

## The Relationship between Creativity and Iranian EFL learners' Speaking Skill

Sherko Karimpour<sup>1\*</sup>, Mohammad Ali Mojallal Chopoghlu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MA student, Educational researches department, Azad University, Ajabshir branch, Ajabshir, Iran

<sup>2</sup>PhD, Faculty member, Azad University, Ajabshir branch, Ajabshir, Iran

\*Corresponding author's Email: Sherko.Karimpour@yahoo.com

**ABSTRACT:** Creativity is an ability which is present in almost everybody. Creativity is developed in the appropriate environment and manifested through creative product in some people. Creativity is the generation of imaginative new ideas, involving a radical newness innovation or solution to a problem, and a radical reformulation of problems. This study investigates the relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill. At first, a modified version of Comprehensive English Language Test was administered to a group of 62 students to determine their homogeneity as well as to assess their language proficiency. In the next phase of the study, Arjomand creativity Questionnaire was administered to the participants. Afterwards, participants were held an interview in the classroom context. The findings suggest that there is a significant correlation between creativity and speaking skill.

**Key words:** Creativity; Speaking Skill, Iranian EFL Learners

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### INTRODUCTION

The main source of educational, economical, and cultural growth in the twenty first century is not competition, knowledge, or technology. Development heavily depends on creative mind nationwide. The benefits of increasing creativity and risk-taking are not only gaining a competitive advantage and economic growth but also these two characteristics can bring about changes in all aspects of life (Sheldon, 1995). Language learning field is also related to these two factors in different ways (Albert and Kormos, 2004; Albert, 2006).

It seems that it is the nature of Applied Linguistics which tries to examine variables that have already been found significant in general or personal psychology (Albert, 2006; Albert and Kormos, 2004; Fasko, 2001). Variables like aptitude, motivation, anxiety, learning styles and strategies, creativity, risk-taking, and self-esteem are some of the common research topics of the field.

Though, it should be mentioned that research on creativity could not find its proper place in today's pedagogy especially in the developing countries. People in these countries still wrongly believe that creativity is connected to negative behavior (Candy, 2006). They think that people are born with the creative talent. If one assumes that creativity is a rare talent, conducting academic research on a group and generalizing its finding to a larger population seems useless. Even the vague definition of creativity is a barrier to academic research. In the developing countries such as Iran, the creativity has not gained the proper attention it deserves and that creative people are not working at the right place, either. Some countries have gone further and involved creativity education in their educational systems including primary schools and kindergartens. Education for

creativity provides the situation for fostering latent talents which are available in all human beings (Morris, 2010). Almost all of the researchers who have worked on the creativity issue in the context of language teaching and learning have emphasized its role in this realm (Fasco, 2001; Albert, 2006; Albert and Kormos, 2004). Furthermore, these researchers believed that most of the teachers and people who are engaged in education are not aware of the importance of creativity and risk-taking.

The language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols, which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learnt the system of that culture, communication or to interact. By speaking, we do not mean merely uttering words through mouth. It means conveying the message through the words of mouth. This skill is also neglected in our class rooms. Students do not get any chance either in the class room or outside to speak English. Speaking is not a part of our examinations. Learning to speak also demands a lot of practice and attention. We learn to speak our mother tongue just by listening and repeating. The teacher can adopt the same natural way. He can give them certain structures and ask them to repeat. This will remove their shyness. He can give those drills in the basic patterns of language. Asking short questions and the use of short dialogues in the class room can also develop this skill.

Based on the analysis of data obtained from speaking skill and creativity questionnaire, this study aims to find out the relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill.

### Research Questions

**RQ1.** Is there a significant relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill?

**RQ2.** Do gender differences have impact toward creativity of students?

**RQ3.** Do gender differences have impact toward speaking skill of students?

### Research Hypotheses

**H.** There is a significant relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' speaking Skill.

**H01.** There is no significant relationship between creativity and gender of students.

**H02.** There is no significant relationship between speaking skill and gender of students.

### Review of literature

**Creativity:** There is very little agreement among authors on definitions of what creativity is, and most of the scholarly research is comprised of quoting one another. However, there is a consensus in the literature that the phenomenon termed individual creativity is a highly complex one and the measurement of creativity has been a persistent source of debate and critique. Definition of creativity has always been under the influence of psychological trends. The dominion of each psychological and philosophical approach brings about a new and different definition of creativity. Furthermore the context in which the creativity is discussed has considerable effect on its definition. Berman (1995) points that: "the more one studies the subject of creativity, the more complex and bewildering it seems, and the closer one comes to accepting Freud's conclusion that it simply cannot be understood" (as cited in Buchanan, 1990, p. 14). Karkockiene (2005) states that: "there is no agreement on what creativity actually is".

