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# The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Teachers' Creativity of Online Teaching Classrooms in the Saudi EFL Context

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The worldwide coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has engendered substantial changes for teachers and students. During this epidemic, teachers have been trying to adapt to unforeseen conditions and teaching in remarkable ways to meet the objectives of their virtual lessons. Accordingly, teachers' creativity has been significantly affected by this severe condition. Therefore, this study aimed to explore to what extent teachers were able to enhance creativity in their classes during the pandemic from their students' perceptions in the Saudi context of English as a foreign language. Moreover, the study sought to determine whether these perceptions diverged significantly due to students' gender and university level and teachers' gender. To this end, a 62-item English Language Teacher Creativity Scale with seven multi-dimensions was carried out on a group of 500 male and female university students chosen by a snowball sampling method. Results from this descriptive quantitative study showed a moderate level of creativity in the teaching styles of EFL teachers. The unexpected pandemic has affected teachers' preparedness and limited their capacity to develop creative online teaching methods. Results have also shown no significant differences between the perceptions of students and the level of their teachers' creativity due to students' gender, university level, and teacher's gender. Based on these results, limitations and recommendations were provided.

## KEYWORDS

**covid-19, creativity, EFL teachers and students, teachers' creativity, Saudi EFL context**

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted everything from individual lives to broader organizational structures. Education systems were significantly affected by the ongoing COVID-19 protocols, resulting in unprecedented changes to what historically has been a reasonably stable industry. Both educators and students suffered when schools began to close as the pandemic ravaged the world, forcing teachers to quickly establish a new learning approach to continue educating their students (Jones, 2020; Al-Samiri, 2021).

While the shutdowns were deemed necessary to slow the spread of the virus, it came as a shock to many schools and universities because no one anticipated that a virus in China would be so deadly or affect learning to the extent that it did (Alshaikh et al., 2021). Initially, people were unsure how long the pandemic would last or how the virus would spread. The world was hopeful that a pandemic could be avoided, so universities and schools did not anticipate that they would be closed for an extended period.

The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was an incredibly challenging time for all classes of educators worldwide since educational institutions were all mandated to shut down to avoid the spread of the deadly virus. While public healthcare organizations experienced many changes because of COVID-19, other industries were also impacted by the pandemic, including education and economics. Vilas et al. (2021) stated that higher education institutions and universities felt it the most since the 2020 pandemic significantly altered every educational institution's learning.

Additionally, there was an unprecedented increase in school closures and the implementation of emergency remote teaching (Tarkar, 2020; Yi and Jang, 2020). This unexpected change required a rapid transition to e-learning platforms, the consequences of which were unknown to educators. This was a drastic change in the education system. Cardullo et al. (2021) stated that this change caused teachers to shift their pedagogical practices and content delivery to online modalities, making it more challenging for teachers to create and deliver quality teaching content.

The situation in Saudi Arabia is a good case study to represent what countries are experiencing worldwide. The Saudi Arabian government imposed curfews and total restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, disrupting the educational sector (Alsuhaibani, 2021; Kadir and Yunos, 2021). The Ministry of Education did its best to adhere to these requirements by swiftly migrating to online education (Alshaikh et al., 2021). These changes had an enormous impact on education in Saudi Arabia, with Alqurshi (2020) finding that this emergency move to remote teaching forced teachers to create alternative assessment methods that positively affected students' overall skills.

In this study, it was presumed that the suddenness of COVID-19 may have had an impact on the creativity level of English as foreign language (EFL) teachers and, therefore, their ability to develop a suitable teaching style that could be used to teach English in the aftermath of the pandemic. Therefore, this study aims to find out how EFL teachers' creativity was affected during the pandemic, specifically from the perspective of Saudi EFL students. Thus, the two research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent were EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia able to enhance creativity in their classes during the pandemic according to their students' perceptions?
2. Is there a significant difference between students' perceptions of their teachers' creativity during the pandemic based on gender and university level? Do also

these perceptions diverge significantly due to teachers' gender as specified by their students?

## Review of literature

English was first introduced in Saudi Arabia through the elementary school system, but EFL programs have been greatly influenced by the Arabian culture, religion, and the country's official language, Arabic. Alrabai (2018) stated that these factors have prominently influenced and would continually influence how EFL was taught. This influence is significant because there is a natural resistance to learning a new language such as English (Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi, 2017).

