ESP CREATIVE TEACHING METHODS. CASE STUDY

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Abstract: This paper aims at identifying and selecting appropriate creative methods that can both ensure and facilitate learning while developing all four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), in addition to examples of practical use. The first section of this paper tackles several key concepts, such as "creative", "creativity", and their integration into the ESP methodology. The second section of the article concerns the practical aspect of using creative methods for ESP teaching, being focused on an experiment whose main hypothesis is that teaching English as a foreign language using creative methods can make the teaching/learning process more efficient for the learners. The experiment was conducted on two parallel groups of students, i.e. a control group exposed to the traditional teaching methods in order to develop reading, listening, speaking and writing skills, and a focus group, exposed to creative methods, activities, tools and techniques. The analysis of the results reveals the necessity of thinking outside the box for teachers facing generations of students that are no longer like the previous ones, neither in goals or knowledge, nor in interests or abilities, illustrating the advantages and benefits of integrating these interests and goals in ESP teaching and learning activities.

Keywords: ESP, creative methods, experiment, language skills

1. Introduction

Some of the issues that make the difference in an English language class, such as generating interest in the topic, making use of technology, task-based teaching, communicative, collaborative teaching and learning alongside with teaching creatively and teaching for creativity, are considered in this paper as part of the teaching-learning process. Students have always enjoyed meeting the unexpected and learning new, interesting things. It is a well-known fact that the first few seconds in a lesson are of crucial importance not only for us, as teachers who want to achieve our educational goals, but also for students, who instantly choose whether they like the teacher and the subject he/she teaches (see Brown, 2000; Brown, 2006; Harmer, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2009).

According to Alan Maley and Nik Peachey (2015: 4), "Creativity is an endangered species in the current model of education, which is increasingly subject to institutional, curricular and assessment constraints". Therefore, in a time of profound change for the school curricula, uncertain textbooks, outdated classroom scenarios and students of high technological literacy, the present paper will offer the opportunity of choosing methods and techniques that are suitable for these students and that can provide a familiar, yet engaging context of learning, in a warm atmosphere. Nonetheless, it will also give the possibility of combining traditional tools and techniques with more modern ones.

One can view creativity from different pedagogical perspectives. However, it should be approached at least as the creativity of the teacher, and the creativity of the student. Nevertheless, when mentioning the creativity of the teacher, there should be included both his/ her ability of delivering memorable lessons and the ability of determining students to come up with ideas and their own products. It is presumed that teacher's creativity can trigger creativity in the students as

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well. Therefore, every student is creative if he/she is given the opportunity, time and support to express that creativity. After that, it is their chance to advance further.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical part of this paperdeals with concepts integrating the theoretical issues and specific terminology in terms of creativity. Within the general area of methodology, people talk about approaches, methods, techniques, activities and exercises, all of which go into the practice of English teaching. Teaching English as a foreign language is not a simple job, primarily because the students are non-native speakers. It usually takes time to acquire the new vocabulary items and use them in appropriate contexts, especially with beginners, so as the final product of the activity to be achieved, in terms of acquiring good pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar rules, concepts and cultural issues (see Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Moras, 2001; Scrivener, 2011).

2.1. "Creative" and "creativity" - key concepts in ESL methodology

Talking about creativity is everywhere today, mostly because the companies and the organizations tend to be more competitive. Educational institutions moved recently towards learned-centered (Nunan, 2003; Richards and Rodgers, 2001) rather than test-driven teaching and ministries of education in different parts of the world encouraged schools to focus more on creativity. Creative teaching is said to increase the level of motivation and self-esteem in students, preparing them with the flexible skills they need for the future. Creativity is also important as it can improve academic attainment, not only in science but also in second language learning as it involves student-centered, interaction-based and open-ended elements.

As these words connect with the verb *to create*, which stems from the Latin verb *creare*, with "*creat*-" meaning "*produced*", when searching for definitions or explanations, the dictionaries offer the following: "to make something new or invent something" (*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*), "1. Bring (something) into existence. 1.1. Cause (something) to happen as a result of one's actions" (*English Oxford Living Dictionaries*), or "1. to make something exist that did not exist before. 2. to invent or design something" (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English;* see also Richards et al., 1992).

