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Iranian EFL Teachers' Perception of Creative Teaching: Understanding the Facilitators, Barriers, and Consequences

ABSTRACT

Creativity is a fundamental property of the 21st-century pedagogical process. Integrating creativity into educational systems despite structural limitations remains a significant concern for educational researchers. This descriptive-qualitative study aimed to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of creative teaching and to develop a conceptual framework within the constrained environments of English language institutes. Using purposive sampling, 10 male and female EFL teachers from various institutes in Isfahan, Iran, participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach via MAXQDA 2023. The findings were categorized into three dimensions: facilitators (driving forces), inhibitors (structural boundaries), and consequences. Thirteen themes were identified as facilitators, including two-way interaction, continuous monitoring, and creative problem-solving. Primary inhibitors emerged as rigid institutional policies, personal factors, sociocultural aspects, and time constraints. The consequences of creative strategies included enhanced student achievement, motivation, and improved communication. Based on these findings, the study proposes a multidimensional interaction of multiple factors that influence creative teaching within the limited structures of English language institutions, revealing creative teaching as a dynamic navigation between pedagogical innovation and institutional constraints. The findings provide a roadmap for teachers and administrators to transition from mini-c to pro-c creativity within limited institutional structures.

Keywords: barriers, consequences, creative teaching, EFL teachers, facilitators, negotiated performance, teachers' perception

Introduction

Creativity has increasingly become one of the central pillars of educational transformation in the twenty-first century, particularly in language education where communication, flexibility, and innovation are essential for meaningful learning. Contemporary educational systems no longer define effective teaching solely in terms of content transmission; rather, they emphasize the cultivation of higher-order thinking skills, learner autonomy, collaboration, and adaptive problem-solving. Within this paradigm shift, creativity has emerged as both a pedagogical objective and a professional necessity for teachers.

Educational theorists have argued that creativity is not merely an artistic or exceptional human attribute, but a practical cognitive and social process that enables individuals to generate original and contextually appropriate ideas (1, 2). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, where communication and interaction form the core of instruction, creativity becomes particularly significant because language learning requires flexibility, imagination, and meaningful engagement with linguistic content.

The notion of creativity has evolved considerably over time. Early perspectives often treated creativity as an innate talent possessed only by exceptional individuals; however, more recent theories conceptualize creativity as a dynamic and developable capacity influenced by environmental, cognitive, and motivational factors (3, 4). Amabile's componential theory proposed that creativity emerges through the interaction of domain-relevant knowledge, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic motivation, emphasizing the importance of contextual support in fostering innovative performance (4). Later developments expanded this perspective by introducing the dynamic componential model, which highlighted the role of organizational and emotional factors in sustaining creative performance and innovation (5). Similarly, Sternberg and Lubart's investment theory conceptualized creativity as the willingness to pursue unconventional ideas despite resistance, suggesting that creative individuals "buy low and sell high" in the realm of ideas (2). Such theoretical developments shifted the discourse from creativity as an exceptional trait to creativity as a contextualized pedagogical practice that can be nurtured and supported.

In educational contexts, creativity has been linked to both teaching methods and learning environments. The influential distinction between "teaching creatively" and "teaching for creativity" has significantly shaped educational discourse. Teaching creatively refers to teachers' use of imaginative and engaging approaches to facilitate learning, whereas teaching for creativity aims to develop learners' own creative capacities (6, 7). Creative teaching therefore extends beyond entertainment or classroom novelty; it involves designing learning experiences that stimulate curiosity, critical reflection, collaboration, and authentic engagement with knowledge. Lin argued that creative pedagogy requires flexibility, learner-centeredness, and opportunities for experimentation within educational settings (8). Likewise, Davies et al. emphasized that creative learning environments are characterized by openness, supportive relationships, risk-taking, and collaborative interaction (9). Such perspectives highlight that creativity is deeply embedded in the social and pedagogical dimensions of classroom life.

Within the field of language education, creativity has become increasingly important due to the communicative and interactive nature of language learning. EFL classrooms require teachers to move beyond rigid textbook-based instruction toward more adaptive and learner-responsive pedagogies. Creative teachers often employ storytelling, role-playing, multimedia resources, collaborative projects, dialogic interaction, and problem-solving tasks to enhance learners' engagement and communicative competence. Woods described creative teachers as professionals who possess the capacity to transform routine classroom activities into meaningful and motivating learning experiences (10). Similarly, Wang and Kokotsaki found that EFL teachers conceptualize creativity as the ability to encourage learner participation, flexibility, and original language use within the classroom (11). Such findings indicate that creativity in language teaching is not restricted to artistic performance but encompasses adaptive instructional strategies that promote deeper language acquisition and learner agency.

