

MASARYK UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Education

Department of English Language and Literature

**Integrating Neurodivergent Students into EFL Classes
through Creativity-Based Activities**

Master's thesis

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Abstract

Learners in contemporary English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms display diverse cognitive, emotional, and interactional profiles. For neurodivergent students, everyday EFL practices, especially those emphasizing rapid oral interaction, may lead to withdrawal, anxiety, or reduced participation, despite adequate linguistic ability. This study explores how creativity-based activities can support the inclusion of neurodivergent learners in lower secondary EFL contexts. This study is grounded in the researcher's experience as an EFL teacher between 2023 and 2026 in three schools in Prague and İzmir, working with students in grades 7 and 8. It adopts a classroom-based, practice-oriented perspective to examine how creativity can be integrated into the curriculum and everyday teaching.

Keywords

Neurodivergent learners, creativity-based activities, inclusive EFL education, language anxiety, multimodal learning, differentiated instruction, emotional safety

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Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá začleňováním neurodivergentních žáků do výuky angličtiny jako cizího jazyka (EFL) na nižším sekundárním stupni vzdělávání prostřednictvím kreativně založených aktivit. Vychází z předpokladu, že běžné výukové postupy, zejména ty, které kladou důraz na rychlou ústní interakci, nemusí být vhodné pro všechny žáky a mohou u některých z nich vést ke zvýšené úzkosti, stažení se z komunikace nebo snížené participaci.

Výzkum je založen na zkušenosti autora jako učitele EFL v letech 2023 až 2026 ve třech školách v Praze a Izmiru, kde pracoval se žáky 7. a 8. ročníku. Studie využívá kvalitativní, na praxi orientovaný přístup a sleduje, jak lze kreativní aktivity efektivně integrovat do běžné výuky.

Klíčová slova

Neurodivergentní žáci, kreativně založené aktivity, inkluzivní výuka EFL, jazyková úzkost, multimodální učení, diferencovaná výuka, emoční bezpečí

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Deklarace

Prohlašuji, že diplomová práce s názvem **Integrating into EFL Classes through Creativity-Based Activities**, kterou předkládám k posouzení, je zcela mým původním dílem a že žádná její část nebyla převzata z práce jiných autorů bez řádného citování a uvedení zdroje v textu práce.

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V Brně dne 20. dubna 2026

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ALPCAN OZISIKCILAR

Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis titled **Integrating Neurodivergent Students into EFL Classes through Creativity-Based Activities** that I have submitted for assessment is entirely my original work, and that no part of it has been taken from the work of others unless explicitly cited and acknowledged within the text of my thesis.

AI tools were used in a limited and ethically responsible manner, specifically for language editing, clarification of academic phrasing, and structural refinement. No AI tools were used to generate research data, analyse findings, or replace original academic reasoning. The use of such tools complies with the regulations of Masaryk University.

Brno April 20, 2026

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ALPCAN OZISIKCILAR

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1. INTRODUCTION

The learner-centered approach has become a dominant paradigm in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in recent times. Nevertheless, in most cases, the approach seems to favor students who are articulate, socially responsive, and comfortable in a situation where they are required to interact quickly and spontaneously. In some of the lower secondary classrooms in which I worked, there was a noticeable group of students who remained consistently silent, hesitant, or passive throughout the lessons. This was not because they lacked the ability, but because the setting did not allow them to participate in a way that they could control and express themselves in the way they wanted. For instance, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is a popular approach in English language teaching and learning, and which focuses on interaction and spontaneous verbal fluency (Richards and Rodgers, 2014; Littlewood, 2004), seems to work better with students who are socially confident, responsive, and spontaneous in their verbal interactions (Walsh, 2011; Harmer, 2015). For students who have cognitive and sensory differences from neurotypical norms, this may create pressure without the opportunities to utilize their language skills.

Throughout different school contexts in Prague and İzmir, I repeatedly observed students who processed language carefully and creatively yet withdrew during fast-paced speaking activities. Such students have often been characterized as unmotivated and passive, despite their high level of interest in other forms of expression such as drawing, singing, or creative writing. Studies have shown that students with neurodiverse conditions are more likely to be thoughtful, sensitive, and anxious in the classroom, especially in situations that require rapid responses and interactions (Silberman, 2015; Armstrong, 2010). In such cases, group work and rapid-speaking activities may not only function as a barrier, hindering the students from participating in the activities, but may also lead to the students abstaining from the activities altogether, and their behavior may be misinterpreted as a lack of motivation and/or ability.

In response to such concerns, many researchers have proposed a variety of inclusive strategies, among which the idea of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) stands out, which stresses the necessity of flexibility in engagement, representation, and expression (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). Yet in the context of EFL education, such approaches are often largely theoretical in nature. They provide broad pedagogical principles; however, they offer limited practical guidance in terms of their implementation within everyday language teaching practice. Although creative activities, including visual storytelling, music, drama, and reflective writing, are widely recognized for their motivational value, existing research rarely considers how they comply with the sensory, emotional, and cognitive profiles of neurodivergent learners in EFL classrooms. More importantly, there is a lack of practice-oriented research that examines how creativity can be used in structured, curriculum-aligned ways to support inclusion rather than merely engagement.

1.2. Research Problem

Creativity has often been highlighted by various research in language learning so far, as well as its power to increase motivation and class participation. However, much of this work treats learners as a relatively homogeneous group and gives limited attention to students who experience language learning differently. In particular, there is little research that examines whether creativity-based activities respond to the everyday challenges experienced by neurodivergent learners in EFL classrooms due to cognitive, emotional, or sensory variation. In practice, inclusive support structures are not always inclusive of successful language learning support. In the schools where the researcher worked in Prague, teaching assistants were present in several classrooms. While these assistants played an important role in supporting cognitive or affective regulation, most of them did not have sufficient English proficiency to contribute meaningfully to language instruction. As a result, language-related support for neurodivergent learners often remained limited, and responsibility for adapting instruction fell largely on the teacher. To compensate for this gap, teaching time was frequently adjusted to allow for individual support during or around lessons. The researcher reduced

whole-class instruction where possible in order to work one-on-one with neurodivergent students, providing additional explanation, reassurance, or alternative ways of engaging with the language. Although these practices addressed the immediate needs of individual learners, they also revealed a broader lack of systematic strategies for supporting neurodivergent students in EFL classrooms without relying primarily on individual teacher effort. However, this study does not aim to propose a universal or prescriptive model of inclusion, but rather to identify transferable pedagogical principles that can inform inclusive practice across varied EFL contexts. This situation has brought out the gap between the principles of inclusive education and the actualities of English as a Foreign Language teaching in the classroom, especially in lower secondary school settings, where the demands of communicative language teaching techniques increasingly restrict the level of oral participation. While creative activities have often been recommended as an alternative to motivate the students, there has been little research done to explore the potential of these activities to promote the consolidation of neurodivergent students within the curriculum requirements of the entire class.

1.3. Research Questions and Aims

This study asks three related questions about the use of creativity in lower secondary EFL classrooms. The first question looks at how neurodivergent students respond to creativity-based activities, particularly in terms of their participation, confidence, and language use. The second question considers which types of creative activities seem to work better than others in supporting these areas. The third question focuses on the difficulties teachers encounter when using creativity-based activities with neurodivergent learners in lower secondary EFL settings. Together, these questions reflect a practical concern rather than a theoretical claim. The purpose of the study is not to present creativity as a solution in itself, but to better understand how it can be used, under real classroom conditions, to support the inclusion of neurodivergent students in EFL lessons.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is more focused on the daily practice in the classroom as opposed to an ideal scenario in terms of teaching and learning. Although there might be an assistant or pedagogical assistant in EFL classrooms, their role does not necessarily extend to supporting language learning. As inclusive education and neurodiversity have become widely discussed in literature, it is sometimes difficult to put them into practice in the classroom, especially at the lower secondary level. Unfortunately, many schools demonstrate limited practical inclusion due to rigid communicative expectations, insufficient awareness and pedagogical knowledge, as well as limited implementation of alternative assessment methods. As a result, this study is more focused on what is realistically achievable in the classroom in terms of the curriculum framework that is in place. From a pedagogical point of view, this study shows that creativity-based practices are useful tools for inclusion in EFL lessons, rather than an added value or an enrichment practice. As such, it shows how creativity-based practices can be integrated with textbooks. Finally, this study contributes to the literature that emphasizes neurodiversity as a difference as opposed to a deficit in terms of learning and teaching practices. As it is focused on the lower secondary level, it provides practical suggestions for inclusive language teaching and learning practices and presents a practice-oriented perspective that might be useful in terms of teacher training and future research.

1.5. Personal Motivation

I chose this topic because it connects directly to my own experiences as a neurodivergent person, a language learner, and an English teacher. During my bachelor's studies, as I gained pedagogical knowledge, I developed a strong interest in the field, particularly after reading *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity*. More precisely, the book did not provide ready solutions for me; instead, it helped me formulate questions I had had difficulty answering for years. It reframed my perspective from viewing neurodivergence as a problem to be fixed toward understanding it as a form of difference that education systems

regularly fail to work with meaningfully. As my teaching experience developed through the years and across different countries, I became increasingly aware of how neurodivergent students are positioned in language classrooms. Many of these students showed strong sensitivity to language, creativity in expression, and depth in meaning-making. At the same time, their strengths were rarely recognised within standard classroom routines focused on the performance-based or summative assessment. What appeared to be a language difficulty was often, in my observation, a problem with the learning environment itself: the pace of lessons, expectations around participation, or narrow definitions of what a “successful” learner looks like. These concerns became more visible as I taught in different school contexts. I kept encountering those students who were described as passive, unmotivated, or disruptive by their previous teachers. However, upon integrating creativity-based activities, they responded with noticeable engagement with the language itself because they were given alternative ways to work with language. Writing, drawing, or music integrated creativity-based activities often created spaces for them, and they could concentrate, feel calmer with their pace, and communicate more authentically. In contrast to traditional classroom interaction, such moments allowed them to participate without the pressure to conform to dominant communicative norms. This study, therefore, approaches neurodivergent learners who are not as lacking linguistic ability, but as learners whose ways of engaging with language are often incompatible with prevailing classroom practices.

1.6. Structure of the Thesis

The structure of the thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the thesis, which explains the purpose and background of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the theory behind the present study, specifically the concepts associated with neurodivergence, the problems encountered by neurodivergent learners in EFL classes, and the concepts of inclusive practice and creativity in EFL. Chapter 3 explains the design and methodology used in the study, including the context, the target group, the process, and the ethics. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the study, specifically the response to creativity-based practice, the types of practice found to be the most significant, and the impact on student participation. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in the context of the literature review and their importance to the field of inclusive practice in EFL. Chapter 6 is a conclusion to the thesis, which summarizes the key findings, the limitations of the study, and the possibilities for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Definitions and Key Concepts

In the current research, the concept of neurodivergence is used primarily in relation to education rather than medicine. The research is not intended to make diagnoses of the students but rather focuses on the learning needs and styles of participation in classes, specifically the needs for predictability, low social pressure, multi-modal input/output, prolonged processing time, and alternative means of participation. Some students may also experience anxiety, cognitive differences, or family-related stress; however, these are not treated as forms of neurodivergence, but they are additional factors that may influence language learning. The focus of this study is therefore not diagnosis but accessibility and participation within the classroom environment.

There is a question that many teachers quietly ask themselves: how do we truly support students who think and learn differently? In search of answers, this study brings together several core concepts, including neurodivergence, inclusion, EFL teaching, and creativity in learning. Before diagnosing any condition, it is important to appreciate the abilities of neurodivergent learners. These include superior abilities in recognizing patterns, increased creativity, and the ability to concentrate for long periods on tasks that hold intrinsic interest to them. The term "neurodiversity" was coined by Judy Singer in 1998 in order to reject the notion that everyone's brain had to be the same. Neurodiversity includes but is not limited to ASD, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia. Armstrong (2010) states that neurodivergent learners have unique approaches in which they learn and express themselves that can differ from traditional classrooms, and this does not imply the lack of ability but rather a different way of thinking.

Closely related to this is the concept of inclusive education, which extends beyond physical integration and seeks to promote active participation, recognition, and success for all students. UNESCO (2009) defines inclusive education as an approach that requires changes in

what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed in order to support learners with diverse cognitive and emotional needs. In this context, neurodivergence should not be viewed as a problem to be solved, but rather as an important consideration when designing and evaluating teaching practices (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). When these differences are not recognized within the learning environment, disengagement may develop gradually. In practice, participation may become irregular, and students may contribute less frequently, while attendance and overall classroom involvement may also decline. These changes are often interpreted as evidence of low motivation or limited ability, rather than as indications that the classroom environment does not provide sufficient flexibility to accommodate different forms of engagement. Withdrawal, in this sense, can be understood as an indication that important elements of support, recognition, or adaptability may be absent from the instructional context.

Inclusive teaching, therefore, requires the creation of space for multiple ways of learning and participating in the classroom. One way to support such flexibility is through the integration of creativity-based pedagogy. Creative activities can provide students with alternative ways to engage with language, demonstrate understanding, and show progress, particularly when tasks do not rely solely on immediate verbal responses. For example, storytelling and visual materials may allow language to be explored in less pressured and more reflective ways. Maley and Peachey (2015) note that creative activities can be particularly supportive for learners who prefer more autonomous forms of work while maintaining an emotional connection to the learning process. For this reason, creativity is treated in this thesis not as an additional element, but as a central pedagogical tool through which language learning may become more inclusive.

2.2. Characteristics of Neurodivergent Language Learners

An effective approach to the instruction of neurodivergent students should consider the unique characteristics of neurodivergent students and their need for different ways of information perception and participation. Notwithstanding the fact that neurodivergent students should not be treated as a homogenous group, certain tendencies that influence their learning and class participation may be observed.

At the cognitive level, neurodivergent learners may experience difficulties with perceiving information according to the patterns that apply to most learners in traditional classroom environments. The majority of neurodivergent learners rely more on visual thinking, pattern recognition, or associative processing than the processes used by neurotypical learners. Hence, activities involving the use of short-term memory, such as rapid-response activities, repetitive drills, or quick recall activities, may cause distress to neurodivergent learners. Instead of promoting learning, the mentioned activities may increase stress and anxiety since these learners have limited processing capabilities and time to perform the activity successfully. ADHD learners may experience problems in concentrating on lengthy or repetitive activities, while autistic learners may respond better to structured and predictable classroom conditions. On the other hand, these differences may be accompanied by neurodiverse learners' advantages like attention to detail, good pattern recognition skills, creative problem solving, or excellent long-term memory in specific subject domains (Silberman, 2015).

Notwithstanding their cognitive peculiarities, neurodivergent students may experience classroom activities differently at the social and emotional levels. Students who find it difficult to recognize social cues, sustain eye contact, and engage in open-ended discussions in groups may become anxious in socially demanding situations and increasingly withdrawn. Moreover, environmental factors like noise, movement, unpredictability, or sudden changes in the routine may amplify the mentioned problems. In many cases, learners' silence, hesitance, or low levels of participation may be interpreted by educators as signs of a lack of motivation or interest.

Nevertheless, this may be a response to cognitive, sensory, or emotional overload experienced in a learning environment (Armstrong, 2010; Florian & Spratt, 2020). Regarding the domain of language learning, neurodiverse students tend to demonstrate an uneven profile of skills. For instance, one of such students may face problems with spontaneous speech but perform exceptionally well in writing or independent tasks. Similarly, a student may experience difficulties with collaborating in groups but succeed independently. According to Kormos (2017), with proper scaffolding and adaptation, neurodivergent learners may attain results equal to those of neurotypical learners.

Knowledge of neurodiverse learners' characteristics should serve as a basis for a shift in teachers' paradigm away from the model of uniform learning and participation. This applies in particular to EFL classes, where the success of the learners is measured by their ability to speak and interact.

2.3. Neurodivergence in Educational Contexts

Despite growing awareness of neurodiversity in educational research, the practice of teaching has remained largely unchanged. Many teaching approaches still follow the textbook-based model, implying uniform participation, fixed pace, and standardization. This approach may hinder the inclusion of neurodivergent learners who think and express their knowledge differently from other students.

Firstly, being neurodivergent creates problems related to assessment. As Van Herpen et al. (2020) highlight, language assessments are often characterized by fixed standards and time-related aspects, which may disadvantage neurodivergent students who need extra time to complete a task and another way of demonstrating their knowledge. Thus, if listening comprehension tests require instant answers, a learner may not be able to complete a test, not because he/she does not understand the language input, but because there is insufficient time.

In this case, anxiety may grow, and performance will fail to provide information about the learner's actual capabilities. This means that an assessment system measures the speed of performance rather than the depth of understanding.

However, neurodivergent learners' inclusion goes far beyond their physical presence in classrooms along with other neurotypical students. As Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) underline, inclusive education is possible only through the redefinition of what counts as participation and success. Similarly, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework by CAST (2018) proposes that instruction should include various methods of engaging students, representing information, and allowing students to express understanding of the material.

Hence, neurodiversity suggests that EFL teachers should change their approaches and become more accommodating. Provision of extra time for completion of an assignment, provision of visual representations to support verbal instructions, and creation of opportunities for different ways of participating in classroom activities may prove beneficial not only for neurodiverse students but also for all participants. According to Burgstahler (2015), this phenomenon is referred to as the curb-cut effect because adaptations made for some students are eventually enjoyed by everyone.

