

Teaching Creative Writing as a Strategy of Cognitive Activity

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Abstract

Issues surrounding creative writing have become increasingly significant in recent years, fueled by the benefits provided by the Internet and the needs of remote learning caused by an isolation period. The English language is a discipline to learn and a tool to study other subjects through reading and analysing short or extended texts. This way, students perceive ready knowledge, then they enhance their higher order cognitive skills: and evaluation of the events and discoveries and create their own texts, articles, essays, research papers. As English is accepted as a language of communication, science and of the Internet all over the world so writing in English provides students with physical evidence of their achievements. They share their understanding of different scientific phenomena and deepen their knowledge in certain fields. Writing takes more time and is not so attractive practice to use in class, as it is considered to be a “quite” activity. The authors suggest the approaches to use creative writing as a crucial strategy of cognitive performance, as it covers many of the learning objectives: distant communication, sharing ideas and opinion, using appropriate grammar, vocabulary, register, style, ability to write, structure and edit the texts for various purposes.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, there have been a lot of discussions about the need to teach writing at secondary school, along with other types of speech activities. It is obvious that written speech ceases to play only an auxiliary role in teaching a foreign language. In the new standard of secondary (complete) general education in a foreign language, along with the ability to fill out a form, a questionnaire, sign a postcard, write a letter, summarize the content of what has been read, students are required to be able to “write about facts and events of their lives, expressing their opinion, judgments and feelings; write with minimal support about real and imaginary past events, activities and experiences on a growing range of familiar general topics and some curricular topics (SPE, 2017). Thus, the teacher must prepare students to create written messages with a very different functional and communicative orientation, content, compositional structure and linguistic form.

The researchers note that in spite of the difficulties of writing, it is of utmost importance that learners achieve competence in this area. “Writing provides the ability to articulate ideas, argue opinions, and synthesize multiple perspectives, it is essential to communicating persuasively with others, including teachers, peers, colleagues, coworkers, and the community.” (Crowhurst, 1990).

Competent writing is an indicator of the high level of development, mindset, outlook and quality education. Creative writing skills can be attributed to skills that will be helpful lifelong.

Nowadays when recruiting, the employers give preference to those candidates who are able to express their thoughts competently in an essay, reason logically, offer original solutions to problems. Language choices regarding syntax and word selection serve to reflect sophistication of linguistic skills, the writer's competence, and even socioeconomic status (McNamara, Crossley, & McCarthy, 2011, p. 63).

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that in the existing teaching materials, this aspect of learning a foreign language is not paid enough attention to; often in addition to the topic the textbook offers a sample of an essay in the end of the unit.

Pamela Rausch emphasizes that the two productive language domains -speaking and writing- should be taught in interaction, without separating them, as it happens traditionally. The researcher also insists that systematic instruction is essential: "...purposeful instruction of speaking appears to be transferable, also benefiting English learners' writing skills. However, while students are able to transfer skills relating to critical analysis and organization, they will need additional instruction on skills, such as spelling and other conventions, which are exclusive to writing." (Rausch, 2015)

Taking into account the finding, described above and also students' age, level of language proficiency, learning style the teacher has to look for ways to solve the problem independently, seek for answers to questions, first of all - how to organize the educational process where each student is an active participant and does not just put letters into words, words into sentences, does not just write a plain answer to the topic set, but tries to find appropriate means of expressing their own thoughts and ideas.

The school learning process changed in accordance with the demands of the society, as well as its goals and objectives (Saeed et al., 2021). In particular, the practical goal of teaching was transformed from teaching a foreign language as a formal school subject to teaching foreign language skills, then to teaching a foreign language speech activity and finally to teaching a foreign language communication. However, as the main contradiction of the modern stage can be considered the fact that the proclaimed practical (communicative) objectives of learning, implying mastering a foreign language as a means of communication, in most cases are not implemented in practice, since the current formal speech approach is aimed mainly at achieving pre-communicative results of teaching. In this case it is the formation of language and speech competence of students which provides understanding patterns and the ability to construct statements by analogy. The achievements of the students are estimated on Criteria-based assessment system: formative – during the learning process and summative – at the end of the learning period. In our schools the summative assessment takes place when the students finish learning a unit (a module) of their textbooks and at the end of the term. According to the official English language course program, the assessment test for the term should include the tasks in listening, reading, writing and speaking (SPE, 2017; Razak et al., 2020). Analyzing the results of the term tests it is often noted that the most mistakes are made in creative writing tasks. This has become a topical issue that needs to be solved as early as possible, as it might develop into a permanent disadvantage that will hinder students to achieve their objectives in the future.