Some of the scholarly definitions of creativity are more suitable for the purpose of this study; since they emphasize the same aspects which this study is going to investigate. For example, the focus of this research is on the subjective aspect of creativity which Jarvie (1981, p. 117) defines as "a property of persons or their minds". In this view, creativity is a process rather than a product. It is an asset which exists in all human beings, but its realization can be different under the influence of various factors. Knowledgeable people, who dare to break the conventional rules of thinking and put aside the presuppositions and existing assumptions, can show their creative potentials.

**Creativity and education:** Creativity of humans, first of all shows itself in the very first steps of learning language. The nature of language is such that the vast majority of utterances produced or heard are done so for the first time. Most of what we hear

and speak are created rather than recalled from memory. Language is stored as knowledge of speech sounds, of word patterns, and of rules for creating words and stringing them together. Having developed these automated skills and knowledge, language use becomes almost entirely subconscious and almost entirely creative. It can be concluded that the use of language perhaps the most common creative act that all humans possess and exhibit as a regular part of their daily lives. In fact, the famous statement "Every language user is linguistically creative" which has been borrowed from Chomsky (1966) completely explores the relationship of creativity and using language. Therefore, Creativity is not an innate quality of only a few selected people. Creativity is present in everyone. It can be learned, practiced and developed by the use of certain techniques, and by removing some constrains.

Creativity in the classroom involves innovative teaching, high motivation, the ability to communicate and listen and the ability to interest and inspire (Ferrari, 2009). Establishing a creative environment in the classroom will absolutely optimize language learning and teaching. Creative build a good rapport, stimulate curiosity, know the characteristics of creative students, and raise self-esteem, risk-taking and confidence (Runco, 2004).

Creativity can be enhanced in an environment in which team work, intrinsic-motivation, independence, socio-cultural diversity, and risk-taking culture that tolerates and even encourages failure are encouraged (Landry, 2000; Tepper, 2005; Shaughnessy, 1991). In creating this type of environment, it is 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). However, most school environments do not support, and many actively suppress, creative expression. Torrance and Safter (1986), for instance, assert that teachers are often ill equipped to develop, support, or evaluate creativity in their students. In addition, much theory and research shows that creative students often lose their creative potential (Shaughnessy, 1991). If education strives to prepare children for a productive life in society, the educational system must accept responsibility for supporting and developing creativity.

In general, creativity in education is dependent to various factors including: assessment, culture, curriculum, individual skills, teaching and learning format, national policies, teachers, technology, and tools. All of these factors

have been elaborated in details in the literature (Marrapodi, 2003; Ferrari 'et al., 2009; and Morris, 2006).

### **What is Language?**

Language is a formal system of signs governed by grammatical rules of combination to communicate meaning. This definition stresses the fact that human languages can be described as closed structural systems consisting of rules that relate particular signs to particular meanings (Bloomfield, 1914). Language is basically speech. It is universal among human beings who use it for carrying out various activities of life. It is such a common phenomenon that we always take it for granted.

**Stages of Language Learning** Individuals learning a second language use the same innate processes that are used to acquire their first language from the first days of exposure to the new language in spite of their age. Second language learners are usually observed developing a new language system that incorporates elements from the native language and elements from English they recently learned. Inter-language actually helps second language learners test hypotheses about how language works and develop their own set of rules for using language.

**Stage I: Pre-production:** This is the silent period. Beginners only listen but rarely speak. English language learners may have some words in their receptive vocabulary but they are not yet speaking. Some students will be able to repeat only everything that someone says. They are not really producing language but are imitating. Students may duplicate gestures and movements to show comprehension. Teachers should focus attention on listening comprehension activities and on building a receptive vocabulary because English language learners at this stage will need much repetition of English.

**Speaking Skills:** The learner can hardly understand anything at all, unless the speaker is talking about things the learner is observing, or unless the language being learned is closely related to some other language the learner knows. Through comprehension activities the learner can internalize some vocabulary and some grammatical structures, which will help the learner to understand more in stage two, when she or she knows enough to actually converse in a simple way. The result of getting through stage one is that the learner has acquired enough of the basic building blocks of the language to begin to function in real communication situations in a halting way. In stage one there is very little real speaking ability, apart from some words and sentences that can be built on the comprehension exercises. In real communication situations the learner has to depend

on memorized survival phrases to meet the most immediate needs.

