

## Research Article

# A Comprehensive Investigation on the Moment-to-Moment Instructional Techniques Employed to Enhance Students' Creativity Skills in the EFL Context of Iran

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### ABSTRACT

The attainment of success in diverse fields, including education, hinges significantly on the presence of creativity. The cultivation of creative thinking within educational institutions has been recognized as a valuable objective due to its potential to equip students with the essential competencies required for navigating an unpredictable future. The present study utilized a blend of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in a specific sequential process to explore the methodologies employed to foster creativity within EFL contexts. A standardized questionnaire was administered to 214 EFL instructors working in public high schools to evaluate the frequency of their implementation of creativity-promoting strategies within their instructional environments. The findings suggest that teachers seldom employ these strategies in their instructional practices. Furthermore, a series of interviews were conducted with the instructors to discern the factors that hindered their successful implementation of these approaches. This study employed an analysis to deduce themes and categories extracted from the interviews to understand the lack of implementation of creativity-nurturing strategies among Iranian EFL teachers. Consequently, five key themes emerged from the analysis, illuminating the observed failures. The findings indicate that the simultaneous inclusion of performance-oriented instruction and the fostering of creativity within Iranian EFL classrooms imposes a challenging predicament for EFL instructors, leading to a sense of pressure and a conundrum when attempting to encourage creative expression. The capacity of educators to cultivate creativity is highly constrained by variables such as temporal limitations and curriculum-related stressors. Comprehensive reforms are required to promote the teaching of English in Iran, with the aim of cultivating creativity among students.



## Introduction

In an ever-changing world, there is a crucial need for creativity (Gabora & Unrau, 2019). It is widely recognized as an essential element in attaining success across various domains. The promotion of creative students in educational contexts has become a desired outcome, as it equips learners with the necessary foundations to navigate an uncertain future (Beghetto, 2010). Various researchers have acknowledged that creativity enhances students' personal growth, decision-making skills, problem-solving abilities, and performance in academic environments (Cropley, 2018; Karwowski et al., 2020). Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of creativity in language learning and teaching (Ellis, 2016; Maley & Kiss, 2017). These investigations emphasize that the acquisition of language skills not only enhances creativity in learners but also demonstrates that creativity is beneficial for effective language acquisition. According to Ellis (2016), the interactions, attitudes, connections, and actions among individuals engaged in language teaching and learning can create an environment that fosters creativity.

However, various challenges, including standardized curricula, materials, high-stakes language exams, and expectations placed on teachers by external measures, have impeded both the nurturing of creativity and its integration into teaching (Richards, 2013). An interesting approach to uncover whether learners' creativity skills are fostered through task-based and communicative activities is to examine the actions, practices, and behaviors of teachers while considering the barriers that may exist. The primary emphasis of the present investigation is the evaluation of the process of promoting creativity in the EFL context of Iran.

The major focus of this research is to evaluate the everyday procedures and constructs of instructors to determine how creativity is promoted among learners. Therefore, efforts were made to provide responses to the following inquiries:

1. How much do instructors incorporate moment-to-moment techniques that promote creativity in their students?
2. What are the possible reasons for instructors' success or failure in fostering the creativity of their learners?

As mentioned earlier, creativity is a vital aspect in all fields; however, providing a comprehensive definition for it proves challenging. Numerous explanations and understandings of creativity have been proposed by different scholars. Rhodes (1961) introduced the Four Ps conceptual framework, which provides a comprehensive understanding of creativity, encompassing the individual, cognitive processes, the creation of a novel communicable outcome, and the influence of the environment (Doyle, 2019). In his 2013 study, Glăveanu introduced a new concept by substituting the traditional Four Ps with Five As, which include actors, actions, artifacts, audience, and affordances. In the field of education, Beghetto (2017) classified creativity into three different types concerning teaching: instructing on creativity, incorporating creativity into teaching, and utilizing creativity during instruction. The first form focuses on enhancing students' understanding of innovative concepts. This study focuses on the second form, which involves teachers' endeavors in nurturing students' creativity. The third form pertains to adopting innovative teaching methods. In a similar vein, the 4 Cs developmental model was proposed by Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) as a

