



Creative teaching in English language classrooms: A reflective and contextual interpretation

Muhamad Ahsanu*, Erna Wardani, Ashari Ashari, Nisa Roiyasa

Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Indonesia

Creativity has become a defining competency in twenty-first-century higher education, particularly in English language teaching (ELT), yet how university educators conceptualize and enact it remains under-explored. This study investigates the lived experiences of two Indonesian lecturers—one from a public and one from a private university—through a narrative inquiry approach supported by classroom observations and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that creative teaching in ELT is a reflective, adaptive, and contextually grounded process characterized by continual negotiation between pedagogical innovation and institutional constraints. Two interrelated models emerged: the Five-Facet Framework (FFF) (teaching capital, material, media, method, and evaluation) and Reflective Adaptation as the sustaining mechanism of creativity. Effective creative teaching was found to rely not on isolated techniques but on the orchestration of these five components, harmonized like instruments in an orchestra. Teachers' passion, autonomy, and responsiveness to learners' needs serve as catalysts that transform routine instruction into dynamic, student-centered learning experiences. Reflection and contextual empowerment further enable resilience amid limited resources and rigid curricula. The study contributes to sociocultural and constructivist perspectives by framing creativity as both a personal and collective endeavour—rooted in interaction, reflection, and contextual engagement. Theoretically, it reaffirms that creative teaching forms the foundation of effective pedagogy; practically, it advocates institutional support systems that nurture reflective professional cultures and empower teachers to sustain innovation in ELT.

Keywords: creative teaching, creativity in ELT, higher education, reflective pedagogy, narrative inquiry, contextual innovation

OPEN ACCESS

ISSN 2503 3492 (online)

*Correspondence:

Muhamad Ahsanu

muhamad.ahsanu@unsoed.ac.id

Received: 13th August 2025

Accepted: 16th September 2025

Published: 31th October 2025

Citation:

Ahsanu, M., Wardani, E., Ashari, A., Roiyasa, N. (2025). Creative teaching in English language classrooms: A reflective and contextual interpretation. *JEEES (Journal of English Educators Society)*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v10i2.1967>

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary higher education (HE), the integration of creativity into pedagogical practices has become an increasingly prominent focus, particularly within the context of English language instruction. The infusion of creativity in teaching, often referred to as Creativity in Language Teaching (CiLT), is now regarded as essential rather than supplementary. As higher education institutions deal with escalating demands driven by globalization, digital innovation, and the shift toward more engaging instructional systems, creative pedagogy (CP) has gained increasing recognition as a transformative educational model. Its rising relevance is evident in university reform agendas and contemporary pedagogical scholarship, both of which emphasize innovation and pedagogical flexibility over traditional, transmissive models of instruction (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024). In this context, the present study approaches creativity

not solely as an individual cognitive ability but as a deliberate, strategic, and context-responsive teaching practice situated within Indonesian tertiary English language education. This focus reflects the urgent imperative to redesign language instruction in ways that address the complex intellectual, social, and affective demands of 21st-century learners.

English language educators frequently negotiate the dual pressures of maintaining established instructional standards while simultaneously adopting more exploratory and student-centered approaches. Although such negotiations can be challenging, they also provide conducive milieu for the creation of learning environments that are more participatory, culturally relevant, and personally meaningful. Creative pedagogical approaches enable instructors to respond flexibly to different learner profiles and emerging classroom dynamics. However, the continuance of conventional teaching methods in many higher education settings continues to draw critique from scholars who argue that rigid, test-oriented practices disproportionately benefit analytically dominant learners while constraining those with creative strengths (Sternberg, 2006; Ismayilova & Laksov, 2022). Against this backdrop, the current research places attention on educators who actively destabilize prevailing norms by incorporating creative strategies into their pedagogical planning. Specifically, it examines how English language lecturers conceptualize, operationalize, and sustain creative pedagogy in their everyday instructional decision-making processes. By centering on practitioners of understanding how creativity is operationalized within authentic classroom contexts.

The central premise of this investigation is built around a fundamental proposition: Creative teaching in English language classrooms hinges on a reflective and contextual interpretation. Exploring this fundamental construct in language teaching requires a multidimensional approach that examines both the characteristics of creative instruction and its tangible impact on students and teachers. Creativity in teaching is not merely about entertainment or aesthetic sense; it is closely linked to instructional effectiveness. By identifying the specific elements that constitute creative pedagogy in higher education (HE), this study seeks to clarify how such practices contribute to deeper student engagement and improved academic outcomes.

Of particular interest is how faculty members define creativity in pedagogical terms and how these definitions translate into classroom practice. Through this lens, creativity is examined not only as an abstract ideal but also as a functional teaching tool. This line of inquiry lays the foundation for uncovering the essential features of effective creative teaching. Several foundational studies have laid the groundwork for the evolving discourse on creativity in language education. Kettler, Lamb, Willerson, and Mullet (2018) observed that teachers who value creativity are more likely to foster it among their students. Their research suggests that such educators promote student autonomy, critical thinking, and a deeper sense of ownership in the learning process.

