

## **EFL Pre-Service Teacher Trainees' Perceptions on Developing Pupils' Creativity**

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### **Abstract**

*Creativity is recognized as a critical 21st-century skill, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. While fostering creativity in language learning is widely acknowledged, limited research has explored how EFL pre-service teachers perceive and apply creativity in their teaching. This study investigated the perceptions of 123 EFL pre-service teachers who had completed a teaching practicum, focusing on their understanding of creativity, strategies for fostering it, and classroom practices. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted using a 24-item Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from validated instruments, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The total mean score was 52.09, indicating generally positive perceptions but with considerable variation among individuals. Higher scores were recorded for practical strategies such as questioning techniques, collaboration, and adapting lessons to student interests. In comparison, lower scores were found for recognizing contextual factors and utilizing technology creatively. Overall, the findings suggest that while pre-service teachers value creativity, their understanding remains more product-oriented and expressive, with limited integration of higher-order thinking, contextual awareness, and technology as a strategic tool in fostering creativity.*

**Keywords:** *creativity, creative teaching strategies, EFL pre-service teachers, teacher perceptions, language education*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Creativity has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental competence in 21st-century education, particularly in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). As language learning extends beyond linguistic accuracy toward the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability, creativity has emerged as a key pedagogical skill that supports learner engagement and innovation (Jabeen & Sarifa, 2024; Kim, 2023). In EFL contexts, fostering creativity allows learners to navigate diverse linguistic and cultural challenges while promoting autonomy, flexibility, and communicative competence. Consequently, creativity is not merely an enhancement to language learning but a central component of meaningful, student-centered pedagogy.

Creativity in EFL instruction has been associated with the use of open-ended tasks, problem-solving activities, project-based learning, collaborative strategies, and multimodal approaches that encourage divergent thinking and authentic expression (Cosgun & Atay, 2021; Rak, 2021). Such practices contribute to higher-order thinking and enhance student motivation; however, teachers often face systemic constraints such as rigid curricula, standardized testing, and limited time, which inhibit the consistent application of creative methods (Çelik & Tümen Akyıldız, 2021; Kurt & Önalın, 2018). Studies in various contexts reveal this tension. For example, Turkish and Iranian EFL teachers acknowledge creativity as essential for engagement, but often confine it to supplementary activities rather

than integrating it into core instruction (Abbasi et al., 2023; Akyıldız & Çelik, 2020). Similarly, Brazilian teachers and students associate creativity with originality and flexibility, yet misconceptions about its practical implementation hinder its classroom application (de Oliveira et al., 2023).

Pre-service teachers' perceptions are particularly significant, as their beliefs about creativity strongly shape their future teaching practices. Research consistently shows that although pre-service teachers recognize creativity as valuable, many feel inadequately prepared to implement it effectively. Their understanding of creativity is often limited to aesthetic or entertaining activities such as music, games, or art, while its broader cognitive dimensions—critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation—are overlooked (Moore, 2023). These findings underscore the need for teacher education programs to provide structured training emphasizing theoretical frameworks and practical strategies for fostering creativity in language learning.

Several theoretical perspectives have informed the study of creativity in education. Guilford's Divergent Thinking Theory and Torrance's Creative Thinking Model highlight fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration as central dimensions of creative thought (Fernández-Fontecha, 2021). Complementing these, Rhodes (1961) 4P framework—Person, Process, Press, and Product—has been widely adopted in recent research to capture the multifaceted nature of creativity. Within this framework, creativity is seen not only as a trait of individuals (Person) or the cognitive stages they engage in (Process), but also as a construct shaped by environmental influences (Press) and realized in tangible outcomes (Product). Studies applying this model in EFL contexts demonstrate that while teachers often associate creativity with its outcomes, their understanding of environmental and cognitive dimensions is still developing (Khabibah et al., 2023; Zha & Greenier, 2023).

