

The Relationship between Creativity and Iranian EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

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ABSTRACT: Every language user is linguistically creative. Creativity, along with productivity, displacement and arbitrariness, is one of the most important features of human language. This study investigates the relationship between creativity and listening comprehension. At first, a modified version of Comprehensive English Language Test was administered to a group of 82 students to determine their homogeneity as well as to assess their language proficiency. In the next phase of the study, Arjomand creativity Questionnaire was administered to the participants. Afterwards, the students were given a listening comprehension test consisting of two lectures to measure the listening comprehension of students. This test was designed to examine the relationship between creativity and listening comprehension. The findings suggest that there is a significant correlation between creativity and listening comprehension.

Key words: Creativity; Listening Comprehension, Iranian EFL Learners

ORIGINAL ARTICLE
Received 07 May, 2014
Accepted 05 Jun, 2014

INTRODUCTION

Since 1970's, communicative teaching has been the main concern of the educational specialists (Brown, 2000). There have been large amounts of efforts and studies, along with hypotheses and theories, which have tried to devise a way to enable teachers to teach better. Nowadays, the trend has shifted toward investigating what learners do when they are involved in a learning task. In fact, learners and their characteristics in learning have gained the most attention over the last decades. In spite of traditional approaches toward language teaching, current communicative approaches emphasize on the cognitive and affective traits of language learners as whole humans (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As the importance of learners' characteristics has been increased during recent decades, much research has been devoted to them (Cole et al., 1994).

The study of creativity as a cognitive factor which influences language teaching and learning has a long history in the field (Cole et al., 1994; Albert & Kormos, 2004). After the innovative address of Guilford in 1950's, creativity was studied scientifically in many different areas of study (Sternberg, 2006). These studies especially in the psychology show that creativity is a latent capability which is present in all humankind. However, some people may benefit the appropriate environment and education and are able to show and utilize their potentials. Fasco (2001) believes that although all people are creative, some people due to the factors such as motivation, knowledge, culture, etc. are more creative in specific fields. Researchers still did not reach a consensus about the domain-specificity and domain generality of creativity (Baer, 1998). Domains such as music, mathematics, religion, and various technologies are the components of culture. Domain- specificity in

creativity studies refers to the unique talent of a creative person in a special domain, which cannot be utilized in other fields and domains. For most people creativity is an intuitively appealing concept, and everyone seems to know, or feel, or at least have a hunch about what it means. The question arises, nevertheless, if this term is interpreted as a rare phenomenon observable only in the exceptionally talented, in which case its relevance for the millions of average people learning foreign languages is obviously negligible. If, however, creativity is hypothesized to be a special arrangement of those cognitive, motivational, personality or social characteristics that are present in everyone, its effects on second language acquisition cannot be disregarded. In other words, if creativity is considered as a domain-general talent which could be fostered and utilized in different domains, it would be of significance in the language teaching and learning fields. A number of researchers (Barkóczy & Zétényi, 1981; Cropley, 2007; Guilford, 1950) believe that the underlying components of creativity are normally distributed in the population. Therefore, creativity, which implicitly involves imagination, unconventionality, risk-taking, flexibility, and creating new classifications and systematizations of knowledge (Sternberg, 1985), might be a factor affecting second language acquisition.

For the most EFL (English as a foreign language) learners, listening is the most difficult one among the four skills. Research shows that in order to be effective listeners, learners must be able to actively and strategically participate in the listening process within a low- anxiety classroom environment. Among the many skills required to use a language (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing), listening skills are considered important for communication with others. Language learners are expected to

understand what the interlocutor is saying in order to continue the conversation.

Based on the analysis of data obtained from listening comprehension and creativity questionnaire, this study aims to find out the relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension.