Similarly, Ismayilova and Laksov (2022) argue that creativity allows educators to navigate complex classroom dynamics, enhance student participation and introduce

innovative content delivery methods. Collectively, these studies underscore the dual influence of personal attributes and institutional culture in either enabling or constraining creative teaching. Together, they provide a strong foundation upon which the present study is situated. In another pivotal contribution, Yu, Wang, and Yuizono (2023) examined the role of creativity in enhancing student's questioning skills, a key component of critical thinking and linguistic competence. Their findings demonstrated that student-centered creative techniques improved learners' ability to formulate questions, which, in turn, led to greater vocabulary and grammar acquisition. This research reinforces the notion that creativity in teaching is not a luxury but a necessity for language development, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

Nonetheless, the integration of creative practices is not without its challenges. Frawley (2020) highlighted how institutional and structural limitations often hinder teachers from realizing their creative potential, leading to professional fatigue or disillusionment. This underscores the importance of addressing systemic barriers to foster sustainable creative teaching. Richards and Cotterall (2016) outlined two primary benefits of creative instruction: it fosters students' imaginative thinking and builds self-confidence, while simultaneously energizing teachers by enhancing job satisfaction. Building on this, Khany and Boghayeri (2014) argued that HE instructors must not only understand creative teaching techniques but also apply them systematically within their classrooms. Creativity, in this light, is a skill that can and should be developed. It is not merely a personal attribute, but a pedagogical imperative linked to broader societal progress. Elisondo (2016) further emphasized that creativity is central to advancements in science, art, and technology, marking it as a cornerstone of human development and societal transformation.

Such systemic issues underscore the need for localized strategies to embed creativity into English language instruction. Creativity's central role in ELT is widely acknowledged for its positive impact on student motivation, participation, and learner-centered instruction. Studies by Richards and Cotterall (2016) and Kettler et al. (2018) highlight how creative strategies can significantly improve classroom dynamics and learning outcomes.

Despite growing recognition of the pedagogical value of creativity, its implementation in higher education (HE) remains constrained by rigid curricula, bureaucratic structures, and institutional resistance (Frawley, 2020; Ismayilova & Laksov, 2022). One of the enduring challenges in this domain lies in reconciling theoretical conceptions of creative pedagogy with their operationalization in classroom contexts. This study seeks to address this gap by offering empirical insights into how creative teaching is conceptualized and enacted within Indonesian universities.

To this end, the study proposes a functional framework for creative pedagogy emphasizing adaptability, multiple teaching approaches, and responsiveness to sociocultural and institutional learning contexts (Sawyer, 2011). Grounded in key theoretical traditions—namely Holec's (1981) notion of learner autonomy, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and Boden's (1990) models of creativity—the framework

situates teachers' beliefs and practices within broader paradigms of educational innovation. As [Heidari-Shahreza \(2024\)](#) contends, faculty belief systems significantly shape pedagogical choices, with institutional support serving as a crucial mediator that determines whether such beliefs materialize into innovative teaching practices. Conversely, obsolete tools and unsupportive learning environments often stifle even the most motivated educators. The case of a creative lecturers, Shanti and Shinta, illustrates how pedagogical creativity evolves dynamically in response to student participation and feedback ([Khany & Boghayeri, 2014](#)), providing a contextual foundation for analysing creativity in authentic teaching settings.

Creativity in teaching constitutes a multifaceted construct that merges imaginative thinking with pedagogical decision-making to enhance learning engagement and efficacy. [Freire \(2005\)](#) and [Wisdom \(2006\)](#) argued that creativity should form a central component of educational praxis; nevertheless, many HE institutions struggle to actualize this ideal. Divergent understandings of what constitutes creativity among educators contribute to this inconsistency. For some, creativity denotes the generation of novel ideas, while for others, it involves problem-solving or the reinterpretation of existing knowledge and materials ([Beghetto, 2007](#); [Dobbins, 2009](#)). To mitigate such ambiguities, teacher education programs must offer explicit frameworks for embedding creativity across lesson planning, assessment, and classroom interaction ([Rinkevich, 2011](#)). Hence, establishing a shared conceptual and operational understanding of creativity is a prerequisite for its coherent integration into pedagogical practice.

From a cognitive and psychological perspective, creativity is often interpreted through the dual framework of "big-C" and "little-c" creativity ([Kaufman & Sternberg, 2019](#)). The former represents eminent, world-changing innovations, whereas the latter pertains to everyday acts of creative problem-solving and instructional adaptation, such as designing engaging learning activities or reconfiguring teaching materials ([Alves-Oliveira et al., 2021](#)). In educational contexts, most manifestations of creativity correspond to "little-c" creativity, which involves recontextualizing existing knowledge to address immediate instructional needs. [Boden \(2004\)](#) further distinguished creative cognition into combinational, exploratory, and transformational processes, each contributing to the reformation of pedagogical knowledge and practice. These perspectives collectively offer a theoretical scaffold for analyzing and cultivating creativity within classroom environments.

Nevertheless, institutional conventions frequently restrict creative expression in education. Mechanisms such as standardized testing, prescriptive syllabi, and rigid evaluative procedures often deter experimentation and innovation ([Dawson et al., 2011](#); [Mullet et al., 2016](#)). Such institutional rigidity underscores the need for empirical inquiry into how teacher beliefs, professional preparation, and contextual factors interact to shape creative pedagogical behavior. Although many educators express a willingness to innovate, their efforts are often hindered by insufficient resources, limited time, and a lack of institutional encouragement.

Accordingly, this study aims to elucidate the conditions that enable or constrain creativity within higher education language instruction.

Within the Indonesian context, English language teaching (ELT) continues to encounter persistent challenges. Traditional teaching paradigms emphasizing rote memorization and textbook dependency still dominate, thereby restricting opportunities for communicative engagement and critical inquiry ([Puspitasari & Purnomo, 2020](#)). Standardized curricula further curtail the pedagogical space for innovation ([Wahyu, 2021](#)), while disparities in access to professional development and technological resources—particularly in rural regions—compound these issues ([Suyadi & Zakaria, 2021](#); [Amin, 2022](#)). Addressing such contextual impediments is essential for devising sustainable and contextually relevant interventions to foster creativity in language teaching.

Despite these challenges, creativity offers significant potential to revitalize ELT in Indonesia. Empirical evidence indicates that creative educators are more effective in engaging students, stimulating motivation, and cultivating reflective thinking ([Adnan, 2022](#); [Hidayat et al., 2023](#)). They tend to employ student-centered pedagogies such as project-based learning, task-based instruction, and digital media integration to enhance interactivity and contextual relevance in language learning ([Suryati & Suwarno, 2020](#)). These practices demonstrate that creativity, when purposefully cultivated, can function as both a practical and transformative force within the classroom.

