



The Teacher's Creativities in the Implementation of Group Work in EFL Classroom

Ari Gusti Sundari¹, Muhammad Dalimunthe², Didik Santoso³

^{1,2,3}Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Corresponding E-Mail: gusti0333233005@uinsu.ac.id

Received: 2025-12-20 Accepted: 2025-12-31

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.9030

Abstract

This study investigates the forms of teacher creativity demonstrated in the implementation of group work in an EFL classroom. Creativity in instructional practice is essential for supporting student engagement, especially in vocational education where practical communication skills are prioritized. The study aims to investigate an EFL teacher employs creative strategies when organizing, facilitating, and responding to group work dynamics. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi structure interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal three major forms of teacher creativity: Product Creativity, Process Creativity, and Reactive Creativity. Product Creativity was reflected in the teacher's use of digital learning materials, gamified tasks, authentic resources, and visually enriched media to support group activities. Process Creativity emerged through varied grouping arrangements, systematic role assignment, creative monitoring techniques, and strategic language management to guide students' interaction. Reactive Creativity appeared when the teacher adapted spontaneously to classroom situations such as mixed proficiency levels, behavioral challenges, and technical disruptions. Overall, the findings underscore that teacher creativity in group work extends beyond creating innovative materials; it also involves adaptive facilitation, responsive decision-making, and context-sensitive problem-solving. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how creativity shapes group work practices in EFL vocational settings and offer practical recommendations for promoting more engaging and effective collaborative learning in similar contexts.

Keywords: *Creativity, EFL Classroom, Group Work, Teacher Practices.*

Introduction

Teacher creativity has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental component in enhancing the quality of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. In modern classrooms, effective teaching requires approaches that extend beyond traditional methods and respond to students' diverse needs, learning styles, and classroom challenges. Creative teachers are not only capable of designing meaningful tasks but also able to adapt strategies, manage classroom dynamics, and cultivate an engaging learning environment. Scholars highlight creativity as a key element that contributes to students' academic achievement and meaningful learning experiences (Ma, 2022; Arifani et al., 2022; Meihami, 2022).

Creativity in teaching includes imaginative planning, flexible execution, and reflective evaluation, all of which help teachers sustain student interest and improve the overall learning process. In EFL contexts, where meaningful communication and active engagement are essential, teacher creativity remains a central factor that shapes the quality of instruction and classroom interaction.

The importance of teacher creativity becomes even more pronounced when viewed through the lens of group work. Rooted in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), group work provides learners with crucial opportunities to engage in authentic interaction, negotiate meaning, and practice English collaboratively. This approach is especially critical in contexts where exposure to English outside the classroom is limited. Prior studies emphasize that the success of group work is closely tied to teachers' beliefs, personality traits, pedagogical decisions, and classroom management skills (Tamimy et al., 2023; Rahman, 2024; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Effective group work requires strategic planning, thoughtful grouping, purposeful task design, and continuous monitoring.

Without these elements, group activities may fail to generate the intended communicative benefits. Research also highlights persistent challenges such as unequal participation, excessive use of the mother tongue, time constraints, and difficulties in providing timely feedback (Brown, 2001; Harmer, 2007). These findings indicate that group work is inherently complex and highly dependent on teachers' ability to creatively manage and facilitate collaborative tasks.

Recent studies have explored teacher creativity and collaborative learning separately, offering valuable insights into their respective roles in EFL education. Studies on teacher creativity emphasize its contribution to engagement, motivation, and effective instructional practices, while studies on group work focus on interaction patterns, task types, and student outcomes. Collaborative learning research shows that teacher facilitation, thoughtful task selection, and structured group processes significantly influence students' communicative performance (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022; Ochoa et al., 2023). Despite these contributions, existing research tends to examine creativity or group work in isolation, without investigating the types of creative teaching practices directly shape the implementation of group work. Moreover, few studies explore this issue within vocational school contexts, where students often display diverse proficiency levels,

practical learning needs, and behavioural challenges that demand adaptive and context-sensitive pedagogical approaches.

