



Exploring Iranian EFL Teachers' Creativity-Supportive Behaviors

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Abstract

This study investigated the creativity-supportive behaviors of Iranian EFL teachers. A mixed-methods data collection approach was adopted: quantitative data were obtained from randomly selected 94 teachers and 216 students through the Persian version of the Creativity Fostering Teaching (CFT) index (Soh, 2000), and qualitative data were collected via students' reports on twelve classroom aspects. To analyze the quantitative data, an independent samples t-test and for the qualitative data, thematic analysis coding were used. There was a significant difference between the teachers' and the students' views on creativity-supportive behaviors of Iranian EFL teachers. Additionally, environment and interaction were extracted as two main themes from the analysis of the qualitative data. These two themes were discussed as the central factors influencing the creativity-supportive behaviors of the teachers. Although most Iranian EFL teachers want and try to adopt strategies and activities to develop or support creativity in their classrooms, the results showed that Iranian EFL students do not experience the classrooms as a locus of supporting creativity. Generally, creativity is not implemented and supported in Iranian EFL classrooms. The findings illustrate that teacher-training programs should equip Iranian EFL teachers with the knowledge and strategies of creativity- fostering instruction.

Keywords: Creativity; Creativity-Fostering Instruction; EFL Classrooms; Interaction; Environment

1. Introduction

Due to the vital role of creativity in improving life and out-of-the-box thinking in changing world, many societies have tried to include it in education (Southwick, 2012). As Richards (2013) stated, "Talking about creativity is everywhere today, driven by the need for companies and organizations to be more competitive and by the movement towards learner-centered rather than test-driven teaching in schools"(p. 20). Many attempts have been made to define and conceptualize creativity (e.g., Cropley, 2018; Fisher, 2004; Glăveanu, 2018; Mullen, 2019; Rhodes, 1961; Richards & Cotterall, 2016; Robinson, 2001). Rhodes (1961) recommended a framework named the Four P's composed of person, process, product, and press (e.g., environment). The framework has been used to understand and examine creativity by many researchers. It has also been extended or modified by some researchers (Glăveanu, 2013, 2018; Runco, 2003).

Fisher (2004) defined creativity as a property of people (who we are), processes (what we do), or products (what we make). He further notified the principal techniques of creative evolution are generation, variation, and originality. Different dimensions of creativity have been described by Richards (2013):

a) the ability to solve problems in original and valuable ways that are relevant to goals, b) seeing new meanings and relationships in things and making connections, c) having original and imaginative thoughts and ideas about something, d) using the imagination and experience to create new learning possibilities. (p. 21)

Additionally, the Four C model (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014) is a developmental framework for understanding creativity. The Four C model includes mini-c, little-c, pro-c, and big-c. "Mini-c creativity refers to subjective self-discoveries—the new and personally meaningful insights and interpretations that are a component in the learning process" (Beghetto and Kaufman, 2014, p. 54). Every day (or "little-c") creativity enables individuals to find ways and paths to travel in various aspects of their lives (Craft, 2001), Pro-c creativity is the creativity of expert-level creators who have not yet reached eminent status and genius-level (or "Big-C") creativity.

As Beghetto and Kaufman (2014) mentioned, the Four C model can assist teachers in understanding the levels of creative expression most relevant to the classroom environment (i.e., mini-c and little-c) and recognize critical factors (feedback, practice, and time) essential for supporting the development of creativity from one level to the next. Additionally, "central to the definition of mini-c creativity is the dynamic, interpretive process of constructing personal knowledge and understanding within a particular socio-cultural context"



(Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009, p. 3). Since the present study deals with the everyday practices of EFL teachers in the sociocultural context of Iran, mini-c and little-c are taken into consideration.

The role of creativity in education in general and in the language teaching profession, in particular, has been recognized in the last decades. Creativity has been considered an essential skill to be fostered in schools because it helps children be successful and productive individuals leading to their individual and intellectual development (Craft, 2003; Hui, Chow, Chan, Chui, & Sam, 2015). It is also regarded as important as literacy in education (Robinson, 2006). It is clear that creative teachers have a positive impact on learners to learn language better (Kumar, 2020).