In conclusion, creativity in English language teaching within higher education is a complex, context-sensitive, and transformative notion. While its pedagogical benefits are widely recognized across both global and Indonesian contexts, its systematic implementation remains obstructed by structural constraints, outdated pedagogical orientations, and insufficient teacher preparation. This study, therefore, endeavours to investigate how Indonesian university English lecturers conceptualize, apply, and are institutionally supported in their creative teaching endeavours. The insights derived are anticipated to inform the development of more responsive teacher training models, evidence-based policy reform, and enhanced pedagogical practice in higher education language education.

METHODS

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that centers on collecting data through individuals' personal stories. It embodies a continuous process of experiencing, articulating, revisiting, and reinterpreting one's lived stories ([Clandinin & Connelly, 2000](#)). It positions researchers' personal histories and inquiries as integral to producing authentic knowledge ([Clandinin, 2013](#)). Guided by the recognition that numerous meaningful narratives remain unspoken, this approach further serves as a critical space for amplifying marginalized perspectives ([Creswell, 2012](#)). By emphasizing personal narratives, it deepens our understanding of teaching, learning, and educational performance, and can inform the development of more effective teaching strategies ([Meegan,](#)

2023). As Meegan's notes, narratives shape how educators perceive their learners and offer valuable insights for addressing both theoretical and practical educational challenges.

This study applies narrative inquiry to explore an individual's lived experience. As outlined by [Clandinin and Connelly \(2000\)](#), this approach is deeply contextual and connects moments across time and intentional action, acknowledging the continuity of past, present, and future. We conducted narrative interviews with an English lecturer at a university in Purwokerto, Indonesia. Through her storytelling, the study highlights her experiences in teaching language skills, aiming to share insights with fellow educators. Narrative inquiry fosters collaboration between researcher and participant, generating meaningful, shared understanding ([Clandinin & Connelly, 2000](#); [Wei, 2023](#)).

Sampling Strategy

This study employed purposeful sampling, specifically criteria sampling - a of purposive sampling ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). Purposeful sampling is widely recognized in qualitative research for its ability to identify information-rich cases that can provide in-depth insights into a phenomenon ([Patton, 2015](#)). The participant was selected based on three criteria: (a) having taught language skills in an English department at higher education level, (b) possessing more than five years of teaching experience, and (c) demonstrating a passion for teaching, a willingness to engage in professional development, and enthusiasm for applying new learning in the classroom. This approach aligns with the principle that effective qualitative sampling prioritizes participants who are especially knowledgeable or experienced in the topic of interest ([Merriam & Tisdell, 2016](#)). The participants, referred to hereby the pseudonym Shinta and Shanti, taught content courses in EFL classes in a public university.

Data Collection

This study employed narrative interviews and observation as the primary data collection methods, comprising two different sessions with the participants. The initial session involved an in-depth conversation guided by semi-structured questions, allowing the participant to share her experiences in a conversational and open manner. Follow-up interviews were intentionally structured to assist the participants in refining, elaborating, and articulating their personal accounts with greater precision and depth. Designed in an open-ended, exploratory manner, these sessions facilitated expansive storytelling and ensured the generation of rich, contextually embedded descriptions that capture the multifaceted nature of her lived experiences ([Hamadou, 2024](#)). Each interview lasted between 90 and 120 minutes, allowing ample temporal flexibility and enabling a more participant-driven pace for narrative construction. In addition, systematic classroom observations were conducted to complement the interview data and strengthen the overall narrative dataset.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analytical process employed a narrative inquiry approach integrated with thematic analysis, highlighting both the experiential dimension of the participants' stories and the patterned meanings emerging across narrative and

observational sources. Data analysis progressed through a cyclical, reflexive engagement with the empirical material, balancing inductively derived insights with theoretically informed interpretations ([Bingham, 2023](#)). Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and underwent iterative coding to reconstruct narrative sequences around key events and thematic patterns. Member checking procedures were implemented to uphold validity and authenticity. Continuous re-examination of transcripts and field notes supported deeper immersion into the participant's perspective, enabling the researcher to more comprehensively "experience the experience" ([Clandinin & Connelly, 2000](#); [Proudfoot, 2023](#)).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion unfold in two interconnected parts, encompassing insights from classroom observations and in-depth interviews with two English teachers, Shinta and Shanti. Using thematic analysis, both data sources were examined to capture the recurring patterns and underlying meanings that define creativity in language teaching. The analysis moves beyond description to offer interpretive insights into how creativity emerges and operates in classroom contexts. In particular, the observation results illuminate three pivotal research questions:

1. What distinctive features frame and shape creativity in language teaching?
2. How do teachers translate creative principles into tangible classroom practices?
3. What foundational elements serve as the driving forces behind creative teaching?

The classroom observations conducted in two distinct English language teaching contexts—Shinta's and Shanti's classes—revealed a vibrant interplay among creativity, reflective thought, and contextual responsiveness that shaped their pedagogical practices. Observation data demonstrated that creativity functioned as a consistent pedagogical orientation rather than an occasional or spontaneous action. Teachers regularly infused creative choices into instructional planning and classroom decision-making. The interpretive thematic analysis identified seven key dimensions guiding their creative practice in English language teaching: defining and demonstrating creativity, sources of creative inspiration, inventive instructional strategies, techniques for enhancing student engagement and development, contextual supports and constraints, reflective professional growth, and the creation of a positive classroom climate. These dimensions were consolidated into four interconnected themes and one overarching integrative construct: Sustaining Creativity in Language Teaching through Reflective Adaptation and Contextual Empowerment. This core theme captures creativity as an evolving process in which educators refine approaches through reflection, innovation, and strategic responsiveness to institutional and sociocultural demands to foster meaningful language learning.