means to comprehend creativity. The model includes small c, mini-c, pro-c, and large C components. The most basic level is mini-c creativity, which pertains to the process of uncovering significant understandings and explanations that are naturally embedded in experiential learning (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). Mini-c creativity refers to a situation where individuals express their small-scale creative ideas to others (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). Everyday creativity is mainly articulated as small "c." Pro-c creativity refers to more advanced creative skills achieved in professional contexts, where creators have not yet attained notable recognition from relevant organizations. Big-C represents exceptional talent and extraordinary levels of creative thinking. According to Beghetto (2019), mini-c and little c are essential in educational settings, particularly in schools and classrooms. The cooperative, interactive, and supportive qualities of teachers are evident at both lower and higher levels of education. Teachers and students have opportunities to collaborate and engage in meaningful communication through the exchange of feedback. Consequently, individuals work together to create dialogues, engagements, and interactions that generate innovative conceptualizations and strategies.

The sociocultural theory of creativity, as articulated by Glăveanu (2020), further reinforces this notion. The extent to which learning fosters creativity is fundamentally linked to how teachers communicate and engage with learners. Within the educational context, instructors play a crucial role in nurturing the creativity of learners. This study, therefore, adopts a particular sociocultural theory of creativity to achieve its objectives. To put it differently, this study defines creativity as

the act of exchanging viewpoints and perspectives among individuals to encourage and enhance creative processes (Glăveanu, 2020, p. 279).

Numerous studies have extensively investigated creativity in education, exploring its significant impact on teaching and learning. Researchers (e.g., Glăveanu, 2018; Gu et al., 2021) have examined diverse aspects of creativity and its relationship with teaching, identifying factors influencing creative instruction. These factors include the school environment, teacher beliefs, personalities, training programs, and policies (e.g., de Bruin & Harris, 2017; Gu et al., 2021). Notably, the type of school can influence creative thinking; students from alternative educational institutions often outperform their mainstream counterparts in divergent thinking tasks (Gu et al., 2021). Furthermore, collaboration among teachers and the overall school climate can significantly contribute to fostering creative learners (Huang et al., 2021; Hondzel, 2013).

Teachers' beliefs and personalities notably affect their ability to create a creative learning environment (Chan & Yuen, 2014). Some educators may grapple with conflicting beliefs about creativity-focused instruction, leading to uncertainty regarding how best to promote such skills (Katz-Buonincontro et al., 2020). Training programs designed to enhance divergent thinking skills have demonstrated positive effects on students' creative abilities (Doron, 2016). However, policies may not always align with the practical needs of teachers in nurturing creativity in classrooms, resulting in a disconnect between instructional approaches and techniques (Henriksen et al., 2019). This gap can hinder the facilitation of creativity within the pedagogical context. Research within

applied linguistics has indicated a lack of encouragement for creativity in language teaching, often due to unclear concepts, inadequate teacher training, and limited support in available textbooks (Al-Qahtani, 2016; Hana & Hacène, 2017; Cho & Kim, 2018; Liao et al., 2018).

In the context of Iran, research exploring how instructors foster creativity in EFL classrooms has been limited (Meihami, 2022). Understanding the factors that influence creative instruction in this context could provide valuable insights for enhancing creativity in language learning. In conclusion, the significance of creativity in education cannot be overstated, with various factors—such as the school environment, teacher beliefs, and training programs—affecting the process of creativity enhancement in classrooms. Future investigation, particularly within the context of Iran, is essential to uncover effective practices for promoting creativity in EFL environments.

