

## Developing Creative Thinking Skills in EFL Classes in Morocco

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**Abstract**

*The present paper reports on an evaluation study investigating the extent to which Moroccan EFL high school classrooms encourage the development of creative thinking skills. Our objectives were: to explore the extent to which educational policy documents, namely the National Charter for Education and Training (1999), the White Paper (2002) and the Guidelines for teaching English (2007) promote the development of creative thinking; to find out whether Ticket to English 2 textbook has the potential to support students to think creatively; to investigate teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards developing creative thinking and to discover insights into the nature of classroom environment with regard to the development of the skill. The study used a mixed methods design which involves a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The purpose behind this choice is to investigate the match between the aims and objectives outlined in educational policy documents and their implementation through the textbook and teaching practices. The study employed five research instruments namely documents analysis, textbook evaluation, questionnaires, classroom observation, and a semi-structured interview. The results revealed that the importance of creative thinking has been emphasized in policy documents, yet the textbook and teaching practices focus on lower-order thinking skills, such as remembering and understanding. The study concludes with practical recommendations for policy makers, textbook designers, teachers, and teacher development programs.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Creative thinking is considered one of the major aims of the 21st century (Craft, 2005; Puccio, 2017; Robinson, 2011; World Economic Forum, 2016, 2018). We live in a world that is changing at an unprecedented pace. Twenty first century is a period of uncertainty (Falconer et al., 2018). Today's generations are faced everyday with new information, new problems and new challenges such as new epidemics, social problems, global warming and financial crises. Traditional problem-solving methods can no longer help deal with the unexpected challenges (VanGundy, 2005). To face these unpredictable and unknown challenges successfully, we need creative thinkers. The skill of creative thinking is important for both societies and individuals.

It is a key to the development of any society (Onyinyechukwu et al., 2021; Ritter et al., 2020; Runco, 2018) and to the success of any individual (Jones & Richards, 2016a; Ritter et al., 2020; Robinson, 2011; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). The Moroccan context is no exception.

Creative thinking is a skill that is mostly needed in the Moroccan job market. A study conducted by Ait Tejan and Sabil (2019) indicated that creative thinking is ranked as the top essential skill by Moroccan employers. The king of Morocco, on the occasion of the anniversary of the revolution of the king and the people, also stressed in his speech on August 2012, that the educational system should aim at enabling young people to make use of their creative abilities to fulfill their duties as citizens and contribute to the economic, social, and cultural development of the country. In this regard, Morocco must develop individuals' creative thinking skills to achieve success, boost the economy and make progress in all areas of life. To achieve this aim, education should equip students with the ability to be creative and not be merely, as Masadeh (2021) warns, consumers of knowledge left by ancestors.

Education is supposed to meet the needs of society. As Hartley and Plucker argue (2014), if a country wants to have creative individuals in society, then its education must aim at preparing students to think creatively. Education is the area where the creative thinking skills of a large population of a country could be enhanced. Hence, the educational context must provide the appropriate environment for students to develop their creative thinking potential across all grades and subjects, including language classes. Such an environment can influence not only the development of creative thinking skills but also their academic achievement and motivation to learn. The integration of creative thinking especially in language classrooms increases motivation, improves students' learning performance and promotes creative thinking (Kasirer & Shnitzer-Meirovich, 2021; Liao et al., 2018; Mohamed Salmane, 2019; Zibenberg & Da'as, 2022).

Given the paramount significance of creative thinking for students, we need to investigate the extent to which education especially language classrooms, which is the concern of the present study, promote this skill. We have to analyze educational policy documents as they dictate the major goals and objectives that an educational system aims to achieve. We also have to explore teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices because teachers are the implementers of the curriculum, role models and mentors who spend a significant amount of time with students and have the ability to promote or suppress creative thinking (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Kampilis et al., 2009; Tümen & Çelik, 2020; Wyse & Spendlove, 2007). We also need to evaluate textbooks because as Mrah (2017) and Sheldon (1988) emphasize, the textbook is a crucial element in every classroom, and it is the most widely used instructional material in schools today.

Many studies in different contexts have investigated teachers' perceptions of creative thinking (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Al-Qahtani, 2016; Aldujayn & Alsubhi, 2020; Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Hamada & Hana, 2017; Kurt & Önalın, 2018; Masadeh, 2021; Shaheen, 2011; Tümen & Çelik, 2020; Wang et al., 2018), their attitudes towards the skill (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Aldujayn & Alsubhi, 2020; Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Hamada & Hana, 2017; Li, 2016) and their practices regarding the development of the skill in the classroom (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Al-Qahtani, 2016; Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Cheung, 2012; Masadeh, 2021; Shaheen, 2011; Tümen

& Çelik, 2020; Wang et al., 2018). Some studies also explored creative thinking in educational policy documents (Heilmann & Korte, 2010; Shaheen, 2011; Wyse & Ferrari, 2015) and textbooks (Al-jabri, 2020; Roohani et al., 2014; Zareian et al., 2015). Surprisingly, to the best of our knowledge, no research has been carried out to investigate creative thinking in the Moroccan EFL context. To fill this gap, this study aims to determine the extent to which creative thinking is nurtured in the high school EFL curriculum in Morocco and eventually provide contextually appropriate recommendations for policy makers, textbook designers and teachers to help them integrate creative thinking skills successfully in Moroccan education in general and EFL classrooms in particular. To achieve this aim, this study seeks to answer the following question:

To what extent does the Moroccan EFL high school curriculum encourage the development of creative thinking skills?

In order to answer the central question, the following questions were addressed:

1. To what extent do Moroccan educational policy documents encourage the development of creative thinking skills?
2. To what extent does Ticket to English of 2nd year Baccalaureate promote creative thinking skills?
3. What are the perceptions, attitudes and practices of EFL teachers towards the integration of creative thinking skills in their teaching?

