

# Running head: CREATIVITY BASED INSTRUCTION FOR L2 SPEAKING

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## Abstract

The researcher used an experimental design to assess the effectiveness of using creativity based instruction in order to enhance young L2 learners' English speaking, for communication abilities. The researcher taught the group of students for 14 weeks total-the first 7 weeks using traditional EFL teaching methods, the final 7 weeks using creativity based instruction. The students' speaking for communication skills were assessed at the end of the first 7 weeks, twice through out the treatment period and again at the end of the 14 weeks. The creativity based instruction implemented during the treatment period included reading literature, bringing in English speaking community members, working with authentic materials and completing real world tasks. Although the study is preliminary, the results suggest that using creativity based instruction does, in fact, significantly enhance young learners' L2 speaking for communication skills.

**Keywords:** Creativity, L2 English, teaching speaking for communication

## Introduction

Year 2015 commenced the beginning of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Within AEC, 10 Asian countries are uniting in order to better serve their collected economies in hopes of economic gains (Jindathai, 2015, p. 1) - resulting in an increase of job competition as employers will have a much larger range in which to seek out employees (Wall Street English Thailand, 2014).

The AEC has specified English as the lingua franca for all meetings, business and transactions within its community (Jindathai, 2015, p. 1) and Thailand lags far behind its AEC counterparts when it comes to English abilities. The Programme for International Assessment (PISA) ranked Thailand's English competency skills as 50 out of 64 participating countries (Sedghi, Arnett & Chalabi, 2013). Similarly, the English First English Proficiency Index (2011) ranked Thailand's English competency at 42 of 44 participating countries (EF EPI, 2011, p. 5), 12 out of the 14 participating Asian countries (EF EPI, 2011, p. 14). Thailand's English skills don't measure up - if Thailand does not want to fall further behind in the new economic community, the English skills of Thai people need to improve.

Considering that ESL is a compulsory course in Thai schools, it is a wonder that Thai people's English skills are so poor (Boonkit, 2010, p. 1). Research suggests a direct link between Thai people's low English speaking skills and the method of English instruction found in Thai schools (Boonkit, 2010; Pawapatcharaudom 2007). This method of teaching English in Thailand has created students who can copy from the board, but are unable to communicate in English in an effective way; Thai students are not being given a

competitive edge against their AEC counterparts.

Seeing the importance of English in this global world and the importance of having English communication skills in order to have a voice in the AEC economy, it is time for change. This study suggests that teaching English as a second language through creativity based instruction (CreBI) should be that change. It is asserted that CreBI will greatly improve young Thai learners' English communication abilities, specifically their speaking skills.

## What is CreBI?

Creativity based instruction (CreBI) is defined as ESL instruction that moves away from the traditional classroom methods towards a method of teaching where the instructor uses creative tasks in order to create a low-stress environment that is enjoyable for the language learners. Within CreBI the teacher will teach class through creative tasks, allowing students to work with their peers, scaffold and socialize and giving opportunity for the learners to create meaning out of the language.

The ideas of CreBI greatly draw upon Vygostian theories of scaffolding and learners' inherent need of socialization as the basis of individual learning (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 33). Through CreBI students will be able to interact and socialize with one another while working on their specific classroom tasks. Vygotsky's (1978) idea of scaffolding assumes that while the students are working and learning together, the weaker students will be able to 'lean' on the stronger students and therefore build up their own abilities (pp. 33-36).

CreBI in this study will be carried out through the teacher modeling how to give 'how to' demonstrations, by bringing in English speaking members of the community, through storytelling,



YouTube videos and a lot of practice. The teacher will use the completion of tasks and projects in the classroom to provide the framework in which creativity can be incorporated and where the students will be able to socialize and scaffold one another. The tasks that the students will be carrying out will work as what Vygostky (1971) calls a ‘mediating system’ or and a “bridge for the learners to cross from language unknown into language known” (p.83). Through task/project-based learning, the ESL teacher will focus primarily on the students’ process of learning; watching as her students interact with and enjoy English. As the students begin to feel comfortable in the low stress environment that CreBI creates, their English speaking for communication skills will improve.