In practical terms, strategies such as brainstorming, storytelling, role-play, drama, and collaborative projects have proven effective in stimulating students' creativity and promoting authentic language use (Hana & Hacène, 2017; Soykurt, 2021). Anwar et al. (2023) demonstrated that small-group discussion techniques significantly enhanced students' speaking performance by increasing their confidence, interaction, and fluency. The integration of technology—through digital storytelling, gamification, and interactive multimedia—further enriches the learning experience and allows students to experiment linguistically in diverse contexts (Aliakbari & Kalantari, 2021; Yudha et al., 2024). However, the success of these approaches depends largely on teachers' confidence, professional training, and the presence of supportive classroom environments that value exploration and risk-taking (Zha & Greenier, 2023). Without adequate preparation, pre-service teachers often struggle to balance curricular demands with the need to cultivate creativity. Likewise, Setyawan & Susanto (2019) demonstrated that integrating game-based media in language learning enhances students' motivation and creative thinking, suggesting that innovative and technology-supported instruction can meaningfully foster creativity when properly designed. These studies reveal that while the awareness of creativity in Indonesian EFL education is increasing, its pedagogical integration is still inconsistent due to limited exposure in teacher education programs and a lack of contextualized training.

Based on the previous literature, three main research gaps can be identified. First, most studies focus on in-service teachers, while little research explores how pre-service teachers, who are still developing their teaching identity, perceive creativity after completing their teaching practicum. Second, previous studies usually discuss creativity only from one side, such as teaching strategies or classroom activities, without connecting it to a broader framework like the 4P model, which helps explain creativity more completely. Third, research in Indonesia on EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of creativity is still limited, even though creativity is one of the core competencies expected in the curriculum. Thus, there is still little understanding of how Indonesian pre-service

teachers interpret and apply creativity in their teaching practice.

To address these gaps, this study explores EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of developing students' creativity through the lens of the 4P framework. By focusing on three key dimensions: 1) understanding of creativity, 2) strategies for developing creativity, and 3) classroom practices, this study bridges theoretical and practical perspectives. It provides new insights into how future EFL educators in Indonesia perceive creativity as a pedagogical tool and a cognitive and environmental process shaped by contextual realities. Moreover, by employing a quantitative approach across multiple institutions, the study offers a broader empirical understanding of how teacher education programs can be enhanced to cultivate creative teaching competencies better. With the following research question: "How did EFL pre-service teacher trainees perceive developing students' creativity?"

This study provides empirical insights into prospective educators' readiness to apply creativity in language learning. Focusing on EFL pre-service teacher trainees who have completed their teaching practicum, it offers a contextual understanding of how creativity is viewed and practiced in English as a foreign language classrooms in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of pre-service EFL teacher trainees regarding the development of students' creativity, with particular attention to their understanding of creativity and the extent to which it is integrated into their teaching practices. The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design using a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. This design enabled the systematic collection of data from a large group of participants at a single point in time, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends in their perceptions of developing students' creativity in EFL teaching.

### **Respondents**

This study's respondents were EFL pre-service teacher trainees enrolled in 41 universities across Indonesia, all of whom had completed their teaching practicum. This inclusion criterion ensured respondents possessed theoretical knowledge and practical teaching experience, making their perceptions of creativity development in EFL instruction meaningful and contextually grounded.

A snowball sampling technique was used to reach a broad and diverse range of respondents nationwide. Initial respondents who met the inclusion criteria were contacted through professional networks, academic groups, and online platforms. They were then invited to share the survey link with other eligible pre-service teachers within their institutions or networks. This method was chosen because it effectively reaches respondents from geographically dispersed areas, particularly in a large and diverse country like Indonesia. Respondents were voluntary, and informed consent was obtained electronically. Respondents were informed about the study's purpose, their rights to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their data. All responses were anonymized and securely stored to ensure data protection.

