

“Verbal Creativity JOB LAB English Training Course Using Task-Based Language Teaching for Undergraduates.”

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Abstract

The study aimed to develop creative verbal skills for students of a master's degree program in our university Zilina in Slovakia, focused on teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) through investigating task-based teaching (TBLT) approach. The student-centered approach and the need to think out of the box have increased in foreign languages learning in our digital age. The research instruments included students' pre-test and post-test and a questionnaire. Participants were the students of bachelor's degree of Economics, approximately the same level of English, who took part in the research in an experimental group with a task-based class approach (N=25) and a control group with a traditional class approach (N=25). Before and after the intervention, the pre-post students' tests were conducted. The questionnaires (5 Linkert scale, open questions) were used to measure the differences in results in connection with the experiment. The test tasks assessed the creativity in terms of fluency, flexibility, and originality in a topic-based Job Lab course based on creative thinking and sensitivity, elaboration, and redefinition as side-line factors. Research instruments were questionnaires, experiments, A set of methods were used in the paper: theoretical analysis, methods of mathematical statistics (mean, standard deviation). In research, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. Quantitative data were analysed statistically using SPSS software. The positive results show that the task-based language teaching with teachers supports via step-by-step activities concentrating on transforming tasks from convergent to divergent ones increased boosting the student's innovative approach and proved out as effective, engaging considerable growth in the foreign language teaching both practical knowledge of the target language and the development of the student's verbal creativity, fluency, and cognitive skills.

Keywords: creativity, convergent vs divergent thinking, CATs' elements, verbal creativity, task-based language teaching (TBLT).

1 Introduction

In our high-tech society, under the rapid influence of the word Covid pandemic, the growing demand for creativity, flexibility and advanced communication skills raised and a need for more efficient practices in English language teaching (ELT) to promote learners' L2 development in the English language teaching. Innovative learning/teaching practices in terms of generating unconventional or novel ideas creating a context for an interactive educational environment focused on fresh and original verbal performance. Spontaneous communicative creativity in performance is vital to target language development. It allows students to explore conscious cognitive learning more deeply using task-based teaching/learning by combining, changing existing ideas. This study goal is to explore the effectiveness of task-based learning teaching (TBLT) focused on improving creative verbal skills in an academic setting in the Job Lab English training course.

1.1 Creativity

According to Runco, in our digital era, *“creativity is more important now than ever before and is a useful and effective response to evolutionary changes since it allows the individual to respond to the continuously changing conditions around us flexibly”*. (Runco, 2004, p. 658).

The term creativity comes from the Latin word “creatio”, meaning the ability to create, find new solutions to problems. Creativity began to be addressed by the professional public at the investigation of Guilford, highlighting creativity as the production of new and valuable ideas (Guilford, 1968); McKinnon, Torrance, Schoppe, Benedek, Runco, Zelina, Kim, Gardner, Csikszentmihaly, Slovak authors Zelina and Zelinová.

1.2 Teaching for creativity

Teaching for creativity is described it due to training. Sternberg described *“creativity as a habit”*, and like any habit, creativity can be encouraged or discouraged and there are three factors enhancing creativity: opportunities, encouragement, and rewards. (Sternberg, 2006).

Boden creativity is the *“ability to come up with new ideas that are surprising yet intelligible, and valuable in some way”* (Boden 2001, p. 95) that needs proper training, different types of creative thinking. According to Tran et al., teaching for creativity is *“a process of equipping students with a knowledge of a particular discipline and related areas, knowledge about creativity and using creative methods and tools to explore; and the design of creative classroom environments in which students can express their creativity freely”* (Tran et al., 2017, p. 11).

1.3 Convergent vs Divergent thinking

According to Guilford convergent thinking is the process of finding a single best solution to a problem to solve. In contrast, divergent thinking is a thought, process or method used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions (cognitive convergent thinking), which follows a particular set of logical steps to arrive at one solution. By contrast, divergent thinking typically occurs in a spontaneous, free-flowing, 'non-linear' manner, such that many ideas are generated in an emergent cognitive fashion. Thus, divergent tasks can develop divergent creative thinking, typified by sensitivity to problems, fluency and flexibility of thinking, originality, ability to investigate, synthesize and redefine things (Guilford, 1968).