The current research is focused on teaching creative writing. The purpose is to highlight that creative writing should be specially trained. Firstly, it is relevant to use the opportunities provided by the Internet: e-mail correspondence, participation in distance competitions, IELTS or TOEFL international exams, where writing an essay is one of the crucial points for defining the level of language proficiency. Secondly, a developed written text provides a well-prepared oral speech. Thirdly, the ability to formulate written texts for various purposes in an appropriate way is an indicator of functional literacy, since students apply the gained knowledge in practice.

The communicative competence is integrative and includes several components: communication skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing; linguistic knowledge and

skills to use it for the generating and recognizing information; linguistic knowledge and country study provide a socio-cultural background, without which the formation of communicative competence is impossible.

Writing proficiency allows using the knowledge of a foreign language, being outside the linguistic environment, communicating with native speakers using modern means of communication. The ability to write personal and formal letters, the need to fill out questionnaires, document forms, etc. motivates students to master written communication in the target language.

The issues of teaching creative writing are extremely relevant to the schools of our country. The significance of the topic of this work is determined by the growth of requirements for the written language of students; great potential of creative writing to increase the level of language proficiency; a lack of developed systems of exercises for teaching creative writing.

2. Experimental

In our research, we pay attention to teaching creative writing which needs to be taught specifically. Firstly, it is relevant in the spot of opportunities provided by the Internet: electronic correspondence, participation in remote competitions and IELTS testing, where writing an essay is one of the essential points of determining the level of language proficiency. Secondly, a well-developed written text provides a well-sounding oral speech. Thirdly, the ability to formalize written texts for various purposes in a proper way is an indicator of functional literacy, as students apply their knowledge in practice.

The value of academic, particularly analytic, writing is evident through the assignments assigned across disciplines (Rausch, 2015). Considered a central aspect of western education, analytic writing makes up a vital aspect of writing assignments assigned to students and serves to elicit demonstration of competence in both writing and content (Cowhurst, 1990).

Cambridge Dictionary defines the word “writing” as “a person’s style of writing with a pen on paper that can be recognized as their own; something that has been written or printed; a person’s style of creating stories, poems, texts; activity of creating stories, poems, articles.(Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

As a linguistic term “writing” refers to a complex speech skill, “an additional means of communication to the sound speech with help of graphic signs it allows recording speech to transmit it over distances, to preserve it in time” (Akhmanova, 1966). This definition reflects two sides of writing: writing as a productive activity (to record speech for its transmission) and writing as a result of this activity –“works”, that is, texts intended for reading by others.

The historical importance of writing has always been emphasized by both linguists and historians. People who could write were appreciated in all periods of the human history as they saved invaluable information about different epochs, events and outstanding personalities. Writers possessed the ability to capture their thoughts, biographies and speeches.

Nowadays the school education provides the children with basic knowledge and skills to read and write which they use along their life.

The fact that each age corresponds to a level of physical, mental and social development is well known. It is obvious that students use acquired skills in various ways according to their age. It is important for the teacher to know these features and take them into account and purposefully use them to maximize the possibilities and comprehensive development of students abilities.

The secondary school age covers the period from 11 to 17 years. It is considered a transitional age from childhood to adolescence. During this period, there is an active process of spiritual and physical maturation, restructuring of the organism. This age is especially favorable for pedagogical stimulation and elaboration of self-awareness, self-education.

Adolescence is characterized by the ability to creative imagination and fantasy. The logic of judgments, generalizations and conclusions is gradually increasing. However studying the IELTS results taken by our students it was found out that the average score in writing is 5,5. In

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comparison to reading – 7, 5; to speaking – 8; to listening – 8,5, writing results look quite low. This way the problem was identified and we made an attempt to search for effective solutions how to improve students' writing skills.

To determine the causes of the low results in writing tasks a survey was conducted among the students. The research revealed the following reasons: the students could not generate new ideas to the given assignments; they did not manage to organize the ideas in their essays; they did not know the structures of different kinds of essays or letters, they did not have appropriate vocabulary to do the tasks, they failed to do the writing tasks because of time limit. The most students confessed that they felt unsure while writing messages to their pen-friends in the Internet because of the possible mistakes.