Recent developments in creativity research have further emphasized the psychological dimensions of innovative teaching. The concept of creative self-efficacy has attracted substantial scholarly attention because teachers' beliefs about their creative capacities strongly influence their willingness to experiment with novel instructional methods (12). Teachers who perceive themselves as capable of generating innovative solutions are more likely to implement creative pedagogical practices despite institutional challenges. Moreover, emotional and psychological wellbeing has emerged as a crucial factor influencing teacher creativity. Mercer and Kostoulas argued that teacher wellbeing, resilience, and emotional support significantly contribute to

sustainable professional innovation in language teaching contexts (13). This perspective suggests that creativity is not solely a cognitive phenomenon but also an emotional and relational process shaped by institutional climates and interpersonal dynamics.

Technological transformations have also altered the landscape of creativity in education. The rapid emergence of artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and multimodal instructional tools has expanded the possibilities for creative pedagogy. Henriksen et al. argued that generative artificial intelligence has reshaped teaching and learning by enabling teachers to design more interactive, personalized, and imaginative educational experiences (14). Similarly, Zahedi Moghaddam and Doulikhani highlighted the potential of AI-based educational projects in fostering creative thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities among learners (15). In the context of EFL instruction, digital technologies provide opportunities for authentic communication, collaborative learning, and multimodal language practice, thereby supporting innovative classroom experiences. However, the integration of such technologies also requires teachers to possess sufficient digital literacy, pedagogical flexibility, and confidence in experimenting with new instructional approaches.

Dialogic and collaborative teaching approaches have similarly been recognized as facilitators of creativity. Tao et al. demonstrated that dialogic teaching enhances learners' creative thinking through meaningful teacher-student interaction and collaborative exploration of ideas (16). Likewise, Hsiao et al. found that integrating creative thinking strategies into STEAM-oriented instructional models significantly improves learners' engagement, hands-on performance, and behavioral outcomes (17). These findings reinforce the notion that creativity flourishes in environments characterized by interaction, participation, and intellectual openness. In language classrooms, dialogic interaction is particularly important because communication itself becomes both the means and the outcome of learning.

Despite the recognized value of creativity, numerous institutional and sociocultural barriers continue to limit its implementation in educational contexts. One of the most persistent obstacles is the dominance of performativity-driven educational systems that prioritize standardization, examination performance, and measurable outcomes over innovation and experimentation. Ball argued that performative educational cultures often constrain teacher autonomy and reduce teaching to technical compliance with institutional demands (18). In such contexts, teachers may avoid creative practices due to fear of evaluation, curriculum pressure, or institutional resistance. The emphasis on examination-oriented instruction can discourage risk-taking and reinforce traditional teacher-centered methodologies.

The Iranian EFL context provides a particularly important setting for examining these tensions between creativity and institutional constraints. Previous research has shown that Iranian teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward creativity but encounter considerable barriers in implementing creative pedagogies. Aliakbari and Kalantari reported that Iranian EFL teachers associate creativity with learner engagement, flexibility, and innovative classroom interaction; however, they also identified institutional limitations and rigid curricula as major obstacles (19). Similarly, Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh found that creativity in Iranian EFL teaching is closely linked to teachers' instructional styles and emotional experiences, including burnout and motivational challenges (20). These findings suggest that while teachers may value creativity conceptually, contextual pressures often restrict their practical implementation of innovative strategies.

Sociocultural expectations and traditional educational norms further complicate the enactment of creativity in EFL classrooms. In many educational systems, including Iran, teachers and students are often socialized into hierarchical and examination-oriented learning cultures that prioritize correctness and conformity over experimentation and divergent thinking. Such environments may discourage learners from actively participating in creative tasks and may lead teachers to rely on familiar instructional routines. Furthermore, limited access to technological resources, insufficient institutional support, and heavy workloads can reduce teachers' opportunities to develop and sustain creative practices.

At the same time, contemporary educational reforms increasingly emphasize critical thinking, learner-centeredness, and communicative competence, thereby creating new opportunities for creative instruction. Shahani et al. demonstrated that flipped instructional approaches significantly improve critical thinking and listening comprehension among Iranian EFL learners (21). These findings indicate that innovative pedagogical models can help teachers move beyond traditional classroom limitations and promote more active and reflective learning experiences. Furthermore, Navera emphasized the importance of dialogic and collaborative interaction in enabling language learners to articulate ideas, negotiate meaning, and develop communicative confidence (22). Such developments highlight the growing relevance of creativity in fostering meaningful language learning experiences.