Finally, this study will rely heavily on Carol Read’s (2015) “Seven pillars of creativity in primary ELT” as a framework to build the CreBI around. Reed (2015) lays down the foundation of how an ELT can best incorporate creativity in his/her classroom in order to create an environment of success for the learners. She specifies seven “pillars” that the English instructor cannot ignore if a CreBI is being used. These pillars are:

- (1) Build student self-esteem
- (2) Model creativity yourself
- (3) Offer children choice
- (4) Use questions effectively
- (5) Make connections
- (6) Explore ideas
- (7) Encourage critical reflection (Reed, 2015,

pp.29-35).

As the English language teacher designs her classroom around these pillars of creativity, she is creating a comfortable environment for the

learners - giving them an opportunity to see and hear English used creatively, while thinking through decisions and exploring new ideas all in L2 English. Students will learn how to process their ideas and how to produce them in English.

The CreBI used in this study will use Read’s (2015) seven pillars to create a learning environment that fosters students’ creativity, building upon the Vygotskian (1971, 1978) theories of scaffolding, socialization and mediation tools in the English language classroom through the use of creative tasks and projects aiming to improve Thai students’ English speaking skills.

## Why Speaking for Communication Skills?

As English is used as the lingua franca, not only within AEC, but worldwide, today’s society demands a good knowledge of the English language. However, knowledge of English is no longer enough for one to achieve high levels on success, rather, one must also possess and be able to properly utilize English communication skills, specifically oral communication skills. Being able to effectively communicate in English, through speaking, opens up many avenues of success for a speaker of a different language - personally and professionally (Morozova, 2013). As Thai people’s English speaking skills lag far behind their AESAN friends, this study will look at specially improve that (speaking) communication skill (EF EPI, 2011; PISA, 2012).

It should be stated that speaking is one of the four macro skills for effective communication (along with listening, reading and writing), research suggests speaking be taught along with the other skills. This study agrees with that assertion and therefore within CreBI, students will have

opportunities to practice all four of the skills; however, this study focuses specifically on developing speaking skills. As there are many sub-skills of speaking that could be measured, this study narrows the sub-skills down and will only be measuring the students' abilities to express, direct, narrate and elicit information. CreBI will provide a plethora of activities that will allow the learners to communicate through English in authentic ways - hearing vocabulary and grammar structures spoken around them and through lots of opportunities to practice speaking (Hedge, 2000; Morozova, 2013; Thornbury, 2005).

In this globalized world, in order for Thai students to be competitive members to society, it is important for Thai learners to be confident English speakers. Moving away from the traditional English teaching methods towards more dynamic, creative teaching methods is an invaluable step towards creating effective Thai speakers of English.

## Method

### Purpose of the Study

While there is plenty of research out there proving that using the arts and creativity in corecurriculum classrooms, improves students' learning (Ruppert, 2006; Spina, 2006), very little research has been done exploring the effectiveness of using creativity in the ESL classroom. This research needs to be done to show how incorporating creativity into the ESL classroom will, not only give the learners opportunities to use and produce language in more dynamic, exciting ways, but will also improve their communication skills (Morozova, 2013; Maley and Peachy, 2014; Ruppert 2006; Trent, 2009). Incorporating CreBI into the ESL classroom will create students who are effective English

communicators and therefore giving them a chance to become active participants in the global society.

This study seeks to investigate and answer the following questions with the following objectives:

### RQ 1: To what extent does CreBI enhance students' English speaking for communication skills?

Ob 1: Design and develop creativity based instruction for a level 4 ESL classroom to promote students' English speaking for communication skills.

Ob 2: Investigate students' English speaking for communication skills done before, after and throughout the CreBI curriculum implementation process.

### RQ 2: What are students' reactions to CreBI?

Ob 1: Examine students' reactions to the CreBI curriculum.