## Method

The mixed-method design employed in this study, specifically an exploratory sequential approach, offers several advantages worth elaborating on. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, the researchers were able to gain a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the problem, thereby enriching the overall analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The quantitative phase facilitated the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data, providing a broad overview of the extent to which Iranian EFL teachers adopt creativity-nurturing strategies (Hondzel, 2013). This initial quantitative exploration laid the groundwork for the subsequent qualitative phase, which aimed

to investigate the underlying factors and experiences shaping teachers' practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

## Participants

This investigation involved 214 Iranian instructors actively teaching English in public high schools across various regions of Iran. The sampling technique utilized was purposive sampling, aimed at selecting instructors who could provide significant insights into the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Among these, 26 instructors participated in the qualitative phase, selected based on criteria such as teaching experience, educational qualifications, and willingness to engage in the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The participants exhibited a range of teaching experience, from early-career teachers to those with several years of EFL instruction experience. This diversity contributed to a comprehensive understanding of creativity-nurturing practices, considering the potential influence of experience on teaching approaches (Katz-Buonincontro et al., 2020).

Moreover, the participants held various degrees and certifications related to English teaching, reflecting a range of professional backgrounds and training in EFL education. Most were certified EFL teachers, with many holding BA or MA degrees in TEFL or related fields. Some had completed specialized courses in language teaching methodologies or pursued additional certifications to enhance their teaching skills (Katz-Buonincontro et al., 2020). This variety in educational backgrounds provided a nuanced perspective on the factors influencing creativity-nurturing practices among EFL teachers in Iran.

Furthermore, the participants represented a diverse demographic in terms of the regions where they taught, encompassing both urban and rural areas. This geographical diversity facilitated the exploration of potential variations in creativity-nurturing practices based on contextual differences (Katz-Buonincontro et al., 2020), considering how educational context and resources impact instructors' ability to promote creativity in their students.

The participants' willingness to contribute to the research indicated their interest and commitment to the topic of creativity in language teaching (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Their eagerness to share their experiences enriched the data collected during the interviews. Additionally, the researchers ensured anonymity and confidentiality, fostering open and candid responses during the interviews (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Overall, the participants' diverse backgrounds, teaching experience, educational qualifications, and regional representation made them valuable contributors to the study. Their insights illuminated the complex interplay of factors that influence creativity-nurturing practices among EFL teachers in Iran (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The data collected from this varied group provided a broad understanding of the challenges and opportunities for promoting creativity in EFL classrooms, enhancing the robustness and applicability of the findings to the broader context of English language education in Iran.

### Data Collection Procedures

This research employed a mixed-method approach, following an exploratory sequential design. This methodology involved a comprehensive investigation of the research

problem by first gathering and analyzing quantitative data, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to deepen insights into the research results (Ivankova et al., 2006). In the initial phase, a survey questionnaire was administered to the 214 EFL instructors. The questionnaire utilized the Creativity Fostering Teaching Index (CFTI), developed by Soh (2000), a reliable and validated instrument designed to measure the frequency of creativity-nurturing practices in classroom teaching. The survey comprised 45 Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (all the time), allowing instructors to indicate the extent to which they implemented various creativity-nurturing strategies in their classrooms. Additionally, the questionnaire included a demographic section to collect relevant data about participants' age, gender, teaching experience, educational qualifications, and school type (urban or rural).

To further clarify the quantitative findings and explore the underlying factors influencing creativity-nurturing practices, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of instructors. Twenty-six instructors were purposively selected from the initial group based on their demonstrated insights and experiences related to the research question. The interviews were conducted in Persian, the instructors' first language, to facilitate more fluent and comfortable expression of their thoughts and experiences. The interview guide consisted of 12 open-ended questions designed to explore the teachers' experiences, practices, and perceptions regarding creativity nurturing. The questions were informed by the analysis of the questionnaire, existing literature on creativity-nurturing practices, and the researchers' expertise in language education (Jones & Richards, 2016). The items were pre-

tested with nine instructors to ensure clarity and appropriateness, leading to minor modifications based on the feedback received.