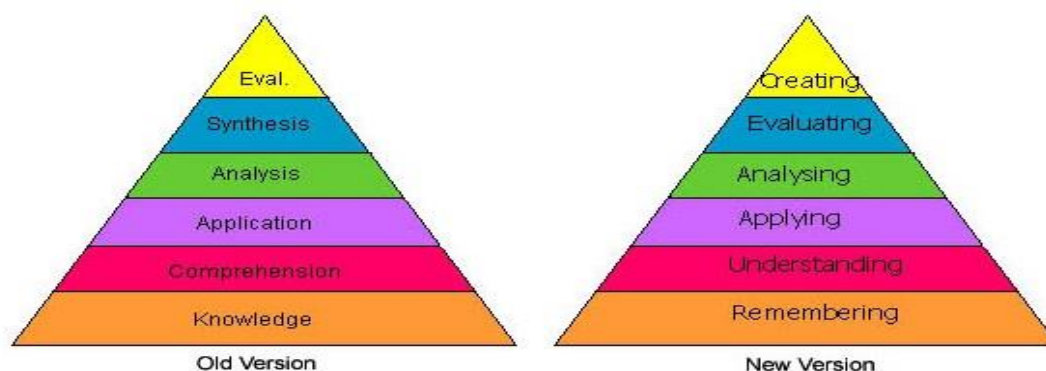
Currently, the problem of creativity is one of the most alarming issues in modern psychology and is so relevant today that D.B. Bogoyavlenskaya calls it "the problem of the century" (Bogoyavlenskaya, 2002)

“Stress is a well-known creativity killer”, stated psychologist Robert Epstein, PhD. He added time as constraints that can do harm the inspiration of even the most imaginative students. He is sure that many constraints are detrimental to creative expression. (Epstein, 2000).

A Kazakhstani methodologist and educator S.S. Kunanbayeva underlined that “With the development of competency-based education, the field of pedagogy began to work on the system of characteristic features and its educational process was defined as an environment where individuals are prepared for continuous independent learning. The fundamental defining features of “competency-based education” were also established:

- student/personality-centred learning; allowing students to select courses based on their interests;
- The development of creative thought; the use of creativity and non-standard means for problem-solving;
- an orientation towards individual self-development, the acknowledgement of the uniqueness of each individual personality, creative self-development etc.” (Kunanbayeva, 2013, p. 103).

In the well-known Bloom's pyramid of educational objectives, the concept “Evaluation” stands at the top. While studying research materials on the distance courses “Shaping teaching English” (<https://coe.uoregon.edu/cds/files/2020>) provided by the University of Oregon (the USA) we found a revised version of this pyramid, where the concept "Creativity" is placed at the pinnacle (Anderson, Krathwohl, Bloom, 2001) It means that creativity and creative thinking are referred to strategic skills now. Indeed, the ability to analyze and evaluate their knowledge is important for students, but it is more significant to be able to build new ideas for new situations, consider things from a fresh perspective and different points of view, applying knowledge in practice, and here creativity turns up as the most crucial skill.



Picture 1. Retrieved from <https://coe.uoregon.edu/cds/files/2020/04/Blooms-Revised-Question-Frames.pdf>

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Writing is more difficult than speaking. Teaching students to write English creatively is one of the main tasks. The main objective is to enhance the large spectrum of skills, which help the students create their own texts. When trying to involve the students into different writing activities we faced a contradiction: on the one hand the students understand the usefulness of the creative writing but on the other hand even advanced learners are reluctant to do writing tasks on the regular lessons, as they expect that their work will be assessed and may get low grades because of the grammar or spelling mistakes. Based on the given above reasons, as the first stage of the solution of the problem we compiled a special course program, that suggests to include an additional lesson to the school learning plan.

Before developing the course, we need to consider the concept “Creativity”, as well as what creative abilities are and, importantly, consider the mechanisms of creativity.

Creativity is a complex form of human activity, involving the mobilization of knowledge, skills, life experience, spiritual and physical forces and generating something qualitatively new, unique, original, distinguished by socio-historical originality. The psychology of creativity is a field of knowledge that studies how people create something new, original in various fields of activity.

The ability to create is a distinctive feature, due to which people live in the unity with nature, create without harming, contribute without destroying. Psychologists and educators have come to the conclusion that the early development of creativity at a younger age is the key to future success.