### RQ 3: What are students' perceptions of their own English for communication skills before and after implementation?

Ob 1: Examine the students' perceptions of their own English speaking for communication abilities before and after implementation.

## Research Site and Participants

The research will take place at the School of Promise in Hang Dong, Chiang Mai, Thailand. The students at the School of Promise are grouped into English levels according to their proficiency rather than staying in their grade level, therefore many grade levels are found within one English level.

The participants of this study are the population (17 students) of the English level 4 classroom at the School of Promise in Hang Dong, Chiang Mai,



Thailand. Because of the ability-grouping practiced within the English program at this school, the students vary in age and grade level - from grade 3 (8 years old) to grade 6 (14 years old) - 10 males and 7 females.

## Instruments

**Treatment: CreBI Curriculum.** The treatment in this research is the CreBI taught in the classroom. The teacher will teach specially designed lessons implementing CreBI in the classroom. The treatment period spans over seven weeks, with the participants receiving instruction twice a week for four hours (56 hours). The activities and methods included in the curriculum incorporate the ideas of Vygotsky (1962, 1971, 1978) and Read's (2015) "Seven Pillars of Creativity", as well as the types of activities that had been mentioned before - incorporating community members, tasks, projects, technology, etc.

The curriculum focuses on the speaking functions of expressing, narrating, directing and eliciting. The students will watch YouTube videos, use the internet to find information, interview community members, express their opinions and give 'how to' demonstrations. The students will not only learn the vocabulary necessary to use these functions, but will also learn how to appropriately and effectively communicate within the functions. The functions covered throughout the treatment period are basic skills needed to be effective communicators, and the students will be working within these functions - in L2 English - for the seven weeks treatment period.

Creativity is found within the teaching methods. The students are doing a wide variety of activities and are given space to draw pictures before they are asked to actually speak in English.

The teacher will utilize Read's (2015) 7 Pillars of Creativity throughout the seven week treatment, giving the students opportunities to explore ideas, make connections and offering them choice in topics for their demonstrations.

## Data Collecting Tools:

**Pre/Post Assessments and Rubrics for English Speaking Communication.** In order to answer research question 1 (to what extent does CreBI enhance students' English speaking for communication skills?), the participants speaking skills will be assessed at the beginning of treatment and again at the end of the treatment period through the completion of a speaking task. In order to assess the students' abilities to elicit information, the students were required to ask questions at the end of their peers' demonstrations.

In order to assess the participants' English speaking for communication, a rubric were created following Hughes' (1989) framework. The rubrics will be assessing the participants' accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension within the specified function(s). The researcher, along with a colleague trained in assessing the students' speaking performances scored the students using the rubrics, the students' received the mean of the two raters scores.

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**Student Interviews.** In order to answer research question 2 (what are students' reactions and perceptions to CreBI) and research question

3 (what are students' perceptions of their own English for communication skills before and after implementation), student interviews will be held at the end of each formal assessment (four times total). The student interviews will be facilitated by the researcher with a Thai colleague present in order to allow the students to answer the questions in L1 Thai ensuring complete understanding. The interviews will be recorded, translated, transcribed and then thematically categorized in order to answer the research questions .

**Field Notes.** The researcher will begin taking field notes about the students' speaking abilities, use of L2 in the classroom, attitudes, body language, behavior and willingness to participate seven weeks before the treatment begins and the field notes were continued throughout the treatment period. Beginning the field notes before the treatment begins provides a comparison sample of the students' perceived attitudes and willingness to participate in classroom tasks before and during the treatment period. As much of this research is built upon the idea that the use of CreBI creates a more exciting, stimulating and creative classroom environment in which the students will be more engaged and therefore more willing to communicate in L2 English - the field notes will provide the most accurate idea of whether or not this was the case in the classroom. These field notes will also provide insight into how the classroom atmosphere changed from teaching in the traditional manner to the implementation of CreBI and will work to provide a source of comparison of the students' reactions to the classroom before and during the implementation of CreBI.