2.4. Challenges of Neurodivergent Students in EFL Classrooms

2.4.1. Challenges of the Communicative Approach

Richards (2006) describes communicative language teaching as an approach centered on speaking in real-time and working with others in pairs or small groups. This can be highly effective for many learners. However, when it comes to students who use language in another way, fast communication and interactions could be obstacles in terms of participation. For example, quick discussions and speaking-based group discussions might result in higher levels of stress, mental strain, or lack of concentration for some students (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2021). Also, students with ASD may face difficulties participating in quick interactions, while those with ADD/ADHD might find it challenging to stay focused when communicating verbally with their group members. (Armstrong, 2010; Kormos, 2017). These students are often capable of doing the work, but the way the lessons are designed does not always help them show what they can do. In many classrooms, speaking quickly, making eye contact, or jumping into group tasks are treated as signs of success. But not every student can or should be expected to perform in this way. When teachers do not adjust their methods, students who need a different pace or format may feel left out. This study does not argue against Communicative Language Teaching itself but rather against certain classroom practices that are often associated with it, such as fast-paced spontaneous speaking, mingling activities, and immediate oral responses. While CLT emphasizes meaningful communication, in practice, some classroom implementations may unintentionally disadvantage students who need more processing time, structure, or alternative forms of participation.

2.4.2. Anxiety and Social Interaction Differences

Another issue that frequently comes up in the literature is the effect of language anxiety on performance, especially in tasks that involve spontaneous speaking. Horwitz (2010) and MacIntyre (2017) note that anxiety itself can interfere with language use, even in students who actually know the material. The link between language anxiety and neurodivergence is also well-known within the discipline of educational psychology. Language anxiety has long been understood as an important emotional barrier in second language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) define it as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process.” This kind of anxiety can seriously affect a learner’s willingness to communicate, take risks, and make progress in their use of the language. The term "language anxiety" refers to the discomfort or fear students feel when asked to perform language tasks, especially when they have to speak in front of others. Horwitz and Cope (1986) break this down into three principal categories:

- **Communication Anxiety:** This happens when students are expected to speak or engage in conversation in the target language. Neurodivergent students are especially likely to feel overwhelmed by the pressure to perform and interact in front of their classmates.
- **Fear of Negative Evaluation:** This form of anxiety arises when students worry about getting bad grades or being judged by peers. It often intensifies during performance-based activities where making mistakes feels risky.
- **Test Anxiety:** This comes up during exams or assessments. All students can feel it, but neurodivergent learners may be especially affected due to their heightened sensitivity to failure and the pressure of performing under timed conditions. Each of these anxiety types can create barriers to the language learning process, particularly for neurodivergent students, because they are more reflective and less inclined toward spontaneous communication. A lot of research confirms that when students experience high levels of language anxiety, their performance in language tasks tends to drop (MacIntyre, 2017; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

For many neurodivergent students, learning English in a classroom setting brings a kind of anxiety that goes beyond just the fear of getting something wrong. It is not simply about pronunciation or grammar. Often, it is the fast pace of conversations, the unpredictable noise, or the challenge of figuring out when and how to join in that can feel overwhelming. Social cues that others seem to pick up on naturally might be confusing or unclear, adding another layer of stress to speaking up or participating (Florian & Spratt, 2020). For example, students with ADHD might lose focus during oral tasks, and students with ASD may find group discussions disorienting. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) provides an account of the role of affect in impeding language learning. When students are anxious or have low self-confidence, their ability to process language is reduced, and their focus is deflected from the language itself. But when those emotional obstacles are reduced, learning tends to happen more easily. This matters even more for neurodivergent students, who may already carry a significant amount of stress into the EFL classroom.

Using creativity-based activities in language classes helps teachers reduce stress among the students, especially for students who tend to freeze up when they feel they have to be perfect, such as seen in the spectrum of autism. Shifting the focus to self-expression helps them explore the different ways of learning a language. When the attention shifts from accuracy to self-expression, students are often more willing to participate. Instead of being afraid of making a mistake, they get to focus on sharing something. A thought, a story, or even something small, such as a meme, that they have an emotional connection to. In their study, Maley and Peachey, as well as Sawyer, suggest that activities such as storytelling, drawing, role-playing, or using music provide alternative ways to use the language free of fear of error correction (Maley and Peachey, 2015; Sawyer, 2022). These activities also allow students to work at their own pace and choose how they want to participate. That kind of flexibility matters for neurodivergent learners because they may need more time to process information or prefer to express themselves in less conventional ways. It is hard for students to learn when they do not feel emotionally safe, and Florian and Spratt (2020) describe emotional safety as a basic need in the

classroom. Learners should feel respected, supported, and free from the fear of being ridiculed. Without that, many students begin to tune out. In EFL classrooms, emotional safety involves more than simply accepting grammatical errors. It relates to how students are allowed to participate and whether their contributions are taken seriously. For some learners, speaking freely means answering in unconventional ways, taking longer to respond, or relying on creative expression rather than immediate accuracy. In this context, emotional safety means not only correctness and control of behavior but also the experience of being noticed and appreciated during communication. From a practical perspective, emotional safety may be supported by many classroom strategies that reduce pressure and help the student to self-regulate. This could include routines, clear activity and lesson design, and opportunities for choice, which may help the student look more relaxed and secure in a language learning process. Simple visual signals, such as dim lighting and routine greeting rituals, may help the student to recognize the experience of a safe space.

To sum up, helping students feel emotionally safe and less anxious is a key part of inclusive expression teaching, especially for neurodivergent learners. When teachers bring creativity into their lessons, students often feel more relaxed and willing to take part. This may result in stronger language skills and more confidence over time.

2.4.3. Cognitive Load and Processing Differences

Neurodivergent students suffer from cognitive loads because of the fact that the way their brains interpret and process stimuli is different than their neurotypical peers. While the classroom might be easy for neurotypical students to cope with, it might represent a continuous stream of noise, motion, and unexpected elements that have to be processed all the time (Florian & Spratt, 2020). All these sensory stimulations might lead to difficulties with maintaining focus for neurodivergent students since they overload attention mechanisms. Students with ADHD or any sensitivity to particular sensory stimulations may need to spend much effort managing their attention to be able to participate in the classroom activities. Moreover, this self-regulating process leaves fewer ways to work with the activity, thus resulting in burnout. And it might lead to disengagement signs, confused with laziness or inability to follow the lesson. It will become particularly obvious when the lesson is designed with multiple activities and well differentiated. Multisensory engagement is an important factor when it comes to the outcomes of language learning; however, at the same time, it can be responsible for putting more cognitive pressure on students. Consequently, this will make neurodivergent students seem withdrawn from the activities, even though they have been making an effort to remain attentive.

Therefore, a discussion appears regarding what it means to participate in class when it comes to language learning. For example, if fluency, speed, and confidence in speaking are considered the main criteria of language proficiency, some components of participation might be ignored. According to Rowe & Zook (2021), such instructional strategies promote fast learners, thus having less room for learners with special needs.

2.5. Inclusive Pedagogy and Creativity

In this study, creativity is not understood primarily as artistic talent, but as the opportunity for learners to express meaning through multiple modes, including visual, written, dramatic, musical, and digital forms. Creativity is therefore understood as multimodal expression, personal meaning-making, and learner choice in how participation takes place during English lessons. Creativity-based activities, therefore, not only act as functional activities but also enhance the accessibility of language learning for many students.

Inclusive teaching suggests that differences between students should not be viewed as barriers. In fact, they are the opportunities that make learning easier for the students. In their study, Florian and Spratt (2020) imply that inclusion in education is closely connected to striving to achieve learning that celebrates student diversity rather than maintaining a curriculum/textbook based on practices. For the context of an EFL classroom, this means that teachers must look at participation in a broader sense by means of moving away from conventional models of participation, such as the desire to respond quickly or following fixed rules for taking turns. Using multimodal activities and integrating creativity, a teacher can offer students various ways for participation.

Maley and Peachey (2015) describe creativity in language classrooms as a way of introducing flexibility into how learners work with language, which means this is particularly important for learners who do not respond well to narrowly defined expectations of participation during the activities. For many neurodivergent students, working with language through images, stories, sound, movement, or written reflection may be more manageable than responding immediately in spoken interaction. By integrating creativity-based activities like drawing, storytelling, music, drama, and creative writing, there is a change in the nature of classroom interaction. The students who participate less in fast-paced class discussion may find it easier to participate when given visual, individual, and/or creative chances to do so. Moreover, there are those students who may show their understanding best by being creative. In this respect, creative activities need to be perceived not as something extraneous to language learning but rather as a vital mechanism for how language works both inside the brain, as well as its expression and understanding outside the brain. Previous literature

also suggests a connection between neurodiversity and creativity. In particular, Pasarín-Lavín et al. (2024) analyze connections between verbal creativity and language learning of ADHD learners, along with the impact of visual creativity on language learning in dyslexic learners. This means that creative methods are not merely motivating but may also align with the cognitive strengths of neurodivergent students.

As a matter of fact, integrating creativity-based activities into lessons does not necessarily require complicated steps. Simple processes will help develop multimodality in communication. For example, a quick activity such as “draw and talk” can be used as an exit ticket for students. They can be asked to create a sketch about what they have just learned and then explain their sketch to their partners or to the teacher at the end of the lesson as a reflection of learning. Although it is a short exercise, it helps learners slow down and think about vocabulary and make connections with language.

The relationship between creativity and emotional safety is also particularly relevant in classrooms that include neurodivergent learners. As Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) argue, high levels of anxiety can have a seriously negative effect on language learning, especially in situations requiring rapid and open-ended spoken production. Creativity-based activities can help shift attention away from accuracy and performance pressure toward self-expression and meaningful communication. In this sense, they may help lower the affective filter and support willingness to take risks in language use. Rather than positioning creativity at the margins of language teaching, this study treats it as a central pedagogical means of amplifying participation through multiple modalities.

2.6. Types of Creativity-Based Activities

Creativity-based activities serve as a way to integrate and support neurodivergent learners into English lessons as well as their language learning process. These activities, which are best adapted to students' preference for independent work, reflective practice, and deep cognitive engagement, have proven to be most helpful. Notably, according to some research mentioned below, creativity-based activities have been shown to benefit neurodivergent students by reducing language anxiety and providing opportunities for self-expression during these activities. This anxiety reduction can significantly contribute to their learning process.

Creativity-based activities may contribute to the inclusion of neurodivergent students because they offer different ways of engagement with language. They are less demanding for neurodivergent students compared to repetitive textbook exercises. It does not comply with the principles of UDL to force all students to work with the language input in the same way, while it is possible to integrate such activities that involve the ability to engage in language through creative writing, design, sound, movement, and other forms of interaction. Recent research suggests that creativity-based activities could contribute to reducing language anxiety in classes, especially among learners who feel stressed about their language proficiency. It is possible to consider creative activities as alternative paths for learning and interacting with language.

2.6.1. Creative Writing and Journaling

One of the reasons I wanted to start with writing and, therefore, highlight the importance of writing in my study is that it is a Cinderella skill in that it is always neglected by students and even by teachers, and it frequently receives less attention compared to other language skills, such as speaking, listening, and reading. Creative writing is believed to be highly effective for language learning, sometimes for neurodivergent learners who have a cognitive load; spontaneous speech can make them anxious. (Albert & Kormos, 2011). Creative writing activities are given in the form of poetry, short stories, and reflective essays, and actually allow the neurodivergent learners to use the language in ways more compatible with his/her need to reflect alone. Indeed, writing provides opportunities for neurodivergent students to use language individually without experiencing language anxiety related to immediate verbal participation or feedback. Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) examined to what extent an activity such as creative writing (keeping a journal) influences the psycholinguistic effects of both the cognitive and practical development of learners.

2.6.2. Visual Storytelling and Digital Media

Using pictures to use language appeals to many neurodivergent students in that it softens the social load of communicative activities and helps students demonstrate understanding without performing on the spot. For instance, a storyboard, comic strip, or short slide set may help recall vocabulary while the student adds words they can manage to remember. This mix of visual and verbal expression supports attention, working memory, and word retrieval, and it allows contributions that are spoken, written, or recorded. That matters for neurodivergent students. This combination of visual and verbal language practice supports multiple cognitive processes, which is important for neurodivergent students in terms of focusing, memorizing, sequencing, and language retrieval. As pointed out by Maley and Kiss (2015), using different modalities stimulates multimodal learning, which enables students to work with information using various sensory channels at once. This might be especially beneficial for learners who

have trouble with text-heavy or purely auditory teaching because visual input gives another clue for understanding and remembering. At the same time, teachers can focus on the quality and precision of students' ideas rather than speed. Moreover, another finding of this study reveals that students who engage in digital storytelling become more successful because of the higher levels of language retention and reasoning skills ability compared to their peers who follow more traditional activities.

The effectiveness of the activity can be further enhanced by the use of digital storytelling technologies, which would enable learners to interact with content in a manner similar to their interaction with digital content in real-life situations. This strategy could involve the creation of multimedia stories using applications such as Canva, slide presentation software, comic makers, and basic video editing. Such a strategy will not only increase engagement but will also enhance students' language and technological competencies.

2.6.3. Music as a Tool for Language Learning

With the growing adoption of technology in education, music is increasingly being embraced as a core part of language learning around the world. Research repeatedly shows that incorporating music into language instruction can help reduce students' anxiety levels as well as improve their motivation, participation, and long-term retention of language concepts. Good et al. (2020) noticed that when students sing grammar patterns to a beat, they tend to remember both the rules and the words more easily. Music is not just repetition, but also a way of easing the tension many students feel during formal grammar exercises. Hence, when students sing a song, the repetitive lyrics allow them to practice grammatical forms and vocabulary multiple times without feeling monotonous.

The results are promising because activities integrated with music lower mental effort and performance anxiety. According to the study, singing helps students work with the material in a way that feels natural and enjoyable, thus lowering their affective filter, a concept from

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, and increasing language input processing. Moreover, through music-based activities in the EFL classroom, neurodivergent students have the opportunity to approach the language in a less socially demanding and more reflective way. Schäfer and Eerola (2020), in their study titled *How Listening to Music Fosters Language Learning and Emotional Involvement: A Cognitive Perspective*, explored how music-based pedagogy could benefit students, particularly those who prefer reflective and analytical ways of learning a language.

Traditional language-teaching activities based on rote memorization, grammar-translation, and drill-based exercises often prioritize mechanical repetition and memorization of language rules. Although these methods can be useful for learning grammar and vocabulary, they can also be monotonous and disengaging, particularly for neurodivergent learners due to the lack of creative and emotional involvement. According to Schäfer and Eerola (2020), music-based activities support a multidimensional learning process in which students are engaged cognitively, emotionally, and creatively while learning the language. This can be especially beneficial for neurodivergent students who may prefer reflective and individual processing of learning material rather than the high pressure of fast-paced traditional activities such as mechanical memorization and drill exercises.

The study also highlights that music-based activities allow for an emotional connection between the language and the learner, which supports reflective processing of the language. For example, when students listen to a song, they do not only learn the words and grammar used in the song, but they also engage with the meaning and context of the lyrics. In this way, they are not simply practicing language forms but engaging with language as part of a broader emotional and cognitive process. Furthermore, this thesis draws attention to the importance of creativity in language learning, as it encourages students to use language in more personal and meaningful ways. Activities such as songwriting or interpreting song lyrics allow students to connect language with their own experiences and emotions and therefore develop fluency and accuracy in language use. Such an approach is supported by Dörnyei (2001), who suggests that

motivational strategies in language learning should include creative and emotionally engaging activities to promote intrinsic motivation in language learners. The music-based pedagogy discussed by Schäfer and Eerola (2020) is consistent with these ideas, as it promotes a learner-centered environment where students are encouraged to use language in their own way.

2.6.4. Drama

Drama gives the learner a way to practice the language that is different from other activities found in the textbook. By acting, role-playing, or even improvising, the learner deals with the language in a way that feels natural, even if the situation is imaginary. According to Wagner (2017), drama links the language to movement and emotion, which helps the learner retain the language. For students who don't feel confident speaking, playing a character may help alleviate the language anxiety mentioned in this study.

Unlike more passive creative activities, drama involves the practice of language in which students may engage physically. By using gestures, intonation, and movement, they can convey meaning. For example, playing roles, previously rehearsed dialogues, and creating characters bring the learner into contact with a new identity with which they can use the language in realistic situations, thus increasing linguistic fluency and consolidating self-confidence in the target language. More importantly, Neelands (2010) points out that drama is multimodal, which means it uses multiple ways of communication or expression. In its broadest sense, the term refers to the multiple uses of senses or modalities, whether for learning or communication, that utilize a mix of visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic elements. In addition to language, verbal and nonverbal indicators (such as metalinguistic communication) allow for holistic learning.

For neurodivergent learners (especially those with ASD, who mainly prefer introspective exercises, this drama would offer a low-risk exploration of language, allowing them to try out different language functions and, consequently, build confidence through creative expression.

Casteleyn's research (2019) demonstrates and supports this thesis, thus showing that systematic desensitization through drama gradually reduces speaking anxiety among learners. The research shows that participating in role-playing activities helps students get over the fear of speaking in public by exposing them to real-life communication situations. Similarly, Wagner (2017) notes that drama provides an opportunity for developing exposure to social interactions, allowing a neurodivergent student to practice verbal and non-verbal communication in a safe and emotionally helpful environment. Over time, this will eventually build up confidence and linguistic fluency.