Although the existing literature has provided valuable insights into creativity and language education, several important gaps remain. First, much of the previous research has employed quantitative methodologies focusing on correlations between creativity-related variables and educational outcomes. While such studies provide useful statistical patterns, they often fail to capture the complexity of teachers' lived experiences and subjective perceptions. Creativity is inherently contextual and socially negotiated; therefore, qualitative approaches are necessary to explore how teachers understand, experience, and navigate creativity within specific institutional environments. Second, relatively few studies have specifically investigated Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of creative teaching within private language institutes, where teachers may simultaneously experience greater pedagogical flexibility and increased commercial or institutional pressures. Third, the existing literature has often examined facilitators, barriers, or outcomes separately rather than exploring their interconnected and dynamic relationships within the broader ecology of creative teaching.

Given these limitations, there is a need for in-depth qualitative investigations that explore how Iranian EFL teachers perceive creativity, what factors facilitate or inhibit creative teaching, and what consequences emerge from implementing creative pedagogical practices within constrained educational settings. Understanding teachers' perspectives is particularly important because teachers function as the primary agents of classroom innovation and pedagogical transformation. Their perceptions, beliefs, motivations, and experiences directly shape the ways creativity is enacted or suppressed within educational environments. Furthermore, examining creativity within the specific sociocultural and institutional realities of Iranian language institutes can provide context-sensitive insights that contribute to both local educational development and broader international discussions regarding creativity in language education (23-26).

Therefore, the present study aimed to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of creative teaching by identifying its facilitators, barriers, and consequences within the context of private language institutes in Iran.

Methods and Materials

The present study adopted a qualitative research paradigm grounded in the interpretivist perspective in order to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and lived experiences regarding creative teaching in English language classrooms. Since the primary objective of the study was to understand the subjective meanings teachers attribute to creativity, a descriptive-exploratory qualitative design was considered the most appropriate methodological approach. Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to examine complex educational phenomena within their natural settings and to capture the nuanced experiences, beliefs, and interpretations of participants that may not be adequately represented through quantitative methods. In this regard, the study specifically sought to identify the facilitators, barriers, and consequences associated with creative teaching practices in Iranian private language institutes. The research was conducted between August 2024 and November 2024 in two private English language institutes located in Isfahan, Iran, namely Pooyesh Language School and Mehrvarzan Language Institute. These institutes were selected because private educational settings generally provide greater pedagogical flexibility compared

to public schools and universities, thereby offering a more suitable context for exploring teachers' creative instructional practices within partially constrained educational systems.

The participants of the study consisted of 10 Iranian EFL teachers, including six females and four males, who were employed at different private language institutes in Isfahan. The participants were selected through purposive sampling in order to ensure that they possessed sufficient teaching experience and professional knowledge relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling was particularly suitable for this study because it enabled the researchers to recruit information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into creative teaching practices. In terms of teaching experience, the participants represented both novice and experienced teachers. Following the classification proposed by Araujo et al. (2016), teachers with less than three years of teaching experience were categorized as novice teachers, whereas those with more than three years of experience were considered experienced practitioners. Among the participants, one teacher had less than three years of experience, five teachers had between three and ten years of experience, and four participants possessed more than ten years of teaching experience. Regarding educational qualifications, two participants held bachelor's degrees, six held master's degrees, and two possessed doctoral degrees. Most participants had majored in English-related fields, while one participant came from a non-English academic background. The participants also represented diverse age groups ranging from 25 years old to above 40 years old, which allowed the researchers to capture a broad spectrum of professional experiences and perspectives concerning creative teaching.

To maintain ethical rigor throughout the research process, several ethical principles were carefully observed. Before data collection commenced, all participants received detailed information regarding the aims and procedures of the study and were informed that participation was entirely voluntary. They were also assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. To protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity, all identifying information such as names and institutional affiliations was removed from transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms during the analysis process. Furthermore, the researcher established a non-judgmental and supportive atmosphere during the interviews in order to minimize social desirability bias and encourage participants to express their genuine experiences and opinions freely. All digital recordings and transcribed materials were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the primary researcher. In qualitative studies, the researcher functions as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation. Accordingly, the researcher's extensive background as an Iranian EFL practitioner with approximately 16 years of teaching experience contributed to the theoretical sensitivity required for understanding participants' experiences and contextual realities. To ensure methodological rigor, the researcher practiced reflexivity and bracketing throughout the study by consciously setting aside personal assumptions and biases related to creativity and teaching practices.

The primary instrument used for data collection in this study was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview protocol designed to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions, experiences, and understandings of creative teaching. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide sufficient flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences while simultaneously enabling researchers to maintain consistency across interviews through predetermined thematic questions. This approach was considered particularly suitable for investigating creativity in teaching because it allowed participants to discuss complex pedagogical experiences, institutional challenges, emotional responses, and classroom practices in depth. The interview questions were developed based on an extensive review of the literature concerning creativity, creative pedagogy, and language teaching. In particular, previous studies conducted by Hong et al. (2003), Wang and Kokotsaki (2018), and other scholars in the field of creative education informed the conceptual development of the interview framework. The protocol included open-ended questions related to teachers' definitions of creativity, factors facilitating creative instruction, institutional and personal barriers to creativity, and the educational outcomes associated with creative teaching practices.

