Exploring middle school students' creative capacity in reading literary texts

Nguyen Thi Thanh Nga[1], Bui Thi Dien[2]

[1] Email: ngantt@vnies.edu.vn
[2] Email: dienbt@vnies.edu.vn
The Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences

ABSTRACT: *This study aims to discover middle school students' creative capacity in reading literary texts. Starting with discussing the definition of creative capacity prior to assessing the creative capacity of 128 middle school students in reading literary texts, the research finds that Vietnamese students perform well in a low level of creativity as in recognizing new ideas. However, they are limited in the high level of the capacity in reading comprehension such as giving their own opinion on literary text content, comparing works, applying the values of literary texts into real life as well as the ability to create new products. The results provide significant insights into the current situation of enhancing creative capacity for students in reading comprehension grounding the basis for proposing some appropriate solutions and recommendations to help develop students' creativity in reading comprehension of literary texts.*

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century and the 4.0 revolution have opened up many opportunities and challenges all over the world. In parallel with an era of strong digitalization, an era of a knowledge-based economy requires a new generation of dynamism, creativity, and autonomy (Cannatella, 2004; Meleisea, 2005). Both domestic and international training demand innovation in education, moving from content-based one to competency-based education with a focus on developing transferable skills for students. In the variety of transferable skills, creativity is defined as an important skill that helps persons be successful in the future (Sokół & Figurska, 2017). The New General Education Curriculum (2018) has also identified the capacity of creativity as one of the common competencies that need to be formed and developed in all subjects with the desire to create an active generation. Creativity skill helps each individual be independent, self-controlled, active as well as master all increasingly complicated life changes. With the subject of Vietnamese language arts, creative capacity can

be developed in reading, writing, and speaking-listening. Nurturing creative capacity will be effective in reading comprehension of literary texts as the kind of text account for a large ratio in the Vietnamese Language art curriculum. Students can be creative while interpreting and receiving texts. However, not much academic research in Vietnam that find out about this field of education, particularly the definition, manifestations as well as assessing students' creative capacity. This research examines the notion of creativity and students' creativity capacity in reading comprehension in the subject of Vietnamese language art, followed by some recommendations to enhance students' capacity in creativity in the educational field.

This study was conducted in Vietnam with the participation of 128 ninth grade students in 3 middle schools. The results are expected to help teachers enhance their teaching methodology to develop students' creative capacity.

1.1. The definition of creative capacity

Many attempts have been made to the definition of creativity over the past decades

since the term was first mentioned. Many scholars confirmed that this term is complex with multidimensional constructs making defining creativity become controversial (Puryear, Kettler, & Rinn, 2019). Not only in the past but also in the present, many efforts of researchers are continuing to be recorded in clarifying the concept of creativity (Simonton, 2017; Harrington, 2018). Based on previous research, Runco and Jaeger (2012) stated that creativity was defined in 2 factors as originality and effectiveness with various manifestations. However, the authors admitted the existence of a different number of criteria for creativity. Kaufman and Sternberg proposed 3 components' novelty, quality, and appropriateness' for creativity (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010). A recent study by Acar et al. confirmed that although there is no uniform definition, many researchers come to an agreement that creativity consists of 2 mentioned ingredients including novelty and usefulness. Based on synthesizing plentiful perspectives, the authors grounded their research about the relationships among components of creativity on four main factors including 'originality, value, surprise, and aesthetics' in the different contexts and investigated that originality is the most relative component among four of them (Acar, Burnett, & Cabra, 2017). The recent research has added to the criteria of creativity, some scholars include authenticity, surprise, inconsistency, potentiality, appropriateness, and discovery (Mark A Runco & Beghetto, 2019). Finding the complexity and conflictive definition of creativity, Smith & Smith (2017) offers the notion 'Creativity is the process of coming up with a good idea on the basis of asserting that creativity is a mental process.

Davies et al conducted a systematic review from 2005 to 2011 on 210 documents to find out factors that support the creativity skills development of children and young people (Davies et al., 2013). The various factors that cover physical, pedagogical and psychosocial aspects in the study environment were found such as flexible access to space, time, and

materials, working out of classroom/school, game learning approaches, positive relationships between teachers and students, in-school and out-of-school cooperation, learners' needs, and flexible planning.

Although the wording is somewhat different, the above concepts have common in the effort to define creative capability with keywords such as the ability to create new things; distinctiveness, originality; create ideas, solutions, efficiency, usefulness. Based on the research on creative capabilities, we define creative capacity as an attribute of the individual, based on the mobilization of knowledge, skills, and other factors such as excitement, belief, a will to create new things including new ideas, new solutions, new products at different levels in learning and life situations in a unique, new and effective way. The concept of the creative capacity of students is basically built on the general concept of adding the difference in the level of creativity, such as creativity is creating new things for themselves, doing things that they have not been able to do before. However, excellent students can reach a higher-level, making new things meaningful to the community and society. According to the definition, students' creative capacity in reading comprehension of literary texts can be defined as the creation of new meaningful messages from the text to themselves and society. This can include the ability to explore new meanings of the text; establishing new values and applying them to solving life and social problems; creation of new products on the basis of the suggestion of the text.