Review of literature

Creativity: There is very little agreement among authors on definitions of what creativity is, and most of the scholarly research is comprised of quoting one another. However, there is a consensus in the literature that the phenomenon termed individual creativity is a highly complex one and the measurement of creativity has been a persistent source of debate and critique. Definition of creativity has always been under the influence of psychological trends. The dominion of each psychological and philosophical approach brings about a new and different definition of creativity. Furthermore the context in which the creativity is discussed has considerable effect on its definition. Berman (1995) points that: "the more one studies the subject of creativity, the more complex and bewildering it seems, and the closer one comes to accepting Freud's conclusion that it simply cannot be understood" (as cited in Buchanan, 1990). Karkockiene (2005) states that: "there is no agreement on what creativity actually is". Some of the scholarly definitions of creativity are more suitable for the purpose of this study, since they emphasize the same aspects which this study is going to investigate. For example, the focus of this research is on the subjective aspect of creativity which Jarvie (1981) defines as "a property of persons or their minds". In this view, creativity is a process rather than a product. It is an asset which exists in all human beings, but its realization can be different under the influence of various factors. Knowledgeable people, who dare to break the conventional rules of thinking and put aside the presuppositions and existing assumptions, can show their creative potentials. Other related definitions include:

• "...a conscious and deliberate process which is used to interpret or evaluate information and experiences with a set of reflective attitudes and abilities that guide thoughtful beliefs and actions" (Marrapodi, 2003, p 5).

• "...the ability to analyze facts, generate and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments and solve problems" (Chance, 2000).

Creativity and Education

Creativity of humans, first of all shows itself in the very first steps of learning language. The nature of

language is such that the vast majority of utterances produced or heard are done so for the first time. Most of what we hear and speak are created rather than recalled from memory. Language is stored as knowledge of speech sounds, of word patterns, and of rules for creating words and stringing them together. Having developed these automated skills and knowledge, language use becomes almost entirely subconscious and almost entirely creative. It can be concluded that the use of language perhaps the most common creative act that all humans possess and exhibit as a regular part of their daily lives. In fact, the famous statement "Every language user is linguistically creative" which has been borrowed from Chomsky (1966) completely explores the relationship of creativity and using language. Therefore, Creativity is not an innate quality of only a few selected people. Creativity is present in everyone. It can be learned, practiced and developed by the use of certain techniques, and by removing some constraints. Craft et al. (2001) distinguish between two types of creativity. The first type is the creativity which can be seen in people such as Mozart, Picasso, and Einstein. The second type "is not for the gifted and talented and does not apply to creative and innovative outbursts that have a strong impact on society." It is a mental attitude and an ability to find new and innovative solutions for everyday problems." The latter is particularly suitable for the educational sector.

Creativity in the classroom involves innovative teaching, high motivation, the ability to communicate and listen and the ability to interest and inspire (Ferrari et al., 2009). Establishing a creative environment in the classroom will absolutely optimize language learning and teaching. Creative teachers build a good rapport, stimulate curiosity, know the characteristics of creative students, and raise self-esteem, risk-taking and confidence (Runco, 2004).

Creativity can be enhanced in an environment in which team work, intrinsic-motivation, independence, socio-cultural diversity, and risk-taking culture that tolerates and even encourages failure are encouraged (Landry, 2000; Tepper, 2005; Shaughnessy, 1991). In creating this type of environment, it is recommended that teachers accept and encourage creative thinking, tolerate dissent, encourage students to trust their own judgments, emphasize that everyone is capable of creativity, and serve as a stimulus for creative thinking through brainstorming and modeling (Torrance & Myers, 1970). However, most school environments do not support, and many actively suppress, creative expression. Torrance and Safter (1986), for instance, assert that teachers are often ill equipped to develop, support, or evaluate creativity in their students. In addition, much theory and research

shows that creative students often lose their creative potential (Shaughnessy, 1991). If education strives to prepare children for a productive life in society, the educational system must accept responsibility for supporting and developing creativity.

In general, creativity in education is dependent to various factors including: assessment, culture, curriculum, individual skills, teaching and learning format, national policies, teachers, technology, and tools. All of these factors have been elaborated in details in the literature (Marrapodi, 2003; Ferrari et al., 2009; and Morris, 2006).