To ensure the content validity and relevance of the interview questions, the initial version of the interview protocol was reviewed by three experts in Applied Linguistics and English language teaching. Their feedback focused on the clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, and appropriateness of the questions in relation to the research objectives. Based on their recommendations, several modifications were made to improve wording clarity and thematic coverage before the final version of the interview schedule was prepared. The interviews were conducted individually in a quiet and professional environment in order to facilitate open discussion and reduce external distractions. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes depending on the depth of participants' responses and willingness to elaborate on their experiences. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the collected data. Following the completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to create a detailed textual corpus for qualitative analysis.

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, several qualitative validation strategies were employed. Investigator triangulation was utilized through the involvement of multiple coders during the coding process. The reliability of the coding procedure was examined using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, which indicated moderate to strong inter-rater agreement levels. Specifically, the agreement coefficients between coders reached .804 and .766, reflecting acceptable coding consistency and dependability. In addition, member checking was conducted to increase the credibility of the findings. During this process, participants reviewed the extracted themes and preliminary interpretations to confirm whether the results accurately reflected their original viewpoints and experiences. The researchers also employed low-inference descriptors by incorporating direct quotations from participants in the findings section to preserve authenticity and minimize interpretive bias. Furthermore, an external audit was conducted on approximately 30% of the data to evaluate analytical consistency and thematic accuracy. Any discrepancies identified during the auditing process were discussed collaboratively among the coders until consensus was achieved.

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Grounded theory was selected because it provides a systematic framework for identifying patterns, relationships, and conceptual categories emerging directly from participants' experiences. Unlike purely descriptive approaches, grounded theory enables researchers to move toward conceptual interpretation and theoretical understanding of complex social phenomena. In the present study, the analysis aimed not only to identify facilitators, inhibitors, and consequences of creative teaching but also to develop an integrated understanding of how these dimensions interact within the Iranian EFL context. All interview transcripts were imported into MAXQDA software (version 2022) to facilitate data management, coding organization, and thematic analysis.

The analytical process proceeded through three interconnected stages including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the open coding phase, the researcher conducted a detailed line-by-line examination of the interview transcripts. In this stage, the data were broken down into smaller conceptual units, and initial labels were assigned to meaningful statements, ideas, and experiences expressed by the participants. Similar codes were then grouped together into preliminary conceptual categories based on recurring patterns and thematic similarities. The purpose of this phase was to generate a broad range of conceptual insights grounded directly in the participants' narratives.

Following open coding, axial coding was conducted to identify relationships among the emerging categories and subcategories. During this phase, the researcher reassembled the fragmented data by examining how different categories were connected through causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening variables, strategies, and consequences. This process enabled the researchers to develop a more structured and comprehensive understanding of creative teaching within the Iranian EFL context. Finally, selective coding was performed to integrate and refine the categories into a coherent explanatory framework. In this phase, the central themes were identified and systematically linked to supporting categories in order to

construct a conceptual model representing the dynamic interaction between facilitators, inhibitors, and consequences of creative teaching. Through this iterative analytical process, the researchers extracted 24 core categories that directly addressed the research questions and contributed to the development of an overarching conceptual understanding of creative pedagogy in constrained educational environments.

To ensure analytical rigor and reliability, a second coder independently analyzed a subset of the interview transcripts. Interrater reliability was subsequently calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, yielding coefficients of .804 and .766 for different stages of coding. These values indicate a high level of agreement and confirm the reliability and consistency of the coding process. Throughout the analysis, the researchers continuously engaged in reflexive evaluation and comparative analysis to ensure that the findings remained grounded in participants' authentic experiences rather than being shaped by preconceived assumptions or theoretical biases.

Findings and Results

The findings of the grounded theory analysis revealed a comprehensive framework of creative teaching within the Iranian EFL context. The findings are categorized into facilitators, inhibitors, and the consequences of creative teaching.

The first research question explored factors that facilitate creative teaching. Based on the participants' experiences, 12 distinct themes were identified. As shown in Table 3, the most prominent facilitators were *collaboration* ($f = 28$) and *learning process* ($f = 25$).

The participants noted that *collaboration* involves frequent communication between staff and teachers and sharing ideas through group meetings. Regarding the *learning process*, the teachers emphasized the use of multimedia, updated theories, and brainstorming to engage students. Other significant facilitators included *creative problem solving* ($f = 21$), which involves risk-taking and avoiding uniformity, and *supportive behavior* ($f = 19$), such as providing a safe environment and rewarding innovative efforts.

