



## **A Schema-Learning Based Program to Develop Al-Azhar Secondary Stage Students' EFL Creative Reading and Writing Skills**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed at investigating the effect of a schema-learning based program on developing EFL Al-Azhar secondary Stage Students' creative reading, writing and reading metacognitive awareness. The study participants were sixty (60) 2<sup>nd</sup> year secondary Al-Azhar students from Awlad Zaid Religious Institute, Al-Ibrahimia department, Sharkia governorate, Egypt. The study adopted the quasi-experimental design. So, there were two groups: an experimental group (n= 30) and a control one (n= 30). To collect data, the researcher designed multiple instruments: creative reading and writing skills checklists, pre- posttests of creative reading and writing skills. The experimental group was taught through the schema-learning based program while the control group was taught by the regular instruction. The results of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and that of the control group in creative reading and writing skills in favor of the experimental group. The effect size of using the schema-learning based program was found to be high. The study recommended using the program as a program in teaching EFL skills and as a training approach in professional development programs of EFL teachers.

**Key words:** creative reading skills; Creative writing skills; Schema-learning based Program; Secondary Stage

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**DOI: 10.48047/ecb/2023.12.8.721**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Language learning requires performing the four basic skills successfully. All these skills are productive skills as every skill has its own processes of acquiring and delivering information. These skills are interrelated and interchanged as they cannot be learnt or taught separately, thus, the new trend in teaching EFL skills is to be taught in an integrative way. Speaking skills need listening skills as writing skills require reading skills. So, writing skills cannot be developed unless reading skills are developed especially for secondary and university students. Thus, the more reading skills develop, the more the writing skills develop. Recent language learning and teaching focus on the advanced skills of language

such as creative reading, which will lead to creative writing. Therefore, recent study will investigate some integrative strategies to enhance creative reading and writing (1).

According to Winskel (2), EFL reading is an essential skill for learners of all ages. It serves as the key to develop second and foreign language reading fluency and grammatical knowledge. It also helps readers build their good reading habits, boost knowledge of vocabulary, and encourage a liking for enjoyment. As for El-shaer (3), Reading is a creative activity in itself though it is often perceived as passive and receptive, and frequently an important element in other creative processes. It encourages connections and provides stimulus. It links other types of cultural expression and other art forms. It helps young people explore the world and enrich them educationally and emotionally.

According to Yurdakal & Kirmizi (4), Reading, which is a life-long skill, is actualized through five steps: obtaining knowledge, comprehension, continuity, critical and creative reading. This is also reflected in the evolution of the education system. Whereas the behavioral approach aims at developing open reading skills, the cognitive approach focuses on developing critical reading skills. On the other hand, the constructivist approach addresses interaction with the knowledge and creating new knowledge, and therefore is concentrated on the creative reading process.

Creative reading is a reading activity that involves creative thinking skills. Creative thinking skill is identified with the emerging of new ideas or the combination of several ideas in the form of new ideas. Creative thinking also involves divergent thinking, a cognitive aspect that is characterized by fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality (5).

According to Syahrin et al. (6), creative reading is strongly associated with imagination, innovation, originality, and excellence. Creative reading is the key to productive thinking because creative thinking is defined as a mental activity used to build new ideas. Creative reading skills consist of two essential elements that are the skills to make a decision and the ability to develop a new idea based on the result of the decision-making process. As the aforementioned definitions, it can be summarized that creative reading is reading to produce creative writing based on the response to what has been read.

It is important to create a comfortable learning-teaching environment in order to keep curiosity alive at all times. Text selection and reading it aloud constitute some of the important points of this process. The teacher should read the selected literary text as a film artist. In this way, the learners are enabled to benefit from the musicality of the text and enjoy the content. Besides the joy of listening, the learners should be drawn closer to the text by means of intermittent divergent questions. The teacher should assume the role of an usher in this process by directing questions that enable imagination and extraordinary thoughts during creative reading (5).

Creative reading skills include many skills such as fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. Firstly, Fluency is the ability to recall the largest number of appropriate responses to the problem or an incentive in a specific period. It can also be described as the mental skill that is used to generate thoughts flowing freely in the light of a number of related

ideas (7). However, from student's point of view, fluency is the skill that makes student's ideas flow freely in order to get plenty of ideas in the possible quickest time.

Students who have the ability to read creatively will have the ability to write creatively. Students can develop and express their ideas, feelings and thoughts by writing. Almost every aspect of the students' life is carried out into writing form.

Writing can be arranged into two types: functional and creative. Functional writing refers to the type of writing intended to convey a specific, direct, and clear message to a particular audience (8). It includes areas such as writing instructions, letterheads, notes, invitations, reports and advertisements. On the other hand, creative writing is a form of writing by which learners express their feelings, emotions, reactions, and ideas in a great literary style (9).

