

Abstract

Teachers' crucial role in realising creativity within their subject and providing more opportunities to foster creative abilities in pupils have been widely recognised. However, few studies have focused on what constitutes creativity in a particular subject such as English. This research explored teachers' conceptions of creativity in primary EFL classroom, with a particular focus on the Chinese context. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted to explore how EFL teachers conceptualised creativity in their practice using the phenomenographical approach to categorise teachers' conceptions. The findings showed that most of the teachers valued creativity in EFL, and regarded fostering creative thoughts as being important for personal development as well as effective EFL learning. Teachers' conceptions of creativity in EFL were categorised into creative products, cognitive development, creative teaching approaches and freedom in choice and expression. Favoured approaches to facilitate creative teaching included the use of art forms and playful activities, and the establishment of a stimulating classroom environment for creative ideas. However, some teachers tended to have limited conceptions and were uncertain about the relationship between creativity and foreign language learning. Challenges included an overcrowded curriculum, limited teaching time, exam pressures and a social and cultural context characterized by lack of support. The findings are discussed in terms of their educational implications.

Keywords: creativity conceptions, EFL, primary education, phenomenography, Mainland China

1. Introduction

One fundamental question in the research on creativity is what can be understood as 'creative' (Simonton, 2013). Although creativity has been described in a number of ways without arriving at a consensus, it usually refers to the activity, process or ability to produce something new and appropriate (NACCCE, 1999; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999; Sternberg, 2003; Boden, 2004; QCA, 2004; Fleming, 2010; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). People 'question, make connections, innovate, problem solve and reflect critically' (Banaji, Burn & Buckingham, 2010, p.4) in the creative process, thinking, imagining and exploring possibilities (Cremin, 2015). Common associations to creativity are usually identified as originality, freedom, imagination and play, rather than tradition, being rule-bound, wisdom and skill (Fleming, 2012).

As a commonly agreed feature of creativity, originality can be interpreted differently according to whether the creation is 'original in some absolute sense or just to the creator' (Fleming, 2012, p.80). It may be remarkably and uniquely new with historic achievements (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi & Gardner, 1994; NACCCE, 1999; Dacey & Lennon, 2000), which may only apply to a few extraordinary and talented people (Craft, 2001). On the other hand, an outcome may be creative in relation to one's previous work (NACCCE, 1999). It is still a creative act as long as the output is new to the individual (Craft, 2002, 2005). While the former is often called 'high' creativity which tends to reflect elitist views that creativity is often possessed by a genius, the latter, in Craft's term, 'little' c creativity, recognises the 'democratic nature of creativity', and emphasizes the creativity of everyday life (Craft, 2002, 2005; Banaji et al., 2010; Fleming, 2010). Therefore, creativity is not limited to the domains of knowledge nor highly valued artistic or scientific activities, but in all areas of life and human activity (NACCCE, 1999; Craft, 2001; Lin, 2011; Baer & Kaufman, 2012; Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem & Taqi, 2014). The notion of democratic creativity stresses that everyone can be creative in their own ways (NACCCE, 1999; Craft, 2001; Lin, 2011; Newton, D., 2012a; Newton, L., 2012a; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012; Al-Nouh et al., 2014), which is more relevant to education (Al-Nouh et al., 2014). Given that every student has the potential to be creative, it is important for teachers to develop their creativity in teaching practices (Esquivel, 1995).

2. Creativity and education

According to Piaget, fostering creativity and developing creative people is the principal goal of education (Fisher, 2005). In the classroom, creative thinking helps to improve students' social skills, motivation, self-esteem and achievement (QCA, 2004; OFSTED, 2006; Leahy & Sweller, 2008). It equips students with the skills to be flexible and adaptable, to deal with everyday problems and new situations in the fast-changing world, and to seek to thrive in their future (QCA, 1999,2004; Sharp & Le Métails, 2000; Craft, 2002; Sternberg, 2003; Shaheen, 2010; Newton, D., 2012a; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). In the light of this, there is an urge in policy documents worldwide to foster creativity in education (see, for example, NACCCE, 1999; QCA, 1999; and Ministry of Education, 2010), and a number of approaches and strategies have been recommended to encourage creative thoughts in the classroom (see, for example, NACCCE, 1999; Craft, 2001, 2002, 2006; Niu & Sternberg, 2003; Fisher, 2005; Fraser, 2006; and Newton, D., 2012a).

However, children are not 'taught creativity by direct instruction' (NACCCE, 1999, p.102). NACCCE (1999) distinguishes two ways of creative teaching: teaching creatively and teaching for creativity. While teaching creatively focuses on the use of imaginative teaching approaches to stimulate students' interest, teaching for creativity is concerned with 'forms of teaching that are intended to develop young people's own creative thinking or behaviour' (NACCCE, 1999, p.103) and can help create an engaging and stimulating learning (NACCCE, 1999; also see in Jeffrey & Craft, 2004). These two notions interrelate to build a context for the development of creativity (Jeffrey & Craft, 2004; Lin, 2011), and sometimes teachers do both in their practice (Jeffrey & Craft, 2004).

Although creativity has been valued in policy and by teachers, a number of tensions and challenges can lead to what MakeI (2009) called the 'creative gap' (MakeI, 2009) 'between the perceived value of creativity and its absence in schools' (Rinkevich, 2011, p.220). For example, creativity is often viewed as an 'extra' to teaching responsibilities (Beghetto, 2007), and the fundamental nature of creativity as a process in everyday context is rarely recognised by some teachers (Newton, L., 2012b). Creativity education in schools tends to

focus on “allowing” rather than “developing” creativity, on arts-based “expression” rather than broader or deeper kinds of creativity; and on the role of techniques rather than dispositions’ (Claxton, Edwards & Scale-Constantinou, 2006, p.57). Furthermore, pressures from a heavy syllabus and standardised tests, limited time to practice creative teaching, and teachers’ lack of training and knowledge may also constrain the integration of creativity in education (Anderson-Patton, 2009; Rinkevich, 2011; Newton, L., 2012a,2012b). A supportive environment is required to encourage, nurture and value creativity (Sternberg, 2003; Newton, L. & Newton, D., 2014), and teacher education needs to be revisited to prepare teachers with knowledge and skills for creative teaching throughout the education system (Anderson-Patton, 2009).

2.1 Creativity in English and EFL teaching

Although creativity is commonly associated with arts subjects such as drama and music, it may also apply to other areas and disciplines (NACCCE, 1999; Newton, D., 2012a; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012; Newton, L. & Newton, D., 2014) where imagination and originality are involved (Fisher, 2005). Creativity is polymorphic, and its attributes may vary according to the disciplines (Newton, D. 2012b, 2012c; Newton & Waugh, 2012; Newton, L. & Newton, D., 2014). It is imperative for teachers to understand creativity and its attributes both in general across the curriculum and in a specific subject context, in order to seek opportunities to promote creative thinking in a systematic way (Newton, D., 2012a; Newton & Waugh, 2012; Newton, L. & Newton, D., 2014).

In terms of English teaching, Cremin (2015) describes the opportunity for creativity as active engagement, freedom in choice and the use of knowledge as well as skills to reflect on the learning experience. Although the focus on literacy skills tends to overshadow the development of creativity in the teaching of English in countries such as the UK (Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012; Newton & Waugh, 2012), in the last decade, the potential and opportunities for the development of creativity have been explored in various areas of the subject (see, for example, Vass, 2002, 2007; Fisher, 2006; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012; Newton & Waugh, 2012). Activities and techniques have been investigated to foster creative thinking in language classes with primary school children.