## **2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Despite more than six decades of systematic research on creative thinking, there is still no consensus as to a single definition for the concept. However, most of the available definitions follow, what Runco and Jaeger (2012) call, the standard definition which states that creative thinking includes the features of originality and value. Many prominent researchers in the field of creative thinking have tried to offer more precise and practical definitions of the concept. The adopted definition for the current study is the result of a comprehensive review of definitions in literature which were mainly linked to Torrance's definition of the concept. Torrance (1977), who is known around the world as the father of creativity, defines creative thinking as a process in which individuals sense a problem or gaps in information and then search for solutions by drawing hypotheses, testing and communicating results to others. Torrance also developed Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) based on Guilford's concept of divergent thinking abilities to measure the individual's ability to generate various and original solutions to solve a problem.

Divergent thinking is based on four main skills namely fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality. Fluency refers to the generation of many different ideas and solutions to a problem. Flexibility is described as the ability to generate ideas that have multiple possibilities and different approaches. Elaboration refers to the ability to clarify and provide details about ideas or solutions to a problem. Originality is advanced by exploring many unusual solutions to a problem and generating a new one (Guilford, 1967; Guilford & Christensen, 1973). The

current study adopts the definition of Torrance because it places creative thinking in the realm of everyday living and does not reserve it for the rarely achieved heights of creative thinking. More precisely, creative thinking especially in language classroom entails the capacity of language learners to produce original and valuable ideas, solve problems and make hypotheses and new connections between various ideas during the process of learning the target language. Torrance's framework of the four skills of creative thinking was used in the evaluation of textbooks and teaching practices.

There are many educational factors that can promote or hinder the development of creative thinking. Conceptions of creative thinking is one of the major factors that influence the development of this skill in the classroom. Having misconceptions and wrong beliefs that do not align with the scientific findings hinder the development of creative thinking (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007, 2014; Benedek et al., 2021; Glaveanu, 2011; Glăveanu, 2014; Henriksen et al., 2017; Patston et al., 2018). For example, art bias that links creative thinking only to producing poetic texts or using drama activities and games in language classrooms (Glăveanu, 2014; Henriksen et al., 2017; Jones & Richards, 2016a) or associating the skill to genius people (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007; Kaufman, 2014) impede efforts to develop the skill. Teaching practices also affect the development of creative thinking. Traditional teaching practices that are based on passive learning and rote learning suppress creative thinking (Calavia et al., 2021; Cheung, 2012; Turner, 2013). Furthermore, the kind of questions that teachers ask impact the development of the skill. Asking open-ended questions that require thinking differently, making connections between different ideas and asking students to solve problems in various ways using unconventional solutions and ideas foster creative thinking in the classroom (Batchelor & Bintz, 2013; Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Cheung, 2012; Rahimi & Shute, 2021; Read, 2015). While solving problems, teachers should encourage students to express opinion and think creatively (Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Cheung, 2012) and also give them enough time to think (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2018; Clack, 2017; Cremin et al., 2006; Liao et al., 2018; Sternberg, 1995; Williams & Sternberg, 1996). The mode of work also plays an essential role in promoting creative thinking in the classroom. Cooperative learning has a positive impact on boosting creative ideas among students (Ibán et al., 2020; Kim & Song, 2012; Marashi & Khatami, 2017; Siew & Sombuling, 2017). Encouraging intrinsic motivation is vital too according to Amabile et al. (1986), Kaufman (2016) and Zhou and Shalley (2003). However, overemphasizing high-stakes testing hinders the promotion of creative thinking (Jones & Richards, 2016b; Niu & Sternberg, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Turner, 2013).

Many studies addressed teachers' beliefs about creative thinking and their attitudes towards developing the skill in their classroom. These beliefs focused on three major themes: teachers' perceptions of the meaning of creative thinking, their opinion about the classroom environment that can foster creative thinking and their views of the factors that can promote or hinder the development of creative thinking along with many subthemes linked to these. Findings of studies that explored the encouragement of creative thinking in educational policy documents and textbooks are also included. These studies were conducted in EFL classrooms in primary, secondary and higher education. It is worth noting that the only study that evaluated all these elements namely beliefs, attitudes, practices, educational policy documents and textbook, as the current study, is Shaheen's study (2011).

Most studies such as Al-Qahtani (2016), Aldujayn and Alsubhi (2020), Hamada and Hana (2017), Masadeh (2021), and Tümen and Çelik (2020) revealed that teachers do not have a clear idea about creative thinking. The concept is confusing and ambiguous to them. The majority of teachers defined creative thinking as the production of novel and different ideas with little emphasis on appropriateness and usefulness (Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Kurt & Önalın, 2018; Shaheen, 2011). This emphasis on novelty only, with the exclusion of appropriateness, does not align with the scientific theories creative thinking. In Shaheen's study (2011), besides the emphasis on novelty, going against conventions and independence were rated low. The researcher believes that these findings could be explained by the fact that Pakistani society is very conservative and students are expected to respect and obey the rules. The majority of teachers believe that creative thinking refers to the production of original texts such as new dialogues, story endings and poems (Wang et al., 2018). This reflects the art bias teachers have about the skill of creative thinking. However, though teachers have confusing ideas about the meaning of creative thinking, that there is a high agreement among EFL teachers that creative thinking is an important and a valuable skill (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Aldujayn & Alsubhi, 2020; Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Hamada & Hana, 2017; Li, 2016; Newton & Beverton, 2012; Rubenstein et al., 2013; Shaheen, 2011; Wang et al., 2018). A great majority of teachers also agree that everybody can be creative and that creative thinking can be taught (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Aldujayn & Alsubhi, 2020; Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Shaheen, 2011).

