



# Examining the Impact of Emancipated Curriculum on EFL Teachers' Creativity in Lesson Planning and Teaching Practice at Vocational High School, Semarang Regency, Central Java

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## Abstract

This study examines how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Pringapus design and implement creative teaching practices within the Emancipated Curriculum, utilizing Torrance's (1962) creativity framework, which focuses on four aspects of creativity: fluency (idea generation), originality (uniqueness), elaboration (detail development), and flexibility (adaptability). Employing a qualitative single-case study approach, data were collected over one month from mid-April to mid-May 2025 through interviews, classroom observations, and lesson plan analysis involving three EFL teachers with varying teaching experiences. Thematic analysis revealed that the curriculum fosters teacher autonomy and creativity, though the extent of creative implementation varied. One teacher demonstrated high fluency and flexibility through differentiated instruction and technology integration, while others showed limited originality due to reliance on conventional methods. These findings suggest that successful implementation of the Emancipated Curriculum depends on teachers' readiness and openness to innovation. The study highlights the need for targeted professional development focused on enhancing reflective practices, digital literacy, and the design of student-centered learning strategies to support sustained pedagogical creativity in curriculum enactment.

**Keywords:** *Emancipated Curriculum, EFL teachers, creativity*

## **Introduction**

The field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Indonesia has undergone significant transformation following the introduction of the Emancipated Curriculum, a flexible policy promoting teacher autonomy in designing contextually relevant learning activities (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This policy encourages creative and student-centered approaches but also presents challenges in pedagogical adaptation and professional readiness (Yusuf & Sari, 2022; Sari & Lestari, 2023).

In practice, implementing the Emancipated Curriculum has proven complex. Teachers are expected to develop lesson plans, modules, and teaching strategies independently, incorporating student-centered, differentiated, and project-based learning models (Tomlinson, 2012; Hidayat et al., 2023). However, several challenges emerge: lack of clear guidelines (Prasetyo, 2021), increased workload (Lestari, 2023), and limited professional training (Rahayu et al., 2023). Unlike previous curricula, which provided structured directives, the Emancipated Curriculum places full responsibility for instructional design on teachers, which can be overwhelming, especially in vocational school settings.

Challenges also extend into classroom practice. Teachers are encouraged to use flexible, technology-integrated, and collaborative methods to promote critical thinking and student engagement (Cahyono & Rahman, 2023; Arifin & Saputra, 2023). Yet, disparities in digital infrastructure and teacher digital literacy, along with the lack of standardized assessment benchmarks, hinder the consistent application of curriculum goals (Sari, 2022; Rahayu et al., 2023). Additionally, students' varied readiness levels and class heterogeneity further complicate the implementation of student-centered strategies, especially in large SMK classrooms (Ningsih, 2023; Yulianti & Kurniasari, 2023).

Despite these challenges, the curriculum offers a platform for teachers to exercise creativity. Torrance's (1966) Creative Teaching Theory—comprising fluency, originality, elaboration, and flexibility—provides a useful framework for analyzing teacher innovation. This is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which highlights the role of interaction and context in learning, and Richards and Rodgers' (2001) model of approach, design, and procedure in language teaching.

While numerous studies have examined the Emancipated Curriculum broadly (e.g., Santoso, 2023; Ningsih, 2023; Rahmawati & Yulianto, 2023), research focusing on how vocational EFL teachers interpret and apply creative teaching practices within this curriculum remains limited. Most existing work centers on primary and junior secondary schools, with little attention paid to the distinct challenges and opportunities in the SMK context. Moreover, there is a lack of research linking curriculum autonomy to teacher creativity using Torrance's theoretical lens.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how EFL teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Pringapus plan and implement creative teaching practices under the Emancipated Curriculum. Specifically, it explores:

1. How do EFL teachers at SMKN 1 Pringapus plan lessons that reflect creativity under the Emancipated Curriculum?
2. How is creativity manifested in their teaching practices?
3. What challenges do they face in applying curriculum flexibility?

By focusing on three EFL teachers with different professional backgrounds, this study offers in-depth insights into how creativity is negotiated within curriculum demands. The findings are expected to inform both policymakers and practitioners by highlighting the need for targeted professional development and institutional support to foster meaningful curriculum transformation in vocational education settings.

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to explore how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Pringapus interpret, plan, and implement the Emancipated Curriculum, with particular emphasis on how creativity is manifested in their lesson planning and teaching practices. This design enabled an in-depth exploration of a bounded system within its real-life context (Yin, 2018; Merriam, 2009).

### **Research Setting and Participants**

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to explore how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Pringapus interpret, plan, and implement the Emancipated Curriculum, with particular emphasis on how creativity is manifested in their lesson planning and teaching practices. This design enabled an in-depth exploration of a bounded system within its real-life context (Yin, 2018; Merriam, 2009).

The Emancipated Curriculum was first introduced in 2021 as part of the Sekolah Penggerak initiative and has been gradually adopted since 2022. By the 2024/2025 academic year, it became the standard national curriculum across most educational institutions in Indonesia.