Table 1. The Major Themes and Related Codes for Facilitators of Creativity

Main Category	Theme	Codes	f	%
Facilitators	Collaboration	Frequent communications; idea sharing; student-centeredness; active classroom engagement; creative conversation; collaborative student activities; friendly relationships; diverse viewpoints; administrative support; explanatory meetings; teacher-student connection; experience sharing; creative pedagogy; collegial feedback.	28	16.28%
	Controlling	Self-evaluation; teacher efficiency evaluation; hiring qualified teachers; identifying creative teachers; annual recreational retreats.	8	4.65%
	Creative Problem Solving	Avoiding routine; risk-taking; monitoring student roles; cultural exploration; innovative lesson presentation; advance planning; fostering critical thinking; investing adequate time; novelty seeking.	21	12.21%
	Engagement	Student discussions; student engagement; employee idea sharing.	13	7.56%
	Flexibility	Adaptability; teacher authority; teacher autonomy; comfortable classroom atmosphere; thinking beyond conventional paradigms.	16	9.30%
	Learning Process	Cartoon imagery; online resources; updated theories; TTC courses; brainstorming sessions; inspiring instruction; multimedia materials; teaching level; learner-interest integration; pedagogical learning; authentic English classes; textbook revision; learning from mistakes; creativity across four skills.	25	14.53%
	Personal Traits	Considering students' age; theoretical knowledge; instructor motivation; leadership; teacher personality; positive attitude; good teacher behavior; teacher commitment.	18	10.47%

Responsibility	Responsibility for applying creative methods.	5	2.91%
Supportiveness	Providing teaching–learning requirements; encouraging lifelong learning; encouraging out-of-the-box thinking; facilitating learner development; awareness-focused learning; improving learner motivation; increasing teacher income; safe environment for creativity; rewarding creative teachers.	19	11.05%
Management	Class control and student attention; clear explanations; making learning fun.	5	2.91%
Teaching for Creativity	Specialized workshops for teachers.	3	1.74%
Classroom Features	Following practiced theories; classroom decoration; eliminating negative attitudes to new ideas; sharing creative ideas; vocabulary teaching; using technology for learning.	11	6.40%
Total		172	100%

Note. f = frequency. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

The second research question addressed the barriers to creative teaching. Seven themes emerged, as detailed in Table 4. The primary inhibitor identified was *organizational barriers* ($f = 15$), which included syllabus pressure and a lack of necessary equipment.

The participants also identified *environmental barriers* ($f = 12$) and *rules and procedures* ($f = 12$) as significant obstacles. These factors include strict discipline, inflexible policies, and time limitations. Furthermore, *personality factors* ($f = 11$), such as a teacher’s fear of change or a lack of motivation, were found to hinder the implementation of creative strategies in the classroom.

Table 2. The Major Themes and Related Codes for Inhibitors of Creativity

Main Category	Theme	Codes	f	%
Inhibitors	Environmental	Competition; cultural barriers; time limitations.	12	19.05%
	Financial	Lacking fondness for teaching; low payment.	6	9.52%
	Organizational	Being under syllabus and supervisor pressure; educational barriers to creativity; restrictive rules and traditions; pedagogical process constraints; poorly identified goals; institutional teaching frameworks; lack of teaching equipment or aids; toxic atmosphere.	15	23.81%
	Personality	Lack of motivation among teachers and learners; fear of change; fixed or uniform viewpoints across subjects; introverted characteristics; lack of literacy among teachers; general lack of motivation; learners’ learning habits.	11	17.46%
	Rules/Procedures	Educational system constraints; lack of creativity and innovation in teaching methods; lack of using creative teaching approaches; strict discipline; traditional structures; inflexibility in lesson plans and tasks.	12	19.05%
	Demographic	Students’ age; teachers’ age.	4	6.35%
	Shortage	Inappropriateness of time; following classroom themes.	3	4.76%
Total			63	100%

Note. f = frequency. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

The third research question examined the outcomes of creative teaching. As shown in Table 5, *achievement* ($f = 29$) was the most frequently mentioned consequence, representing 63% of the total responses in this category.

The teachers observed that creative pedagogy leads to improved learning performance, increased student proficiency, and heightened self-confidence. Additionally, *communication* ($f = 8$) was enhanced through better teacher-student engagement. The results also suggested that creative teaching methods promote *motivation* and deeper language acquisition, described by one participant as “lighting up the brains” of the learners.

