

An Investigation in to the relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Creativity and their Classroom Management Strategy Use

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the potential relationship between teachers' creativity and their classroom management strategy use. In the first phase, two questionnaires (ELTCQ and classroom management strategy use questionnaire) were given to a total of 70 teachers, to determine if there was any relationship between teachers' creativity and their classroom management strategy use. The findings revealed that there was no significant correlation between teachers' creativity and their use of "Organizing strategies", "Teacher-student relationship strategies", and "Teacher punishment/reward strategies". Nevertheless, there was a meaningful positive relationship between teachers' creativity and their "Teaching management strategies". Moreover, the strength of the correlation between teacher creativity and teaching management strategies was average.

1-Introduction

English language, as a lingua franca, has helped people around the world to communicate with each other in the recent century. To achieve this ultimate goal, huge amount of researches (e.g. Fisher, 2004; Maley, 2015; Pugliese, 2010) have been conducted in various fields of English Language Teaching (ELT), namely speaking, listening, writing, and reading to improve the quality of instruction. Researchers have also examined issues about teachers' creativity and its effects on their classroom management and learners' language improvement.

It seems essential to know what the term "creativity" means, and when applied, what its real impacts are. To understand the concept of creativity, it is essential to grasp its definition presented by Craft (2002). Craft (2002) describes that creativity consists of a process of creating something new from an already existed element. He goes on to say that creativity needs interest and commitment. It tries to bring to our attention to what previously was hidden or ignored. It puts into spotlight a lot of delicate points with which the status of something is upgraded.

Educators should consider the extent to which schools are successful in implementing effective education for accomplishing educational objectives. The results of numerous studies

have illustrated that teachers play a key role in shaping effective education (Hattie, 2009). The differences in achievement between students who spend a year with a highly effective teacher as opposed to a highly ineffective teacher are startling.

So, teachers' creativity greatly influences how content is conveyed to language learners and how classroom is managed. Taking the above points into account, the researcher of the current study intends to take an analytical look at function of creativity among teachers, especially those who want to teach English. Therefore, if teachers apply slight amount of creativity in their instruction, they will be successful in their teaching objectives.

2- Importance and necessity of research

Issues regarding how to approach the teaching of foreign languages have always been critical subject for English language teachers and learners (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Most Iranian EFL teachers are always seeking new ways to teach linguistic knowledge of the target language (English) and to manage their classrooms so that language learning is facilitated. Honestly, some teachers get irritated for not being allowed to use creativity and new strategies to make English classes more interesting to learners. They are aware of the impact of technological advancements on any aspects of education, which result in more informed and knowledgeable learners. Nowadays learners are interested in learning English through the implementation of modern and attractive strategies.

Learners' current needs entails teachers' classroom management capabilities as well as their application of creative techniques in language classrooms, something that most teachers are not able to perform. Some Iranian EFL teachers are not comfortable with embracing their creativity and therefore they have a hard time applying creative methods of teaching, which in turn improve their classroom management capabilities, and finally culminates in the promotion of learning quality in language classrooms. That said, creativity among teachers is widely regarded as one of the most powerful factors for the improvement of the teaching profession at schools.

The significance of the role of creativity in today's world is presented by several scholars. For instance, Robinson (2000) accentuates the necessity of implementing creativity throughout the world. He believes that "in a world dominated by technological innovations, creativity is a critical component; human skills and people's powers of creativity and imagination are key resources in a knowledge" (as cited in Grainger, Teresa, Barnes, & Jonathan; 2006, p. 2). Another study which was carried out in a teaching context, with tutors teaching music, geography and English, illustrates that creative teaching is a complex artistic job (Grainger, Barnes, & Scoffham, 2004). Their findings refer to the importance of being creative in teaching.

In addition, it should be mentioned that a large number of studies have been done in the field of creativity, however, limited number of studies have examined the relationship between teachers' creativity and their classroom management strategy use as well as its impact on learners' learning. That said, lack of creativity is strongly considered as a critical problem in Iran.

3-Definition of Key Terms

3-1 Teaching profession

Training also plays a crucial role in promoting the target culture and nurturing competencies for cooperation. Teacher preparation and professional development programs should include such activities which create a high quality atmosphere for learners' improvement (Carrel & Korwitz, 1992).