### **Instruments**

The main instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire developed based on the theoretical framework of the 4P model of creativity by Rhodes (1961) and adapted from previous studies. The questionnaire comprised 24 closed-ended items distributed across three main aspects: Understanding of Creativity, Strategies for Developing Student Creativity, and Creativity Practices in the EFL Classroom. All items were arranged on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The instrument was tested for validity and reliability, and the results confirmed that all items were valid and reliable for use in the main study. The questionnaire was administered in English with clear and accessible wording to ensure comprehension among EFL pre-service teachers from various universities across Indonesia.

### **Procedures**

The research was conducted between April and May 2025 with respondents from 41 universities offering English language education programs in Indonesia. Given the wide geographical distribution of the respondents, the data collection process was conducted online to ensure accessibility and efficiency. The procedures involved several stages, beginning with the preparation and validation of the questionnaire through expert judgment and pilot testing. After validation, the finalized instrument was distributed via Google Forms, and the link was shared through various online channels, including WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, and institutional email networks.

A snowball sampling strategy was also applied to encourage respondents to share the questionnaire with other eligible pre-service teachers. The data collection period lasted for four weeks, during which respondents could complete the questionnaire at their convenience, and reminder messages were periodically sent to increase participation. The first section of the questionnaire contained an informed consent statement outlining the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures, and respondents could only proceed after providing their consent. This online approach ensured efficient data collection from a large and diverse group of EFL pre-service teachers while maintaining ethical research standards.

### **Data Analysis**

All responses were exported from Google Forms and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data were screened for completeness, and only valid responses were included in the final analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS based on responses from 123 respondents who completed the final version of the 24-item questionnaire, which had been previously tested for validity and reliability. The respondents represented various provinces across Indonesia, with the majority originating from West Java, Central Java, Banten, and East Java, while smaller proportions came from other regions.

Descriptive statistics—including means, standard deviations, and percentages—were computed to summarize the respondents' perceptions across the three main variables. These analyses provided an overview of general trends, central tendencies, and response variations. This analytic approach provided a clear and comprehensive understanding of how EFL pre-service teachers across Indonesia perceive and interpret the development of students' creativity within the context of English language teaching.

## **RESULTS**

### **EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Understanding of Creativity**

In this dimension, the results show that EFL pre-service teachers have a positive perception and conceptual understanding of creativity in language learning. Mean scores for this dimension ranged from 1.99 to 2.21, indicating agreement that creativity involves imagination, innovation, and problem-solving in classroom contexts. Most respondents recognized that students can demonstrate creativity through flexible and meaningful language use, even when their linguistic accuracy is limited, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Understanding of Creativity Result**

	Percentage					Mean	Std. Deviation
	SA	A	N	D	SD		
1. I view creativity as a combination of imagination, innovation, and problem-solving in the language classroom.	47.2%	30.9%	5.7%	8.1%	8.1%	1.99	1.264
2. Creativity is about expressing one's identity and perspective through the English language.	32.5%	38.2%	10.6%	13.0%	5.7%	2.21	1.196
3. Creative language tasks support cognitive development and critical thinking.	42.3%	35.0%	7.3%	7.3%	8.1%	2.04	1.237
4. Students can be creative in English even when their language output is not grammatically perfect.	39.8%	36.6%	6.5%	11.4%	5.7%	2.07	1.199
5. Creativity in EFL includes finding multiple ways to express a single idea.	29.3%	43.1%	11.4%	11.4%	4.9%	2.20	1.128
6. Encouraging new ways of thinking is essential for fostering creativity in the classroom.	43.9%	34.1%	6.5%	6.5%	8.9%	2.02	1.258
7. Having new experiences helps both teachers and students develop creativity.	44.7%	32.5%	6.5%	9.8%	6.5%	2.01	1.225
8. A flexible curriculum allows for the integration of creative teaching practices.	31.7%	50.4%	6.5%	4.9%	6.5%	2.08	1.212