However, in methodology, the meanings of the term "*creative"* go far beyond these somewhat simple definitions of the root word. For instance, when taking into consideration creative individuals, people tend to identify famous and eminent personalities in arts or sciences, with clever minds and who accomplished important things in their lives. According to Woodward (2015), this way of seeing things has disadvantages, as it tends to ignore the everyday creativity within our students and people around us. There can be creative teachers, creative techniques, creative exercises, creative students, all of them with a different degree and with different meanings. As Downing stated (1997: 9), "whether there are natural gifts, effort, knowledge and skill, attitudes, favorable settings, each of them can be the asset of a creative person".

As about creativity, it triggered an endless debate around such terms as "creativity", "creative learning" and "creative education". In this regard, the definition offered in 1999 by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education in the UK sums it all: "imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value" (Lai and Law, 2007: 368). This imaginative activity implies the process of generating something original, playing with ideas, trying out possibilities, providing alternatives to expected conventional or routine elements or situations. Creativity occurs when unusual connections are made, when analogies or relations are noticed between ideas and objects that are previously

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unrelated. Creativity implies a very complex process, as it results from the mixture of several abilities, motivations, habits and circumstances. Furthermore, from Downing's perspective (1997: 4), it is divided into artistic creativity (which is the most famous), inventive creativity, theatrical creativity, constructive creativity and interpersonal creativity; all these are necessary items in the process of teaching/learning a foreign language.

The dynamic process of creativity involves the idea of deliberate action and purpose and it always involves individuals and their relative originality. Thus, for instance, a person's work can be original in relation to his/her own previous activities/work and results; moreover, his/her work can be original in relation to his/her peer group. However, originality is not enough, as creativity should also play an evaluative role; moreover, the criteria of value differs in terms of the activity field (i.e. the result of the original item may be effective, useful, enjoyable, satisfying or valid for the respective community).

2.2. Creativity in teaching English language

In the context of a globalized world, dominated by the spread of technology and multilingualism, where specialized languages flourish at an extremely fast pace (Nadrag, 2012; Dan Nadrag, 2015), creativity becomes a necessary instrument in the ESP classroom. When it comes to ESP, language learners cannot be taught creativity in the same way as they are taught the times tables, for example. Creative processes are based on knowledge and practical skills and there are two ways of triggering them: teaching creatively and teaching for creativity (see Jeffrey and Craft, 2004). Teaching creatively implies the use of imaginative approaches, in order to make the learning and teaching process more interesting and exciting, to increase its effectiveness. For this purpose, the ESP teacher should also be endowed with a high creativity level in designing and developing different materials and activities that grasp the students' attention and enhance their learning motivation.

On the other hand, teaching forcreativity in the teaching process is aimed at developing the students' creative thinking or patterns of behavior. Furthermore, it also involves the process of teaching creatively as the learners' creative skills have more development opportunities when the teacher uses his/her own creative skills in a proper manner. When teaching for creativity, usually teachers carry out experimental activities, encourage appropriate attitudes, assist the students' understanding and develop their awareness, encourage them to express their opinions towards a given task, stimulate free play, emphasize and provide more opportunities for the students in order to use and capitalize their imagination, originality, inquisitiveness and inquiringness (Barlex, 2007). Moreover, teamwork, teambuilding activities and pair work should be encouraged, in order to encourage communication, student interactions and exchange of beliefs and experience, and to develop their speaking skills (see Maruntelu and Dumitrascu, 2005; Maruntelu 2006; Zamfir, 2012).

Creativity is directly connected to the idea of triggering or developing original ideas, performing transformations or modifications in the condition or use/ employment of an item in a new way. From this perspective, a creative course or seminar should include at least one or even more of the following features: spontaneity, music, color, variety, fun, humor, movement, personal meaning, security, unpredictability, balance between relaxation and tension (Woodward 2015: 150). Moreover, such a course or seminar should also involve some actions that are connected directly to everyday life activities and that imply creativity; according to Sanders (2012), such actions are suggested by verbs like "do", "make", "adapt" and "create".

Another very important role in this regard is played by creative intelligence, as it seems to be a factor that facilitates language learning, helping students to deal with new and unpredictable

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experience or elements. Teaching ESP creatively also involves the application of communicative teaching methods, as they emphasize functional and situational language use and involve activities that require students to make extensive use of their imagination and to think creatively; such activities are represented by role play or simulations (see Richards 2013; Richards, 1990; O'Keefe et al., 2007; Thornbury and Slade, 2006).