1.4 The CATs' elements in divergent thinking

Kim categorized the Cats' framework illustrated several steps to achieve creativity. The 1st step is “Cultivate creative Climates”, 2nd step is “Nurture creative Attitudes”, 3rd step is “Apply creative thinking” via divergent skills. Kim identified creative attitudes and described them as the principal four “S” attitudes

1. Sun attitude presents optimistic, big-picture thinking, curious, spontaneous attitudes.
2. Storm attitudes describe independent, self-disciplined, self-efficacious, resilient, risk-taking, persistent, and uncertainty-accepting approach.
3. Soil attitudes present open-minded, mentored, complexity-seeking attitudes.
4. Space attitudes present the emotional, compassionate, self-reflective, autonomous approaches (Kim, 2016).

1.5 Verbal creativity

Communication includes verbal and non-verbal parts. Ellis states that verbal communication is the “*key to creating new language expressions and for building learners’ own internal language or I language, the use of language in real communication. Students, therefore, use language as a tool for further language learning and to communicate with other students and their teacher.*” (Ellis 2003, p.176). People do not perceive speech in an isolated form; speech is always connected with the context, which we consider the essential criteria of verbal creativity. According to Kusa, the terms of the so-called “*Little c*” denote “*small*” creativity and “*big C*” to denote “*great*” creativity (Kusá, 2006, p.10). In this context, Carter mentions the term “*H-creativity*”, which means historically significant verbal creativity, and the term “*P-creativity*” with verbal new and valuable for the creator himself. (Carter, 2004, p. 67).

1.5.1 Developing verbal creativity – aspects and components of divergent thinking

Creativity comprises several different aspects: (a) abilities, (b) knowledge, (c) styles of thinking, (d) personality attributes, (e) motivation, and especially intrinsic motivation, and (f) environment. (Sternberg, 2012). Divergent thinking is a valuable concept for identifying, supporting, and measuring creativity. Sternberg set the four major components of divergent thinking are fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration regarding the operational concept.

1. Fluency is the ability to rapidly produce many ideas or solutions to a problem
2. Flexibility is the capacity to consider a variety of approaches simultaneously
3. Originality is the tendency to produce ideas different from those of most other people
4. Elaboration is the ability to think through the details of an idea (Sternberg, 2005).

These four components are involved in Aptitudes Research Project (ARP); the Abbreviated Torrance Test for Adults ATTA (Goff & Torrance, 2002) that generates scores for fluency (number of ideas), flexibility (variety of ideas) and originality (the novelty of idea).

2 TBLT framework and stages

Ellis believed that task-based language learning (TBLT) is “*teaching/learning a language by using language to complete open-ended tasks*”. (Ellis, 2008, p. 89) and he claimed that TBLT follows learner-centred educational philosophy, encourages the learners to experiment with language and explore more possibilities, so it is an efficient way for speaking development.

Hyde describes three parts of TBLT. It consists of the pre-task, task cycle and post-task stages.

1. Pre-task or introduction of task and topic (preparation for the task) teacher is a supportive provider and meets the need in setting an authentic task is “*one which involves the learners in communicating to achieve an outcome, rather than to practice the language*” (Tomlinson 2012, p. 162). According to Ellis, this phase includes modelling, playing a recording of people doing the task that students could not accomplish alone and provide a precise model of performance and using subtasks via layering (Ellis 2003).
2. Task-cycle involved task, planning and report (groups or pairs present to the class) and language focus involved analyses of language features and practice (Hyde, 2013). According to Ellis, “*there are three components of a task cycle: the task (activity), planning (where learners plan their reports efficiently and maximize their learning opportunities) and report. The learners complete the task in pairs or small groups while the teacher frequently observes them*” (Ellis, 2003, p. 263).
3. The Post-Task Stage - students do a speaking performance with the audience. Students have another chance to interact in the target language, and they train activities such as consciousness-raising activities, the practice of sentences, phrases, and patterns. They participate in the correction of both content and language. The teacher provides feedback about the learners’ language accuracy/fluency with formative & summative assessment. The last stage set a learning culture in the TBLT classroom, which is less teacher-dominated, mechanical but embracing spontaneity. (Hyde, 2013).

2.1 Implementing TBLT framework in Job Lab verbal creativity-based course

Job Lab training implemented flexible instructional classroom scenarios need to be “brought to life” by adapting them to the specific contexts. The divergent task in TBLT stimulates different interactional patterns in oral speaking. Proper lesson planning and improvisation are equally central to instruction, using supportive teaching strategies and techniques, including the divergent ways of use textbooks, interactive materials. Job LAB training uses a situated dialogical framework consisting of an opening sequence (a scripted opening part or lead-in intended to break the ice), an unscripted middle part with communicative cues (incentives that leave enough space for a wide range of spontaneous ideas, interpretations, based on prior knowledge) and a communicative ‘emergency exit’ sequence (in contrast to the traditional role the improvised dialogue can be ended once the participants reached the top creative level).