## Data Collection Process

In order to collect the data in this research, the researcher will begin by, taking detailed field notes about the students' body language, behavior and willingness to participate while the classroom is being taught in a traditional classroom. The process of taking field notes will be continued throughout the treatment period.

The students will be given a speaking task at the beginning of the treatment period and will be assessed using a rubric created to measure the students ability within the specified functions (expressing, narrating, directing and eliciting) and then again at the end of the course - as well as twice throughout the seven-week treatment period. The students will be assessed by the researcher and a colleague trained in assessment. The students' assessment scores from the researcher and the researcher's colleague will be averaged together to get the students' individual scores. The individual students' and the class mean assessment scores will be mapped out to show the progression of the class's English speaking for communication skills over the course of the seven weeks; the student's individual and the class mean pre-/post-treatment assessment scores were compared.

The student interviews will be conducted by the researcher and a Thai colleague, after every formal assessment. The student interviews will be recorded, translated and transcribed by the researcher .

## Data Analysis Process

This research study includes a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. To answer research question 1, the researcher



will use the data collected from the students' presentation assessments (quantitative). The students will have been assessed throughout the treatment period. Both the students' individual assessment scores and the class's mean scores percentages will be compared and the student's progress will be mapped out to demonstrate whether or not the CreBl model, did in fact enhance the students' English speaking for communication skills.

In order to answer research questions 2 and 3, the researcher will read and re-read the transcriptions of the student interviews (qualitative) in order to find themes among the students' answers. Themes found in their interviews will become topics and sub-topics in order to answer the second and third research question.

The field notes (qualitative) gathered will also transcribed, read and re-read in order to find themes. This data will shows the contrast among the students behavior and willingness to participate in classroom activities before and during the treatment period. The field notes provide information to back up the ideas found in the student interviews.

## Results

The results are presented in the following order: pre-/post-assessment results, students' reactions to CreBl and finally, students' perceptions of their own English speaking for communication skills pre-/post-treatment.

### Pre/Post-Assessment English Speaking for Communication Results

The participants average English speaking for communication (expressing, narrating, directing) scores increased in a statistically significant way over the course of the treatment period from 7.53 to 12.68 as seen in the table below. These results show that CreBl does, in fact, enhance the English speaking for communication abilities among young L2 English learners.

### Pre/Post-Assessment Eliciting (out of 15)

The participants average English speaking for communication (eliciting information) scores increased in a statistically significant way over the course of the treatment period from 6.26 to 11.74 as seen in the table below. Again, these results show that CreBl does, in fact, enhance the English speaking for communication abilities in young learners.

**Table 1: Pre/Post-Assessment Expressing, Narrating, Directing Results (out of 15):**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
pre-test	7.5294	2.69531	-9.558	0.000
post-test	12.6765	2.60373	-9.558	0.000

**Table 2: Pre/Post-Assessment Eliciting Information (out of 15)**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Eliciting Information pre-test	6.2647	4.04320	-5.572	0.000
Eliciting Information post-test	11.7353	2.21584	-5.572	0.000



**Pre/Post-Assessment Sub-Skills Results:**

The participants were also scored in five specific sub-skills of speaking: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The students’ average scores, in each of the sub-skills, increased in a statistically significant way over the course of the treatment period. The results are shown in the table below. These results, once again, illustrate how CreBI, does in fact, enhance the English speaking for communication skills of young L2 learners.

**Students’ Reactions to CreBI (Researcher Field Notes):**

The field notes show that, there was a visible change in the student engagement during the treatment period. The researcher noted that prior to the treatment period, the students’ were quiet and docile, often saying that they understood and looking as if they were following along with the instruction, but once expected to produced work it was clear that they lacked meaningful understanding. With the initiation of CreBI, the researcher notes, the classroom became a much

noisier place with the students engaging and expressing themselves vocally in ways they hadn’t before.

**Students’ Reactions to CreBI (Student Interviews):**

The participants were interviewed a total of four times over the treatment period. The interviews were held in the students’ L1 Thai, translated and transcribed into English. Through a process of thematic coding the researcher found three major themes among the students’ answers in regards to their reactions to CreBI. These themes are: “Student Preference”, “Challenging” and “Authentic Tasks”.