Creativity as a Dynamic Pedagogical Process

The observation data underscored that creativity was embedded in the teachers' pedagogical philosophy rather than

being an occasional instructional choice. Their lessons integrated multimodal and participatory approaches such as storytelling, games, role-plays, and contextualized discussions, transforming routine classroom sessions into spaces of exploration and engagement. These strategies exemplified [Richards' \(2013\)](#) idea of “pedagogical creativity,” emphasizing the teacher’s capacity to devise novel and contextually appropriate methods to facilitate meaningful learning.

Both educators strategically integrated visual resources and culturally grounded content reflective of students’ immediate sociolinguistic environments, thereby transforming abstract linguistic concepts into contextually meaningful learning experiences. Through the implementation of multimodal activities—such as interactive games, role-play, and dramatized performance—the teachers not only strengthened learners’ grammatical and lexical development but also enhanced intrinsic motivation, positive affect, and communicative fluency. These pedagogical practices align closely with [Cremin's \(2015\)](#) characterization of creative language educators as “possibility thinkers,” who intentionally craft learning spaces that nurture curiosity, adaptive thinking, and imaginative engagement within classroom interaction.

Furthermore, the teachers’ questioning styles demonstrated deliberate efforts to stimulate divergent thinking. Instead of convergent, single-answer questioning, they frequently posed open-ended inquiries that encouraged multiple perspectives and linguistic experimentation. This approach aligns with [Sawyer's \(2011\)](#) concept of “disciplined improvisation,” in which structure and spontaneity coexist, enabling originality within guided frameworks. By embedding humour, playful interaction, and culturally situated content into instructional delivery, the teachers effectively transformed English language lessons into dynamic learning spaces where learners were encouraged to explore language and develop expressive confidence. In this context, creativity emerged not as a supplementary instructional feature but as a foundational pedagogical orientation that shaped both lesson design and classroom discourse.

Reflective Practice as a Catalyst for Professional Advancement

Parallel to their creative enactment, reflective engagement represented a defining dimension of the teachers’ professional identity and growth trajectory. Observation records revealed consistent engagement in self-monitoring, collaborative reflection, and ongoing pedagogical refinement. Following each instructional session, both teachers systematically examined student participation, comprehension indicators, and learner feedback, aligning closely with [Schön's \(1983\)](#) conceptualization of reflection-in-action, wherein educators evaluate and adjust their instructional decisions both during and after teaching encounters. Reflection, therefore, functioned not solely as a retrospective exercise but as a productive mechanism that informed and enlivened creative pedagogical innovation. [Richards and Farrell \(2005\)](#) argue that reflective teaching shifts instructional behaviours from mechanical execution to

“informed artistry,” in which decisions are grounded in analytic judgment.

Correspondingly, the teachers’ engagement with reflective journaling and collegial exchange demonstrated a growing sense of creative agency—defined by [Khany and Boghayeri \(2022\)](#) as teachers’ capacity to enact autonomous, contextually responsive choices that enrich student learning experiences. Their ongoing participation in professional dialogues, peer observations, and collaborative learning forums further highlighted that creativity flourishes within supportive professional communities, resonating with [Burnard and White's \(2008\)](#) assertion that collaborative creativity enhances educators’ capacity to innovate, adapt, and sustain professional growth. For the teachers observed, reflection did not operate in isolation but was embedded within a social process of professional learning that continuously shaped their creative teaching identities.

Navigating Constraints through Pedagogical Adaptability

Despite the centrality of creativity in their pedagogy, the teachers also navigated various systemic challenges, including limited instructional time, inadequate access to technology, and diverse proficiency levels among students. Despite institutional and material constraints, innovation was not hindered; rather, these limitations acted as catalysts or promoters for adaptive creativity. When digital tools were unavailable, the teachers effectively employed improvised visual aids and locally sourced materials to sustain learner engagement. Such pragmatic adjustments reflect [Beghetto and Kaufman's \(2014\)](#) concept of mini-c creativity, highlighting everyday inventive actions that arise within routine classroom challenges. These practices demonstrate that educational creativity frequently emerges from transforming constraints into meaningful pedagogical opportunities. As [Craft \(2011\)](#) notes, creative educators exhibit strong contextual awareness, enabling purposeful instructional design even in resource-limited environments.

Furthermore, the teachers’ deliberate modifications to task complexity and lesson pacing according to learner readiness illustrated responsive creativity—balancing structure and autonomy in line with [Jeffrey and Craft's \(2004\)](#) creative pedagogy model. These adaptive strategies also exemplified professional resilience and agency. Faced with administrative demands and limited time, the teachers introduced short yet impactful activities—such as vocabulary challenges and peer feedback exchanges—to maintain engagement while meeting curricular expectations. Such strategic decision-making aligns with [Glaveanu's \(2018\)](#) ecological perspective, which positions creativity as a product of interaction between teacher agency and contextual affordances. Ultimately, creativity in these classrooms operated as a negotiated or co-constructed process, bridging pedagogical aspirations with institutional realities.

Empowering Classroom Culture for Learning and Expression

The observations further revealed a strong affective and social dimension to the teachers’ creative pedagogy. Both educators cultivated emotionally supportive environments marked by mutual respect, empathy, and humor. This nurturing atmosphere encouraged students to participate without fear of

making mistakes—a condition [Dömyei \(2020\)](#) identifies as essential for motivation and sustained engagement. Within these psychologically supportive classroom environments, learners demonstrated greater willingness to take linguistic risks, experiment with new forms of expression, and engage creatively with English.