Supporting creativity in an educational context in general and in classrooms, in particular, can bring about greater probability for major discoveries and economic development (Sternberg, 2015). Fostering Creativity can help students adopt different thinking styles in learning (Khany & Tazik, 2017). Soh (2000) explained that teachers can directly and indirectly foster student creativity. They can reinforce student creativity through interaction with students and reward their creative efforts and outcomes, as well as recognize their creative traits. Additionally, a teacher can create a classroom environment supportive of creativity through her words and deeds (Runco & Johnson, 2002; Soh, 2000). In other words, how teachers apply creativity in their teaching can be related to the atmosphere they create and strategies they adopt to encourage creativity which can result in academic success in any field of life.

Regarding English language teaching, creativity is a vital factor in achieving success. English teachers should try to motivate, inspire, and support creativity in their students to help them acquire English communicatively. If schools want creative EFL students, they should have creative EFL teachers capable of applying strategies to foster creativity in their classrooms. Moreover, promoting EFL students' opportunities to nurture their creativity is the duty of the teachers. Unfortunately, Iranian EFL teachers have not usually been successful in helping their students learn English communicatively. Most Iranian EFL students cannot speak English after six years of learning English in public high schools. It seems that most Iranian EFL teachers have limited insights into creativity- supportive teaching. Thus, it is critical to understand the teachers' and learners' experiences concerning whether creativity is fostered in class activities or not. Also, asking students to write about their experiences in learning English can be a reliable way to understand the nature of the teaching environment and the actions of teachers (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013).

Because no study has been conducted concerning teachers' and learners' experiences on creative instruction in Iranian EFL classrooms, this study

investigated the creativity-supportive behaviors of Iranian EFL teachers in their teaching profession. Accordingly, attempts have been made to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between students' and teachers' views on creativity- supporting teachers?
2. What factors influence the creativity-supporting behaviors of Iranian EFL teachers?

2. Literature Review

A great deal of studies has been done to examine the role of creativity in education and has mentioned reasons why creativity-supportive strategies are essential (Al-Dababneh, Al-Zboon, & Ahmad, 2017; Baer & Garrett, 2010; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Chan & Yuen, 2015; Davies et al., 2012; De Souza Fleith, 2000; Dewett, 2006; Glăveanu, 2018; Horng et al., 2005; Soh, 2000; TAN, 2001). TAN (2001) investigated Singaporean elementary school teachers' perceptions of activities helpful in promoting creativity. The participants were both beginning and experienced teachers that rated the degree of usefulness of creativity-fostering activities. He elicited three clusters from the data, including C1: moderate and high teachers' ratings for all the learning activities. C2: learner-centered independent and collaborative learning activities. C3: learner-directed independent learning activities. The results indicated that beginning and experienced teachers held significantly different perceptions of the teacher-directed activities that demand recitation and memorization. He concluded that relaxing activities that can bring forth fun should be regarded as necessary for inducing creative thinking. Horng et al. (2005) conducted a study aimed at finding the factors that influence creative teaching. The participants were primary and junior high school teachers. Their results revealed the following factors: (a) "personality traits, (b) family factors, (c) experiences of growth and education (d) beliefs in teaching, hard work, motivation and (e) the administrative side of school organization" (Horng et al., 2005, p. 352). Student-centered activities, multimedia assistance, class management, the connection of teaching contents and real-life, open questions, and encouragement to creative thinking were mentioned as the strategies of creative instructions. They suggested that creative instructions can be developed if they begin with teacher-training programs in colleges and if schools and bureaus of education hold workshops on creative instructions.

Hong, Hartzell, and Greene (2009) examined three constructs influencing fostering creativity among 178 elementary-school teachers. They were teachers' epistemological beliefs, intrinsic motivation, and goal orientation. They focused on various perspectives in problem-solving, transfer of knowledge to diverse



situations, task commitment, creative skill use, and collaboration. The results indicated that teacher features constitute a statistically significant and practically significant amount of variances in each of the five instructional practices.