“**Student Preference**”. During the student interviews, when asked to reflect on CreBI and the activities that they had been doing on the class, students’ repeatedly (10/17) brought up appreciating the different input methods used by the researcher (reading a novel out loud, bringing in English speaking community members, teacher demonstrations) as well as the ample amounts of actual speaking practice allowed in the class.

**Table 3: Pre/Post-Assessment Sub-Skills Results (out of 3):**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pronunciation pre-test	1.2647	0.77293	-5.130	0.00
Pronunciation post-test	2.2352	0.56230	-5.130	0.00
Grammar pre-test	1.2647	0.77293	-5.492	0.00
Grammar post-test	2.3824	0.65023	-5.492	0.00
Vocabulary pre-test	1.2941	0.81123	-5.101	0.00
Vocabulary post-test	2.4706	0.67246	-5.101	0.00
Fluency pre-test	1.2941	0.81123	-5.307	0.00
Fluency post-test	2.3235	0.61087	-5.307	0.00
Comprehen. pre-test	1.2647	0.77293	-5.988	0.00
Comprehen. post-test	2.4706	0.64881	-5.988	0.00





Students reflected that while they didn't always understand everything that was being read aloud from the novel or being said by the community member, they enjoyed being able to hear English all the time and the exposure to the new words. Without this theory ever being explained to the learners, they innately understood that the more they listened to and practiced speaking English, the better their English would become.

**“Challenging”.** Falling directly in line with Vygotsky's (1978) theories on socialization and scaffolding, the students (8/17) repeatedly reported that they enjoyed learning in a CreBl classroom because they were not only learning from their teacher, but from one another. Students consistently made mention of activities and in-class opportunities to work with and learn from their peers. Once again, the theories of group work and socialization were never mentioned or explained to the participants, but the students see the implicit benefits.

**“Authentic Tasks”.** One of the core aspects of CreBl is bringing the outside world into the L2 classroom - using authentic materials and making meaning out of the English that is being taught. This was another favorite aspect the participants (13/17) brought up during the interviews. Students made mention of enjoying the fact that they were learning a skill (how to make a smoothie, how to create a board game, etc.) that they could actually use in the future. One student went so far as to say that he can imagine being an adult and having a career making board games because of one of the projects done in class. Another student reported liking the smoothie presentation the most because the researcher brought in the actual ingredients in the recipes they found, saying that this spoke a lot

of value to them and showed that the researcher really cared.

**Student Reactions Summary.** In summation, it is clear that the students reacted to CreBl positively. Students became excited and participatory learners. The students spoke favorably of the authentic materials and real world activities that a CreBl classroom makes use of. Students saw the value in the authentic input they received and the opportunities to practice communicating through English. CreBl not only enhances the learners' actual speaking abilities, but enhances their learning experience as a whole.

**Student Perceptions of Their Own English Speaking for Communication Abilities.** Data from the student interviews was also used to answer the final research question. Through the process of thematic coding of the student interviews the main theme found was Self-Esteem.

**“Self-Esteem”.** At the beginning of the treatment period 14 out of the 17 students made mention of their poor English speaking skills, saying things like “ my English is bad” or “I can't speak and don't know what to say”. When asked to rate their speaking skills on a scale 1-5 (one being very poor, 5 being excellent), during the first set of interviews, 14 out of the 17 participants rated their English speaking at a 3 or lower, making comments like “I am a three because I am not good at speaking, but I can understand a little bit”, however, by the final set of interviews the students perceptions changed. Among the data for the final two of interviews, students made comments about having increased confidence, that their English is better and that they are now more motivated to participate in class, many saying that they feel proud of themselves and what they have accomplished.

Furthermore, when asked to rate their English speaking abilities on the same scale, only 5 of the 17 participants scored themselves as a 3 or lower - compared to the 14 that gave themselves this score at the beginning of the treatment period. This means that 12 of the 17 students gave themselves a 4 or 5 on the scale. Five of the students believed their English speaking abilities to have increased by two points over the treatment period and eight of the students believed their English speaking abilities increased by one point; the remaining four students believed their English speaking abilities stayed the same or decreased. This is illustrated in the table below.