2.7. Limitations of Creativity-based activities

Creative activities offer important opportunities for student self-expression, particularly for those who may not engage with traditional textbook activities. For neurodivergent students, such activities can help with more meaningful participation for them. However, these activities are not inherently inclusive. Interactive or performance-based activities may also be overwhelming to students. Therefore, when students are provided with choices and a supportive classroom atmosphere, they can engage in tasks that suit their needs. Despite the general image of creative tasks as flexible and student-centred, their appropriacy can also vary according to neurodiverse types. For students with ADHD or ASD, tasks tend to be more effective if they are structured and predictable. Interactive or open-ended activities that require rapid social interaction and multitasking may be overwhelming to these students (Maley & Kiss, 2015). In addition, more independence may also create problems for students to stay focused on the activity. Therefore, it is important to create a balance between flexibility and guidance to ensure all students are included (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Good et al., 2020).

From the teacher's perspective, one of the major challenges in implementing creativity-based activities is the lack of training and expertise required to design and manage them effectively. Such practices often call for the development of a range of competencies that differ from the focus of traditional approaches to the teaching of languages. Such practices may also

involve long preparation times, which is a problem for English teachers who already have a high workload (Newton, 2015). Although creativity through technology is often described as motivating and innovative, it frequently depends on costly tools and digital resources that are not consistently available across schools (Barrot, 2019). Likewise, activities such as "role-playing" or "drama" require sufficient space in the classroom, as well as supplementary materials, which are not always provided in lower secondary EFL contexts (Pishghadam, 2011).

Other than the logistical difficulties, there are the difficulties of assessment. Outputs such as storytelling, poetry, or visual posters can be difficult to measure in a quantitative manner, as opposed to the more objective measurement of grammar or vocabulary exercises. There can be differing criteria for assessing such work, and as such, a level of subjectivity can be introduced. Albert and Kormos (2011) suggest that "if learners follow different trajectories and have different learning needs, standardized assessment tools often do not measure their progress accurately." In terms of alleviating concerns about preparation time and practicality, it is possible for educators to incorporate creative activities that are low in terms of threshold. One example is the use of textbook images as a means for the creation of silent comic strips. This would allow students to engage in the creation of narratives without the need for performance or the creation of a great deal of verbal material. Another important limitation is the restricted amount of instructional time available in EFL contexts. In many lower secondary schools, English lessons are limited to only a few hours per week, which constrains the implementation of more complex or time-consuming creative activities. As a result, teachers may struggle to balance curriculum requirements with the integration of creativity-based tasks, often prioritizing core language content over exploratory or extended activities.

2.7. Related Research

Whilst both neurodivergence and EFL education have received considerable scholarly interest in their specific fields, the cross-section of the two topics has been somewhat less explored. Studies that focus on the experience of neurodivergent EFL learners and how creative and inclusive approaches can be used to promote their EFL learning have, in fact, only started to emerge (Florian & Spratt, 2020; Dewaele & Li, 2020). Inclusive education research, as discussed in the works of Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), among others, asserts that for a student to be included in a classroom, it is not merely the physical aspect that needs consideration but also the student's ability to participate and achieve. This means that for the students in a language classroom, the need for different teaching methods that address different learning types and cognitive abilities is a necessity.

Maley and Peachey (2015) illustrate the function of creativity in language acquisition through various case studies of classroom practice. Their work reveals the role of creativity in language acquisition by promoting increased emotional engagement, autonomy, and expression. The study reveals the potential of creative activities such as visual arts, drama, and storytelling to motivate learners who might be difficult to motivate through more communicative approaches to language teaching. In a similar context, Gregersen et al. (2014) discuss the impact of creativity in the reduction of language anxiety. In their study of the relationship between creativity and language anxiety, they reveal the potential of creativity to create a positive affective climate. More recently, Dewaele and Li (2020) investigated emotional experiences in foreign language learning and highlighted that positive emotional environments considerably increase language development, especially for learners prone to anxiety as well as social withdrawal. While their research does not exclusively focus on neurodivergent students, the implications are clear: emotionally supportive, creativity-driven instruction benefits those learners most vulnerable to affective barriers.

Specific studies carried out regarding neurodivergent students in language learning, although limited in number, provide valuable information. One such study carried out by Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars (2021) focused on the learning of the English language by students with autism spectrum disorders, showing that systematic yet flexible activities, low social pressure, and opportunities to express themselves visually and in written form greatly improve the comfort level of the students. Another study by Mottron (2021) argues that individuals with autism tend to show high levels of creativity in certain areas, which can increase learning outcomes in all fields, including language learning. Although these developments show promise, there is an important void in the research studies that explicitly address the interrelation between the neurodivergent profile, creativity-based EFL work, and cohesive approaches in the classroom. Most research studies currently available study these three concepts in isolation from one another rather than as interrelated components of an overarching pedagogical problem. This thesis aims to make an important contribution to this growing body of research with a specific and practice-focused exploration of the ways in which creativity-based EFL work can facilitate inclusion among the neurodivergent lower secondary student population.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory design grounded in classroom action research, characterized by iterative cycles of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. In each cycle, a classroom participation issue was identified, followed by the introduction of a creativity-based or multimodal instructional adjustment. Student engagement and participation were systematically observed and documented, and teaching strategies were subsequently refined. Rather than testing a single predefined intervention, the study focuses on examining how creativity-based practices function within authentic EFL classroom contexts, particularly in relation to neurodivergent learners. Creativity-based activities were not implemented as a fixed programme, but were integrated flexibly into lessons when aligned with instructional goals and classroom dynamics. Teaching remained guided by the curriculum and textbook, with context-sensitive modifications made in response to learner needs. This design supports a naturalistic and practice-oriented understanding of how inclusive, creativity-based teaching operates in real classroom settings.

3.2. Research Context and Participants

The research was carried out in two different lower secondary school settings over four different academic semesters: two semesters in a public school in İzmir, Turkey, and two semesters in a public lower secondary school in Prague, Czechia. The subject was English, which was a compulsory foreign language in both settings. This allowed the researcher to analyse the use of creativity-based activities and the engagement of neurodivergent students in different educational settings. The participants were chosen from an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. In these classrooms, the age group of the students was between 13 and 15. In the two settings, the sample included students with varied cognitive and emotional characteristics. Some students demonstrated learning behaviors commonly associated with

neurodivergent profiles by the researcher. Although classroom composition differed across the two settings of İzmir and Prague, there were mixed-ability groups that included neurodivergent students in EFL classrooms.

Students in the sample demonstrated observable learning behaviors commonly associated with neurodivergent profiles, such as differences in attention regulation, sensory sensitivity, and participation patterns. One of the students also showed characteristics that are usually associated with autism, particularly limited spontaneous verbal participation in class and increased sensitivity to sensory inputs. Another student showed characteristics of dyslexia, such as difficulties in language activities that involve text, while showing considerable potential in visual activities and art. The medical diagnosis of these students, however, was not necessarily made known in either of these situations, most likely due to ethical issues in such cases. Hence, learning profiles of students were derived based on systematic observation in the classroom, informal consultation with teachers, and relevant learning records, as emphasized by Florian & Spratt (2020), that inclusive education practice is based not on diagnosis but on learning need, which is the basis of the present study.

In addition to the general classroom activities as well as creativity-based activities, some informal data were also collected by extracurricular activities, or afternoon clubs. The researcher voluntarily took part in these activities. Compared to formal classroom lessons, these settings were characterised by lower performance pressure and reduced anxiety, allowing students to use language more spontaneously and express themselves with less anxiety. By observing the learners within the learning and extracurricular environments, it was possible to assess the impact of the differing environments on the learners' participation, emotional investment, and linguistic use. This approach is consistent with the research perspectives emphasized within qualitative research paradigms that recognize the need to assess the learners' behaviour within multiple environments to create a more in-depth understanding of the learning process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The selection of classrooms and participants followed a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study focuses on information-rich cases with detailed observations during the lessons to gain more insight into the phenomenon being researched. In this study, the chosen students represented a range of neurodivergent characteristics and were involved in various aspects of the curriculum and, where possible, extracurricular English-related/CLIL activities. They were, therefore, particularly well placed to observe the possible benefits that creativity-based practices might offer neurodivergent learners across a range of teaching contexts.

In terms of the school setting, though all schools showed evidence of a general approach to inclusion, multilingualism, and diversity, provisions that were made to address neurodivergent students' needs in English as a Foreign Language education were limited even though there were assistants in some classes. Therefore, this environment provided itself as fertile ground to explore the possible benefits that creativity-based practices could offer as a possible solution to inclusion and neurodivergent students' psychological well-being in the mainstream English as a Foreign Language classroom.

The researcher in this study was also the classroom teacher, which created both advantages and limitations. The advantage of this dual role was long-term familiarity with students, classroom dynamics, and participation patterns. However, this position also created a risk of researcher bias, as the researcher was emotionally and pedagogically involved in the teaching process. To reduce this risk, the researcher kept a reflexive journal, documented decisions made during action research cycles and included both successful and unsuccessful classroom interventions in the analysis.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

Different approaches to data collection were adopted in the research to ensure an in-depth understanding of the level of engagement of neurodivergent students with creativity-based practices in the EFL learning context. Furthermore, the data collection tools adopted in the research, with class observation, extracurricular participant observation, student-produced data, and researcher field note-taking, are consistent with the data collection approach used in qualitative research in education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.3.1. Classroom Observation

Systematic classroom observation was used as the primary tool for data collection in this study. The classroom observations were carried out during four academic semesters, two in İzmir and two in Prague. Throughout these semesters, the researcher conducted systematic observations during regular English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lessons, where students' engagement, emotional state, and interaction during creativity-based activities were focused on. An observation protocol was designed according to guidelines provided by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018). The researcher used it systematically during both contexts. The classroom activities included visual storytelling, role plays, and collaborative writing, allowing for an investigation of students' reactions to different types of creativity. The observations focused on aspects such as student engagement, including voluntary participation, sustained attention, and verbal contributions, as well as aspects of emotional state, including signs of enjoyment and low anxiety. The researcher also looked at aspects of interaction, including collaboration, turn-taking, and non-verbal communication. To ensure that classroom observations did not interrupt regular lessons, notes were taken during lessons. These notes were then used to write more detailed observation memos, including reflexive texts and contextual information relevant to each setting.

3.3.2. Participant Observation in Extracurricular Settings

To complement the classroom-based data, informal participant observation was carried out during art club sessions attended by some of the students. Although the researcher did not assume a formal instructional or facilitation role, participating alongside students made it possible to observe learning-related behaviours from within the activity itself. English was used as the main language of interaction during these sessions, which took place in a more relaxed and low-anxiety setting than the regular classroom. This informal context allowed learners to interact with English in ways that were less restricted by curricular demands or assessment expectations. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note, participant observation in non-instructional settings enables researchers to observe learners' natural language use. Such settings also make it possible to access learners' perspectives that may not emerge in more structured, formal classroom environments. The researcher observed spontaneous linguistic output along with decision-making and language expression among students during their interactions with peers and materials as well. Observations show a different perspective on the way students naturally use English outside of formal structures, besides how creativity contributes to their speaking skills.

3.3.3. Student-Created Artifacts

Another data source involved the collection of language output and artifacts, and analysis of artifacts developed by students through creativity-based activities, as well as extracurricular activities. These artifacts included visual narratives, written stories, comic strips, lyric-based activities, and collaborative posters. These language outputs were analysed for linguistic development, creativity, and personal engagement with English. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), student-developed artifacts can serve as a valid and non-intrusive data source, enabling the researcher to access the students' inner world.

3.3.4. Researcher Field Notes

Throughout the research period, the teacher-researcher also maintained a set of reflective field notes to record immediate impressions, recurring patterns, unpredictable reactions, and systematic feedback from students and tandem teaching, as well as considerations about the use of creativity-based activities. These included both descriptive and analytical reflections about learner involvement, affect, and classroom processes across a variety of activities. The use of the field notes also helped to achieve methodological triangulation, as it provided additional data to the researcher's observations, participant observations, and analysis of artifacts. It also helped to make continuous, iterative adjustments to the classroom activities based on the researcher's observations of the students' demands and feedback. This is a reflective research approach, as it is part of a larger research tradition that views reflexivity as a key aspect of qualitative research (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014).

3.4. Procedure of the Study

The study was conducted over four academic semesters across two lower secondary school contexts. Throughout the research period, creativity-based activities were integrated into regular English as a Foreign Language lessons as part of the normal teaching process rather than as isolated interventions. The procedure followed an action research cycle involving planning, implementation, observation, reflection, and adaptation. Activities were selected and adjusted continuously based on classroom observations, learner responses, and reflective evaluation of previous lessons. This cyclical approach allowed the researcher to modify teaching strategies in response to emerging classroom needs while maintaining alignment with the prescribed curriculum and lesson objectives.

3.4.1 Planning and Implementation of Creative Activities

The planning of creativity-based activities was guided by both pedagogical objectives and observed learner needs. Activities were selected according to their relevance to the curriculum, linguistic goals of each lesson, and their potential accessibility for neurodivergent learners. Particular attention was given to design tasks that offered multiple modes of participation, including visual, written, oral, dramatic, and music-based forms of expression. Activities were not implemented as separate interventions but were integrated into standard textbook-based lessons to maintain ecological validity and reflect authentic classroom practice. Examples of implemented activities included visual storytelling tasks, role-play exercises, lyric gap-fill activities, guided creative writing, poster design, and multimodal vocabulary tasks. Where possible, tasks were adapted to incorporate students' personal interests in order to increase emotional engagement and motivation. To avoid overstimulation or confusion, each activity was introduced with clear instructions, visual modelling, and structured scaffolding. The researcher intentionally balanced creative freedom with predictable task frameworks in order to ensure that students could engage with the activity without becoming overwhelmed by excessive ambiguity.

3.4.2 Observation and Reflective Adaptation Process

Following the implementation of each activity, student responses were systematically observed and documented through classroom observation notes and reflective field notes. Particular attention was paid to students' levels of participation, emotional responses, interaction patterns, and willingness to engage with English during and after the activities. The researcher reflected on each lesson after implementation in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the activity and identify possible adjustments for future lessons. Reflection focused not only on whether students completed the activity successfully, but also on how comfortable they appeared during participation, which students engaged most actively, and which aspects of the task may have created barriers or challenges. Based on these reflections, activities were continuously modified across subsequent lessons. For example, tasks that caused overstimulation, confusion, or visible discomfort were simplified, scaffolded further, or replaced with more structured alternatives. Likewise, activities that produced strong engagement or positive emotional responses were adapted and reused in later teaching cycles. This process ensured that the research remained responsive to students' evolving needs and consistent with the reflective principles of action research methodology (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014).

3.4.3 Assessment of Creativity-Based Activities

The effectiveness of creativity-based activities was assessed through ongoing formative evaluation rather than through formal testing procedures. Assessment focused primarily on students' observable participation, emotional comfort, linguistic output, and quality of engagement during activities. Rather than measuring performance quantitatively, the researcher examined whether activities appeared to increase willingness to participate, reduce anxiety-related behaviours, and facilitate meaningful language use. Student-created outputs such as posters, written texts, visual narratives, and collaborative tasks were reviewed as part of this evaluative process. In some cases, peer feedback and informal classroom discussion

were also used to gather student perspectives on activities and determine which formats learners found most engaging or supportive. Importantly, assessment was not used solely to measure student achievement but also to evaluate the suitability of the activities themselves. The researcher considered whether the activity design successfully accommodated diverse learner needs, encouraged inclusive participation, and aligned with the intended pedagogical outcomes. This evaluative process informed subsequent lesson planning and supported the continuous refinement of activity design throughout the study.

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Thematic Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. Observation notes, student artefacts, peer-assessment feedback, and teacher reflections were reviewed repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the dataset. Initial codes were generated focusing on participation patterns, emotional responses, and preferred modes of expression. These codes were then grouped into broader themes such as anxiety in spontaneous speaking, preference for structured tasks, multimodal expression, and the role of creative activities in classroom participation. Themes were subsequently reviewed and refined through continuous comparison across data sources. The analysis specifically focused on identifying patterns related to participation, emotional engagement, and the use of different modalities in language learning.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Given that this study involved working with minors and individuals potentially classified as vulnerable learners, stringent ethical guidelines were observed throughout the research process. Ethical procedures were designed in accordance with the standards set by the **British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018)** and **SAGE ethical research guidelines (Flick, 2018)**, ensuring that participants' rights, dignity, and well-being were protected at all times.

3.6.1 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Prior to commencing the study, **informed consent** was obtained from the school administration, the students' legal guardians, and the students themselves. All participants and their guardians received a clear explanation of the study's aims, procedures, potential risks, and anticipated benefits. It was emphasized that participation was **entirely voluntary** and that students could withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. Consent forms were designed in accessible language appropriate for both minors and their guardians to ensure full understanding of the research commitment (BERA, 2018).

3.6.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

To protect the privacy of participants, strict measures of **anonymity and confidentiality** were implemented. Pseudonyms were assigned to all students, and any identifying information (such as names, school identifiers, or specific personal characteristics) was removed or altered in the final thesis and any related reports. All data, including observation notes, field notes, and student artifacts, were securely stored in encrypted digital files accessible only to the researcher. Data will be retained securely for a limited period (no longer than five years) in accordance with institutional data protection policies and will be permanently deleted thereafter.