### Strategies for Developing Student Creativity

The second dimension revealed that respondents showed a moderate understanding of pedagogical strategies that foster creativity, with mean scores ranging from 2.02 to 2.45. The highest mean was recorded for questioning techniques that promote creative thinking, while lower means were found in statements related to recognizing contextual factors affecting creativity. This suggests that while pre-service teachers know instructional methods that encourage creativity, their ability to adapt strategies based on context remains underdeveloped, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Understanding of Developing Strategies Result

	Percentage					Mean	Std. Deviation
	SA	A	N	D	SD		
9. I know how to use questioning techniques that promote creative thinking in English learners.	20.3%	37.4%	23.6%	14.6%	4.1%	2.45	1.095
10. I believe integrating students' personal experiences enhances creativity in English classes.	35.8%	37.4%	11.4%	7.3%	8.1%	2.15	1.219
11. I promote peer collaboration to help students develop and refine their creative ideas in English.	26.8%	45.5%	11.4%	8.9%	7.3%	2.24	1.162
12. I believe metacognitive strategies (planning, monitoring, evaluating) help foster student creativity.	29.3%	46.3%	8.9%	8.1%	7.3%	2.18	1.160
13. I intentionally design learning tasks that encourage multiple solutions or expressions.	30.9%	37.4%	16.3%	9.8%	5.7%	2.22	1.156
14. I believe that structured scaffolding is necessary to help students develop creativity in English learning.	33.3%	35.8%	16.3%	11.4%	3.3%	2.15	1.109
15. I acknowledge that contextual factors such as time, motivation, and background affect creativity.	39.0%	33.3%	11.4%	7.3%	8.9%	2.14	1.263
16. I am aware that adapting instructional strategies to student interests enhances creativity.	27.6%	46.3%	9.8%	11.4%	4.9%	2.20	1.114

### Creativity Practices in the EFL Classroom

The final dimension examined actual classroom practices, where mean scores ranged from 1.95 to 2.37. Respondents generally reported engaging students in creative tasks such as writing original texts, using problem-solving scenarios, and encouraging multiple forms of expression. The highest mean was found in creating inclusive environments where diverse

and unconventional expressions are welcomed. However, lower scores were noted for using visual or multimedia tools, indicating that technological and material-based creativity practices are less frequently implemented, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics: Creativity Activities in the EFL Classroom Result**

	Percentage					Mean	Std. Deviation
	SA	A	N	D	SD		
17. I provide opportunities for students to invent original English texts (e.g., stories, dialogues).	33.3%	37.4%	11.4%	13.8%	4.1%	2.18	1.160
18. I use visual or multimedia tools to inspire student creativity in language tasks.	52.0%	26.0%	5.7%	7.3%	8.9%	1.95	1.299
19. I use problem-solving or real-world scenarios to promote creative language use.	30.9%	39.8%	13.0%	7.3%	8.9%	2.24	1.222
20. I give feedback that encourages students to expand or explore their creative ideas in English.	31.7%	41.5%	9.8%	9.8%	7.3%	2.20	1.199
21. I organize classroom tasks that require students to create something new in English.	28.5%	39.0%	13.8%	10.6%	8.1%	2.31	1.222
22. I create an inclusive environment where diverse and unconventional expressions are encouraged.	20.3%	43.9%	17.9%	14.6%	3.3%	2.37	1.066
23. I design classroom discussions and tasks that can be solved in multiple creative ways.	30.9%	40.7%	12.2%	8.9%	7.3%	2.21	1.189
24. I provide students with leadership roles and open-ended challenges to express ideas and strategies.	25.2%	43.1%	14.6%	10.6%	6.5%	2.30	1.152

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the study of EFL pre-service teacher trainees' perceptions on developing pupils' creativity showed that EFL pre-service teacher trainees' perceptions on developing students' creativity have positive views on the importance of developing students' creativity in English language learning. However, this understanding is not yet entirely consistent or deep. EFL pre-service teachers realize the importance of creativity in English language learning to increase students' motivation, critical thinking ability, and problem-solving skills. However, their understanding and application of creativity development concepts and strategies still vary.