**Student Perception Summary.** The data collected from the student interviews show us

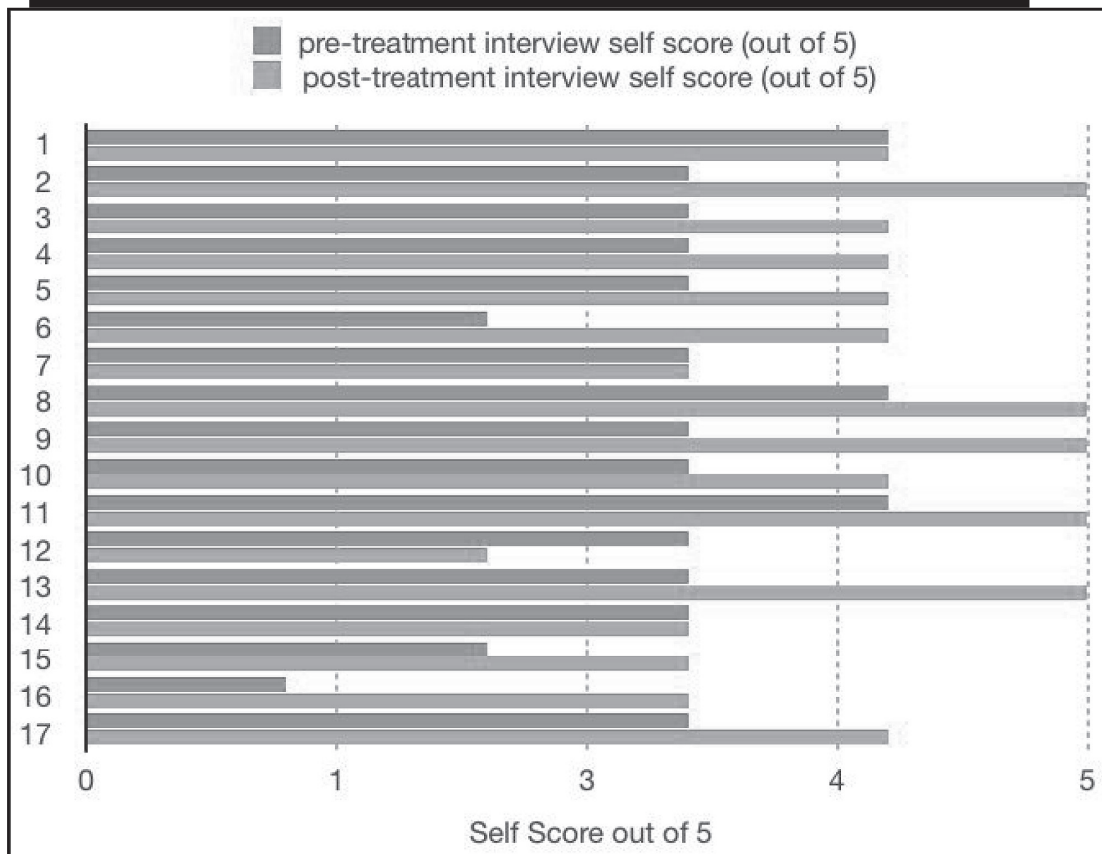
that while some of the participating students' still express feeling shy and nervous when having to produce spoken L2 English, their confidence in their abilities to speak has increased, as well as their motivation to participate and take part in speaking activities. CreBI, therefore, not only enhances young L2 learners' English speaking for communication skills, but also the students' perceptions of their abilities.

## Discussion

### Implications

The results indicated that CreBI enhances young L2 learners' English speaking for communication abilities, as well as, increases students' perceptions of their own English speaking

Table 4: Student Perceptions of Own English Speaking Pre/Post-Treatment.





abilities - creating more confident L2 English speakers. Knowing the EFL is a compulsory course in all Thai schools, starting as early as grade one (Bonkit, 2010, p.1) and that the Thai people's L2 English skills lag far behind their ASEAN counterparts (Wall Street English Thailand, 2014), something is wrong.

