

Teaching Creatively for Sustainable Learning in English Language Education: A Pathway to Motivation and Academic Performance

Y. Y. Adam¹ & M. Ephraim² & C. F. Obialo³

¹ Department of Arts Education, University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria

² Baptist Science Grammar Yantrailer Jos North Plateau State

³ Karewa GRA Jimeta Yola

¹ yahya.adam@uniabuja.edu.ng, ² ephraimmartina2019@gmail.com, ³ Obialocherry@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the role of creative teaching in promoting sustainable learning, motivation, and academic performance in English language education. Grounded in the Multiple Intelligences Theory, the study conceptualizes creative teaching as a learner-centered pedagogical approach that integrates innovative strategies such as storytelling, role-play, collaborative learning, and gamification to enhance meaningful engagement in the classroom. The paper synthesizes recent empirical and theoretical literature to establish how creative instructional practices contribute to deeper cognitive processing, improved language retention, and enhanced communicative competence among learners. Findings from the reviewed studies indicate that creative teaching significantly improves learners' motivation by increasing engagement, reducing language anxiety, and fostering autonomy, while also enhancing academic performance through active participation and higher-order thinking development. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that sustainable learning is achieved when learners are exposed to diverse instructional methods that align with their individual learning intelligences, thereby enabling long-term retention and real-world application of language skills. The paper also highlights contextual challenges such as inadequate resources, large class sizes, and curriculum rigidity, particularly in developing educational systems, which may hinder the effective implementation of creative pedagogy. It concludes that creative teaching is not merely an instructional preference but a necessary pedagogical shift for improving English language outcomes in the 21st century. The study recommends the integration of creative, technology-supported, and learner-centered strategies into English language curricula to enhance motivation, academic performance, and sustainable learning outcomes.

Keywords: academic performance, learner-centered pedagogical, motivation, multiple intelligences theory, gubernatorial election, sustainable learning

1. Introduction

Teaching creatively for sustainable learning in English language education involves the deliberate use of innovative, flexible, and learner-centered pedagogical approaches that enhance long-term knowledge retention, motivation, and academic performance. In contemporary classrooms, particularly in the 21st century, creativity is no longer optional but essential for fostering deeper engagement and meaningful learning experiences. Creative teaching goes beyond routine instructional methods by stimulating curiosity, promoting critical thinking, and addressing diverse learner needs.

Recent studies emphasize that creative pedagogy enhances not only engagement but also sustainable learning outcomes, particularly in language education where communication, interaction, and contextual understanding are crucial (Zarei & Fabregas, 2024; Sheokarah, 2025).

2. Conceptual Clarifications

A clear understanding of the key concepts underpinning this paper is essential for establishing its theoretical direction and analytical focus. This section explicates the core constructs of creative teaching, sustainable learning, motivation in language learning, and academic performance within the context of English language education.

2.1 Teaching Creatively

Teaching creatively refers to the use of imaginative, innovative, and learner-centered instructional approaches that make learning more engaging, meaningful, and effective. It goes beyond routine teaching methods to incorporate flexibility, originality, and responsiveness to learners' needs. In English language education, creative teaching involves strategies such as gamification, storytelling, drama, role-play, collaborative learning, and the integration of digital tools to enhance classroom interaction and participation.

Recent scholarship emphasizes that creative teaching is not merely about entertaining learners but about fostering deeper cognitive engagement and facilitating knowledge construction. For instance, studies highlight that creative pedagogical practices promote active learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, all of which are essential for language acquisition (Zarei & Fabregas, 2024; Henriksen et al., 2023). Similarly, creative teaching has been linked to improved classroom dynamics, as it encourages learners to take ownership of their learning and participate more actively in communicative tasks (Lin, 2024).

In the Nigerian context, creative teaching is particularly relevant given the diversity of learners and the limitations of traditional, lecture-based approaches. By

adopting creative methods, teachers can create inclusive learning environments that cater to different learning styles and abilities, thereby enhancing overall learning outcomes.

2.2 Sustainable Learning

Sustainable learning refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills in ways that ensure long-term retention, transferability, and applicability beyond the classroom. It emphasizes deep learning rather than surface memorization and encourages learners to develop competencies that support lifelong learning.

The concept of sustainable learning is closely aligned with contemporary educational goals that prioritize critical thinking, adaptability, and continuous learning. According to recent studies, sustainable learning occurs when learners actively engage with content, reflect on their experiences, and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts (Wals & Benavot, 2024). In language education, this involves developing communicative competence, cultural awareness, and the ability to use language effectively in diverse situations.

Creative teaching plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable learning by facilitating meaningful engagement and encouraging learners to connect new knowledge with prior experiences. Research indicates that interactive and student-centered instructional approaches significantly enhance knowledge retention and the ability to transfer learning across contexts (Huang et al., 2023). Thus, sustainable learning in English language education is achieved when learners move beyond rote memorization to develop functional language skills that endure over time.

2.3 Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing success in language learning. It refers to the internal and external forces that initiate, direct, and sustain learners' efforts toward achieving learning goals. In the context of English language education, motivation determines the extent to which learners are willing to engage in language tasks, persist in the face of challenges, and invest effort in improving their skills.