Baer and Garrett (2010) explored the role of creativity in education and clearly stated that standardized testing does not conflict with creativity entirely. They can exist simultaneously in the classroom. For this reason, teachers should identify the role they play in cultivating creativity, as well as the different forms and qualities of creativity. They concluded that teachers who regard creativity as static composed of divergent thinking or original ideas are not able to support creativity in the classroom than those who have a broader and more complete understanding of the traits of and benefits from creative thought. Tan, Lee, Ponnusamy, Koh, and Tan (2016) conducted a study to explore the role of context in enhancing creativity in high-ability students across three secondary schools. Wallach-Kogan Creative Thinking Test (WKCT) was utilized to measure creativity in the schools. Four aspects of creativity, namely fluency, flexibility, unusualness, and uniqueness, were taken into consideration. Two groups of students enrolled in the Express program and the Integrated Program (IP) took part in the study. The findings showed that all the four Ps, that is, the person, process, product, and press (i.e., environment), have to be taken into consideration in teaching for creativity.

Chan and Yuen (2015) investigated the beliefs primary school teachers hold concerning creativity and their creativity-fostering practices. The findings indicated that teachers in Hong Kong use their knowledge and experience to guide students in developing their creativity and positive learning habits. The teachers adapt teaching strategies to help students learn by establishing a stimulating and creativity-fostering learning environment. The teachers valued creativity in their students and deliberately tailored their classroom practices to foster creativity.

Davies et al. (2012) identified factors that encourage creativity skills in children, including physical and pedagogical environments, accessibility of resources/materials, play-based learning, and teacher-learner relationships. The structure, atmosphere, and operation of the classroom and the teacher's attitude towards creativity are general aspects of the school environment that seem essential in developing creativity. Beghetto and Kaufman (2014) have done a study to find out the ways teachers might create a creativity-nurturing learning environment in their classrooms. While proposing the Four C model, they realized that while most teachers value learning about the nature of creativity, they want something concrete. They want ready-made procedures for establishing a creativity-supportive classroom environment. Finally, Al-Dababneh, Al-Zboon, and Ahmad (2017) conducted a study to measure primary stage teachers' perceptions regarding creativity, their self-efficacy, teaching creativity, and barriers to creativity to compare the availability of a creative environment within

regular schools between the academic year 2009/ 2010 and 2015/2016. They found that high rank was related to teachers' self-efficacy to foster children's creativity in the classroom and then high averages for teaching creativity, the lowest-ranked was connected to barriers to creativity. Additionally, there were statistically significant differences between the academic years for the overall scale and the four domains on the side of the 2015/2016 academic year. They concluded that teachers play a vital role in creating creativity-fostering environments.

Regarding English language teaching (ELT), a few studies have been conducted. [Cho and Kim \(2018\)](#) conducted a study to investigate the role of language play in promoting creativity in EFL classrooms. They offered five different types of language play and helped teachers integrate them in L2 classrooms. They argued that playful and creative language use could develop the creative ability of the students. They concluded that the role of teachers in creating active and participatory classroom environments is vital. [Wang \(2019\)](#) investigated the use of the Creative Problem-Solving (CPS) model to nurture creativity training in English L2 classes at a public high school in Taiwan. Some creative writing tasks according to the CPS model were implemented. The analysis of students' responses to a task evaluation indicated that students hold a positive sense regarding the effects of the CPS tasks on facilitating their English skills, creative thinking, classroom participation, and interaction. The findings emphasized the design and implementation of CPS activities in English classes. As a result, creative teaching and teaching for creativity needs to be explored in specific fields and contexts to find out the factors influencing creative education. Regarding Iran, up to date, no study has been done to investigate creativity – fostering instruction of EFL teachers.

3. Method

3.1 Design

For the sake of a deep understanding of teachers' and students' experiences on creative instruction, the present study adopted *quan*→*QUAL* mixed-methods design. The use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques expand and strengthen the study conclusions. Therefore, to enhance the validity and reliability of the study, triangulation was used and the data were collected through two measures.

3.2 Participants

The study population was the entire Iranian EFL teachers and students in public high schools of Iran. All Iranian EFL students studying in high schools were considered because they were learning the same textbooks within the same



educational system. Additionally, all EFL teachers were considered since they were teaching the same instructional materials within the same educational system. As the population was large and geographically dispersed, it was necessary to use a sample. To create the sample to be representative of the population, it was randomly selected from EFL teachers and students in different public high schools in different provinces across the country. One of the researchers is a member of the WhatsApp group which is composed of EFL teachers from many provinces of the county. First, the researcher asked all members to participate in the study. Three hundred and twenty-two of the teachers announced to participate. and the questionnaire was sent to two hundred of them randomly. Additionally, the teachers were requested to ask their students to fill out the students' version of the questionnaire.