Participants were purposively selected to ensure diversity in teaching experience, pedagogical styles, and familiarity with the curriculum (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Three EFL teachers participated:

1. Teacher A: A senior teacher with over 15 years of teaching experience and a Master's degree in English Education. Known for her consistent use of student-centered learning and reflective practice.
2. Teacher B: A mid-career teacher with 8 years of experience, holding a Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching. Limited exposure to formal training on the Emancipated Curriculum.

3. Teacher C: A novice teacher with 2 years of experience, recently graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English Education. Actively integrates technology into instruction and has attended multiple workshops on the new curriculum.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected from mid-April to mid-May 2025 through:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews  
Each teacher participated in two rounds of interviews. The first explored their understanding of the Emancipated Curriculum, lesson planning strategies, and perceptions of creativity. The second round clarified emerging themes. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, lasting 45–60 minutes each, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Interview questions were informed by Torrance's (1962) four creativity dimensions (fluency, originality, elaboration, flexibility) and principles of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2014).
2. Classroom Observations  
Each teacher was observed teaching a 90-minute lesson. The observation protocol was developed based on Torrance's creativity framework and included indicators such as:
  - a. Variety and originality of instructional methods
  - b. Use of student-centered and collaborative learning
  - c. Responsiveness to diverse student needs
  - d. Integration of digital tools

Observers used a structured rubric and field notes to document behaviors aligned with creative teaching.

1. Document Analysis  
Each teacher submitted two lesson plans and one teaching module (*modul ajar*). These documents were analyzed using a rubric adapted from Emancipated Curriculum guidelines (Kemendikbudristek, 2022) and Torrance's creativity dimensions. The rubric examined lesson objectives, content design, instructional strategies, assessments, and differentiation.

## **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis in five stages:

1. Familiarization: Reading and rereading transcripts, notes, and documents.
2. Coding: Initial codes were generated inductively (e.g., "repetitive activities," "technology integration") and deductively (e.g., "fluency," "flexibility").
3. Theme Development: Codes were grouped into overarching themes reflecting the theoretical framework, such as "Creativity in Planning" or "Constraints in Implementation."
4. Reviewing Themes: Themes were refined by cross-checking with the original data.
5. Triangulation: Interview data, observation notes, and document findings were compared for consistency and divergence using thematic matrices.

Manual coding was supported by color-coded spreadsheets and memoing techniques.

## **Trustworthiness**

To enhance the study's rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the following strategies were applied:

- a. Triangulation: Data from multiple sources was cross-verified.
- b. Member Checking: Participants reviewed the summary of findings for accuracy.
- c. Audit Trail: Analytical steps and decisions were documented throughout the process.
- d. Thick Description: Detailed context of school setting, teaching culture, and participant profiles provided for transferability.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The study received ethical approval from the university's research ethics board. All participants provided written informed consent before data collection. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and findings. All data, including recordings and documents, were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher.

## **Limitations**

As a single-case study focused on one vocational school, findings may not be generalizable to all SMK or EFL teaching contexts. The limited number of participants, while purposively selected for diversity, may not capture the full range of teacher experiences in implementing the Emancipated Curriculum. Future research could incorporate a multi-site design or comparative studies across regions.

## **Findings and Results**

This section presents the findings based on the two research questions: (1) How do EFL teachers at SMKN 1 Pringapus demonstrate creativity in designing lesson plans under the Emancipated Curriculum? and (2) How do they apply creativity in classroom practices? Data from interviews, lesson plans, and classroom observations were thematically analyzed using Torrance's (1962) dimensions of creativity: fluency, originality, elaboration, and flexibility.

## **Creativity in Lesson Planning**

### **Fluency**

- a. Teacher C generated multiple strategies in lesson planning, including project-based learning, gamification, and multimedia integration. For example, she described, "*Saya mencoba membuat kegiatan proyek yang menggabungkan video dan podcast siswa untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara.*"
- b. Teacher A showed moderate fluency by offering two to three alternative tasks for different student groups, but remained within conventional formats.
- c. Teacher B mostly relied on textbook-based activities with limited variation.

### **Originality**

- a. Teacher C incorporated digital platforms such as Canva and Quizziz for assessment. In one lesson plan, students were asked to create infographics about environmental issues.
- b. Teacher A used thematic integration, such as combining English lessons with moral education, e.g., "Students discuss real-life dilemmas in English and reflect on values."
- c. Teacher B's plans lacked innovative features and primarily followed textbook instructions.

**Elaboration**

- Teacher C developed detailed sequencing in tasks, such as warm-up activities leading to collaborative production tasks.
- Teacher A included elaborate instructions with scaffolding and reflective journal prompts.
- Teacher B provided brief descriptions and a limited task breakdown.

**Flexibility**

- Teacher C tailored materials based on student interests, providing alternative tasks for high and low achievers.
- Teacher A allowed students to choose between group or individual tasks.
- Teacher B did not adjust tasks for different student needs.