English as foreign language programs have long been a priority to the Saudi Arabian government, which recently resulted in the creation of the Tatweer Project. Assulaimani (2019) states that the project aimed to improve Saudi Arabian students' English skills *via* online learning platforms and technology. EFL was developed in 2015 after the sitting government recognized the need for a modern, well-rounded economy – similar to those of other developed countries – which would be made possible by reducing its heavy dependence on oil revenue (Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi, 2017). As a result, EFL programs became a critical venture in Saudi Arabia, irrespective of the prevailing pandemic (Al-khresheh, 2020a).

When the pandemic occurred, many teachers were not equipped with the digital tools or creativity required to facilitate a rapid and sudden transition from traditional classroom teaching to teaching *via* an e-learning platform. Nonetheless, the situation forced them to make these changes with their current skills and resources. In a study that explored how the year 2020 changed academic English teaching trends, Wright (2021) found that only about 10% of English teachers spent a considerable amount of time online before the pandemic. However, post-pandemic, Wright (2021) found that 55% of the surveyed language teachers spent 100% of their time online between teaching, creating instructional materials, evaluating students, sending and replying to emails, etc. Hernandez and Florez (2020), in a study on online teaching during COVID-19, found that language teachers now spend between 10 and 12 h in front of a computer screen each day. Despite the inconveniences of moving to an online platform, this change still has positive aspects. According to Yahdell (2020), travel restrictions meant that even instructors stranded across borders, many time zones apart, could still successfully teach their students. Removing the physical constraints of space and time paved the way for a new (creative) learning approach to transcend these barriers (Al-Samiri, 2021).

To deal with the learning issues created by COVID-19, the Saudi Arabian government has provided online resources for students to use at their convenience and organized multiple workshops and training sessions for teachers on subjects such as online technology and education (Bahanshal and Khan, 2021).

Blackboard was one of the most commonly used learning management systems during the pandemic in Saudi Arabia. Several studies have indicated its effectiveness in resulting successful virtual classrooms (Abdellatif and Alsharidah, 2020; Alamer, 2020; Al-khresheh, 2022b).

English is recognized as a universal language, so many academic institutions desire well-qualified and dedicated language teachers who can also bring creativity into language learning. This is especially important because learning a foreign language is often difficult for students. A growing body of research demonstrates the importance of having creative teachers (Akinwamide and Adedara, 2012; Canh and Renandya, 2017; Ghonsooly and Shoghi, 2012; Ramos and Baldespinosa, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has made creativity an even more vital skill for teachers. The COVID-19 crisis is a challenge of transformation, revision, and adaptation for educators. Moving to a virtual learning platform, especially during indefinite uncertainty, has no user manual (Khurram, 2021).

Teachers' creativity in teaching styles should be tailored to the unique circumstances of that moment in time to achieve success. Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2016) describe teaching styles as the instructional strategies and activities used by a teacher for a specific subject in the classroom. Al-Ababneh (2020) defines it as the production of new ideas across any part of human activity—including science, business, education, arts, and everyday life—where new ideas are required to face a current opportunity or challenge. Creativity is also defined as the distinctive attributes an individual possesses; these attributes give someone the ability to invent something entirely new or combine pre-existing works into an innovative solution that can interact with the environment to solve problems (Daker et al., 2019; Khajavy et al., 2020; Regine et al., 2019).

A teacher's creativity influences the quality of learning because of their ability to select and implement the best learning techniques and approaches (Katz-Buonincontro and Anderson, 2018; Beghetto, 2019). This creativity greatly enhances the language learning process because it engages students and increases their motivation to learn English (Afida et al., 2013; Saroghi et al., 2015). Creativity is an integral aspect of the teaching process, and, as stated by Amabile (2017), it can enhance students' academic success. Further, as noted by Artini and Padmadewi (2021), teachers' creativity plays a pivotal role in the accomplishment of the overall teaching and learning process. The level of success can be identified through the learning outcome; in other words, when students have the expertise to use their foreign language in real life. Brown (2012) said that creative teachers become teacher-scholars when they implement learning using their expertise and knowledge to change the learner experience. Teachers-scholars are curious, investigative, confident, highly qualified, intuitive, and self-disciplined creatives who can adequately balance logical considerations, analysis, and perception to make decisions that will drive the best results (Bereczki and Kárpáti, 2018).