Usually, teachers find creative solutions when they hold courses or seminars, depending on how they perceive creativity, i.e. as a quality of the people, as a process of what is done or as a product. For instance, if the teacher perceives the term "creativity" as a product, s/he focuses on his/her course/seminar, on a specific task or activity or on a piece of writing. In this respect, the teachers' main competence should be represented by the ability to analyze and assess different situations and to identify innovative ways of responding to them. In other words, in order to enhance the students' creativity, teachers should also be creative. For this purpose, teachers should possess some qualities. For instance, they should be knowledgeable (having a solid knowledge of English and of English teaching and learning), confident, committed to helping learners succeed, non-conformist (seeking original ways of creating and holding courses/seminars that reflect their teaching style and adapting them in order to meet the students' needs) (see Richards and Lockhart, 1994), risk-takers (willing to experiment, innovate). Moreover, they should be familiar with a wide variety of strategies and techniques, carry out student-centered lessons, be reflective (review their practice, identify ideas and strategies that best suit the students' needs), use eclectic methods based on a variety of resources and activities, a combination of styles, according to the students' needs. In addition, such teachers should capitalize the creative dimensions of activities (such as challenges, interesting contents, personal elements, individual choices), teach flexibly (be able to switch between teaching styles, change the pace, improvise), look for new ways of doing things, customize their lessons (in order to meet the students' interests and needs), use technology, look for creative ways in order to motivate students, challenge them, engage their curiosity, encourage thorough learning and accentuate their creativity. Therefore, creative teaching is underlain by adaptation and innovation, collaboration between teachers and students, sharing ideas and experience, with the purpose of enhancing both their own creativity and the creative potential of their students.

3. Case Study

3.1. Research design: methodology, hypothesis and objectives

This section of the paper concerns the practical aspect of using creative methods in ESP teaching. For maximum efficiency in the ESP classroom, the lessons should be "catchy", i.e. they should keep students involved from the very first moment until the end of the course/seminar. For this purpose, a teacher has to choose wisely not only the most appropriate course books, materials or types of exercises, but also the best methods and techniques involved in delivering the information that meet the students' needs and interests.

The main hypothesis of this paper is as follows: teaching English as a foreign language using creative methods can make the teaching/learning process more efficient for students. The main objectives of the research were to improve the students' reading, listening, writing and speaking skills by means of modern activities; to design new activities in order to enhance students' creativity; to underline the value of modern techniques and tools in nowadays teaching system; to emphasize teachers' responsibility in raising awareness of the students towards studying English.

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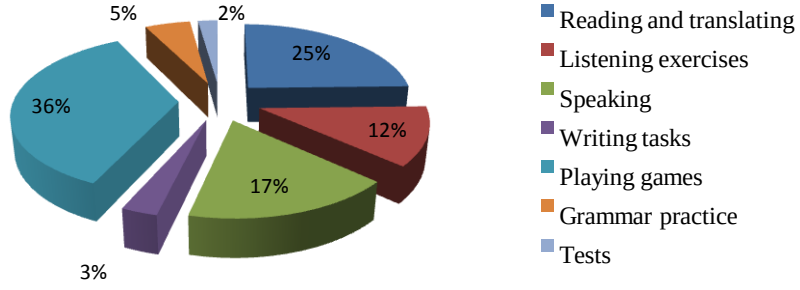
The research methods used in order to meet these objectives and to test the research hypothesis were the experiment, the observation and the survey. Thus, I conducted an experiment on two parallel student groups, having one group exposed to the traditional teaching methods in order to develop reading, listening, speaking and writing skills, whereas the other group of students was taught by means of creative methods, activities, tools and techniques. Both groups consisted of 28 students majoring in Oil Processing and Petro-chemistry, the first year of study (the first semester of the academic year 2016-2017). Both groups answered a questionnaire before the experiment (for the teacher to assess the students' ESP skills and interests); they took a final test at the end of the experiment, in order for them to compare the results and to assess the effectiveness of creative teaching.

The experiment started from the attempt of making my ESP seminars more up-dated, interesting and more appealing to the students. The challenges I faced concerned the way of motivating my students in class and outside classes, the ways of improving my own teaching, modalities of keeping students actively involved during the English language classes. The study was conducted over a period of one month (November 2016).

