

The Influence of Teachers' Creativity, Attitude and Commitment on Students' Proficiency of the English Language

Hemaloshinee Vasudevan

PhD. Candidate

*Department of Business Administration, School of Business (IBS), University Technology Malaysia
University Technology Malaysia 54100 Kuala Lumpur*

Abstract: *The intensity of teachers' creativity, attitude and commitment are considered as key factors in the success of the current educational reform agenda, as it heavily influences the teachers' willingness to engage in cooperative, reflective and critical practice to develop students' proficiency or performance in English language. This study examined the effect of creative thinking, creative teaching, creative learning, teachers' attitude and teachers' commitment on students' proficiency in English language. Three hundred and ten teachers at private schools were surveyed for this purpose. The results of this study revealed that creative thinking, creative learning, creative teaching, teachers' attitude and teachers' commitment positively and significantly influence the students' proficiency in English language.*

Keywords: *Students' Proficiency, Teachers' Creativity, Attitude, Commitment, creative teaching, teachers' commitment, students' proficiency*

I. Introduction

Over the past decade, occupations that rely on people skills and emotional intelligence gained tremendously from a creativity of employees. This was also witnessed in jobs that required imagination and creativity. According to the researchers, creativity is vital, especially at the present when current jobs are transforming rapidly with the advance of information technology that complements globalization. Even the teaching profession will not be exempted from changes taking place in the world and as such; creative thinking is currently expected of teachers. Creative thinking can increase teachers' capability to learn and teach in a way that ignites interest in the classroom. Rapid changes taking place in the world today coincide with the definition of creativity given by Young (1985), in which case the author states that creativity is breaking away from old styles, and it is skills that bring something new and valuable to the people to do new things. As the demand for the new skill increases with globalization, especially now when countries have to know what skill of the workers and income of the nation, creativity is and would be demanded in schools and teaching institutions all over the world.

Teachers these days are expected to assimilate reforms on a number of levels in their daily practice. According to Day, (2000, p. 125) "the reform agenda has created an environment where those who wish to survive and thrive must become involved in an increased rate of personal adaptation and professional development." According to Darling – Hammond (1997), the quality of teaching is the key to boost the success of students in learning and proficiency. Many efforts have been taken to provide a better quality of teaching throughout the professional development. The trainings or workshops will be effective when the teachers transfer new knowledge and skills obtained from the classroom. However, at times, these teachers cannot interpret whatever they learn from the training program into their classroom practice because of their efficacy and organizational support (e.g., Smylie, 1988). Related training programs for English teachers will enable them to learn and apply accurate and appropriate usage of oral and written discussion; speak, listen and read strategies; advance grammar and academic and practical vocabulary. These knowledge and skills influence the students' proficiency in English language.

The overall objective of this study is to examine the influence of teachers' creativity, attitude and commitment on students' proficiency in English language. Specifically, this study aims to examine the relationship between teachers' creativity and students' English language proficiency. This study is also carried out to determine the relationship between teachers' attitude and students' English language proficiency and to investigate the relationship between teachers' commitment and students' English language proficiency.

II. Literature Review

There are many opinions and suggestions about the influence of teachers' creativity, attitude and commitment on students' proficiency of the English Language. Teachers' creativity can help students to increase their level of thinking and teachers' communication with students. Teachers' attitude or commitment towards work is very important to encourage the students to learn. Teachers' commitment towards work becomes visible

in promoting and maintaining the teachers' positive behaviors. Teachers who teach effectively can give students fitting and helpful feedback. Research has found that academic achievement and students' behavior are influenced by the quality of the teacher-student relationship (Jones & Jones, 1981). According to Kreitner and Kinicki (2007), commitment is an important work attitude because it drives the individuals who are expected to be willing to work harder to achieve their goal and remain employed.

Creative Thinking

English teachers need to be creative in their teaching method because this component provides something extra from creative performance (Termed "creativity-relevant skills" in Amabile, 1983, op.cit... and "creativity-relevant processes" in Amabile, 1996, op.cit).

