What Suppresses Learners' Creativity?
Creativity Barriers of English Students
at M'sila University, Algeria

Messaouda Ladjini *

M'sila University,(Algeria)

messaouda.ladjini@univ-msila.dz

Fawzia Bouhass Benaissi

Sidi Bel Abbes University. Algeria,

fawzia.benaissi@univ-sba.dz

Abstract ;

Creativity is a valuable element in teaching and learning. Nevertheless, some factors may get in the learners' way of creativity .Accordingly, the aims of this paper is to uncover the possible barriers that hinder creativity and to highlight the strategies that boost it in the classroom. This study is based on the hypothesis that university students can be negatively affected by a number of factors. To test the hypothesis the descriptive method was adopted. A questionnaire was distributed to 37 students of English at M'sila university. Findings of the study reveal that the majority of students are not facing obstacles; however, one clearly noticed barrier to

---

* *Corresponding author*

creativity is 'time inadequacy'. On these bases, some implications are suggested to help learners foster their creativity and overcome whatever barrier they may encounter.

✓ *Technology Use.*

1. *Introduction*

According to current practices underlying teaching/learning process, learners are no longer regarded as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. Therefore, teachers must aim to make their learners skilful and competent. Educators must be qualified, capable and above all creative in order to increase the curiosity of their learners, thus awakening their mind while developing the pleasure of learning. The teacher must therefore realize that her/his role is no longer to transmit knowledge, but to encourage learners to acquire academic skills by providing them with tools and strategies, so that they can develop creativity-oriented learning styles.

There is a great need to foster creativity in today's rapidly changing learning world. Interestingly, both students and teachers favour a creative environment that would guarantee effective learning. Today much change is required at several levels. There is a need for creative learners and a need for creative teachers to plant the seeds of creativity. There is a great need, as well, for creative material that would creatively engage learners in learning a second language.

As far as the Algerian tertiary education, which is the context of the present study, is concerned, an attempt has been made by stake holders as a response to the demands of the labour market. To achieve this purpose, the LMD system has been implemented as a new educational system for nearly all university disciplines. The new system encourages students' involvement in decision-making about the teaching/learning process. To be effectively engaged in this process, students' creativity and curiosity for learning need to be improved.

However, this might raise some factors which hinder the development of students' creative learning skills. The present study is designed to determine the different obstacles repressing learners' creativity. Additionally, it seeks to sensitize both teachers and learners about them. A further aim stressed in this

paper is suggesting some assignments, classroom activities and techniques that might offer an opportunity for developing creativity.

2. *Literature Review*

Creativity is increasingly recognised as an interesting area of research. Factors found to be influencing it have been explored in several studies. The researcher will try, in this paper, to provide some details about creativity barriers. However, it seems significant to start first with definitions the concept of creativity.

2.1 *Definition of Creativity*

There are several definitions of creativity provided by different authors. For example, Thorne (2007) defines it as ''the original thought, the spark, the ignition, the original design concepts or the blueprint'' (p. 17). It has also been defined by Martin (2007) as the act of ''purposefully bringing something new and valuable'' (p. 64).

Runco and Jaeger (2012) claim that creativity is associated with both: originality and effectiveness. They focus on two interesting facts. Firstly, things cannot be creative unless they are effective. The second point is that usefulness, appropriateness and fitness are all equivalents to the term effectiveness. In his definition, Higgins (1994) mentions a distinguished feature of creativity. He argues that creativity is not innately exclusive for some people; everyone can learn how to be creative. In an attempt to explain the previous idea, Higgins (1994, p.4) states that creativity "is a skill. It is not something mystical, available only to a few. It can be learned by anyone. Everyone possesses an innate capacity for creativity'.

Creativity is playing a crucial role in the learning/ teaching process. Nevertheless, it seems worth noting here that creativity is affected by several factors that will be discussed in the next section.

2.2 *Barriers to Creativity*

In some cases, learners are faced with obstacles that stifle creativity and hold them back from being creative.

- **Using ICT in the classroom**

Integrating ICT in the classroom can be efficient. However, there are some factors that need to be taken into account. This view is supported by Martin (1997, p. 238) who assures that "for all of these advantages to be reaped as an enhanced accrual of learning, it is essential that adequate resources are available, that adequate training is provided, and that preparation and ICT use in the classroom is   supported by technical and auxiliary personnel''.

- **Time Insufficiency**

Time is a crucial factor for fostering creativity in the classroom. In this regard, Horner and Ryf (2007) observe that learners need considerable thinking time to reflect and respond to teachers' instructions and that they need to be given more opportunities to show their creativity. Nevertheless, time, as such, can impede the creative process. That is to say, when students are not afforded a sufficient amount of time to perform their tasks and express themselves, they might not behave as creatively as they planned.