3.2. Experiment design and results

Before starting the experiment, I submitted an open-answer questionnaire to my students in both control and focus groups, enquiring them about different aspects regarding the English language lessons that they may consider: what particular aspects they like or dislike in ESP classes, what difficulties they have encountered in learning English, which activities they like or dislike most, what other ESP learning sources they use (if any), what are their sources for picking up words that are not in the English language lessons/ books. The results of the questionnaire, which are illustrated in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4, offered me as a teacher a database that I could explore in order to overcome the students' learning difficulties.

Figure 1. Preferred activities in ESP classes

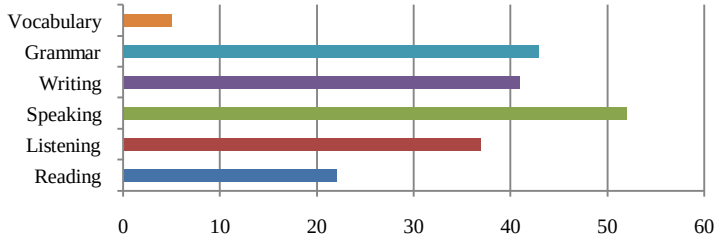


Source: Author's own processing

Figure 1 reveals that playing games is the students' most preferred activity (36%), followed by reading and translating (25%), speaking (17%) and solving listening exercises (12%). Other activities, such as grammar practice, performing writing tasks and tests are least preferred by students, revealing the fact that they do not pay too much attention to grammar, testing and writing skills.

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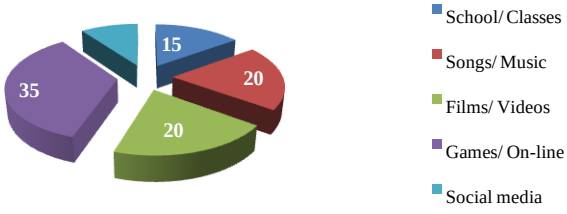
Figure 2. Difficulties in ESP learning



Source: Author's own processing

Figure 2 shows that students face difficulties when they perform speaking, grammar and writing activities. Listening, reading and vocabulary exercises do not pose great problems to them. Therefore, in order to meet my students' needs and to help them overcome their difficulties, the ESP seminars should focus more on speaking, grammar and writing activities.

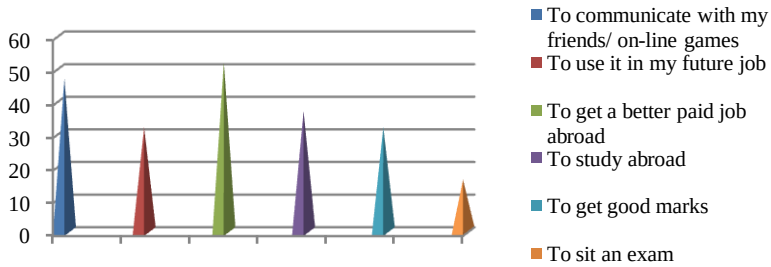
Figure 3. Sources of acquiring English



Source: Author's own processing

Figure 3 reveals the students' sources of acquiring English and also provides a hint to their areas of interest. Thus, games and the Internet (35%), films and videos (20%) and songs/ music (20%) represent their main sources; a less important role is played in this regard by school/ classes (15%) and social media (10%). The answers to this question provided me with valuable information, as these should also represent a source for my future seminar materials, in order to raise the students' interest.

Figure 4. Reasons for students' ESP learning



Source: Author's own processing

Figure 4 provides information about the students' reasons for ESP learning. These answers should be taken into consideration when drafting the objectives of my ESP seminars, in order to meet the students' needs and interests: the most important reason is represented by the desire to get a better-paid job abroad, followed by the desire to communicate with friends or to play on-line games. The desire to study abroad ranks third, followed by the reasons "to use it in my

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future job" and "to get good marks", the last place being held by "to sit an exam". These answers reveal that students value the importance of communication skills and they learn English in order to get better jobs.

During the study, for the control group students, the traditional teaching involved typical inductive teaching, with presentation of the seminar, exercises relying strictly on the seminar workbook and other handouts, mostly based on the grammar-translation method and the audio-lingual approach. For the experimental group, different modern techniques were used in order to stimulate the students' active involvement in the learning process, apart from the use of the course book and the handouts, based on creativity.