Creative thinking depends on the personal characteristics which relate to the independence, self-discipline, orientation towards risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity, perseverance in the face of frustration and a relative lack of concern for social approval (Barron, 1988). On the other hand, creative skills can be raised by the learning and practice techniques to improve and develop the teachers' cognitive flexibility and intellectual independence. So, to make the lesson interesting; activities are one of the techniques for climate and schema for creative thinking in most classrooms. For example, they might be done on a fixed basis, like for the first twenty minutes of class on "Thinking Thursday."

Creative Learning

In education, the link between intelligence and creativity is vital in developing the learning process. Creativity cannot be dismissed on the grounds of the different levels of intelligence that one could find in a classroom. Creativity is an inborn trait that cannot be proven, which connotes a democratic view of creativity.

The democratic view of creativity supposes the existence of a threshold for the intelligence that requires being creative, even if it distinguishes that intelligence alone does not guarantee a creative output (Runco, 2007). According to this theory, focusing on creativity would be simple to assume in the classroom that would leave out a small part of those students whose intelligence falls below the threshold. Runco (2007) explained that the threshold referred to the traditional intelligence, which is often associated with academic performance and linguistic or logical fluency and knowledge. According to Ng and Smith (2004), it has been acknowledged that intelligence could be perceived as something incremental and malleable, as a quality that can be developed and, thus improved (Taylor, 1988), hence creativity could also be nurtured and increased gradually.

In terms of knowledge, these researchers found through a review of literature, creative learning is also linked to creativity. According to Boden (2001) and Weisberg (1999), knowledge is a necessity, but not sufficient, and it is a condition for creativity. Nevertheless, knowledge and expertise are unquestionable attributes of the creative mind, regardless of the debate about the amount and the kind of knowledge needed (Scott, 1999).

Williamson and Payton (2009) explained that the current educational discourses attempted to view the learners at the center of teaching and learning processes, with an active role in the production of knowledge and meaning, democratically bringing their expertise, experiences and ideas into the classroom. Therefore, creativity is an aspect of learning (Craft, 2005). A conceptualization of learning and creativity as "overlapping sets," as Sternberg would have it, leads to a perception of creative teaching as a form of skillful teaching (Craft, 2005). Therefore, creativity is not only required but also necessary because it also involves the co-construction of meaning and the learner taking an active role so that creativity is developed in the learning, and it makes the teaching more effective.

Creative Teaching

Creative teaching is defined in two ways: firstly, teaching creatively and secondly, teaching for creativity. Teaching creatively can be described as teachers using the imaginative approaches to make the learning process to be more interesting, motivating, attracting, thrilling and effective.

Teaching for creativity is defined as using the forms of teaching, which are intended to develop and improve the students' creative thinking and behavior, but it also involves creative teaching. Teachers cannot develop the creative abilities of their students if the students' creative abilities are undiscovered or suppressed. Teaching with and for creativity are included in all the characteristics of effective teaching such as high motivation, high expectations, the ability to communicate and listen and the ability to notice, engage and motivate (Morris, 2006).

Creative teachers need capability in particular, fields because it can show whether the teacher is familiar with that particular subject and able to teach well. They need to use some techniques that inspire their interest and raise their self-esteem and confidence. In other words, teaching for creativity is not an easy option, but it can be enjoyable and deeply fulfilling.

It can involve more time and planning to generate and develop ideas and to evaluate whether they have worked. It involves confidence to improvise and take detours, to pick up unexpected opportunities for learning; to live with uncertainty and to risk admitting that an idea led nowhere. Creative teachers are always willing to experiment, but they recognize the need to learn from experience. All of these require more, not less, expertise of teachers. (Morris, 2006).

Teachers' Attitude

According to researchers, the teachers' creativity is not generally successful in a variety of fields that are related to creativity because of the lack of proper understanding towards it. Teachers are unaware of creativity, and they are unable to classify the creative students (Torrance, 1968; Renzulli, 1993). They pay lesser attention; give lesser encouragement and approval to creative students (Gatzeles & Jackson, 1962). All these discourage creativity (Hossein, 1997) and go against creative teaching method (Cropley, 2001; Mellow, 1996). These points make it essential for conducting the educational programs for teachers to be clear and creative. Teachers' commitment would work in creating the proper awareness, skill, and attitude for teachers to teach and learn something beneficially.

