reading texts while reading. Work avoidance pertains to the aspects of reading that the learner dislikes or attempts to avoid. The second category originates from theories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, achievement goal orientation and achievement values. It can be further arranged into two sections: The first primarily focuses on intrinsic motivation, and which includes reading curiosity, reading involvement, and the importance of reading, while the second explores extrinsic motivation and performance goal orientation. The second sub-category consists of three components: Reading competition, reading recognition, and reading for grades. These aspects are distinct from each other since they seek the reasons either internal or external to explain the learners' involvement into reading tasks (Mori, ٢٠٠٢).

Finally the last category comprises social reasons for reading and reading compliance, both grounded in the belief that reading can be a social experience. It recognizes that children often engage in social reading activities, where they read together or discuss books in a group setting and, thus, read to achieve social goals (Mori, ٢٠٠٢).

I. ٢.٢. Importance of Motivating Students to read

The significance of reading motivation relies on the role that reading plays in boosting students' academic achievement and knowledge. Furthermore, interest has been grown to investigate the factors hindering students' reading motivation for the purpose of improving students' performance and accomplishment. Kirchner and Mostert (٢٠١٧), maintain that self-efficacy beliefs, reading goals and values, as well as social aspects of reading, are central to reading motivation, and that motivation should be viewed as multifaceted or multidimensional." (p. ٦).

I.٣. Cognitive Abilities Definition

Cognitive abilities are the individuals' brain skills that enable them to do multiple tasks and behave in general. These cognitive potentials include the ability to think, comprehend, pay attention, solve a problem, perceive and memorize. As stated by Bayne et al (٢٠١٩) cognition is a mental process of perception, it is the facility to understand and

think. Similarly, Zhang (٢٠١٩) defines cognition as “the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses.”(p. ٢).

I.٣.١. Importance of Boosting Learners’ Cognitive Potentials

Humans owe a number of mental processes known as cognitive abilities that allow them to perform different functions for their everyday life. EFL learners make use of their cognitive abilities to acquire the target language and improve their levels for a better academic achievement. Psychologists and pedagogues attempt to explain the mechanism of these cognitive abilities and seek ways to enhance them because there is an interrelationship between these cognitive potentials and academic achievement (Belkhir, ٢٠٢٠).

So, by improving cognitive abilities, EFL learners can enhance their problem-solving skills, and critical thinking abilities. This, in turn, permits to perform complex tasks, and learn more effectively (Mirolli and Parisi, ٢٠٠٩). Boosting cognitive abilities also has a positive impact on memory retention information processing and learning effectively. EFL learners who have enhanced their cognitive potentials are able to approach challenges and make their learning experience unique and fruitful.

II. Methodology

To assess the impact of creative writing on EFL students’ reading motivation and cognitive potentials, a descriptive qualitative analysis is used; a questionnaire is employed with the aim of evaluating their attitudes. The questionnaire consists of close ended-questions, open-ended questions and also multiple-choice questions.

II.١ Population and Sampling

EFL master one Didactic students at Larbi Ben M’hidi University are chosen as a target population. So, thirty (٣٠) students were required to respond to the designed questionnaire that aims at checking their attitudes towards the effects of creative writing on their reading motivation and cognitive abilities.

II.٢. Aim of the study

The present research aims at checking EFL students’ attitudes towards the effects of implementing creating writing on EFL students’ reading motivation and cognitive potentials. More specifically to figure out whether or not engaging the students into creative writing tasks may boost their reading motivation and improves their cognitive potentials.

II.٣. Research Question

What are the attitudes of Master One EFL students towards the effects of creative writing on their reading motivation and Cognitive potentials?

II.٤. Description of the questionnaire

The questionnaire is made up of ١٠ questions. It comprises of three sections. The first section deals with the students attitudes about their reading skill and their motivation to practice reading. The second section describes the participants standing points about their cognitive potentials and the factors that affect them. Moreover, the last section aims at describing the students’ viewpoints about the role that creative writing may play on enhancing the students’ willingness to read and their cognitive abilities as well.

III. Results and Discussion

The obtained results will lead us to rather approve or disapprove whether or not creative writing boosts students' reading motivation and cognitive potentials.

III. ١. Analysis of the Results:

Question One

Do you like to read?

Option	Percentage
Yes	٣٦%
No	٦٤%

This question aims at investigating whether or not the students are willing to read. The above table shows that a large proportion of the participants ٦٤% disfavour to read while a minority that represents ٣٦% of the entire sample expressed their favour and desire to practice reading. This means that reading skill is marginalized by the majority.

Question Two

How do you evaluate your reading ability?

Very good	Good	bad	Very bad
١٢	٣٨	٣٤	١٦

The question above seeks to evaluate the students' ability to read. So, the results indicate that only ١٢% of the participants think that they are very good on reading, then ٣٨% believe that they are good on reading, a percentage that represents ٣٤% of the participants believe that they are bad on reading while ١٦% believe that they very bad on reading.

Question Three

What are the factors that weaken your motivation to read?