The examples presented below were used with the experimental group for "Unit 3 – In the Chemical Lab", which was centered around the performance of chemical experiments in the laboratory, using different specialized instruments and glassware items, both in modern times and in the Middle Ages (with a focus on alchemy). In terms of grammar, this unit also dealt with present and past tenses, while in the communicational area, it introduced asking and offering opinions, giving instructions and descriptions.

One of the activities used for improving speaking skills was the *Investigative Journalist* (see Monaco, "7 Superb Speaking Activities That'll Get Your ESL Students Chatting", on *FluentU English Educator Blog*) with a variety of scenarios (performing chemical experiments in a modern laboratory vs. performing alchemy experiments in the Middle Ages) according to specific grammar, in this case for practicing present and past tenses. The *Investigative Journalist* asked students to interview one another in pairs and present their experiments and findings. Students were given genuine news reports, one of them in the pair asking questions in order to identify data for a report and the other student answering accordingly.

Another speaking activity required the assignment of the same dialogue to several students in the class, e.g. asking for information, call centre activity, etc. Each time, the student who acted the customer had to act according to the individual instructions on the post-it they received. For instance, one should act the dialogue as a shy person, another one as a person rushing to a toilet, a third one as an angry and impatient customer, a fourth one as a babbling one. In this way, genuine dialogues were presented, each role-player adding authenticity to his/ her speaking.

A modern speaking activity that involved no preparation at all was a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) (see McLean, 2016; Raths, 2012; Stavert, 2013) activity where students had to use their own phones or tablets. They were asked to choose one photo on their device which meant a lot for him/ her and to answer the questions using short answers only. The photo needed to be a real one, not something they had saved in their phones previously from the internet. Students asked questions about the photo, in order to guess what/ who was in the photo and to identify how it represented the student who had taken it. At the end of the activity, the questioned student revealed his/ her photo and the rest of the students got instant feedback with their guesses.

Another BYOD activity was used for developing writing skills, addressing both technology and language fluency, by using social media for good purposes, in groups, through brainstorming. For example, students were asked to identify as many ways of using a plastic bottle as possible. The task was posted on the group wall one day before the class, so at the beginning of the class there was a data bank with answers to the task that was ready to be used.

In order to enhance written creativity in my students, I initiated a writing activity through reverse reading. The activity helped my students to focus on the storyline first, then on the language to be used, and in the end to write a story. I announced my students that I had a text for them to read that I had unfortunately forgotten at home, but that I still remembered the

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comprehension questions at the end of the text. I wrote them on the board and the students copied them in their notebooks. Then, in groups of 4, they had to answer those questions using just their imagination about the topic and structure of the text. They invented the answers and connected them in the form of a note. At this point, I asked the groups to pass the papers on which they wrote the note to the other group (the 1st group would pass it to the 3rd, the 2nd to the 4th, etc.), until each group who elaborated one note received a total different one. The final part of the task was to write a story following the lines in the received note, and totally ignoring the one they had created.

As for practicing receptive skills with the focus group, I used apart from the material provided by the course book some other types of activities, one of which being to fill in the blanks in a song, *All About That Base (No Acid)*, which provided a sum of follow-up activities.

For improving vocabulary along with writing skills, I used *Sound-Off activity* for which I selected a video extract with characters and dramatic events, e.g. *The Call* (which is an award winning short film on *Youtube*) and I showed the students the video with the sound off. The students had to describe in groups what they thought it had happened in the film, so there were 4 or 5 descriptions/opinions. Then, the video was played again, but stopped this time after each dialogue exchange, so as the students could write a script based on the visual clues. The students dubbed the video as it was played again. At the end of the activity, the video was played with sound on and the ideas were compared with the original.

Revision and reinforcement of new or challenging vocabulary was done with *Word Wheel* activity, which was played usually in the last class of the month, and occasionally applying *Word Wizard* when each student had the responsibility not only for learning a new expression/word, but also for peer-teaching it. This last activity proved very stimulating as there were students who made their presentations quite memorable. For reading activities, I used the flipped-classroom technique, especially when the texts were too large to be covered in the class. As a routine, during the next class, I used *Creative testing* (see Fulcher and Davidson, 2007) where students achieved points that at the end of the semester would turn into an average mark. That is why they were motivated to really read the text. The advantage was that no time was wasted in class, every student could read at his/ her own pace and time, depending on the previous knowledge and acquiring new vocabulary.