The average length of the interviews was approximately 20 minutes, allowing ample time for participants to share their experiences and insights in depth. Intelligent verbatim transcription was employed to capture the essence of the participants' responses, focusing on the meanings conveyed rather than the exact wording (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis process began with a statistical examination of the Creativity Fostering Teaching Index (CFTI) responses, revealing patterns and insights into the teachers' creativity-nurturing practices. Concurrently, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts to extract significant themes from the teachers' experiences. This integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enriched the study, providing a comprehensive view of creativity in EFL classrooms.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the researchers adhered to the principles of credibility, transferability, and dependability. Feedback from expert participants bolstered the credibility of the qualitative findings, assuring accuracy. Additionally, the researchers painted a vivid picture of the context, enhancing the transferability of the findings to similar educational environments. To further establish dependability, an external reviewer was invited to assess the procedures, validating the authenticity of the analysis and leading to compelling conclusions.

Quantitative data analysis utilized the CFTI, a well-established tool measuring instructors' perspectives on creativity-nurturing practices

(Hondzel, 2013; Soh, 2015). The six-point Likert scale allowed for nuanced ratings of the frequency with which teachers employed various strategies, effectively minimizing bias toward a neutral midpoint (Soh, 2015). This approach provided a more accurate representation of teachers' practices and their perceptions of creativity-nurturing strategies (Hondzel, 2013).

The qualitative phase, consisting of in-depth interviews, offered richer insights into the factors influencing creativity-nurturing practices within the classroom (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The use of open-ended questions enabled instructors to express their views freely, yielding valuable insights into their experiences and perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Conducting the interviews in Persian, the participants' native language, ensured they could articulate their thoughts and experiences comfortably and accurately (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed five main categories: pedagogical conditions, lack of involvement, affective filters, absence of collaborative activities, and the influence of testing and assessment (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). These categories illuminated the significant challenges faced by Iranian EFL instructors in fostering creativity in their classrooms.

The school environment emerged as a critical factor affecting both the physical and educational aspects of teaching (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Limited resources, inadequate instructional facilities, and constrained class time hindered teachers from effectively implementing creativity-nurturing practices (Hondzel, 2013). The pressure to prepare students for high-stakes exams, particularly the

university entrance exam, dominated the educational landscape and discouraged teachers from exploring innovative and creative teaching approaches (Hondzel, 2013; Harris & de Bruin, 2019). Findings regarding the lack of student involvement and rapport underscored the importance of student-centered, interactive, and challenging classroom activities in fostering creativity (Henriksen et al., 2019; Craft, 2005). However, the prevailing emphasis on rote learning and competition for exam results limited opportunities for learners to actively engage in creative endeavors (Harris & de Bruin, 2019). Building rapport and trust with students was identified as crucial for encouraging their creative expression, though teachers expressed concerns about maintaining discipline if they were too flexible (Henriksen et al., 2019; Craft, 2005).

The absence of collaborative training highlighted the limited opportunities for teachers to share and exchange creative teaching strategies with peers (Davies et al., 2012; Glăveanu et al., 2019). The lack of collaboration and professional development in creativity-nurturing practices may result in missed opportunities for growth and innovation within the pedagogical community (Davies et al., 2012; Glăveanu et al., 2019). The impact of testing and assessment emerged as a prominent factor influencing teachers' practices (Harris & de Bruin, 2019; Berliner, 2011). The dominance of exam-oriented education in Iran, particularly regarding the university entrance exam, fostered a test-driven culture that prioritized exam preparation over creative teaching (Harris & de Bruin, 2019; Berliner, 2011).