3.2.1 Teachers

The researchers sent the questionnaire to 200 teachers randomly. The teachers were dealing with the students with common characteristics in terms of their ages, the schools, the instructional materials, and even their level of proficiency in English. Attempts have been made to contact teachers from different parts of the county to guarantee the representativeness of the sample. Finally, 94 teachers filled out the questionnaire. They held BA, MA, and Ph.D. in TEFL or Linguistics, and their ages varied from 22 to 50 (average: 31). Ten classes where these teachers teach English were randomly chosen in different provinces for the second phase of the study.

3.2.2 Students

Regarding the first phase of the study, 216 Iranian EFL students in public high schools filled out the questionnaire at their teachers' request. Their ages ranged from 14 to 18 years. To make sure of the actual responses, the teachers told their students that their responses to the questionnaire are for research purposes. After that, twelve students were requested randomly in the ten classes to write about the nature of activities in five consecutive sessions of their classes. They were requested to read twelve statements given to them provided by the researchers before each class session and then write about them after the session

3.3. Instruments

To gauge teachers' creativity- supportive behaviors, two instruments were adopted. The first instrument was Creativity Fostering Teacher Index (CFTI), developed by [Soh \(2000\)](#). It was translated into Persian to be more understandable for the teachers and the students. Because inaccurate translation may lead to misunderstandings and also improve validity, accuracy, quality, and readability of the index, it was back-translated into English by a Ph.D. student in Translation.

Then, the original and back-translated versions were compared to assess correspondence of meaning between the source and target versions. Although some minor differences were observed between the two versions, the accuracy of translation was acceptable. The Persian version was validated through factor analysis and pilot testing of the items. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the translated version of the instrument, which was acceptable (.86). The Persian version of CFTI was given to the teachers and the students to rate their views about Iranian EFL teachers' classroom behaviors. CFTI is a self-rating scale developed to measure teachers' creativity fostering behavior and is composed of 45 items that use a 6-point Likert scale ranging from disagree entirely to agree. It is formed by the nine scales, which are dependence, integration, motivation, judgment, flexibility, evaluation, question, opportunities, and frustration. Each scale consists of 5 items. "One item of one scale is followed by one item from the next scale and so on to avoid probable response set within each set of items for the same creativity fostering behavior"(Soh, 2000, p, 12).

To collect qualitative data from the students, twelve statements (Appendix) were gathered from reading the related studies (Cropley, 1995; Soh, 2000; Richards, 2013; Jones & Richards, 2015). These twelve statements characterized twelve aspects of the class where creativity- supportive instruction could occur. They were translated into Persian. First, as a pilot testing, the gathered statements were given to twenty students to read and explain their understanding. Considering the results of pilot testing and careful scrutinizing by the researcher, the statements were given to the target students. They were given to 12 students in 10 English classes to report on the aspects of classrooms in 5 consecutive sessions.

3.4 Data Analyses

The data in this study were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Regarding the first question, an independent samples t-test was used to find out whether there is a significant difference between the students' and teachers' views on teachers' creativity supportive behaviors in the classroom.

Concerning qualitative data of the students' reports to the statements, thematic analysis coding was adopted. It was utilized to identify codes, categories, and themes across the data.

The answers of the students to the statements were gathered, and initial codes were created. Words, phrases, or sentences that represented the same meanings were applied to the same codes. Then the themes were driven by analyzing and merging codes and categories. Two coders coded the data to enhance interrater reliability. There was an agreement between the two coders, namely 93%



4. Results and Discussion

To answer the first question, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for teachers and students, including the means and standard deviations and standard measurement errors.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of both teachers and students

	value	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Views	teachers	94	205.9255	14.06837	1.45104
	students	216	224.1991	21.73096	1.47860

As can be observed in Table 2, there was a significant difference between the teachers' (M=205, SD=14) and the students' (M=224, SD=21) views on Iranian EFL teachers' creativity-fostering behaviors, $t(263) = 8.82, p = 0.00$.