The approaches to cultivate creativity might be similar when English is taught as a foreign language, including offering more choices to children, asking engaging questions and planning activities to explore different ideas (Read, 2015). The foreign language classroom has been described as 'a nest of creativity' (p.89) where learners can have a joyful and rewarding experience through engaging creative activities that motivate them to take risks in using the new language (Piasecka, 2018). A number of scholars emphasized the importance of the learners' affective engagement in the process of learning the new language, as... (Lewandowska, 2017; Múglová, Malá, Stranovská & Chvalová, 2017). When both the language tools and the desire to communicate in the foreign language are present, then the main goal is to encourage the learners to use the target language spontaneously which will further enhance their risk-taking, sense of agency and creativity resulting in a cycle of successful communication (Christie, 2016). Nonetheless, language and communicative skills may be more emphasised in EFL education guidelines (Legutke, Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-v. Ditfurth, 2009), while the notion of creativity seems to be explicitly mentioned less often. The limited number of studies that do discuss creativity in the process of learning a foreign language emphasise the productive aspects of language use. For example, Múglová et al. (2017) discussed important attributes of creativity that can allow for the development of productive forms of language use as opposed to re-productive ones, such as originality, flexibility, sensitivity, variability and self-expression. Additionally, the 'correct and repetitive reproduction of prefabricated language patterns' are not uncommon in some primary classrooms to enhance literacy skills (Legutke et al., 2009).

EFL teaching and learning may start from the repetitions of language knowledge from the textbooks, however, the outcomes usually lie in the flexible, active and rich self-expression in real situations with the use of foreign language (Robert, 1973; Ostojčić, 1975). Students are required to 'be active, to question, inquire and manipulate old and new ideas' (Ostojčić, 1975, p. 310), and create new ideas based on the knowledge they already have (Ostojčić, 1975). In addition, it is important to note that creative teaching and learning does not contradict the notion of knowledge acquisition (Cremin & Barnes, 2014). Rather, it 'involves teaching the subjects in creative contexts that explicitly invite learners to engage

imaginatively and that stretch their generative, evaluative and collaborative capacities' (Cremin & Barnes, 2014, p.467). Creative education should be 'a careful balancing act between teacher control and student autonomy and between the encouragement of emotional engagement and playful thinking and conscientious, mindful reflection' (Vass, 2007, p.115).

Some educators may be concerned about the insufficient language skills for students to be creative, especially children in primary schools (Vygotsky, 1967). However, based on her EFL teaching experience in Bulgaria, Markova (2015) found that pupils with limited foreign language knowledge could engage imaginatively and enthusiastically in classroom activities, as long as a supportive environment and conditions were offered and the teacher was skilled and patient to draw out children's creative potential. Zhang Lihong and Chen Qing (2010) also argue that teachers in some regions of China may underestimate children's ability in thinking. Therefore, opportunities should be provided for students to express their creativity, as everyone has creative potential in a diverse way with some measure of originality and can draw on their imagination, fantasy and perceptions of experience (Ostojčić, 1975).

Although there is very little literature that explicitly discusses creativity in the EFL context, a number of recommendations have been suggested to establish a supportive classroom environment to promote creativity in EFL (Peck, 2001; Heathfield, 2015; Hlenschi-Stroie, 2015; Markova, 2015; Read, 2015; Wright, 2015) including in the Chinese context (Wang, T., 2002; Cao, 2006; Li, H., 2010; Hua, 2012; Pang, Y., 2012; Zhou, 2013; Rao, 2014). A number of strategies considered to facilitate the development of creativity have been applied in EFL teaching with a primary aim to foster the use of the target language (Peck, 2001), such as the use of dramatic activities, storytelling, songs and chants (Peck, 2001; Ministry of Education, 2011; Lu, 2014; Heathfield, 2015; Hlenschi-Stroie, 2015; Li, W., 2016) through the encouragement of self-expression (Eyring, 2001). Furthermore, enough time needs to be allowed to try and practise different ideas (de Souza Fleith, 2000; Fraser, 2006; Brinkman, 2010). Based on research on creativity and classroom experience, Read (2015) establishes seven pillars of creativity to facilitate creative teaching in EFL education,

including offering free choices to children, asking questions which require thinking, making connections between different things, and exploring and playing with ideas. These seven pillars are designed to build a constructive classroom learning environment both theoretically and practically with instructions on the use of each pillar in the classroom (Read, 2015).

Due to the implementation of the new English Curriculum Standards by the Ministry of Education in 2011 in China, teachers have placed increasing attention to the development of creativity and creative teaching in the EFL classroom (Cheng, X., 2011; Zhou, 2013; Lu, 2014; Wang, D., 2015; Li, W., 2016). Teachers are required to apply more imaginative and effective teaching approaches to contribute to students' cognitive development (Cheng, X., 2011), building a stimulating environment context for imagination (Li, H., 2010), cultivating divergent and flexible thinking skills (Wang, T., 2002; Zhou, 2013), and inspiring students to question and explore ideas (Wang, T., 2002; Cao, 2006; Zhou, 2013). Moreover, it is important for teachers to realise their changing role from knowledge-transmitters to facilitators (Li, H., 2010). Rather than following a teacher-centred approach, a student-centred model may be helpful to allow students to explore the areas that they are interested in, apply their ideas and self-evaluate their work (Rao, 2014). It is noteworthy that an increasing number of EFL teachers have started realising their role in the cultivation of creativity in the educational system (Li, H., 2010; Hua, 2012; Pang, Y., 2012; Rao, 2014).

2.2 Teachers' conceptions of creativity

In order to facilitate creative teaching in school settings, teachers need to be able to identify creative potential in students, recognise the opportunities for creative thinking in the classroom and encourage students to display their creative ideas (Brinkman, 2010; Newton, D., 2012a; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). More importantly, teachers are required to know what counts as creativity (Newton, D., 2012b), as how teachers conceptualise creativity across the curriculum and in a specific subject is related to their practice in the classroom (Craft, 2001; Newton, D., 2012a). Knowing teachers' conceptions may help shed light on the choices they make in supporting creativity in the classroom (Waters-Adams, 2006; Newton, D., 2012a), and provide insights for teacher trainers as well as policy makers to

better promote creativity in the curriculum (Newton, D., & Newton, L, 2009; Bolden, Harries & Newton, 2010; Cheung & Mok, 2013). In the literature, different terms have been used to describe the way teachers think about creativity, and *conceptions* is one of them. Other attempts include terms such as *views*, *perspectives*, *conceptualizations*, *perceptions* and *beliefs* among others (see Wiles, 2017). In the field of teacher cognition, in particular, concepts such as belief and knowledge are closely related and hard to disentangle (Borg, 2003). In this study, the term conception will indicate teachers' general mental structure that includes their system of concepts, preferences and beliefs in line with Thompson's (1992) conceptualization of teachers' beliefs and conceptions.

At a general level, it is reported that teachers' notions of creativity are similar worldwide and relatively stable over time (Newton, D., & Newton, L, 2009; Bolden et al., 2010; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012; Newton & Waugh, 2012). However, accessing teachers' notions at a general level may be 'too vague to shape planning and teaching' (Bolden et al., 2010, p.146; Newton, D., & Newton, L, 2009, p.8; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012, p.167) and focusing on a subject-specific level of conceptions may be more effective to explore a closer relationship between conceptions and teaching practices (Lunn, 2002; Beswick, 2004; Newton, D., & Newton, L, 2009; Bolden et al., 2010; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). Most importantly, the study attempts to contribute to the limited domain-specific research that exists on young learners, especially in the field of language teacher cognition (Borg, 2003).