These limitations suggest the need for deeper exploration into the teachers employ the types of creativity specifically within group work implementation. While previous studies have addressed creativity as a general teaching attribute and group work as an instructional strategy, limited research has examined the intersection between it particularly what creative practices teachers demonstrate when planning, organizing, and facilitating group work to enhance students' learning experiences. Additionally, empirical evidence from Indonesian vocational schools remains scarce, even though these settings require teachers to respond to unique classroom dynamics and learning objectives. This creates an important scholarly space for research that highlights creativity as an integral part of collaborative pedagogy.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the form of teacher creativity demonstrated in the implementation of group work in EFL classrooms. This research is guided by the question: What are teachers' creativities in the implementation of group work in an EFL class? The objective of this study is to investigate the teacher's creativities in group work implementation of EFL classrooms. The novelty of this study lies in its qualitative, experience-based focus that highlights teacher creativity as a dynamic, context-responsive process rather than a fixed attribute. By examining creativity within authentic classroom practice, this study contributes new insights into creative pedagogy and supports the development of more effective group work implementation in EFL vocational education.

Method

This descriptive qualitative study to investigate teacher creativity in group work implementation within its natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted at SMK, a vocational high school in Indonesia, where English is taught as a compulsory subject for students specializing in computer technology.

The key informant was one English teacher with more than five years of teaching experience, selected through purposive sampling based on criteria including active implementation of group work strategies and demonstrated creative practices in classroom activities. Supporting informants included two students who participated in group work activities and one fellow teacher who had observed the key informant's teaching practices.

Data were collected over six weeks through three primary techniques. First, multiple classroom observations were conducted during English lessons to capture teaching and learning activities, focusing on creative practices during group work. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all informants to explore beliefs, strategies, and experiences. Third, documentation was collected, including lesson plans, teaching materials such as digital worksheets and slides, and photographs of classroom activities.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, consisting of data collection, data condensation (selecting and transforming raw data), data display (organizing information through tables and narratives), and conclusion drawing and verification. Trustworthiness was established through triangulation techniques, combining data triangulation (multiple informants) and methodological triangulation (observations, interviews, and documents), ensuring findings accurately reflected teachers' creative practices (Denzin, 2017).

Results

Product Creativity

Product creativity refers to the teacher's capacity to design and produce original, engaging, and pedagogically valuable materials, media, and learning tools that support effective group work. The findings indicate that the teacher demonstrated product creativity through four primary forms.

1. Digital Learning Materials.

The teacher consistently created digital learning materials using various online platforms. During classroom observation, she utilized an infographic worksheet designed through Canva for an English lesson. The worksheet featured colorful layouts, embedded images, vocabulary boxes, and QR codes linked to pronunciation videos on YouTube. The teacher explained: *"I use Canva because today's students are very visual learners. They are more interested in colorful materials with pictures. I also include QR codes so they can practice pronunciation at home."*

Students expressed enthusiasm for these materials. One student noted: *"I like it when Miss uses Canva because it's more interesting than ordinary photocopies. We can also scan the QR codes to listen to the pronunciation."* Another added: *"The materials are really nice. The pictures make it easier to understand, and we can open them on our phones anytime if we forget something."* Observation notes revealed that 28 out of 32 students actively used their smartphones to access the digital worksheet, and group discussions appeared more lively compared to sessions using conventional printed materials.

2. Gamified Learning Activities.

The teacher developed gamified learning tools that transformed traditional language practice into enjoyable competitive experiences. During observation, she introduced a board game where student groups competed to complete language tasks, earn points, and advance on the board based on correct use of English expressions. The teacher explained: *"I created this game because students often feel bored when they only work on written exercises. Through games, they can learn without feeling pressured. Since they are competitive, they become more motivated to speak English correctly to win."*

Students expressed strong engagement with the activity. One stated: *"The game was so much fun! Our group was really excited while playing. We tried to use English correctly so we could earn more points."* Another shared: *"Usually I feel shy when I have to speak English, but when we played the game, I forgot my shyness because*

I just wanted to win. It made me more confident to speak." The supporting teacher confirmed: *"I once observed her class when she used this game. The students were very enthusiastic, unlike other classes that tended to be passive."*

3. Adaptation of Authentic Materials.

The teacher demonstrated creativity by adapting authentic materials from real-world contexts to make learning relevant to students' vocational needs. During observation, she brought travel pamphlets and transformed them into scaffolded group tasks requiring students to analyze, discuss, and present information in English. The teacher explained: *"Vocational students will work in the future, so I use real materials related to their field. However, I modify them so they are not too difficult. I highlight important vocabulary and provide example sentences."*

Students responded positively. One noted: *"It's great that Miss used those brochures because they feel real. We can understand what kind of work we might do in the future. We also learn the terms that are actually used in the workplace."* The authentic materials were carefully scaffolded with vocabulary glosses, guiding questions, and sample sentences to ensure accessibility for students at different proficiency levels.