**Stage II: Early production:** At this stage students try to speak some words. Students can use short language chunks that have been memorized although these chunks may not always be used correctly. Learner listen more their talkative classmates and extend his vocabulary.

**Speaking Skills:** In stage two inputs is comprehensible if the learner already knows the nonlinguistic content what he or she is hearing or if the communication situation is very predictable. There are more genuine two-way conversations with speakers of the language, although it takes a very patient native speaker to persevere in trying to communicate with a learner at this stage. The result of getting through stage two well is quite a bit of "fluency" in comprehending language which uses a variety of structures in connected discourse, with an ever growing vocabulary. In stage two, the learner is able to speak well in tasks that are fairly structured and predictable.

**Stage III: Speech emergence:** At this stage, Students have a good vocabulary of words and uses simple phrases and sentences in his communication with others. They are able to ask simple questions, which may be grammatically correct or wrong. Students try to initiate short conversations with classmates. They are able to read and understand easy stories.

**Speaking Skills:** In stage three the learner can understand new information, but it still helps if that information is still specially geared to a new speaker's needs. This means that meanings must often be negotiated. In order to keep increasing in comprehension fluency during this stage, the key ingredient is coming to understand the background information that everyone in the culture knows about, and in particular, learning this information in connection with the language that is associated with them. Because the learner can by now understand a lot of the linguistic content, it is possible to develop more ability for top-down processing of "new" information of the nonlinguistic content. If there is adequate input, the learner should be developing a sense of the different discourse genres and registers of speech. The result of getting through stage three is that the learner is able to comprehend language related to a vast range of topics, situations and contexts, as well as easily process many social nuances. In stage three, the learner has increasing facility to produce connected narrative discourse.

**Stage IV: Intermediate fluency:** At the stage of intermediate fluency, English language learners able to use more complex sentences in speaking and

writing to express opinions and share their thoughts. They are able to ask questions to clarify what they are learning in class. Learners are able to work with some teacher support. Comprehension of all subjects' content is increasing. At this stage, students are able to use different strategies to learn content in English. Teachers have to focus on learning strategies. Students in this stage can understand more complex concepts.

**Speaking Skills:** In Stage Four the learner learns most from normal native-to-native speech as it occurs in the whole range of life experiences. The learner will understand most input, provided he attends to it. For example, native speakers may talk about the learner right in his presence, intending to tease him and get a reaction. He will certainly hear that they are talking, but may not in the deeper sense "hear" a thing they say, unless he is attending to it. In Stage Four, the learner has increasing facility in abstract and hypothetical discussions

**Stage V: Advanced Fluency:** Student at this stage will be near-native in their ability to perform in content area learning. Students have needed continuous support from classroom in reading writing and speaking.

**Speaking Skills:** In Stage five, the learner has increasing facility in discussions using his vocabulary without any proper preparation.

### Why Speaking Skills?

Speaking is productive skill in the oral mode. It is like the other skills, is more complicated than it seems at first and involves more than just pronouncing words.

### Listening Situations

There are three kinds of speaking situations in which we find ourselves:

- Interactive;
- Partially Interactive;
- Non-Interactive

Interactive speaking situations include face-to-face conversations and telephone calls, in which we are alternately listening and speaking, and in which we have a chance to ask for clarification, repetition, or slower speech from our conversation partner. Some speaking situations are partially interactive, such as when giving a speech to a live audience, where the convention is that the audience does not interrupt the speech. The speaker nevertheless can see the audience and judge from the expressions on their faces and body language whether or not he or she is being understood.

### Teaching Speaking

Many language learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language. These learners define fluency as the ability to converse with others, much more than the ability to read, write, or comprehend oral language. They regard speaking as the most important skill they can acquire, and they assess their progress in terms of their accomplishments in spoken communication.

Language learners need to recognize that speaking involves three areas of knowledge:

- Mechanics (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary): Using the right words in the right order with the correct pronunciation

- Functions (transaction and interaction): Knowing when clarity of message is essential (transaction/information exchange) and when precise understanding is not required (interaction/relationship building)

- Social and cultural rules and norms (turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pauses between speakers, relative roles of participants): Understanding how to take into account who is speaking to whom. in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason.