3-2 Creativity

Borden (1998) believes that creativity can be defined as the producing of new ideas from the known elements, providing valuable solutions to a problem. It also involves motivation and emotion.

3-3 Classroom management

Charles (1992), Wolfgang (1995) defines classroom management as the ability of "how the teacher works, how the class works, how the teacher and students work together, and how teaching and learning happen. For students, classroom management means having some control in how the class operates and understanding clearly the way the teacher and students are to interact with each other. For both teachers and students, classroom management is not a condition but a process. Classroom management is much more than any one of these words or the sum of all these words" (as cited in Yavuz, 2009, p. 642)."

4-Literature Review

Creativity in the classroom is intertwined with innovative teaching, learners' and teachers' high motivation, the ability to communicate and listen, as well as the ability to interest and inspire others (Ferrari, Cachia, 2010, p.17). According to Runco (2004), causing a creative condition in the classroom will completely improve language learning and teaching. Creative teachers provoke curiosity within students, recognize the characteristics of creative students, and enhance their self-confidence, risk-taking and autonomy (Runco, 2004).

Landry (2000), Tepper (2005), and Shaughnessy (1991) worked on creativity in education and found that creativity can be increased in an environment in which team works, self-motivation, independence, sociocultural diversity, and risk-taking culture are encouraged. In creating this type of environment, Torrance and Myers (1970) recommended that "teachers accept and encourage creative thinking, tolerate dissent, encourage students to trust their own judgments, emphasize that everyone is capable of creativity, and serve as a stimulus for creative thinking through brainstorming and modeling" (Torrance & Myers, 1970, as cited in AminiNaghadeh, Kasraey, Maghdour, Eyvezi, 2014, pp.537-538). As a whole, creativity in educational environments depends on several factors such as evaluation, culture, curriculum, personal abilities, teaching and learning format, national policies, technology, and tools (Marrapodi, 2003; Ferrari, Cachia, & Punie, 2009; and Morris, 2006).

Cremin, Barnes, and Scoffham (2009) carried out a study examining creativity within various teaching areas. The research consisted of an initial investigation of 20 schools followed by a more detailed survey undertaken in four of the schools (two primary and two secondary). They finally found that the quality of creative teaching was outstanding.

Through gathering the research on effective teacher behavior, educators and researchers were interested in recognizing practices and behaviors that allow teachers recommend for impressive classroom leadership. Kounin's (1970) work was one of the preliminary efforts to recognize these practices. Kounin in his oft-cited book made comparison between teachers' managerial behaviors in smoothly functioning classrooms with teachers from classrooms that had high rates of in-attention and frequent disruptions. Based on his investigations of videotapes of teachers in both types of classrooms, Kounin determined a series of teacher behaviors that were related to greatly-managed classrooms. Kounin (1970) claimed that "impressive classroom managers were informed of student behaviors and activities at all times so that they prevent small issues from escalating, a trait he termed 'withitness' (p. 74)".

Also successful classroom managers were able to share more than one classroom task at a time in order to identify student behavior and structure classroom activities that kept high degrees of student attention. Additionally, successful and unsuccessful teachers did not vary in how they reacted to student misbehavior. The difference that set the effective classroom managers apart from the less effective classroom managers was in the preventive, organizational strategies used by the effective teachers. According to Kounin's study the motivations for effective observational studies investigating managerial practices of teachers during the 1970s and early 1980s. A large part of the discussion of successful classroom managers has been in accordance with one year research by Anderson, Evertson, and Emmer achieved in the late 1970s. They gathered a vast sum of narrative findings of teacher behavior in 28 third grade classrooms over the course of an entire school year and investigated attitudes in leadership styles of successful teachers (Anderson et al., 1979). In an early report from this study (Anderson & Evertson, 1978), researchers recognized one successful and unsuccessful teacher according to students' achievements at the final of the school year. Then, they made comparison between those teachers' management practices from the starting of the school year and discovered extensive differences in the behaviors of the successful and unsuccessful teachers. They conducted that successful teachers had better classroom management. The better classroom manager had clear expectations about behavior and communicated them to students drastically on the first day of school. Classroom principles and daily activity were precisely trained to students applying examples and non-examples and teacher appreciated for appropriate behavior applying behavior-specific praise. Therefore, teacher's encouragement and creativity caused learners' development and consequently effective classroom management.