4. Visual Aids and Multimedia.

The teacher created visual aids and multimedia presentations that supported group work activities, including infographic posters with key vocabulary, PowerPoint presentations embedded with short videos, flashcards with pictures for vocabulary games, and role-play props. The teacher explained: *"Visuals are important for EFL learners. I always provide pictures or videos to introduce the topic. Videos are especially helpful because students can see body language and context, not just the words."*

Students confirmed the effectiveness of these tools. One shared: *"I like it when Miss shows us a video before we start the discussion. It gives us an idea of what to talk about."* Another added: *"The posters on the wall are really helpful. When we forget some vocabulary, we can just look at the poster."* Document analysis revealed that every observed lesson included at least one form of multimedia to introduce topics before group work.

Process Creativity

Process creativity refers to the teacher's innovative approaches in organizing, facilitating, and managing group work activities. The findings reveal five key manifestations.

1. Creative Grouping Strategies.

The teacher applied a range of grouping strategies rather than relying on a single fixed method. She strategically adjusted her grouping techniques to match learning objectives and task nature. During observations, she used random grouping with numbered cards to foster social integration, mixed-ability grouping pairing stronger students with weaker ones for peer assistance, and interest-based grouping according to topics students found engaging.

The teacher explained: *"I don't always use the same strategy. Sometimes I make random groups so they can get to know everyone. Other times, I group them by level so that the weaker students can be supported by the stronger ones. It depends on the type of task."* Students appreciated this flexibility. One stated: *"Miss always changes the group members, so we don't get stuck with the same people all the time. I like it because I can work with different friends."*

2. Role Assignment and Rotation.

To ensure equal participation and accountability, the teacher assigned specific roles to each group member and rotated these roles across sessions. Roles included leader/coordinator, timekeeper, note-taker/secretary, presenter/reporter, and encourager/monitor. The teacher explained: *"If there are no roles, usually only the active students talk while the quiet ones remain passive. By giving roles, everyone has their own responsibility. I also rotate the roles so that every student experiences each position."*

Students confirmed the strategy's effectiveness. One shared: *"With roles, our group becomes more organized. Everyone knows what to do, and no one just stays silent."* Another noted: *"At first, I didn't like being the presenter because I was shy. But since everyone had to take turns, I became braver, and now I'm used to it."* Document analysis revealed the teacher explicitly planned role assignments in lesson plans and maintained written records of rotation.

3. Monitoring and Facilitation Techniques.

The teacher's monitoring was systematic and purposeful, including structured circulation visiting each group for two to three minutes, observation note-taking to record participation and language use, proximity management positioning near groups needing encouragement, and a non-verbal signaling system using traffic light cards (green for okay, yellow for some difficulty, red for urgent help).

The teacher described: *"I can't monitor all groups at the same time, so I have a system. I visit each group in turn, observe for one or two minutes, and then intervene if necessary. I also use traffic light cards so that groups can signal when they need help."* Students confirmed: *"Miss always goes around to check our group. If we get stuck, she helps by giving us hints instead of directly giving the answer."*

4. Language Use Management.

To address students' tendency to use their mother tongue, the teacher applied creative strategies including the English Ticket System, English-Only Zones, and Language Support Tools. The English Ticket System involved giving each group tickets at the lesson's beginning; every time students spoke Indonesian, they surrendered one ticket, with the group retaining most tickets earning extra points.

The teacher explained: *"The biggest problem is that students still use Indonesian. So I created the 'English Ticket' system. Every time they speak in Indonesian, they must give up one ticket. The group with the most tickets at the end gets extra points. This makes them more aware and motivated to speak English."* Observation data showed clear progress: English usage increased from approximately 40% in the first observation to 65-70% by the third observation.

5. Scaffolding and Feedback.

The teacher provided different levels of scaffolding based on each group's needs, including modeling language through examples, providing word banks, using visual organizers, and encouraging peer-assisted learning. She used various feedback types: immediate oral feedback during group work, written feedback on worksheets, whole-class feedback highlighting common strengths and areas for improvement, and peer feedback.

The teacher explained: *"I don't treat all groups the same. For weaker groups, I give more support, like word banks or sentence examples. For stronger groups, I challenge them with extension questions. I also give feedback right away while they are working so they can immediately improve."* Students appreciated this approach: *"Miss always helps when we have difficulties, but she doesn't give the answers directly. She asks questions until we can figure it out ourselves."*

Reactive Creativity

Reactive creativity refers to the teacher's ability to adapt quickly and effectively to unexpected classroom situations, student needs, or technical challenges. The findings indicate three key manifestations.