Teachers' Commitment

The degree of teachers' commitment is one of the important aspects of increasing performance and quality of school staff (Miskel and Ogawa 1988; Reyes 1990; Rowan 1990; Rosenholtz 1989). Commitment is defined as a degree of positivity, affective bond between the teacher and the school. Teacher's commitment reflects the degree of internal motivation, enthusiasm, job satisfaction, efficacy and effectiveness.

The improvements in the commitment of teachers are one of the outcomes that is likely to be positively affected by the new teacher reform efforts. Researchers argued that increasing the commitment of teachers is an important step in the process of school reform. Moreover, professionalization of teachers will result in higher commitment, which will positively affect teachers' performance and students' proficiency that will ultimately lead to improvements in student learning (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Darling-Hammond 1984; Rosenholtz 1989; Sergiovanni and Moore 1989; Weis et al. 1989; Conley and Cooper 1991; Holmes Group, 1986; Darling-Hammond 1995; Talbert and McLaughlin 1993).

Students' Proficiency

According to Blackorby et al (2003), the special education teachers are less likely than general educators to consider homework or attendance in grading the students' proficiency or performance. They are more likely to consider in-class participation as an important issue. In other words, students' proficiency increase because of teachers' commitment in the teaching process and techniques that are evident in increasing student participation in the classroom. Increasing student participation in the classroom requires creativity; hence created thinking becomes part of the learning process.

Researchers have also recognized that study efforts, age, and a good match between the students' learning style and the teacher's teaching style as factors that have positive effects on students' proficiency. According to Devadoss and Foltz (1996), class attendance has a positive effect on students' proficiency and performance.

Apart from attendance, memory and note, taking had been shown to positively affect students' performance (Cohn, Cohn & Bradley, 1995). Thus, the achievement processes have been supported by the characteristics of students, their environments, utilization of teaching-learning models, and instructional materials as well as the structural ability of the students to perform better in their learning process.

Conceptual Framework

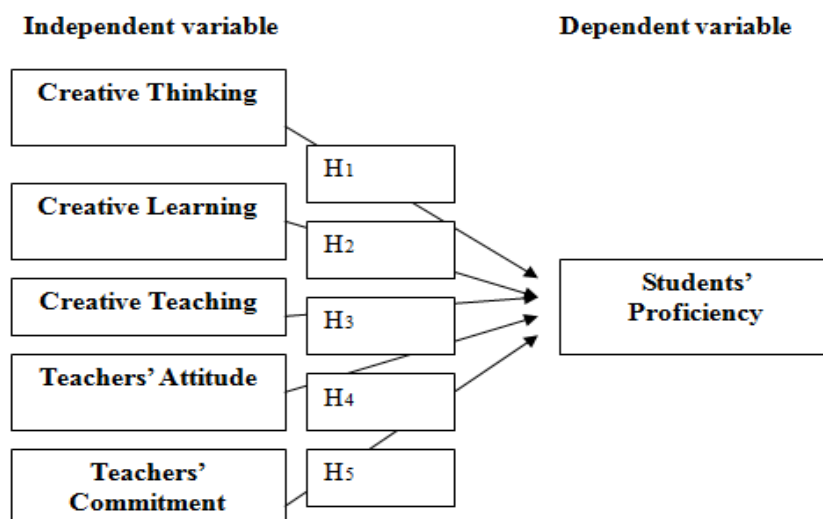


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is proposed for this research based on previous academic reviews, which encourages a systematic analysis of educational development by exploring its influence towards teachers' creativity, teachers' attitude, teachers' commitment and students' proficiency, as shown in Figure 1. The conceptual framework illustrates the influence of teacher's creativity, attitude and teachers' commitment towards students' proficiency. Various researchers have considered creative thinking, creative learning, creative teaching, and teachers' attitude as factors that have a connection with the teachers' commitment and students' proficiency.

The independent variables of this study's conceptual framework include creative thinking, creative learning, creative teaching, teachers' attitude and teachers' commitment towards the English language, while the dependent variable is student's proficiency.