Role of Listening in Second or Foreign Language Acquisition

As stated in Chapter I, until recently the skill of listening was paid the least attention of the four language skills. This neglect may have derived from the fact that listening was viewed as a passive skill. However, recent L2 studies reconsidered speaking-only initial focus when this production-oriented initial emphasis was found to interfere with the students' learning, disrupting the association process essential for integration and retention of the target language (Asher, 1969; Gary, 1978). Empirical studies have shown that pushing learners to produce material they have not yet stored in their memory can overload their short-term memory.

L2 research studies have also found that there is a high degree of positive transfer between a listening-only initial focus and other language skills, while lower scores were reported in all language skills when learners were required to develop simultaneously the skills of speaking and listening (Gary, 1978). A listening-only initial focus has been found to yield a significant affective advantage for foreign/ second language learners, increasing their effectiveness and concentration in language learning.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Participants: Survey data were collected from 62 students from three institutes in Naghadeh including Sadaf institution, Danial institution, Ertebatat institution. First of all, 82 male and female students in intermediate level were chosen. Then a Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT) was used. The reason for the administration of such a standardized test was to evaluate the proficiency level of the subjects as well as to select a homogeneous sample. Of the 82 participants, only 68 were found to be homogenous. 6 subjects could not take part in reading task and were excluded from the study. 62 main participants who took part in all phases of the research were both male and female and in an age group 18 to 22.

Instrumentation

To achieve the purpose of the present study, while controlling for the differences in the participants' level of language proficiency, the researcher utilized the following instruments:

Language Proficiency Test: A modified version of a language proficiency test, Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT), consisting of 54 items, was selected to investigate whether the participants were homogeneous in terms of their general language proficiency. The test was piloted to 82 intermediate students at different institutes of Naghadeh. This group was almost similar to the target group regarding their language proficiency level, gender, and age.

Creativity Questionnaire: Among all available creativity questionnaires, a self-report inventory called Arjmand Creativity test, which has claimed to be the most reliable and valid test in Iran, was employed in three institutes in Naghadeh including Sadaf institute, Ertebatat institute and Danial institute, to measure the creative abilities of the participants.

Listening Comprehension Tests: Since this study is concerned with the listening strategies learners use in the academic setting, the listening test constructed for this study was comprised of two lectures to measure listening comprehension. The two lectures varied immensely in length and topics discussed. One of the lectures is only three minutes long. It was made sure that the lecture did not contain any technical terminology that could make the comprehension of the lecture overly challenging to the participants. The comprehension of this lecture was measured using a test, in which the subtests were comprised of four items with four potential choices, and an essay question that was focused on the recognition of the main idea of the lecture. The other lecture is about 9: 35 minutes long. The comprehension of this lecture was measured using five inferential essay questions that centered around the recognition of the main ideas and key supporting details in the lecture.

Research Questions

RQ1. Is there a significant relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?

RQ2. Do gender differences have impact toward creativity of students?

RQ3. Do gender differences have impact toward listening comprehension of students?

Research Hypotheses

H. There is a significant relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension.

H01.There is no significant relationship between creativity and gender of students.

H02.There is no significant relationship between listening comprehension and gender of students.

RESULTS

In order to analyze and interpret the data, descriptive and inferential statics has been used.

Research hypotheses:

H: There is a significance positive relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension.

The Correlations of these variables including creativity and listening comprehension are computed through Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The correlation coefficient between creativity and listening comprehension is 0.82 in error level of 0.01 and certainty level of 0.99 and with regard to level of significance at 0.05, because the correlation coefficient is higher than level of significance, we concluded that there is a significance relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension, which show that the higher level of

creativity, the higher level of listening comprehension, and converse.

H01.There is no significant relationship between creativity and gender of students.

By computing T-test for males and females (T=4.641 for creativity and T=.030 for listening ,sig=0.77,), we concluded that there is no significant relationship between males and females in creativity with the mean of 50.84 in females and 50.46 in males, so we accepted the null hypothesis.