This observation corresponds with Vygotskian sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is collaboratively constructed through interaction and social engagement. Indicators such as heightened participation, spontaneous dialogue, and cooperative peer interaction revealed that the learning atmosphere effectively minimized anxiety and strengthened students' creative self-efficacy. As noted by [Cremin and Chappell \(2021\)](#), classrooms characterized by trust and openness are essential for nurturing creativity, as they encourage learners to articulate and refine ideas without apprehension. The teachers' connectedness to learners' emotional and cognitive needs fostered a reciprocal relationship between motivation and creativity, enabling students to assume active roles in co-constructing meaning through dialogic inquiry and playful experimentation.

Sustaining Creativity in Language Teaching through Reflective Adaptation and Contextual Empowerment

Synthesizing these themes, the overarching interpretation emphasizes that creativity in teaching is sustained through reflection, contextual adaptation, and empowerment. The observed teacher's practices embodied a holistic model of creativity that integrates pedagogical innovation, emotional intelligence, and professional self-regulation. This integrated enactment reflects [Richards' \(2013\)](#) conceptualization of Creative Teaching, which comprises three interrelated dimensions: innovative pedagogical practice, the cultivation of creative learner dispositions, and the facilitation of original learner output. The teacher effectively demonstrated all three, by (1) employing inventive instructional approaches, (2) nurturing students' creative confidence and autonomy, and (3) enabling the generation of novel linguistic expressions. Moreover, the creativity observed was contextually situated rather than universally prescribed.

Within Indonesian educational settings—characterized by linguistic heterogeneity, restricted material resources, and assessment-driven policies—such adaptive creativity represents both a pedagogical imperative and a manifestation of teacher agency. This aligns with [Ismayilova and Laksov's \(2018\)](#) assertion that creativity in educational practice emerges through continual negotiation with institutional structures. Teachers enact creativity by reinterpreting curriculum expectations and designing locally meaningful learning opportunities. The overarching theme also highlights how creativity sustains both teacher motivation and student engagement. Reflection nurtures professional vitality, while contextual empowerment ensures that creativity remains relevant to learners' realities. In this sense, creativity functions as a sustaining energy within the ecology of teaching ([Cremin, 2015](#)).

Theoretical Integration and Implications

The findings contribute to theoretical understandings of creativity as a socially situated and reflective practice. Rather than an individual talent, creativity manifests through the

teacher's engagement with context, community, and learners. The observed practices resonate with sociocultural theories of creativity ([Glăveanu, 2018](#)) emphasizing co-construction, mediation, and the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments. Pedagogically, the findings underscore the necessity of cultivating learning environments that prioritize reflective professionalism. Systematic opportunities for teachers to document, analyze, and collaboratively discuss their creative practices can help embed innovation as a shared institutional norm. Initiatives such as professional learning communities, lesson study, and structured peer mentoring may further strengthen the reflective habits identified in this study.

At the instructional level, fostering emotionally supportive and participatory classroom climates is vital for sustaining learner creativity and engagement. The emphasis placed on learners' affective well-being illustrates that creativity extends beyond novel techniques to include the construction of psychological safety and expressive openness. From a policy standpoint, these insights call for context-responsive support that recognizes teacher agency and creativity as essential competencies for educational improvement.

Interview Results with Shinta as First Participant

This study draws upon insights gathered from semi-structured interviews with two participants, Shinta and Shanti, conducted shortly after their teaching sessions on campus. Grounded in a narrative inquiry approach, this article delves into their lived experiences as creative language educators. Through their stories, the research explores the multifaceted dimensions of creativity in language teaching. Specifically, the narratives are examined to address four guiding questions: What contextual and pedagogical features shape creativity in language teaching? In what ways do teachers enact creativity within their instructional practices? What underlying elements drive and sustain creative teaching? Why do teachers perceive creativity as essential in their professional practice?

The following points illustrate some of the dimensions of creative teaching that Shinta perceives as integral to her classroom activities.

Shinta's Views on Teaching Creativity

Shinta, as Participant 1, shared her experiential knowledge and understanding of creative teaching, particularly within the context of ELT. She strongly supported the notion of teaching creativity in higher education settings. She emphasized that lecturers should adapt to various situations and effectively consolidate their resources to meet students' needs in meaningful and engaging ways. The sections below elaborate on her views on creative teaching.

TABLE 1 | Shinta’s views guiding principles of creative language teaching

Main theme	Creative teaching serves as the foundation of effective teaching				
Sub themes	To perform effectively in ELT, a lecturer needs to have at least five elements (capital, material, method, media, evaluation)				
	To teach creatively in ELT, a lecturer needs to integrate the five elements into an orchestra				
Categories	Teaching capital	Teaching material	Teaching media	Teaching strategy	
Codes	Having the passion to teach	challenges in teaching TOEFL and Basic Writing	Stimulating students’ learning enthusiasm through scored quizzes	Playing teacher’s multiple roles	
				Working in pairs and in group	
	Having hidden Lesson Plan			Implementation of lesson summary	
				From textbook-based to practice-based teaching	

Shinta’s Views on Stimulating Students’ Learning Enthusiasm Through Scored Quizzes

In her Writing classes, Shinta implemented quizzes to assess students' comprehension. Correct answers earned students reward points, which contributed to their final grades. For instance, a student with a grade of 74 could raise it to 75 using these points. This incentive system fostered increased engagement and participation. Such practices align with findings that creative teaching methods can significantly boost students’ self-confidence and motivation in language learning (Sitepu & Parudani, 2023). By integrating creative strategies, teachers can enhance learners’ enthusiasm and academic performance. This practice also supports Richards’ assertion that creative teachers can enhance motivation and self-esteem among learners (Richards, 2013) and is consistent with recent studies highlighting the use of incentives to enhance student engagement (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

Shinta’s Views on Lesson Summary

A key element of Shinta's creative teaching was the use of lesson summaries. At the end of each class, she asked students to summarize the material based on their understanding. These summaries varied according to students’ comprehension levels, helping them reinforce their learning. This practice also allowed Shinta to assess students' grasp of the lesson and adjust future instruction accordingly. Additionally, it served as a tool to evaluate teaching effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. This approach reflects Richards and Cotterall’s view that creative teachers employ diverse teaching strategies (Richards & Cotterall, 2016) view that creative teachers employ diverse teaching strategies. It also aligns with recent findings showing that teacher creativity and classroom management significantly enhance student learning (Hasan et al., 2024) and improve the efficacy of teaching strategies (Yulianengsih, 2023).