In studies investigating teachers' conceptions of creativity in primary and secondary school English, teachers tended to have narrow and inadequate conceptions of constructions of creativity (Howell, 2008; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). Moreover, teachers were uncertain about the creative part in a teaching practice (Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012), with inconsistent thinking and misconceptions sometimes occurring (Howell, 2008). A similar piece of research conducted with primary EFL teachers in Kuwait (Al-Nouh et al., 2014) reported teachers' high regard towards creative thinking and learning which was influenced by the teachers' age, their teaching experience and training. However, research on teachers' conceptions of creativity in English or EFL is still limited. (Newton & Waugh, 2012).

Meanwhile, it is also important to note that the link between teachers' beliefs and practices is often complicated and mediated by factors, such as the pressure to cover content, teachers' experience and knowledge, and reactions from the pupils (Bolden, 2006; Newton, D., & Newton, L, 2009; Newton, D., 2012a; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). Nonetheless, teachers who do not know what creativity means in the classroom are unlikely to support the development of creative thinking (Newton, D., 2012a).

2.3 Fostering creativity in the Chinese context

Creativity has attracted increasing attention in China since the late 20th century, particularly in response to the rapid development of global economy and intercultural exchanges in the 21st century (Niu, 2006). It has been valued as an important component of education, and developing creativity through the curriculum has become a priority in policy documents (Vong, 2008; Cheng, M. Y., 2010; Hui & Lau, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2010; Shaheen, 2010; Pang, W. & Plucker, 2013; Hartley & Plucker, 2014). For example, according to the national medium- and long-term guidelines for education reform and development in Mainland China (Ministry of Education, 2010), cultivating creativity is one of the major objectives of education, and appropriate environment should be provided for students to think independently and be brave to create new ideas.

Research has shown that more innovative and modern teaching approaches have been applied to integrate creativity in Chinese schools (Hartley & Plucker, 2014). For example, play-based teaching activities are considered to be stimulation for children's creativity in early childhood education (Vong, 2013). Dramatic play encourages children to produce new scripts, and corner play allows them to imagine while making use of open-ended materials placed in various corners in the learning environment (Vong, 2013).

Nonetheless, it has been noted that the educational reforms to infuse creativity are not widespread around China, and there are also limited studies on how the policies have been translated into teaching practice (Hartley & Plucker, 2014). Meanwhile, creativity education has been confronted with different dilemmas and tensions from various perspectives,

including the nature of pedagogical practices and the educational testing system (Niu & Sternberg, 2003; Cheng, M. Y., 2010). Traditional teacher-centred, book-centred and grammar-based methods do not disappear (Zhang, Y., & Wang, J., 2011), and the teaching of basic knowledge and analytical skills is more stressed by many teachers in China (Niu & Sternberg, 2003). Thus, students seem to have fewer opportunities to engage in activities which foster creativity (Niu & Sternberg, 2003), and teachers may also struggle with their role between being a facilitator in creative teaching and being a knowledge-transmitter (Cheng, M. Y., 2010). Additionally, high-stakes tests, as a worldwide challenge, also hinder creativity education in China, and seem to play a more vital role in the Chinese educational system (Niu & Sternberg, 2003). Consequently, more attention has been paid to master the knowledge and skills required in the exams (Cheng, X., 2011), in order to succeed in the tests rather than cultivating creativity (Niu & Sternberg, 2003).

2.4 Challenging environmental context for creativity in China

It is crucial to realise the important role of cultural and social environment on valuing and developing creativity (Amabile, 1982,1983,1996; Simonton, 1984,1992,1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Amabile & Conti, 1997; Niu & Sternberg, 2003; Newton, D., 2012b; Gauntlett & Thomsen, 2013; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015). Cultural variation may result in different desirable behaviours in different contexts (Newton, D., & Newton, L, 2009; Newton, D. & Donkin, 2011; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015). Amabile (1982,1983,1996; Amabile & Conti, 1997) summarises the effects of society on creativity as ‘the social environment, including a society’s educational system, overall classroom climate, school and work environment, and family, could be important resources to facilitate or inhibit a person’s creativity’ (Niu & Sternberg, 2003, p.104). Consequently, it is necessary to have a better understanding of the cultural and social environment in the discourse of creativity in the Chinese context, in order to explore appropriate approaches to develop creativity (Cheng, M.Y., 2010; Kwang, 2001).

Chinese social culture is often regarded as not encouraging creative thinking (Kwang, 2001; Runco & Johnson, 2002; Niu & Sternberg, 2003; UNESCO, 2006; Chien & Hui, 2010; Gauntlett & Thomsen, 2013). Conformity and obedience rather than individuality tended to

be more valued in the classroom under the influence of Confucian culture, which may limit Chinese students' freedom in creative expression (Niu & Sternberg, 2003; Cheng, M. Y., 2010; Chien & Hui, 2010). Students are more expected to listen to teachers rather than raise questions (Cheng, M.Y., 2010; Zhao & Wang, N., 2013). Besides, individuals usually construct themselves in an interdependent manner with others and the society (Kwang, 2001), and seek to fit in the larger community with relevant others (Niu & Sternberg, 2003). Being creative sometimes may differentiate an individual from others, yet 'standing out from the crowd generally is not highly appreciated in Chinese societies' (Niu & Sternberg, 2003, p.108). Along with the nature of pedagogic practice of stressing basic knowledge and analytical abilities over self-exploration, and the pressure that derives from the educational testing system, there seems to be less incentive for cultivating creativity in the Chinese context (Niu & Sternberg, 2003).

One obstacle which might be typical in the Asian contexts may be the physical classroom environment (Cheng, M. Y., 2010; Li, W., 2016). Due to the large class size (Kim, 2008; Cheng, M.Y., 2010), traditional seating arrangements are usually applied in Chinese schools, in which tables and chairs are organised in straight lines facing the blackboard (Cheng, M.Y., 2010; Li, W., 2016). Although this type of classroom arrangement facilitates teachers' control over the class and helps students keep focused, it limits the communication between students and fails to inspire students' creative engagement (Cheng, M.Y., 2010; Li, W., 2016). In particular, for those students who sit at back rows of the classroom, it is pointed out that they may find it hard to see the blackboard and listen to the teacher clearly (Li, W., 2016). Meanwhile, they tend to receive little attention from the teacher, and have fewer opportunities to respond to questions (Li, W., 2016). Consequently, their interest and motivation in learning may decrease (Li, W., 2016), which may further restrict their willingness to engage and express. What is worse, if the teacher tries to change the seats and group the students, little time may be left for the lesson (Cheng, M.Y., 2010). As a result, some teachers have expressed their tiredness in conducting creative activities in such a handicapped classroom environment (Cheng, M.Y., 2010).

These theoretical as well as empirical studies indicate a discrepancy between Chinese

classroom culture and creativity culture in China (see Cheng, M.Y., 2010), and a lower need for autonomy to energise creative ideas in Chinese students compared with their western counterparts (Niu & Sternberg, 2003). Based on a comparison with other countries such as the US and Japan, Ma (2000) summarises that creative education is not only an educational issue but also a social issue in China, given the unsupportive social environment for cultivation of creative thoughts. China may need to learn from the achievements in creative education in the West, and establish a social as well as educational system which truly values and encourages creativity (Ma, 2000; Zhao & Wang, N., 2013). However, when learning from others' success in creative education, it is important and necessary to realise the difference in values, desirability and emphasis on creativity between the Eastern and the Western culture (Craft, 2005,2006; Newton, L., 2012b). Cheng (2010) raises cautions against applying directly the ideas of creative education originated from the Western context to the East. Instead, a progressive and culturally fit model for the development of creativity in the Chinese-specific context is needed (Cheng, M.Y., 2010), and teachers are recommended to start from the creative elements 'which are easier to be induced in the existing curriculum and school environment' (Cheng, M.Y., 2010, p.135). Given the classroom culture which usually values submissive obedience, Niu and Sternberg (2003) argue that simply providing permission to creativity may help to enhance students' creative performance. Students are guided and encouraged to break the restricted norms and display their creative ideas, which might be the starting point for educators to facilitate creative teaching (Niu & Sternberg, 2003). Based on analysis of the differences between Asian and western cultures, Kwang (2001) suggests a number of guidelines specifically for Asian students to be more creative. For example, both schools and parents need to help children to develop a positive self-concept in order to enhance children's confidence as individuals when trying something new or taking risks (Kwang, 2001). Additionally, more freedom and space should be provided for students to question, explore, and show their creative spirit without being scolded by the voice of judgement (Ma, 2000; Kwang, 2001). Ward and Newton (2012) have argued that it is imperative to recognise the social context of the discourse of creativity, and avoid leaving national cultures behind in the pursuit of a more creative society (Ward & Newton, 2012).