2.2 Job Lab verbal creativity performance training and testing

The main performance components of verbal creativity testing were fluency, flexibility, and originality in the next five subtasks defining cognitive processes as the main cognitive factors to define and assess creativity based on Torrance Thinking Creative Test adjustments.

Table 1: The verbal creativity assessment of testing tasks

No	Sub-testing	Creativity factor	Task	Score
1	Word formation (5 'activity)	Verbal fluency divergent production of symbolic units/given letter (P, B, M)	Topic: Marketing Instruction: Write as many words as	1 point/ correct word
2	Speed of creating association (5 'activity)	Association fluency divergent production of semantic relations (compounds)	Topic: Branding Instruction: Write as many compounds as possible	1 point/ correct formed structure
3	Originality of creating expressions (5 'activity)	Expressive fluency Divergent production of semantic systems (W+I+M+S)	Topic: Creative writing Instruction: Write as many sentences as possible - connection to	2 points/meaningfully formed sentence
4	Testing new ways how to use things (5 'activity)	Spontaneous flexibility divergent production of semantic classes (describing the creative use of the subject)	Topic: Smart devices Instruction: Write as many words as possible,	"Shift-score"(number of moves)/3 points
5	Subtitles for texts (5 'activity)	Originality/Creativity Divergent production of semantic units/transformations/ information	Topic: High Heading Instruction: Write the most creative and catchy caption possible for the text	5 points for "High-caption" 2 points for "Law-title"

Source: (author)

The divergent tasks in verbal creativity are adjusted to fulfil the pragmatic competence that can reveals the gaps between the realities of spoken interaction and its representation in dialogues in coursebooks in terms of practicing word fluency (writing words containing a given letter), ideational fluency (naming things that belong to a given class), associational fluency (writing synonyms for a specified word), expressional fluency (writing 4-word sentences-each word begins with a specified letter) and alternate uses (listing as many uses as possible).

Job Lab course presents a small selection of task-driven, learner-centered, and topic-based communicative activities designed to engage foreign language learners in increasingly self-regulated oral interaction in the target English language. Using TBLT in Job Lab avoids reducing education to competency-based instruction and the demonstration of knowledge and skills in centralized performance output. The need to set an authentic task is “*one which involves the learners in communicating actively, creatively and autonomously to achieve an outcome, rather than to practice the language*” (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 162).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of the work are to study the effects of using TBLT (task-based language teaching) and traditional teaching approach in Job Lab English topic-based, student-centered verbal creativity focused speaking training course for undergraduates. The results based on pre-post experiment creativity tests and Students' self-assessment questionnaires were analysed and compared.

3.2 Participants

The participants in the experiment (Job Lab course) were 50 undergraduates from two classes of Economics of study at the University Zilina, Slovakia (N=50) taught by the researcher. The experiment was focused on university master's degree students. The t-test was used in the pre-experimental phase to compare the English language level grades and the academic achievement of students studying both classrooms to have the same level classes. Students were distributed randomly into two groups with approximately the same level of English. The first one was the control group (N=25) taught traditionally method of classroom and the second group was experimental (N=25) taught through a TBLT classroom learning/teaching approach with the same content for both groups.

3.3 Research Design and Instruments

The research tools used for collecting data were testing results of verbal creativity students' pre/post tests and Students' self-assessment questionnaires conducted before/after the experiment. The pre-intervention phase's first "need analysis" questionnaire was set to create the appropriate Job lab course content. The second Students' self-assessment questionnaire was conducted before/after the Job Lab creativity skills-focused course in the experimental phase and the last post-experimental phase. Data analyses involved analysing, summarising, and making conclusions. Before the experiment, an experimental study with one group pre-test and post-test was conducted. It involved divergent tasks testing verbal, association and expressive fluency, spontaneous flexibility, and originality. The instruments used included a writing pre-test - post-test set as 5 Likert opinion questionnaire, five open-ended questions and the lesson plans for ten weeks. The validity was ensured by the lessons and the course textbook-Benchmark Intermediate, and all research tools were checked for content validity by a native speaker and ELT experts.