3.6.3 Special Considerations

Working with neurodivergent students necessitated heightened ethical sensitivity. As Florian and Spratt (2020) emphasize, ethical research involving neurodivergent learners must prioritize **emotional safety, respect for cognitive diversity, and non-pathologizing approaches**. Throughout the study, particular care was taken to create an environment where students felt comfortable, respected, and free from judgment. Observations were conducted discretely to avoid disrupting natural behaviours or causing discomfort. In the afternoon club setting, the researcher maintained a participant–observer role to minimize power imbalances and encourage genuine, voluntary interaction. Furthermore, no formal psychological evaluations or labels were assigned by the researcher. Instead, students were considered based on observed learning behaviours and preferences, following inclusive education principles that emphasize meeting students’ needs without stigmatization (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). To ensure trustworthiness, in the study, triangulation of data sources (observations, student work, teacher reflections) across action research cycles was used.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Overview of Findings

The results do not aim to prove causal relationships but to describe observed patterns and changes in student participation across different types of classroom activities. The findings should therefore be understood as indications and observed tendencies rather than measurable cause-and-effect relationships. The introduction of creativity-based activities produced noticeable and predominantly positive effects in learner engagement, particularly among the neurodivergent learners targeted in this study. Collected data gathered across the study demonstrated that students generally responded with increased enthusiasm, emotional openness, and willingness to participate when activities involved elements of art, music, writing, or drama.

One of the first noticeable changes was an increase in voluntary participation. During conventional activities such as grammar exercises and textbook-based tasks, neurodivergent students were frequently observed to show signs of disengagement, including reduced eye contact, fidgeting, and minimal verbal contribution. In contrast, when activities involved visual storytelling, collaborative songwriting, or dramatic role-play, these same students became visibly more engaged and invested in the tasks. For example, a student who displayed characteristics associated with ADHD and who typically struggled to maintain attention during traditional exercises demonstrated sustained concentration and verbal creativity during a group activity that involved designing and narrating a comic strip.

Emotional expression also appeared to increase during creativity-focused activities. Increased instances of laughing, smiling, and spontaneous contributions were observed during role-play and music activities, which were less common during conventional instructional activities. In one case, a student on the autism spectrum who usually avoided large group speaking activity actively participated in a small-group dramatization after being given the

opportunity to choose a familiar role and work within a predictable script. This observation suggests that when activities were structured but still allowed imaginative input, students appeared to feel more emotionally comfortable and were more willing to participate. Furthermore, there were indications that creativity-based activities helped reduce visible signs of anxiety among neurodivergent students. During open-ended creative tasks, students demonstrated fewer signs of self-conscious behavior, such as hesitation, whispering, or reluctance to participate. Creative tasks and student-produced artifacts also supported these observations, as students who were normally hesitant to contribute to class discussions were observed to participate more actively in English during these activities.

Taken together, the findings suggest that creativity-based activities were associated not only with increased participation but also with improved emotional comfort and motivation among neurodivergent learners. When students were given opportunities for creative and flexible expression, they appeared to engage more actively and confidently in language learning processes that had previously posed difficulties. However, it is important to note that not all creative activities were equally effective for all students. In some cases, drama activities increased anxiety, and background music was distracting for certain learners. These observations highlight that neuroinclusive teaching does not imply that one method works for everyone, but rather that flexibility, choice, and adaptation are essential.

4.2 Effective Creative Activities

Throughout the study, a variety of creativity-based activities have demonstrated notable effectiveness in increasing neurodivergent students' motivation, engagement, and supporting their active participation. Activities that allow for multisensory expression, offer personalization opportunities, and also incorporate a certain structure have been observed to be associated with higher levels of engagement, emotional comfort, and language use over time. In this context, rather than a single type of activity being decisive, the balance between creative freedom and predictability appears to have determined student involvement.

Activities related to "visual storytelling," such as creating comic books and storyboards, and personal posters, have been found quite effective, and students who had difficulty with text-dense activities show a high degree of engagement when they can construct meaning with the help of visuals. A particular instance of such an effect is that exemplified by a student who showed signs of dyslexia and, while normally reluctant to produce written language, participated in a visual storytelling activity and produced a well-developed comic book that accurately depicted the story sequence and showed creative use of words. The combination of modalities eased verbal output. The drama-based activities were also very effective, provided that there were clearly developed scenarios with specific roles. Neurodiverse students struggling with social anxiety in open discussions could be successfully involved in structured role-playing activities. Thus, for instance, when I tried a structured role-play exercise, which entailed discussing a simple shopping scenario, one of my students who was diagnosed with autism exhibited more self-confidence, used better pronunciation and more functional language in their speech.

As for music-related activities, which included fill-in-the-blank song lyrics and rhythm language games, the effectiveness was moderate, mainly for students who had symptoms of ADHD. Indeed, those ADHD students showed a lot of focus and perseverance in performing music tasks, especially when those involved physical activity. However, it should be noted that sometimes loud music caused certain discomfort to those students with auditory sensitivities.

Creative writing activities showed different results depending on the neurodevelopmental condition of a student and their verbal abilities. Indeed, neurodiverse students, whose verbal abilities were well-developed, successfully coped with the personal stories writing and creative writing activities; however, at the same time, the students who showed poor writing skills were not successful at all when it came to performing open tasks. Thus, writing activities must be structured. Especially, neurodivergent students should be presented with clear instructions along with good examples in order to improve their engagement and performance.

4.3 Effects on Language Development and Emotional Comfort

During the study, students used a wider range of vocabulary, more sequencing language, and more varied sentence structures during creative tasks. Moreover, visual narration and poster-making activities helped students produce longer stretches of language. With visual cues, students who usually produced minimal spoken output were able to create longer utterances and experiment with descriptive language. The visual support appeared to help students maintain communication in English for longer periods of time. Drama-based tasks contributed mainly to the development of functional and pragmatic language. Through repeated role-play of everyday situations, students appeared to gain greater control over formulaic expressions and pragmatic routines, which in some cases seemed to transfer to later classroom interactions. The embodied and rehearsed nature of these activities appeared to support retention and transfer, which is consistent with embodied approaches to language learning (Gregersen et al., 2014). Although grammatical errors were still present, students showed a greater willingness to communicate.

The results also indicate that the instructional approach had a noticeable effect on students' emotional comfort while communicating in English. Students appeared to show lower levels of anxiety and participated more consistently in activities, while non-participation became less frequent compared to more traditional activity types followed through the textbook. In particular, one student who previously showed clear signs of social anxiety began to participate more regularly during creativity-based activities. Participation increased first in activities that included visual and musical support, and later in group storytelling activities, which suggests that multimodal and creative tasks may have helped students feel more comfortable using English. Extra curriculum setting supported these findings. In creative settings without evaluation or grading, students used English more freely and showed greater emotional engagement. The reduced focus on immediate error correction appeared to encourage students to take more risks and experiment with new forms of expression, which is consistent with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis. Overall, the findings suggest that

creativity-based activities did not function only as motivational tools but also contributed to the creation of a stable learning environment in which neurodivergent students were able to use English more regularly and felt emotionally safer while participating in classroom activities.

4.4 Individual Case Profiles

The individual case studies vary in length and detail in order to reflect the differing complexity of learners' profiles and the nature of the challenges observed, rather than to suggest hierarchical importance among cases.

4.4.1. Venessa

Venessa is a seventh-grade student formally diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). She displays common traits associated with her neurodivergent profile, including high distractibility, impulsive behavior, and difficulty maintaining focus during written or highly structured activities. Despite these challenges, she exhibits strong creative potential, particularly with language practices when music and art are integrated. Her verbal intelligence, emotional expressiveness, and spontaneity become especially visible with creativity-based activities that are flexible and personally meaningful for her. These characteristics align with Armstrong's (2012) argument that neurodivergent learners often demonstrate significant strengths when learning contexts accommodate their cognitive preferences.

Visual scaffolding techniques, such as mind maps and vocabulary illustrations, helped her grasp the meaning better, as well as increased her motivation through the observation period. However, the most impactful activity was definitely music integration. Venessa enthusiastically participated in gap-fill lyric activities based on songs by her favourite artist, The Weeknd, often singing along with the class. These tasks not only increased her motivation but also improved

her pronunciation and concentration span, which is consistent with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis in that it highlights emotional engagement with lowering anxiety and facilitates language acquisition. Other strategies included drama and shadowing activities, which helped her perform dialogues and imitate the speech of the native speakers in a creative and playful way (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). She also received effective individualized reading activities that related to her own experiences, such as her weekend routines and her own interests. In contrast, traditional classroom activities based on the textbook, mostly mechanical activities, written assessments, and silent reading tasks, were intentionally avoided with her. Previous exposure to these activities had caused frustration and visible disengagement, which was required for a differentiated approach. When Venessa was allowed to express herself through music, movement, and narrative, it was observed that her affective barriers diminished, and her focus noticeably improved.

Venessa's case suggests how creative, student-centred learning environments can help to increase the motivation of neurodivergent students. Therefore, integrating creativity-based activities that reflected her own interests, she was willing to participate in most of them. Her emotional management improved noticeably because she had verbal conflicts with her peers at the beginning of the term. This case further supports the development of an inclusive pedagogical approach that stresses the necessity of flexibility, relevance, and autonomy in a variety of learning settings (Florian & Spratt, 2013). In conclusion, the above case study reveals the empowering effects of a safe and creative linguistic environment for students with ADHD.

4.4.2. Honza

Honza is a seventh-grade student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Unlike the hyperactive type of ADHD that is commonly encountered in language classes, Honza has hypoactive and internalized symptoms. He is highly emotional but oftentimes quiet and withdrawn. He also has impulsive tendencies that happen during the lessons unpredictably. His

inability to focus and emotional outbursts also present a big barrier for his engagement. Despite all the barriers he faces, Honza has shown exceptional emotional intelligence and sensitivity when interacting with people on a one-to-one basis, especially those he trusts. He also formed a personal bond with the teacher that emerged as an important factor that could help him engage academically at any level. To engage Honza with his peers and the teacher, English language activities were developed that focused on his only and constant interest: football. These activities included reading about famous football players, football-related vocabulary work, and opinion-based speaking activities about recent football games. This approach was based on theories that support motivating second language learners by including personal interests in activity design, as suggested by Dörnyei (2001). Despite this approach, Honza did not have much enthusiasm for any activity that involved engagement with his peers and teacher. He also showed resistance and withdrawal when faced with conventional academic work. He wrote a series of personal and emotional letters written in English and addressed to the teacher. These letters demonstrated his expressive ability and potential for advanced-level writing.

Emotional expression and **ongoing academic engagement** were observed to be a clear gap. Although he was able to open up emotionally in certain moments, this did not carry over into most classroom activities. However, in terms of his interaction with structured activities, his motivational levels were significantly reduced. His non-participation, withdrawal, or seeming lack of emotional engagement in the lessons was evident, notwithstanding all attempts to make the learning materials more flexible and personally relevant to him. This is, therefore, a broader issue that is often faced when dealing with neurodivergent students, especially those students with less externally visible ADHD traits. Emotional trust, when intentionally established, creates a window of opportunity in which students are willing to share their own perspectives during speaking activities. However, this does not necessarily mean that the students will participate each time. This case also demonstrates the interrelation between cognitive and emotional needs. In low-pressure, one-to-one, or personally meaningful situations, his verbal skills and emotional capacities were obvious. However, his strengths were

not sufficient to support his progress when the activities were not intrinsically meaningful to him.

Therefore, this case illustrates both the **strengths and the limits of creative pedagogy**. Personalised and relational approaches can successfully open communication channels, but they do not always bridge the gap between emotional safety and long-term academic persistence. This was particularly visible when the student's underlying motivation toward the language remained low despite the opportunities provided by the teacher.

4.4.3. Michal

Michal, a seventh-grade student, began the academic year with a notably negative attitude toward English. His language proficiency was significantly below grade expectations, and his previous teacher had labeled him as a “hopeless case” and academically incapable. Observations revealed behaviors commonly associated with ADHD, particularly inattention, sensory sensitivity, and emotional reactivity. He experienced discomfort in absolute silence yet was also easily overwhelmed by loud or sudden noises. These conflicting sensory responses made it difficult for him to concentrate in a conventional classroom setting, which typically demanded sustained attention and tolerance for external stimuli.

In an effort to rebuild his relationship with English, highly personalized, creative activities were integrated into daily ELT classes. Drawing on his interests, namely sports and specific television shows, activities were designed to incorporate familiar content in meaningful ways. One particularly successful method was the use of shadowing, where he mimicked dialogues from his favorite TV series. This strategy, often used in pronunciation training, helped him to practice oral fluency in an enjoyable and low-pressure environment (Murai, 2014). Visual aids and multimedia resources were also utilized extensively to introduce and reinforce vocabulary, which goes well with his preference for visual-spatial processing (Silverman, 2010). Additionally, he engaged with ChatGPT as part of a self-directed learning activity. The use of

conversational AI offered him autonomy and flexibility, which increased his willingness to engage with written and spoken English both during and outside of the class.

Unlike traditional worksheets or grammar drills, which previously triggered disengagement in him according to his reflections, these flexible, technology-supported activities fostered moderate but meaningful improvement in his classroom behavior and language skills. His vocabulary expanded noticeably, and he began to show signs of curiosity and voluntary participation in informal activities. Although his functional engagement was average around, this marked a significant shift from total resistance to partial cooperation.

His case reflects both the transformative potential and practical limitations of creative pedagogy for neurodivergent learners. While he did not respond well to structured academic formats, interest-based and interactive tasks helped reduce his emotional resistance and reframe English as an accessible subject. His progress was non-linear and dependent on maintaining emotional safety and autonomy. Two pillars of inclusive learning as emphasized in neurodiversity-oriented teaching (Armstrong, 2012; Florian & Spratt, 2013). His development, while modest in academic terms, represents a powerful narrative of transformation from being labeled a “hopeless case” to becoming an engaged participant in his own learning process.

4.4.4. Ege

Ege is an introverted seventh-grade student who has not received any formal diagnosis but displays characteristics commonly associated with autism spectrum. According to observations through 2 semesters, persistent toe-walking, limited facial expression, minimal peer interaction (except with one trusted friend), very silent talking as if he whispers, and deep absorption in solitary interests, namely technology and drawing, were noted by the teacher. Ege, despite his differences in social communication skills, demonstrated unexpectedly high levels of proficiency in English for his age and engaged in class activities, especially when the topic interested him. He even offered to communicate in English with his seatmate during class activities as well as breaktime outside. A lot of colleagues reported that they were also surprised that they were so fluent in English, which they found related to the researcher's attitude during the classes, which is not commonly observed among his peers. During activity planning, it was intentional to incorporate self-directed and interest-based learning activities. Visual learning activities were found to be the most effective in helping Ege express his understanding of the language through drawing and diagramming. This type of activity was suitable for his learning type, which is visual-spatial, is commonly found in neurodiverse students who tend to understand and process information better with images and designs than with linear spoken words (Silverman, 2010). Technology-based activities related to his interests were also found to be effective in keeping him engaged and supporting self-directed learning. Project-based activities were also found useful in providing him with autonomy in learning within a non-threatening and non-competitive context, where he could set his own pace in learning.

Ege frequently drifted into his internal world during class but responded well to gentle redirection. Having a friend of his own to work with made him feel safe, and when focused, he did good work that was thoughtfully done and accurate. He liked being engaged in activities that allowed self-expression, though not as much with group activities or fast-paced ones. His preference for routine and predictability, combined with deep topic focus, is characteristic of

students on the autism spectrum (Baron-Cohen, 2008), though in Ege's case, these traits were never formally assessed.

Ege's case demonstrates that language learning success does not require extroversion or high verbal output. His peaceful, reliable involvement, particularly in the visual and technical aspects, demonstrates the potential for neurodivergent students to thrive if they are enabled to work in their own way. Instructional strategies that respect the autonomy of the learners, minimize stressors, and incorporate personal interests are an excellent starting point for significant learning (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Ege's performance questions conventional expectations of "active participation" by showing that internal motivation, paired with adapted input, can be equally effective in promoting language growth.

4.4.5. Dominik

Dominik is a seventh-grade student with advanced English skills beyond his age. He consistently achieves high academic achievements and has an evident interest in language-related activities. Despite his linguistic strengths, he displays several socially atypical behaviors such as selective communication, unpredictable mood changes, and attention-seeking actions such as imitating animals to elicit peer reactions. He forms close relationships with some classmates but can be abrupt or aggressive toward others. These behaviors, along with his necessity of frequent verbal redirection and distinctive interpersonal style, suggest likely neurodivergent traits, particularly in social communication. To address both his advanced abilities and behavioural needs, I used a mix of structured and creative instructional strategies. Role plays, mini-presentations, and group speaking activities helped him in terms of demonstrating fluency within clear social frameworks. Also, personalized writing activities were supported by means of his emotional range and imagination, and complex self-expression. In line with inclusive pedagogy, I often provided instructions to him as an individual, as he had a habit of missing instructions given to the group, as discussed in Florian and Spratt (2013). This was important in securing clarity and completion.

He excelled when academic expectations were clear, and the content encouraged creativity. His motivation stayed high. Moreover, he had always shown good performance in activities related to writing and speaking skills. Nevertheless, his social behavior was not within the usual norms of classroom social behavior, as he tended to associate with very few students and always sought attention. These are examples of a unique social cognitive profile, one that is often seen in twice-exceptional learners (2e learners), defined as those students who are both gifted and neurodivergent (Silverman, 2009), rather than a lack of cognitive ability.