Teachers' level of creativity is seen in their daily activities and performance (Amabile, 2017). Ideally, a creative teacher can establish a new approach to teaching styles, learning activities, and materials (Beghetto et al., 2021). Several researchers stated that it does not matter how good curricula are; the most critical factor is how that information is used inside or outside the classroom. Therefore, their teacher's creativity can affect the quality of a student's education (Sun et al., 2008; Cross, 2012; Anderson et al., 2021).

The education industry relies on digital technology now more than ever. Given this shift, it is important to focus on the 4Cs – Creativity, Communication, Critical thinking, and Collaboration. Febliza and Oktariani (2020) define online learning as acquiring knowledge using an education management system through an internet network. Due to the rapid pandemic changes, Antonini et al. (2020) stated that people now teach, learn, work, and communicate remotely at a higher percentage rate than ever previously experienced. Rusdin (2018), in exploring teachers' perceptions of their readiness to teach the students using 21st-century learning methods, discovered a significant correlation between the teacher's level of education and their perceptions about their 21st-century learning skills.

Yalcinalp and Avcı (2019) argue that a technology-enhanced setting could enhance one's creativity through online interactions and mutual discovery. Henriksen et al. (2018) attempted to describe the impact of teachers' creativity in implementing 21st-century learning by saying that their creativity was influenced by their education level and the assessment and regulation of the education when attempting to implement a creative solution.

At the start of the pandemic, various factors adversely affected English teachers' creativity level. Related studies revealed that many individuals suffered from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety (Anderson and Beard, 2018; Khodabakhshzadeh et al., 2018; Alkhamees et al., 2020; Al-khresheh, 2020c) which made both teaching and learning English stressful given the sudden changes and fear associated with the pandemic. Al-Qahtani, 2016 found that EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia had lower levels of enthusiasm and did not put effort into incorporating creativity in the classroom. A survey by Huskho (2017) indicated that teachers' creativity in classroom management significantly affected students' learning outcomes.

The gender of the teacher is another factor that may or may not influence creativity. Kimmelmeier and Walton (2016) draw attention to the fact that research about the impact of gender on creativity has produced little evidence of any reliable differences in creative performance in people of different genders. They did, however, find that differences sometimes occur in the self-evaluation of creativity based on gender. Females were found to be more in concurrence to the independent level of the innovation of their inspired performance than males. This contrasted with Arifani and Suryanti (2019) findings who believe that gender differences might not affect teachers' creativity. Additional studies later supported this claim (Wang and Cheng, 2016; Khajavy et al., 2020).

Previous studies have investigated the importance of teachers' creativity before the pandemic, especially in teaching EFL. [Cremin and Barnes \(2015\)](#) believe anyone can be creative regardless of who they are or what they do; in other words, it is achievable for all. [Atmojo and Nugroho \(2020\)](#) stated that EFL teachers had an advantage over other teachers when the pandemic began. Before COVID-19, English was already taught online, so some teachers and learners were already acquainted with the online learning process. Similarly, [Bailey and Lee \(2020\)](#) also said that Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) had been used for language teaching and learning purposes for more than 40 years. When designing creative learning activities, [Khikmah \(2019\)](#) suggests that the activities should align and appeal to students' interests, ages, levels of language proficiency, learning materials, school policy, and media availability.

While rich literature highlights online teaching during and after the pandemic, the impact on the creativity in language learning during COVID-19 remains to be explored in greater detail. With this in mind, the present research aims to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on EFL teachers' creativity during 2020–2021. A study around the transition to online teaching for EFL teachers may provide critical insight into creativity's role in establishing successful online learning experiences.

## Research methods

### Study design

The descriptive quantitative research design was used for this study. This is a form of scientific methodology where the study participants are observed in their natural state. Descriptive research resorts to the scientific approaches wherein surveying the tested or experimented population is implemented in familiar surroundings to discover "what" is linked to a phenomenon ([Creswell and Plano, 2018](#)).