3.4 Job Lab verbal creativity English training course (experiment)

Job Lab course was based on Ellis's task-based teaching theory (Ellis, 2003) to explore creativity course design for students. The experiment was involved in a 10-week English Job Lab course, creativity enhancing divergent training composed of various topic-based tasks. Firstly, focused on task-based accuracy, later open divergent, holistic approach to foster innovative approach while rehearsing professional terms and structures. As Cohen recommends before the training, a pilot study was set to discover any problems with ease/difficulty, ambiguities and generating topic-based categories in advance (Cohen et al., 2007). All students, both experimental & controlled groups, used both English textbooks (Benchmark,

English for Business studies) and a variety of additional topic-based materials (videos, quizzes). Creativity based divergent tasks were used via TBLT in comparison with traditional teaching approach, later analysing the pre/post interventions tests and students' self-assessment questionnaires were conducted. The research was based on studies and tasks adopted from well-known creativity tests such as the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Torrance, 1966) and Schoppe's (1975). A prototype of this training has already proven to be effective in previous research (Benedek et al., 2006; Fink et al., 2006).

3.5 Data Collection

Before the study started, all research instruments were developed, validated, piloted, and revised. Needs Analysis Questionnaire was conducted to examine the needs of students, the preferences, which were used to design classroom tasks. In the first and last week, the researcher administered the same experimental and control groups pre/post-tests and the experimental and control groups questionnaire. Having gathered all research instruments, the researcher analysed and interpreted data from the pretests, post-tests, and questionnaire responses.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analyses consisted of a comparison of experimental and traditional group students' results of pre/post-experiment tasks testing five creativity factors in terms of verbal, association and expressive fluency, spontaneous flexibility, and originality (Fig. 2: The assessment of tasks in the tests) and Students' self-assessment questionnaire ten items using ten items of 5-Likert scale questionnaires and five open-ended questions. The questionnaires were verified in a pilot group (Cronbach's alpha coefficient $\alpha = 0.81$). Data were analysed statistically using the SPSS software. The means achieved by both the control and experimental groups in each of the studied variables are shown. Basic statistics such as average, mean and standard deviation were used. The statistical treatment was deployed, taking a $p < 0.05$ as a statistically significant difference. The answers from students were submitted together with the qualitative findings to support the quantitative findings and content-analysis and frequency-count were used to study the student open-ended opinions, suggestions, and solutions to TBLT English learning.

3.7 Results

In terms of pre-test and post-test comparison achievement, students statistically improved their learning and mastering of the subject in a post-test. The results of the experiment show that the system of exercises developed for boosting the student's creativity proved out effective, and the selected indicators showing the creative activity of students reflect considerable growth. The practical significance of this research involves developing effective methods of teaching/learning, TBLT activities in the process of creativity focused ELT for undergraduates.

3.7.1 Pre/post verbal creativity tests - comparing control & experimental group results

The main verbal creativity performance components in pre/post testing were focused on fluency (verbal, association and spontaneous), flexibility, and originality in foreign language lessons tested in next five subtasks with scores. (See Table 1.: The verbal creativity assessment of testing tasks).

Task 1.: Testing verbal fluency by creating words (topic-based brainstorming)

Instruction: Write as many words as possible on the given starting with the letter “P” (5 minutes activity). Testing verbal fluency of divergent production of symbolic units known as word formation based on the speed and correctness. Students generated words like product, price, placement etc.) Assessment: score 1 point/correct word.

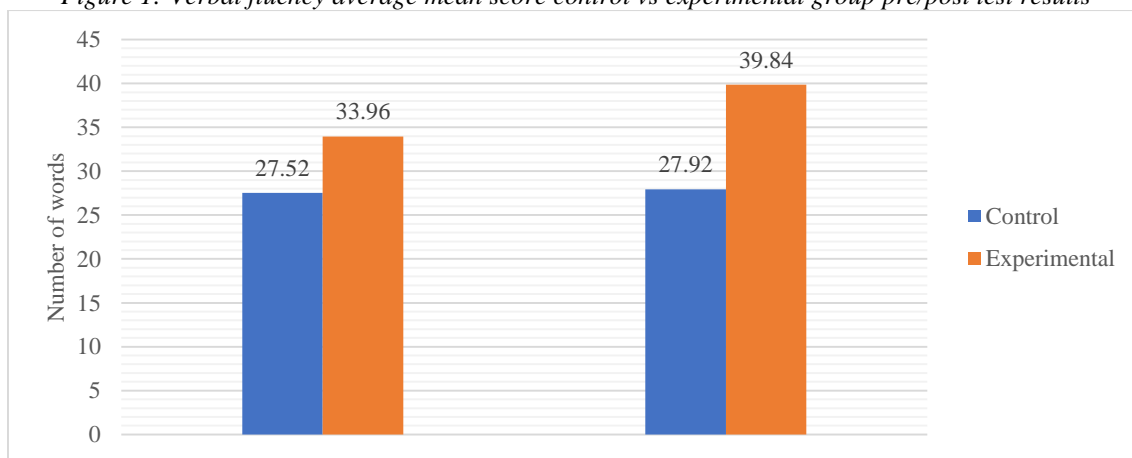
Table 2: Verbal fluency (p < .05)