H02.There is no significant relationship between listening comprehension and gender of students.

By computing T-test for males and females (T= 4.641 for creativity and T=.030 for listening, sig=0.81,), we concluded that there is no significant relationship between males and females in listening comprehension with the mean of 204.13 for females and 204.03 for males, so we accepted the null hypothesis.

In order to determine the level of creativity on listening comprehension, Regression method has been used. The results showed that the effect of creativity on listening comprehension is positive and significant (r= 0.68, p < 0.001, df= 60, f= 8.669).

Table1. Descriptive indexes

	N	Mean	Mode	Median	SD	V	Rang
creativity	62	204.06	209.00	191	16.748	280.488	52
Listening comprehension	62	47.66	47.50	54	6.233	38.851	23

Survey data were collected from 62 students, 31 males and 31 females.

Table 2. Correlation coefficient

		creativity	listening comprehension
creativity	Pearson Correlation	1	0.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.822
	N	62	62
listening comprehension	Pearson Correlation	0.029	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.822	
	N	62	62

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
creativity	Equal variances assumed	.000	.77	4.641	60	.861	.387	2.202
	Equal variances not assumed			4.641	59.775	.861	.387	2.202
Listening comprehension	Equal variances assumed	.081	.56	.030	60	.000	6.355	1.369
	Equal variances not assumed			.030	60.000	.000	6.355	1.369

Table 4. Regression summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.683 ^a	.643	.616	8.669	.001	.051	1	60	.822

a. Predictors: (Constant), listening comprehension; b. Dependent Variable: creativity

Validity

In this research the test-retest method has been used which 0.66 reported for creativity, it showed a good level of validity and also 0.71 reported for listening comprehension which showed that these students have a good level of written narrative proficiency and showed a good level of validity.

As it was mentioned the content validity and test-retest validity has been used in this research. For analyzing and interpreting the validity, KMO and Bartlett's Test has been used.

Table 5. KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.66
Approx. Chi-Square	3.654E6
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity df	60
Sig.	.001

Table 6. KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.71
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	2.876E5
df	58
Sig.	.000

Reliability

Coronbach's alpha has been used for calculating the reliability of these tests. 0.79alpha reported for creativity and 0.64 alpha reported for listening comprehension which showed reliability of tests.

Table 8. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.791	30

Table 9. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.648	33

DISCUSSION

When one is trying to assess a person's creative potentials, usually two different approaches are taken. One option is measuring several non-cognitive aspects of creativity, such as personality and motivation, in addition to intellectual processes and intellectual style, as was done by Sternberg and Lubart (1991), who tried to establish individual creativity in this way. Although this approach is more in line with current constructs of creativity, it is not

feasible in research designs in which creativity needs to be operationalized as one single variable. The other option, therefore, is to try to assess divergent thinking, the intellectual ability that is thought to be most characteristic of the creative process (Guilford, 1967; Torrance, 1962). Although tests of divergent thinking have been criticized on many counts, because of their reported validity and reliability (Harrington et al., 1983) and their relative ease of use, they are still widely applied as indicators of individual creativity in research on individual variables. Although tests like Word Fluency certainly have limited face validity as measures of creativity, their ability to identify creative individuals is an empirical matter, and in fact they are reasonably successful in this. In this study the researcher has used the second option which has been proposed by Guilford. This method is also used in all other studies with the creativity as an independent variable (Albert & Kormos, 2004; Kunco, 2004). The correlation coefficient of creativity and listening comprehension is 0.67. These significant values show that there is a moderate relationship between these two variables.

These findings complement those of the series of studies conducted by Ehrman and her colleagues (Ehrman, 1996), who claim that the ability to cope with novelty is an important characteristic that affects the success of language learning. Their line of argumentation can be extended, and on the basis of our results, we can argue that the ability to produce original that is, novel, ideas in general does moderately affect how students perform in a particular language learning task.