### Participants

A total of 500 English language undergraduates (240 male and 260 female) from Saudi universities participated in this study. In terms of their university level, there were: freshmen (234), sophomores (182), juniors (22), and seniors (62) (see [Supplementary Appendix A](#)). Blackboard technology is the primary teaching-learning tool in Saudi Arabia's higher education. As stated earlier, this technology has provided multiple options to

facilitate the educational teaching process for teachers and students.

## Instrument

The instrument for data collection in this research study included a questionnaire with two sections: A and B. Section A was a demographic survey used to obtain potential participants' personal information (see [Supplementary Appendix A](#)). This provided data on participants' characteristics and determined their eligibility to participate in the research study. The demographic survey determined participants' gender, university level, and teachers' gender. This was to help determine how many of these variables are related to language teaching and how they affect teachers' creativity in online teaching.

Section B of the instrument was used to investigate how EFL teachers in the Saudi context enhanced creativity in their classes during the pandemic. This 62-item scale titled English Language Teacher Creativity Scale (ELT-CS) was constructed by [Pishghadam et al. \(2012\)](#) and was adopted for this study. The instrument was validated through Andrich's Rasch Rating Scale Model (RSM) (as cited in [Pishghadam et al., 2012](#)). The Rasch model was used because it is item and persons free and predicts how individuals with primary ability levels are predictable to approve each item ([Pishghadam et al., 2012](#)). Furthermore, it focuses mainly on persons and individual items more willingly than group statistics ([Conrad and Smith, 2004](#)). The ELT-CS is a 20 min scale comprising 62 items ranging from Always (3 points), Sometimes (2 points), and Never (1 point). The scale has seven multidimensions: Originality and Elaboration; Fluency and Flexibility; Person (Teacher); Press (Environment) and Materials; Motivation; Autonomy (Independent learning); and Brainstorming. This questionnaire was adopted because it covers all the components of creativity in language teaching. The choice of gathering information through a questionnaire for this research was due to the limited cost, the ability to send the instrument through an email to avoid physical contact, and the advantage of participants remaining anonymous, thereby enabling them to express controversial opinions. Students filled the items on this questionnaire as teachers' creativity was viewed from students' perspectives.

To meet the main objective of this study which deals with the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' teaching creativity during the pandemic, there was a need to make a slight change to two items of the English Language Teacher Creativity Scale (ELT-CS). Items 45 and 19 were a bit suitable for a physical situation rather than a virtual one; therefore, they were revised in [Table 1](#) below.

TABLE 1 Modifications on questionnaires' items.

Item numbers	Item statement (before)	Item statement (after)
45	His/her behavior in class is predictable	His/her behavior in online classes is predictable
19	We are allowed to walk and move in the class	We are allowed to log in and out of the class



TABLE 2 Overall arithmetic mean and standard deviation of the ELT-CS ranked descendingly.

Numbers	Dimensions	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
1	Originality and elaboration	2.24	0.30	Moderate (sometimes)	1
4	Press and materials	2.24	0.32	Moderate (sometimes)	2
5	Motivation	2.23	0.29	Moderate (sometimes)	3
6	Autonomy	2.23	0.30	Moderate (sometimes)	4
2	Fluency and Flexibility	2.21	0.27	Moderate (sometimes)	5
3	Person	2.21	0.29	Moderate (sometimes)	6
7	Brain storming	2.13	0.31	Moderate (sometimes)	7
Total		2.21	0.22	Moderate (sometimes)	

TABLE 3 Arithmetic mean and standard deviation of originality and elaboration ranked descendingly.

Numbers	Items	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
13	Makes use of flashcards and videos in her teaching	2.02	0.74	Moderate	1
50	Asks us repetitive questions	2.24	0.73	Moderate	2
12	Cares a lot for class discussions	2.32	0.72	Moderate	3
59	Chooses learners' favourite topics for class discussions	2.23	0.72	Moderate	4
48	Asks the similarities and differences of the pictures, sentences, and texts	2.22	0.71	Moderate	5
51	Learners are allowed to give <i>only</i> one response to teacher's questions	2.26	0.71	Moderate	6
26	Helps us to be clear in discussions	2.37	0.69	Moderate	7
27	Learners who comment more are encouraged more	2.28	0.67	Moderate	8
Originality and elaboration		2.24	0.30	Moderate	