N Test/ group	25 Pretest/ control group	25 Posttest/ control group	25 Pretest/ Experimental group	25 Posttest/ experimental group
Average	27,52	33,96	27,92	39,84
Median	28	32	28	38
SD	7,04	8,12	6,59	8,54

Source: (author)

The results of task 1 showed that average mean score of experimental TBLT group (39,84) has reached significantly better results, TBLT participants were more fluent in creating topic-based words with the given first letter in comparison with average mean score of traditional control group score (33,96).

Figure 1: Verbal fluency average mean score control vs experimental group pre/post test results



Task 2: Testing association fluency of divergent production of compound nouns.

Instruction: Write as many topic-based compounds as possible for a given word “brand” + compounds focus on the speed and correctness (5 minutes activity). Assessment was based on 1 point/meaningfully formed structure. Students generated compound words like brand + ambassador, persona, consideration, stretching, endorsement, awareness, image, identity, new, name, loyalty, switchers, values, management, etc.).

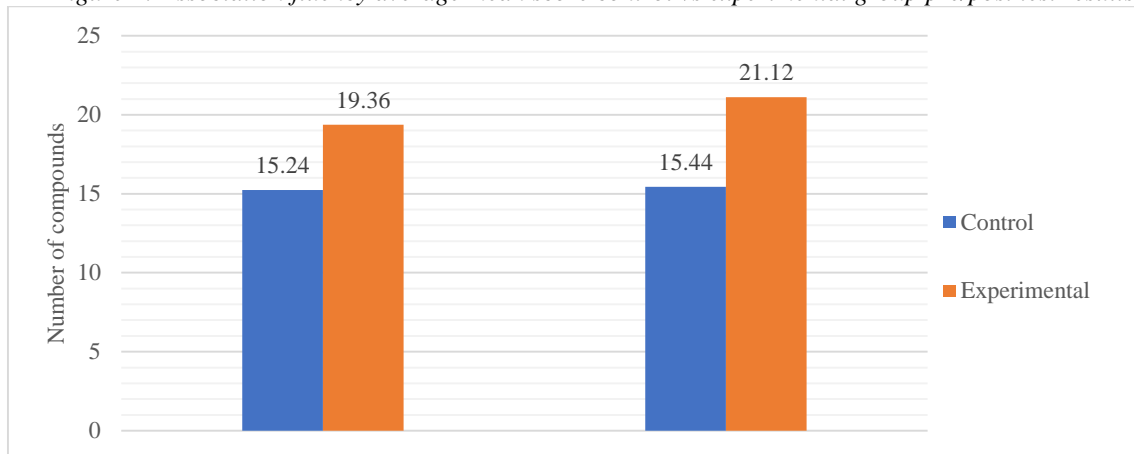
Table 3: Testing association fluency ($p < .05$)

N Test/ group	25 Pretest/ control group	25 Posttest/ control group	25 Pretest/ experimental group	25 Posttest/ experimental group
Average	15,24	19,36	15,44	21,12
Median	15	18	15	20
SD	3,35	5,67	4,70	4,57

Source: (author)

The results of task 2 showed that average mean score of experimental TBLT group (21,12) has reached better results in divergent production of topic-based compound nouns semantic relations (19,36) in comparison with traditional control group score (19,36).

Figure 2: Association fluency average mean score control vs experimental group pre/post test results



Task 3: Testing expressive fluency (creative factor) divergent production of semantic systems.

Instruction: Write as many sentences as possible - connection to the given four initial letters/word W+I+M+S (What Is Manager Selling) (5 minutes activity). Students generated affirmative sentences and Wh-questions. Assessment was based on 2 points/meaningfully formed structure in connection with business English based on proper word order.