CONCLUSION

First of all, the relationship between the continuous variables i.e. creativity, listening comprehension would be analyzed. The findings indicate that hypothesis, namely, that there is a significant relationship between creativity and listening comprehension, is partially supported. The correlation coefficient of creativity and listening comprehension is 0.67. These significant values show that there is a moderate relationship between these two variables.

There are several pedagogical implications that can be drawn from the present research. For example, the issue of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivators and their effects on creativity can be applied to any classroom at any grade level. That is, creative people are intrinsically motivated to complete a task. Thus, educators must be aware that, if they implement an extrinsic reward structure with these students, this will undermine their intrinsic motivation. Assessment

procedure is another area that can be influenced through the results of this study. As mentioned before, creative potentials and high risk-taking may be affected negatively when it comes to a formal assessment (e.g. traditional final exam). Assessment procedure needs to come along with needs and wants of intrinsically motivated learners. However, assessment and exams are a part of a broader educational system. These systems, which may be called creativity killers, are like barriers toward creative behaviors. Such systems not only do not allow creative teachers to try innovative approaches, but also they reduce risk taking and creativity in language learners. However, creativity is an important element in relation to education and social growth. As the degree of complexity and the amount of information in the society continue to increase, society's problems require more creative solutions. For this reason, all sectors of society are requiring leaders who can think critically and creatively (Isaksen & Murdock, 1993). The current study aimed to explore these relationships and provide an academic evidence for policy makers in the related field.

Considering the relationship of the variables of the current study, it seems necessary to provide a more student-centered teaching and learning environment in our schools. Such an environment can stimulate learners and allow them to take the risk of speaking in front of other peers and show their creative abilities. Policy makers can provide the learners and teachers with "teaching of creativity" and "methods for successful risk-taking" programs and in this way have a great role in developing moderate risk-taker and high creative individuals in the future. As Davis and Rimm (2004) suggest, educators should choose the programs that appear to best meet the needs of their students in their school. Thus, as Rhodes (1961) stated more than 35 years ago, "Now is the time for every teacher to become more creative" (p. 310).

It may well be said that Guilford's (1967) statement that "creativity is the key to education in its fullest sense and to the solution of mankind's most serious problems" (p. 13) is still relevant today. It is clear that if students have no fear of speaking in class, they could not have trouble acquiring a second or foreign language. Therefore, reducing risks and negative effects may be one of the main concerns of methods and approaches of language teaching. It is worth to note again that, creativity and risk-taking are highly correlated. As we know, Suggestopedia is one of the approaches which tried to calm down the worried learners and provide an atmosphere in which they are not afraid of being judged negatively. Relaxation exercises and music are a good way to relieve students' tensions. The more students feel relaxed, the better they can learn and the better they

can produce language in a creative manner. A learner-centered approach in which students can feel comfortable to talk in a foreign language and have fun in classroom may increase learning. Since low risk-takers who can't show their creative capabilities, do not dare to ask questions fall behind of other learners; teachers should be aware of the overall behaviors of such learners and take care of them.

The present study recommends teacher to know the primary focus of language learners. Most of learners want a reaction to meaning, not an evaluation of form. Often, providing the former creates a natural communicative setting. However, emphasizing on accuracy over fluency may increase the risks of being interrupted by the teacher and even being mocked by other learners in the class. Teachers should encourage moderate risk-takers to flourish the creative potentials and adjust extreme high risk-takers and risk-averse learners to the atmosphere of the class (Buchanan, 2001).

The last but not the least would be the implications of the study on interviews and written tasks. Based on the results of the study, creative learners show a partial success in reading comprehension than other learners.

Reviewing the language teaching approaches through history shows that creativity was not so important in mechanical drills of the Audio-Lingual or Grammar-Translation methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). They owe their importance in the literature to the 1970's approaches which emphasize on communicative aspects of language learning. It is evident that the more language teaching and learning goes toward a communicative and learner centered approach, the more these personal variables play role in it.

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