As traditional English teaching methods like rote-memorization and grammar drills are still the main means of English instruction in Thai schools, it is time for change - this research points to another option. While using the tried and true, traditional English teaching methods will produce quiet students that can copy and memorize words and phrases, the research done here shows that moving away from the traditional methods into CreBI will not only enhance the learning experience for the students, but also enhance the students' ability to produce spoken L2 English.

With the combination of Vygotsky's (1968, 1971, 1978) theories and Read's (2015) seven pillars of creativity, the young L2 learners are given a low-stress environment, full of interesting tasks that bring the outside world into the classroom. Through CreBI, the teacher is able to encourage the students' to participate in L2 English learning without the pressure that traditional teaching methods put on performance and perfection; emphasizing instead, creativity and exploration. As the young L2 learners experience success in the classroom, not only does their self-esteem increase, but their willingness to participate in further activities of the sort increases as well.

Taking into account young L2 learners are not exposed to the English language outside of the four walls of the classroom, it is the responsibility of the English teacher to create an environment

where learning English is not only enjoyable, but also stimulating and possible. CreBI does just this, while setting the foundation that English is fun and success is accessible.

## Limitations

The researcher acknowledges limitations in this study, one being the small amount of participants. It would be ideal to have been able to compare the results of two class populations being taught the same material with the different teaching methods. As the researcher was only working with one classroom, the treatment period had to be cut in half (from 14 weeks to 7 weeks). It would be ideal to do this study again collecting data from the participants over the course of a year rather than just one unit of study.

A second limitation to this study was that the researcher could not control all variables, such as students' receiving English tutoring outside of class or interacting with English speakers at home, and these variables could confound the effects of the study.

Finally, because the classroom used in this study was an ability-grouped classroom, combining students from ages 8 to 14 certain activities and ideas were easier/harder to grasp for students of different cognitive levels. While the students in the classroom were on an even playing field for their incoming English abilities, that even playing field did not extend to other areas - such as maturity levels, thinking abilities and motor-skills. While using CreBI in the classroom allows for a lot of flexibility and creativity on the part of the teacher, it is difficult to create projects that are assessable to all of the students, accommodating for all of their individual differences and needs.

## Recommendations

The researcher suggests a similar study be done comparing the data of two similar English classes - one taught with only traditional English teaching methods and the other taught only through CreBl and collecting data over the course of a year. Another suggestion is, instead of highlighting only English speaking for communication skills, research could be done examining the effectiveness of CreBl on the other English communication skills.

Further studies could be done in order to determine if certain characteristics of the teacher implementing CreBl, such as gender, age, ethnicity, etc., have any confounding effects on the data. Along the same line, further study could be done testing to see if a more homogenous classroom (in regard to age and maturity, rather than English ability) has any effect on the data collected.

Finally, this study focused on young learners', a follow-up study could be done to see the effects CreBl has on high-school, college-aged or adult learners.

## Conclusion

Creativity is a good thing. This study aimed to show that instead of running away from creativity, incorporating creativity into the L2 English classroom will not only spark learners' creative thinking skills and imagination, but will also create a classroom context in which speaking English is no longer as anxiety driven as it once seemed. Maley and Peachy (2015) believe that creativity holds the key that can spark student interest and create within them a desire to be engaged involved in classroom activities.

This paper attempted to prove their point. By creating a classroom environment that is exciting, low-stress and brings the outside world in, the students were able to not only enjoy their activities, but develop their L2 English speaking skills. This study examined not only the improvements in students' performance abilities, but also their reactions to the method of instruction and their perceptions of their own English abilities. The findings are promising, showing clearly that CreBl has a positive effect on the students' English speaking abilities, as well as on their self-esteem. Let us now hope for more creativity to be incorporated into the English educational system.



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