Table 2
Independent samples test for the difference between students' and teachers' views on teachers' creativity-supportive behaviors.

	Levene's Test	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Views	variances	27.42	.000	7.49	308	.00	18.27	2.43	13.47	23.07
	variances			8.82	263	.00	18.27	2.07	14.19	22.35

The difference between the teachers' and the students' views might reveal that Iranian EFL teachers do not adopt creativity supporting strategies in their classes. Moreover, scrutinizing students' answers to the questionnaire scales and items confirmed that Iranian high school EFL students do not experience the classroom environment as a place for fostering creativity. Thus, it can be said that creativity is not systematically implemented in Iranian EFL classrooms.

One reason can be related to the point that some teachers believe that creative students are disruptive students, and teachers do not admit curricular chaos into their classroom (Scott, 1999; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). In addition, the idea of creativity sounds nice in theory when teachers consider creative students, but not when confronted with the idea of a crowded classroom (Runco, 2004).

Sometimes highly creative students may present curricular and management challenges to teachers.

Another reason can be associated with Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning English (epistemological beliefs) in Iran as to whether student creativity should be supported or fostered or not. This reason is mentioned by a few studies (Chan & Yuen, 2015; Katz-Buonincontro, Perignat, & Hass 2020; Mullet et al., 2016; Schacter, Thum, & Zifkin, 2006). All these studies reported that teachers hold misconceptions about creativity which extended to their teaching practices and their views of students' creativity in their classrooms. Hong, Hartzell, and Greene (2009) also explained that those teachers who mentioned using creativity-supportive practices have high-quality learning enjoyed creative work. The teachers' answers revealed that although Iranian EFL teachers selected the strategies to foster creativity practices in their class, students' answers indicated that these strategies are used infrequently, irregularly, and sporadically. Two following strategies, which are directly related to teaching explicitly for creativity, are used sporadically in the classrooms.

- Probing students' ideas to encourage thinking.
- Encouraging students to think in different directions even if some of the ideas might not work.

It can be argued that Iranian EFL teachers do not create opportunities that help their students cultivate creative thinking abilities because implementing creativity in practice is difficult (Ahmadi et al., 2019).

A different factor that may influence the use of creativity fostering strategies is the environment. "The term environment is conceived broadly and encompasses various contextual facets (e.g., classroom environment and school climate)" (Ahmadi et al., 2019, p. 256). Davies et al. (2012) also defined learning environment as extending "beyond the physical architecture of the space in which learning takes place ... to encompass psychosocial and pedagogical features ... [and include] the influence of places and people outside of school" (p. 80). It seems that student creativity has been influenced by features of the learning environment. Cachia et al. (2010) explained that fostering creative abilities within schools entails the support from an organizational culture opening to creativity and the creation of a creativity-friendly environment.

The physical environment includes the flexible use of internal and external spaces, materials, and time (Davies et al., 2012). Creating a pleasant, meaningful environment in space and time helps teachers and students to become personally creative (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).



It seems that Iranian EFL teachers do not have enough time to incorporate creativity-supporting activities in their classes. Also, there is no plan for the use of outside space in the school, for example, the schoolyard. The analysis of the Iranian EFL teachers' answers to the following items related to classroom opportunities showed that these two strategies are sometimes adopted, not always in the class. It is worth noting that Iranian EFL teachers should have sufficient time to provide inside and outside opportunities for their students to involve them in creative activities.

- I provide opportunities for my students to share their strong and weak points with the class.
- In my class, students have opportunities to judge for themselves whether they are right or wrong".

It can be argued that even though Iranian EFL teachers may think that creativity is essential and should be developed or taught, they are under pressure to complete the curriculum by the end of the academic year. They feel that teaching time is not adequate to support or foster creativity in their classrooms (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014).

Concerning pedagogical and psychosocial factors, the following four statements in the questionnaire are directly related to these factors.

- I help students who experience a failure to cope with it so that they regain their confidence.
- My students who are frustrated can come to me for emotional support.
- I encourage students who have frustration to take it as part of the learning process.
- I encourage students who experienced a failure to find other possible solutions.