His case demonstrates the complexity of supporting students whose cognitive strengths coexist with non-normative social behaviour. He often completes some of the most advanced work in the classroom, which questions the idea that academic achievements necessarily mean classroom success. Neurodivergent students with high abilities may need as much emotional and behavioral support as their less academically achieving counterparts. Individualized instruction, emotional tolerance, and social flexibility are crucial for developing their abilities and meeting their needs.

4.4.6. Emir

Emir is a highly energetic, articulate, and assertive seventh-grade student with a strong passion for English. Over two academic semesters, he consistently expressed his desire to become a translator, which was observed as both a long-term motivation and high verbal intelligence. While Emir has no formal diagnosis. Nevertheless, his frequent changes in attention, impulsivity, and resistance to mechanical drills may reflect characteristics commonly associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). His engagement remains low in passive, transmission-based classroom activities; however, tasks designed around active participation result in noticeably higher concentration and task completion. To help Emir use his energy in positive ways and build his language skills, a variety of creative and student-focused strategies were implemented. Through drama activities, he could perform dialogues with emotions and spontaneity, while shadowing activities, where he repeated dialogues from

selected film clips, allowed him to practice his fluency and pronunciation in an interesting way (Murai, 2014). Emir has also shown his ability in translation activities, especially when he is given short texts or dialogues from movies between Turkish and English. Activities that were personally meaningful and allowed him to express himself worked best to keep his attention and reduce distractions.

Emir showed a lot of enthusiasm and took an active role in creative tasks. He consistently outperformed expectations in speaking, writing, and translation exercises. However, his engagement decreased during grammar activities that relied primarily on passive participation. Emir found it hard to focus during reading comprehension or language drills and often lost interest unless he liked the activity or the theme of the activity. This pattern matches research on ADHD learners, who tend to do well in open-ended, expressive activities but have difficulty with repetitive or less meaningful tasks (Armstrong, 2012; Zentall, 2006).

Emir's experience shows how important it is to match teaching techniques with students' interests and ways of thinking. His progress proves that when neurodivergent students have choices, real-world tasks, and ways to express themselves, they can focus and do very well. At the same time, his story points out that standard instruction methods commonly do not work for everyone. Emir succeeded because of flexible teaching, a receptive approach, and real engagement. His case shows how interest-based learning can help neurodivergent students in language classes.

4.4.7. Aneta

Aneta is a seventh-grade bilingual student born and raised in London, whose level of proficiency in the English language was better than that of her classmates. She shows high proficiency in the four skills of the English language, i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking, with the highest level of proficiency in writing. In spite of her high level of proficiency in the English language, certain aspects of her behavior point to the possibility of certain neurodivergent traits. She generally does not participate in large group activities and always interacts with only a limited group of students, showing a strong preference for solitary activities. Her strong preference for the visual arts and solitary activities, and limited verbal interaction with students, point towards certain neurodivergent traits, i.e., high-functioning autism or sensory sensitivity (Aron, 1996; Baron-Cohen, 2008).

Creativity-based activities were found to be the primary mode through which her learning and psychological well-being were facilitated. These activities enabled the combination of linguistic production and visual expression, reducing affective demands while maintaining cognitive and linguistic challenges. The creative writing activities also enabled reflective language use and self-meaning-making, while the visual storytelling activities enabled multimodal language output through drawing, sequencing, and storytelling. The collaborative structures evidenced their flexibility of design, consistently offering her the opportunity, if ever possible, to either work alone or with a self-selected partner group. This was not simply an adaptation or differentiation of the instruction, but a conscious instructional design, because of the possibility of her emotional withdrawal and anxiety associated with whole-group activities and unpredictable collaborative designs. Under the creativity-centred instruction model, her learning performance was found to be consistently high and excellent in written work, which showed high organization, originality, and linguistic accuracy, especially in activities where visual planning and individual work were involved. However, in learning situations where high social demands and low structure were involved, her learning participation was found to be

low, indicating that her learning participation was not necessarily related to her linguistic abilities.

Her case challenges the deficit models of neurodivergence in the context of EFL learning settings. She presents a case of camouflaged neurodivergence, where high learning and academic performance mask underlying sensory and affective regulation needs (Livingston et al., 2019). When the creativity-centered instruction model was used as the main mode of instruction and integrated into the curriculum, it not only maintained her learning potential but also augmented it, which is consistent with the wider inclusive models of instruction and learning (CAST, 2018; Attwood, 2007).

4.4.8. Karoline

Karoline is an eighth-grade student with a formal diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Tourette's Syndrome. Although Karoline displayed very advanced language skills, emotional awareness, and empathic capacity, these traits often challenge deficit models of the neurodivergent learner. From an educational perspective, the learner's profile indicated a gap between intellectual ability and performance under conditions of evaluation and assessment. Formal testing conditions consistently increase anxiety, subsequently increasing her tics and stress-related behaviours because of her perfectionist nature. The learner's perfectionism and empathic awareness created a sense of cognitive rigidity. Therefore, this made it difficult for her to cope with the teacher's or peer correction. She had reactions towards unexpected changes, and had peer disagreements often. Her profile is consistent with the findings of research on the autistic learner with co-occurring conditions (Baron-Cohen, 2008; Attwood, 2007).

As a result of the barriers to learning itself, creativity-based and integrative activities were incorporated and integrated as essential parts of the curriculum, rather than supplementary strategies to accommodate the learner's difficulties. Formal assessment was minimized or

replaced with alternative forms of authentic assessment, such as creative writing, storytelling, and the application of visual supports. This enabled the learner to show her language ability without anxiety and stress-related behavioural responses associated with performance and testing conditions. In line with inclusive strategies (Florian & Spratt, 2013), the learner was encouraged to utilize self-selected strategies, thus supporting a sense of agency and control during the learning process. Her involvement with the school art club served as a basis for instructional planning, especially with regard to the integration of visual mapping, drawing, and imagery-based planning strategies. These creative processes served as a guide or pathway for oral production and meaning-making. When activities allowed spontaneous use of language, she demonstrated fluency, confidence, and emotional involvement with language.

Her affective reactions, however, also showed a strong contextual dependence. When tasks were unpredictable, time-constrained, or unstructured, tics were exacerbated, and tolerance for ambiguity decreased. Frustration was also experienced within collaborative activities, especially with regard to peers' interpretations of tasks and their performance during those tasks. Instead of seeing these experiences as behavioural problems, educational modifications focused on managing activities and the setting. Modelling, role expectations, and a low-stimulation setting were successful in facilitating activity completion and preventing emotional distress.

Karoline's case, therefore, points to the necessity of emotional safety and flexibility in EFL instruction. Karoline's academic and linguistic capabilities were only accessible within a frame that managed anxiety and creative autonomy. Traditional EFL instruction and assessment structures failed to capture Karoline's capabilities and, indeed, constrained her ability to participate. This case supports the argument that inclusion is not about treating learners differently, regardless of their affective and cognitive conditions, but about modifying activities based on their affective and cognitive conditions (Rix et al., 2009; Armstrong, 2012). For Karoline and learners like her, empathy, flexibility, and trust are not add-on values; they constitute foundational conditions that make EFL instruction effective.

4.4.9. Lena

Lena is a seventh-grade student from Ukraine who attended the school in Prague because of the war. Upon arrival, Lena had not been exposed to English. She experienced significant challenges during her first weeks in the classroom because of her lack of proficiency in the dominant language and her emotional and social challenges. During the initial stage, Lena did not make any sounds and did not maintain eye contact with her teacher and peers. She also experienced high levels of anxiety, especially during social interactions and collaborative learning activities. These behaviours, though not formally diagnosed, could be related to both autism and PTSD because they are also exhibited by people who experience PTSD and autistic disorders, such as the response to auditory stimuli and emotional withdrawal, which might be related to both PTSD and autistic disorders (Kagan, 2016; Causadias, 2020).

Despite these barriers, however, it was clear that Lena possessed certain strengths in the area of visual intelligence and metacognitive skills. She was much more engaged during non-verbal activities such as making posters, Canva designs, and graphics. This was a turning point for Lena's classroom participation, and it was clear that this was an area where her L2 skills could be engaged. To help Lena during activities, the materials were made more visual and sensory-friendly intentionally to support her. Visual storytelling, silent vocabulary games, and matching pictures based on emotions helped her understand L2 without putting too much emphasis on speaking. In line with the sensory integration approach, it was found that activities involving the visual motor system were associated with the regulation of the vestibular and proprioceptive systems, which are key in the reduction of anxiety and the development of self-regulation skills (Ayres, 1972). In order to assess the impact of the intervention strategies, the level of participation and L2 comprehension was monitored in different classroom configurations. For example, during weeks when the background music and sensory modifications or creativity were not present, Lena's level of participation in group activities was and more visual prompts were required for her to follow classroom instructions. In weeks when the sensory modifications were consistently in place; however, Lena was more inclined

to participate nonverbally and was able to complete up to 80 percent of the vocabulary-matching activities independently. This would suggest, therefore, that the level of participation and L2 comprehension was closely related to the sensory modifications and not the passage of time.

The impact of the intervention strategies was clear, and the level of participation and L2 comprehension was enhanced, with the creation of a softer classroom ambiance with the addition of background music and emotionally themed pictures promoting a more inclusive classroom, in line with the research literature on trauma-informed and sensory-safe classroom environments (Carello & Butler, 2015; Tomas, 2021). Lena initially was totally quiet with the group and then moved into some non-verbal interactions. She started to smile during her daily activities, follow instructions, and participate in some activities in the classroom, such as greeting activities. At some point, I was afraid that the continued silence indicated that the learner was not being reached or that the strategies employed were not yielding any results. Although Lena was non-verbal in English, she started using eye contact, nods, and body language to communicate some of her preferences. This was an indication of a sense of security and belonging, which are key for the development of the learner, especially for refugees or trauma victims (Block et al., 2014).

Lena's experience, therefore, represents the complex interplay between language acquisition, neurodiversity, and trauma. Though Lena's lack of verbal contribution could be viewed as a learning delay in academic terms, in fact, this was a function. By refocusing the learning environment on emotional regulation and creative expression, rather than performance, Lena re-engaged with the learning environment on her own terms. This experience, therefore, represents the need for a more culturally responsive and emotionally aware pedagogy in a diverse learning environment, particularly in working with displaced or highly sensitive learners (Cummins, 2001; Arnot & Pinson, 2005).

4.5. Thematic Analysis

This thematic analysis synthesizes the information obtained from the nine separate case studies concerning the neurodivergent learners in the EFL classroom. Although all the learners have had different learning routes and have faced different challenges, one can spot some common patterns in all the case studies. Five different themes have been derived from the case studies: personal relevance, emotional safety, sensory and social sensitivity, opposition to traditional learning methods, and the benefits and limitations of creative expression.

4.5.1 Personal Relevance as a Motivational Anchor

Across the case studies, learner engagement increased when activities connected with students' personal interests, routines, or preferred forms of expression. For instance, Honza responded most strongly to football-related material, Emir to translation and drama, Venessa to music and art, and Michal to television-based tasks and AI-supported communication. Even quieter learners appeared more willing to participate when activities were emotionally or personally meaningful. This is in line with the Self-Determination Theory by Ryan & Deci (2000), where autonomy support, personal relevance, and other factors are said to influence intrinsic motivation in learners. For the neurodivergent learners, who have difficulties with attention and emotional regulation (Zentall, 2006), the relevance of the learning materials to the learners' personal interests and personalities might have helped them have less resistance to learning, not to mention the enjoyment they derived from the learning process. From the teaching perspective, personal relevance was not just desirable; it was necessary. In some cases, it marked the moment participation first became possible. Therefore, students' interests should be considered integral to activity design.

4.5.2 Emotional Safety as a Prerequisite for Learning

Another theme that cuts across the data is the significance of emotional safety for the students' learning process. Here, emotional safety means the learning environment allows students to hesitate, differ, and be quiet without instant judgment and correction. Karoline's experience is a good case in point, where formal tests led to increasing anxiety and physical tics. Similarly, for Lena, who was a refugee with no pre-exposure to English, situations in unfamiliar and uncomfortable contexts meant withdrawal.

Other students, like Ege and Aneta, did not show overt signs of discomfort and distress, but they still needed routines and low social pressure in their learning process. Their high language proficiency was only visible in situations where activities were routine, familiar, and non-intrusive. Under pressure, their participation dropped significantly. These observations are consistent with the trauma-informed education movement (Carello & Butler, 2015), which stresses trust, predictability, and reducing performance pressure in learning contexts. For neurodivergent students, emotional safety is not just given; it is created through activity design as well as feedback and expectations (Armstrong, 2012). If emotional safety was missing, emotional control required so much mental processing power that risks in language production were unlikely. Hence, emotional safety preceded participation.

4.5.3 Sensory and Social Sensitivities

Sensory input and social interaction sensitivity can also be seen here. For example, Michal had problems with complete silence; however, he also had problems with too much noise. Similarly, although Aneta and Ege had low social interaction, Dominik had selective and unstable social interaction. This can also be explained in terms of general characteristics of autism, attention, and other profiles (Robertson & Baron-Cohen, 2017). Some students benefited from being in control of their immediate learning environment, e.g., by choosing a learning partner, sustaining physical distance, or feeling discomfort with whole-class interaction. This should not be interpreted as avoidance. The "double empathy problem"

research suggests that these kinds of interactional difficulties stem from a mutual misunderstanding, not a problem with the student (Milton, 2012). In practice, the “sensory-aware” modifications, e.g., visual support, opportunities for movement, or reduced auditory stimuli, correlated with increased student involvement. Rather than being nice-to-have in classroom management, these modifications were integral parts of the teaching methodology itself (Tomchek & Dunn, 2007; Tomas, 2021).

4.5.4. Resistance to Traditional Pedagogies

Another phenomenon that emerged was resistance towards traditional teaching methodologies. Grammar exercises, worksheets, or test-style activities caused displeasure or withdrawal, especially in Venessa, Honza, Michal, and Emir. The problem was not the language level. Rather, the problem stemmed from the way these activities came with repetition, assessment, and a lack of control. This is an extension of a more general criticism of standardized language teaching, which focuses on correct answers, pace, and teacher control (Rix et al., 2009; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). For learners with ADHD and autism spectrum profiles, these conditions increase the likelihood of fatigue and avoidance (Zentall, 2006). The problem is the lack of flexibility in the structure, the inability to change the pace, the way of expression, or the level of participation. From a didactic standpoint, the problem lay less in the traditional content than in the rigid interactional demands attached to it.

4.5.5. Power and Limitations of Creativity-Based Activities

Creative activities, music, visual work, drama, role play, and storytelling were common in almost all of them. All of the students had a chance to interact with at least one of the forms of creative activity. Venessa responded best to music, Emir responded best to drama and translation, and Aneta responded best to visually supported writing. The above findings support existing research into the linguistic and emotional benefits of arts-based learning (Glăveanu, 2018; Sawyer, 2012). However, even though creativity is important, it is not enough on its own to ensure that the learner will continue to engage with their learning. The case of Honza and Michal is an example of this, as being creative did not necessarily translate into greater engagement in their learning.

4.6. Summary

From the thematic analysis above, inclusive EFL teaching for neurodivergent learners is not about reducing the level of academic demands placed on learners; rather, it is about rethinking and redesigning the way learning is made accessible to them. Personal relevance, emotional safety, sensory awareness, structure, and creativity are intertwined in various ways across the case studies above. They together indicate that EFL learning is not just cognitively driven; rather, it is also emotionally, socially, and even sensually driven, and this is particularly visible when learners do not conform to the traditional way of learning.

When taken altogether, however, the results of thematic analysis show that the participation in English language classes is determined not just by the learners' level of language skills and proficiency, but to a large degree by the structure of the learning experience provided to them. For instance, if the process involves frequent verbal communication and/or social aspects, learners with neurodivergent traits may withdraw even if they possess all the necessary knowledge to actively participate and share their insights. At the same time, it is important to note that according to the obtained data, an affective environment plays an important role in language learning, especially when dealing with a neurodivergent population.

Namely, when students are able to feel emotionally comfortable and safe, have sufficient structure and a predictable environment, they can use more language and take risks without being afraid of possible mistakes. Thus, problems associated with participation and interaction do not necessarily originate from the neurodivergent population and its needs. The mismatch of approaches and requirements on the part of educators also contributes significantly to participation difficulties among neurodivergent students.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary and Interpretation of Findings

This study investigated the potential of creativity-based classroom activities to support the inclusion of neurodivergent lower secondary learners in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, with particular attention to students who tended to withdraw from oral participation. The study went beyond the exclusive focus on learning outcomes to explore the role of variations in the structure of activities on the learners' willingness to participate, express themselves, and use the target language. As part of the intervention, posters, visuals, and vocabulary activities prepared by the teacher were displayed in the classroom to motivate students and support their learning. The findings show that structured creative activities significantly impacted targeted learners' participation and affective comfort in the classroom. The learners, being unwilling participants in any drill work or teacher questioning, or any other form of open verbal interaction, were willing to communicate during the creativity-based activities, showing a stronger tendency to experiment with language. The results show that creativity served not simply as a motivational supplement, but as a mechanism for transforming students' relationship with language use in the classroom.