Literature on creativity in English often focuses on the conceptions of teachers in western countries (see Howell, 2008; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012; Newton & Waugh, 2012; Al-Nouh et al., 2014). It is therefore worth exploring how teachers from a non-western context understand creativity, and the relationship between their beliefs and practices in disciplines such as English or EFL. To respond to the call for cultivating creativity in education and address the gap in the literature, this research investigated teachers' conceptions of creativity with a focus on the Chinese context, and placed particular attention to the teaching of EFL subject in primary schools to examine the relationship between teachers' conceptions and their teaching practice (Newton, D., & Newton, L, 2009; Bolden et al., 2010; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). It is noteworthy that how English teachers perceive and promote creativity in the primary school classroom may be influenced by the fact that English is taught and learnt as a foreign language in the Chinese context.

3. Methodology

Purposive sampling was considered the most suitable sampling approach for the current study as the aim was to find appropriate participants that could offer fruitful information to the research questions. For this reason, 26 primary school teachers currently teaching English (EFL) in 7 different public primary schools in Beijing, were purposefully approached and invited to participate in the research. These schools' teaching effectiveness and overall performance are considered to be of at least a good standard in the region according to the region based school ranking, and five of them are in top 50% in the region in 2017 (see school ranking on www.xschu.com on October 31th 2017). Teachers from these schools were approached because it was hoped that they would be able to provide insightful information given their educational results and teaching expertise. The majority of the participants were female (92.3%) which may be representative of the EFL teacher body in primary education (Kokotsaki, 2012; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012; Al-Nouh et al., 2014). More than half were 30-39 years old, while there were also a few younger (20-29 years old) and middle-aged teachers (40-49 years old). The amount of time the teachers spent on EFL teaching in primary schools ranged from 1 year to more than 15 years.

Data were collected through questionnaires and a follow-up interview. All 26 participants were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of 17 open-ended questions (see Appendix A), which was modified and developed from the one used with British teachers (see, for example, Howell, 2008; Bolden et al., 2010; Kokotsaki, 2011; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012; and Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015). Any particular issues with the use of this adapted version of the questionnaire in the Chinese context were not anticipated. The questions were open-ended enough to allow for participants to contribute their own personal accounts and examples of the use of creativity in their classrooms without stressing any particular views or approaches to creative teaching and learning. The only attributes of creativity that were shared with the participants involved the development of skill, imagination and the novelty of the creative product which are well-established attributes in the creativity literature. Furthermore, the questions that referred to subjects taught at schools were adapted to the Chinese schooling context.

The questionnaire aimed to enable the participants to reflect on their perceptions of creativity and teaching practice regarding the implementation of creativity in their EFL classroom. Specific examples based on experiences in schools were required in some questions to illustrate the situations in which creativity was encouraged and fostered. Following the questionnaire, 10 teachers further participated in an interview to provide richer data on teachers' conceptions of creativity. They were asked to explain their understandings and attitudes toward creativity in the EFL classroom in more depth, and reflect on the wider climate of encouraging creative thoughts in EFL teaching and learning (see Appendix B).

Both questionnaires and interviews were conducted via email. Whereas data collection via questionnaires sent to participants electronically is a well-established method of collecting research data (see, for example, Kokotsaki, 2012; Tymms, 2012), the decision to follow up some participants' responses in more depth via email was made for convenience and to deal with the issue of participant accessibility. While email questionnaires and interviews helped the researcher to save time and travel costs when collecting data from a number of schools, email interviews also enabled to conduct different interviews at the same time

through sending the same questions to different participants (Hunt & McHale, 2007; Robson, 2011). In addition to the list of questions, other subsequent questions were asked which varied from each participant according to the responses received. The researcher and the participants were given the chance to refer to previous email scripts which allowed access to a bank of information for further consideration and reflection. In this research, questionnaire and interview questions were sent directly to the participants, and were expected to be returned by a given date. All participants had easy access to computers and the Internet.

In terms of data analysis, the phenomenographical approach was adopted as its emphasis on people's conceptions and their understanding of the world around them (Marton, 1981,1986; Dall'Alba, 1996; Åkerlind, 2012) accords with the aims of this research to understand how teachers perceive creativity in the EFL classroom. Phenomenography has been extensively applied in previous studies on teachers' conceptions of creativity in the UK context (Howell, 2008; Newton, D. & Newton, L., 2009; Bolden et al., 2010; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015).

'Categories of description' are the primary outcomes of phenomenographic analysis (Marton, 1981,1986; Dall'Alba, 1996; Entwistle, 1997; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Instead of determining the categories in advance prior to the research, meanings are developed in the process of comparing and sorting utterances to specific categories based on their similarities and differences (Marton, 1981,1986). In this study, EFL teachers' responses to the questionnaire and interview were, firstly, thematically coded and then sorted into four emerging categories of description following a strongly iterative and comparative process in line with the phenomenographic analytic method (Åkerlind, 2005). Links within and between different categories of description, or ways of experiencing (Entwistle, 1997; Marton & Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2012) were analysed, and explored within the context of the group of conceptions as a whole (Åkerlind, Bowden & Green, 2005; Åkerlind, 2012). Particular attention was paid to identifying both the similarities and the variation in teachers' creativity conceptions in order to identify their complexity. The commonalities and diversity

in conceptions were carefully considered, analysed and formed part of the final analytic framework as presented in the next findings section.

The research has adhered to the ethical guidelines, and ethical approval has been granted by the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee of the University. Participants were informed of the aims and procedures of the research, and of the voluntary basis of their participation. Each participant was approached separately, and no sensitive or identifiable questions were asked in either the questionnaire or the interview. Although the questionnaire contained the participants' names, its aim was to know who had completed the questionnaire (Bell, 2010) in order to check on those who had not. Anonymity has been preserved in the presentation of the research results.

Translation between Chinese and English was another issue which needed to be carefully considered. Participants were allowed to respond in Chinese in both the questionnaire and the interview when they felt uncomfortable to express their thoughts in English. When participants chose to express their thoughts in Chinese, subsequent discussion and further clarification took place in Chinese too. In order to maintain the authenticity of the data and stay as close as possible to the meaning of participants' conceptions as these were articulated, the Chinese-English translation was carried out after the data analysis. In order to represent the participants' views of creativity as accurately as possible, a combination of approaches was used to test the translation, such as checking for comprehension, naturalness and readability, and translating English back into Chinese (Esposito, 2001). Besides, when translating the phrases, more focus was given on technical and conceptual accuracy in the given context, rather than on their literal translation (Overing, 1987; Temple, 1997; Squires, 2009). How the words conceptually related to the context was valued along with the literal meaning of the words (Gee, 1990), in order to overcome language barriers and perform a good translation according to good practice in qualitative research (Squires, 2009). For instance, 'knowledge from the textbook was placed at the first place' (literally translation from *shuben zhishi fangzai diyiwei* in Chinese) was regarded as a reason to demonstrate little space for creativity in the classroom. This phrase was translated into 'knowledge from the textbook was more prioritised (than fostering creativity in the

classroom)' in data analysis to emphasise the teaching priority in EFL teachers' practice in primary schools, and further how it might constrain children's creativity.