Table 3. The Major Themes and Related Codes for Consequences of Creative Teaching

Main Category	Theme	Codes	f	%
Consequences	Achievement	Increasing students' learning and performance; becoming effective in speaking and listening; commitment to creative teaching; dealing with unpredictable problems; increasing students' proficiency; persuading learners; preparing learners with flexible future-oriented skills; promoting self-confidence; enhancing language-learning outcomes; solving problems; strengthening teachers' confidence.	29	60.42%
	Motivation	Enhancing critical thinking and creativity; promoting teachers' self-reflection; helping young children use their experiences; increasing levels of motivation.	5	10.42%
	Communication	Teacher-student engagement; showing feelings.	8	16.67%
	Teaching Methods	Student-centered rather than teacher-centered learning; language acquisition rather than mere teaching; encouraging learners' critical and reflective thinking; focusing on deep learning; lighting up students' brains.	6	12.50%
Total			48	100%

Note. f = frequency. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

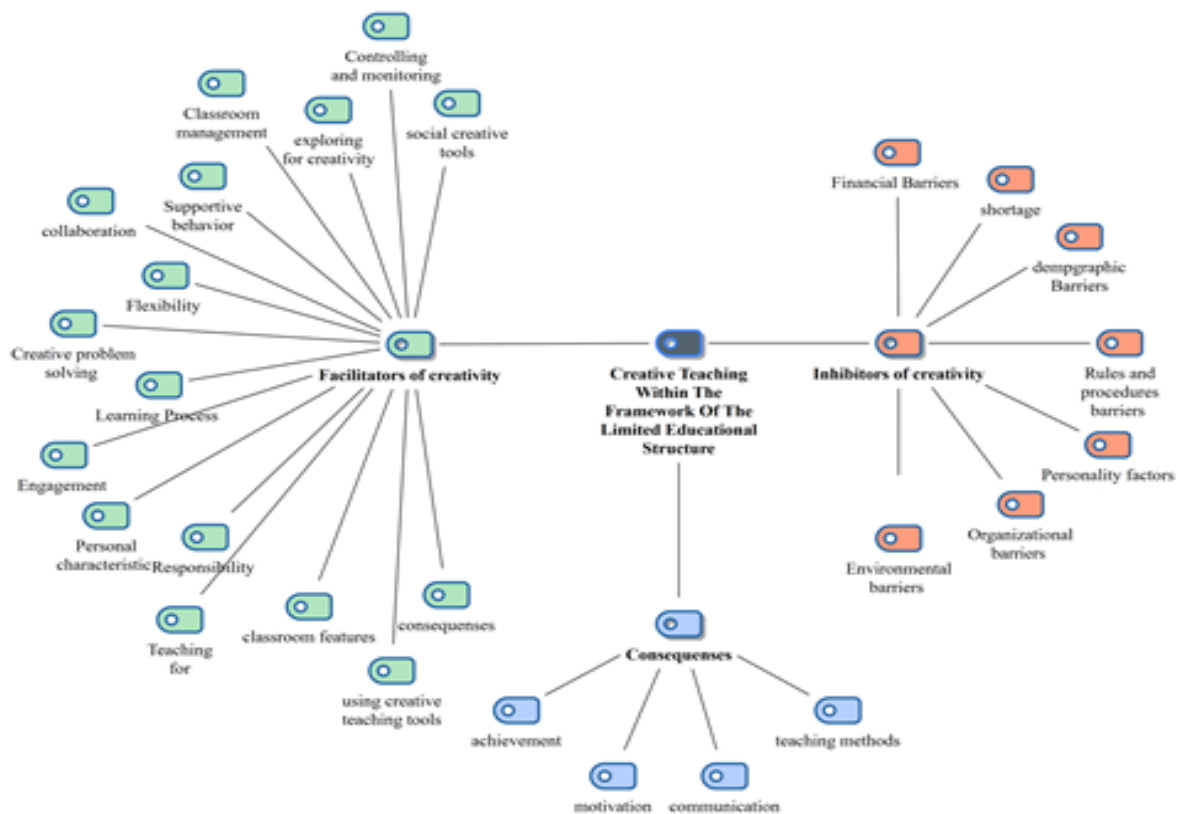


Figure 1. Creative Teaching Within the Framework of the Limited Educational Structures

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of creative teaching by examining its facilitators, inhibitors, and consequences within private language institutes. The findings demonstrated that creative teaching is a multidimensional and context-sensitive phenomenon shaped by the dynamic interaction between institutional structures, teacher-related factors, and classroom practices. The results revealed that teachers perceive creativity not as an abstract or innate quality, but as a practical pedagogical process requiring flexibility, collaboration, motivation, and supportive learning environments. The findings also indicated that while teachers value creative pedagogy and recognize its positive outcomes for

language learning, they continuously negotiate structural barriers such as institutional regulations, time limitations, and traditional educational expectations. Overall, the study confirms that creativity in EFL teaching emerges through the interaction of personal agency and contextual affordances rather than through isolated individual talent (4, 8).