In my efforts to update and develop myself as a teacher, I came to the conclusion that the results of the experiment were positive and thus encouraging in applying methods that can enhance autonomy, creativity and spontaneity in students. The assessment was performed through direct observation and through summative tests at the end of the experiment. With the control group, the amount of time spent with searching words in the dictionaries was larger and less efficient, as not all the words introduced during the lessons were active or at least familiar to the students. While reading, the comprehension was lower and the students were not willing to participate in solving the tasks, and the long time dedicated to reading aloud made them lose interest and wait for other students to give the answer. Listening proved difficult to follow, even if the extract was played three times, while productive skills ranked A2-B1 mostly, with a few students scoring B2.

With the focus group though, the wide variety of engaging activities and the lack of any pressure from the teacher led to rewarding results. Because of the entertaining activities, students in this group managed to express easily, in spoken and written language, trying to paraphrase whenever they did not know the exact word or expression. Moreover, they did not feel restricted in any way because their self-esteem increased. The most successful activities were those

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demanding the use of technology as a resource or tool, as the students belong to Generation C – where C stands for connected, as they are digital natives. An overall view of the experiment that I have carried out shows without doubt that the students from the experimental group were considerably motivated by the student-friendly approach, the captivating extra materials and the modern techniques used in the seminar.

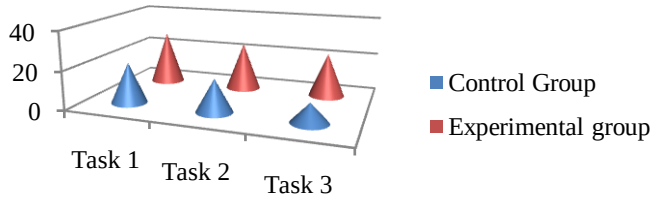
Figure 5. The students' overall score in the final test



Source: Author's own processing

The final assessment supported what direct observation had identified: the experimental group scored higher than the control group in all parts of the test (the test consisted of three exercises; each exercise had 30 points and 10 granted points were also added). The first exercise was a multiple-choice exercise, the second one was an open cloze exercise and the last one was a written essay. The results are illustrated further on, with striking differences in the written production.

Figure 6. The students' results per task



Source: Author's own processing

Teaching the target language in a creative way developed and promoted creativity and positive thinking in students. The study revealed that for this generation of students, the traditional methods are not the best choice. The alternative ones interest and consequently motivate them, drawing the students' attention to knowledge and relating them to their experience.

4. Conclusion

Creativity represents a fundamental means of survival for humanity, as well as a provider of excitement and joy. Therefore, education should cultivate the creativity lying within students. Teaching ESP creatively, through a wide range of techniques and modern tools stimulates creativity in students, not only for the main purpose of developing their language skills but also preparing them for their professional and personal lives.

Making courses and seminars creative requires the teacher's effort (especially when s/he does not know the students, for instance when teaching students in the first year) to search for the suitable material or techniques, to keep the pace with the novelties in the area, to choose the right approach from all that is offered nowadays. However, the outcome of all these efforts is always a positive one, represented by students who overcome their fear towards tests, students who learn and improve their language skills, students who are eager to attend English classes and students

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who even decide to become English teachers only because they liked the English language courses they attended.

This study was aimed at emphasizing the need for bringing creativity in the ESP courses and seminars, in order to improve the students' skills. The experiment revealed that by teaching ESP creatively, the students can become capable English users, as their ESP skills are visibly enhanced. Moreover, the creative tasks and activities raised their interest, transforming them into information seekers and sharers, active participants, problem solvers and decision-makers regarding the learning process. Creative teaching and teaching for creativity are beneficial because students are provided with more opportunities for exploring important pieces of information and sharing them to a greater extent.

Creative teaching also provided solutions to the challenges raised by the cultural and socio-economic diversity of students, their various ESP levels, skills, background, age, interests and learning styles (not to mention their extremely different personalities), for the purpose of teaching effectively. Thus, creativity, creative teaching and teaching for creativity have improved my teaching style, which was also reflected in the students' final test results and attitudes (they engaged more in the learning process because it is natural to become involved in something new and enjoyable that also meets one's needs and interests). Faulty situations will always exist, but it is up to the teacher and to his/ her potential in these cases to make the course or the seminar information attractive and to present it in an entertaining way. This is the exact creativity needed in class. The creative methods of ESP teaching are undoubtedly propulsive for developing the twenty-first century skills, such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.

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