## Data collection and analysis

The survey instrument was uploaded in Google form and circulated through the snowball method. The Snowball sampling method is a widely used non-probability survey method deployed to discover hidden populations by relying mainly on participants recommending other persons interested in participating in the research (Johnson, 2014). This method was considered suitable for data collection during the pandemic as it ensured minimal contact where the COVID-19 protocol was duly observed. However, it poses some difficulties reaching the intended number of participants and controlling and receiving the referred participants (Johnson, 2014). The data were collected in the first academic semester of 2020–2021. During this period, teachers were teaching remotely.

Items were scored according to the 3-point scale ranging from (1) "Never," (2) "Sometimes," to (3) "Always." Negatively worded items were reverse-scored to ensure that a total positively oriented score could be achieved. The questionnaires were collected, and the obtained data were coded and processed. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) was used to analyze the descriptive statistics, and afterwards, one way ANOVA was run on the students' scores with different teachers' creativity levels. ANOVA was deployed to determine the statistical differences between the three independent groups and determine the effect of the differences.

## Reliability

The overall reliability estimates obtained for each of the 62 items on the questionnaire using Cronbach Alpha to substantiate the scale's reliability in the context of EFL teachers and learners was 0.821 (see [Supplementary Appendix B](#)). The internal consistency value (0.821) was considered a good value regarding the reliability of the data collection instrument.

## Results

This section presents the statistical analysis of the data obtained. The three-point scale of Always (3 points), Sometimes (2 points), and Never (1 point) was used. Evaluating the arithmetic averages was through the following formula: (the highest value–the lowest value)/3 = (3–1)/3 = 0.66. Thus, the categories are as follows: From (1–1.66) is low; (1.67–2.33) moderate; (2.34–3) high. [Table 2](#) below summarizes the arithmetic mean and standard deviation of the ELT-CS descendingly. Showing a moderate level of all dimensions indicates that teachers were able to enhance creativity in their classes during the pandemic reasonably.

[Table 3](#) indicates that EFL teachers have a moderate level (2.24) of Originality and Elaboration. The clarity in discussions received the highest mean value, implying that teachers generate rare ideas and provide more explanations to issues and solutions.

Table 4 indicates that EFL teachers have a moderate level (2.21) of Fluency and Flexibility, implying that teachers allow students to express themselves in class. This was through giving chances to ask more questions, allowing them to talk about their favourite topics and experiences for a couple of minutes in the class.

Table 5 points out that EFL teachers have a moderate level (2.21) of Person (Teacher), implying that teachers put students' interests in mind while teaching. This is evident from applying students' favourite topics in the online class, reviewing their previous knowledge, and teaching them new grammatical structures to help them develop recent examples.

Table 6 illustrates that EFL teachers have a moderate level (2.24) of press (Environment) and materials, implying that teachers make the learning environment conducive while using relevant teaching materials. The high mean value of item 20 shows that teachers are in control of the learning environment.

Table 7 illustrates that EFL teachers have a moderate level (2.23) of Motivation, indicating that teachers put students'

interests in mind while teaching. A high level for item 10 shows that teachers exhibit creativity in their teaching styles, aligning them to each student's needs. The table also shows that teachers were able to make classes a bit more enjoyable by creating a good class atmosphere.

Table 8 shows that EFL teachers have a moderate level (2.23) of Autonomy (Independent Learning), implying that teachers encourage independent learning. Using gamification techniques, doing exercises in groups, and employing competitions are considered good autonomy indicators.

Table 9 indicates that EFL teachers have a moderate level (2.13) of Brainstorming. There is a high and low level for items 3 and 1, respectively. For item 3, the result shows that teachers give students adequate opportunities to brainstorm and develop ideas from their personal knowledge. Item 1 is the opposite since teachers tend to prevent students from expressing themselves.

The ANOVA analysis's overall results revealed no significant differences in students' gender, university level, and teachers' gender, as depicted in Table 10 below.

TABLE 4 Arithmetic mean and standard deviation of fluency and flexibility ranked in descending order.