In the communicative model of language teaching, instructors help their students develop this body of knowledge by providing authentic practice that prepares students for real-life communication situations. They help their students develop the ability to produce grammatically correct, logically connected sentences that are appropriate to specific contexts, and to do so using acceptable (that is, comprehensible) pronunciation.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Participants

Survey data were collected from 62 students from three institutes in Naghadeh including Sadaf institution, Danial institution, Ertebatat institution. 62 main participants who took part in all phases of the research were both male and female and in an age group 16 to 20.

### Instrumentation

**Language Proficiency Test:** A modified version of a language proficiency test, Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT), consisting of 54 items, was selected to investigate whether the participants were homogeneous in terms of their general language proficiency. The test was piloted to 62 intermediate students at different institutes of Naghadeh.

**Creativity Questionnaire:** Among all available creativity questionnaires, a self-report inventory called Arjmand Creativity Test, which has claimed to be the

most reliable and valid test in Iran, was employed in three institutes in Naghadeh including Sadaf institute, Ertebatat institute and Danial institute, to measure the creative abilities of the participants.

**Interview:** The interview was held in the classroom context. In the interview, participants were acted in a one to one oral interview designed to elicit a sample of their conversational English ability in classroom. A video camera and recording devices were used to record the process, with three raters invited to evaluate the subjects' oral performance.

Each interview lasted 5\_8 minutes and the oral interview was conducted by the

Author during which, the participants were asked to respond in English to common conversational prompts.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In order to analyze and interpret the data, descriptive and inferential statistics has been used. Survey data were collected from 62 students, 31 males and 31 females.

**Table1.** Descriptive indexes

	N	Mean	Mode	Median	SD	V	Rang
<b>Creativity</b>	62	204.06	191	209.00	16.748	280.488	52
<b>Speaking skill</b>	62	49.90	36	46.00	7.012	49.171	20

**Table2.** Correlation coefficient

		Creativity	Speaking skill
<b>creativity</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	1	.770**
	<b>Sig.(2-tailed)</b>		.000
	<b>N</b>	62	62
<b>Speaking skill</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	.770**	1
	<b>Sig.(2-tailed)</b>	.000	
	<b>N</b>	62	62

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Research hypotheses:**

H: There is a significance relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill. The Correlations of these variables including creativity and speaking skill are computed through Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The correlation coefficient between creativity and speaking skill is 0.77 in error level of 0.01 and certainty level of 0.99 and

with regard to level of significance at 0.05, because the correlation coefficient is higher than level of significance, we concluded that there is a significance relationship between creativity and Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill, which show that the higher level of creativity, the higher level of speaking skill, and converse.

**Table 4.** Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
<b>Creativity</b>	.316	.576	.030	60	.976	.12903	4.28921
<b>Equal variances assumed</b>			.030	59.764	.976	.12903	4.28921
<b>Speaking skill</b>	.003	.956	-.252	60	.802	-.452	1.795
<b>Equal variances assumed</b>			-.252	60.000	.802	-.452	1.795

**H01.** There is no significant relationship between creativity and gender of students.

By computing T-test for males and females (T= - 0.252, sig=0.95), we concluded that there is no significant relationship between males and females in creativity with the mean of 204.13 for females and 204 for males, so we accepted the null hypothesis.

**H02.** There is no significant relationship between speaking skill and gender of students.

By computing T-test for males and females (T= - .252, Sig=0.95), we concluded that there is no significant relationship between males and females in oral proficiency with the mean of 46.68 for females and 47.13 for males, so we accepted the null hypothesis. In order to determine the level of creativity on speaking skill, Regression method has been used. The results showed that the effect of

creativity on speaking skill is positive and significant (r= 0.77, p < 0.001, df= 60, f= 87.252).

**Table 5.** Regression table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.770	0.593	0.586	15.703	10.779	82.252	1	60	.000

a. Predictors:(Constant), speaking skill; b. Dependent Variable: creativity

**Validity**

In this research the test-retest method has been used which 0.66 reported for creativity, it showed a good level of validity and also 0.61 reported for speaking skill which showed that these students have a good level of speaking skill and showed a good level of validity.

As it was mentioned the content validity and test-retest validity has been used in this research. For Analyzing and interpreting the validity, KMO and Bartlett's Test has been used.

**Table6.**KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olk in Measure	Of Sampling Adequacy.	.66
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3.654E6
	df	60
	Sig.	.001

**Table7.**KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olk in Measure	Of Sampling Adequacy.	.61
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2.876E5
	df	58
	Sig.	.000

**Reliability**

Cronbach's alpha has been used for calculating the reliability of these tests. 0.79alpha reported for creativity and 0.62 alpha reported for speaking skill which showed reliability of tests.