5- Research Questions

The present research intends to answer the following questions:

- 1- What strategies Iranian EFL teachers use for managing their language classrooms?
- 2- Is there any relationship between EFL teachers' creativity and their classroom management strategy use?

6- Participants

To find answer to the first research question, a total of 70 Iranian EFL teachers working in different language academies across the city of Lamerd were asked to take part in the study by filling out creativity as well as a classroom management strategy use questionnaire. They were both male and female. They were all native speakers of Persian.

7-Instruments

To collect data intended to find answer to the first research question, two questionnaires were utilized, namely English Language Teaching Creativity Quotient (ELTCQ) Questionnaire constructed by P'Rayan (2011), and a Classroom management strategy use questionnaire designed by Shawer (2010).

The ELTCQ questionnaire had 10 dimensions. These ten dimensions are as following:

- 1) Did teacher make a range of practical, creative activities for each child?
- 2) Did teacher note individual and cooperative thinking and learning throughout creativity implement?
- 3) Did teacher suggest a wide range of opportunities to discover engagement, enjoyment and other positive emotions?
- 4) Did creativity influence on learners' decision making?
- 5) Did creativity have any effect on learners' calculating probabilities?
- 6) Did creativity influence on learners' creativity?
- 7) Did creativity influence on learners' learning strategy?
- 8) Did teacher create a positive, secure and comfortable atmosphere?
- 9) Did teacher use a manageable number of relevant subjects to throw light on the topic?
- 10) .Could teacher arrange the classroom's pattern through creativity?

This questionnaire has been constructed by P'Rayan (2011). It consisted of 30 three-point likert-scale items. On the scale, 5 means "strongly agree", 3 means "agree but not strongly", and 1 means "disagree". In order to score the level of creativity of teachers, teachers' response to each item of the test were added up. A score of 120 – 150 suggests a high potential for creativity. A score of 100 - 120 shows above-average potential. A score of 75 – 100 shows average potential, and a score below 75 suggests a lower ability to be creative. In order to analyze research questions, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) were used.

8- Investigating Research Questions

8-1 Descriptive statistics for both questionnaires

8-1-1 Descriptive statistics for the creativity questionnaire

In order to elicit the extent to which Iranian EFL teachers were creative in language classrooms, a creativity questionnaire originally designed by P'Rayan (2011) was utilized.

This questionnaire consisted of 30 three-point likert scale items including disagree, agree to a certain extent, and strongly agree. P’Rayan(2011) assigned each of the above mentioned scales a certain value, namely disagree (1 point), agree to a certain extent (3 points), and strongly agree (5 points). By adding up students’ responses based on the values presented above, the extent of teachers’ creativity in language classrooms was determined. P’ Rayan (2011) presented the following measurement framework for determining teachers’ degree of creativity in language classrooms:

- 75 Low creativity
- 75-99 Average creativity
- 100-119 Above average creativity
- 120-150 High creativity

Based on this framework, a total of 18 Iranian EFL teachers were identified as having low creativity, while 20 were found to have high creativity. In addition, 32 participants had average potential for being creative in language classrooms. Figure 1 shows the results of descriptive statistics for teachers’ creativity.

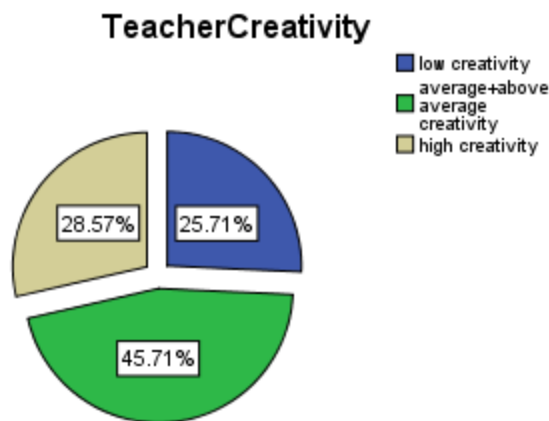


Figure 1: Descriptive statistics for teacher creativity

8-1-2 Descriptive statistics for teachers’ classroom management strategy use questionnaire

