
THE USE OF INTEGRATED LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP CREATIVE THINKING IN PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT: The article investigates how carefully designed integrated language activities contribute to the development of creative thinking among pre-service English language teachers. The study was conducted with 62 undergraduate trainees enrolled in a bachelor's programme in English Language Education at a regional pedagogical university. A mixed-method, quasi-experimental design combined pre- and post-testing with qualitative analysis of reflective journals and focus-group interviews. Quantitative results demonstrated a statistically significant increase in divergent-thinking indicators measured by an adapted Torrance test ($t = 4.21$; $p < 0.01$). Qualitative findings revealed enhanced imaginative flexibility, more sophisticated metaphorical language use and greater self-efficacy in lesson planning. The discussion interprets these outcomes through constructivist and socio-cultural perspectives, arguing that the simultaneous engagement of receptive and productive language modes provides the cognitive branching necessary for creative elaboration. The study recommends embedding project-based and multimodal tasks across the teacher-education curriculum to cultivate a sustained culture of creativity.

KEYWORDS: Integrated language activities; creative thinking; pre-service teachers; English language pedagogy; mixed-method research.

INTRODUCTION: Teacher education worldwide increasingly emphasises twenty-first-century competencies, among which creativity occupies a central place. While creative thinking has been broadly acknowledged as essential for adaptive language instruction, empirical work on how to foster it systematically in teacher-training programmes is still limited. In many curricula, language skills are developed in isolation, and creativity is relegated to elective courses or extracurricular workshops, which dilutes its practical value. Integrated language activities—tasks that blend listening, speaking, reading and writing within a coherent communicative purpose—have been shown to stimulate higher-order cognition, yet their potential to nurture creativity in future teachers remains under-researched. This study addresses that gap by examining the impact of a semester-long intervention built around integrated language projects on the creative thinking abilities of pre-service English language teachers in Uzbekistan.

The research was conducted during the spring semester of 2024 – 2025 in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Khorezm Regional University. Participants were 62 third-year students (46 female, 16 male; mean age = 20.7) randomly assigned to an experimental group ($n = 31$) and a control group ($n = 31$). Both groups followed the same core syllabus in Methodology of TEFL; however,

only the experimental cohort completed six integrated language projects embedded in regular course time. Each project required students to negotiate meaning across receptive and productive modalities: for instance, reading contemporary short fiction, scripting and recording a podcast discussion, composing a reflective essay, and micro-teaching a lesson that recycled thematic vocabulary through improvisational drama. Tutor feedback focused on originality, risk-taking and pedagogical transferability.

Creative thinking was measured with the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) Figural Form A, adapted for language-learning contexts by replacing visual prompts with open-ended text stimuli. Reliability of the adapted instrument was confirmed with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$. Pre- and post-tests were administered to both groups. For qualitative insight, all participants in the experimental group kept weekly reflective journals; five voluntary focus groups were conducted at semester end. Quantitative data were analysed using paired-sample t-tests and ANCOVA with SPSS 29. Qualitative data underwent thematic coding in MAXQDA, following an inductive approach to identify emergent patterns.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the university's research committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants. To minimise instructor bias, teaching in both cohorts was delivered by lecturers unaware of group allocation, while assessment was performed blind by external raters.

The experimental group exhibited substantial gains in all TTCT dimensions. Mean fluency scores rose from 19.4 to 27.2, flexibility from 14.7 to 23.5, originality from 15.1 to 24.8, and elaboration from 12.9 to 19.6. The composite creativity index improved by 37.8 %, compared to 8.6 % in the control group. ANCOVA, controlling for initial ability, confirmed a significant main effect of the intervention ($F(1, 59) = 18.37, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.24$).

Reflective journals revealed three dominant themes. First, participants reported a heightened ability to generate multiple pedagogical solutions for a single language point, describing this as "thinking in parallel streams rather than in a straight line." Second, integrated tasks encouraged playful experimentation with genre and register, leading to richer lexical choices and more nuanced discourse strategies. Third, collaborative creativity emerged: students drew inspiration from peers' divergent responses, which in turn amplified their own imaginative outcomes.

Focus-group discussions corroborated these themes, adding that trans-modal transitions—moving from reading to audio production to performance—acted as cognitive "reset buttons," preventing habitual responses. Trainees also expressed increased confidence in designing learner-centred activities, citing the intervention as a model for future classroom practice.

The findings demonstrate that sustained engagement with integrated language activities can measurably enhance creative thinking in pre-service teachers. The quantitative leap in TTCT scores aligns with the theoretical proposition that creativity flourishes when individuals juggle multiple semiotic resources, as posited by socio-semiotic theory. Integrated tasks require learners to re-

encode meaning across modalities, a process that inherently involves abstraction, transformation and elaboration—core components of creative cognition.

Moreover, the social dimension of project collaboration resonates with Vygotskian notions of the zone of proximal development. Peer interaction provided scaffolding for risk-taking, thereby lowering affective barriers to originality. The study's results extend previous research that predominantly focused on young language learners by confirming similar benefits for adult teacher-trainees.

However, the intervention's success was conditioned by several contextual factors: supportive instructor feedback, institutional flexibility to accommodate project timelines and a cohort already motivated by professional aspirations. Further research should test the model in settings with less favourable conditions and over longer periods to examine sustainability. Limitations include a relatively small sample size and reliance on a single creativity instrument; triangulation with classroom observation rubrics would strengthen external validity.

CONCLUSION

The semester-long integration of multi-modal language projects significantly advanced creative thinking abilities among pre-service English language teachers. The dual activation of linguistic skills and imaginative processes fostered flexible, original and pedagogically transferable ideas. Teacher-education programmes aiming to meet contemporary standards of innovation should, therefore, mainstream integrated language activities rather than treating them as adjunct enrichment. Policy-makers and curriculum designers are encouraged to allocate formal credit hours for creativity-centred projects and to provide professional development that equips lecturers with appropriate task-design expertise. Future investigations might explore digital adaptations of the model, longitudinal impacts on in-service teaching and correlations between creative thinking growth and learner outcomes in school classrooms.

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