The course “Teaching creative writing” differs from the traditional courses that help the students to write fiction or poetry, it is designed to provide students with the basic preparation for further successful mastery of communicative competencies, in particular the skills of written communication and expression of intentions in a productive form, which will have a positive impact on expanding vocabulary and improving language skills in general.

The course ensures the development of students' skills to write essays, compose texts and messages for various purposes; it helps to solve the described challenges involving not only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, but also their conscious application.

As it was stated above, creativity plays a huge role in teaching a foreign language. Having no natural language environment, students can find it in written communication with real native speakers and English learners around the world. As the German and American scientist Erich Fromm wrote “The creative attitude requires the capacity to be puzzled, the ability to concentrate, the ability to experience oneself as the initiator of ideas and actions, the ability to find solutions in non-standard situations, it is a focus on discovering new things, it is an ability to deeply understand own experience”... He also insisted that “... creativity does not refer to a quality which particularly gifted persons or artists could achieve, but to an attitude which every human being should and can achieve“.(Fromm, 1959)

Table 1. The mechanisms of creativity: (according to Erich Fromm)

Mechanism	Characteristic
Fluency of thought	the number of ideas that arise per unit of time
Flexibility of thought	the ability to quickly and effortlessly switch from one idea to another, to see that the information received in one context can be used in another one
Originality	The ability to generate ideas, paradoxical, unexpected solutions that differ from the generally accepted. It is associated with a holistic vision of all the connections and dependencies that are invisible during sequential logical analysis

Inquisitiveness	the ability to be surprised, curiosity and openness to everything new, desire to learn something new
Precision	the ability to improve or give a logical conclusion to the creative product
Courage	The ability to make a decision in a situation of uncertainty, not to be afraid of own conclusions and entrust them to the end, risking personal success and reputation.

Fredricka Reisman scrutinized the creativity from different points: as a process, a product, a personality, environment and a technology. The researcher raises two very essential questions: if creativity can be taught and if creativity can be measured. (Reisman, 2013). Guilford argued that creativity is a continuous trait in all people, and that those individuals with recognized creative talent simply have “more of what all of us have” (Guilford, 1950, p. 446).

As any learning activity writing needs assessment, and this involves gathering, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data. These data might be either *qualitative* or *quantitative*. Qualitative refers to information based on observation, biographical information, special records, or other similar efforts to view the subjects. Quantitative data analysis can estimate numerical scores or results, such as number of words, number of used structures, time spent for delivering the assignment, checklists, and self-report inventories.

Teachers, program coordinators, administrators, counselors, talent managers or researchers who are concerned with such questions as, “What assessment tools are available to assist in recognizing creativity in students...?” or “How might we evaluate and compare various ways of assessing creativity?” are often posed, especially by those interested in studying creativity and concerned with identifying creative talent or evaluating the effectiveness of program goals involving creativity(Reisman, 2013).

As one of the main conditions of the course it is suggested avoiding summative assessment, since traditional assessment often inhibits creativity. Students are afraid of mistakes that will cause poor grades, and therefore often do not fully disclose their abilities. It would be more effective to use formative assessment, to provide the students with constructive feedbacks, informal and individual. (Anderson, Krathwohl, Bloom, 2001). The results of the assessment of one student should be analyzed and compared only with data of this student in the beginning and in the end of the course not with data of the students in a group.

Thus, through the use of various methods and techniques, the course is aimed at developing the mechanisms of creativity in students.

Objectives of the course:

- Mastering communicative competencies, in particular the skills of written communication and the abilities to express intentions in a productive way, which will have a positive impact on further work and enhancement language proficiency.
- formation concepts about the stylistic means and the modern written genres;
- development (or improvement) of students' creative writing skills, abilities to give information in the texts with a certain volume;
- understanding the increasing importance of using a foreign language;

Project tasks:

- to reveal the ideological significance of a foreign language,
- to deepen understanding of the role and place of a foreign language in various fields of human activity;
- to give sufficient knowledge on the basis of written communication in a foreign language;
- to form the foreign language skills, both oral and written;
- to promote the development of critical thinking;
- to develop the skills of autonomous work with textbooks and other literature in a foreign language;

- to improve the abilities of to conduct personal and business correspondence
- to teach writing texts of various genres: letters, resumes, stories, essays etc. on given topics;
- To develop the abilities to analyses and use socio-cultural material when communicating with peers, teachers, native speakers in social networks.