In conclusion, the mixed-method design employed in this investigation provided a

comprehensive and multifaceted exploration of creativity-nurturing practices among Iranian EFL teachers (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The integration of quantitative and qualitative data offered profound insights into the challenges and complexities related to promoting creativity within the EFL context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The findings emphasized the importance of addressing various factors, such as the school environment, teacher-student relationships, collaboration, and the impact of testing and assessment, to enhance creativity-nurturing practices (Hondzel, 2013; Harris & de Bruin, 2019; Berliner, 2011). The study's implications underscore the need for educational policymakers and teacher educators to consider these challenges and work towards creating a pedagogical context that fosters creativity and innovation in EFL teaching environments in Iran and similar contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

### Quantitative Results

The quantitative analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire revealed the mean scores for the creativity-instigating techniques used by EFL instructors. Table 1 presents the mean scores for each item (strategy) along with the overall subscale mean scores. The results indicated that the mean scores for the instructors' responses to the items were relatively low, suggesting that creativity-nurturing strategies were not extensively employed in their teaching practices.

**Table 1.***Mean scores of Items and subscales*

subscale	Items and their means			Subscale mean
Independence	1: 2.53	10: 1.90	19: 3.76	3.22
	28: 2.94	37: 4.69		
Integration	2: 2.55	11: 3.57	20: 3.06	3.82
	29: 5.72	38: 3.53		
Motivation	3: 2.94	12: 5.45	21: 1.39	2.87
	30: 2.11	39: 2.56		
Judgment	4: 2.81	13: 3.83	22: 2.40	3.08
	31: 3.51	40: 2.73		
Flexibility	5: 4.66	14: 1.62	23: 2.05	2.85
	32: 3.80	41: 1.96		
Evaluation	6: 4.69	15: 2.82	24: 3.12	3.29
	33: 2.51	42: 3.58		
Question	7: 2.29	16: 5.44	25: 4.39	3.33
	34: 2.20	43: 2.32		
Opportunities	8: 2.71	17: 4.63	26: 3.51	3.36
	35: 2.04	44: 3.67		
Frustration	9: 4.12	18: 3.64	27: 3.38	4.13
	36: 4.29	45: 4.91		
Combined mean score of scales				3.42

To interpret the mean scores, it is essential to understand the scale used in the questionnaire. Mean scores can range from 1 to 6, with 1 indicating that a strategy is never used, 2 suggesting it is rarely used, 3 signifying sometimes, 4 denoting often, 5 implying usually, and 6 representing always (Edinger, 2008; Soh, 2015). The researchers opted for a six-point scale to prevent respondents from endorsing a neutral midpoint, maximizing variance in scores (Soh, 2015). Considering a cut-off score of 4 or more, the results showed that creativity-nurturing strategies were not frequently used by Iranian EFL teachers. The combined value of the total mean for all scales yielded 3.42, indicating a moderate level of utilization. The quantitative data provided a preliminary glimpse into the teachers' practices regarding creativity-enhancing strategies, paving the way for deeper exploration through qualitative data collection.

### Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis, based on deductive thematic analysis of the interviews, revealed five significant categories. These categories were pedagogical context, lack of engagement, lack of collaborative activities, affective filters, and testing as well as assessment. Regarding the pedagogical context, the instructors expressed dissatisfaction with the immediate requirements, inadequate materials and instructional facilities, limited time for instruction, and challenges posed by university entrance exams. The competitive nature of the classroom, driven by the pressure to excel in exams, was highlighted as a major obstacle to effective teaching. The theme of absence of involvement reflected that EFL instructors do not actively engage the learners in student-centered, interactive, or challenging classroom activities. Out-of-class communication with students was limited, with homework being the primary mode of involvement. Time constraints

and the perceived lower priority of language learning for high school students contributed to this situation. Lack of rapport emerged as a key issue, with teachers expressing a desire to create a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere. However, some hesitated to accept student suggestions and criticisms, fearing a loss of discipline. Trust among instructors and learners was identified as lacking, with few instances of understanding and empathizing with students' perspectives. The absence of collaborative training indicated that most teachers had not participated in workshops or training related to pedagogical creativity or pedagogy for the sake of educating creative learners. Limited interaction among instructors, coupled with a traditional approach to teaching, hindered the development of personalized and innovative teaching practices. The theme of testing and assessment revealed that instructors felt restricted in providing learners with essential instructions in line with different exams, such as the Concours exam for gaining admission to higher education in Iran. This emphasis on exam results led to a focus on teaching to the test, overshadowing creative teaching approaches. Together, the qualitative findings revealed significant insights into the complexities and problems that EFL instructors in Iran confront in boosting creative learners.