**Lesson Plan Comparison Table**

Dimension	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Fluency	Moderate	Low	High
Originality	Moderate	Low	High
Elaboration	High	Low	High
Flexibility	Moderate	Low	High

**Creativity in Teaching Practices  
Classroom Observation Data**

- Teacher C implemented dynamic methods: students worked in groups creating digital posters and presenting in English. She said, "*Mereka lebih semangat saat pakai teknologi dan merasa pembelajaran itu milik mereka.*"
- Teacher A facilitated discussions around real-life issues and used scaffolding to help students express their opinions.
- Teacher B primarily used lecture methods with minimal student interaction.

**Creative Practices Observed**

Activity Type	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Use of Media	Visual aids, whiteboard	Textbook only	Digital media (videos, apps)
Student Engagement	Guided discussion	Lecture	Collaborative, interactive tasks
Differentiated Instruction	Some task options	None	Extensive task differentiation

### Teacher Quotes Supporting Analysis

- a. Teacher A: *"Saya mencoba memberikan pilihan agar siswa merasa lebih nyaman."*
- b. Teacher B: *"Saya masih belajar dan lebih nyaman pakai metode yang sudah biasa saya gunakan."*
- c. Teacher C: *"Saya tertarik mencoba metode baru karena siswa lebih antusias."*

These findings suggest that while the Emancipated Curriculum allows for creative instructional practices, individual teacher readiness and mindset significantly influence implementation. Teacher C demonstrated the strongest alignment with Torrance's creativity framework, while Teacher B showed the least. Teacher A displayed a balanced but more cautious approach.

### Discussion

The findings indicate that while the Emancipated Curriculum provides a flexible and supportive structure to nurture teacher creativity, its practical implementation varies significantly among teachers. This variation is closely aligned with Torrance's (1962) framework, which outlines creativity through four key dimensions: fluency, originality, elaboration, and flexibility.

Fluency was most evident in Teacher C, who consistently generated multiple instructional ideas and used diverse teaching strategies, such as digital storytelling and collaborative projects. This aligns with Torrance's emphasis on idea generation and with findings by Craft (2005), who asserted that creative fluency in teaching is often linked to digital fluency and openness to experimentation.

In terms of originality, Teacher C's use of infographics, student-made podcasts, and gamified assessments illustrated a strong departure from conventional methods, a quality less evident in Teachers A and B. Previous studies (e.g., Jeffrey & Craft, 2004) also highlight that originality in instructional design is closely tied to teacher autonomy and access to innovation-friendly environments.

Elaboration was visible in the thorough sequencing of tasks and scaffolding by both Teachers A and C. However, while Teacher A used reflective journals and moral integration in lessons, the structure remained traditional. This suggests that experience alone does not guarantee innovative elaboration, especially when institutional norms encourage standardization.

Flexibility differentiated the participants most clearly. Teacher C demonstrated strong adaptability by modifying tasks based on student profiles, aligning with Tomlinson's (2014) theory of differentiated instruction. In contrast, Teacher B's rigid, textbook-driven methods suggest a lower comfort level with autonomy, echoing Beghetto's (2007) argument that fear of failure and uncertainty often hinder teacher creativity.



These contrasts underscore how teacher mindset, training background, and institutional culture shape curriculum enactment. Supportive school leadership, ongoing professional development, and a culture of innovation are essential to unlock the curriculum's full potential. For example, teachers with prior exposure to ICT training or Emancipated workshops (as in the case of Teacher C) felt more confident experimenting with new approaches.

In line with research by Priestley et al. (2012), the success of curricular reforms like Emancipated Curriculum does not solely depend on policy documents but also teachers' interpretive agency—their ability and willingness to interpret, adapt, and innovate within flexible curricular structures.

### **Practical Implications**

These findings suggest several implications:

- a. Schools and policymakers should offer structured, ongoing training focused on creative pedagogies and curriculum interpretation.
- b. Mentoring programs can pair experienced yet conventional teachers with digitally literate or innovative colleagues to foster peer learning.
- c. Institutions should provide resources and technological support to reduce the barriers to creative implementation.
- d. Reflection-based workshops should be encouraged to help teachers confront fears around experimentation and move beyond rigid practices.

### **Generalizability and Future Research**

While this study is limited to a single vocational high school, the diversity of teacher profiles offers transferable insights for other SMK contexts. Future studies might involve a multi-site comparative case study to explore how different school cultures and infrastructures affect teacher creativity. Additionally, longitudinal research could examine how teacher creativity evolves over several semesters of implementing the Emancipated Curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the Emancipated Curriculum holds significant promise in fostering teacher creativity in lesson planning and teaching practices. The extent of creative implementation, however, depends on individual teacher factors such as pedagogical orientation, technological proficiency, and openness to innovation. While some teachers maximize the curriculum's flexibility to design engaging, student-centered lessons, others continue to rely on traditional methods.

For the curriculum's transformative potential to be fully realized, it is essential to provide targeted professional development, peer mentoring, and sustained institutional support. These initiatives will empower teachers to

confidently explore and apply creative teaching approaches, ultimately enriching student learning experiences in EFL classrooms.

This research contributes valuable insights into the conditions that support teacher creativity within the Emancipated Curriculum framework, offering guidance for policymakers, school leaders, and educators aiming to foster innovation in education. Future studies could build on these findings to explore long-term impacts on student outcomes and curriculum effectiveness.

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