According to the answers, it can be said that Iranian EFL teachers allow their students to experience learning on their own, and they provide opportunities for them to feel relaxed. Additionally, an atmosphere of mutual respect exists among teachers and students. The point worth mentioning is that scrutinizing the students' answers to the above-mentioned strategies indicated that these strategies are also used infrequently and intermittently by Iranian EFL teachers. Thus, it is necessary to talk to or interview these teachers to find out the exact reasons. It seems that Iranian EFL teachers need to cover what is included in the textbooks to prepare the students for a test in a limited amount of time. This reduces more pedagogical and psychosocial support from the teachers. Amabile, DeJong, and Lepper (1976) explained that deadlines for completing a task could harm intrinsic interest and weaken creative manifestation. As a result, although Iranian EFL teachers are aware of the characteristics that enhance creativity in the classroom,

such as emotional support and confidence, the transference to practice is intuitive (De Souza Fleith, 2000).

To sum up, Iranian EFL teachers cannot convert their preferences into actual teaching because teachers' wants and preferences are not enough to teach creatively. Their wishes, beliefs, and views need to be supported by education and social contexts where they teach.

Regarding the second question, coding and categorizing the students' reports led to two themes (environment and interaction). Table 3 illustrates codes, categories and, themes. Accordingly, environment and interaction can be considered as two main factors influencing creativity-supportive behaviors of Iranian EFL teachers, which are discussed in detail.

Table 3
Codes, categories, and themes

Codes	Categories	Themes
(1) Paying attention to views, suggestions and, critiques (2) Supporting and behaving friendly (3) Correcting errors and, mistakes	Classroom atmosphere	Environment
(1) Correcting assignments (2) Asking and answering questions (3) Managing and encouraging activities	Instructional strategies	Interaction

4.1 Environment

As emphasized in the quantitative data, educational environment plays a vital role in developing students' creative disposition. Creating an enhancing, harmonious, and meaningful environment can contribute to the development of creative potential (De Souza Fleith, 2000). Creating an environment that stimulates and supports creativity is the responsibility of the teachers (Al-Dababneh, Al-Zboon, & Ahmad, 2017). Three codes associated with the environment (Table 3) are discussed.

1. Paying attention to views, suggestions, and critiques: creating a classroom atmosphere in which ideas, suggestion, and comments are valued and taken into account make students concentrate on what they are learning and increase their interest in the lesson. A supporting teacher who pays attention to what the students feel and want encourages the students to give their opinions and suggestions, leading to the development of students' creativity potential (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Additionally, when the students think that their suggestions,



views, and critiques are taken into account and can share their opinions and suggestions with classmates, they try to explore and experiment with new ideas and approaches in a relaxed way and learn to deal with frustration (Madjar, 2008; Ahmadi et al., 2019). Based on the data, most Iranian EFL teachers listen to students' views and suggestions but not to the students' critiques. One of the students reported that:

"Our teachers respect our views and suggestions but ignore our critiques."

It is to be noted that Iranian EFL students do not express their views, suggestions, and critiques directly. The students should have a say in the classroom procedures. Additionally, the classroom climate should not be firmly related to the views, practices, and the teachers' characteristics. One probable reason is that if Iranian EFL teachers accept views, opinions, and suggestions, especially critiques of the students, curricular and management challenges to teachers may be observed (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). Other reasons require talking to or interviewing the Iranian EFL teachers.

2. Supporting and behaving friendly: The issue at the classroom level that teachers have to consider to foster creativity is the teacher-student relationship. There should be mutual respect between the teachers and their students. Teachers' emotional and informational supports may be expressed through respect, praise for any successful performance, and open interaction with students (Madjar, 2008). Students' awareness of these supports can help them foster their creativity. The results showed that Iranian teachers and students had a pretty good relationship in the class. Many students mentioned their teachers as kind and friendly. Some students answered that if we get frustrated, we can count on our teachers for support (Cropoley & Cropoley, 2009). Interestingly, scrutinizing different students' reports in different sessions indicated ups and downs in the student-teacher relationship. Consequently, a classroom atmosphere in which creativity is supported in a friendly way can lead to developing more autonomy for learners' self-evaluation and formative evaluation.