## Discussion

The findings of the present research indicated a relatively low level of adoption with regard to creativity-instigating techniques, yielding a combined total mean score of 3.42 (Table 1) (Ivankova et al., 2006). This finding aligns with previous research by Hondzel (2013), which also found that creativity is not a

prevalent aspect of teaching practices in Iranian EFL classrooms. It is consistent with other studies that indicate a lack of emphasis on creativity in language education (de Souza Fleith, 2000; Edinger, 2008). One plausible explanation for the limited utilization of creativity-instigating techniques might deal with the instructors' understandings and views about creativity. If instructors have negative or indifferent views regarding creativity, they may not actively incorporate creativity-promoting practices into their teaching methods. Instead, they might prioritize accomplishment, testing, meaningless instruction, and adherence to constraints over fostering creative thinking and higher-order learning skills, as proposed by Amabile (1989) and Cropley (1997). This aligns with research results that emphasize the contribution of instructors' beliefs as well as attitudes in shaping their teaching practices (Mullet et al., 2016; Wang & Kokotsaki, 2018). Additionally, factors beyond the instructors' control—such as restricted access to pedagogical materials, the non-standard nature of pedagogical content, socio-economic factors in school districts, and standardized testing—can also influence their ability to implement creativity-nurturing strategies (de Bruin & Harris, 2017; McLellan & Nicholl, 2013). These external constraints may hinder instructors' autonomy as well as their creative higher-order skills within the context of the classroom. In fact, prior investigations confirmed that standardized testing can lead to a focus on teaching to the test, which may limit opportunities for creative teaching practices (Harris & de Bruin, 2019). Addressing these challenges requires a deeper exploration of the underlying essence of instructors' misunderstandings regarding the notion of

creative instruction, as well as the barriers that impede their efforts in utilizing creativity-nurturing strategies. Educational policymakers and curriculum developers can make a crucial contribution to promoting creativity and innovation in the teaching environment. By gaining a broad understanding of these underlying points, targeted interventions can be developed to assist instructors in the amalgamation of creativity-inducing techniques with pedagogical practices. Sternberg and Williams (1996) argue that boosting higher-order skills, such as creative thinking, should be preceded by a shift in the prevailing educational culture and mindset. Encouraging teachers to recognize the significance of creative thinking in EFL pedagogy and providing them with the necessary support and resources can help create a context in which students' creativity and higher-order learning skills are activated and gradually elevated.

The qualitative analysis in the current investigation has led to significant messages conveying the deficiency of creativity cultivation by Iranian EFL instructors in their students. The identified factors encompass the school environment, lack of involvement, deficient affective support, lack of collaborative activities, and the washback or impact of non-standard evaluation. Such results are congruent with prior investigations, highlighting the influence of the pedagogical environment on creativity (Chan & Yuen, 2014; Patston, 2017). The absence of involvement indicates that instructors do not actively engage learners in student-centered, interactive, or challenging activities (McLellan & Nicholl, 2013). Limited time and students' perceptions of language learning being a lower priority contribute to this situation. To address this issue, it is essential to emphasize the value