4. Findings

With no drop-outs from both the questionnaire and interview, research results are presented below in three stages, including some background beliefs held by the EFL teachers, categories of conceptions of creativity in the EFL classroom, and the encouragement of creative thoughts in a wider context. Comments from the interviews were combined in the results presentation to corroborate, supplement and extend the findings from the questionnaire as appropriate (see Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012).

4.1 Background beliefs

Although there was variation in responses, more than half of the respondents (61.5%) believed that primary school EFL subject was creative. Reasons to justify their views included opportunities to ask various kinds of questions in class, and create a playful and inspiring environment for pupils to use English creatively. However, some teachers (11.5%) stressed the 'paradox' between fostering creativity and the primary goal of developing linguistic competence in EFL primary education. According to them, EFL could not be considered as creative as children were only taught about linguistic knowledge and skills, and were asked to imitate English native speakers of how they use the language. Other respondents (15.4%) pointed out the complexity in understanding creativity in foreign language education as well, and perceived primary EFL subject to be creative 'sometimes'. While some activities such as reading dialogues provided little space for creative thoughts, creativity could be found sometimes in other activities, such as making new dialogues and stories in which more freedom was provided to children without worrying about finding the 'right answer'.

In terms of whether other primary school subjects provided more or fewer opportunities for creative thoughts than EFL, there was a variation in opinions among the respondents (see Figure 1). For most of the teachers, art (drawing and painting) and science were

overwhelmingly perceived to be more creative than EFL, as these two subjects offered more opportunities for imagination and thinking, and were open to different answers. On the other hand, some primary school subjects were considered to be less creative, such as physical education (38.5%), music (30.8%), Chinese and ethics and social life (23.1% for both). Reasons often linked to 'learning content', 'traditional teaching and learning approach' and 'little space for thinking'. For example, due to the fact-based approach in ethics and social life classes (consisting of learning of history, geography and politics), children were primarily expected to memorise the factual knowledge from the textbook by rote to survive from the exams, rather than thinking about other questions or generating new ideas. There was a similar situation in Chinese and music subjects. It may be interesting to note that although music was considered by teachers as an effective technique to stimulate pupils' interest and creative expressions in English classes (Peck, 2001; Newton & Waugh, 2012), according to 8 respondents, music itself as a subject tended to emphasise more on basic knowledge and singing skills.

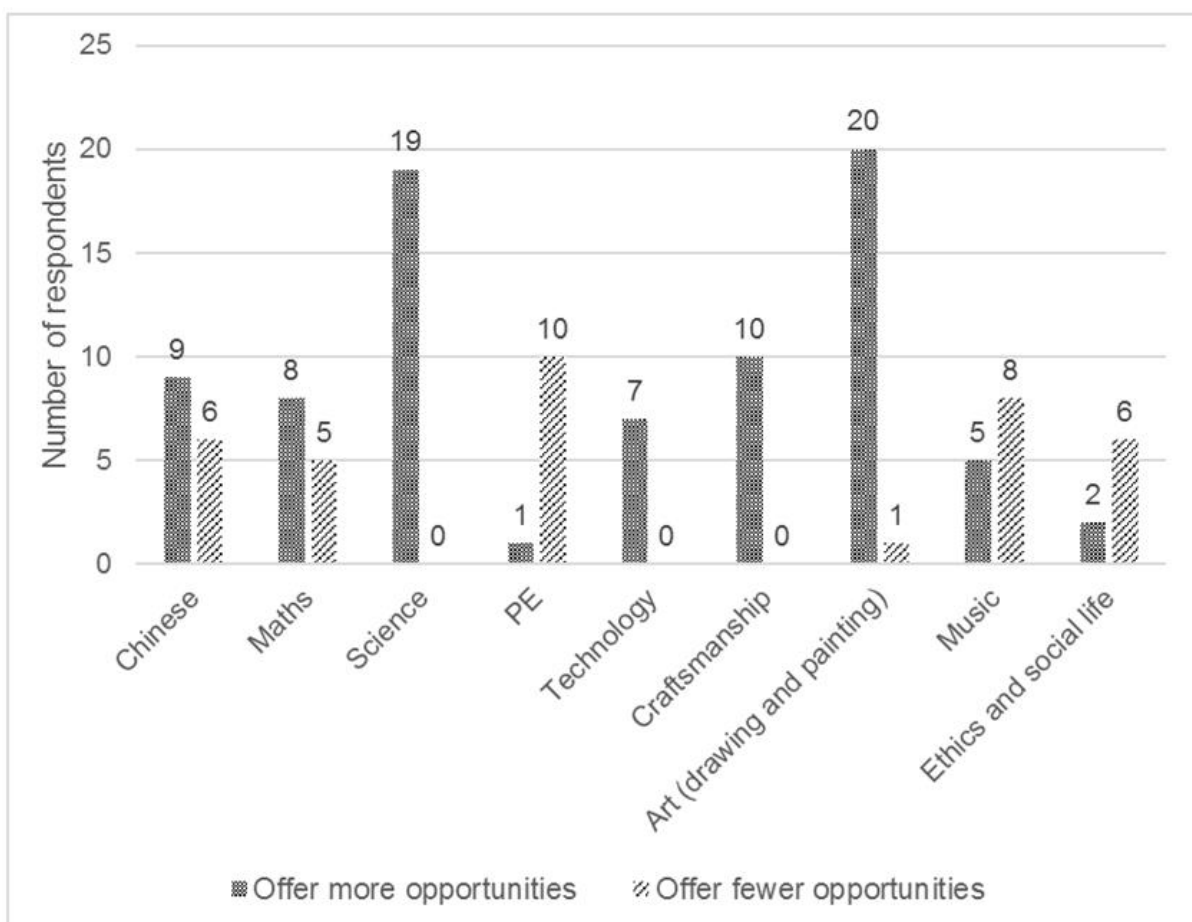


Figure 1. Teachers' views regarding opportunities for creative thought in different primary school subjects

Responses to Q1 to 5 in the questionnaire have shown that most respondents agreed that primary English was a creative subject, although other subjects such as science and art were more favoured. However, it seemed that some teachers were uncertain about whether there was space for creativity in the EFL classroom, especially when linguistic skills and competence were more emphasised in foreign language learning.

4.2 Conceptions of creativity in primary school EFL classrooms

Q6 to 11 elicited teachers' conceptions of creativity in primary school EFL with examples in their practice, including a general (Q6-8) and a topic-specific example (Q9-11) of creativity. Responses to these two blocks of questions were paralleled and combined when appropriate to explore how teachers understood creativity. The most common descriptions of creativity from teachers' responses were shown in Table 1.

Categories of descriptions	Number of respondents	Examples of notions
Creation of original texts	18	'creation of a new dialogue/ story ending/ English verse/ chant/ English diary'; 'new ideas expressed in English'
Imagination/ thinking/ use of own ideas	10	'imagine a situation'; 'think by themselves'
Freedom	10	'freedom to choose'; 'freedom to express'
Creative teaching approaches	10	'use of arts forms such as art, music and dance'; 'creative use of teaching materials and tools'; 'task-based language teaching approach'

Table 1. Most common descriptions of creativity in the EFL classroom.