Recent studies suggest that the concept of language learning should be viewed from the perspective of the association between affective and rational engagement. Thus, creativity-based reading helps EFL learners to foster their critical thinking skills, which explains the rationale behind multimodal activities that aid learners to think more critically than merely mechanically (Shahini, 2025). From an interpretive perspective, the changes that are observed in the learners are because the creativity-based reading task takes away the performance anxiety that is usually associated with conventional EFL teaching techniques. For instance, conventional EFL instruction techniques make people feel like their spoken language is always under scrutiny or being judged, which is difficult for neurodivergent students because they tend to get really nervous or sensitive about being judged. This is confirmed by recent studies

regarding inclusivity, which have shown that a lack of confidence and communication barriers are some of the most limiting factors to the participation of multilingual learners (Sadiq et al., 2024). For instance, the creativity-based task eliminated the need to be accurate or correct at all times, allowing the learners to feel comfortable taking risks even when their linguistic output was not accurate.

A particularly revealing pattern appeared during moments of intentional role reversal. At certain points in the intervention, students—native speakers of Czech—were invited to support the teacher’s own Czech language learning. In these communications, English functioned as a shared working language through which explanations, comparisons, and clarifications were negotiated. What is interesting is that the students who are not as proficient in English and would generally not use it to communicate in a normal situation were becoming more willing to use it in this context. This implies that the issue may not be proficiency alone, but rather a problem of how the use of language is being evaluated. When students were placed in the role of experts, and the teacher became the learner, the evaluative pressure of the classroom changed significantly. Students who were usually silent became more confident and more willing to speak English in later activities. This type of situational reframing is consistent with recent theories of inclusive teaching, which adapt the learning context to assist diverse learner profiles and reduce the need to achieve perfection. This demonstrates the potential of creative and flexible pedagogical techniques to considerably improve inclusive student participation (Olsson et al., 2026). Moreover, recent research on neuroinclusive design has underlined the importance of settings that recognize cognitive diversity and facilitate the participation of all learners. (neuroinclusive design principles, 2024) which supports the study.

The results are also in agreement with Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, particularly as it relates to anxiety and self-confidence. However, unlike previous research, it is clear from the results of this study that it is the learning context rather than the learner’s affective state that is critical in determining their responses to second language learning. The constant increase in the complexity of the students’ language use also demonstrates that

creative instructional techniques are not only emotionally safe but also cognitively beneficial. The variety of tasks, which include elements of drawing, music, and performance, allowed learners to access different cognitive strengths and express themselves in different ways. This is in keeping with recent theories of neurodiversity, which emphasize the variability of cognitive strengths and learning expression. This further supports the argument that inclusive EFL teaching is most effective where learners are offered a variety of learning opportunities rather than a single approach.

5.2 Comparison with Previous Research

The results of this study are mostly in line with earlier research on creativity and inclusion in EFL classrooms, but they also add new insights. Earlier studies have shown that creativity can boost learner engagement, motivation, and language development when it is used thoughtfully in class (Maley & Peachey, 2015; Armstrong, 2012). Still, much of this research has looked at creativity as a broad teaching benefit, without closely examining how creative activities affect learner anxiety, avoidance, or neurodivergent students.

More recent research has begun to address this gap by examining the relationships among creativity, affective engagement, and participation. However, according to Shahini in his study, he indicates that language learning can be understood in terms of how people think and feel in communication, rather than from a logical point of view (Shahini, 2025). This aligns with recent studies indicating that multimodal, creativity-based activities can help teachers alleviate students' stress and increase their engagement. This is because these types of activities may shift students' attention from the mechanical aspects of language to the aspects of meaning and potential for expression. This way, students' potential for language exploration and application increases. Furthermore, Sadiq et al. (2024) studied the issue of multilingual students and the language challenges they encounter. The researchers established that lack of self-confidence and fear of speaking are major impediments to the learning of foreign languages, especially when the students know that their classroom language is being assessed. Recent studies on

integrative and multilingual classrooms also support the current research results. The current research results extend previous studies by indicating that changes in activity design and in student-teacher interaction can break this pattern. This is particularly evident in the current research results in the way in which multimodal and creativity-based activities reframe language usage in the classroom and reduce students' withdrawal in the case of neurodivergent students.

The observed role exchange between students and teachers in the current research aligns with recent studies on student agency and identity in language learning. However, the current approach to the teaching of languages emphasizes the sharing of power and knowledge within the classroom to accommodate students who feel left out within the traditional teacher-centered approach. Recent research has also found that the extent to which students learn a language independently relates to the tasks and methods they use. The current research results indicate that even short-term shifts in indicated roles and expertise between teachers and students increase students' potential to apply the target language. This is particularly important for students who feel they are not very proficient in language application, since they avoid it in fear of being judged rather than being incompetent.

Basically, neuroinclusive design principles are about making classrooms work for different ways of thinking and reducing all the external grading pressures (Neuroinclusive Design Principles, 2024). The current study thus supports existing research while offering a new perspective through a deeper look into the mechanisms of creative and integrative approaches to instruction. While existing research has established the need for creativity and affective safety in language learning, the current study offers a deeper look into the mechanisms underlying such an approach. The findings of the current study similarly highlight the need to consider inclusion as a factor of classroom design as much as individual needs.

5.3 Implications for Inclusive EFL Practice

The results of this study offer important implications for inclusive language teaching. Firstly, creativity-based activities should not be viewed as extracurricular or supplementary but rather as fundamental elements of daily language instruction. Providing varied modes of engagement, most notably through visual, musical, dramatic, and written expression, may make language learning accessible and meaningful to a wider spectrum of students.

Secondly, careful **scaffolding** is essential during the implementation of creativity-based activities. Empirical evidence suggests, for instance, that Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the **Zone of Proximal Development**, learners are most likely to succeed more when they are scaffolded carefully and appropriately through obstacles. In the study, it was seen that creativity-based activities were not simply effective because of their creative content but also because of the teacher's scaffolding and structuring of these activities, making them more and more complex and providing feedback support. In the absence of such scaffolding support, some of these students might have been overwhelmed, particularly if they were neurologically different. The findings also indicate that shifting classroom roles can work as an effective inclusive strategy when put into practice thoughtfully. While such measures may help reduce performance anxiety and increase the students' engagement, especially in the case of those students who tend to avoid evaluative language, these measures should not be obligatory and should allow teachers to be flexible in their application.

Thirdly, it is imperative that the teacher recognizes that the manifestation of participation may be varied. In this respect, inclusion, as Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) suggest, is the modification of the learning environment to facilitate the participation of all the learners according to their cognitive abilities. Encouraging written, visual, or dramatized outputs, alongside spoken contributions, values the strengths of introverted and neurodivergent learners equally.

Finally, teacher education programs should point out the importance of creative and integrative practices in EFL methodologies, moving beyond communicative and examination-oriented approaches. Support for teachers in the design and delivery of flexible, multimodal instruction can have a major impact on equity and effectiveness in the classroom.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Despite its promising findings, this study has several limitations. The **small sample size** and focus on only two schools limit the generalizability of results. Future studies should replicate this research across varied cultural and institutional contexts to confirm applicability. Also, although efforts were made to identify neurodivergent traits informally, **formal diagnoses** were not part of the study design, and the spectrum of neurodivergence among participants was relatively narrow. Future research should include students with formally diagnosed conditions such as ADHD or autism to explore broader neurodivergent profiles. Moreover, while qualitative observation provided rich data, **subjectivity** remains a limitation. The teacher-researcher's dual role could introduce unconscious bias in interpreting student behaviors. Triangulation with external observers or standardized creativity and participation scales would strengthen future research. Finally, **time constraints** (the intervention spanned approximately two months) limited the ability to measure long-term impacts. Longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the sustainability of creativity-based inclusive practices in EFL classrooms.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Participation as a Design Problem

The findings suggest that the main barrier to participation was not lack of knowledge but a mismatch between classroom participation design and students' engagement. When participation was redesigned to include visual, written, scripted, and individual modes of expression, previously silent students began to participate more actively. This suggests that participation in language classrooms should be understood not as a student trait but as a result of classroom design.

6.2. Summary of the Study

This study explored the potential contribution of creativity-based activities to the inclusion of neurodivergent students in lower secondary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms across two contexts, Prague and İzmir. Rather than testing a fixed intervention, the study used an exploratory, qualitative approach based on systematic classroom observation, as well as analysis of student-produced artifacts and reflective field notes.

The analysis shows that creativity-based activities can create a framework that promotes a safe emotional environment, engagement in classroom activities, and participation in English language learning among neurodivergent students. Visual expression, drama, music, and writing activities provided alternative ways of using English that did not require product-oriented assessment or standardized tests, which might be challenging for students with special learning needs. Notably, these activities were incorporated into standard, textbook-based EFL lessons, demonstrating the viability of integrating inclusive practices into conventional curriculum. However, the study also demonstrates that a creativity-based pedagogy does not provide a comprehensive solution to the challenges of inclusion for

neurodivergent students. Student responses to the activities varied, and the absence of a safe emotional environment did not consistently lead to academic engagement.

6.3. Contributions to the Field

This study offers three practical contributions to inclusive EFL education. First, the study takes a realistic approach to neurodivergence by focusing on learners' actual needs and participation, rather than on labels or diagnoses. It supports inclusive education by looking at how neurodivergent learners use language in different activities and by treating each learner as an individual, not as someone with a deficit. The study also shows that creativity-based activities can help both language development and emotional safety for neurodivergent learners in public schools. In this way, it expands the idea of inclusive education to include neurodiversity in EFL, highlighting that neurodivergence is often overlooked in teaching plans and needs more attention.

Another contribution is that it uses creativity to enable learners' participation and access to language learning, not exclusively as a motivator. It shows how creativity-based activities can support inclusive education if they are properly supported, predictable, and curriculum-based. In other words, creativity helps inclusion by providing learners with more opportunities to demonstrate their interest and use of language, not by assuming learners are capable of less. It presents practical awareness of the design and implementation of **structured creative activities** that can activate neurodivergent learners' talents without overwhelming them. It covers different learning styles in EFL by combining visual, musical, drama-based, and creative writing activities.

One final contribution of the study is that it provides actual classroom evidence of the relationship between neurodivergence, emotional safety, and EFL teaching. It tracks learners' participation over time and shows how learners' neurodivergence and activities relate to each

other, in cases of learners who may experience anxiety, sensory overload, and social withdrawal with CLT. It provides practical advice to EFL teachers, trainers, curriculum developers, and education policymakers who wish to create fairer, more encouraging, and effective EFL classrooms.

6.4. Suggestions for Further Research

In light of the results from this study and issues that need further consideration, there are numerous opportunities for future research. Further research should investigate the long-term impact of creativity-based activities on neurodivergent learners, including such parameters as language proficiency, academic success at school, and personal self-image. Moreover, future research can explore the application of creativity-based strategies to other categories of neurodivergent children, such as those with ADHD, autism, and dyslexia, to understand if the same types of activities can be equally effective for them. Furthermore, comparative research in various cultures will allow researchers to understand whether the use of creativity-based practices is relevant across various education contexts and curricula. Research into teacher training and development will help better understand how educators are prepared to apply the described activities in practice in their classrooms. Another interesting research opportunity lies in exploring the potential of modern technologies in promoting creativity-based activities and alleviating cognitive overload.

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8. List of Appendices

- 1- Appendix A- Observation Form
- 2- Appendix B- Parent Consent Form
- 3- Appendix C- Activities and Lesson Plans
- 4- Appendix D- Teacher's Posters for Awareness

8.1 Appendix A Observation Form

This observation form was **developed by the researcher** and **informed by classroom observation guidance** in qualitative educational research (e.g., Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It was refined iteratively during the data collection period.

Item	Description
Date	_____
School Context	<input type="checkbox"/> Lower secondary – Prague <input type="checkbox"/> Lower secondary – İzmir
Grade / Class	_____
Lesson Topic	_____
Type of Activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual storytelling <input type="checkbox"/> Creative writing <input type="checkbox"/> Music-based <input type="checkbox"/> Drama / Role-play
Duration	_____
1. Participation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary participation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustained attention	
<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal contribution	
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-verbal engagement (drawing, writing, gestures)	
2. Emotional State	
<input type="checkbox"/> Signs of enjoyment (smiling, laughter)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Signs of anxiety (hesitation, withdrawal)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional regulation during the activity	
3. Interaction	
<input type="checkbox"/> Interaction with peers	
<input type="checkbox"/> Interaction with teacher	
<input type="checkbox"/> Turn-taking	
<input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration / avoidance	
4. Language Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary use	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sentence length	
<input type="checkbox"/> Fluency (relative to student's usual performance)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to experiment with language	
5. Field Notes / Comments	

8.2. Appendix B Parent Consent Form

Title of the Study:

Integrating Neurodivergent Students into EFL Classes through Creativity-Based Activities

Dear Parent / Guardian,

Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted as part of a master's thesis at Masaryk University, Faculty of Education. The purpose of the study is to explore how creativity-based activities (such as visual storytelling, music, drama, and creative writing) support students' participation and emotional comfort in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lessons.

Participation in the study involves classroom observation during regular English lessons and the possible use of anonymized student work (e.g., drawings or short written texts) for research purposes. No additional tasks will be required beyond normal classroom activities.

Participation is **entirely voluntary**. You and your child may withdraw consent at any time without any negative consequences. All data will be treated confidentially and anonymously. No real names, school names, or identifying details will appear in the thesis or any related publications.

If you agree to your child's participation, please sign below.

Parent / Guardian Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher:

Alpcan Özışıkçılar

Masaryk University – Faculty of Education

8.3 Appendix C - Activities and Lesson Plans

🎧 LISTENING

Fill the Gaps—Then Read Between the Lines

Step 1: Complete the lyrics
For twenty-four years I've been ____ next door to Alice.

Step 2: Sort the missing words
By category:

Feelings sad, angry	Verbs waiting, living	Connectors but, still
-------------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------

PRO TIP: How many feeling words do you hear Alice say? Why might they matter?



REWRITE THE STORY – BACKWARDS

Activity Idea:

And Sally called out my name...
I looked out the window
He was already gone.

REORDER


Alice's Perspective
I never thought he'd leave me for her...

Step 1: Reorder mixed-up story sentences

Step 2: Rewrite the full story from Alice's or Sally's point of view

Focus: Past tenses
Sequence markers (then, after that, finally...)
Connectors (but, because, even though...)

Sentence Starter:
"I never thought he'd leave me for her..."



🎭 SPEAKING:

ROLE-PLAY THE STORY

The song tells a story. Time to live it.

Activity Idea:

- Students take roles: narrator, Sally, Alice.
- Recreate the scene before/after the song
- Optional: speed-dating role play where each "neighbor" explains their drama.



NARRATOR SALLY ALICE

Try: "How would you respond to Sally's confession?"

READING ACTIVITY

Whose Voice Is It?

— *Read Between the Lines*

- Identify who might be speaking: Sally or Alice?
- Highlight clues: word choice, tone, emotion
- Explain: Why do you think this is her voice?

"I watched them pack. Box by box, word by word. I smiled. But I didn't mean it."

Who's speaking – Alice or Sally? Why? Find the clue

Alice **Sally**



LESSON PLAN

Teacher: Alpcan Ozisikilar

Level: A1-A2

Age: 16-17

Time: 45 minutes

Focus: Plural nouns, speaking, writing, collaboration

Methodology: Task-Based Learning + Creative Roles

1. Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Use plural nouns in simple written and spoken tasks.
2. Collaborate in mixed-ability groups using clear role distribution.
3. Produce an original shop concept using English.
4. Present a short, structured description of their shop.

2. Materials

- Role cards: Artist, Product List Creator, Writer, Speaker
- Slogan inspiration sheet
- A4 group poster
- Markers, paper
- Timer

3. Lesson Procedure

1) Warm-up – Plural Race (5 min)

- The teacher writes 6 singular nouns on the board.
- Students create plural forms in 10 seconds.
- Quick whole-class check.

2) Introduction to the Task (3 min)

- Teacher introduces the idea of a **Magical Market**.
- Teacher explains that each student will take a **different role** in a group of four.
- Teacher may show the final outcome: a group poster + a short presentation.

3) Role Distribution & Instructions (5 min)

Students choose or are assigned roles:

- **Artist:** Draws shop front, creature, products, slogan.
- **Product List Creator:** Creates 3-5 plural products + prices + effects.
- **Writer:** Writes a 4-6 sentence introduction using the frame.
- **Speaker:** Prepares a 20-25 second group presentation.

- Teacher briefly explains each card.

4) Group Work – Creation Phase (15 min)

- Students work individually on their role tasks but coordinate to keep shop details consistent.

Teacher monitors:

- Use of plural nouns
- Group collaboration
- Clarity of ideas
- Task completion

Teacher **may use these questions during the process** :

- "What problem does this product solve?"
- "How is your creature connected to the shop?"
- "Why did you choose this slogan?"



6) Group Presentations (10 min)

Each group presents:

- Speaker delivers the main text.
- Writer reads one sentence.
- Product Creator introduces one product.
- Artist displays the poster.

Assessment criteria:

- Use of plural nouns
- Clarity
- Creativity
- Teamwork

7) Cool-down (4 min)

Class votes for:

- Most creative creature
- Best slogan
- Most dangerous product

Teacher provides 1 positive + 1 improvement point for the class.



TEACHER NOTES

- **Roles** naturally support different strengths (artistic, verbal, logical) and mixed-ability grouping ensures peer scaffolding.

- Product Creator and Writer tasks can be simplified or extended based on level.

- During group work, ask probing questions to deepen thinking:
 - "Why does your product work like this?"
 - "What does your creature do in the shop?"
 - "How is the slogan connected to your shop?"
 - "Which product is the most dangerous? Why?"
 - "How can you show plural nouns more clearly?"