Participants in many studies were asked questions that probed deeper into teachers' own practices by asking whether they applied creative-thinking activities in their classes and by giving examples of such activities. Questionnaires and interviews with teachers in the studies of Al-Qahtani (2016) and Masadeh (2021) revealed that teachers made little effort to integrate creative thinking in their teaching. Concerning the development of creative thinking in the classroom, Al-Qahtani's study (2016) indicated that teachers do not use activities that engage students in solving problems and using creative thinking. The results in some studies also indicated that teachers had limited knowledge about creative activities. For instance, some of the teachers in the studies of Tümen and Çelik (2020) and Wang et al. (2018) reported that they use song activities such as 'fill in the gaps' exercises as if they are creative ones and artistic activities such as drawing and singing. Story based activities and games were also reported in the studies of Al-nouh et al. (2014), Tümen and Çelik (2020) and Wang et al. (2018) to promote creative thinking. Stories, games and songs cannot be described as creative thinking fostering activities if students are not required to imagine, explore, solve a problem or produce unusual ideas while doing these activities.

More than half of the participants in the study of Al-nouh (2014) added that extrinsic motivation promotes creative thinking. In the same study, teachers did not give examples of activities that can develop creative thinking when prompted to do so though they claimed to foster creative thinking. This could be interpreted by their lack of knowledge about these activities according to Al-nouh (2014). In Shaheen's study (2011), few teachers reported allowing students to make mistakes, be independent, ask unusual questions or question rules and facts, which are considered to be at the core of developing creative thinking. In the European context, most teachers (86%) in the study of Cachia and Ferrari (2010) chose conventional ways that often or always take place in their classroom such as teacher explaining and a focus on discipline which hinder students' participation and engagement in creative

thinking. Classroom observation findings showed that there is a discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and their actual practices. In the studies of Cheung (2012) and Shaheen (2011), the interviewed teachers believed in the factors that promote creative thinking; however, classroom observation findings revealed that teachers used traditional teaching methods that emphasize teacher-centered approach and rote learning to help students memorize content and reproduce it in exams.

Many studies investigated teachers' views regarding the factors that can hinder or promote the development of creative thinking in EFL classrooms. These studies revealed a range of hindering factors such as lack of time (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Hamada & Hana, 2017; Shaheen, 2011; Tümen & Çelik, 2020; Wang et al., 2018), lack of training (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Al-Qahtani, 2016; Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Hamada & Hana, 2017; Masadeh, 2021; Shaheen, 2011), overloaded curriculum (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Cachia & Ferrari, 2010; Nejdah & Hamada, 2018; Shaheen, 2011; Tümen & Çelik, 2020; Wang et al., 2018), exams and standardized tests (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Hamada & Hana, 2017; Shaheen, 2011; Tümen & Çelik, 2020; Wang et al., 2018), limited and inadequate materials, resources and facilities (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Shaheen, 2011), large class sizes (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Shaheen, 2011; Tümen & Çelik, 2020; Wang et al., 2018), unsupportive social culture (Shaheen, 2011; Wang et al., 2018), traditional teaching methods such as lecturing (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Al-Qahtani, 2016; Shaheen, 2011), children's lack of imagination, linguistics knowledge and thinking skills (Wang et al., 2018), students inability to think creatively (Al-Qahtani, 2016), traditional arrangement of seats in rows (Wang et al., 2018), the teaching objectives that target linguistic and communicative competence rather than creative thinking (Wang et al., 2018), students' disruptive behavior (Al-nouh et al., 2014) students' unwillingness to use or develop creative thinking competences (Hamada & Hana, 2017), the need for rote learning to pass exams (Al-nouh et al., 2014), the need for questions that encourage creative thinking in exams (Al-nouh et al., 2014), students' attitudes towards English and their level in English (Hamada & Hana, 2017; Tümen & Çelik, 2020; Wang et al., 2018), lack of support for creative thinking in textbooks (Al-Qahtani, 2016), inappropriate application of creative thinking in language teaching (Al-Qahtani, 2016) and lack of school support (Aldujayn & Alsubhi, 2020). Some teachers in the study of Al-Qahtani (2016) believed that involving students in creative thinking activities would prevent them from doing important things.

For what concerns educational policy documents, results from three studies namely Heilmann and Korte (2010), Shaheen (2011) and Wyse & Ferrari (2015) indicated that educational policy documents mention the essential role of creative thinking; however, they do not give any clear definition of the concept or techniques to foster the skill in the classroom. The documents in the studies of Heilmann and Korte (2010) and Wyse & Ferrari (2015) linked creative thinking to art only (art bias). The study of Shaheen (2011) revealed that educational documents emphasize knowledge acquisition with very little emphasis on the development of creative thinking.

Concerning creative thinking in EFL textbooks, Roohani, Taheri and Poorzangeneh (2014) evaluated two EFL textbooks namely Four Corners Book 2 and Four Corners Book 3 drawing on Bloom's revised taxonomy. The Content analysis showed the prevalence of the processes of remembering and understanding in the textbooks while creative thinking process

constituted the lowest percentage of processes in both textbooks (Roohani et al., 2014). A similar study by Zareian et al. (2015) was conducted in Iran to explore the types and levels of questions contained in two English for Specific Purposes (ESP) textbooks, namely, English for the Students of Sciences (ESS) and English for the Students of Engineering (ESE) taught in Iranian universities. The objective of the analysis was to evaluate the questions under the framework of the revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy of learning objectives (1956). Results revealed that most of the questions targeted the three lower-level categories of remembering, understanding and applying, while analyzing, evaluating, and creating as the three higher-level categories constituted the lowest frequency in the two textbooks. In Oman, Al-jabri (2020) evaluated the presence of creative thinking skills (fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration) in grade 12 EFL textbooks. The findings showed that activities in post-basic EFL textbooks do not provide enough support for creative thinking skills as only about 20% of grade 12 textbook activities included creative thinking skills partially or fully.

As far as the Moroccan context is concerned, we did not find any Moroccan published study that investigated creative thinking in the Moroccan educational system particularly in EFL classrooms. Many studies explored teaching practices in Moroccan education which might give insight into how these practices affect the development of creative thinking according to research.