In general terms, many teachers had appropriate perceptions of creativity and were able to identify what constituted creativity in their practices. They approached creativity from

various perspectives and many of their conceptions covered different categories. According to nearly 70% of respondents, creativity in EFL referred to the creation of original texts in English, such as new dialogues, story endings and English verses. Teachers valued and encouraged children to have new ideas and express themselves with the use of English. The focus on creative 'products' seems also to be connected with notions of imagination, thinking, freedom of choice and expression. A few teachers recognised that the teaching practices that involved creative thoughts were those where children had freedom to choose and made decisions independently, and where they spent time imagining and thinking before producing their own ideas. On the other hand, creativity was also understood as creative pedagogical approaches, or teaching creatively by a few teachers (38.5%). Different types of methods and activities such as music (songs), art (drawing), dance and games were used with an aim to create an inspiring environment and increase pupils' interest in English. These approaches were reported to be necessary especially when learning might be dull.

However, the teacher needed to create a classroom environment where learners would develop open-mindedness to consider varied possibilities in the production of language, figure out for themselves certain linguistic rules or discover their individual ways of practicing the new language. These points are illustrated in the quotes that follow.

'For example, because some vocabulary is complex and hard to pronounce and memorize, teachers can let students find out the rules of composing these words, such as head+ache, tooth+ache, ear+ache, and stomach+ache. Students figure out the rules by themselves to pronounce ...and this process cultivate their creative thinking skills.' (Respondent 15)

'(The creative part of teaching Lesson 11 to primary school students is that) Everything is not certain. There are many possible things. It's open-minded...' (Respondent 2)

'Students need to adjust themselves in real life situation according to their abilities and tasks to complete. They choose their own way to complete the task, which can help them practise their comprehensive skills....' (Respondent 8)

To conclude, teachers' conceptualisations of creativity in EFL may be categorised into four more general clusters which represent on a more abstract level the four categories of description introduced above: creative product-focused (76.9%), cognitive development (69.2%), pedagogical approaches (50%) and control of behaviours (38.5%) (see Figure 2).

Table 2 provides examples from the questionnaire and the interview.

Four clusters	Number of respondents	Example quotations
Creative product-focused	20	1. 'The learning output in EFL teaching shows students' creativity, for example,...the new dialogue they make, the new endings of story they write...'(Respondent 5)
		2. 'Creativity in English for EFL countries is the ability to use English as an important tool to communicate and think fluently.' (Respondent 13)
Cognitive development	18	1. The creative part in a lesson: 'When children read the picture book, they can think about something...'(Respondent 22)
		2. The creative part in a lesson: 'To stimulate students' rich imagination by using objects, pictures, drawings and teaches' body language.' (Respondent 3)
Pedagogical approaches	13	1. 'When students read the book <i>Run Cat Run</i> , students need to predict what animals will say to Cat, and what Cat will respond. (This is the creative part of the lesson.)' (Respondent 5)
		2. 'Creativity in EFL class is to create teaching methods, materials needed for teaching, activities and situations in class, and something students are interested in. Teachers need to encourage students to participate, to present, and enhance their sense of achievement. Anyway, creativity is everywhere...'(Respondent 21)
Control of behaviours	10	1. '(Creativity in EFL is about) Do not limit their [children's] imagination, give them more opportunities to think, and give encouragement.' (Respondent 18)
		2. The creative part in a lesson: 'Students can choose whichever way of travelling as they like from the lesson <i>How do seeds travel</i> , and

		create new dialogues. It's up to them.' (Respondent 10)
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Table 2. Examples of four general clusters of conceptions of creativity in the EFL classroom.

As the largest cluster, product-focused conceptions referred to the creation of something new during or at the end of the learning process, and the ability to use the language flexibly and learn the language in their own way. Cognitive development as the second largest cluster related to children's mental activity that incorporated creative thoughts, such as imagination, thinking, and being open-minded during the process of thinking. The third cluster, pedagogical approaches, referred to different imaginative and inspiring approaches used in the classroom to teach creatively. The last cluster of control of behaviours within the learning process was concerned with children's freedom to choose and express their feelings. These clusters may represent teachers' outlook on creativity in EFL from different perspectives.

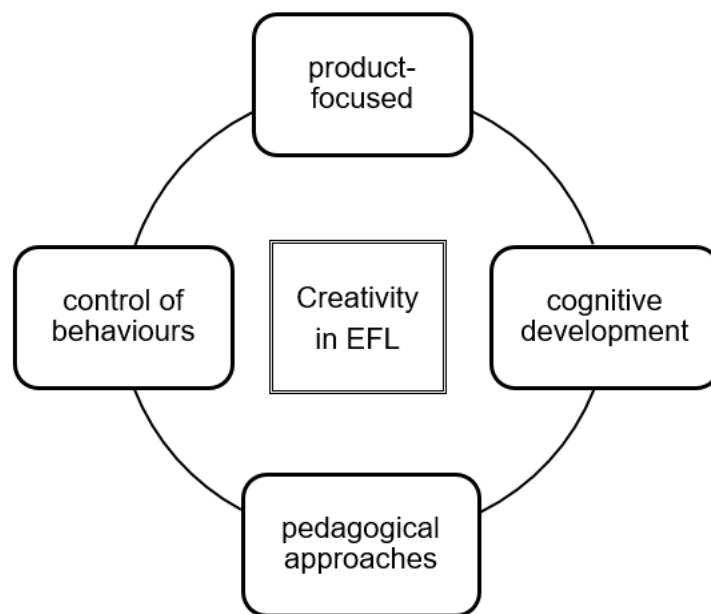


Figure 2. Interaction of four clusters of teachers' conceptions of creativity in EFL (adapted from Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012).

4.3 Encouraging creativity in EFL

At the end of the questionnaire and interview, teachers were asked about their views of encouraging creativity in primary EFL. Almost all the respondents in the interview (90%) pointed out the importance of cultivating creativity in teaching. Many agreed that creative thought was beneficial for personal development, enabling children to be open to different

ideas and think from various perspectives. Additionally, the teachers incorporated the use of creative teaching approaches in their EFL classes as these were thought to increase pupils' interest in learning and enable them to enjoy the learning process.

According to responses to Q15 and 16, although a small number of respondents (15.4%) considered it was easy to foster creativity in primary EFL, the majority (84.6%) had a different view. A number of challenges and barriers were identified. These can be summarised as mainly four aspects as shown in Figure 3. Example quotations are listed in Table 3.

