

**ENHANCING CREATIVE THINKING IN EFL INSTRUCTION THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY****Abirkulova Nafisa Abdusalamovna**2<sup>nd</sup> year Master's student, Foreign Language and Literature,  
Jizzakh State Pedagogical University**Keywords:** Project-Based Learning (PBL); creative thinking skills; EFL instruction; higher education; learner-centered pedagogy; innovative teaching methods; English language teaching**Abstract**

Developing creative thinking is a key objective in contemporary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in higher education. This study examines the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing creative thinking among EFL learners. A quasi-experimental design was employed with 48 first-year undergraduate students divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group participated in a semester-long project-based intervention, while the control group received traditional instruction. Creative thinking was assessed through performance-based tasks focusing on originality, flexibility, elaboration, and language use. The results indicate that students exposed to Project-Based Learning demonstrated higher levels of creative thinking and greater engagement in meaningful language use than those taught through conventional methods. The findings suggest that PBL is an effective instructional approach for fostering creative thinking in EFL higher education contexts.

In recent decades, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has undergone significant pedagogical transformation due to globalization, digitalization, and the growing demand for transferable skills. Beyond linguistic accuracy, learners are now expected to demonstrate creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities. Consequently, fostering creative thinking has become a priority in contemporary language education.

Despite this shift, EFL instruction in many educational contexts still relies heavily on traditional, teacher-centered approaches that emphasize grammar drills, vocabulary memorization, and controlled practice. While such methods may support basic language acquisition, they often fail to stimulate learners' creative engagement and higher-order cognitive processes. This pedagogical mismatch necessitates the integration of innovative teaching methodologies capable of addressing both linguistic and cognitive development.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a promising instructional approach that aligns with constructivist learning theory and learner-centered pedagogy. By engaging students in authentic, meaningful tasks, PBL encourages learners to actively construct knowledge, collaborate with peers, and apply language creatively in real-world contexts. The present study aims to examine the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in enhancing creative thinking skills among EFL learners in higher education.

**Creative Thinking in EFL Education**

Creative thinking is commonly defined as the ability to generate original, flexible, and elaborated ideas in response to problems or tasks. In EFL contexts, creative thinking enables learners to use language beyond mechanical reproduction, allowing them to express personal meanings, negotiate ideas, and adapt language to diverse communicative situations.

Previous studies have emphasized that creative thinking contributes to improved learner motivation, deeper language processing, and increased communicative competence. However, research also indicates that creativity is often underdeveloped in traditional language classrooms due to rigid curricula and assessment systems focused primarily on accuracy.

### **Project-Based Learning as an Innovative Approach**

Project-Based Learning is an instructional methodology in which learners acquire knowledge and skills by working over an extended period to investigate and respond to complex questions or challenges. Unlike task-based activities with limited scope, PBL involves sustained inquiry, learner autonomy, and the creation of tangible products.

In EFL education, PBL has been shown to enhance learner engagement, collaboration, and language use in authentic contexts. Studies suggest that PBL supports the development of speaking and writing skills while simultaneously fostering creativity and critical thinking. Nevertheless, empirical research examining the direct relationship between PBL and creative thinking development in EFL settings remains limited, particularly in higher education contexts.

This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design to investigate the impact of Project-Based Learning on EFL students' creative thinking development. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative performance assessment with qualitative classroom observation.

The participants were 48 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in an EFL program at a higher education institution. The students were randomly assigned to:

- an experimental group (n = 24), taught using Project-Based Learning;
- a control group (n = 24), taught using traditional instructional methods.

Both groups had comparable English proficiency levels at the beginning of the study.

The experimental group participated in a semester-long PBL intervention centered on the project theme:

*"Designing an English Learning Product for Secondary School Students."*

The project was implemented in four stages:

1. **Problem identification and planning**
2. **Information gathering and analysis**
3. **Product design and development**
4. **Presentation and reflection**

Students collaborated in small groups and were encouraged to make independent decisions regarding content, format, and presentation style. The teacher acted as a facilitator, providing guidance and feedback throughout the process.

The control group followed a textbook-based syllabus emphasizing grammar instruction, reading comprehension, and structured speaking tasks.

Creative thinking was assessed using performance-based tasks evaluated according to four criteria:

- originality,
- flexibility,
- elaboration,
- language use.

Data were analyzed by comparing the post-intervention performance of the experimental and control groups.

The findings revealed notable differences between the experimental and control groups. Students exposed to Project-Based Learning demonstrated higher levels of creative thinking across all assessment criteria. In particular, the experimental group showed significant improvement in originality and flexibility, indicating an increased ability to generate novel ideas and adapt language creatively.

Additionally, students in the experimental group exhibited greater confidence in oral presentations and more sophisticated written language use. Classroom observations further indicated higher engagement, collaboration, and learner autonomy among PBL participants. In contrast, the control group's progress was largely limited to grammatical accuracy and controlled language use.

The results of this study support the hypothesis that Project-Based Learning positively influences creative thinking development in EFL instruction. By engaging learners in authentic, problem-oriented tasks, PBL creates opportunities for meaningful language use and creative expression. These findings are consistent with constructivist perspectives, which emphasize learning as an active and socially mediated process.

However, the study also highlights potential challenges associated with PBL implementation. Without clear guidelines, assessment criteria, and continuous scaffolding, projects may become superficial or uneven in quality. Therefore, teacher expertise and instructional planning play a critical role in ensuring the effectiveness of PBL in EFL classrooms.

This study demonstrates that Project-Based Learning is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing creative thinking in EFL higher education contexts. By integrating language learning with real-world problem-solving and collaborative inquiry, PBL supports the development of both linguistic competence and higher-order thinking skills.

The findings suggest that EFL educators should consider incorporating Project-Based Learning into their instructional practices to foster creativity and learner autonomy. Future research should explore longitudinal effects of PBL, its impact across different proficiency levels, and its integration with digital learning environments.

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