Moroccan culture is a collective culture (Al-alawi & Alkhodari, 2016; Balambo, 2014; Hmada, 2010; Nouiga, 2004). Collectivism which puts emphasis on agreement and harmony hinders people from thinking creatively and from producing ideas that challenge the norms (Bechtoldt et al., 2012; Sahmi, 2021). Sahmi (2021) argues that the collective tendency in the Moroccan and Arab cultures emphasizes stagnation and glorification of the past as well as of the group and regards autonomy, different thinking and individualism as kind of deviation. Elhayzan (2002) also supports this view when he confirmed the idea that the Arab culture in general encourages people to stay in their comfort zone and avoid creative thinking. The educational environment in the Moroccan context is no different. Moroccan high school students, according to Sahmi (2021), have a kind of phobia to change or criticize the prevailing ideas or express themselves freely. This is because, as Sahmi (2021) argues, the Moroccan educational system glorifies dependence and imitation and resists individual freedom and opinions that contradict the values of the group. The Moroccan educational system still puts emphasis on information transmission and knowledge acquisition, as stated by Ettadli (2017). A study conducted by Ghaicha and Mezourai (2018) indicated that Moroccan high school EFL teachers resort to traditional practices such as high teacher talking time, too much interest in teaching enough content and the domination of teacher students' interaction. This results in students reaching university without having the ability to use higher-order thinking skills as proved by the study of Hellalet (2021). The study assessed Moroccan university students' critical thinking skills and their ability to express their opinion and support their arguments with relevant evidence. The findings revealed that the participants showed a low level of critical thinking and inability to develop a stand and support it with arguments (Hellalet, 2021). Laabidi (2021) points out that many students could not think critically since their instructors could not implement critical thinking in their instructional practices. Another study conducted by Sahmi (2021) on the encouragement of creative thinking in Arabic teaching classroom in Moroccan high schools indicated that teachers of Arabic face many difficulties when developing creative

thinking such as overloaded syllabus, the pressure of high stakes exams, lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms.

As far as higher-order thinking skills in EFL textbooks are concerned, many studies investigated thinking skills in Moroccan EFL textbooks. Ait Bouzid (2016) explored the extent to which three Moroccan ELT textbooks currently used in teaching second year Baccalaureate students in public high schools contain activities that help learners build skills that match the needs of the 21st century. The findings indicated that the textbooks do not encourage learners to think creatively. Other studies investigated critical thinking in EFL textbooks. Mrah's study (2017) on Ticket 2 English textbook series revealed that most of the questions targeted the three lower-level categories of the taxonomy. Nakkam and Khamoja (2020) also examined two EFL textbooks namely Ticket to English 2 and Gateway to English 2 to explore the extent to which reading comprehension questions promote higher-order thinking skills. The results showed that the two textbooks failed to foster higher-order thinking skills through reading comprehension questions (77% of the questions in ticket to English 2 and 84.12% of the questions in Gateway to English 2 are classified as being low-order questions). The same findings were revealed in the studies of Elfatih and Essalhi (2019) who found out that Gateway to English 2 textbook promote only lower-order thinking skills, especially comprehension, and application.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Morocco has always been a multilingual country with two official languages, Moroccan Arabic and Tamazight, and multiple foreign languages particularly French and English. Students learn standard Arabic, Tamazight and French starting from the first grade of public primary school. For English, the National Charter for Education and Training prescribes that learning English should start from primary school; however, this is not implemented in reality. Students start learning English in the 9th grade. The three educational policy documents selected for analysis in the current study dictate the main goals and objectives that the Moroccan educational system aims to achieve.

The National Charter for Education and Training (Ministry of National Education, 1999) is a set of initiatives and measures to revamp the educational system at all levels. The charter consists of 69 pages and is divided into two complementary parts. The first part discusses the basic tenets and the major aims of the Moroccan educational and training system, the rights and obligations of all stakeholders and the national mobilization that is needed for the success of the reforms. The second part outlines six areas that require innovation in the field of education.

The White Paper (Ministry of National Education, 2002) is another official educational document that aims at implementing the goals and the objectives that were stated in the National Charter for Education and Training (1999). The document consists of eight parts that target the curricula of primary school, middle school and high school with all its streams namely classical education (religion and Arabic language streams), literature and humanities, arts, sciences and technologies. The parts that concern us in the present study is the introduction (the first part) and the curriculum of English as a foreign Language in all high school streams.



The English Language Guidelines for Secondary Schools are designed for all the secondary school levels namely common core, first year and second year baccalaureate (Ministry of National Education, 2007). They were designed in accordance with the principles set forth in the National Charter for Education and Training, and subscribe to a standards-based approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Ticket to English 2 textbook designed by Hammani et al. (2007) is an EFL textbook that is used in the three directorates where classroom observation in the current study took place. This is why, this textbook was selected for evaluation. It was published by the Moroccan ministry of education in 2007, and it was designed for the students of second-year baccalaureate. It is worth noting that in Morocco there is no textbook designing as a specialty. A teacher supervisor and two high school teachers designed the textbook that respects the principles stated in the National Charter for Education and Training and subscribes standards-based approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language. The textbook includes ten units. Each unit contains the following elements: functions, listening, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, culture, study skills and project work in addition to exercises that check students' progress.

This study used a mixed methods design, which involves a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Creswell and Clark (2018) state that mixed methods design is characterized by the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data rigorously in response to research questions and the combination of the two forms of data and their results. Investigating creative thinking in the EFL classroom is supported by exploring the elements of the EFL educational system especially educational policy documents, the textbook and teachers' beliefs and practices to give a more holistic view of the phenomenon. A mixed methods approach is important to cross-verify the results and draw conclusions which help investigate the match between the aims and the objectives outlined in educational policy documents and their implementation through the textbook and teaching practices and identify gaps for improvement in policy and practice. Convergent design is used to incorporate the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods and compare the two kinds of data in order to get a full understanding of the problem as emphasized by Creswell & Clark (2018). This design involves the collection, analysis and mixture of quantitative and qualitative data in order to get a full understanding in response to the study's overall purpose which is investigating the development of creative thinking in Moroccan EFL classrooms. The mixed methods approach is also used as a triangulation strategy, which helps to bring multiple perspectives from different sources of data. Triangulation of data was obtained by the use of different methods and instruments.