- **Lack of Self-confidence**

Self-confidence refers to how human beings see themselves; it is an image of one's self. This image affects how one operates in a given situation, especially in a situation that demands a considerable level of cognitive ability. In learning context for example, if a learner has a high self-confidence, s/he will attain positive results, and vice versa.

A high level of self-confidence may also foster creativity in the classroom. A further support to this view is provided by Martin (2007, p. 32) who claims that self- confidence is ''a key personality trait advancing creativity endeavours''. Nevertheless, low self-confidence can be regarded as a barrier to creativity since it hinders learners' development and even blocks their creativity.

- **Using Non-verbal Language**

Communication may take place either verbally or non-verbally through body language, eye contact, facial expressions, tone, voice,..etc. What to present is of a crucial importance but how to present it matters too. In this respect, Borg (2009, p. 18) confirms: "93 percent of our message is conveyed by the language of the body (including voice)". Basically, the creative

individuals need to know how to deliver messages and how to inspire audiences by performing creatively.

Some researchers tie the latter to creativity and think that creative people are the ones who know how to use nonverbal aspects effectively. They all add more significance to their performance. It is already confirmed that boring talks cannot be called creative presentations. Consequently, Tiearney (2006) suggests using gesture and facial expressions to keel boredom and to inspire audience (peer students and teachers).

- **Interesting Theme**

Finding an original interesting theme that would impress peers and bring surprise to the classroom is one of the essential creativity indicators. Hence, teachers and student view it as a crucial but demanding step. Creativity is associated to interestingness and "measuring the interestingness of a theme is to determine how useful it is" (Turner, 2014, p. 19).

3. *Methodology of the Study*
3.1 Method

The method adopted in this study is the descriptive method which seems suitable for investigating the different barriers to creativity from students' point of view.

3.2 Participants and Tools of Research

For this study, sample size per group was 40 English students from the University of M'sila. Two (2) classes were selected, 20 students in each group. Regarding the tools of research, a questionnaire was distributed to the selected sample. 37 participants responded and filled in the questionnaire whereas 3 did not. Frequency is reported on 3 and 2 point scale questions. In addition to the questionnaire, some statistical tests (x^2) were employed to measure the reliability and validity of the results.

4. *Results*

Statement 1: "I faced difficulties when presenting something creative in my class". After doing the statistical processing, the results achieved are shown in Table (1) below.

Table 1. Facing difficulties when presenting something creative in the Classroom

Options	Frequency	Percentage	Theoretical frequency	Residual	df	χ^2	Asymptotic level	Decision
Agree	13	35%	12,3	,7	2	10,43	0.005	Significant at 0.01
Disagree	20	54%	12,3	7,7				
Neutral	4	11%	12,3	-8,3				
Total	37	100%						

Table (1) above displays students' responses to statement (1) which tackles their views about facing difficulties when preparing and presenting creative tasks. Findings show that the responses of the 37 students (the sample of the study) differed. In order to verify the significant differences in frequencies and percentages, the researcher chose the statistical significance test Chi-square(x^2). As for the findings, it was noticed that the value in the degree of freedom (2) is estimated by 10.43 which is statistically a significant

value at the set alpha level (0.01). Accordingly, it is found that there are statistically significant differences between the two groups for the second category that said 'No'. The confidence level is 99% with an error probability of 1%.

The findings reveal that the majority of students (54%) do not seem to face any difficulties when presenting creatively. It seems that no obstacle gets in their way towards creativity. Nevertheless, 35% of students claimed that they do encounter some obstacles. Hence, being creative is a complex task for them.

Statement 2: I face difficulties in finding an interesting theme for my creative presentation''

Table N°2. Students views about facing difficulties in finding an interesting theme

Options	Frequ-Ency	Perc-entage	Theo-retical frequency	Res-idual	df	χ^2	Asym-ptotic level	Decision
Yes	12	32%	18,5	-6,5	1	4,568	0.033	Signif-
No	25	68%	18,5	6,5				icant at
Total	37	100%						0.05

Table (2) above displays students' responses to statement N^0. 2. It illustrates their views about how difficult it is to find an interesting theme for their creative presentations.

The findings show that the responses of the 37 students (the sample of the study) differed in their responses: those who said yes and those who said no.