1.2. Creative capacity in reading comprehension of literary texts

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the ways to develop students' creative capacity in the school environment as well as in school subjects. Lin et al. (2017) demonstrated that knowledge-building activities could promote students' creativity through the study of 38 participants. In the same vein, Beghetto et al. (2014) showed that classroom

contexts could enhance creativity. Among various factors, the learning environment is defined as one of the most important factors to nurture creativity for students. Therefore, teachers can build a creativity-supportive learning environment through cooperative activities and a positive attitude to support students. Lebler et al. (2008) found the alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to develop creative capacity for students.

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In the details of language lessons, Richards (2013) published a paper in which the author demonstrated that creativity has a strong link to all activities in language lessons. The language tasks are examined to release students' creativity especially, for involving students in such activities as centered, interaction-based, and open-ended tasks. In another research, Tabačková (2015) argued reading could enhance students' critical thinking and creative thinking, through exploring between the denotative and the connotative meaning, understanding correlations between specific events of the plot, finding the tone of the text, involving transferable skills such as problem-solving, decision making, logical reasoning as well as interpretation to unwrap the hidden meanings from the text. The paper illustrated that literary texts could be considered an effective way to help learners connect the real world and think outside the classroom. A recent study by Marcos et al (2020) investigated the correlation between children's creative thinking and reading and writing skills in a cooperative learning environment by conducting research on sixty fifth-grade students. The results revealed that reading and writing activities can enhance students' creativity with cooperative learning for school-age children.

There has been little discussion about the indicators or manifestation of creative capacity in the Vietnamese language arts. The author Van. N.T.H (2017) has pointed out the indicators of students' creative capacity such as (1) being able to ask different questions about the text contents; identify and clarify new information and ideas; analyzing and connecting relevant information from different linguistic sources according to personal perspectives; (2) being able to propose ideas based on the given information sources; express their thoughts on problems and how to implement them (in social and literary contexts); compare and comment on the effectiveness of the proposed ideas; (3) being able to control feeling, thinking, and generalizing into models and processes when interpreting texts; apply them in a similar situation; (4) being able to think independently, do not accept one-way information; not prejudiced when considering, assessing the issue; interested in convincing arguments and proofs; ready to consider, re-assess the issue.

As the above research shows, this capacity is shown in identifying situations and ideas, especially ideas embedded in literary texts, in understanding and considering things and phenomena from other perspectives, and presenting students' thinking and feeling to beauty, a value of life. The creative capacity shows the students' passion and desire to learn, without thinking familiarly, following a formula. One of the highest levels of creative capacity in reading literary texts is that the readers become co-creators of the work (when they have their own unique feelings about characters, images, words of work).

Based on the description of the capacity in The General Education Curriculum 2018 and the requirements for reading comprehension of literary texts, we propose the indicators of the creative capacity for middle school students in reading comprehension of literary texts as follows:

Table 1: The indicators of the creative capacity for middle school students in reading comprehension of literary texts

Sub-capacity	Indicators
1. Recognising new ideas	Recognising new ideas in terms of the content of literary texts
	Recognising new ideas in terms of the art form of literary texts
2. Analysis and evaluation of new ideas	Giving their own opinion about the content elements of literary texts
	Giving unique findings and explanations about the artistic elements of literary texts
	Comparisons and evaluation between one text and another reveal in-depth findings on content and art
3. Applying to the new context	Reading new text similarly
	Offering ways to solve problems associated with real life
	Applying the value of the text in changing one's own perception, thoughts, and feelings
4. Receiving literary text by new products	Speaking products
	Writing products
	Other products (drawing, theatricalization)

2. Research design

Research objectives include assessing the middle school students' creative capacity in reading comprehension of literary texts before proposing recommendations to promote the capacity for students.

The research site is in Ha Tinh and Hanoi with the participation of 128 students in grade 9 in 3 middle schools, including Ky Tay middle school, Giang Dong middle school (Ha Tinh), and Thuc Nghiem middle school (Hanoi). Grade 9 was chosen because this is the last year of middle school when students nearly complete middle school curriculum, therefore we can assess students' learning outcomes in the domain of reading comprehension at the end of the level.