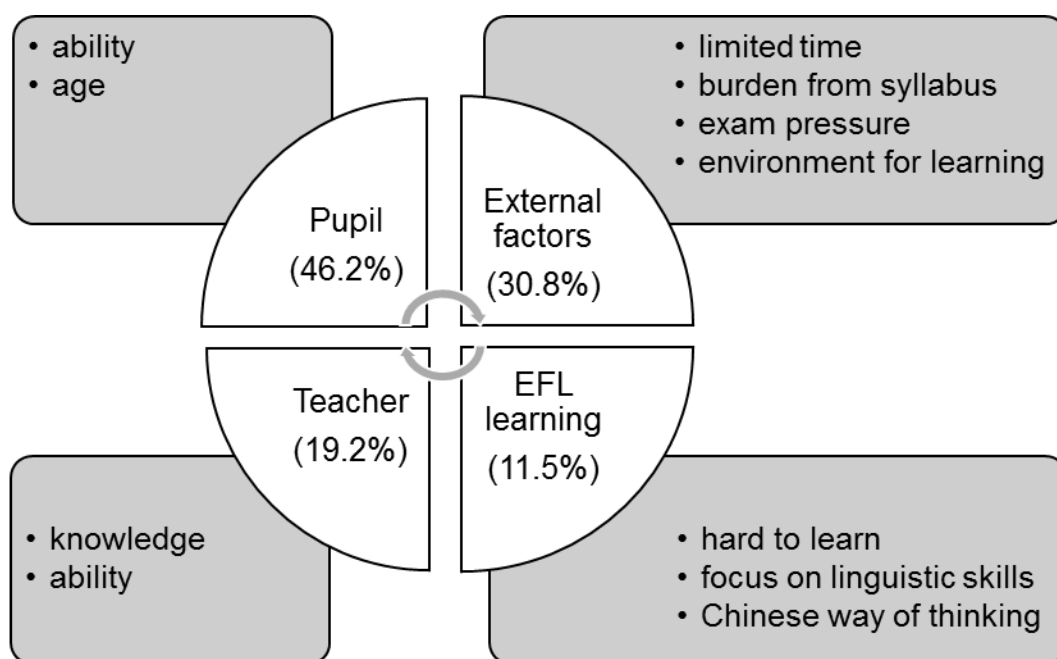


Figure 3. Illustration of each aspect of constraints.

Four main challenges	Number of respondents	Example quotations
Pupil	12	1. 'Most of the students in my class are good at trying to answer the question. They rarely ask questions. I think creative thought needs questions.' (Respondent 6)
		2. 'The children are too young.' (Respondent 22)
		3. 'Children don't know many words and lack knowledge about grammar. So at the beginning of English learning, they

		are a little shy to show themselves.’ (Respondent 14)
External factors	8	1. ‘There is limited time in class, so teachers have limited attention to put both on developing creativity and covering textbooks to pass the exams.’ (Respondent 11)
		2. ‘...The class size is big. Classroom decoration is not relevant to English learning. There is too much to cover in the syllabus. We teach to let students pass the exam.’ (Respondent 8)
EFL learning	3	1. ‘It is an EFL subject after all. Students mainly learn vocabulary and sentence patterns in class, and the teaching aim set by teachers is to enable students to listen, speak, read and write well, rarely considering fostering creativity.’ (Respondent 15)
		2. ‘As a country which doesn’t take English as a native language, children might be more used to thinking and exploring in their native language, unless when they need to read some English materials.’ (Respondent 13)
Teacher	5	1. ‘It need [asks] teachers [to] have more knowledge and wisdom in teaching.’ (Respondent 21)
		2. ‘Teachers need to know their students well before delivering a lesson, understand the textbook well and get fully prepared before class, so they can come up with the activities, tasks or questions which can foster students’ creativity. It is also necessary for teachers to have good language competence, teaching theory and practical skills.’ (Respondent 26)

Table 3. Examples of four main challenges in encouraging creativity in the EFL classroom.

Nearly half of the teachers (46.2%) linked the encouragement of creativity with children’s age and ability. Some were concerned that pupils were too young and it may be hard for them to produce new ideas in English without enough knowledge and thinking skills. Besides, a few teachers were concerned that a lack of linguistic knowledge and

competence may constrain children to express themselves in English. Therefore, they would be more focused on teaching of knowledge rather than teaching for creativity in their practice. Children's lack of other abilities such as imagination, open-minded thinking and questioning were also thought to hinder teachers from encouraging creative thoughts in the EFL class. Secondly, a few external limiting factors were also mentioned. Limited class time for teaching English, the heavy burden from syllabus requirements and pressure from exams and tests were pointed out, which led to little space for teachers to practice creative teaching. Additionally, the large class size and irrelevant classroom layout were also mentioned to illustrate the failure of creating a stimulating physical environment. With traditional arrangement of seats in rows and little relation to English language use, it was considered hard to inspire children to express and generate their own ideas. Furthermore, EFL was described by some teachers as a hard subject to learn for most pupils. The teaching objectives were more about linguistic and communicative competence rather than creativity in current EFL teaching practice. Given the limited time for teaching, creativity had to be sacrificed when teachers tried to cover all the curriculum content and prepare the pupils for exams and tests. Additionally, teachers' knowledge and ability were also identified as an important factor to facilitate or hinder the encouragement of creativity (11.5%). Only when teachers were confident of their theoretical knowledge and practical skills to nurture creativity, they would be able to guide and encourage children to be creative.

Although obstacles may be confronted, nearly all the teachers recognised their important role in encouraging creativity, according to the strategies they suggested to facilitate creative teaching. Playful activities, stories, picture books, art forms such as music and drama were commonly mentioned by respondents as effective approaches for teachers to encourage creative thinking. While these strategies were more focused on using imaginative teaching approaches and teaching creatively, there were other strategies suggested aiming to promote children's creative thinking. For example, cultivation of autonomous learning and asking open questions rather than simple fact-based questions were suggested to be helpful to inspire imagination, encourage more thinking and generate new ideas.

5. Discussion

Creativity was valued by the majority of participants in the research, and attention has been paid to both teaching creatively and teaching for creativity in primary EFL. Although most of teachers' conceptions of creativity tended to focus on creative output of English, thinking, imagination as well as freedom in choice and expression during the cognitive process were also recognised by many teachers as important components of creativity in EFL. Besides, EFL teachers have made efforts actively to shift their traditional teaching approaches to more modern and creative ones to better facilitate creative teaching (Cheng, X., 2011), including the use of arts forms, role play and stories, although several challenges of encouraging creativity have also been identified which echoes the wider literature.

One major characteristic of the teachers' practice is the integration of arts in the EFL classroom. Artistic activities such as drawing, singing, and role playing were often mentioned as more favoured approaches to foster creative thoughts, create a stimulating environment and motivate children to learn in the EFL classroom (Zhou, 2013; Lu, 2014; Read, 2015; Li, W., 2016). This belief indicates what education may learn from arts education (Eisner, 2002; UNESCO, 2006). While much of current schooling seems to emphasise more legitimated knowledge with single correct answers, arts in class allow for different answers and solutions to a question or problem (Eisner, 2002). Rather than instructing each child to reach the same destination, education integrated with arts celebrate variability and children's personal signatures (Eisner, 2002; Humes, 2011).

Another feature of teachers' responses is the emphasis on motivation and the educational environment in primary classrooms. It echoes the teaching objectives proposed in the curriculum standards (see Cheng, X., 2011; Ministry of Education, 2011). According to the English Curriculum Standards in Mainland China (Ministry of Education, 2011), primary EFL education should foster pupils' interest, motivation and self-confidence in learning and using the English language (Li, H., 2010; Zhang, L.H. & Chen, Q., 2010; Cheng, X., 2011; Hua, 2012; Lu, 2014; Li, W., 2016). Besides, motivation, especially intrinsic and task-focused motivation is beneficial for creative endeavours (Sternberg, 2003). Individuals

are more likely to react creatively when they have intense interest on the subject matter, enjoy the challenging process, show willingness to take risks and focus on the task itself rather than extrinsic motivators such as rewards and grades (Sternberg, 2003; Zhang, L., 2013). On the other hand, creativity also needs to be cultivated by providing a stimulating environment (Zhang, L., 2013). A supportive and rewarding environment is an important external resource to display the creative ideas residing within children through stimulating, encouraging, evaluating and rewarding creative ideas (Sternberg & Lubart, 1991; Sternberg, 2003; Cox, 2009; Foxall & James, 2009; Zhang, L., 2013).