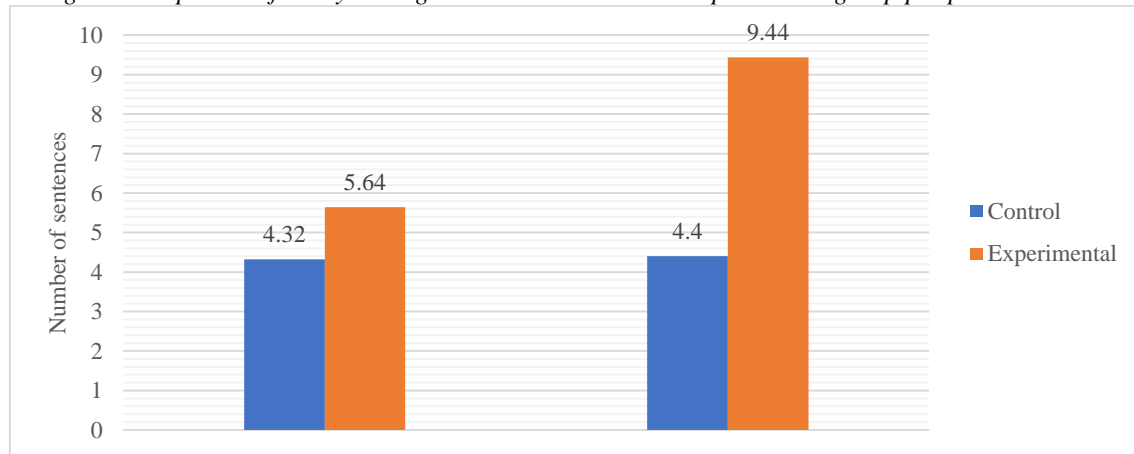
Table 4: Testing expressive fluency ($p < .05$)

N Test/ Group $p < .05$	25 Pretest/ control group	25 Posttest/ control group	25 Pretest/ experimental group	25 Posttest/ experimental group
Average	4,32	5,64	4,4	9,44
Median	4	5	4	9
SD	1,07	1,22	1,19	1,53

Source: (author)

The results of task 3 showed that average mean score of experimental TBLT group (9,44) has reached better results in divergent production of topic-based compound nouns semantic relations (19,36) in comparison with traditional control group score (19,36).

Figure 3: Expressive fluency average mean score control vs experimental group pre/post test results



Task 4: Spontaneous flexibility of divergent production of semantic classes

Instruction: Write as many words as possible, describing the creative use of the subject how to use things in a new innovative way (5 minutes activity) in terms of smart devices in the future (Apple watch). The assessment was based on "Shift-score" (number of moves) /3 points.

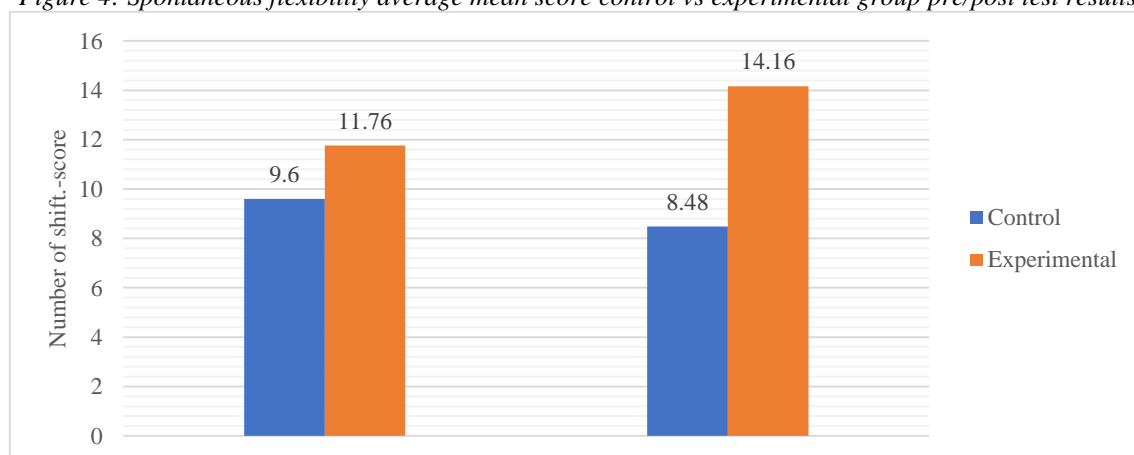
Table 5: Testing spontaneous flexibility ($p < .05$)

N Test/ Group $p < .05$	25 Pretest/ control group	25 Posttest/control Group	25 Pretest/ experimental group	25 Posttest experimental group
Average	9,6	11,76	8,48	14,16
Median	10	12	9	14
SD	3,18	2,52	3,22	3,24

Source: (author)

The results of task 4 showed that average mean score of experimental TBLT group (14,16) has reached better results in testing task in comparison with traditional control group score (11,76).