Qualitative and quantitative methodology is used, including a designed linked-scale questionnaire for students to self-assess with detailed indicators of creative capacity in reading

comprehension. The collected data is then analyzed by SPSS software to assess the status of creative capacity among middle school students in reading comprehension literary texts. In addition, classroom observation was conducted in four classes where 128 students were learning to find out more about their activities in classes. The information then is coded following the defined indicators to examine the reality of developing creative capacity.

3. Findings

The sub-domain of realizing new ideas: students self-assess that they have a high level of recognizing novel and unique elements relating artistic form in the literary texts with the level of good, accounting for 43.74%. In addition, they do not feel confident with the ability to find out the originality of the author's ideas and conceptions and the indicator if proposing questions that express their wonder about the unique elements in the text with the ratio of 45.33 % for the fair level. Observing reading comprehension lessons showed that students lack initiative; they mainly listen to teachers and passively answer the teachers' questions. Students rarely proactively pose questions for teachers in their lessons.

The sub-domain of analyzing and evaluating new ideas: to evaluate the literary text, students must analyze and connect the information in the text according to their point of view. The survey results show that students can analyze the information contained in the documents according to their own views with 42, 19% assessing the good level. According to two indicators of comparing and comparing information inside and outside the text and generalizing content, the artistic value of the literary text from the personal opinion, more than 50 % of students assess themselves as a fair level, respectively 52.43% and 50.78%. Thus, it can be seen that students are still limited in their ability to compare and draw in-depth assessments of the literary text. When expanding outside the text, students lack capital and lack the depth to evaluate many literary works' outstanding points and contributions.

Table 2: Results of students' self-assessment of applying the value of text into real life

Content	Very poor		Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1. Applying to have the right and appropriate attitude and actions in real life.	3	2.34	15	11.72	39	30.47	55	42.97	16	12.50
2. Applying the value of the text in changing thoughts, forming a good personality	1	0.78	11	8.59	68	53.13	37	28.91	11	8.59
3. Knowing how to solve in your own way the problems related to the literary texts in learning tasks	3	2.34	13	10.16	66	51.56	37	28.91	9	7.03

Applying to the new context: With the indicators of applying the value of the literary texts to the new context, the survey results have shown the following:

Students found themselves capable of applying to have the right and proper attitude and actions in real life with the highest selection at the level of good, accounting for 42.97%. For the left indicators, students found themselves to be confident at the fair level. This shows that the ability to apply the value of the text in real life and learning context is still limited. Cronbach's Alpha index> 0.75 shows that the reliability of the question is high.

Receiving literary texts by new products: After reading comprehension of literary texts, students show the results received through speaking, writing products, and other forms. The survey results show that: students' self-assessment of the ability to transform the learned texts into other forms remains low. In indicator 1: transforming literary text into other genres (poetry, stories), students lacked confidence in selecting poor level with 35, 16%. The left indicator, students, mainly chose at a fair level. The above results show that students are still limited in this ability. They are better at theatricalizing the literary texts but weaker in transforming the text into similar genres like poetry, stories, and other art forms. This reflects that teaching reading comprehension of the literary texts in schools almost only stops at text reading, little for students to adapt and create texts. The index of the reliability of the question is confirmed by> 0.88.

Relating to students' ability to create new products after receiving literary text, the results obtained are shown in Table 3.

In the capacity domain, most of the students assessed them at the fair level for all three indicators. This demonstrates that students' ability is still limited in creating new products after the reading process. In which, students were

Table 3: Students' ability to create new products after the reading literary texts

Content	Very poor		Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1. Composing new works of the same genre with texts (poems, stories, plays)	27	21.09	34	26.56	45	35.16	15	11.72	7	5.47
2. Composing new literature that is inspired by original texts.	17	13.28	36	28.13	45	35.16	22	17.19	8	6.25
3. Composing other art products on the basis of the text inspiration (painting, composing music, making movies)	18	14.06	33	25.78	35	27.34	27	21.09	15	11.72

more confident in composing new works of the same genre with the text (poetry, stories, plays with 35.16%) and they feel less confident when creating other art products on the basis of textual inspiration (painting, composing music). The rate of students choosing a fair level for this indicator is 27, 34%. Since then, it shows that teachers need to change in teaching methods to stimulate creative needs and generate ideas to get students' creative products after reading comprehension of literary texts.

In general, the survey results have shown partly the picture of teaching and learning reading comprehension of literary texts in schools in relation to developing students' creative capacity. Students did well in recognizing new ideas but they were still limited in giving their own opinion on literary text content, comparing between works, applying the values of literary texts into real life, and the ability to create new products. The above limitations, as shared, have been caused by the gap of curriculum, textbooks; the teaching activities of the teachers; from other factors such as assessment; teaching conditions, teaching time. It can be affirmed that these survey results are important facts to give the necessary and appropriate measures to help students develop creative capacity in reading comprehension of literary texts.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

As discussed above, organizing the activities is decisive to develop students' creative capacity. Therefore, teachers have to change the way they organize reading comprehension classes to meet developing capacities. The following are some recommendations to enhance the students' students' reading comprehension of a literary text.