Descriptive data show differences in perceptions between understanding creativity, understanding of developing strategies, and creativity in the EFL classroom. This can be seen from the average scores in each section, which show diversity, and the relatively high standard deviation scores, which reflect individual perceptions.

### **EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Understanding of Creativity**

The findings show that EFL pre-service teachers view creativity mainly as self-expression and imaginative activity rather than as a systematic cognitive process integrated into learning. This is evident from the relatively moderate mean scores (1.99–2.21), indicating that while most participants agree that creativity involves imagination and innovation, they perceive it more as a means of expressing personal identity than an approach to developing higher-order thinking. This aligns with the results of Akyıldız & Çelik (2020) and Aliakbari & Kalantari (2021), who found that EFL teachers often equate creativity with enjoyable or aesthetic classroom activities rather than cognitive and metacognitive engagement. Similarly, Khoiriawati & Afriyanti (2023) and Hlas & Hlas (2024) reported that pre-service teachers' understanding of creativity often focuses on “fun” learning tasks rather than structured pedagogical strategies that cultivate reflective and analytical thinking.

The limited recognition of curriculum flexibility as a key factor in fostering creativity also supports earlier findings by Akyıldız & Çelik (2020) and Zha & Greenier (2023), who emphasized that rigid, exam-oriented curricula constrain teachers' ability to experiment creatively. This suggests that institutional and curricular pressures may shape pre-service teachers' narrower conceptions of creativity. This highlights the need for teacher education programs that explicitly connect creativity to curriculum design and critical pedagogy.

These results highlight a conceptual gap between valuing creativity and understanding its deeper cognitive and pedagogical dimensions. When creativity is viewed mainly as expression, teachers are less likely to design lessons that cultivate divergent thinking, innovation, or analytical reasoning. This implies that teacher education programs must integrate creativity as a systematic pedagogical framework, emphasizing creative thinking as part of higher-order learning rather than as an optional enrichment activity. Another possible explanation for this limited perception may stem from cultural influences. In collectivist educational contexts such as Indonesia, creativity is often framed in harmony and personal expression rather than independent or unconventional thinking, which may shape how pre-service teachers define and apply it in practice.

### **Strategies for Developing Student Creativity**

EFL pre-service teachers demonstrated a relatively better understanding of instructional strategies for developing creativity (mean range 2.01–2.45). They expressed confidence in using questioning techniques, collaborative learning, and scaffolding strategies. This finding is consistent with Akyıldız & Çelik (2020), who found that EFL teachers adopt strategies such as brainstorming, group discussions, open-ended questions, and scaffolding to support creativity, although their application is often unsystematic.

In addition, Hana & Hacène (2017) reported that teachers understand the importance of open-ended questioning techniques to encourage students' creative thinking, but still feel less confident in integrating these strategies consistently. Zha & Greenier (2023) research also suggests that creating a supportive environment for taking intellectual risks, through reflective questioning and open-ended tasks, is important for fostering creativity. These findings indicate that EFL pre-service teachers have a reasonably adequate understanding of practical strategies such as collaboration, scaffolding, open-ended questions, and adapting learning to students' interests. However, they still lack understanding of how environmental factors, student motivation, or student background can influence creativity.

This uneven awareness indicates that while EFL pre-service teachers are familiar with creative strategies, they may not fully understand the situational factors determining their effectiveness. Without reflective insight into when and why specific strategies work, creative teaching can remain procedural rather than transformative. These results support the initial hypothesis that pre-service teachers' knowledge of creative pedagogy is still developing. The finding underscores the need for reflective and experiential learning opportunities in teacher education programs that help future teachers connect strategy use with learner context and classroom dynamics. Alternatively, this pattern may reflect the participants' limited teaching experience. Most had only completed their practicum, which may restrict their understanding of how creativity interacts with real-world classroom variables such as assessment demands, institutional culture, and learner diversity. Hence, their perceptions likely represent an early stage of pedagogical awareness that can be deepened through more extensive, hands-on practice supported by mentorship and reflection.