At the end of the course the students will

- ❖ know the means and genres of writing, their components and functions;
- ❖ be able to comprehend and generalize the received theoretical knowledge in practice;
- ❖ be able to express thoughts and ideas in written form logically, grammatically correct;
- ❖ Apply the acquired knowledge of language expressive means for presenting opinions, reviewing, narrations etc.
- ❖ Be able to communicate in formal and informal written genres on various topics of everyday life.

The content of the course includes following topics: Writing styles. Genres. Patterns of written prose. Keywords. Topic sentences. Paragraph. Writing a plan. Summary. Message. Essay. Types of letters. Instructions. Advertisement. Free essay. Formal and informal letters. Giving Advice. Narrative essay. Persuasive essay. Discursive essay. Descriptive story. Review of an article (a film). Argumentative essay. Application letter. Resume. Report. Scenario. Project.

The second stage of the course implementation is the compilation of a series of teaching objectives for different grades with tasks of varying complexity.

As one of the most effective techniques Laxman suggests teaching writing through task-based instructions which is a communicative setting at the center of the way the curriculum has been designed and developed. The finding connects with the idea of Ellis (2000) who mentions, TBLT is on the way the students collaborate to scaffold each other's attempt to perform functions that lie outside their individual abilities. In this regard the class is may be divided into different groups with mixed ability students. The brighter ones help slow learners when they face difficulties, and they come to teacher for more difficult tasks.(Laxman, 2020). In support of this statement, Vygotsky (1986) states the real learning when students collaborate with their peers in pairs and groups. The curriculum of the course and teaching-learning strategies should address the level, needs, and interests of the students.

The expected results are that students will have the skills of proper writing on the various topics, will write reviews, essays, articles, original texts, know the rules of formal and informal correspondence, and compose scenarios for school events.

The course "Teaching Creative writing" was introduced in the classical school #3 for gifted children of Pavlodar city. After the approval of the methodological commission it was implemented by the English teachers and involves students from 5 to 11 grades.

By now our students have some positive results: they successfully participate in the regional and republican level language competitions, where creative writing is presented as one of the tasks, win in national and international competitions in English, international FLEX programs and British Council programs, where students also demonstrate their excellent creative writing skills.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that writing, according to the state educational standard, is the goal of learning, in fact it is often still considered as a means, and in the theory of learning, the issues of approaches to teaching writing at school remain undeveloped, which inevitably leads to insufficient results.

As English is accepted as a language of communication, science and of the Internet all over the world so writing in English provides students with physical evidence of their achievements. They share their understanding of different scientific phenomena and deepen their knowledge in certain fields. Writing takes more time and is not so attractive practice to use in class, as it is considered to be a “quite” activity. The specific approaches are suggested to use creative writing as a crucial strategy of cognitive activity, as it covers many of the learning objectives: distant communication, sharing ideas and opinion, using appropriate grammar, vocabulary, register, style, ability to write, structure and edit the texts for various purposes.

Our practice shows that creative tasks that contribute to the development of learner’s interest, memory and thinking can provide invaluable assistance to a teacher in teaching writing.

Having considered the theoretical aspects of teaching writing namely: the concept of foreign language writing, the goals, approaches, means and content of teaching writing, it can be concluded that teaching creative writing is inextricably linked with teaching other types of speech activity. Creative writing helps to preserve and enhance linguistic and factual knowledge, serves as a reliable tool of thinking, stimulates speaking, listening and reading in a foreign language.

The promotion of creative writing a means of teaching is connected not only with the difficulties of this type of speech activity, but also with the linguistic attributes of the graphic codes of the foreign language studied at school.

Having analyzed the points of view of methodologists and researchers it can be concluded that the development of students’ ability to express their thoughts in writing can firstly be based on reproductive exercises, writing texts on samples, using supports and then on productive assignments, aiming to creation new texts to share own ideas, thoughts, solutions. As a condition of students’ progress in the course is avoiding summative assessment and applying different techniques of formative assessment.

As a conclusion, it was approved that the creative tasks are effective, because they make the learning process engrossing and motivating for students, help to teach writing more productively. Creative tasks allow developing the mechanisms of creativity, which in turn has a positive effect on the educational and cognitive process. Undoubtedly, creative tasks should be based on the subject program and material of a specific methodological complex.

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