Figure 4: Spontaneous flexibility average mean score control vs experimental group pre/post test results



Task 5. Testing verbal originality of divergent production of semantic transformations.

Instruction: Write the most creative and catchy caption possible headings matching High and Low caption the text based on a new and catchy approach. The assessment was established on 5 points for “High-caption” 2 points for “Low-title” (5 minutes activity).

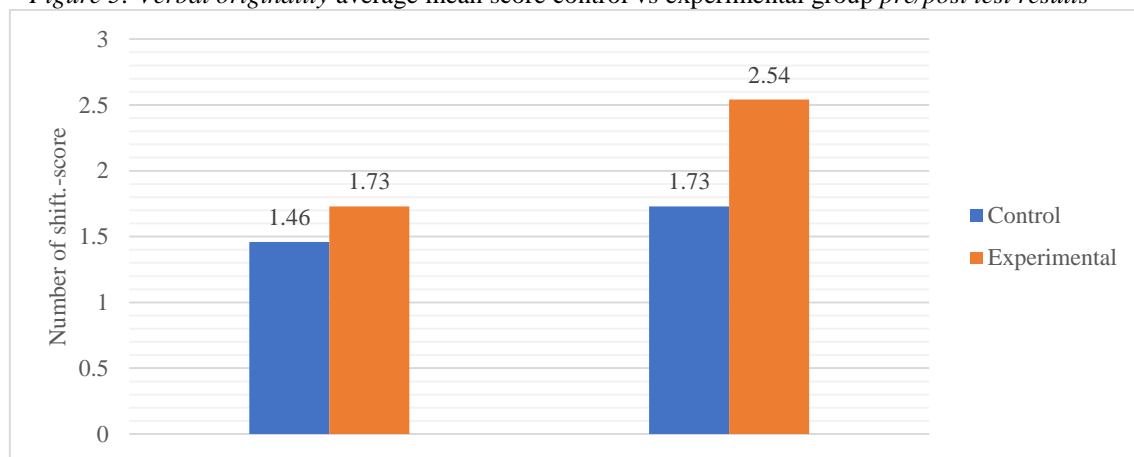
Table 6: Testing verbal originality ($p < .05$)

N Test/ group $p < .05$	25 Pretest/ control group	25 Posttest/ control group	25 Pretest/ experimental group	25 Posttest/ experimental group
Average	1,46	1,73	1,73	2,54
Median	0,00	0,00	0,00	2,00
SD	1,19	1,50	1,50	1,93

Source: (author)

The results of task 5 showed that the average mean score of the experimental TBLT group has reached better results (2,54) in comparison with the traditional control group (1,73).