According to Diab (10), Creativity in language is concerned with novelty and originality. Creative writing is directly associated with creativity. It means that the student has the ability to put his feelings and ideas about a particular topic on paper using imagination freely. Creative writing involves going beyond the ordinary without deviation from the normal values, creating ideas that are different from everyone else's ideas with the help of one's imagination, achieving originality and writing fluently while taking pleasure in the act of composing. Temizkan (11), viewed creativity as a skill is found in all daily activities whether cognitive, emotional, or social which is the base of human daily life and development of the individuals. Developing students' creative writing skills serves as an aid to the acquisition of certain aspects of the language (particularly grammar and vocabulary) and addresses the development of communicative competence.

It is worth mentioning that the following four creative writing skills will be adopted in the current study:

1. Fluency (the ability to write, generate ideas related to the topic).
2. Flexibility (the ability to produce variety of ideas to support the main idea of the topic).
3. Originality (the ability to come up with new ideas that are unique and unrepeated).
4. Elaboration (the ability to add more details and to enhance ideas).

To sum up, EFL creative reading and writing skills need more focus as they are the advanced levels of EFL reading and writing. Every researcher, teacher, or educator can choose the strategies that suit students and help them improve their creative skills. To achieve this purpose, which is improving creative reading and writing skills and reading metacognitive awareness, the schema based instruction strategies which is a branch of metacognition theory will be used. Schema-learning based strategies proved its effectiveness in developing EFL reading and writing skills especially the advanced levels as some studies indicated such as Al-Ahmmady (12) and Mahmoud (13).

Schema is a term used in psychology and cognitive science, which describes a systematic pattern of thought and behavior. Schemata affect attention and the absorption of new information. People use schemata to organize prior knowledge and provide a framework for future understanding.

According to Carrel (14) Schema can be classified into three types: linguistic schema, content schema and formal schema. Linguistic schema refers to readers' prior linguistic knowledge, including the knowledge about phonetics, grammar and vocabulary as traditionally recognized. They should decode both the lexical units and syntactic structures they encounter in texts. Therefore, accumulated linguistic information is a necessity for readers to obtain meaning of a passage.

Firstly, Content schema is the background knowledge an essay or the topic it relates to Carrel (14). It involves many things, such as topic familiarity, cultural knowledge, conventions and previous experience of the domain. As culture-centered, this type of schema is, among the three, the very one which decides readers' understanding of a passage, since whatever kind of writing is read, it must be interpreted under a cultural context because it is a product of that culture. For students with low language proficiency, content schema is a very important tacky problem they should deal with. Defined as “background knowledge about the formal, rhetorical, organizational structures of different kinds of texts”.

Secondly, formal schema is “abstract, encoded, internalized, coherent patterns of meta-linguistic, discoursed, and textual organization that guide expectations in our attempts to understand a meaningful piece of language” (14). It is the knowledge of different text genres and their respective structural organization, language structures, vocabulary, grammar etc. Argumentation, exposition, description and narration are the general types which are explained in writing books for students, but the fact is that the reading materials that they come across are of various subcategories under these four, such as newspaper reports, poems, short stories, editorials, and so forth. Their specific characteristics do work as a necessary part of the whole. To know them, readers find it easier to grasp the whole reading materials since it can help to deepen their understanding; otherwise, it becomes a hinder. Schema enables readers to relate new information to their prior experience. By bridging the new with the old, unfamiliarity is decreased, interest is aroused, and prediction in reading is possible. Schema helps to solve the problems in reading and thus ensure to make the right decision

Thirdly, Linguistic schema refers to the language knowledge, which is the fundamental of understanding a text and is an essential part in understanding passage background knowledge. Vocabulary accumulation is one of difficult points for EFL learners. They always think memorizing words wastes a lot of time and are not efficient. The reason for this problem is that they do not master a good method to memorize words. In the process of teaching words, teachers can combine the new words and previous memorized ones, which can activate students' schema that was grasped. In the process of word teaching, the word context should be paid attention. Grammar accumulation is also important. Grammar knowledge is an important part in reading. Teachers can explain the grammar that is encountered in teaching. This can also activate students' schema in mind.

The researcher will integrate between some strategies based on schema-learning through the program such as brainstorm, questioning, modeling and K-W-L strategy to produce a suggested strategy which will be called as 3E strategy (experience, experiment and

expectation) through some Quranic stories to develop creative reading, writing and reading metacognitive awareness.

## **Methodology**

### **1-Participants of the study**

The participants of the study were second year secondary stage Al-Azhar institutes' students. The researcher chose secondary stage students because it is a transitional period between basic education and college education. It is the best period to enable these students to develop their creative skills to be prepared to meet the modern educational and vocational needs. The participants were chosen from two classes. Every class has thirty students. Two classes Awlad Zaid religious institutes represented the control and the experimental groups. To make sure that both groups were of the same level at the beginning of the experimentation, an EFL creative reading and writing tests were pre-administered to both groups. Then, the experimental group was taught through the suggested program while the control group was taught through the regular method. After that, both groups were administered to the post creative reading and writing test. Finally, the results of the post-test were statistically analysed.