Forty Moroccan public high school teachers of English including 20 female and 20 male teachers who teach English as a foreign language in different regions with a minimum of five years of teaching experience participated in the online survey. In the classroom observation, three currently employed full-time public high school teachers were observed in a regular classroom. This sample was selected based on convenience sampling in which the researcher selected participants because they were willing to be observed. Each of the participants has more than six years of experience in teaching English in high school. The three teachers who participated in classroom observation teach in different provincial directorates in

Souss Massa region, and this allowed us to obtain results from different schools in different contexts. Each participant was observed once because the main purpose of the observation was to find out whether teachers integrate creative thinking skills in their regular classes. The role of the researcher was a nonparticipant observer who collected field notes during the lesson based on a checklist that was developed in advance. These three teachers were also interviewed to find out whether their responses in the interview match their teaching practices with regard to the integration of creative thinking in teaching.

Five research instruments were used to gather data in the present study namely documents analysis, textbook evaluation, a questionnaire, classroom observation and a semi-structured interview. These instruments were selected to address the research questions and develop a full understanding of the extent to which high school EFL curriculum in Morocco encourages the development of creative thinking skills. The collected data were analyzed in two separate ways. Statistical procedures were used for the analysis of the questionnaire responses and a thematic analysis was undertaken for the educational documents, the textbook, classroom observation and interviews.

### **3.1. Thematic analysis of educational policy documents**

The qualitative approach of thematic analysis was chosen for the analysis of the three documents namely the National Charter for Education and Training (1999) (Ministry of National Education, 1999), the White Paper (2002) (Ministry of National Education, 2002) and the Guidelines for teaching English (2007) (Ministry of National Education, 2007). The conceptual framework for the analysis was based on the theoretical positions of Braun and Clarke (2006). According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyze and report themes within the data (2006). This approach facilitates the analysis of data from two different perspectives. The first perspective, which is data driven, is based on coding in an inductive way. The second perspective is based on the research questions to check if the data provide sufficient information to answer these questions.

Concerning themes, what counts as a theme in thematic analysis method according to Braun and Clarke (2006) is not the frequency or the space of the theme within data, but it is any idea that represents an answer to the research questions or provide insightful information on the issue of the paper. In this sense, theme or pattern that is linked to the development of creative thinking skills in Moroccan education or EFL classrooms was coded and analyzed. Concerning the pre-existing coding frame of analysis, we were interested in themes and patterns related to the research questions. To give an example, the charter points out, at the very beginning, that education “has to train citizens to be ...passionate for discovery and creativity” (Ministry of National Education, 1999, p. 8). This idea is coded (labeled) as ‘one of the goals of the Moroccan educational system is to train citizens to be passionate for creativity’. The theme is then extracted from that code and clustered as ‘the attitude of policy makers towards creative thinking in education’. This theme is created according to the research question ‘To what extent do Moroccan educational policy documents encourage the development of creative thinking skills? The final stage was writing up the findings and interpreting them according to the review of literature.

### **3.2.Evaluation of Ticket to English 2 textbook**

The study used a two-level model of textbook evaluation, as suggested by McDonough and Shaw (2003). The first level involved a brief external evaluation of the cover, the author's introduction and table of contents to look for any mention of the development of creative thinking skills. The second level involved an internal examination of the textbook. This evaluation aimed at finding out the type of tasks included and also examining the extent to which the content of the textbook matches the claims of the authors as well as the aims and objectives of the three educational documents analyzed in the current study. McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara propose a close examination of at least two units of the textbook in order for an effective internal investigation to take place (2013). The evaluation focused on the questions, objectives and activities selected to teach language skills. Closer examination of the related literature revealed that frequent references had been made to Bloom's taxonomy and Torrance's framework of creative thinking skills. This is why the in-depth analysis checklist was based on the revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) and Torrance's framework of creative thinking skills (Torrance, 1977) to make the checklist more comprehensive.

The taxonomy is organized into 'six major classes' which are remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. After the inclusion of the selected thinking skills in the checklist, these elements (skills) were operationalized. That is, for each skill, a statement mirroring the characteristics of that skill is developed according to the related literature, precisely the revised Bloom taxonomy and Torrance framework of creative thinking skills. We randomly selected two units in the textbook (unit 3 and 7) and then prepared a list that contains all the activities and questions provided in the selected units. All the listed questions and activities were then counted to reveal the total number of tasks included in each of the two selected units. The researchers and a high school teacher of English examined each question and activity and then classified them according to the thinking skill they target. Afterwards, the number of items categorized in each thinking skill column was noted down in a table and the percentage of items being classified in each column was calculated. As far as the findings of the two raters are concerned, inter-rater reliability score was counted using the Cohen's kappa (k) method. The percentage agreement was 81.08%. The discrepancy was then discussed and resolved through consensus.

The views of teachers with regard to the presence or absence of activities and questions that promote creative thinking skills were also investigated through the use of a checklist. Linguists such as Brown (1995) and McGrath (2002) assert that it is very important to involve teachers in the evaluation process of the textbooks they are using. That is why the current study investigated the views of the users of Ticket to English 2 with regard to the integration of creative thinking skills. Besides, having different sources of data can ensure the validity of the findings as far as textbook evaluation is concerned (McDonough & Shaw, 2003). The checklist questionnaire designed for teachers contain items that were linked to the conceptual framework of the study, which focused on Torrance's framework for creative thinking skills. The checklist

comprised the popular Likert scale which leads to quantitative evaluation (Sheldon, 1988). Some types of guided open questions were also part of the questionnaire. The questions targeted mainly the extent to which the activities and questions in the textbook encourage creative thinking skills. The statistical analyses were carried out using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

### **3.3. The online questionnaire**

The purpose of having an online questionnaire in the present study was to collect data about teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the incorporation of creative thinking in EFL teaching. We selected this method because we wanted to collect a large amount of information about the perceptions and the attitudes towards creative thinking and reach a large number of teachers in large geographic areas via Internet in a short period of time. The questionnaire comprises three sections that seek to investigate teachers' perspectives on the definitions of creative thinking skills and the development of such skills in the classroom. The questionnaire was designed based on the existing literature on creative thinking. The type of questions used include both open and closed ended. The number of questions included in the questionnaire was kept to a minimum to make the instrument more manageable, requiring no more than 15 minutes to complete. All multiple-choice questions were concluded with the 'others' category to allow the participants an opportunity to provide additional comments. The questionnaire was shared as an email and as a post on social networks that include groups of Moroccan EFL teachers mainly on Facebook. The questionnaire was sent as a link to the participants via online Google Forms. To achieve the validity and reliability of the questionnaire and the checklist questionnaire, piloting was conducted with five high school teachers of English.