According to Day (2000), in order to sustain their energy and enthusiasm for the work, teachers need to maintain their personal commitment to the job. This will help increase students' proficiency in the learning process. The concept of commitment as an investment of personal resources has long been associated with the professional characteristics of a teacher. It is generally recognized that as the role of the teacher intensifies, teachers are also required to adapt to bureaucratically driven escalation of pressures, expectations and controls concerning what teachers do and how much they should be doing within the teaching day (Hargreaves, 1994:108).

Hypotheses

Based on the preceding sections, this study proposes to test five hypotheses, which are as follows:

- H1: Teachers' creative thinking positively influences students' English language proficiency.
- H2: Teachers' creative learning positively influences students' English language proficiency.
- H3: Teachers' creative teaching positively influences students' English language proficiency.
- H4: Teachers' attitude positively influences students' English language proficiency.
- H5: Teachers' commitment positively influences students' English language proficiency.

III. Methodology

Research Design

Creative thinking is identified as one of the independent variables in this study. Creative thinking consists of five items and was adapted from Kawasaki (1999). The second, third and fourth independent variables, which are creative teaching, teachers' attitude and teachers' commitment consist of four items, respectively and were adapted from Jon-Chao, et.al., (2010). Students' proficiency is identified as the dependent variable in this study and includes four dimensions, which are writing, reading, listening and speaking. Each dimension has four items and is adapted from Tannenbaum and Wylie, (2005).

The target population for this study is secondary school English teachers at private schools in Kuala Lumpur area, of which 310 respondents agreed to participate in the survey. The respondents were 110 male teachers and 200 female teachers. Data from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS version 14.0 software. The techniques used in analyzing the data included descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

IV. Results

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

	Number	Percentage
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	110	35.5%
Female	200	64.5%
<u>Group of Ethnic</u>		
Malay	82	26.5%
Chinese	119	34.8%
Indian	90	29.0%
Others	19	6.1%
<u>Marital Status</u>		
Single	150	47.9%
Married	155	49.5%
Divorced/Separate	5	1.6%
<u>Education Level</u>		
Degree/Professional certificate	291	93.0%
Diploma/A-Level	9	2.9%
Post Graduate	10	3.2%
<u>Occupation</u>		
Level Head	17	5.5%
Assistant Level Head	19	6.1%
Centre Coordinator	13	4.2%
English Teacher	261	84.2%
<u>Years of teaching English at current organization</u>		
Less than 2 years	105	33.5%
2 – 5 years	123	39.3%
6 – 10 years	63	20.1%
More than 10 years	19	6.1%
<u>Hours of teaching English</u>		
4 – 5 hours	23	7.3%
5 – 6 hours	5	1.6%
7 – 8 hours	113	36.1%
More than 9 hours	169	54.0%

The profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1 above. The majority of the respondents are female (64.5%), from the Chinese ethnic group (34.8%), married (49.5%), have a degree or a professional certificate (93%), English teachers (84.2%), have been working in the current organization between 2-5 years (39.3%) and teach English more than nine hours (54%).

Table 2: Reliability of Variables

Variables	Number of items	Reliability (Cronbach alpha)
Students' Proficiency	16	0.99
Creative Thinking	5	0.95
Creative Learning	4	0.95
Creative Teaching	4	0.98
Teachers' Attitude	4	0.97
Teachers' Commitment	4	0.93

N=310

The alpha values of all variables are well above 0.80, which is considered a good indicator of internal consistency. The alpha value for students' proficiency was .99; creative thinking and creative learning was .95, respectively; creative teaching was .98; teachers' attitude was .97 and teachers' commitment had an alpha value of .93.

Table 3: Correlations Matrix of Variables

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

(1) Creative Thinking					
(2) Creative Learning	0.62**				
(3) Creative Teaching	0.69**	0.69**			
(4) Teachers' Attitude	0.67**	0.70**	0.67**		
(5) Teachers' Commitment	0.60**	0.60**	0.59**	0.60**	
(6) Students' Proficiency	0.65**	0.59**	0.67**	0.64**	0.59**

**p <.00; n=310

The results show that all the independent variables are correlated with the dependent variable, students' proficiency. However, creative thinking and creative teaching seem to have the strongest correlation, with correlation coefficient values of 0.65 and 0.67, respectively. Nevertheless, the correlation results suggest students' proficiency in the English language is correlated with creative thinking, creative learning, creative teaching, teachers' attitude and teachers' commitment. In other words, the results can be interpreted to suggest that higher students' proficiency of the English language is related with higher creative thinking, creative learning, creative teaching, teachers' attitude and teachers' commitment.