**The study Procedures:** To implementing the program, the following procedures were conducted:

1. Reviewing relevant literature and previous studies related to:
  - A- The independent variable. Schema- learning based programme to frame the study experiment.
  - B- A dependent variable: EFL creative reading skills to crystallize the target skills.
  - C- A dependent variable: EFL creative writing skills to specify the target skills
2. Designing an EFL creative reading skills checklist of the main and sub skills, judging it by TEFL jury members and modifying it according to their opinions.
3. Designing an EFL creative writing skills checklist of the main and sub skills, judging it by TEFL jury members and modifying it according to their opinions.
4. Translating the approved EFL creative reading and writing skills into a pre/posttest and implementing it before and after the experiment for experimental group.
5. Choosing the study participants from Al-Azhar institutes.
6. Designing the proposed programme in the light of its aims, activities, methods, procedures and learner's and teacher's role.
7. Pre-administrating the study instruments to both groups.
8. Teaching the experimental group by the proposed programme.
9. Post -administrating the study instruments to both groups.
10. Comparing the pre to the post results statistically of experiment group.
11. Concluding, suggesting for further studies.

### **Findings of the study:**

1. There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-post administrations of EFL reading skills test, in favor of the post administration.
2. There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of experimental group and control group in the post administration of EFL reading skills test, in favor of the experimental group.
3. The proposed program had a positive effect on creative reading and writing skills.

### **Discussion:**

The pre-test means of scores indicated that both the experimental and control groups were homogeneous. There were no significant differences between the means of scores of the experimental and control groups in EFL creative reading skills. The major purpose of this study was to investigate whether the use of the schema-learning based program has any effect on the promotion of the participants' creative reading skills. The results of the present study indicated that the suggested program positively and significantly influenced their creative reading, writing skills and reading metacognitive awareness. The researcher observed that schema-learning based program has new, unusual ideas and innovative thoughts, ability to put things together in a new image. It means to think in a different way that is like thinking outside the box. Schema-learning calls for benefitting from prior knowledge to reach new understanding, besides, reading and writing a text creatively read a text. Thus, creativity is a mental activity that leads to original production, and includes new solutions to ideas, problems and curricula.

Finally, schema-learning program can be described as a process of sensing difficulties, gaps in information, missing elements, something oblique, making new guesses and formulating hypotheses about these deficiencies; evaluating and testing these guesses and hypotheses; revising and retesting them and finally communicating the results. The post-test results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the means of scores of the experimental and control groups in the EFL creative reading and writing skills. Therefore, it can be argued that the cognitive thinking strategy proved to be statistically and educationally significant in developing the participants' creative reading fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration skills.

The participants fluency skill developed as they were able to derive the objectives of a reading text, generate new words from the spelling of given words, generate new words related semantically to given words, suggest new titles to the text, relate between the elements of the reading text and others and suggest other alternatives of some words in the reading text. Their flexibility skill also developed as they were able to put the incidents of a story in the correct order as these incidents happened, produce questions about information not mentioned directly in the text, give evidences about the information of the reading text, deduce characteristics of objects and expressing opinions, predict what will happen next,



view the text from another aspect, use the reading text information in situations and realize the missing elements in the reading text. This findings are agree with several studies (15-17).

The participants originality skills developed as they were able to summarize the idea of the reading text, reformulate the reading text in another way, predict the results of a specific situation, suggest ideas not mentioned in the reading text, give unusual reasons for an incident, give new strange names to the characters of the story and predict unusual endings to the story (17,18).

Their elaboration skills developed as they were able to write a paragraph using a required list of words, add adjectives or figures of speech to an existing passage, add story details to a basic story map, add setting details to enhance a literary work and compose an illustrated character study.

### **Recommendations:**

Based on the results of the present study and the delivered conclusion, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration:

- 1- Teachers should emphasize the development of the students' creative reading and writing skills in early educational stages in order to develop throughout the following stages to prevent any possible creative reading difficulties the students may face.
- 2- It is necessary to devote more time in English language teaching to teaching creative reading and writing skills.
- 3- Lecturers of English should teach the students how to use the schema-learning based program in reading texts in order to help them overcome any difficulties they face.
- 4- The major implication of the present study for EFL instructors is to integrate schema-learning in their classes on a regular basis as classroom courses. In so doing, teachers are in a better position to not only enhance learners' creative reading skills but also monitor their weaknesses in reasoning, enriching the curriculum with cognitive thinking that enhances students' creative reading skills.
- 5- Supplying schools with different materials for employing cognitive thinking strategy like short stories is really needed.
- 6- Preparing and distributing instructional materials that increase teachers' awareness concerning the significance of schema-learning and necessity of its training for promoting students' creative reading skills should be targeted.

### **Suggestions for further studies:**

The following areas of research can be suggested for further studies:

- 1- Using schema learning strategies with students' reading comprehension.
- 2- Using schema-learning strategies with students' writing, speaking or listening skills.
- 3- Using schema learning strategies with EFL language skills among prep school students.

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