### **3.4. Evaluation of teaching practices**

There are two main reasons for conducting a classroom observation. First, it allowed to verify that the methods indicated by the teachers as being used to develop students' creative thinking in the interview were actually used. This is because, as Johnson and Christensen (2014) point out, people may not always do what they say they do in reality. Second, classroom observation helped to determine the extent to which the events in the classroom are developing or restricting students' ability to think creatively. The framework that was chosen for conducting classroom observation is the Classroom Creativity Observation Schedule (CCOS) that was developed by Denny (1972). The reason behind the choice of this model is the fact that the listed observation categories are related to students, teachers and the surrounding environment, all of which are deemed relevant for the development of creative thinking skills. In addition to that, an evaluation of the activities that the participants used is conducted using Torrance's framework of creative thinking skills.

A checklist was used as an observation tool during the three observed lessons. The checklist items were linked to the conceptual framework of the study, which focuses on

Torrance's framework for creative thinking (Torrance, 1977). These items investigate the extent to which the activities used by the teacher provide opportunities for nurturing elaboration, originality, flexibility and fluency during teaching. The verbal and non-verbal behaviors suggested in the Classroom Creativity Observation Schedule developed by Denny (1972) were also included. Each participant was observed once because the main purpose of the observation was to find out whether teachers integrate creative thinking skills in their regular classes. The role of the researcher was a nonparticipant observer who collected field notes during the lesson based on the checklist developed in advance. Data obtained from classroom observation was coded and then categorized based on the theoretical framework constructed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

To ensure the validity of the data obtained from classroom observation, the researcher conducted a member check of findings with the participants at the end of the observation. Member checking is important as it allows the validation of the notes and correction of factual errors (Cohen et al., 2018). All the participants indicated that the field notes were an accurate reflection of their practices. Due to the method of sampling that is used in classroom observation (the convenience method), we cannot say with confidence that the individuals are representative of the population as a whole. Furthermore, since the data in the current study was collected in three different schools from three different EFL high school teachers, the generalizability is limited (Cohen et al., 2018). However, there is a possibility that some readers could relate some findings of the research to their own context.

### **3.5. The semi-structured interview**

The semi-structured interview contained open-ended questions that investigated views about how to develop creative thinking skills as a teacher. Our purpose was to investigate the extent to which teachers' views match their teaching practices. We conducted a semi-structured interview with the same three high school teachers who were observed in their classes. The interview contained open-ended questions that investigated views about how to develop creative thinking skills as a teacher. We audio-recorded the interview and then transcribed these recordings for analysis. A thematic analysis of data was conducted. This is because thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) focuses on what is said in the interview rather than how it was said, allowing key themes to emerge from the data. The researchers also employed member-checks method by soliciting feedback from the participants after the interviews. This ensured that the researcher's interpretations of participants' responses and perceptions were accurate (Cohen et al., 2018). All the participants indicated that the results were an accurate reflection of their responses and views.

## **1. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

## **1.1 Perceptions and attitudes towards creative thinking**

The findings from quantitative and qualitative data regarding perceptions of creative thinking indicate that there is confusion and bias against the concept. In the current study, an overwhelming majority of participants (97.5%) as in other studies like Cachia and Ferrari (2010), Kurt and Önalın (2018) and Shaheen (2011) agreed with the idea that creative thinking is the skill of producing new and original ideas. This emphasis on novelty only and the exclusion of appropriateness does not align with the scientific theories of creative thinking. The numbers also demonstrated that the majority of respondents in the current study (97.5%) as in the study of Shaheen (2011) relate creative thinking to the production of new ideas and very few support the idea that going against conventions is creative thinking. One explanation that can be offered for the lowest rated definition, ‘going against convention’ is that Moroccan society, as Pakistani society (Shaheen, 2011), is very conservative and students are expected to follow the existing rules. These actually are the traits of collective culture where individuals are supposed to be obedient to authority (Hofstede et al., 2010). This raises questions about the kind of creative thinking that can be developed with this perception. A large number of respondents (72.5%) also linked creative thinking to problem solving. This suggests that teachers are either aware of creative thinking as a problem-solving skill or feel the need to choose more than one option as a definition of the skill. This conclusion came as a result of the analysis of the comments related to the development of creative thinking in which no respondent suggested providing students with problem-solving experiences as a method to nurture creative thinking skills. These responses indicate that teachers do not have a clear idea about the concept of creative thinking as was found in other studies such as Al-Qahtani (2016), Aldujayn and Alsubhi (2020), Hamada and Hana (2017), Masadeh (2021) and Tümen and Çelik (2020).