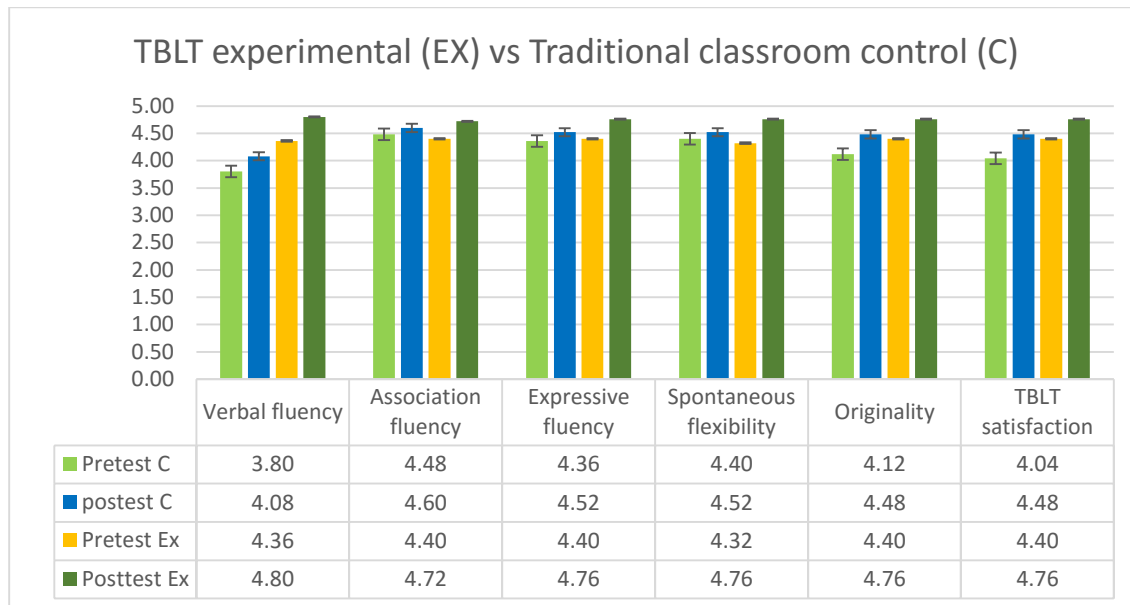
Figure 5: Verbal originality average mean score control vs experimental group pre/post test results



3.7.2 Pre/post intervention Students ‘self-assessment questionnaires

The bar chart describes results based on Students ‘self-assessment questionnaires in line with the verbal, association and expressive fluency, spontaneous flexibility, and originality.

Figure 6: Self-assessment questionnaire results (pre/post intervention)



The level of agreement/disagreement in Students’ self-assessment questionnaires (Fig.6) in connection with the statements evaluating the main learning/teaching factors were calculated based on the scores of five-point Likert scale items from strongly disagree (5), disagree (4), neutral (3), agree (2), to strongly agree (1) in lines with fluency (verbal, association and expressive), spontaneous flexibility, and originality before/after the experiment in TBLT and traditional undergraduates’ group. Data were analysed quantitatively based on after/before experiment evidence of the used TBLT as a learning tool. Basic statistics were used. The statistical treatment was deployed, taking a $p < 0.05$ as a statistically significant difference. The students’ questionnaires showed significant differences in rating the influence in all creativity tasks betterment, focused on fluency (verbal, association and spontaneous), flexibility, and originality in foreign language Job lab course mostly preferring the better results of experimental group. Regarding students’ opinions about their high-low level satisfaction with creative development, implementing the TBLT approach (4.40- 4,76) has reached a high level of satisfaction. In addition, all verbal creativity tasks in the experimental group (4,72-4,80) were agreed at the highest level of satisfaction in comparison with the traditional control group.

3.7.3 Open-ended questions

Interpretation of findings from open-ended questionnaires described positive impact expressed by satisfaction issues supporting quantitative findings in creative categories of fluency, flexibility, and originality and their subtasks. Students appreciated the task-based learning as a relaxed atmosphere to promote target language use. They enjoyed TBLT activities, learning by doing and observation, the claim that using tasks activities is a good way to improve English and gives them more chances to practice creative verbal speaking in a professional life like Job Lab via tasks which were connected to a real-life situation than the activities in the book. Job Lab course enhance the interest, motivation, and interactions among students in class; it improves learners’ communicative competency and provides students with more opportunities to use English creatively, cooperate and learn how to bring topic-based original and new ideas.

4 Discussion

Developing creative communicative verbal skills are the prerequisite of 21st-century skills that can meet the needs of both the academic and business world by implementing the student-centred TBLT approach. In the future divergent and holistic approaches in foreign language teaching/learning can offer a solid base of knowledge and boost the understanding of creativity, foster development in creative thinking as combinational thinking (produces new ideas by associating old pictures), exploratory thinking (explores all possibilities inherent in a current conceptual space) and transformational thinking (alters one or more rules of the conceptual space) as important life-transferrable skills.

4.1 Conclusion

According to the findings, the Job Lab English verbal creativity training highly influenced all course participants. The TBLT approach in the experimental group positively affected undergraduates' results and attitudes in connection with open divergent creativity-based tasks and increased motivation, confidence, and willingness to use English. Furthermore, our university students have limited exposure to using professional English creatively outside the classroom, so that Job lab activities offered them a vital opportunity to develop their higher thinking cognitive processes as critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. Additionally, teaching creativity empowers undergraduates to create innovative solutions, fresh spontaneity, and the ability to communicate open and free of stress.

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