Numbers	Items	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
49	Asks questions to make us think deeper	2.33	0.70	Moderate	1
28	We are required to put the learned materials into use	2.30	0.71	Moderate	2
29	The learners who do not observe the class rules are punished	2.27	0.71	Moderate	3
52	According to him/her, questions constantly have one correct answer	2.27	0.69	Moderate	4
56	Listens carefully to our questions and answers	2.27	0.73	Moderate	5
24	Asks us to talk about our favourite topics for a couple of minutes	2.24	0.72	Moderate	6
22	Before starting a new conversation or reading, we should guess the theme from the provided pictures	2.20	0.74	Moderate	7
53	We are allowed to talk about our experiences in the class	2.20	0.74	Moderate	8
4	Administers various teaching methods	2.16	0.72	Moderate	9
25	Encourages our novel, original ideas	2.09	0.72	Moderate	10
2	Asks us for synonyms and antonyms	2.09	0.53	Moderate	11
23	Accepts learners' ideas that contradict his/hers	2.04	0.74	Moderate	12
Fluency and flexibility		2.21	0.27	Moderate	

TABLE 5 Arithmetic mean and standard deviation of person (teacher) ranked descendingly.

Numbers	Items	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
58	Interprets the text irrespective of our opinions and interpretations	2.27	0.68	Moderate	1
57	Gives exams regularly	2.26	0.70	Moderate	2
32	Applies our favourite topics in the class as far as possible	2.26	0.72	Moderate	3
45	His/her behavior in online classes is predictable	2.24	0.71	Moderate	4
6	We use supplementary books along with our main textbook in the class	2.24	0.71	Moderate	5
30	Insists on carefully covering the whole book	2.22	0.69	Moderate	6
46	Points to the title of each section and appreciates us guessing the subject	2.20	0.71	Moderate	7
39	Before starting a new topic, s/he reviews our background knowledge	2.17	0.75	Moderate	8
21	After teaching new grammatical points, helps us to make similar examples	2.16	0.70	Moderate	9
5	Gets tired of our numerous questionings	2.00	0.68	Moderate	10
Person (teacher)		2.21	0.29	Moderate	

TABLE 6 Arithmetic mean and standard deviation of press (environment) and materials ranked descendingly.

Numbers	Items	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
20	Reminds us dos and don'ts	2.37	0.69	High	1
31	Necessitates learning the basic materials accurately	2.31	0.71	Moderate	2
7	Assigns several rules for the class to obey	2.25	0.68	Moderate	3
36	Writes the meaning of the new words on the board without asking learners' interpretations	2.24	0.71	Moderate	4
61	To facilitate the process of writing, teacher reviews our background knowledge and writes them on the board in categories	2.19	0.69	Moderate	5
14	Mocks learners' seemingly irrelevant ideas	2.18	0.71	Moderate	6
18	Appreciates our both right and wrong responses	2.16	0.75	Moderate	7
Press (environment) and materials		2.24	0.32	Moderate	

TABLE 7 Arithmetic mean and standard deviation of motivation ranked descendingly.

No.	Items	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
10	Teaches us how to learn more effectively	2.34	0.70	High	1
60	Keeps the atmosphere of the class happy	2.33	0.70	Moderate	2
54	Some questions are left unanswered for us to explore	2.32	0.68	Moderate	3
34	We are expected to check our work before s/he does	2.32	0.70	Moderate	4
38	Asks us to listen to a conversation for the first time while our books are closed	2.31	0.72	Moderate	5
44	Takes our opinions serious and follows them up	2.26	0.71	Moderate	6
19	We are allowed to log in and out of the class	2.18	0.73	Moderate	7
42	Asks successful learners to talk about their learning strategies	2.14	0.73	Moderate	8
9	More than a single topic is offered to us to choose for each writing task	2.08	0.70	Moderate	9
33	Chooses writing topics that are closely related to everyday life	2.07	0.74	Moderate	10
Motivation		2.23	0.29	Moderate	

TABLE 8 Arithmetic mean and standard deviation of autonomy (independent learning) ranked descendingly.