As far as supporting the development of creative thinking is concerned, the findings reveal that a very high percentage of teachers (97.5%) like in Al-nouh et al. (2014), Aldujayn and Alsubhi (2020), Cachia and Ferrari (2010), Hamada and Hana (2017), Li (2016), Newton and Beverton (2012), Rubenstein et al. (2013), Shaheen (2011), Wang et al. (2018) agreed with the idea that developing creative thinking is of paramount importance. An overwhelming majority of participants (60%) also reported that students could be taught to be creative which corroborates the findings of Al-nouh et al. (2014), Aldujayn and Alsubhi (2020), Cachia and Ferrari (2010) and Shaheen (2011). Many teacher-respondents reported that they develop the creative thinking skills of their students using most of the given methods, which suggests that they employ a diverse range of ways. ‘Stimulating imagination’, ‘allowing students to make mistakes’ are methods which were rated higher than ‘improving the environment’ such as decorating classrooms. This shows that the value the respondents give to the role of the teacher in developing students’ creative thinking in the classroom is higher in comparison to the role of the environment. This finding is in line with the results of Shaheen’s study (2011) which emphasized stimulating imagination and encouraging students to make mistakes instead of improving the physical environment.

The responses in the open comment section pointed out several ways teachers can use to develop students’ creative thinking skills. Some of the suggested ways go in line with other

studies like writing songs and drawing (Tümen & Çelik, 2020; Wang et al., 2018) using riddles and games (Al-nouh et al., 2014; Tümen & Çelik, 2020; Wang et al., 2018). This indicates that teachers have an art bias as explained by Glăveanu (2014) and Henriksen et al. (2017). Working on projects, asking why and how questions and assigning topics for research were also mentioned as developing creative thinking. However, if these activities do not allow students to imagine, explore, question or think creatively, they cannot be described as creative. Competition was also rated higher in the current study (63,9%) like in Shaheen's study (2011) who also found that 97% of respondents believe that competition is the key to the development of creative thinking. Integrating competition is seen as detrimental to creative thinking according to research. Many studies like Ibán et al. (2020), Kim and Song (2012), Marashi and Khatami (2018) and Siew and Sombuling (2017) proved that creative thinking happens within the context of a community and not in isolation.

The majority of teachers (92.5%) reported that they encounter many obstacles in their attempt to develop the creative thinking skills of students. Most teachers (92.1%) reported, as in other studies like Al-nouh et al. (2014), Shaheen (2011), and Wang et al. (2018) that overcrowded classrooms constitute one of the biggest barriers to teaching creative thinking followed by lack of appropriate environment especially resources and facilities (55.3%) which were also mentioned in other studies namely Al-nouh et al. (2014) and Shaheen (2011). A considerable percentage of teachers (44.7%) reported that lack of time to prepare activities for creative thinking is another obstacle that prevents them from training students to think creatively which was also indicated in other studies specifically Al-nouh et al. (2014), Hamada and Hana (2017), Shaheen (2011), Tümen and Çelik (2020) and Wang et al. (Wang et al., 2018). In the open comments section, teachers stated, as in other studies, Al-nouh et al. (2014), Hamada and Hana (2017), Shaheen (2011), Tümen and Çelik (2020) and Wang et al. (2018) and Cachia & Ferrari (2010) that the overloaded syllabus and standardized exams are also the reasons why the teaching of this skill is absent in their classes. These syllabi and programs encourage the learning of knowledge to prepare students for examinations. A simple explanation for this high level of agreement on the obstacles to the development of creative thinking could be that these are obstacles faced by teachers in their teaching practices in general, and not necessarily in teaching creative thinking. Otherwise, if these are barriers to enhancing students' creative thinking, then this implies that teaching for creative thinking is a regular classroom practice, which is not the case as it was revealed in classroom observation.

The lack of a clear definition was also apparent in the educational documents. The analysis of the three educational documents revealed as in the studies of Heilmann and Korte (2010), Shaheen (2011) and Wyse and Ferrari (Wyse & Ferrari, 2015) that there is a clear inconsistency in the use of terminology and that there is no clear definition of the terms 'creativity' or 'creative thinking'. The three educational policy documents point out the necessity to introduce creativity into the educational system. Training citizens to be creative is considered one of the basic tenets for the Moroccan educational system. However, in the three documents, there are no further details that could help teachers develop students' creative thinking skills. This could result in ambiguity and confusion about the skill, especially for teachers. The educational documents associate creative thinking with specific talented individuals. Linking creative thinking to talent or genius hinders the development of the skill as pointed out by Beghetto and Kaufman (2007).

## **1.2 Teachers' practices regarding the development of creative thinking skills**

Analysis of classroom observation data revealed that teaching practices do not encourage the development of creative thinking in students. In the interview, teacher-respondents confirmed the importance of creative thinking; however, their teaching practices seem to suppress the skill. This can be characterized as a paradox because on the one hand teachers claim they value creative thinking, but on the other hand, they engage in practices that do not provide tasks that have the potential to improve students' creative thinking. In addition, teachers did not provide tasks that have the potential to encourage students to think creatively such as problem-solving tasks. These findings are similar to Shaheen's results (2011) which revealed that teaching practices still encourage rote memorization of the given information. Teachers did not integrate cooperative work as for the participants it is a source of noise.

As far as the classroom atmosphere is concerned, the observed teachers established a friendly relationship with their students, and their classes were anxiety-free. All the activities and questions required the correct and expected answer from the teacher. The lessons were usually whole-class activities in which students were given instructions for what to do. There was no opportunity for the students to work in groups. Moreover, students were discouraged to make mistakes. Teaching seems to follow the pattern of having the teacher asking questions, students responding and the teacher evaluating the response. These kind of teaching practices that are based on teachers' taking all initiatives and acting as the source of knowledge for students is a trait of collective societies (Hofstede et al., 2010). Such practices of course suppress creative thinking as was illustrated before. Classroom observation shows that there is a discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and their actual practices. In the studies of Cheung (2012) and Shaheen (2011), the interviewed teachers believed in the factors that promote creative thinking; however, classroom observation findings revealed that teachers used traditional teaching methods that emphasized teacher-centered approach and rote learning which help students memorize content to be able to reproduce it in exams.

In brief, though the teachers valued creative thinking, their practices seem to discourage this skill. This may be due to lack of understanding of what the skill is and to some obstacles such as the pressure of covering the syllabus and preparing students for the requirements of examinations.