In order to verify the significant differences in frequencies and percentages, the researcher chose the statistical significance test chi-square (χ^2). As for the findings, it was noticed that the value in the degree of freedom (1) is estimated by 4.56 which is statistically a significant value at the set

alpha level (0.05). Accordingly, it is found that there are statistically significant differences between the two groups for the category that said 'No'. The confidence level is 95% with an error probability of 5%.

Findings presented in Table (2) show that only a third of students (32%) find it hard to decide and provide a creative presentation with an interesting theme. Moreover, the majority of students (68%) do not have any problem in finding a good theme for their presentations. It can be said that they are creative. This implies that finding an original and an interesting topic is an easy task for them. They might complain about other factors but finding a theme is possibly never a barrier to them.

Statement 3: "I think that time insufficiency is one of the barriers to creativity".

Table 03: Students attitudes towards time insufficiency in doing creative presentations

Options	Freque-ncy	Perce-ntage	Theore-tical frequency	Resi-dual	df	χ2	Asm-ptotic level	Decis:
Yes	29	78, 4%	12,3	16,7	2	33,94	0.000	Signif
No	3	8.1%	12,3	-9,3				0.001
Neutral	5	13,5%	12,3	-7,3				
Total	37	100%						

ab le (3) ab o ve

displays students' responses to statement (3) which discusses whether they consider time insufficiency as creativity obstacle or not. The findings show that 29 students (78%) confirm that time is a creativity barrier that generally represses their creativity. And only three students 3 (9%), on the other hand, do not consider time as an obstacle t creativity. Some students (13%) did not opt neither for 'Yes' not for No'. In order to verify the significant differences in frequencies and percentages, the researchers chose the statistical significance test Chi-square (x^2). As for the findings, it was noticed that the

value in the degree of freedom (2) is estimated by 33.94 which is statistically a significant value at the set alpha level (0.01). Accordingly, it is found that there are statistically significant differences between the two groups serving the category that said 'No'. The confidence level is 99% with an error probability of 1%.

Statement 04: "Being unable to use some technological tools limits my creativity".

Table 4. Facing problems related to technology when doing creative work

Options	Frequency	Percntage	Theoretical frequency	Residual	df	χ^2	Asymptotic level	Decision
Yes	11	30%	12,3	-1,3	2	8,162	0.017	Significant at 0.05
No	20	54%	12,3	7,7				
Neutral	6	16%	12,3	-6,3				
Total	37	100%						

Table (4) above displays the students' responses to statement (4) which is designed to reveal their views on facing technology related problems when performing creatively. Findings of Table 3 show that more than half of the informants (54%) denied having any troubles with ICT use. Whereas, 30% (11 students) reported that the inability to use technology is one of the factors that restrain their creativity. Among the sample of the study 16% of the informants

opted for the 'Neutral' option. In order to verify the significant differences in frequencies and percentages, the researcher chose the statistical significance test Chi-square(x^2). As for the findings, it was noticed that the value in the degree of freedom (2) is estimated by 0.017 which is statistically not significant value at the set alpha level (0.05). Accordingly, it is found that there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups. The confidence level is 95% with an error probability of 5%.

Statement 5: 'Not Mastering non-verbal communication (body language, eye contact, facial expressions) is one of my obstacles to creativity'.

Table 5. Not mastering non-verbal communication as a barrier

Options	Frequency	Percntage	Theoretical frequency	Residual	df	χ^2	Asymptotic level	Decision
Yes	12	32%	18,5	-6,5	1	4,568	0.033	Significant
No	25	68%	18,5	6,5				ficant
Total	37	100%						0.05

Table (5) above stands for students' responses to statement (5) which aims to discover whether students' inability to master non-verbal language would halt their creativity. The findings show that the majority (25 of respondents 68%) seem to master this language feature and thus replied with 'No'. Twelve (12) students (32%), on the other hand, state that one of their obstacles towards creativity is not mastering nonverbal communication. In order to

verify the significant differences in frequencies and percentages, the researcher chose the statistical significance test Chi-square (x^2). As for the findings, it was noticed that the value in the degree of freedom (1) is estimated by 4.56 which is statistically a significant value at the set alpha level (0.05). Accordingly, it is found that there are statistically significant differences between the two groups for the second category that said 'No'. The confidence level is 95% with an error probability of 5%.

