



ENHANCING PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS' CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH INTERACTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES

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Abstract. This article examines the impact of systematically embedded interactive teaching strategies on the creative engagement of pre-service English language teachers. A semester-long mixed-method study involving 68 third-year undergraduates at a metropolitan pedagogical university in Uzbekistan investigated whether dialogic techniques, task-based digital simulations and reflective micro-teaching could foster higher levels of imaginative investment and pedagogical originality. Quantitative analysis using the Creative Classroom Engagement Scale ($\alpha = 0.91$) revealed a statistically significant improvement in fluency, flexibility and elaboration ($t = 3.97$; $p < 0.01$) within the experimental cohort compared to a control group following a traditional lecture-seminar format. Qualitative data derived from video-stimulated recall and learning journals indicated a parallel shift in professional identity, with participants describing themselves as “learning designers” rather than lesson deliverers. The findings support sociocultural and constructivist positions asserting that creativity flourishes in dialogic, learner-centred spaces and underline the importance of embedding such spaces in teacher-education curricula.

Keywords: - Creative engagement; interactive strategies; pre-service teachers; English language education; mixed-method research.

INTRODUCTION

Emerging educational policies across Central Asia position creativity as a foundational competence for twenty-first-century teachers. Despite policy rhetoric, many teacher-preparation programmes still privilege transmissive methodologies and product-oriented assessment, thereby limiting opportunities for creative engagement. Prior research has demonstrated that interactive strategies — defined here as pedagogical moves that require reciprocal negotiation of meaning and contingent scaffolding — contribute to deeper linguistic processing and heightened learner motivation. Yet the extent to which these strategies cultivate sustained creative engagement among future English teachers has not been adequately explored, especially in post-Soviet higher-education systems where academic cultures often discourage risk-taking. This study seeks to fill the gap by investigating whether a structured infusion of interactive techniques into a Methods of Teaching English course enhances pre-service teachers' creative engagement, operationalised as the capacity to generate original pedagogical ideas and to invest affectively in the learning process.

A quasi-experimental design was adopted. Participants were 68 third-year students (52 female, 16 male; mean age = 20.4) enrolled in the English Language Education programme at Tashkent Pedagogical University. Intact groups were assigned as experimental ($n = 34$) or control ($n =$



34). Both groups followed the same content syllabus, assessment rubrics and reading lists; only the mode of instruction differed.

Over fourteen weeks the experimental cohort experienced three interactive teaching strategies woven into every weekly session. First, dialogic coaching required students to critique anonymised lesson plans in pairs, questioning underlying assumptions and proposing alternative pathways. Second, task-based digital simulations employed an open-source virtual classroom platform in which pairs assumed teacher and learner roles while responding to unpredictable linguistic events generated by the software. Third, reflective micro-teaching integrated immediate peer feedback delivered through a collaborative online whiteboard, encouraging iterative redesign of tasks within the same lesson. Lecturers explicitly modelled metacognitive questioning, emphasising curiosity and divergent solution-finding.

The control cohort received conventional lectures, watched demonstration videos and completed individual assignments without structured peer interaction beyond ad hoc class discussion.

Creative engagement was measured pre- and post-intervention with the Creative Classroom Engagement Scale (CCES) adapted for teacher education. The scale contains twenty items rated on a five-point Likert continuum assessing imaginative fluency, idea elaboration, task ownership and emotional involvement. Internal consistency in the present study reached Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$. Supplementary qualitative data were collected from weekly learning journals in the experimental group and from six semi-structured interviews using video-stimulated recall of teaching episodes.

Quantitative data were processed in SPSS 29. Descriptive statistics established baseline equivalence. Independent-sample t-tests compared gain scores between groups; ANCOVA controlled for initial differences. Qualitative material was coded inductively in MAXQDA and triangulated across data sources. Inter-rater reliability for coding reached Cohen's $\kappa = 0.83$.

Ethical approval was granted by the university's research ethics board. Participants provided informed consent and could withdraw at any time. All data were anonymised.

The two cohorts did not differ significantly in pre-test creative engagement ($M_{exp} = 58.3$, $SD = 6.2$; $M_{ctrl} = 57.8$, $SD = 6.6$; $t = 0.33$, $p = 0.74$). Post-test means diverged appreciably ($M_{exp} = 71.4$, $SD = 5.9$; $M_{ctrl} = 61.2$, $SD = 7.1$; $t = 5.96$, $p < 0.001$). After controlling for pre-test scores, ANCOVA yielded a significant effect of the intervention ($F(1,65) = 23.45$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.27$). Sub-dimension analysis showed that fluency and elaboration improved most markedly, rising by 23 % and 26 % respectively, while flexibility increased by 18 %.

Learning-journal analysis produced three interrelated themes. Firstly, dialogic coaching nurtured epistemic curiosity: students reported "seeing multiple routes through the same language point" and "learning to question the first idea." Secondly, digital simulations were perceived as "safe laboratories," helping participants experiment with authentic communicative breakdowns without jeopardising their grades. Thirdly, reflective micro-teaching generated a feedback loop where iterative redesign became an embodied habit rather than an imposed requirement. Interview excerpts corroborated these themes, with one trainee noting that interactive tasks "turned creativity from a rare spark into a daily routine."

The quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that interactive teaching strategies significantly enhance creative engagement among pre-service English teachers. The observed gains align with sociocultural constructs emphasising dialogic meaning-making as a catalyst for



higher-order thinking. By positioning students as co-constructors of pedagogical knowledge, dialogic coaching disrupted hierarchical classroom scripts, enabling divergent idea generation. Task-based simulations invoked what Csikszentmihalyi describes as flow, where optimal challenge and immediate feedback merge to sustain deep engagement. Reflective micro-teaching extended the zone of proximal development by embedding scaffolded critique inside real-time teaching acts, compelling participants to refine ideas on the spot.

These outcomes resonate with earlier studies asserting the link between interactive, student-centred environments and creative dispositions in language learning. However, the present study advances the field by focusing explicitly on teacher trainees and by demonstrating measurable creative-engagement gains over a single semester in a context traditionally resistant to pedagogical experimentation.

Nevertheless, the research has limitations. Group assignment was not randomised, raising the possibility of intact-group bias. The CCES, while psychometrically robust, relies on self-report; complementary observational rubrics would capture performative aspects of creativity more objectively. Future research might adopt longitudinal designs tracking whether increased creative engagement translates into innovative classroom practices during the induction year of professional teaching.

Embedding dialogic coaching, task-based digital simulations and reflective micro-teaching within a standard Methods of Teaching English course markedly increased the creative engagement of pre-service teachers. Interactive strategies appear to cultivate not only imaginative fluency but also a professional identity grounded in creative problem-solving. Teacher-education programmes seeking to produce agile, innovative educators should therefore reconfigure course architectures to privilege sustained dialogue, authentic simulation and iterative reflection. Policy-makers are urged to recognise interactive creativity as a core competency and to support structural adjustments — such as smaller cohort sizes and technology-enhanced learning spaces — that make such pedagogy feasible. Further empirical work is required to test scalability across varied institutional cultures and to link pre-service creative engagement with learner outcomes in school classrooms.

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