Numbers	Items	Mean	SD	Level	Rank
43	Mentions the goal of each exam or exercise	2.32	0.69	Moderate	1
18	Values our learning more than our grades	2.32	0.70	Moderate	2
37	Some of the exercises are done in groups	2.30	0.72	Moderate	3
17	Answers different questions immediately without getting help from us	2.27	0.69	Moderate	4
41	Competitions are chiefly cooperative rather than individual	2.26	0.72	Moderate	5
11	Teacher's questions are mainly open-ended rather than multiple-choice	2.18	0.69	Moderate	6
55	Examples of grammatical points are related to everyday life	2.14	0.75	Moderate	7
35	We play different games in the class	2.07	0.75	Moderate	8
Autonomy (independent learning)		2.23	0.30	Moderate	

TABLE 9 Arithmetic mean and standard deviation of brain storming ranked descendingly.

No.	Item	Mean	Std. Dev	Level	Rank
3	We are required to guess the meaning of the new words in the first place	2.39	0.71	High	1
16	Talks more than the learners in the class	2.29	0.72	Moderate	2
40	We read our writings in the class to our classmates	2.25	0.67	Moderate	3
47	Encourages learners' original and novel interpretations	2.25	0.71	Moderate	4
62	After covering each conversation, s/he expects us to make a change or create a new conversation based on our own situation	2.21	0.70	Moderate	5
15	Comments on the truthfulness of our responses on the spot	2.18	0.72	Moderate	6
1	Interrupts the learners while expressing their ideas	1.35	0.62	Low	7
Brain storming		2.13	0.31	Moderate	

TABLE 10 The three-way ANOVA analysis of the study variables.

Variables	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Student's gender	0.124	1	0.124	2.663	0.103
University level	0.294	3	0.098	2.110	0.098
Teacher' gender	0.023	1	0.023	0.487	0.486
Error	22.639	488	0.046		
Total	2476.212	500			
Corrected total	24.029	499			

## Discussion

The data obtained revealed that the seven subscales of creativity have a moderate relationship with teaching EFL online (see Tables 2–9). So being a creative teacher dramatically influences their ability to teach English language online creatively or even offline, irrespective of the impending situation. A possible explanation for this level of modernity in creativity might be due to the restrictions of the pandemic, which made the teaching process online. Teaching online might affect or reduce the level of creativity. The pandemic was unexpected to be spread quickly worldwide. Therefore, teachers were not well-prepared to develop creative ways to teach online and make the lessons more interesting. Undoubtedly, creativity can be better shaped in physical interactions than in virtual ones. According to Anderson et al. (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic depressingly affected teachers' capability to provide mostly more creative chances for their students. Numerous teachers complained of the hindrance of proposing to students novel and innovative ways to absorb the learning material with tiny to no consummation and interest. Anderson et al. (2021) stated that creativity might be affected because several teachers felt that virtual learning required an entirely different method. Essentially, positive emotions are considered an integral part of creative development. Hence, it is questionable that having more constructive attitudes toward creativity will unavoidably mean less-dismissive perceptual experiences in teaching, particularly throughout an epidemic (Anderson and Beard, 2018). Moreover, it could also be concluded that teachers might feel anxious to face new-fangled challenges that inquire creativity during a school shutdown. This anxiety might also reduce the level of creativity.

The result of this study which indicates that teachers' creativity moderately enhances English language teaching, aligns with Khodabakhshzadeh et al. (2018), who declared that since factors like independent learning, originality and motivation affect teachers' creativity, it is, therefore, safe to assert that teachers who improve creativity through these factors are more up-and-coming in actuality. This result also supports Afida et al. (2013), who stated that a creative teacher could combine an innovative process with existing knowledge

to nourish cognition to obtain a beneficial learning outcome. In examining the relationship between innovation and creativity through a meta-analysis, Sarooghi et al. (2015) found a significant positive relationship between innovation and creativity, especially at an individual level.