Firstly, it is necessary to organize discussion and debate activities to help students give different understandings in recognizing, analyzing, and evaluating new ideas of the text. In reality, teaching reading comprehension in schools should combine individual reading and interactive reading through discussion and debate activities. The organization of discussion and debate activities helps students to reveal the

manifestations of creative capabilities such as: recognizing new ideas; analyzing and evaluating to give separate views to contribute to the meaning of the text; Express personal opinions with convincing arguments, from that, help them to enjoy reading, nurture their passion for creativity and love for literary works. In teaching reading comprehension of literary texts, argumentative activities exhibit positive interaction, requiring understanding, extensive background knowledge, and high-order thinking ability, the ability to make sharp arguments. Debate contributes to the development of linguistic skills. It is an effective way of promoting learners' creative and critical thinking. The debate is a high form of thinking. Through arguments, children have the opportunity to express themselves, express their views clearly and listen to others' points of view.

To achieve that goal, teachers should choose the topic or problems in the literary texts that remain controversial. The topic is crucial to enhance the effectiveness of the activity. For example, in literary texts of the curriculum for middle school students, teachers can take a controversial topic for students to debate from the text 'The countryside boat dock' of the writer Nguyen Minh Chau's (Vietnamese language art grade 9) such as 'Commenting on the Nhi character, some comments are given that he deserves to be condemned, others think that he is just a pitiful person. Give your own opinion and explain the reasons'. Based on the given topic, teachers divide the class into two or more opposing parties to share their own points of view relating to the topic. Each side presents a system of opposing arguments, which is arranged rationally (with tactics).

Secondly, teachers should use problem-based learning to encourage students to create, be proactive, and active in creating new knowledge, and reveal new perspectives. This method aims to stimulate students' self-awareness, need, desire to solve problems, actively make their ideas, actively take knowledge.

Discussing the way to organize problem-based learning, Hoanh. T.B (2003) concretized the method including the following steps (1) detecting and identifying problems needed to

address; (2) solving problems by proposing solutions, planning, and conducting actions (3) conclusion: solving and evaluating the problems. Teachers need to choose a literary text containing a problem need to address and follow a student-centered approach to give student chances to make hypotheses and find solutions.

Thirdly, let students experience characters' situations to exploit students' unique and creative feedback and evaluation. Students are allowed to mobilize their own experiences, connect with texts, and experience the life of the characters. Through this way, they can be immersed in the position of different characters in the literary text, with their emotions, joys, sorrows; understand fate, co-create with the writer. Students are readers who can recognize, analyze, evaluate the value of the text, come up with new ideas and know-how to apply creativity to themselves. An example was given to the teachers such as in the work of Quiet Sa Pa- the author Nguyen Thanh Long, teachers can give the task 'Can you imagine and describe the young man at the moment of saying goodbye with the artist and the engineer?' or the task 'Play the role of a young man to write a letter to the female engineer to share his point of view about work and the concept of happiness'.

Lastly, teachers should diversify reading comprehension activities, creating opportunities for students to make innovative products by combining reading and other extended activities such as writing, drawing, theatricalization. It can be said that the creation of creative products is a manifestation of the highest level of creative capacity in learners. Some tasks can be delivered to the students such as drawing a picture that you are most impressed with in the literary text

of Quiet Sa Pa. Another effective way is to let students participate in staging, role-playing, and performance stages. From a writer's literary text to a theatrical work performed by students is a creative process from producing scripts to performing and interacting with audiences, choosing costumes, props, and background. Combining reading with literary composition could also help to promote students' creative skills. In detail, they can compose a small story with their moderate perspective or poetry with simple requirements for word and volume. Thereby, the students will grasp the genre's characteristics and support for the reading comprehension of literary texts.

In conclusion, creative capacity is one of the core competencies that need to be nurtured for middle school students. To develop creative capacity in reading comprehension of literary texts, it is necessary to determine suitable literary texts, diversified and attractive linguistics for students to exploit and express their views. In addition, teachers need to find innovative ways to let students emerge in interpreting the texts. Teaching literary text to promote students' creativity should be in a creative environment with the teacher's encouragement; with supporting materials. In order to form and develop students' creative capacity in reading comprehension of literary texts, it is necessary to impact all elements of the teaching process from the content, methods, forms of teaching organization to test and evaluate. The report expects to contribute to the innovation of teaching Literature in middle schools, improving the quality of teaching and learning reading comprehension of literary text toward a competency-based approach.

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