This section provides descriptive statistics for the classroom management strategies that Iranian EFL teachers tend to use in language classrooms. Shaver’s (2010) questionnaire was utilized to collect the needed data regarding teachers’ classroom management strategy use. Consisted of 37 items, this questionnaire included 4 main themes, namely teacher organizing strategies, teachers’ teaching management strategies, teacher-student relationship strategies, and teacher punishment/reward strategies. To facilitate the interpretation of the items of this questionnaire, teachers’ responses to each of its 4 themes are presented separately.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the first theme of the questionnaire, which aimed to elicit the organizing strategies that teachers utilize in language classrooms. As can be noticed below, this theme consisted of 8 items whose descriptive statistics are presented with respect to teachers' degree of creativity.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for classroom organizing strategies with respect to their creativity level

Theme 1: Teachers' organizing strategies	Low creative teachers' mean	Moderately creative teachers' mean	Highly creative teachers' mean
1. I follow specific and strict routines of accessing and returning resources.	3.55	3.75	3.60
2. I follow specific and strict routines of handing in work and assignment.	3.66	3.65	3.70
3. I follow specific and strict routines of going to toilet.	3.61	2.90	3.35
4. I specify a strict time of entering the classroom, where nobody can enter beyond it.	3.72	3.84	4.05
5. I follow specific and strict routines of seating the students.	2.88	3.28	2.95
6. I follow specific and strict routines of checking student attendance.	4.11	3.93	4.30
7. I come to lectures and class on time.	4.16	4.43	4.15
8. I miss lectures or classes.	1.66	1.47	1.85

As it was indicated in Table 1, for teachers with low degree of creativity, the highest means belonged to the items "I come to lectures and class on time" ($M= 4.16$), and "I follow specific and strict routines of checking student attendance" ($M= 4.11$) respectively. Moreover, for teachers with average creativity, the highest mean belonged to the items "I come to lectures and class on time" ($M= 4.43$), and "I follow specific and strict routines of checking student attendance" ($M= 3.93$) respectively. Furthermore, for teachers with high creativity level, the highest mean belonged to the items "I follow specific and strict routines of checking student attendance" ($M= 4.30$), and "I come to lectures and class on time" ($M= 4.15$) respectively. This shows that, irrespective of teachers' creativity level, all the participants were very sensitive about punctuality in language classrooms. In addition, they highlighted the significance of checking students' attendance strictly regardless of their degree of creativity. As it can be seen in Table 1, regardless of the teachers' creativity level, the lowest mean within all the groups, was that of the item "I miss lectures or classes" ($M_{Low}= 1.66$; $M_{Average}= 1.47$; $M_{High}= 1.85$). This shows that Iranian EFL teachers tend to share plenty of similarities in the use of organizing classroom strategies regardless of their level of creativity.

Table 2 shows the means for teachers' preferences for teaching management strategies. According to Table 2, this theme consisted of 11 items. As can be noticed below, the mean for each of the items are provided with respect to teachers' degree of creativity in language classrooms.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Teachers' teaching management strategies with respect to their creativity level

Theme 2: Teaching management strategies	Low creative teachers' mean	Moderately creative teachers' mean	Highly creative teachers' mean
1. I choose stimulating tasks that sustain students' interest.	3.50	4.15	4.55
2. I provide the topics which meet the students' needs	3.83	4.37	4.35
3. I provide very difficult tasks for students to do.	2.22	2.12	2.10
4. I provide very easy tasks for students to do.	2.44	2.53	2.65
5. I provide substantial content for students.	4.38	4.34	4.45
6. I use group work to get students busy working instead of having side-talks.	3.88	4.28	4.50
7. I provide extra tasks to fill in the time gaps between low and high ability students.	3.27	3.93	4.25
8. I set out time limits for students to achieve tasks so as to seize time for learning.	3.38	3.68	3.65
9. I look confident in front of the students.	4.38	4.46	4.50
10. I seem to have clear understanding of the lesson in mind.	4.61	4.56	4.60
11. I always keep students busy doing something (no time gap without work).	4.22	4.12	4.05

As shown in Table 2, the highest mean for the teachers with low and average, and high creativity belonged to the item "I seem to have clear understanding of the lesson in mind" ($M_{Low}=4.61$; $M_{Average}= 4.56$; $M_{High}= 4.60$). The second highest mean among teachers with low creativity belonged to the items "I provide substantial content for students" ($M_{Low}= 4.38$), and "I look confident in front of the students" ($M_{Low}= 4.38$) respectively.