Foreign language teaching is known as a means of expressing creativity. This supports the thought line of Ghonsooly and Shoqi (2012), who demonstrated that learning EFL to a highly proficient level significantly enhances four divergent thinking abilities of elaboration, originality, flexibility and fluency. To further support the result that creativity factors have a moderate relationship with teachers' online teaching, in a study about language learning through net-surfing, hyperlinks, and cyber links, Akinwamide and Adedara (2012) suggested that alongside independent learning, creativity plays a vital role in language learning. This is also in line with Cross (2012), who stated that creativity is an integral learning factor that facilitates students' language learning through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

The results also found that Saudi EFL students' perceptions of their teachers' creativity during the pandemic did not diverge significantly due to gender and university level. These perceptions did not also diverge significantly due to teachers' gender. Both male and female teachers of the participants of this study were moderately creative. This fact was supported by Ramos and Baldespinoza (2021), stating that anybody can be creative regardless of the different variables in life and that creativity has no gender or economic status. The result of the present study is also in line with the argument put forward by Khajavy et al. (2020), who stated that gender differences might not be prevalent in university language teaching and learning. Also, in consonance with this, Cremin and Barnes (2015) declared that creativity is not limited to people with distinct capabilities or specific arts-based activities, nor is it an undisciplined play.

On the contrary, the result of this study is not in consonance with Khodabakhshzadeh et al. (2018), who found that teachers' creativity observed among female and male EFL teaching contexts was dissimilar, and those male teachers were less creative than females. This is further supported by Arifani and Suryanti (2019), who asserted that female EFL teachers demonstrated higher learning involvement than their male counterparts. This result also negates Kimmelmeier and Walton (2016), who revealed that gender moderates significantly teachers' creativity where the male had a higher creative thinking effect in English language than females. They also stated gender differences in self-assessment of creativity in females than men because women are more in agreement to the objective level of the originality of their creative performance. However, the current study was conducted in an abnormal situation where the teaching is only delivered online due to the pandemic. All were supposed to teach remotely. Therefore, creativity might be affected by gender differences.



## Limitations and recommendations

This study provides teachers, students, and researchers with theoretical and pedagogical resources on how teachers' creativity can enhance English language proficiency through online learning. It provided a framework for students to share their perception of teachers' creativity during a crucial crisis time. The sample size was relatively small due to the limited access to participants because of the pandemic, which invariably limited the scope of analysis. However, further studies with larger sample sizes and new research designs are needed. Other research studies would be valuable to see the different results obtained using a different research design and if the results can be generalized to the general population by using a larger sample size.

The participants in this study were recruited through Google forms using a snowball method which made reaching the target participants difficult. It is therefore recommended that, since the wave of the COVID-19 is greatly reduced due to the considerable rate of vaccinated people, participants should be recruited on campus so that the sample size can closely relate to the general population, which will invariably enhance the reliability of the results and allow greater generalization of the results.

The second recommendation for future research studies is to conduct new studies with experimental or quasi-experimental research designs. This will significantly benefit the research community because these research designs could provide better insights into teachers' creative skills and how they can be improved upon, especially at a time of debilitating health challenges as recently experienced. EFL teachers' creativity is pretested before the pandemic and retested post-pandemic to give room for the pretest and post-test scores to be compared to determine when the test scores were more substantial.

Creativity is a skill that can be developed by breaking the routines and coming out of a box that eventually translates into an innovative and more effective modern solution to problems. Therefore, it is recommended that creative thinking courses and pre-service teacher education on critical thinking should be made compulsory for all teachers.

## Conclusion

Teachers' creativity is teachers' capability to continuously improve material or subject matter and create a thought-provoking atmosphere to make students always enthusiastic, interested and exhilarated in the teaching-learning process. The present research examined the extent to which teachers in the Saudi EFL context could enhance creativity in class during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of EFL students using the English Language Teaching Creativity Scale (ELT-CS). The study concluded that despite the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that shifted English language teaching from in-class to online, teachers' level of creativity was moderately enhanced. Developing creative skills became the basis for coming up with innovative approaches to continue instructional delivery. In order to achieve quality instructional delivery, EFL students'

perspectives were evaluated based on the demographics of gender and university level, as well as on the multi-dimensions of ELT-CS—Originality and Elaboration; Fluency and Flexibility; Person (Teacher); Press (Environment) and Materials; Motivation; Autonomy (Independent learning); and Brainstorming. A moderate level of creativity in all these dimensions was obtained. The study also found no significant differences between students' perceptions and their gender and university level. Their perceptions of teachers' creativity during the pandemic were not diverged significantly due to teachers' gender. Both male and female teachers provided moderate creativity.

## Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the author, without undue reservation.

## Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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## Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2022.1041446/full#supplementary-material>

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