One of the major findings of the study was the identification of collaboration as one of the strongest facilitators of creative teaching. Teachers emphasized the importance of collegial interaction, idea sharing, student-centered participation, and supportive teacher-student relationships in promoting innovative instructional practices. This finding strongly aligns with previous studies that conceptualize creativity as a socially distributed and collaborative process rather than an individualistic endeavor (6, 9). Collaborative interaction creates opportunities for teachers to exchange instructional experiences, reflect on pedagogical practices, and experiment with alternative teaching approaches. The findings also support Cremin's argument that creative teachers foster learning environments characterized by dialogue, openness, and mutual participation (7). In EFL classrooms, where communication forms the foundation of instruction, collaboration appears to function as both a pedagogical strategy and a facilitator of creativity itself.

The importance of the learning process as another major facilitator also reflects contemporary understandings of creative pedagogy. Participants highlighted the role of multimedia resources, brainstorming activities, authentic tasks, and innovative instructional materials in enhancing classroom creativity. This finding is consistent with Lin's conceptualization of creative pedagogy as an educational process that integrates flexibility, experimentation, and learner engagement (8). Similarly, Hsiao et al. demonstrated that integrating creative thinking strategies into instructional models significantly improves learners' behavioral engagement and hands-on performance (17). The current findings suggest that creative teaching in EFL settings is strongly associated with active learning processes that encourage students to interact meaningfully with language rather than passively memorize information. Teachers' emphasis on authentic and technology-enhanced instruction also reflects the growing role of digital and multimodal resources in contemporary language education.

Another significant finding concerned the role of creative problem-solving and flexibility in facilitating innovative teaching. Teachers reported that risk-taking, avoiding routine instruction, and adapting lessons to students' needs were central to creativity. These findings strongly support Sternberg and Lubart's investment theory, which conceptualizes creativity as the willingness to pursue unconventional ideas despite potential resistance (2). Creative teachers in the present study appeared willing to challenge standardized instructional routines and experiment with alternative pedagogical practices. The findings are also consistent with Woods' characterization of creative teachers as professionals who transform routine educational activities into meaningful learning experiences (10). In addition, participants emphasized the importance of teacher autonomy and adaptability, suggesting that flexibility is essential for sustaining creative instruction within constrained educational contexts.

Supportive behavior and positive institutional climates also emerged as important facilitators of creativity. Teachers highlighted the significance of encouragement, safe learning environments, and institutional recognition of innovative efforts. These findings align closely with Amabile and Pratt's dynamic componential model, which emphasizes that creativity flourishes in environments characterized by intrinsic motivation, psychological support, and organizational encouragement (5). Similarly, Mercer and Kostoulas argued that teacher wellbeing, resilience, and emotional support are fundamental to sustaining innovation in language teaching (13). The current study demonstrates that creativity is not solely dependent on individual talent or instructional skill; rather, it is significantly shaped by emotional and institutional conditions that either encourage or suppress experimentation.

The findings regarding personal traits as facilitators of creativity also provide important insights into the psychological dimensions of innovative teaching. Teachers identified motivation, positive attitudes, theoretical knowledge, leadership, and commitment as crucial elements supporting creative pedagogy. This finding strongly corresponds with research on creative

self-efficacy, which suggests that teachers' beliefs in their creative abilities significantly influence their willingness to implement innovative instructional strategies (12). Teachers who possess confidence in their professional capacities are more likely to experiment with unconventional methods, adapt materials creatively, and persist despite institutional challenges. The findings also suggest that creativity in teaching is closely connected to professional identity and intrinsic commitment to educational improvement.

In contrast to the facilitators, the study identified several substantial inhibitors that restrict creative teaching within Iranian EFL institutes. Organizational barriers emerged as the most prominent obstacle, including syllabus pressure, rigid institutional regulations, lack of educational resources, and restrictive supervisory practices. These findings strongly support previous studies conducted in the Iranian educational context (19, 20). Similar to earlier research, the current findings reveal that institutional systems often prioritize conformity, examination preparation, and curriculum completion over innovation and learner-centered pedagogy. Ball's theory of performativity is particularly relevant in explaining these results because performative educational cultures frequently reduce teaching to measurable outputs and procedural compliance (18). In such environments, teachers may perceive creativity as risky or impractical because institutional expectations prioritize standardization and efficiency rather than experimentation.

Time limitation was another major inhibitor identified by participants. Teachers reported that intensive syllabi, examination-oriented instruction, and restricted class time significantly reduced opportunities for implementing creative activities. This finding aligns with Derakhshan et al.'s argument that EFL teachers often experience tension between innovative pedagogy and institutional demands for syllabus coverage (23). Creativity typically requires flexibility, reflection, exploration, and interaction, all of which demand sufficient instructional time. However, when teachers are pressured to complete predetermined content rapidly, they may abandon creative strategies in favor of more traditional and time-efficient methods.