**Table8.**Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.791	30

**Table9.**Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.626	15

**CONCLUSION**

First of all, the relationship between the continuous variables i.e. creativity, speaking skill would be analyzed. The findings indicate that hypothesis, namely, that there is a significant relationship between creativity and speaking skill, is partially supported. The correlation coefficient of creativity and speaking skill is 0.77. These significant

values show that there is a moderate relationship between these two variables.

**Pedagogical Implications**

There are several pedagogical implications that can be drawn from the present research. For example, the issue of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivators and their effects on creativity can be applied to any classroom at any grade level. Thus, educators must be aware that, if they implement an extrinsic reward structure with these students, this will undermine their intrinsic motivation. Assessment procedure is another area that can be influenced through the results of this study. As mentioned before, creative potentials and high risk-taking may be affected negatively when it comes to a formal assessment (e.g. traditional final exam). Assessment procedure needs to come along with needs and wants of intrinsically motivated learners. However, assessment and exams are a part of a broader educational system. These systems, which may be called creativity killers, are like barriers toward creative behaviors. Such systems not only do not allow creative teachers to try innovative approaches, but also they reduce risk taking and creativity in language learners. However, creativity is an important element in relation to education and social growth. As the degree of complexity and the amount of information in the society continue to increase, society's problems require more creative solutions. For this reason, all sectors of society are requiring leaders who can think critically and creatively (Isaksen and Murdock, 1993). The current study aimed to explore these relationships and provide an academic evidence for policy makers in the related field.

Considering the relationship of the variables of the current study, it seems necessary to provide a more student-centered teaching and learning environment in our schools. Such an environment can stimulate learners and allow them to take the risk of speaking in front of other peers and show their creative abilities. Policy makers can provide the learners and teachers with "teaching of creativity" and "methods for successful risk-taking" programs and in this way have a great role in developing moderate risk-taker and high creative individuals in the future. As

Davis and Rimm (2004) suggested that, educators should choose the programs that appear to best meet the needs of their students in their school. Thus, as Rhodes (1961) stated more than 35 years ago, "Now is the time for every teacher to become more creative" (p. 310).

It may well be said that Guilford's (1967) statement that "creativity is the key to education in its fullest sense and to the solution of mankind's most serious problems" (p. 13) is still relevant today. It is clear that if students have no fear of speaking in class, they could not have trouble acquiring a second or foreign language. Therefore, reducing risks and negative effects may be one of the main concerns of methods and approaches of language teaching. It is worth to note again that, creativity and risk-taking are highly correlated. As we know Relaxation exercises and music are a good way to relieve students' tensions. The more students feel relaxed, the better they can learn and the better they can produce language in a creative manner. A learner-centered approach in which students can feel comfortable to talk in a foreign language and have fun in classroom may increase learning. Since low risk-takers who can't show their creative capabilities, do not dare to ask questions fall behind of other learners; teachers should be aware of the overall behaviors of such learners and take care of them.

The present study recommends teacher to know the primary focus of language learners. Most of learners want a reaction to meaning, not an evaluation of form. Often, providing the former creates a natural communicative setting. However, emphasizing on accuracy over fluency may increase the risks of being interrupted by the teacher and even being mocked by other learners in the class. Teachers should encourage moderate risk-takers to flourish the creative potentials and adjust extreme high risk-takers and risk-averse learners to the atmosphere of the class (Buchanan, 2001). Reviewing the language teaching approaches through history shows that creativity was not so important in mechanical drills of the Audio-Lingual or Grammar-Translation methods (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). They owe their importance in the literature to the 1970's approaches which emphasize on communicative aspects of language learning. It is evident that the more language teaching and learning goes toward a communicative and learner centered approach, the more these personal variables play role in it.

One part that can be highlighted is the importance of working with the students' confidence when it comes to speaking. The teachers have to try to motivate the students to speak and work with the People who are shy so that they can take part of the class like the

others. Several of the teachers bring up the importance of working with the students' confidence in different ways to motivate them to take initiative themselves which is stated in the steering documents.

The main aspect that is considered important when it comes to speaking skill is to work with it a lot and often. When students work a lot and often, they get used to speaking in front of others in different situations and with different people. When creating a good atmosphere in the classroom students will build up confidence and they are therefore more likely to be more competent speakers of English. Last but not least, as a teacher it is always important to find new ways to work with speaking skill. The teacher has to be open to trying new things in order to motivate their students.

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