Statement 6: "Having low self-confidence makes people less creative"

Table 6. Perceiving low self- confidence as a barrier by students

Options	Freq-uency	Percn-tage	Theo-retical frequency	Resi-dual	df	χ^2	Asym-ptotic level	Decision
Yes	9	24%	18,5	-9,5	1	9,757	0.002	Signific-
No	28	76%	18,5	9,5				ant at
Total	37	100%						0.01

Table (6) above displays students' responses to statement N°6. It investigates whether respondents face self-confidence problems that make them less creative or not. The findings show that the majority of responses 28 (76%) are enjoying high-self confidence and that they do not experience any difficulties with this barrier. On the other hand, 9 students (24%) claimed

having low-self confidence is the thing that checks theirs creative abilities. In order to verify the significant differences in frequencies and percentages, the researcher chose the statistical significance test Chi-square (x^2). As for the findings, it was noticed that the value in the degree of freedom (1) is estimated by 9.75 which is statistically a significant value at the set alpha level (0.01). Accordingly, it is found that there are statistically significant differences between the two groups for the second category that said 'No'. The confidence level is 99% with an error probability of 1%.

## 5.   *Summary and Discussion of the Results*

Unexpectedly, the present study shows that more than half of the sample (54%) 'students of English at M'sila Uuniversity' are not facing any difficulties when doing creative tasks. According to this account, one possible interpretation of such a result is that the respondents have received good support inside or probably outside the classroom. Additionally, they might have done a good amount of practice to boost their creativity and also to get rid of any barrier to creativity.

Findings shown in Table (3) reveal that 'time' factor is one of the significant barriers for the sample of the study. The majority of students (78%) stated that time insufficiency is impeding students' creativity. They faced problems concerning the amount of time they were provided with. This might be explained by the fact that teacher does not take into consideration the factor of time when setting creative assignments. One more possibility is that the task is too demanding and students are overloaded with tasks in the other modules.

As far as technology is concerned, findings show that only a few students (30%) (11 out of 37) regarded it as a creativity barrier. Interestingly, it can be said that today's learners are digital and thus they are good at using technology in their creative assignments. This finding corroborates the ideas of Nikolopoulou (2018), who found in his study that technologies were not an obstacle; rather most students reported that their creativity has been boosted by ICTs. Hence, it is worth confirming here that technology helps learners to be creative rather than hinders them.

Regarding self-confidence, this study's findings reveal that students of M'sila University do not have a problem with low-self confidence. Rather, they claimed to be self-confident. This view seems to contradict Martin (2007, p. 64)'s who argues that students generally have "enormous self-doubt about their creativity ability".

Fig1. Creativity barriers reported by students
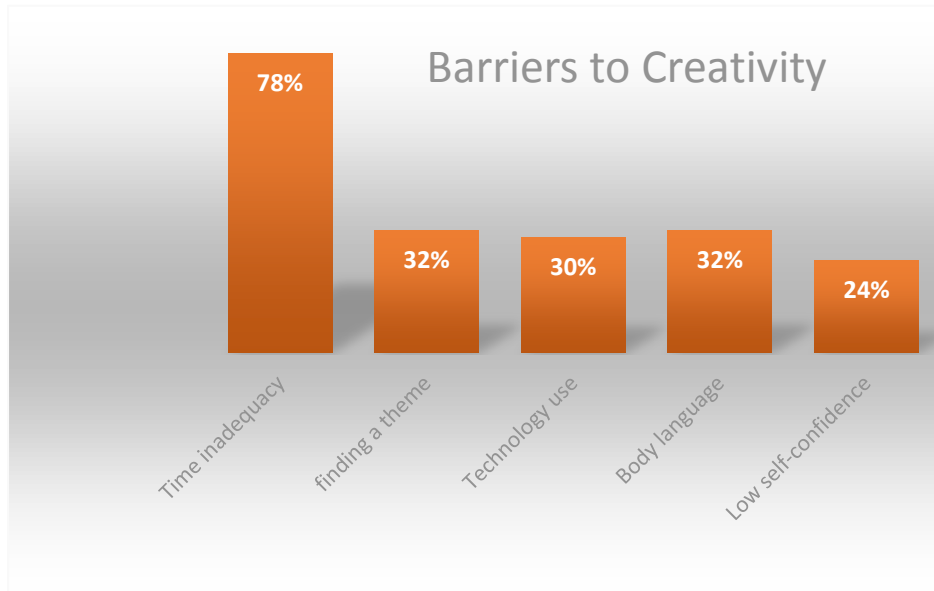
Based on the list of obstacles suggested to the students, time was, unexpectedly, reported as the first barrier distracting students' creativity (78%), followed by the inability to decide about a suitable theme and to use body language (32%) for each, technology use (30%), and low self-confidence (24%).