### **Creativity Practices in the EFL Classroom**

Regarding classroom practices, the mean scores (1.95–2.37) suggest that most pre-service teachers have begun applying creative techniques. They strongly encourage inclusive and expressive classroom environments, indicating an appreciation for the “press” or environmental dimension of creativity; nevertheless, their limited use of technology as a tool for creative learning points to an important shortcoming. Although many participants agreed that digital tools can enhance engagement, they often use them as presentation aids, not as platforms for students' creative exploration. This finding mirrors earlier studies by Saleem Masadeh (2021), Aliakbari & Kalantari (2021), and Purwati et al. (2024), which highlights that while teachers acknowledge the value of technology, technological creativity remains underdeveloped due to a lack of confidence, digital literacy, and curriculum integration.

These results suggest that pedagogical and technological barriers constrain pre-service teachers' creative practices. Their focus on tangible “products”, such as written or oral outputs, shows that creativity is still perceived more as an outcome than a process of exploration and problem-solving. This highlights the need to reconceptualize technology not merely as an instructional aid but as a creative medium that enables learners to experiment, design, and produce original work collaboratively. The findings also point to systemic challenges, including limited digital literacy, restricted access to resources, and a lack of pedagogical models linking technology and creativity in EFL education.

These results support the initial hypothesis that EFL pre-service teachers view creativity positively but demonstrate fragmented implementation in practice. Their perceptions are shaped by individual understanding and broader institutional and structural conditions that limit creative expression in classrooms. Recognizing these constraints is essential to designing professional development programs that address both the cognitive and contextual aspects of creative teaching.

Overall, the findings across the three dimensions indicate that EFL pre-service teachers generally hold positive perceptions toward developing students' creativity in English learning, yet their understanding remains partial. They tend to view creativity in terms of expressive classroom activities rather than as a deeper cognitive process involving problem-solving and critical thinking. This aligns with Khabibah et al. (2023), who found that pre-service teachers often emphasize the product aspect of creativity rather than the person, process, or press dimensions in Rhodes' (1961) 4P model. The limited attention to theoretical and technological aspects suggests that creativity is not yet fully integrated into pedagogical practice, reflecting the need for teacher education programs to provide more explicit and practical training in creative instruction.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of developing students' creativity in English language learning. The findings revealed that while participants generally hold positive perceptions of creativity, viewing it as essential for enhancing motivation, engagement, and problem-solving, their understanding remains partial and uneven across the three examined dimensions—understanding of creativity, strategies for developing creativity, and classroom practices.

Overall, pre-service teachers tend to emphasize the product aspect of creativity—focusing on visible outcomes or products such as students' written or spoken work—rather than the person, process, or press dimensions that involve creative thinking, supportive environments, and reflective learning. This indicates that creativity is still perceived as an outcome rather than an ongoing pedagogical and cognitive process. Such findings refine existing perspectives by revealing that even when teachers value creativity, they may lack the conceptual depth to apply it systematically in EFL contexts.

These findings contribute to the field by offering empirical evidence from the Indonesian EFL teacher education context, highlighting the need for programs that move beyond viewing creativity as an “add-on” to teaching and instead integrate it as a core pedagogical competence. The study challenges existing assumptions that valuing creativity is sufficient for its implementation, demonstrating that conceptual understanding and contextual support are equally critical. Although this study is limited to self-reported quantitative data, its results indicate important implications for curriculum designers and teacher educators. Future research could adopt qualitative or mixed methods to explore how pre-service teachers interpret and enact creativity in authentic teaching settings. Strengthening creativity-oriented training can help bridge the gap between positive perceptions and practical application, enabling future teachers to design more innovative, reflective, and student-centered EFL classrooms.

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