### **3.6. Creative thinking in the textbook**

The teacher-respondents had different views with regard to the incorporation of creative thinking in Ticket to English 2. Almost half of the respondents agree with the idea that the textbook encourages students to think creatively. The justifications given to support their view is the inclusion of open-ended questions and project work. Undoubtedly, creative thinking begins with a question, but not every open-ended question stimulates creative thinking. Questions that require recalling already known facts hinder creative thinking. The open-ended



questions that target creative thinking allow students to express their own ideas and encourage them to get involved in the process of investigation (Craft, 1997). However, one cannot confirm whether the teachers meant ‘by using open ended questions’ questions that require students to recall information and give one accepted and expected answer, or questions that necessitate creative thinking and encourage students to use skills such as fluency, flexibility, and originality to solve problems. Some teachers stated that project work can promote the creative thinking skills of students. According to Uden and Beaumont (2006), project work can promote creative thinking when students are actively involved in the process, which was not predetermined beforehand. However, not every project work can promote creative thinking skills, especially when students are forced to follow strict guidelines and are not encouraged to take initiatives, come up with unconventional solutions to a problem, find alternative ways to accomplish a task, work independently, take responsibility or make decisions.

The respondents (47%) who thought that the textbook does not encourage creative thinking skills gave several reasons to justify their answers. Some of these are linked to the lack of games and chances to show talents and write poems. Games according to Craft (2000, 2002) and Hammershøj (2020) can promote creative thinking skills if students are required to use their imagination to explain things and solve problems in unusual ways. Games that require students to imitate such as in role play or playing with rules cannot be considered activities that promote creative thinking (Craft, 2000, 2002; Hammershøj, 2020). However, we cannot determine whether the respondents refer to the games that provide a problem-solving experience or games that require students to imitate and follow the rules. Other teachers reported that the topics of the textbook are irrelevant to the current interests of the students, which makes the textbook ‘boring and ‘outdated’. We cannot say for sure that the topics are not interesting to the students because the present study did not investigate students’ views of the textbook. In general, any topic and any activity that requires students to explore content knowledge and use their creative thinking is likely to ignite their interest and their curiosity and encourage them to actively participate in the exchange of ideas (Craft, 2003). Traditional teaching techniques in dealing with even interesting topics ignore students’ interest and kill their natural curiosity (Lee & Erdogan, 2007) which may create not only boredom but also confusion in the classroom. Therefore, the concern is not always with the topics but with the way we approach those topics.

The findings of the in-depth analysis of unit 3 and 7 in Ticket to English 2, like in other studies namely Al-jabri (2020), Roohani et al. (2014) and Zareian et al. (2015) revealed the prevalence of the processes of remembering and understanding. The predominance of lower-order categories such as remembering in these textbooks suggest that knowledge is important for textbook designers and policy makers. Krathwohl (2002) support this idea when he stated that knowledge is still emphasized as basic to all the other aims of education. These findings are similar to the findings of Ait Bouzid (2016) who found that Ticket to English 2 does not encourage creative thinking. The textbook does not encourage creative thinking along with other higher-order thinking skills like critical thinking according to the studies of Mrah (2017) and Nakkam and Khamoja (2020).

#### **4. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

This paper has presented an evaluation of creative thinking skills in the Moroccan EFL high school curriculum. Findings have revealed that while policy documents mention the importance of creative thinking, the textbook and teaching practices still focus on lower-thinking skills, namely remembering and understanding.

The study concludes with several suggestions addressed to policy makers, textbook designers and teachers in Morocco. The first step to be taken, if creative thinking is to successfully be integrated in Moroccan education in general and EFL in particular, is to develop a clear and operational definition of the concept in the educational documents. This is an important step to effectively translate creative thinking theory into educational practice. Educational policy makers need to be aware of the fact that all students can be creative thinkers when exposed to the right environment, and appropriate tasks which stimulate their creative thinking. This is why, all students, regardless of their specialty, age or educational level, should be exposed to the appropriate environment to develop their creative thinking skills. Another important step is to set creative thinking as one of the basic learning goals in education so that all students can develop their creative thinking potential. This will address the issue of the lack of emphasis on developing creative thinking in Moroccan policy documents. The next step that concerns policy documents is to provide a detailed description of how to integrate creative thinking skills, especially in the guidelines for teaching English. Informing EFL teachers about the effective methods to incorporate creative thinking in EFL classrooms is likely to empower them to develop the creative thinking skills of their students.

Textbooks, which are the main teaching material for many teachers, are very powerful tools that can be modified to improve teaching practices. Therefore, textbook designers need to be trained to integrate creative thinking in EFL textbooks. They have to make sure that the tasks and the questions provided in the textbooks have the potential to improve the creative thinking skills of students. Teachers also play a significant role in the development of creative thinking skills. Teachers who have a clear understanding of the nature of creative thinking skills can use the textbook content in a way that serves their goal to help students think creatively. They can either use the textbook tasks, if these have the potential to develop students' creative thinking, or they can provide other material which can meet this objective.

To help teachers form a clear understanding of creative thinking, teacher development programs should provide courses, workshops, and activities that can equip teachers with knowledge and skills to foster creative thinking in all students. Creative thinking does not require special facilities or resources, but it necessitates changing practices which focus on mere memorization. To integrate creative thinking skills in education, especially in EFL classrooms, a number of changes should be introduced to the curriculum, including policy documents, teaching practices and textbooks. These changes require an understanding of the need for creative thinking skills in the 21st century and a new comprehensive approach to the teaching of these skills. Such changes require willingness on the part of policy makers and a detailed planning to effectively develop these skills in students.

Concerning the limitations of the study, the study relied on a single sample EFL textbook for data analysis. Therefore, the findings of the current study cannot be generalized. As a recommendation for future research, analysis of other EFL textbooks used in Moroccan

EFL high schools need to be conducted. Because of time constraints, the study involved only 40 high school teachers of English in the survey and three teachers in classroom observation and interviews. Therefore, a large size of the sample needs to be covered to generalize data.

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