Table 4: Simple Regression Analysis of the Variables

Model	Adjusted R ²	F	B	t-value	Sig.
1 (Creative Thinking and Students' Proficiency)	0.76	239.40	2.20	38.65	0.00
2 (Creative Learning and Students' Proficiency)	0.61	120.86	1.71	0.18	0.00
3 (Creative Teaching and Students' Proficiency)	0.60	116.79	0.79	2.26	0.00
4 (Teachers' Attitude and Students' Proficiency)	0.68	162.42	0.85	0.16	0.00
5 (Teachers' Commitment and Students' Proficiency)	0.69	166.78	0.89	-2.593	0.00

n=310

From Table 4, there are significant results of the simple regression analysis. Creative thinking positively influences students' proficiency, which explained 76% of the variation in students' proficiency, with a B value of 2.20. Creative teaching only explained 60% of the variation in students' proficiency with a B value of 0.79.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables	Overall Model		
	B	t-value	Sig.
(Constant)	30.19	2.00	0.00
Creative Thinking	0.42	6.18	0.00
Creative Learning	0.47	7.42	0.00
Creative Teaching	0.42	4.61	0.00
Teacher's Attitude	0.21	1.06	0.00
Teacher's Commitment	0.40	5.23	0.00
Adjusted R ²	0.67		
F – Value	164.74		
Significant	0.00		

n=310

From Table 5, the results show the multiple regression analysis, with all the independent variables (creative thinking, creative learning, creative teaching, teacher's attitude and teacher's commitment) and the dependent variable (students' proficiency). This analysis was conducted to predict the percentage of dependent variable, where independent variables are entered simultaneously. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the overall variance

(students' proficiency) was explained by the independent variables (creative thinking, creative learning, creative teaching, and teacher's attitude and teacher's commitment). Creative thinking ($B = 0.42, t = 6.18$), creative learning ($B = 0.47, t = 7.42$), creative teaching ($B = 0.42, t = 4.61$), teachers' attitude ($B = 0.21, t = 1.06$) and teachers' commitment ($B = 0.40, t = 5.23$) significantly and positively influence students' proficiency. All independent variables show significant results towards the dependent variable.

Table 6: Collinearity Statistics of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Creative Thinking	0.14	7.27
Creative Learning	0.21	5.52
Creative Teaching	0.17	9.20
Teacher's Attitude	0.11	8.27
Teacher's Commitment	0.18	5.57

n=310

Table 6 above indicates the results of the collinearity statistics of the multiple regression analysis. Results from Table 6 show that multicollinearity do not exist, as the values of tolerance are greater than 0.1 and the variation inflation factors (VIF) for all independent variables are less than 10 (Hair, et.al., 1998;).

V. Conclusion

Table 7: Results of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Findings
H1: Teachers' creative thinking positively influences students' English language proficiency.	Supported
H2: Teachers' creative learning positively influences students' English language proficiency.	Supported
H3: Teachers' creative teaching positively influences students' English language proficiency.	Supported
H4: Teachers' attitude positively influences students' English language proficiency.	Supported
H5: Teachers' commitment positively influences students' English language proficiency.	Supported

The outcomes of this study suggest that creative thinking, creative learning, creative teaching, teachers' attitude and teachers' commitment influence students' proficiency in the English language. This study sheds positive light towards increasing student's performance. This is a step towards identifying the kinds of training and development programs needed to ensure creativity is installed in the teachers and that more importantly; it is demonstrated in the way the teachers conduct their classes.

Recommendations for Future Research

As a result of this study, teachers and school administrators are likely to have a better understanding in knowing the importance of teachers' creativity, attitude and commitment on students' proficiency of the English language. Future research should further explore the same independent variables and its effect on students' performance on other subjects taught in school. Another future research could look at the effects of creativity on public school teachers.

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