1. Adapting to Unexpected Situations.

When a group finished their discussion task ten minutes early, instead of allowing them to sit idle, the teacher spontaneously asked them to create three additional questions related to the topic for use in class discussion. The teacher explained: *"I didn't expect them to finish that quickly. But I didn't want them to just sit quietly or distract other groups, so I spontaneously asked them to create additional questions. Surprisingly, their questions were very good and made the class discussion more meaningful."*

Another situation occurred when Wi-Fi unexpectedly disconnected during a digital activity using Google Forms. The teacher immediately switched to a paper-based version using sticky notes, where students wrote responses and placed them on the whiteboard under different categories. The teacher explained: *"I had prepared a digital activity using Google Forms, but the Wi-Fi went down. Instead of canceling it, I switched to sticky notes. It actually became more interactive because students could see each other's responses directly on the whiteboard."*

2. Addressing Mixed Proficiency Levels.

The teacher differentiated instruction to accommodate students with different English proficiency levels. During observation, when Group 4 encountered difficulties understanding vocabulary in a dialogue-making activity, she immediately provided a vocabulary bank and partially completed dialogue template. Meanwhile, groups with higher proficiency created dialogues independently without templates.

The teacher explained: *"I noticed that Group 4 was struggling with advanced vocabulary. So, I quickly gave them a word bank and a dialogue template so they could still participate. It wouldn't be fair if all groups had exactly the same task since their*

levels are different." Students confirmed: "We had trouble with the vocabulary. Luckily, Miss gave us a list of words and an example, so we could complete the task even though ours was simpler."

3. Managing Behavioral Issues and Participation.

The teacher managed unequal participation where dominant students-controlled discussions while others remained passive. During observation, she applied the "talking chips" technique, giving each student three paper tokens. Every time a student spoke, one token was placed on the table. When all tokens were used, that student could no longer talk until others had also used theirs.

The teacher explained: *"There was one student who dominated the discussion while two others stayed silent. I remembered the 'talking chips' strategy from a workshop I once attended, so I decided to try it spontaneously. It worked well those who were usually quiet finally spoke up."* Students reflected positively: *"Usually, I just stay quiet because my friend talks faster and knows more. But with the tokens, I had to speak too. I was nervous at first, but then I realized I could do it."*

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that teacher creativity in group work implementation manifests through three distinct yet interconnected forms: Product Creativity, Process Creativity, and Reactive Creativity. This classification aligns with previous studies by Beghetto and Karwowski (2020), Liu and Zhang (2021), and Ma (2022), confirming the multidimensional nature of teacher creativity.

The Product Creativity found in this study, which includes digital learning materials, gamified activities, authentic materials, and visual aids, is consistent with Liu and Zhang's (2021) findings that product creativity involves the teacher's ability to produce original and useful learning tools. However, this study extends previous research by documenting specific innovative strategies not explicitly reported elsewhere, such as QR code integration in worksheets and computer-related authentic materials adapted for vocational contexts. While previous researchers examined general academic contexts, this study reveals vocational-specific adaptations where the teacher integrated workplace communication tasks, demonstrating that product creativity in vocational settings involves not only engagement but also contextual relevance to students' future professions.

The Process Creativity manifested through creative grouping strategies, role assignment, and monitoring techniques reinforces Ma's (2022) research showing that process creativity enables teachers to balance structure and freedom in classroom management. However, this study provides detailed empirical documentation of micro-practices rarely found in previous studies. For instance, the English Ticket System for language management increased English usage from 40% to 70% across observations, a concrete outcome not documented by previous researchers. The traffic light card system for monitoring represents another novel strategy that operationalizes the concept of responsive facilitation.

The Reactive Creativity observed when the teacher adapted to unexpected situations such as Wi-Fi failure or early task completion confirms Glăveanu's (2020) findings that reactive creativity involves generating contextually appropriate responses to dynamic educational environments. While Glăveanu discusses contextual responsiveness theoretically, this study shows how it manifests practically through spontaneous decisions like switching from digital to kinesthetic activities or implementing the talking chips technique to address participation imbalances. The findings demonstrate that reactive creativity requires not only quick decision-making but also deep pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills.