- Give each group a timer.
- Students must stay seated; moving around increases noise.
- Hand out roles after explaining them — prevents chaos.
- Circulate constantly but avoid fixing decisions for them (keeps ownership).

- If groups finish early:
 - They design a radio advertisement (30 seconds).
 - This keeps advanced students busy and prevents classroom restlessness.

MAGICAL MARKET

— SHOP POSTER —

SHOP NAME:

CREATURE:

- _____
- _____
- _____

PRODUCTS

- _____
- _____
- _____

PRICES:

SLOGAN:

Grade Code

Magical Market

— WRITER ROLE

Your mission:
Write a short introduction text for your shop.
Start with this frame:

Welcome to our shop.

We sell...

There are...

Our most popular item is...

People like our shop because...

- ✓ Use at least 2 plural words (dragons, berries, stones...)
- ✓ 4–6 sentences are enough.
- ✓ Grammar doesn't need to be perfect – creativity first

SLOGAN

Magical Market – ARTIST ROLE

Your mission:
Create the visual identity of your magical shop.

- ✓ Draw your shop front.
- ✓ Include your shop name.
- ✓ Draw 1 magical creature connected to your shop.
- ✓ Add at least 2 plural magical items.
- ✓ Add prices (any currency).
- ✓ Add a simple slogan (e.g., "Buy More Magic!", "Open at Midnight," "Fresh Spells Daily").

SHOP NAME:

MAGICAL CREATURE:

PRICES:

PLURAL ITEMS:

SLOGAN:

TIP: Keep drawings simple.
Symbols and icons are enough.

MAGICAL MARKET

– PRODUCT LIST CREATOR

Your mission:
Make a product list for your shop.

PRODUCT (plural)	PRICE	SPECIAL EFFECT

- ✓ Use plural words.
- ✓ Prices can be funny (5 energy points, 20 moon coins...).
- ✓ Special effects can be creative (invisibility, flying, super memory.).

TIP: Don't copy from other groups – make your shop unique.



MAGICAL MARKET – SPEAKER ROLE ✨

Your mission: Prepare a 20–25 second presentation for your group.

1	This is our shop. Its name is...
2	We sell... <small>Grade Code:</small>
3	These are our products...
4	Our creature is...
5	The most expensive item is...
6	Thank you!



TIP: Don't copy from other groups – make your shop unique.

✨ Slogan ✨ Inspiration

- ✨ Fresh Magic Every Day
- ✨ Open at Midnight
- ✨ Buy One Curse, Get One Free
- ✨ The Cheapest Miracles in Town
- ✨ Dangerously Magical
- ✨ More Spells, Less Stress
- ✨ We Sell the Impossible
- ✨ Only for Brave Hearts
- ✨ Midnight Discounts
- ✨ Touch the Power

MAGICAL MARKET – ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

1. LANGUAGE ACCURACY (0–5)

POINTS	DESCRIPTION
5	Uses 5+ correct plural nouns; very few errors.
4	Uses 3–4 correct plural nouns; some errors but meaning clear.
3	Uses 2 plural nouns; several mistakes.
2	Uses only 1 plural noun; many mistakes.
0–1	No correct plural forms.

2. CREATIVITY & COHERENCE (0–5)

POINTS	DESCRIPTION
5	Shop, creature, products, slogan & story are original and logically connected.
4	Mostly original; minor inconsistencies.
3	Some creativity; weaker connections.
2	Mostly clichés; limited effort.
0–1	Incomplete or incoherent.

3. GROUP COLLABORATION (0–5)

POINTS	DESCRIPTION
5	All members contribute; all roles + originality tasks completed.
4	One weaker member, but good teamwork overall.
3	Uneven participation; teacher support needed.
2	1–2 students did most of the work.
0–1	Roles ignored; poor collaboration.

TOTAL SCORE: / 15



Task 1: Match the Crime with Its Meaning

Write A-H next to the definitions.

Crimes:

- A) theft
- B) robbery
- C) burglary
- D) vandalism
- E) fraud
- F) assault
- G) kidnapping
- H) cyberbullying

Definitions:

1. _____ damaging or destroying property
2. _____ taking something without permission
3. _____ entering a house to steal things
4. _____ attacking someone physically
5. _____ taking someone by force
6. _____ stealing money by lying or cheating
7. _____ violent stealing from a person
8. _____ sending hurtful messages online



**MEETING
THE POLICE
& TYPES OF
CRIME**



Task 2: Complete the Sentences

Use: stolen / ID card / happened / saw / report / near / description / scared

1. I'd like to _____ a crime.
2. My _____, please.
3. My phone was _____.
4. It _____ yesterday evening.
5. I think I _____ the person.
6. It happened _____ the bus stop.
7. Can you give me a _____ of the suspect?
8. I was very _____.



Task 3: Choose a Situation

Circle ONE situation and write 3-4 sentences.

1. Someone broke into your house while you were away.
2. Your backpack was stolen in a shop.
3. You saw someone breaking a car window.

Write:

- What happened?
- Where?
- What details can you remember?

Task 4: Crime Map (Group Work)

Choose two crimes from Task 1.

Create a short story:

- place
- time
- people involved
- what the police should do next



“THE WISE POLICE OFFICER WATCHED PAVEL’S VERY WEIRD WALLET VANISH.”



LESSON PLAN



Teacher: Alpcan Ozisikcilar
Class: 7th Grade (A1-B1 mixed)
Length: 30–35 minutes
Topic: Plural Nouns through Process Drama
Methodology: TBLT, Process Drama, Communicative Approach
Materials: Group Cards 1–6

Teacher Notes

Lesson Objectives

- Students will be able to use regular and irregular plural nouns correctly.
- Students will be able to use and fix plural errors in a meaningful context.
- Students will be able to perform short lines with gestures (drama integration).

- Highly structured drama prevents chaos.
- Snap cue maintains full classroom control.
- Movement supports neurodivergent learners
- Mixed-level tasks ensure accessibility.

Procedure

1. Warm-Up (3 min)

Teacher writes nouns on board (shoe/shoes, mouse/mice...). Students show S/P with hands.

2. Grouping-Instruction (2-5min)

Divide class into 6 groups. Give each group one Cinderella-themed sketch card.

3. Task 1 – Fix the Plurals (6 min)

Students read their sketch, underline incorrect plurals, and write corrected sentences.

4. Task 2 – Optional Creative Edit (5 min)

Students change 1–2 sentences to make them funnier while using at least one plural noun.

5. Task 3 – Line-by-Line Acting (10 min)

Each student chooses one line. Teacher snaps → student reads + gestures. Next snap → next student.

6. Reflection (3 min)

Class discussion: “Which plural was hardest?” “Who acted funniest?”

7. Exit Ticket (2 min)

Students write one correct plural noun and hand it to teacher when leaving.

Assessment:

Formative: plural accuracy, participation, acting clarity, exit ticket.



Differentiation Activities

1. Language Support Cards (A1 learners)

The teacher may give lower-level students small support slips with:

- plural endings: **-s, -es, -ies**
- irregular list: **mice, men, feet, children**

2. Extension Challenges (B1 learners)

The teacher may offer stronger students the option to:

- rewrite the entire sketch using **only irregular plurals**:
- add a new line with **comparatives/superlatives**
- “*Their bags were heavier than the hats.*”
- add **cause-effect** connectors
- *because, so, therefore*
- perform their acting with small **emotion variations** (happy → confused → shocked)

3. Choice-Based Acting

Students may choose **one** of the following acting styles:

- gesture only
- facial expression only
- full body movement
- reading with voice emotion but minimal movement

Students who feel uncomfortable speaking may:

- show their line on a card
- perform only the gesture
- whisper to the teacher instead of speaking to the whole group

GROUP 1 CARD

CINDERELLA & THE LOST SHOES



CREATIVE
ENGLISH
with Alpacan

Mini Sketch

1. Cinderella has three shoe in her room.

Example Acting: Hold up three fingers and look down as if looking at shoes on the floor.

2. The prince brings many glass shoe to the ball.

Example Acting: Open your arms wide as if carrying a big pile of shoes.

3. The stepsisters fight over these shoe loudly.

Example Acting: Make a small silent fighting gesture and frown your eyebrows.

4. Cinderella finally finds two shoe, but one shoe is broken.

Example Acting: Smile as if you found a shoe, then make a shocked/sad face to show the broken one.

✔ TASK 1 – FIX THE PLURALS

Read the sketch.
Find and correct all plural mistakes.
Write the correct versions of the sentences.

🎭 TASK 2 – OPTIONAL: IMPROVE THE STORY

Change **1-2 sentences** to create your own funny or more interesting version.
Use **at least 1 plural noun**.

🎭 TASK 3 – LINE-BY-LINE ACTING

Each student chooses **one line** from the sketch.

When it's your turn:

- Read your line
- Act it out with a **small gesture, facial expression, or movement**

GROUP 2 CARD

THE CRAZY MICE HELPERS



CREATIVE
ENGLISH
with Alpacan

Cinderella's house has many mouse.

Example Acting: Bend slightly forward and look at the floor as if many tiny mice are running around.

2. The mouse are her best friend.

Example Acting: Place your hand on your chest and smile warmly as if you love the mice.

3. They bring dress and button to help her.

Example Acting: Pretend you are holding a dress in one hand and a small button in the other.

4. At midnight, all mouse turn into coachman.

Example Acting: Make a small "transformation" gesture with your hands, like something magically changing shape.

✔ TASK 1 – FIX THE PLURALS

Read the sketch.
Find and correct all plural mistakes.

🎭 TASK 2 – OPTIONAL: IMPROVE THE STORY

Make **1-2 sentences** funnier or more interesting.
Use **at least 1 irregular plural**.

🎭 TASK 3 – LINE-BY-LINE ACTING

Each student chooses **one sentence**.

When it's your turn:

- Read your sentence
- Act it out with a **simple gesture, facial expression, or movement**

GROUP 3 CARD

AT THE ROYAL BALL



CREATIVE
ENGLISH
with Alpacan

Mini Sketch

1. The palace has hundreds of light and beautiful decoration.

Example Acting: Look up and point around as if admiring many bright lights and decorations.

2. There are many lady and man dancing.

Example Acting: Make a tiny, slow dance motion (2 seconds) with a small smile.

3. The prince gives Cinderella two kiss and three rose.

Example Acting: Pretend to hand someone a rose, then make a soft air-kiss gesture (without sound).

4. The king shouts: "Clean all these mess!"

Example Acting: Put your hands on your hips and make a stern "angry king" face, then point to the floor.

✔ TASK 1 – FIX THE PLURALS

🎭 TASK 2 – OPTIONAL: IMPROVE THE STORY

Rewrite **1-2 sentences** to make the scene funnier, more dramatic, or more chaotic.
Use **at least 1 irregular plural**.

🎭 TASK 3 – LINE-BY-LINE ACTING

Each student picks **one line**.

When it's your turn:

- Read your line
- Act it out using a **small movement, gesture, or facial expression**

GROUP 4 CARD

THE STEPSISTER S' PROBLEMS



CREATIVE
ENGLISH
with Alpacan

Mini Sketch

1. The stepsisters wear long dress and strange make-up.

Example Acting: Run your hands down as if showing a long dress, then make a funny "weird makeup" face.

2. They break all the mirror in the house.

Example Acting: Make a small silent "breaking" motion with your hands (no sound).

3. They scream at the servant and throw tomato at Cinderella.

Example Acting: Open your mouth wide in a silent scream, then pretend to throw a tomato gently.

4. Their bag are full of stolen jewel.

Example Acting: Pretend to open a heavy bag and look inside proudly.

✔ TASK 1 – FIX THE PLURALS

dresses, mirrors, servants, tomatoes, bags, jewels

🎭 TASK 2 – OPTIONAL: IMPROVE THE STORY

Add **1-2 new sentences** to make the stepsisters' situation even more chaotic or funny.
Use **at least 1 plural noun**.

🎭 TASK 3 – LINE-BY-LINE ACTING

Each student selects **one line**.

When it's your turn:

- Read the sentence
- Act it out with a small gesture, movement, or facial expression

GROUP 5 CARD

THE STEPSISTERS' CRAZY SHOPPING TRIP



Mini Sketch

1. The stepsisters wear long dress and strange make-up.

Example Acting: Run your hands down as if showing a long dress, then make a funny “weird makeup” face.

2. They break all the mirror in the house.

Example Acting: Make a small silent “breaking” motion with your hands (no sound).

3. They scream at the servant and throw tomato at Cinderella.

Example Acting: Open your mouth wide in a silent scream, then pretend to throw a tomato gently.

4. Their bag are full of stolen jewel.

Example Acting: Pretend to open a heavy bag and look inside proudly.

✔ TASK1 – FIX THE PLURALS

🧑‍🎨 TASK2 – OPTIONAL: IMPROVE THE STORY

Add **1-2 new sentences** to make the stepsisters’ situation even more chaotic or funny.
Use **at least 1 plural noun**.

🎭 TASK3—LINE-BY-LINE ACTING

Each student selects **one line**.

When it’s your turn:

- Read the sentence
- Act it out with a small gesture, movement, or facial expression

GROUP 6 CARD

THE PRINCE’S SEARCH

Mini Sketch

1. The prince looks for **shoe** in houses across the kingdom.
Put your hand on your forehead and look around.



2. He tries the **glass shoe** on many **foot**, but it doesn’t fit anyone.
Make a “trying on a shoe” gesture

3. The prince sends out his royal **messenger** to search.

Step in place like you are running fast

4. **Child** all over the kingdom follow him around excitedly.

Pretend to be kids and follow the prince with happy faces



✔ TASK 1 – FIX THE PLURALS

🧑‍🎨 TASK 2 – OPTIONAL: IMPROVE THE STORY

Add **1-2 new sentences** to make the stepsisters’ situation even more chaotic or funny.
Use **at least 1 plural noun**.

🎭 TASK 3 – LINE-BY-LINE ACTING

Each student selects **one line**.

When it’s your turn:

- Read the sentence
- Act it out with a small gesture, movement, or facial expression

8.4 Appendix D- Teacher's Posters for Awareness

YOUR NEURODIVERGENT CLASSMATE

STIMMINGS

My classmate is doing the same weird movement over and over, or is asking the same question and wants to hear the same answer.

The repetitive behaviour or "stimming" might include flapping hands, snapping fingers, rocking the body, rubbing a particular object, pacing, twirling, or turning a light off and on repeatedly. It is a useful coping mechanism that helps neurodivergent people self-soothe and deal with intense emotions and thoughts.

Even though it could be disruptive, the behaviour has its purpose, and we shouldn't interfere without having a suitable replacement.

MELTDOWNS

My classmate is having a tantrum for no apparent reason, or the reason is not a big deal, and (s)he won't stop.

The autistic meltdown happens when the neurodivergent (autistic) person is completely overwhelmed by an intense situation that cannot be processed otherwise.

Don't judge your classmate. (s)he is not being naughty. Give him or her time and space. If possible, try to prevent meltdowns.

DEMAND AVOIDANCE

My classmate always finds excuses not to do something.

Direct demands may in some neurodivergent people cause anxiety by threatening their need for control so they don't obey or get aggressive.

Remove demands where possible, demand indirectly, avoid confrontational body language, be on the same level.

SHORT ATTENTION SPAN

My classmate is very absent-minded, forgetful, makes careless mistakes, or gets easily distracted.

It takes more energy for neurodivergent people with attention disorder (e.g. ADHD) to focus on even the simplest tasks. That is why they might not be able to reach their full potential.

Be patient, don't tease your classmate, (s)he probably feels bad enough. Give gentle reminders or help him / her stay on track if needed. If (s)he does a good job, let him or her know.

NEURODIVERGENT CLASSMATE

Neurodivergent people (e.g., autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, sensory-sensitive, or trauma-affected) simply process the world differently. Their behaviour reflects how their brains manage attention, communication, and sensory input. These differences are normal variations, not rudeness, laziness, or lack of interest.

HYPERACTIVITY

My classmate is constantly moving, playing with something, or fidgeting, even during lessons.

Neurodivergent people with attention disorder (e.g. ADHD) sometimes have trouble staying still because the part of the brain responsible for regulation isn't working properly.

Give your classmate space during the break from work. If possible, include him or her in your activities, even though (s)he might be a little disruptive, (s)he still wants friends.

OBSESSIVE INTERESTS

My classmate is always talking about the same thing of his or her interest, or spends all of his or her free time doing just one thing.

Some neurodivergent people are sometimes so consumed by their interest that they cannot think of anything else. It contributes to their well-being.

If it doesn't bother you, let him or her do what makes him/her happy. If it's a shared interest, it can be a way to become friendly.

"Because everyone learns best when they feel safe, understood, and accepted."

DIFFERENT GESTURES

My classmate has weird facial expression and gestures that are difficult to understand.

Neurodivergent people may use facial expressions and body language differently which may lead to misunderstanding and they might have trouble decoding body language on others, e.g. with sarcasm or irony where don't match verbal and nonverbal cues.

Be clear with words, don't rely only on facial expressions or gestures, give them space and time when needed, and be open to different ways of expressing feelings and reactions.

NEED FOR PREDICTABILITY

My classmate has a lot of routines and rituals, s/he prefers order, rules and expects everything to happen on time. Otherwise, s/he can get very unhappy or anxious.