Option	Percentage
Laziness	٦٥%
Shortage of time	٤٨%
Difficult vocabulary	٣٩%
Lack of interest	٧٨%

Investigating the participants' opinions about the factors weakening their reading motivation, the findings indicate that laziness is one of the main factor that de-motivates the students to read believing that reading activity necessitates much attention and energy. Moreover, ٤٨% of the participants opted for shortage of time thinking that reading consumes much time that is why they disfavour to read. Besides, facing difficult vocabulary is another factor that is chosen by ٣٩% of the participants that discourage them to practice reading. Finally, a large proportion of the participants who represent ٧٨% believe that lack of interest to read causes de-motivation to read. So, one can say that lack of motivation to read is a consequence

of many reasons and the participants picked more than one factor which reveals the challenges that encounter them to become good readers.

Question Four

Are you satisfied about your cognitive abilities?

Option	Percentage
Yes	٣٩%
No	٦١%

Most students ٦١% showed their own dissatisfaction about their cognitive potentials such as: thinking, paying attention, comprehension, problem solving and memorizing. However, a small proportion that makes ٣٩% of the whole population showed their satisfaction about their own cognitive abilities.

Question Five

If no, please answer the following question.

- **What are the factors that affect your cognitive potentials?**

According to the participants who are not satisfied about their cognitive potentials, and who represent ٦١% of the overall number of the participants the main factors affecting and weakening their cognitive potentials are as follow:

- Lack of motivation to study and make efforts.
- Boredom and lack of interest.
- Low level of academic competence.
- Demotivation to read.
- Laziness.

Question Six

What genre of creative writing do you like to practice?

Option	Percentage
Poetry	٢٨%
Story writing	٢٢%
Play writing	٠%
Free Writing	٥٠%

The above table shows that the majority of the participants ٥٠% practice free writing. Then, ٢٨% of them claimed that they practice poetry, ٢٢% of the participants practice story writing and none of the participants favour to write plays. The results reflect the students' willingness and desire to express themselves

freely without worrying about the norms that restrict the other creative writing genres as style and form that is why the majority picked free-writing as a major choice.

Question Seven

To what extent you agree/disagree about the following statements.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Engaging yourself into creative writing motivates you to read.	٢٤%	٣٤%	٨%	٢٠%	١٤%
Engaging yourself into creative writing develops your cognitive abilities.	٣١%	٣٨%	٦%	١٥%	١٠%

The up mentioned question aims at investigating the participants' attitudes towards the role that creative writing may play on enhancing students' reading motivation and cognitive potentials. The results indicate that a large proportion of the participants (٢٤%+٣٤%) showed their agreement towards the effects of creative writing on their motivation to read. However, a small proportion that represents (٢٠%+١٤%) from the whole population expressed their disagreement. Concerning their perception towards the effect of creative writing on their cognitive abilities, the majority ٦٩% (٣١%+٣٨%) expressed their agreement while a minority that represents ٢٥% (١٥%+١٠%) expressed their disagreement and the other ٦% was indifferent.

III.٢. Discussion of the Results

To sum up, the data obtained from the students' questionnaire revealed that most EFL students disfavoured to read since reading activity necessitates time and efforts. Moreover, some of them feel satisfied about their reading ability level, while the other half showed their dissatisfaction thinking that reading skill is a challenging because while reading, they often encounter many difficulties that hinder them from comprehending what they read. So, among the factors that weaken their reading motivation is lack of interest towards reading activity itself. Boredom and laziness and difficult vocabulary are also the obstacles that face the EFL students to read.

Moreover, the findings displayed that a majority of students are not satisfied about their cognitive abilities including: comprehension, memorizing, focusing

attention, thinking and problem solving. Lower level of cognition characterizes most of them and then affects their academic performance.

Furthermore, the results obtained demonstrated that most students favour free writing in which they could express their feelings and thoughts without worrying about the conventions of both academic writing and creative writing. Additionally, poetry is also practiced by ٢٨% of the participants. This means that engaging the students into creative writing would not be an alien habit for them. Finally, the participants claimed that they have a favourable attitude towards the role that creative writing may have on their motivation to read and their thinking or cognitive potentials as a large proportion from them expressed their agreement with the idea that engaging into creative writing assignments would encourage them to read and boost their cognitive potentials.

Conclusion

The focal point of this study is to investigate the students' attitudes towards the effects of creative writing on their reading motivation and cognitive potentials. A questionnaire was handed to master one EFL students at Oum El Bouagui University. It has been approved that most participants lack the motivation to read, and suffer from a low level of cognitive abilities. However, enhancing EFL students' reading motivation and thinking abilities seems to be essential for a better academic performance. This last can only be realised by engaging the students into activities that interest them and make them active learners. Consequently, creative writing seems to be a good means that may urge them to explore more and think appropriately since the majority expressed their accord with this idea.

Appendix ٠١: Students' Questionnaire

Q١. Do you like to read?

- a. Yes b. No .a

Q٢. How do you evaluate your reading ability?

- a. Very Good b. Good c. Bad d. Very bad

Q٣. What are the factors that weaken your motivation to read?

- a. laziness
b. Shortage of Time
c. Difficult Vocabulary
d. Lack of interest

Q٤. Are you satisfied about your cognitive abilities?

- a. Yes
b. No

-If your answer is no, please answer the following question.

Q٥. What are the factors that affect your cognitive potentials?

Q٦. What genre of creative writing do you like to practice?

- a. Poetry
b. Story writing
c. Play writing
d. Free writing

Q٧. To what extent you agree/disagree about the following statements.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Engaging yourself into creative writing motivates you to read.					
Engaging yourself into creative writing develops your cognitive abilities.					

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