3. Correcting errors and mistakes: Errors and mistakes are considered a part of the learning process. The findings illustrated that most Iranian EFL teachers correct students' errors and mistakes immediately. The students reported a few teachers who ignored the errors and mistakes or corrected the errors indirectly. One student said: "Our teacher does not state our errors and mistakes; he tries to help the students to correct themselves."

Teachers' reactions or feedbacks towards errors and mistakes can have a vital role in encouraging or discouraging student creativity. "The teacher's action and reaction are a signal to the students regarding the acceptability of their creative efforts, outcome, and personal inclinations (Soh, 2000, p.188). Dewett (2006)

explained that everyone's willingness to engage risks in work is an essential influence on creative behavior. As a result, creative behavior requires students to engage in risk because risk-taking is linked to creativity. Therefore, Iranian EFL teachers should create conditions for the students to take risks through making errors and mistakes, which consecutively help them learn and experiment by themselves (Ahmadi et al., 2019).

4.2 Interaction

Generally, interaction can be exercised through the strategies the teachers adopt in managing the classrooms, which may lead to students' creativity. Creativity results from an interaction between persons and situations (Heinzen, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). To improve creativity, "the effective interaction between teacher and student should be considered" (De Souza Fleith, 2000, p. 152). Additionally, Dudek, Strobel, and Runco (1993) stated that student-teacher composition and interactions can have a direct impact on students' creative abilities.

Soh (2000) explained that "A teacher can directly reinforce creativity through her interaction with students by rewarding their creative efforts (process) and outcomes (product) as well as recognizing their creative traits (person)"(p. 118). Moreover, as Posner, Strike, Hewson, and Gerzog (1982) explained, the interactions between teachers and students in the classroom affect the growth of beliefs about the nature of knowledge and knowing (epistemological beliefs).

Cropley (2018) also noted that the development of creativity depends on the interaction of key components—the person, the process, and the environment. Thus, creativity and learning can be shaped by interactions. Moore (1989) distinguished between three types of interaction: "learner–content, learner-teacher and learner-learner"(p.1). Three codes related to interaction (Table 3) are discussed.

1. Correcting assignments: the strategies teachers adopt in correcting homework and assignment can foster potential creativity in the students, i.e., self-correction, peer correction, or teacher correction. Based on the reports, homework and assignments are inseparable parts of Iranian EFL classes, and most assignments are corrected by the teachers. One student reported that: "Our teacher checks the students' assignments one by one and corrects the errors and mistakes."

It seems that there is no place for self-evaluation or peer- evaluation regarding the assignments. There should be learner–content and learner-learner interaction in the classrooms. Iranian EFL teachers should create an atmosphere where the students check their work instead of waiting for teachers to correct them. Promoting self-evaluation in the students causes them to think critically toward



their assignments leading to developing creativity. Furthermore, Iranian EFL teachers do not ask the students to correct each other assignments. This is directly related to learner-learner interaction. If learners discuss issues related to their learning collaboratively, creativity can be fostered in the classroom (Jung, Choi, Lim, & Leem, 2002). Besides, giving purposeful feedback to the assignments can develop creative thinking skills in the students.

2. Asking and answering questions: the kinds of questions the teachers ask during instruction can influence the students to think critically and creatively. Also, by adopting effective strategies, teachers can create a stress-free climate in the classroom in which students can ask questions. As Soh (2000) mentioned, a creative teacher encourages his students to ask questions without restrictions even if they appear unrelated. Hornig et al. (2005) mentioned open questions and encouragement to creative thinking as the strategies of creative instructions. The findings revealed that Iranian EFL teachers encourage their students to ask questions but not any questions and answer the questions patiently. One student explained that: "our teachers set a certain time for us to ask questions." It appears that although Iranian EFL teachers create an asking-question atmosphere in their classrooms, there are some limitations mentioned by the students, such as the time limit for asking and answering. In short, allowing students to interact among themselves to answer the questions stimulates creativity.