of student-centered and interactive learning approaches, which can encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning process and contribute to the promotion of their own higher-order abilities, such as creativity (Henriksen et al., 2019). The lack of rapport between teachers and students emerges as another significant factor. Establishing a promotional and facilitative context within the classroom is vital for nurturing creativity. When students feel trusted and scaffolded, they tend to actively participate, have their own voice among peers, and take intellectual risks, thereby fostering creativity (Craft, 2005; Henriksen et al., 2019). To promote better rapport, teachers can encourage free discussions, construct a supportive environment for learners to communicate and exchange their viewpoints, and show genuine interest in their students' perspectives and experiences. The absence of collaborative training hampers teachers' development of creative teaching practices. Collaborative training and support from experienced educators and colleagues can facilitate the exchange of creative teaching strategies (Davies et al., 2012; Glăveanu et al., 2019). Engaging teachers in professional development programs that focus on creativity-nurturing practices can help them learn the essential competencies and qualifications to implement innovative teaching approaches in their classrooms. Testing and assessment, particularly the pressure to prepare students for high-stakes exams, significantly impact teaching practices. Teachers may prioritize test preparation over fostering creativity, leading to a focus on teaching to the test (Kaufman et al., 2022; Duffy et al., 2009). To address this issue, it is important to harmonize the need for assessment with the promotion of creative

teaching practices. Policymakers can explore alternative assessment methods that assess students' creativity and critical thinking skills, thereby incentivizing teachers to incorporate creativity-nurturing strategies into their teaching.

Overall, the findings indicate that the current educational system in Iran may not sufficiently support creativity-nurturing teaching practices. Factors such as the competitive exam-focused policies, limited resources, and lack of training hinder the efforts of EFL instructors to create a creative context as they practice teaching (Jones et al., 2003). Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach. Policymakers and curriculum developers should take into account the essential requirements for instructors to create pedagogical contexts that include scaffolding and provide them with enough training to incorporate creativity-nurturing strategies into their teaching. Efforts should be made to create a positive pedagogical environment that values creativity and encourages collaboration among teachers (Patston, 2017). In conclusion, fostering creativity in Iranian EFL classrooms demands concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders. Understanding the teachers' beliefs and addressing external constraints can lead to the construction of a more creative and innovative teaching environment. Further research and interventions should focus on enhancing instructors' capacity to nurture creativity in their students and fostering a culture that values creativity in education (Harris & de Bruin, 2019). Moreover, efforts should be made to evaluate the effectiveness of targeted interventions in boosting creativity in EFL classrooms and explore the role of educational policies in shaping creativity-nurturing practices among teachers. By addressing these issues,

educational systems can build a more effective and higher-order-thinking-skills-oriented context to flourish students' inner resources in language education.

## Conclusions

The study's findings indicated that EFL instructors in Iran are currently not effectively implementing creativity-nurturing techniques in the pedagogical contexts. The quantitative data indicate a low level of creativity-nurturing practices, as evidenced by the mean scores of the strategies employed by the teachers. This observation aligns with prior research that has also identified a lack of emphasis on creativity in language education (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Soh, 2017). The qualitative results provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to the deficiency of creativity-nurturing practices. The identified factors encompass the school environment, lack of involvement, deficient rapport, absence of collaborative training, and prevailing testing and assessment practices. These factors are intricately interconnected and present formidable barriers to the effective application of creativity-enhancing strategies in EFL contexts. This observation might be congruent with prior investigations, underscoring the impact of external components, such as the pedagogical context, curriculum, and assessment, on teachers' creativity-nurturing practices (Harris, 2016; Kaufman et al., 2022). Moreover, the findings reinforce prior research on the significance of teacher beliefs and attitudes towards creativity in shaping their instructional practices (Amabile, 1988; Hondzel, 2013). Nonetheless, there are noteworthy differences in the findings. While some studies have emphasized the pivotal role of teacher training and professional

development in fostering creativity (Doron, 2016; Scott et al., 2004), this study reveals a scarcity of collaborative training opportunities for Iranian EFL teachers. Moreover, the research highlights the considerable impact of the high-stakes university entrance exam on instructional practices, a factor that may not be as salient in other educational contexts. This finding resonates with previous research, which has identified testing and assessment as formidable impediments to creativity in education (Duffy et al., 2009; Harris & de Bruin, 2019).