Shinta’s Views on a Textbook-Based to Practice-Based Teaching Approach

With ten years of experience teaching TOEFL, particularly in structure and written expression, Shinta gradually evolved her teaching methods. Initially, she strictly followed the TOEFL handbook and its prescribed structure. Over time, she adopted more practical approaches, focusing on sentence structures, subject-verb agreement, and the correct use of verbs in specific contexts. This pedagogical adjustment improved the teacher’s instructional effectiveness by accelerating lesson coverage while fostering clearer learner understanding. Such refinement demonstrates that creative teaching is not limited to producing new ideas but involves adapting methods strategically to optimize learning outcomes (Khany & Boghayeri, 2014). This perspective corresponds with Richards and Cotterall’s (2016) view that effective instruction requires adaptability and responsiveness. Recent studies further support this approach, showing that task-based learning can enhance TOEFL preparation (Wang, 2023) and that diverse teaching techniques help maintain student engagement in language classrooms (Maharani & Miftachudin, 2021).

Shinta’s Views on Challenges in Teaching TOEFL and Basic Writing

Shinta encountered several challenges while teaching TOEFL and Basic Writing courses. In the TOEFL class, she faced the issue of outdated materials, which students had already mastered, rendering the test questions too easy. To address this, she utilized more advanced versions of the tests. Additionally, creating new test materials was time-consuming and required significant effort to meet established standards. In the Basic Writing class, many students struggled with foundational writing skills, including sentence construction, subject-verb agreement, and punctuation. To address these issues, Shinta focused on reinforcing these basic skills. Her creative approaches demonstrate her ability to adapt teaching

methods to overcome challenges ([Ismayilova & Laksov, 2022](#)).

Shinta's Views on Work in Pairs and Groups

To enhance her students' writing skills in Basic and Academic Writing classes, Shinta incorporated paired work in Basic Writing and group work in Academic Writing, though group work was mainly used for feedback rather than during the writing process itself. In the feedback phase, learners participated in peer review, examining each other's writing and offering constructive recommendations for improvement. This collaborative evaluation fostered autonomous learning by prompting students to take responsibility for their progress and critically address areas needing refinement ([Holec, 1981](#)). By integrating such autonomy-supportive practices, the teacher's creative approach enhanced students' confidence and ownership of learning. Furthermore, enabling varied platforms for idea articulation strengthens comprehension and meaning-making in language learning ([Kettler et al., 2018](#)).

Shinta's Views on Hidden Lesson Plans

From the interview, it becomes evident that Shinta no longer depended on printed lesson plans. In her early years, she relied heavily on detailed lesson plans and even prepared backups in case the initial plan failed. However, over time, she internalized her lessons, making teaching feel almost automatic. Despite this, she acknowledged that sometimes lessons did not proceed as planned. When students lacked motivation, she would switch to group activities to re-engage them. This adaptability aligns with [Richards and Cotterall's \(2016\)](#) view of creative teaching, where diverse strategies are employed to meet student needs ([Richards & Cotterall, 2016](#)). This flexibility also reflects the concept of responsive pedagogy ([Kozminsky & Eylon, 2022](#)) and highlights the importance of teacher autonomy in fostering student engagement ([Müller et al., 2023](#)).

Shinta's Views on Having the Passion to Teach

Shinta believes that teaching requires passion; without it, the profession becomes burdensome rather than enjoyable. She stressed that teachers carry a profound responsibility in shaping future generations, and such commitment must be grounded in genuine dedication. For Shinta, creativity emerges as a manifestation of this professional devotion, driven by a continual pursuit of pedagogical improvement. She advocated for cultivating passion in teaching, arguing that enthusiasm fosters meaningful growth for both learners and educators. This perspective corresponds with [Richards and Cotterall's \(2016\)](#) assertion that creative practitioners willingly take risks and implement innovative instructional approaches. Her passion reflects her creative teaching approach and is supported by recent studies highlighting the importance of teacher passion in fostering creativity and innovation in education ([Zhang et al., 2022](#)).

Shinta's Views on the Teacher's Multiple Roles

When discussing the roles a lecturer must adopt to remain creative, Shinta emphasized that ELT practitioners should embrace multiple roles. She argued that teachers should act as resources, facilitators, leaders, motivators, problem-solvers, mentors, supporters, and learning partners. This flexibility allows teachers to create meaningful connections

in the classroom ([Richards, 2013](#)). A creative teacher must also be adaptable, confident, and capable of responding to student inquiries. By supporting students' interests and strengths, creative teachers facilitate learning. Shinta believed that managing various roles is key to fostering creativity, which aligns with [Richards and Cotterall's \(2016\)](#) characterization of creative teachers as confident decision-makers. This perspective is also supported by recent research emphasizing the importance of teacher passion in promoting creativity and innovation ([Zhang et al., 2022](#)).

The main theme as shown in [Table 1](#): "A creative teaching serves as the foundation of an effective teaching" reflects the principle that creativity is not peripheral but integral to pedagogical success in ELT. It echoes [Richards \(2013\)](#), who emphasizes that creativity fosters learner engagement, enhances language acquisition, and facilitates adaptive instructional practices in dynamic classroom contexts. Within this conceptual model, creative teaching is positioned not simply as a strategy but as a comprehensive pedagogical orientation that synthesizes diverse instructional components into an adaptive and context-sensitive practice.