3. Managing and encouraging activities: managing an interactive-based classroom can help students learn through their participation in achieving knowledge by gathering and processing information and producing what they have learned. The types of activities the teachers designed and the way they managed these activities could lead students to collaborate and interact with each other through pair or group work. Interactive-based makes it possible for a student-centered class (Li, 2014). This encourages students to show what they have learned on their own and have opportunities to do group work regularly, resulting in the development of students' creative potential (Soh, 2000). Based on the results, the activities in Iranian EFL classrooms are mainly individually or in pairs. Although a few Iranian EFL teachers prefer group work regarding some particular tasks, for example, reading tasks, most of them manage the activities in pairs. Encouraging students to participate in activities inside and outside the school in an area of their interest expands opportunities for them to make use of creative thinking and skills (Hong, Hartzell & Greene, 2009). It seems that Iranian EFL teachers have inclined to teacher-centered classes. Creativity fostering teaching should try to provide opportunities for students to do group work regularly, not infrequently. The teachers in this kind of class allow students to interact with the material and with each other and encourage out-of-class interaction. Students have opportunities to show one another their work before submission. Peer collaboration may efficiently increase awareness of students' inert knowledge (Daiute & Dalton, 1993). Thus, like Hong, Hartzell, and Greene

(2009) mentioned, collaborative activities make available individual students with opportunities to boost their creative abilities.

5. Conclusion

The present study aimed at exploring the creativity-supportive behaviors of Iranian EFL teachers. The results of both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that environment and interaction are two factors influencing the creativity-supportive behaviors of the teachers. Environment means school and classroom atmosphere, and interaction means the strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers to support creativity in the classroom. Generally, the main findings indicated that the environment has a strong impact on students' creative potential. Furthermore, although some Iranian EFL teachers want and try to create creativity-friendly atmosphere in their classrooms and also adopt some strategies to foster creativity, these attempts are made infrequently, sporadically, and temporarily. Specifically, even though most Iranian EFL teachers value creativity; yet, they do not adopt creativity supporting strategies in their classes frequently and continuously. Moreover, Iranian high school students do not experience the classroom environment as creativity-supportive. One probable reason could be related to the point that the idea of creativity sounds nice in theory when teachers consider creative students, but not when confronted with the idea of a populated classroom (Runco, 2004).

It can be concluded that Iranian EFL teachers have not received formal creativity training. Additionally, creative learners call for creative teachers, and teachers need to work in schools and societies where creativity is valued. It seems that educational reforms in Iran have little effect on actual pedagogical practices in the classroom. The educational and social environment does not give priority to creativity supportive teaching; because achievement tests such as the university entrance exam are overemphasized in the educational system in Iran, and Iranian EFL teachers have to teach for the tests.

6. Implications and Limitations

The findings imply that teacher-training programs at Teacher Education Universities preparing and training student teachers don't equip them with the knowledge and strategies of creative instruction. Student teachers should be trained regarding different aspects of creativity to learn how and when to be creative and how and when to support the creative actions of the students. Iranian EFL teachers should be trained in in-service workshops to learn how to deal with, manage, and behave with creative students. Additionally, teacher training programs should be assessed and modified to include practical, creative teaching courses to prepare student teachers to be creative and support creativity in their actual classes.



This study had some limitations. Firstly, the participants were from some provinces of Iran; thus the findings should not be generalized to all Iranian EFL teachers and students. More dependable results can be obtained by gathering data from other parts of the country. Secondly, this study applied a questionnaire and students' reports to collect the data; therefore, further research can be done through other data collection methods, including classroom observation, interviews with teachers, and diary writing to verify the findings.

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Appendix:

Twelve classroom aspects

- (1) The way the teacher treats the ideas, views, suggestions, and critiques of the students.
- (2) The way the teacher examines and corrects students' homework and assignments.
- (3) The teacher and the students' relationship.
- (4) Class activities: individual, pair, or group
- (5) The way the teacher responds to students' questions and the patience for answering.
- (6) The way the teacher behaves the students' errors.
- (7) The way the teacher encourages the students to ask questions and give suggestions freely.
- (8) The teachers give the students time to think about the topics in the class
- (9) The way the teacher asks questions.
- (10) The way the teachers treats those students who are frustrated or experienced failure
- (11) The teacher allows the students to go beyond what /she teaches them within the subject.
- (12) The teacher encourages the students to learn out of the class and to learn independently.