Some neurodivergent people need routines. They might have favourite objects, organise things carefully, or want to know exactly what's going to happen next. It helps them to feel calm, safe, and in control, especially when life feels confusing or stressful.

Keep things predictable, warn your classmate about changes early, give him or her extra time and if possible, introduce backup plans.

MASKING

My classmate seems completely fine in class, always behaves perfectly, always smiles but then suddenly breaks down, cries later.

Masking means hiding natural behaviours, emotions, stress, or neurodivergent traits in order to fit in, avoid judgement, or appear "normal". Many neurodivergent students learn to copy social behaviours, or stay quiet even when they are uncomfortable. Once they are in a safe place, the exhaustion or stress shows up.

Do not assume that "everything is fine" just because your classmate looks polite. Masking is draining. Be gentle and give them space to be themselves. If they suddenly withdraw or need time alone, respect that.

SENSORY ISSUES

My classmate is extremely sensitive to sounds, lights, textures, smells, taste, touch or movement.

Oversensitivity can lead to distress, such as anxiety, panic, or behaviors like avoiding situations, covering ears, or needing to leave noisy or busy places. That is because some sensory inputs may feel too strong or overwhelming to neurodivergent people, especially when they come all at once or without warning.

Keep noise and distractions low, avoid strong smells or sudden movements, and give space when your classmate seems overwhelmed. Be patient, don't force eye contact, and allow him or her to use earplugs, sunglasses, or fidget items to feel more comfortable.

EXAGGERATION

My classmate laughs when (s)he is being scolded or when nothing is funny.

Neurodivergent people sometimes don't have appropriate reactions or can't estimate the appropriate degree of their reaction, because they don't experience emotions and social situations like other people.

Stay calm, try to understand your classmate and help him or her to understand the situation and emotions involved.

EYE CONTACT

My classmate isn't looking into my eyes / is staring at me without blinking when we are talking.

It can be extremely annoying for some neurodivergent people to maintain eye contact when talking to someone, as they may not be able to pay attention to what is being said when they are forced to do so.



Do not take the reluctance to look into your eyes as a sign of inattention or lack of respect. It is not personal. Its self-preservation. Allow your classmate to turn his or her body to face you without eye contact.

COMMUNICATION ISSUES

My classmate is weird to talk to because (s)he doesn't follow the set rules of communication. (S)he doesn't speak in turns, can be very blunt, or understands things literally.

Some neurodivergent people may struggle with eye contact, tone of voice, body language or understanding unwritten social rules, which leads to trouble in group. Things like BG noise, unclear rules, or emotional confusion can make communication and stressful.

Be clear and kind, don't expect eye contact. Be open-minded, don't judge based on body language or tone, don't take offense easily, don't take things personally. It helps a lot to accept different ways of communicating.

Different minds, same class.

STIMMING

Můj spolužák/žačka dělá pořád dokola ten stejný divný pohyb nebo se ptá dokola na tu stejnou otázku a čeká stejnou odpověď.

Opakující se chování, neboli "stimming" může zahrnovat mávání rukou, lusknání prsty, pohupování celým tělem, přecházení sem a tam, točení se dokola nebo opakované zapínání a vypínání světa. Pro neurodivergentní lidi to je užitečný mechanismus na zvládnání stresu.

I když toto chování může být velmi rušivé, má svůj účel a neměl bys do něj zasahovat pokud za něj nemáš vhodnou náhradu.

Můj spolužák/žačka mívá záchvat vzteku bez zjevného důvodu nebo kvůli něčemu, co není velký problém, a nemůže se uklidnit.

Autistický "meltdown" nebo autistická krize může nastat, když je neurodivergentní člověk zahlcen intenzivní situací, se kterou se nejde vyrovnat jiným způsobem. I když to byl jen třeba hrmeček špatné barvy

Nesud ho/ji, nevymýšl si ani nezlobi. Potřebuje čas a prostor. Pokud je to možné, snaž se takovým krizím předjet.

VYHÝBÁNÍ SE POŽADAVKŮM

Můj spolužák/žačka si vždy najde výmluvu proč něco neudělat.

Prímé požadavky mohou být pro některé neurodivergentní lidi zdrojem úzkosti, protože ohrožují jejich potřebu mít vše pod kontrolou, a můžou pak neposlechnout nebo reagovat agresivně.

Kde je to možné, nahraď přímé požadavky nepřímými. Nepoužívej agresivní řeč těla, dávej najevo, že jste na stejné úrovni.

KRÁTKÁ POZORNOST

Můj spolužák/žačka je velmi nepozorný(á), zapomnětlivý(á), dělá zbytečně chyby nebo se nechá snadno rozptýlit od práce.

Neurodivergentní lidi s poruchou pozornosti (např. ADHD) stojí hodně energie se soustředit i na ty nejjednodušší úkoly. Proto je možné, že nikdy nerozvinou svůj skutečný potenciál.

Buď trpělivý(á), nedělej si z něj/ni legraci, asi se i tak cítí dost špatně. Připomínej mu/ji citlivé úkoly a pomoz mu/ji pokud potřebuje udržet pozornost. Když se mu/ji něco povede, oceň to.

MŮJ

NEURODIVERGENTNÍ

SPOLUŽÁK/ŽAČKA

HYPERAKTIVITA

Můj spolužák/žačka je neustále v pohybu, s něčím si hraje nebo se vrtí, a to i během hodiny.

Neurodivergentní lidé s poruchou pozornosti (např. ADHD) mají někdy potíže zůstat v klidu, protože část mozku zodpovědná za regulaci nefunguje správně.

Dej svému spolužákovi prostor během přestávky. Pokud je to možné, zapoj ho/ji do svých aktivit. I když může trochu rušit. I on(a) chce mít kamarády.

Neurodivergentní lidé (např. autisté, lidé s ADHD, dyslexií/grafií, zvýšenou citlivostí nebo po prožitých traumatech) vnímají svět jinak. Jejich chování odráží to, jak jejich mozek komunikuje a pracuje s pozorností a smyslovými podněty. Jsou jen jiní – ne nevychovaní, ani líní anebo bez zájmu!

OBSEKVNÍ ZÁJMY

Můj spolužák/žačka mluví pořád jen o jedné věci, která ho/ji zajímá, anebo tráví veškerý volný čas jen jednou činností.

Někteří neurodivergentní lidé mohou být natolik pohlčeni svými zájmy, že nedokáží myslet na nic jiného. Přispívá to k jejich pohodě a duševní rovnováze.

Pokud ti to nevdá, nech ho/ji dělat co ho/ji baví. Pokud je to váš společný zájem, může to být příležitost se skamarádit.

NEOBVYKLÁ ŘEČ TĚLA

Můj spolužák má zvláštní výrazy obličeje a gesta, kterým je těžké porozumět.

Neurodivergentní lidé mohou používat mimiku a řeč těla jinak, což může vést k nedorozumění. A naopak – mohou mít potíže číst řeč těla ostatních. Mohou se snadno zmatat např. sarkasmem či ironií, kdy smívání a neverbální signály nejsou v souladu.

Vyjadřují se srozumitelně, nespolehejí jen na mimiku nebo gesta – ať už tvoje, nebo tvého spolužáka. Dopřejte mu/ji prostor a čas, když to potřebuje, a buď otevřený(á) různým způsobům vyjadřování pocitů a reakcí.

POTŘEBA PŘEDVÍDELNOSTI

Můj spolužák/žačka má spoustu rutin a rituálů, má rád(a) pořádek, pravidla a očekává, že vše proběhne včas. Jinak může být nešťastný(á) nebo pocítovat úzkost.

Mnozí neurodivergentní lidé potřebují rutiny, řád. Mají pečlivě urovnané věci, obližené předměty. Chtějí přesné vědět, co se bude dít dál. Pomáhá jim to cítit se v klidu, bezpečí a že mají věci pod kontrolou, zejména když je život pro ně matoucí a stresující.

Snaž se udržovat věci předvídatelné, upozorni je(ji) na změny včas, dej mu(ji) čas navíc v případě potřeby. Pokud je to možné, měj záložní plán.

OČNÍ KONTAKT

Můj spolužák/žačka se mi při rozhovoru nedívá do očí nebo naopak na mě zírá bez mrknutí.

Pro některé neurodivergentní lidi může být velmi nepříjemné udržovat oční kontakt při rozhovoru, protože když jsou k tomu nuceni, nemusí být schopni soustředit se na to, co se říká. Zíraní může být výsledkem předchozí terapie, která je učila dívat se lidem do očí, ale pak jim mohou unikat sociální signály.

Nebor nechotu dívat se ti do očí jako známku nepozornosti nebo neúcty. Není to osobní, jde o ochranu! Dovol svému spolužákovi (spolužačce), aby se k tobě otočil(a) tělem, aniž by musel(a) udržovat oční kontakt.

MASKOVÁNÍ

Spolužák ve třídě vypadá úplně v pohodě – chová se bez problémů, směje se, nic neřeší... ale pak, mimo hodinu, najednou zkolabuje, pláče nebo vypadá úplně vyčerpaně.

Maskování znamená, že člověk schovává své přirozené chování, emoce nebo neurodivergentní projevy, aby zapadl a nepůsobil "jinak". Navenek může působit klidně a v pohodě, ale uvnitř je vyčerpaný. Teprve v bezpečném prostředí se napětí a únava projeví.

Nebor tak, že je "všechno v pořádku", když působí klidně. Maskování je vyčerpávající. Buď ohleduplný a nech mu prostor – když se stáhne nebo vypadá unaveně, potřebuje jen čas na zotavení.

SMYSLOVÉ OBTÍŽE

Můj spolužák/žačka je velmi citlivý(á) na zvuky, světla, textury, pachy, chutě, dotek nebo i pohyb.

Přecitlivělost může vést ke zvýšené úzkosti, panice, vyhýbavému chování, zakrývání uší nebo k potřebě opustit hlučné a rušné prostředí. Děje se tak proto, že některé smyslové podněty mohou být pro neurodivergentní lidi příliš silné nebo zahlcující, zvlášť když přijdou naráz nebo bez varování.

Nedělej zbytečný hluk, náhlé pohyby, nenos příliš výrazné vůně, a dej svému spolužákovi/žačce prostor, pokud toho je na něj/ni moc. Buď trpělivý(á), nevyžaduj oční kontakt, dovol mu/ji používat špunty do uší, sluneční brýle nebo různé další antistresové pomůcky.

NEPŘÍMĚŘENÉ A NEVHODNÉ REAKCE

Můj spolužák (spolužačka) se směje, když je napominán(a) nebo když není nic k smíchu.

Neurodivergentní lidé někdy nereagují přiměřeně nebo nedokážou odhadnout vhodnou míru své reakce, protože neprožívají emoce a sociální situace stejným způsobem jako ostatní.

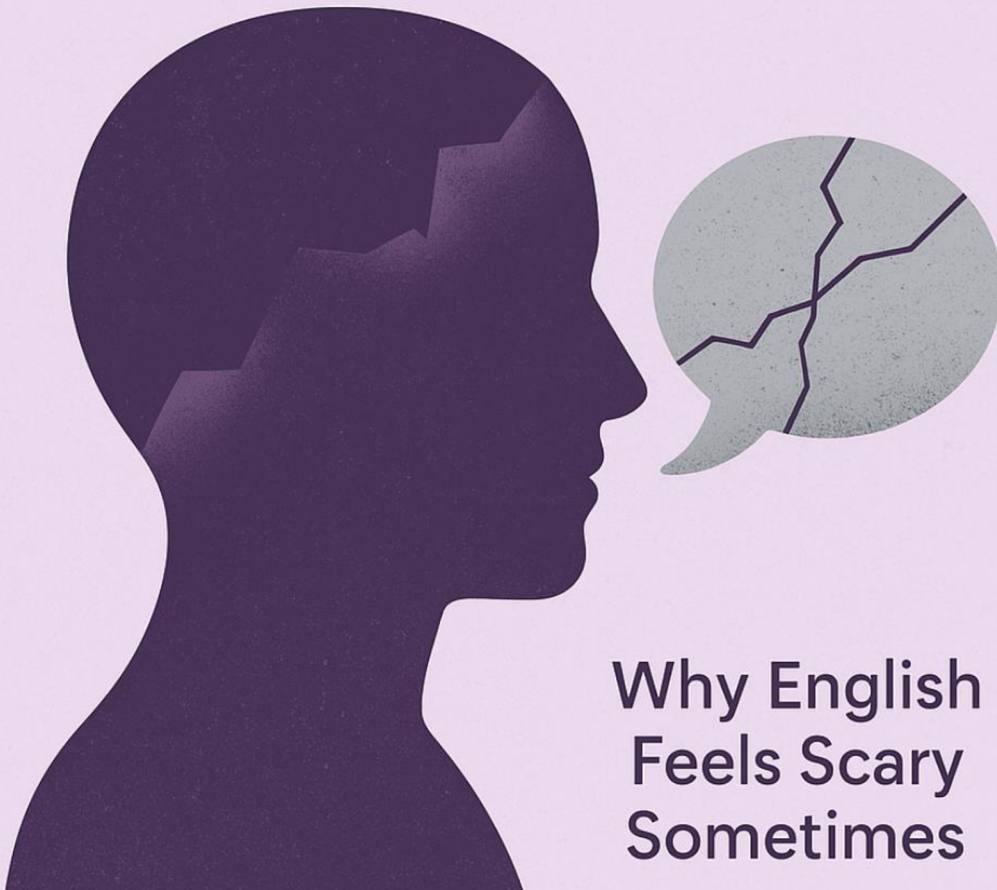
Zachovej klid, snaž se ho(ji) pochopit a pomoz mu(ji) porozumět situaci i emocím, které v ni hrají roli.

MUNI PED



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LANGUAGE ANXIETY



Why English
Feels Scary
Sometimes

LANGUAGE ANXIETY

fear of speaking a new language.



“I know the answer... but my mouth won't open.”

“My heart beats so fast when the teacher looks at me.

“It feels like everyone's watching.”

WHY IT HAPPENS

- **Fear of mistakes**
“What if they laugh?”
- **Fast pace**
“I can’t keep up.”
- **Perfectionism**
“If it’s not perfect, I won’t say it.”



Student thinks:
“I’m a bad learner.”



Reality:
“The brain blocks language when it’s anxious.”

YOU ARE NOT ALONE



1 in 3 learners feel high anxiety in language classes.

It's not lack of talent — it's your brain's defense mode.

Study highlight: Dewaele & Li (2020) found that when learners feel supported emotionally, participation increases by 40%.

What Helps

For Students

- Take small steps
→ even one word is progress
- Breathe before answering
- Use filling words (“well... you know... let me think...”) to collect your thoughts

For Teachers

- Allow wait-time (don’t demand instant answers).
- Use pair/group work to reduce spotlight pressure
- Reframe mistakes: “Nice try, here’s the right word.”



Student: “I goed to school.”

Teacher: “I like how you tried!
The right form is “went.”

Quick Tools Against Language Anxiety



**Prepare key
phrases in
advance**



**Practice
with voice
notes**



**Find a
speaking
buddy**




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TURN ANXIETY INTO POWER



Your racing heart
= your brain is awake.



Mistakes = proof of
progress.

Silence = time to think,
not failure.



WHAT STUDENTS SAY ABOUT ANXIETY

When teacher waits, I feel safe.

Pair work helps me try.

Mistakes don't scare me if teacher smiles.

I know the answer, but my mouth won't open.

I forget words I knew five minutes ago.

I feel like *every-one* is watching only me.

When it's too fast, I can't follow.

I want to speak, but my heart beats too loud.

It's easier when we play a game, not answer alone.

I learn more when the teacher doesn't correct every word.

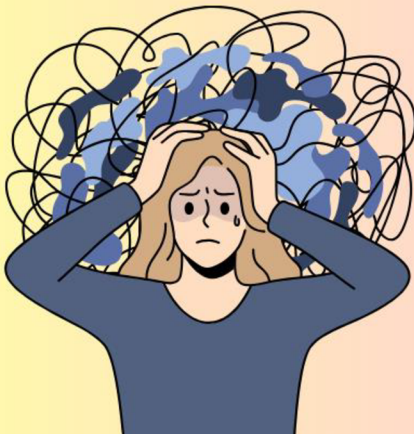


Real voices from the classroom.

Language
anxiety doesn't
mean weakness—
it means
humanity.

*Save this for the days English feels
heavy.*

*and share it to remind someone they're not
alone.*



5 Creative Warm-Ups

That Build Confidence

Gentle ways to
start class with trust
and spark.




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The first few minutes set the tone.



Some learners need time before they speak.







- ✓ Ease anxiety
- ✓ Spark creativity
- ✓ Build trust



One-Word Journal

Write one word about...

-  how you feel
-  a recent dream
-  the weather
-  what's on your mind



Doodle & Describe

Draw anything for 1 min

→ Then:

- describe it in a sentence
- or name 3 adjectives
- or make up a silly name



Wrong Answers Only

Why do cats
secretly run
the world?

What's the
worst
invention
ever?



Let them be wrong. On purpose.
It's freeing.

If I were...

If I were
invisible,
I'd...

If I had
wings,
I'd...

If I ruled
the world,
I'd...





Sound-to-Story

What's going
on here?

Who's
there?

Where
are we?

There are no wrong answers — only
stories waiting to be told.




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Confidence doesn't always mean speaking up.

♥ a whisper

🎨 a doodle

💭 a thought
finally shared



“Start small. Start safe.
That’s how we grow
brave learners.”