The two identified sub-themes serve to operationalize this overarching construct. The first sub-theme—"To perform effectively in ELT, a lecturer needs to have at least five elements (capital, material, method, media, evaluation)"—demonstrates that creativity is grounded in a constellation of mutually reinforcing professional conditions. These dimensions parallel [Ismayilova and Laksov's \(2021\)](#) theorization of pedagogical creativity as a dynamic interplay of planning, responsiveness, and collaborative engagement. The second sub-theme—"To teach creatively in ELT, a lecturer needs to integrate the five elements into an orchestra"—employs the metaphor of orchestration to underscore the synergy required among instructional elements. This view echoes [Cremin's \(2009\)](#) argument that creative pedagogy emerges from educators' capacity to balance structure and flexibility in ways that effectively align content, context, and learner needs.

Shanti's Views on Creativity in Language Teaching Creativity

Below is the overall results of the thematic analysis based on the interview data gained from the second participant of the research.

Shanti's Views on Creativity as Contextual Innovation in Pedagogy

Shanti's understanding of creativity extends beyond the conventional notion of "fun teaching." Rather than associating creativity with entertainment or novelty, she interprets it as the ability to adapt pedagogical strategies to the specific realities of the context. She articulated creativity as the strategic mobilization of available resources to foster meaningful and engaging learning experiences. This stance reflects a form of contextualized creativity—innovation that draws on cultural familiarity, local materials, and students' everyday realities. Her practices frequently incorporate local songs, traditional games, and even ambient classroom sounds, exemplifying what [Sawyer \(2011\)](#) terms "everyday creativity," where inventive ideas emerge through routine pedagogical activities.

TABLE 2 | Thematic Analysis of Shanti’s Views on Creative Language Teaching

Units of Analysis	Codes	Categories	Themes	Over-arching Theme
Understanding of Creative Teaching	Use of local songs, traditional games, real-life contexts, and classroom sounds.	Contextual and Resource-Based Creativity	Creativity as Contextual Innovation in Pedagogy	“Creativity as Reflective Adaptation: Contextual, Student-Centered, and Resilient Pedagogy in English Language Teaching.”
Creative Strategies and Practices	Project-based learning, technology integration, collaboration, reflection.	Integrative Pedagogical Innovation		
Balancing Creativity with Curriculum and Assessment	Evolving understanding, reflective learning, flexibility, and responsiveness.	Reflective and Adaptive Mindset	Reflection as a Catalyst for Sustained Creativity	
Student Engagement and Response	Student motivation, inclusion, dynamic classroom, confidence building.	Student-Centered Empowerment	Student Empowerment through Creative Engagement	
Enabling Conditions for Creativity	Flexibility, supportive leadership, technology access, open-minded environment.	Institutional and Environmental Factors	Negotiating Structural and Environmental Constraints	
Barriers and Challenges	Time, resource limits, adaptation, scaffolding strategies.	Constraints and Resilience		

Her instructional design weaves together multiple pedagogical orientations, such as project-based learning, technology-mediated instruction, and collaborative group work. This corresponds with [Richards’ \(2013\)](#) claim that creativity in language teaching rests on the adaptive and purposeful blending of diverse methods to maintain relevance and student engagement. Illustrative activities include International Day cultural showcases and lyric-recomposition tasks that link vocabulary learning with authentic, multimodal expression. Furthermore, she employs digital platforms like Canva, Animaker, and Adobe Express not as supplementary tools but as core mediators of multimodal communication, enabling students to visualize, narrate, and creatively construct knowledge. Such technology-enhanced design aligns with [Cremin’s \(2015\)](#) notion of “possibility thinking,” wherein educators and learners collaboratively explore and generate alternative pathways for learning. Thus, creativity manifests as contextual innovation—a process of adapting pedagogy, technology, and culture to generate meaningful learning experiences.

Shanti’s Views on Reflection as a Catalyst for Sustained Creativity

A central finding in this study is the pivotal role of reflection in sustaining and deepening creative practice. Shanti’s narrative demonstrates a clear transformation from an early view of creativity as synonymous with “fun” or “entertainment” (songs, games) toward a more mature

conception emphasizing flexibility, problem-solving, and adaptive thinking. Her approach illustrates a form of creativity that is deeply anchored in contextual realities, where pedagogical innovation evolves through the use of culturally relevant practices, tangible classroom resources, and learners’ lived experiences. She routinely integrates local music, traditional games, and environmental sounds into lessons, exemplifying what [Sawyer \(2011\)](#) refers to as “everyday creativity,” in which inventive instructional actions are embedded within ordinary teaching routines.

Her instructional design also melds diverse pedagogical orientations—ranging from project-based learning and collaborative engagement to technology-supported activities—supporting [Richards’ \(2013\)](#) perspective that creativity in language education is achieved through adaptive and strategic combinations of teaching methods to enhance learner participation and meaningfulness. These strategies are reflected in culturally inspired classroom projects and vocabulary-focused lyric adaptation tasks that promote multimodal expression and real-world communication. Moreover, her integration of digital platforms such as Canva, Animaker, and Adobe Express demonstrates an understanding of technology as a dynamic and generative learning environment. This aligns with [Cremin’s \(2015\)](#) notion of possibility thinking, through which educators and students co-construct imaginative and transformative learning pathways. This recursive cycle—experiment, fail, reflect, redesign—illustrates what [Ryan and Deci \(2017\)](#) describe as

self-determined professional motivation, where intrinsic curiosity and mastery drive pedagogical creativity.