Environmental and sociocultural barriers also emerged as important inhibitors. Teachers emphasized competition, cultural expectations, and learners' resistance to unconventional instructional methods as factors limiting creativity. These findings indicate that creativity is not solely constrained by formal institutional structures but also by broader sociocultural norms surrounding education and authority. In many traditional educational settings, students may expect teacher-centered instruction and perceive creative activities as less academically valuable. This finding is consistent with Wang and Kokotsaki's observation that cultural beliefs and educational traditions strongly influence teachers' and learners' conceptions of creativity (11). Consequently, creative teaching requires teachers to negotiate not only institutional expectations but also learners' beliefs, parental expectations, and broader educational values.

The findings concerning personality-related inhibitors are also noteworthy. Teachers identified fear of change, low motivation, and lack of confidence as major obstacles to creative teaching. This finding reinforces the importance of psychological factors in creativity research. Teachers who lack confidence in their creative abilities may avoid innovative strategies because they fear failure, criticism, or classroom management difficulties. This supports Karwowski et al.'s emphasis on creative self-efficacy as a predictor of innovative action (12). Furthermore, low motivation and emotional exhaustion may reduce teachers' willingness to invest additional effort in designing creative instructional experiences. These findings suggest that supporting teacher creativity requires attention not only to institutional reform but also to teachers' emotional and psychological wellbeing.

The consequences of creative teaching identified in the study further demonstrate the educational significance of innovation in EFL contexts. Achievement emerged as the most dominant consequence, with teachers reporting improvements in students' language proficiency, classroom participation, problem-solving abilities, and self-confidence. These findings strongly support previous research indicating that creative pedagogy enhances learner engagement and academic performance (16, 22). Creative

instruction appears to facilitate deeper language acquisition by encouraging students to interact actively with linguistic content rather than passively receive information. Moreover, the findings align with Kaufman and Beghetto's four-C model, particularly the movement from mini-c personal insights toward more advanced and professionally meaningful forms of creativity (27). Through creative classroom experiences, students become more confident, communicative, and capable of applying language skills in authentic contexts.

Motivation was another important consequence highlighted by participants. Teachers observed that creative teaching enhances both learner and teacher motivation by making classroom experiences more engaging and meaningful. This finding corresponds with Amabile's emphasis on intrinsic motivation as a central component of creativity (4). Creative classrooms appear to stimulate curiosity, emotional engagement, and intellectual interest, thereby increasing learners' willingness to participate actively in educational activities. Furthermore, motivated teachers may experience greater professional satisfaction when they successfully implement innovative pedagogical strategies.

Improved communication and interaction also emerged as important outcomes of creative teaching. Teachers reported stronger teacher-student relationships, greater emotional expression, and more interactive classroom environments. This finding strongly supports Tao et al.'s argument that dialogic teaching facilitates creativity through meaningful communicative exchange (16). In language education, communication itself constitutes both the process and the objective of learning; therefore, creative pedagogies that encourage interaction naturally contribute to language development and relational engagement. The findings further suggest that creativity helps transform the classroom into a participatory learning community characterized by collaboration, openness, and mutual support.

Overall, the findings of the present study suggest that creative teaching within Iranian EFL institutes can be conceptualized as a continuous negotiation between innovative agency and institutional limitation. Teachers operate within constrained educational structures while simultaneously attempting to create engaging, learner-centered, and communicative learning environments. The findings support the view that creativity is neither entirely individual nor entirely contextual; rather, it emerges through the interaction of personal motivation, professional competence, emotional resilience, sociocultural expectations, and institutional affordances (3, 14). Consequently, promoting creativity in language education requires systemic attention to both teacher development and institutional reform.

One limitation of the present study is that the findings were derived from a relatively small sample of teachers working within private language institutes in one city, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts such as public schools or universities. In addition, the study relied primarily on self-reported interview data, which may have been influenced by social desirability or participants' subjective interpretations of their teaching experiences. Furthermore, because the study employed a qualitative design, the findings provide depth and contextual understanding rather than statistical generalizability.

Future research could expand the scope of investigation by including teachers from diverse educational settings and geographical regions to compare how institutional structures influence creativity across contexts. Longitudinal studies could also examine how teachers' creative practices evolve over time as they gain professional experience or encounter changing educational policies. In addition, future studies may incorporate classroom observations, learner perspectives, and mixed-methods approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of creative teaching processes and outcomes.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that educational institutions should create more flexible and supportive environments that encourage experimentation, collaboration, and teacher autonomy. Teacher education programs should provide professional development opportunities focused on creative pedagogy, digital literacy, and learner-centered instruction. Administrators should also reduce excessive syllabus pressure and encourage collaborative communities of practice where

teachers can share innovative instructional strategies. Finally, fostering emotionally supportive and psychologically safe learning environments may help teachers and learners engage more confidently in creative educational experiences.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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