Importantly, this study presents a different perspective on the relationship between challenges and creativity. While previous studies emphasize how diverse student needs can lead to teacher burnout (Rahman, 2024), this research shows that the teacher viewed student challenges as opportunities for creative problem-solving. Student progress actually increased her motivation to innovate further, suggesting a positive feedback loop between creativity and professional satisfaction.

The vocational context emerged as a unique and powerful driver not sufficiently explored in previous studies. The vocational nature of SMK was not merely background but an active force shaping what the teacher created (authentic materials related to computer fields), how she taught (workplace simulation activities), and why she made certain choices (preparing students for professional communication). This finding suggests that teacher creativity is deeply embedded in and responsive to specific educational contexts.

In synthesis, this study confirms previous findings regarding the multidimensional typology of creativity while extending them by providing detailed empirical documentation of micro-practices in vocational EFL contexts, identifying innovative strategies not previously documented, demonstrating how theoretical concepts are operationalized in practice, and revealing the vocational context as a unique creative catalyst. These contributions bridge the gap between previous research and classroom practice, connecting global concepts with Indonesian vocational school realities.

Conclusion

This study investigated the forms of teacher creativity demonstrated in group work implementation in a vocational EFL classroom. The findings revealed three main forms: Product Creativity reflected in original materials such as digital worksheets, gamified activities, authentic resources, and multimedia aids; Process Creativity manifested through flexible grouping, systematic role assignment, active facilitation, language management techniques, and differentiated scaffolding; and Reactive Creativity emerging through spontaneous adaptation to unexpected circumstances and responsive decision-making during classroom interactions.

These findings indicate that teacher creativity is dynamic, multidimensional,

and context-responsive, combining well-prepared instructional design with flexibility to modify plans according to classroom realities. In vocational EFL settings, creativity encompasses not only innovative materials and methods but also contextual relevance to students' future professional needs. The creative practices documented in this study transformed group work into collaborative and engaging learning experiences that enhanced student participation and English communication skills.

The study acknowledges limitations in scope, as it involved one teacher at a single vocational school. Future research is encouraged to involve multiple teachers across different school types to capture a wider range of creative strategies. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of creative group work practices on students' communicative competence and professional readiness would provide valuable insights.

For EFL teachers, this study offers practical implications. Teachers can develop creativity systematically by designing engaging materials relevant to students' contexts, implementing flexible facilitation strategies, and responding adaptively to emerging classroom needs. For school administrators and teacher educators, the findings suggest the importance of providing professional development focused on creative teaching strategies and creating supportive institutional environments where teachers feel empowered to innovate. For researchers, this study opens avenues for exploring how teacher creativity influences specific learning outcomes and how contextual factors shape creative practices across different educational settings.

References

Arifani, Y., Setyaningrum, R., & Mahmudah, L. (2022). Enhancing EFL teacher creativity through blended in-service training. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 13(2), 220-228. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1302.05>

Beghetto, R. A., & Karwowski, M. (2020). Toward a taxonomy of creative teaching. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32(3), 645-661. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-020-09505-z>

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Longman.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Denzin, N. K. (2017). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Glăveanu, V. P. (2020). *The possible: A theory of creativity*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited.

Liu, S., & Zhang, J. (2021). Dimensions of teacher creativity in the EFL classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 25(6), 813–832. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168819876251>

Ma, Y. (2022). Teacher creativity, self-efficacy, and EFL learners' achievement. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 16(5), 521–534. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2022.2057047>

Meihami, H. (2022). Reflective practices and creative EFL teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 56(3), 844–868. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.315>

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Nguyen, L. T., & Nguyen, T. M. (2021). Exploring EFL group work dynamics: A cross-cultural study. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 6(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-021-00116-3>

Ochoa, C., Pineda, J., & Avila, P. (2023). Task-based group work and learner interaction in EFL classrooms. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 17(3), 203–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2022.2089456>

Rahimi, M., & Fathi, J. (2022). Collaborative learning and teacher facilitation in EFL group work. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 16(4), 367–380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2021.1910637>

Rahman, A. (2024). Challenges in implementing group work in EFL classrooms. *International Journal of Language Education*, 8(1), 15–29. <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v8i1.45678>

Tamimy, M., Rashidi, N., & Koh, P. S. (2023). Teacher personality traits and group work practices in EFL classrooms. *Asian EFL Journal*, 25(3), 141–158. Retrieved from <https://www.asian-efl-journal.com>