Shanti's Views on Student Empowerment through Creative Engagement

Creativity in Shanti's classroom operates as a means of empowerment, fostering student motivation, inclusion, and confidence. She observes that creative teaching "reduces barriers between teacher and students" and helps "low-proficiency learners feel included and supported." These effects resonate with sociocultural theories of learning, particularly [Vygotsky's \(1978\)](#) view that creativity and learning are co-constructed through interaction within the zone of proximal development. Within her instructional environment, learners are conceptualized as active co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients, participating in collaborative, expressive, and reflective tasks. These practices cultivate confidence in communicating ideas in English, resonating with learner-centered pedagogical perspectives ([Nunan, 2011](#)).

In this regard, creative pedagogy functions as an inclusive approach that recognizes diverse learner competencies and encourages the everyday, personally meaningful innovations that [Beghetto and Kaufman \(2014\)](#) define as "little-c creativity," which supports engagement and growth. Moreover, Shanti explicitly associates creativity with affective involvement, intentionally shaping "a more dynamic and comfortable classroom." Such attention to emotional climate aligns with [Dörnyei's \(2014\)](#) motivational framework, affirming enjoyment and positive affect as influential conditions for successful language learning. In this sense, creative engagement not only supports cognitive learning but also nurtures socio-emotional development, fostering a supportive classroom climate where students feel safe to take risks and experiment with language.

Shanti's Views on Negotiating Structural and Environmental Constraints

Despite her strong commitment to creative teaching, Shanti's experience is situated within structural and environmental constraints typical of Indonesian educational contexts. Persistent challenges such as restricted preparation time, limited materials, and inflexible curricular structures often constrain her creative efforts. Nevertheless, she responds to these obstacles with adaptive problem-solving—an orientation that aligns with [Csikszentmihalyi's \(1996\)](#) notion of the "creative negotiation of constraints." To maintain institutional legitimacy, she ensures that each innovative activity directly supports established learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Her position reflects a pragmatic philosophy: creativity must reinforce, rather than diverge from, mandated curricular goals.

This capacity to merge pedagogical imagination exemplifies the form of integrative creativity identified by [Richards and Cotterall \(2016\)](#) as critical to sustaining meaningful change in educational contexts. Furthermore, Supportive administration, discretionary space for innovation, and reliable technological infrastructure provide fertile ground for experimentation. Consistent with [Jeffrey and Craft \(2004\)](#), she emphasizes that fostering a culture conducive to creative teaching requires institutional trust and

resource accessibility. Simultaneously, she recognizes diverse learner readiness, highlighting the necessity of scaffolding to ensure inclusive and confident participation in creative tasks. This demonstrates the teacher's adaptive professionalism—balancing creativity with structure, autonomy with guidance.

Creativity as Reflective Adaptation

Across these themes, the findings converge on an overarching construct: Creativity as Reflective Adaptation. Shanti's creative teaching identity emerges as a dynamic interplay of contextual awareness, reflective practice, and student-centered responsiveness. In this context, creativity is conceptualized not as an exceptional artistic gift but as a cognitive disposition characterized by flexibility, continuous inquiry, and context-responsive pedagogical action. Such an understanding reflects [Khany and Boghayeri's \(2022\)](#) view of teacher creativity as adaptive expertise, whereby educators navigate evolving classroom needs through deliberate, reflective, and informed professional judgments within institutional constraints. Shanti's practice illustrates this model vividly: she integrates cultural resources, technology, and collaborative tasks to design locally relevant learning; she reflects on both successes and failures to refine her approach; and she adapts creatively within structural constraints to maintain pedagogical integrity.

From a theoretical perspective, this overarching theme situates creativity within constructivist and sociocultural paradigms. Constructivist principles highlight learners' active engagement in developing understanding, while sociocultural theory emphasizes the collaborative and context-bound dimensions of learning ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)). Shanti's pedagogy embodies both, enabling students to generate knowledge through authentic tasks and co-construct creative outcomes via interaction and reflection. Her experience also reflects transformative learning theory ([Mezirow, 1997](#)), wherein critical reflection on practice fosters shifts in pedagogical perspectives. Through reflection, Shanti reconstructs her understanding of creativity—from superficial engagement to deep pedagogical purpose—marking her professional growth as a creative educator. This transformation underscores the central argument of this study: teacher creativity is sustained not by external novelty but by internal reflectivity.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the multifaceted nature of creative teaching in ELT at the higher education level. The findings reveal that effective ELT hinges on five essential components: teaching capital, methods, materials, evaluation, and institutional support. However, these components alone are not sufficient; their creative application is paramount. Creativity enables lecturers to adapt and innovate, fostering engaging and responsive learning environments. The shift from conventional, textbook-based instruction to more interactive and learner-centered paradigms highlight the ongoing need for pedagogical renewal in ELT. The findings suggest that creativity in language education should be viewed holistically, arising from the interaction of teachers' personal commitment, institutional support, and flexible instructional decision-making. Further research is needed to

explore how these elements collectively affect learning outcomes and contribute to developing theoretical models that guide creative pedagogy in higher education.

The study also underscores the importance of contextual responsiveness, as teachers continuously adapt their innovative practices to classroom realities, learner diversity, and local educational demands. Creativity in teaching thus emerges as a dynamic, situated, and evolving process rather than a set of predetermined techniques. It develops through cycles of experimentation, reflection, and refinement, thriving at the intersection of contextual awareness, learner agency, and professional growth. In this sense, creative pedagogy is both an individual and collaborative endeavor shaped by teachers' beliefs, institutional conditions, and learner engagement. Reflection transforms challenges into productive possibilities, positioning creativity as an adaptive and negotiated professional act that depends on both personal resilience and supportive institutional environments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the professional English language teaching practitioners from Jenderal Soedirman University and Nahdlatul Ulama University Purwokerto in the form of observation and interview data that have mostly constituted our meaningful paper.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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