As it can be noticed in Table 2, for the teachers with average creativity, the second highest mean belonged to the item "I look confident in front of the students" ($M_{Average}= 4.46$). In addition, among teachers with high creativity, the second highest mean belonged to the item "I choose stimulating tasks that sustain students' interest" ($M_{High}= 4.55$). On the contrary, among the teachers with low, average, and high degree of creativity, the lowest mean belonged to the item "I provide very difficult tasks for students to do" ($M_{Low}=2.22$; $M_{Average}=2.12$; $M_{High}=2.10$). As the findings show, there was no substantial difference among teachers with different levels of creativity in the use of teaching management strategies.

Table 3 shows the mean for each of the items of the third theme of the questionnaire, namely teacher-student relationship strategies. As it can be noticed in Table 3, this theme consisted of 10 items. The mean results for each of the items are provided below.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for teacher-student relationship strategies with respect to teachers' creativity level

Theme 3: Teacher-student relationship strategies	Low creative teachers' mean	Moderately creative teachers' mean	Highly creative teachers' mean
1. I keep good relations with students.	4.50	4.59	4.45
2. I first started firm with students and then got relaxed.	4.22	4.40	4.30
3. I defuse confrontation with provocative and trouble-making students.	3.72	4.12	3.80
4. I stay calm and take the heat out of a situation.	4.0	4.28	4.10
5. I avoid arguing with students.	4.38	4.59	4.35
6. I use the name of the students.	4.61	4.78	4.85
7. I use humor in the classroom.	3.61	4.0	4.15
8. I use constructive criticism of students.	4.0	4.31	4.35
9. I accept constructive criticism from the students.	4.11	4.34	4.20
10. I look alert and use eye contact.	4.55	4.65	4.55

As shown in Table 3, among the teachers with low, average, and high creativity, the highest mean belonged to the item "I use the name of the students" ($M_{Low} = 4.61$; $M_{Average} = 4.78$; $M_{High} = 4.85$). Furthermore, among teachers with low and average creativity, the lowest mean was that of the item "I use humor in the classroom" ($M_{Low} = 3.61$; $M_{Average} = 4.0$) while for those with high creativity the lowest mean belonged to the item "I defuse confrontation with provocative and trouble-making students" ($M_{High} = 3.80$).

Table 4 shows the mean results for teachers' responses to the fourth theme of the classroom management questionnaire, namely teacher punishment/reward strategies. The fourth theme consisted of 8 items which are presented below.

Table 3 :Descriptive statistics for Teacher punishment/reward strategies with respect to their level of creativity

Theme 4: Teacher punishment/reward strategies	Low creative teachers' mean	Moderately creative teachers' mean	Highly creative teachers' mean
1. I praise good students in public.	4.05	4.28	4.15
2. I give merit points to good students.	4.27	4.31	4.40
3. I display good work of students to the whole class.	3.77	3.87	3.95
4. I do not let unacceptable behavior go.	4.38	4.25	4.30
5. I make students of unacceptable behavior lose rights and privileges.	3.44	3.71	3.65
6. I separate trouble makers by asking each to go and sit in another place	3.50	3.59	3.55
7. I use whole class punishment	2.11	2.28	2.20
8. I involve school manager when a problem escalates.	3.38	3.15	3.05

As indicated in Table 4, among the teachers with low creativity, the highest mean belonged to the item “I do not let unacceptable behavior go” ($M_{Low} = 4.38$) while the highest mean for teachers with average and high creativity was that of the item “I give merit points to good students” ($M_{Average} = 4.31$; $M_{High} = 4.40$). Moreover, among the teachers with low, average, and high creativity, the lowest mean belonged to the item “I use whole class punishment” ($M_{Low} = 2.11$; $M_{Average} = 2.28$; $M_{High} = 2.20$). This shows that in majority of cases, the teacher prefer to only punish the individual who has committed a wrongdoing.

8-2 The relationship between teachers’ creativity and their classroom management strategy use

This section provides the results for the inferential statistics which determined whether there was any statistically significant relationship between teacher creativity and different components of classroom management strategy use. To examine such a relationship, the researcher of the current study used Pearson product moment correlation as the appropriate statistical technique. Before running this statistical method, the researcher made sure that all the assumptions underlying this statistical technique are met. The assumptions are as follows:

According to Pallant (2001), for running Pearson correlation, the independent variable should be either nominal (categorical) or continuous while the dependent variable should be only continuous. The independent variable within this study is teacher creativity which is classified as categorical. In addition the dependent variable was classroom management strategy use which was examined by using a likert-scaled questionnaire. Likert-scales always yield continuous data. That said, the first assumption is met.