6. *Limitation of the Study*

Though most students (54%) claimed they do not encounter any problems when doing creative presentations and since only few barriers were highlighted in the present paper, there is abundant room for further research to determine other uncovered barriers to creativity. Future research may investigate other distracting factors such as: lack of motivation, low-self esteem, applied methodology, negative expectations,... etc. Similarly,

researchers may tackle the teachers' role in fostering creativity in the classroom as a future area of research.

7. *Conclusion*

This study aimed at investigating the obstacles that students of M'sila University may meet when making creative performances. Interestingly, the researchers found that the participants who took part in the questionnaire are creative and that their creativity is distracted by a few factors. Consequently, it can be said that the hypothesis was not totally proven to be correct since the vast majority of student at M'sila are creative and they are almost not affected by obstacles except for time.

One worth stressing barrier to creativity was time. Accordingly, (78%) of students complained about the insufficiency of time allocated to them to accomplish their tasks creatively. A further significant result is related to technology which proved to be of crucial value in boosting students' creativity. It is a creativity indicator. Interestingly, 54% of respondents claimed that they find no difficulties in implementing technology in their production.

Overall, based on the findings above, there seems to be some evidence indicating that some measures have to be taken. If creativity is one of the desired learning goals, then teachers should make more efforts to boost learners' creativity. Simply, because their "job itself offers endless opportunities for creativity" (Cowley, 2005, p.xiii).

8. *Recommendations and Suggestions*

Based on the research findings, some recommendations and suggestions could be provided.

Firstly, teachers are advised to reconsider the issue of time. Reasonable amounts of time should be provided to students to assure creativity. It is necessary bearing in mind that there are individual differences between students and that learn differently. This applies to time factor; students are in a multileveled setting which means that time should be distributed based on some needs analysis carried out circumspectly.

Moreover, knowing that students are keen on ICT use, teachers and policy makers need to encourage its reasonable use. They need to integrate ICT as a

module at university or to devote specific time for students who need further training in this area.

Difficulties in selecting an interesting theme can be solved if teachers provide learners with a list of updated themes or probably show learners a model to facilitate things for them.

With respect to self-esteem and self-confidence, teachers are advised to help learners who underestimate their creative skills and regard themselves as uncreative. They should convince them that they are "inevitably creative in their own lives _ they just don't realize it" (Cowley, 2005, p.xiii). Sometimes students are competent enough but perform badly. All they need is support; all they need is someone who brings back self-confidence in them to sees how well they can do.

Using facial expressions, gestures and body movement is important in the teaching/learning process. Hence, caring about them seems more than a necessity in today's creative classroom. Teachers should sensitize learners to include them when presenting, telling stories or doing any performance. They can help by devoting sessions for body language training exercises, reminding learners to focus on non-verbal aspects while performing until they became part of their presentations.

In order to enhance creativity, educators and teachers need to take learners' styles into account when designing creative activities. This was clearly expressed by Cowley (2005, p.83) who clarifies: "This might mean using a variety of resources: images, music, props. It could mean using a range of approaches, practical work, writing, drawing, and so on".

9. *Bibliography List***:**

1. Borg, J. (2009), Body Language: 7 Easy Lessons to Master the Silent Language. New Jersey: FT Press;

2. Cowley, S. (2005), Letting the Buggers Be Creative. London: Continuum International Publishing Group;

3. Higgins, M. J. (1994), 101 Creative Problem Solving Techniques: The Handbook of New Ideas for Business. New York: New Management Publishing Company;

4. Horner, C& Ryf, V. (2007), Creative Teaching English: In the Early Years and Primary Classroom. New York: Routledge;

5. Landrum, G, N. (1994), Profiles of Female Genius: Thirteen Creative Women who Changed the World. Prometheus Books;

6. Martin, A. (1997), IT, ET and Beyond: Rethinking How. In Martin, A., Smart, L & Yeomans, D (Eds). Information, Technology and teaching of History: International perspectives. Amesterdam: Hardood Academic Publishers;

7. Martin, M. W. Creativity: Ethics and Excellence in Science. New York: Lexington Books;

8. Nikolopoulou, K. (2018), Creativity and ICT: Theoretical approaches and perspectives in school education. In Research on e-Learning and ICT in Education (pp. 87-100). Springer, Cham;

9. Runco, M.A. & Jaeger, G, J. (2012), The Standard Definition of Creativity, Creativity Research Journal, 24(1), 92-96;

10. Thorne, K. (2007), Essential Creativity in the Classroom: Inspiring kids. London: Routledg;

11. Tiearney, J. (2006). (Investigating Poetry: Reading,Writing, Listening and Speaking. RIC Publications;

12. Turner, S. R. (2014). The creative process: A computer model of storytelling and creativity. Psychology Press.