The conclusions underscore the necessity for pedagogical implications to address the identified barriers and enhance creativity-nurturing practices. Strategies such as teacher training, curriculum revision, redefining assessment practices, cultivating a supportive school environment, fostering teacher-student rapport, encouraging student involvement, and advocating for creativity in education policy are vital steps towards cultivating creativity in Iranian EFL classrooms. These implications align with prior research that underscores the significance of teacher training and curriculum development in promoting creativity (Doron, 2016; Kaufman et al., 2022). In summary, the conclusions of the present research underscore the significance of enhancing creativity in language education and illuminate specific challenges and opportunities for improvement within the Iranian EFL context. By addressing the identified factors and implementing the suggested pedagogical implications, it is possible to establish an environment that fosters creativity and enhances the overall learning experience for EFL students in Iran. This aligns with previous research that advocates for a more creative approach to education, preparing

students to tackle the challenges of the future (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Soh, 2017).

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The results of the present investigation include crucial implications in the realm of EFL pedagogy for the enhancement of creativity-nurturing practices in Iranian contexts and potentially in other contexts as well:

1. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** There is a need for comprehensive teacher training and professional development workshops that focus on nurturing creativity in language classrooms. Such workshops should provide EFL instructors with the necessary competencies and skills to implement creativity-enhancing strategies, create student-centered and interactive activities, and encourage students to take intellectual risks. Collaborative training opportunities that allow teachers to share creative ideas and experiences with each other should be emphasized.
2. **Curriculum and Materials Design:** The EFL curriculum and materials should be revised to incorporate creativity-nurturing elements. It is essential to integrate more challenging and engaging tasks that encourage problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity. Teachers should have access to resources and teaching aids that facilitate creative learning experiences. Moreover, the curriculum should promote an inquiry-based and exploratory approach to learning, which encourages students to ask questions and explore ideas.
3. **Redefining Assessment Practices:** The current high-stakes testing culture in Iranian EFL classrooms can be redefined to

encourage creativity. Instead of focusing solely on standardized exams, a more holistic assessment approach can be adopted, including formative and performance-based assessments that value creativity, originality, and critical thinking. By aligning assessments with creativity-nurturing practices, teachers can better promote and reinforce creative behaviors in their students.

4. **Creating Scaffolding in Pedagogical Contexts:** The pedagogical setting makes a significant contribution to shaping creativity-nurturing practices. Administrators and policymakers should create a supportive school environment that values and encourages creativity in education. This includes providing adequate resources, facilities, and technology to facilitate creative teaching and learning. School leaders should promote a positive and inclusive culture where teachers and students feel comfortable expressing and experimenting with creative ideas.
5. **Encouraging Teacher-Student Rapport:** Building rapport between teachers and students is crucial for nurturing creativity. Teachers should create a warm and supportive classroom atmosphere where students feel safe to express their thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment. Positive teacher-student relationships foster trust and encourage students to take risks and explore new ideas.
6. **Promoting Student Involvement:** Teachers should actively involve students in the learning process by incorporating student-centered, interactive, and challenging activities. Involvement in tasks that encourage problem-solving, decision-

making, and creative expression can enhance students' motivation and engagement, leading to more creative outcomes.

7. **Emphasizing Flexibility and Adaptability:** Teachers should embrace flexibility in their teaching approaches to accommodate students' diverse learning styles and preferences. Adopting a more adaptive teaching style allows teachers to respond to students' creative expressions and support their individual interests and passions.
8. **Advocating for Creativity in Education Policy:** The results of the present research and prior studies indicate the need for advocacy at the policy level. Policymakers should recognize the importance of creativity in education and integrate creativity-enhancing initiatives into national educational policies. This includes incorporating creativity as a valued educational outcome and allocating resources for teacher training and professional development in creativity-nurturing practices.

In conclusion, fostering creativity in language education is a multi-faceted endeavor that requires a collective effort from teachers, administrators, policymakers, and teacher educators. By implementing the pedagogical implications discussed above, Iranian EFL classrooms can become more conducive to creativity, leading to enhanced student engagement, motivation, and innovative thinking.

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