Running the normality test on each of the dependent variables, the researcher found that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov results show non-significant data, which in turn indicates normal distribution of the data.

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Teacher Organizing Strategies	.173	70	.265	.938	70	.002
Teaching Management Strategies	.109	70	.140	.982	70	.406
Teacher Student Relationship Strategies	.130	70	.325	.969	70	.077
Teacher Punishment Reward Strategies	.086	70	.200*	.976	70	.192

Table 5 shows the results for the Pearson correlation.

Table 4: The results of Pearson correlation between teachers' creativity and their classroom management strategy use

		Teacher organizing strategies	Teaching management strategies	Teacher/student relationship strategies	Teacher punishment/reward strategies
Teacher Creativity	Pearson Correlation	.123	.365**	.183	.028
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.311	.002	.130	.821
	N	70	70	70	70

As indicated in Table 4.5, there was no significant relationship between teacher creativity and their use of “Organizing strategies” (Sig = .311), “Teacher-student relationship strategies” (Sig= .130), and “Teacher punishment/reward strategies” (M= .821). However, significant positive relationship was found between teacher creativity and “Teaching management strategies” (Sig= .002). It is noteworthy to mention that the strength of the relationship between teacher creativity and teaching management strategies was found to be average ($r = .365^{**}$).

9-Results

This study intended to answer two main research questions. Firstly, it examined if there was any relationship between EFL teachers' creativity and their classroom management strategy use. Using Pearson correlation as the appropriate statistical technique, the researcher of the current study revealed that no significant correlation was found between teachers' creativity and their use of “Organizing strategies”, “Teacher-student relationship strategies”, and “Teacher punishment/reward strategies”. Nevertheless, there was a meaningful positive relationship between teachers' creativity and their “Teaching management strategies”. Moreover, the strength of the correlation between teacher creativity and teaching management strategies was average. In a parallel fashion, Aliakbari (2015) intended to determine the extent to which Iranian high school teachers apply classroom management strategies. He found that these strategies (organizing, teaching management, teacher–student relationship, and teacher punishment–reward strategies) are partially applied by Iranian high school teachers in different degrees. It was also found that teaching management and teacher–student relationship strategies were, respectively, used more than the others, while organization and punishment–reward strategies have got the least mean scores. Aliakbari (2015) also found that teachers do not put much emphasis on punishment–reward strategies. Aliakbari (2015) found that there is not a great difference among the mean score of teachers' employment of management strategies. This implies that there is a kind of homogeneity among the strategies Iranian EFL teachers utilize for managing their classes which can be a consequence of the centralized educational system at work in the country. That said, we consider such a dominant trend an obstacle to teachers' creativity and initiations.

The following findings can be enumerated for the current study:

- Irrespective of teachers' creativity level, all teachers were very sensitive about punctuality in language classrooms. In addition, they highlighted the significance of checking students' attendance strictly regardless of their degree of creativity.
- Iranian EFL teachers tend to share plenty of similarities in the use of organizing classroom strategies regardless of their level of creativity.
- There was no substantial difference among teachers with different levels of creativity in the use of teacher-student relationship strategies, and teacher punishment/reward strategies.
- There was no significant relationship between teacher creativity and their use of teachers' organizing strategies, teacher-student relationship strategies, and punishment/reward strategies.
- Significant positive relationship was found between teacher creativity and their use of teaching management strategies.
- The strength of the relationship between teacher creativity and teaching management strategies was found to be average.

10-Implications of the study

The findings of the current study can provide insights for both language teacher trainers. The findings showed that there was a significant and positive relationship between teachers' creativity and their use of teaching management strategies. Moreover, it was found that teachers' creativity significantly affected students' language achievement at the end of each semester. By taking into consideration these two findings, teacher trainers can improve the quality of teachers' instruction by providing them with as many creative learning tasks and activities as possible, and equip them with the understanding of the importance of focusing on the development of creativity in language classrooms. This way, they can both contribute to quality of teaching and learning.

Language teachers can benefit from the findings of the current study by understanding the fact that in order to improve the quality of teaching, they should constantly try to develop creative learning tasks in order to make the learning more fun and interesting. In order for this to happen, they should reflect on their teaching practice every time their classes end.

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