However, it was found that a few teachers seemed to have a richer understanding of creativity than others. They tended to be able to provide more detailed illustrations in their EFL teaching practice, discuss different components of creativity, such as imagination and thinking, the creation of related classroom arrangement and environment, and make connections between old and new knowledge (Cropley, 2001; Craft, 2002; QCA, 2004; Howell, 2008; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). Thinking and mental activity were emphasised to generate new ideas, and cross-curricular links were made in the learning process such as integrating EFL learning with art and music (Craft, 2001; Kokotsaki, 2012). Moreover, teachers with relatively rich conceptions articulated different teaching approaches and strategies to foster thinking and encourage expression in English, including teaching through stories and playful games. In contrast, some teachers appeared to hold limited conceptions of creativity. For example, a few teachers doubted the relationship between creativity and EFL education, and claimed that fostering creativity in the EFL classroom was dependent on children's age and ability, and paid no attention to teachers' skills, training and capability in modelling the activities. Similar results have been found among student-teachers' conceptions of creativity in primary music classrooms in the UK (Kokotsaki, 2012).

Due to the study's limited data and small sample size, it may be hard to explain the reason why some teachers appeared to have relatively rich conceptions of creativity while others did not. Teaching experience might contribute to the richer conception to some extent (Al-Nouh et al., 2014). Nonetheless, the narrow and limited understanding of creativity in

the research points out to the need to stress creativity in teacher education and training (Hodges, 2005; Vass, 2007; Howell, 2008; Anderson-Patton, 2009; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). Teachers need to realise that 'creativity is not mysterious, elitist or inaccessible' (Simmons & Thompson, 2008, p.606), and they can adopt elements of creativity when acting as a facilitator in their teaching (Fisher, 2005; Cremin & Barnes, 2014). Meanwhile, teacher training needs to better prepare teachers with appropriate conceptions of creativity, as well as knowledge, skills and positive attitudes for development of creative abilities in the classroom (Howell, 2008; Newton, D., 2012b).

Furthermore, a few teachers in the research were uncertain about whether there was place for creativity in foreign language learning. Instead, they emphasised language acquisition by rote. It may be true that teaching practices in foreign language education put much stress on the 'repetitive production of refabricated language patterns' (Legutke et al., 2009, p.28) and facts about language (Ostojčić, 1975). However, children's creative potential in the foreign language classroom should not be undermined (Legutke et al., 2009; Read, 2015). Even if pupils have insufficient language resources to express themselves in the target language, opportunities still exist for teachers to foster creativity with the establishment of creative contexts (Markova, 2015).

6. Conclusion

Creativity has been highlighted as a crucial life skill to develop in education (Turner, 2013). This research explored teachers' conceptions of creativity and their practice in developing creative ideas with a particular focus on primary EFL subject and the Chinese context. The findings have offered a better understanding of teachers' views and practice in creative education, which may help educators worldwide realise what is happening inside Chinese schools regarding children's cultivation of creative thoughts (Hartley & Plucker, 2014). Teachers need to know the meaning of creativity in a specific subject as well as across the curriculum, realise the dilemmas in creative teaching, and be capable to achieve their teaching aims through applying appropriate approaches (Newton, D., 2012a; Newton, L., 2012b). Therefore, limited conceptions as well as challenges in creative education found in the research may indicate further efforts in teacher education to equip teachers with

necessary and sufficient knowledge and skills to facilitate creative teaching (Demetrulias, 1989; Howell, 2008; Anderson-Patton, 2009; Newton, L., 2012b; Newton, L. & Beverton, 2012). Furthermore, it is also important to realise that the understanding of creativity may be different in different countries due to their unique cultures and social values (Kwang, 2001; Niu & Sternberg, 2003; Newton, D., & Newton, L, 2009; Cheng, M.Y., 2010; Newton, D. & Donkin, 2011; Newton, L., 2012a; Gauntlett & Thomsen, 2013; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015). It may not be wise to transfer theories and practices blindly from one culture to another without recognising the differences in cultural and social contexts (Cheng, M.Y., 2010). Most importantly, the study contributes to the limited domain-specific research with young learners in the field of language teacher cognition (Borg, 2003) and provides useful insights into the particular under-researched field of Chinese teachers' conceptions of creativity in the EFL context.

The limitations of this research need to be acknowledged as well, for example, findings in the research may not be generalisable due to the small sample size. Richer categories of conceptions of creativity in primary EFL may have emerged if the sample was larger (Howell, 2008). Besides, this research mainly focused on primary EFL teachers in some schools in Beijing, China, however, teachers from different regions in Beijing and other cities may have different views on creativity, according to their teaching experience and the overall educational level of the area (Zhang, Y., & Wang, J., 2011). It is argued that teachers from developed areas with better English teaching level and resources in China might have better understanding of how to foster creativity, compared to those who are from undeveloped areas with poor English provision (Zhang, Y., & Wang, J., 2011). Furthermore, interview data were collected through an email communication with the participants. While rich data were collected through this approach, it is possible that a face-to-face interview could have uncovered aspects of teachers' conceptions on a deeper or more insightful level.

Further research is necessary to investigate teachers' conceptions of creativity and their practice to promote creative thoughts in more depth, and the influential factors that affect teachers' conceptions (Cheung & Mok, 2013; Al-Nouh et al., 2014). Meanwhile, it may be

worth examining students' development of creativity at different educational stages and within different cultural contexts (Howell, 2008; Cheung & Mok, 2013).

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Appendices

Appendix A. Questionnaire: Creativity in primary school English (China)

Gender: Male/ Female

Age group: 20-29 30-39 40-49

How long have you been teaching English as a second language in the primary school:
_____ year(s)

1. Do you think primary school English is a creative* subject?

Yes/ No/ Sometimes/ Don't know

[Definition of 'creative': a. involving the use of skill and imagination to produce sth. new;
b. having the skill and ability to produce sth. new.]

2. Which primary school subjects offer *more* opportunities for creative thought than primary school English? (Select from this list and tick)

Chinese	Maths	Science	PE
Technology	Craftsmanship	Art	Music
Ethics and social life (including history, geography and politics)	Any other subject? (Please specify)		

3. What makes these have more opportunities?

4. Which primary school subjects offer *fewer* opportunities for creative thought than primary school English? (Select from this list and tick)

Chinese	Maths	Science	PE
Technology	Craftsmanship	Art	Music
Ethics and social life (including history, geography and politics)	Any other subject? (Please specify)		

5. Why do these have fewer opportunities?

6. Give me an example of a primary English lesson in which the children are creative in

English (topic and a brief description)? It can be the lesson you may have observed, participated in or taught.

7. Which was the creative part?

8. What was creative about it?

9. Which topic/area would you like to teach (or enjoy teaching) in English?

10. Suppose you taught this topic. Are there opportunities for creativity in it? If so, what are they?

11. Please explain what is creative about them.

12. Do you see problem solving as being related to creativity?

13. If so, in what way? If not, why not?

14. Please give me an example of a problem that children might solve in English?

15. Do you think that encouraging creative thought in children in English is easy or hard?

16. Why do you think this?

17. Is there anything you want to add about creativity in English? Have I missed something?

Appendix B. Interview schedule

Based on the responses in collected questionnaires, the interview is designed to clarify and further explore the teacher's conceptions reported in more details. Participants were asked to clarify their responses in the questionnaire if not rich data has been provided, explain some interesting responses, and answer other questions to illustrate their ideas on creativity in real practice and experiences in schools.

These questions include:

1. Do you think that English is a creative subject? Why? What is creative about it?
2. Are there any factors that may facilitate creative teaching and learning in the primary school English classroom?
3. Are there any factors that may constrain creative teaching and learning?
4. What strategies can you use to facilitate creative learning?
5. Is it important to teach for creativity in English? Why?
6. So, in light of your responses above, what would you say that creativity in English is about?