Motivation is commonly categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic types. Intrinsic motivation arises from genuine interest or enjoyment in the learning process, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards such as grades, recognition, or career opportunities. Recent research suggests that intrinsically motivated learners tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement, persistence, and achievement in language learning contexts (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2023).

Creative teaching has been shown to enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by making learning more enjoyable, relevant, and interactive. For example, the use of gamification, multimedia resources, and collaborative activities can increase learners' interest and participation in English language classrooms (Tsai, 2024). Moreover, when learners are actively involved in meaningful tasks, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward the language, which in turn supports sustained learning and improved performance.

2.4 Academic Performance

Academic performance refers to the extent to which learners achieve educational objectives, typically measured through assessments such as tests, examinations, assignments, and classroom participation. In English language education, academic performance encompasses proficiency in key language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Research indicates that academic performance is influenced by a combination of cognitive, affective, and environmental factors, including teaching methods, learner motivation, and classroom conditions. Recent studies have shown that learner-centered and interactive instructional approaches significantly improve academic outcomes compared to traditional teaching methods (Liu et al., 2025). Furthermore, motivation has been identified as a strong predictor of academic success, with highly motivated learners demonstrating better performance in language-related tasks (Adventi et al., 2025).

Creative teaching contributes to improved academic performance by enhancing learners' understanding, retention, and application of knowledge. By engaging students in meaningful and interactive learning experiences, creative instructional strategies help to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language use. This, in turn, leads to better performance in both formative and summative assessments.

3.1 Creative Teaching Strategies in English Language Classrooms with Practical Classroom Applications

Effective creative teaching is operationalized through specific strategies that can be directly applied in the classroom. The following approaches illustrate both the methods and how they can be practically implemented:

(a) Storytelling and Narrative Techniques with Classroom Application

Storytelling enhances learners' vocabulary, comprehension, and imagination by placing language within meaningful contexts.

A teacher introduces a short story related to students' daily experiences (e.g., "A Day at the Market"). After narrating, students are asked to:

- Retell the story in pairs (speaking skill)
- Write an alternative ending (writing skill)
- Identify new vocabulary and use them in sentences

(b) Drama and Role-Play with Classroom Application

Drama activities simulate real-life communication and build confidence in language use.

Students are assigned roles such as "teacher," "shopkeeper," or "customer." They act out dialogues based on real-life situations (e.g., buying goods, asking for directions). The teacher guides pronunciation and expression.

(c) Collaborative Learning with Classroom Application

Group-based learning promotes interaction, peer support, and shared knowledge construction.

The teacher divides the class into small groups and assigns a task such as:

- Writing a group essay
- Solving comprehension questions
- Creating a short dialogue

Each group presents their work while others provide feedback.

(d) Use of Digital Tools and Multimedia with Classroom Application

Technology enhances exposure to authentic language and increases engagement.

The teacher uses:

Short educational videos for listening comprehension

Language learning apps for vocabulary practice

Audio recordings for pronunciation drills

Students may also record their own speech and review it.

(e) Gamification (Game-Based Learning Strategies) with Classroom Application

Gamification integrates game elements such as points, rewards, and competition into learning activities to increase motivation and engagement.

The teacher designs a vocabulary or grammar game like word chain game.

Students earn points for correct answers

A leaderboard tracks performance

Rewards (e.g., praise, badges) are given for achievement

Example: A “Word Challenge” where students compete in teams to form correct sentences using new vocabulary.

3.2 Teacher’s Role in Creative Teaching

The effectiveness of creative teaching depends largely on the teacher’s ability to design and facilitate engaging learning experiences. The teacher acts as a guide, motivator, and facilitator rather than merely a transmitter of knowledge. This involves adapting teaching methods to suit learners’ needs, encouraging participation, and creating a supportive classroom environment.

3.3 Contextualizing Creative Teaching in Nigeria

In Nigeria, creative teaching remains essential despite challenges such as large class sizes and limited resources. Teachers can adapt these strategies using locally available materials and culturally relevant examples. For instance, storytelling can draw from indigenous folktales, while gamification can be implemented without technology through simple classroom competitions.

4. Creative Teaching for Sustainable Learning in English Language Education

Creative teaching plays a pivotal role in fostering sustainable learning by promoting deep understanding, long-term retention, and the ability to transfer knowledge beyond the classroom. Within the framework of the Multiple Intelligences Theory, sustainable learning is achieved when instructional approaches align with learners’ diverse cognitive strengths, thereby enabling meaningful engagement with language content. Therefore, creative teaching facilitates sustainable learning in English language education.

4.1 Conceptual Link between Creative Teaching and Sustainable Learning

Sustainable learning emphasizes not only the acquisition of knowledge but also its durability and applicability in real-life contexts. Unlike rote learning, which often leads to short-term memorization, sustainable

learning involves active participation, critical thinking, and continuous knowledge construction.

Creative teaching supports this process by transforming learners from passive recipients into active participants in the learning process. When students engage in storytelling, role-play, collaborative tasks, and gamified activities, they interact with language in meaningful ways that enhance comprehension and retention. Recent studies indicate that learner-centered and interactive teaching approaches significantly improve long-term knowledge retention and the ability to apply learned concepts in new contexts (Huang et al., 2023; Wals & Benavot, 2024).

4.2 Deep Learning and Knowledge Retention

One of the core features of sustainable learning is deep learning, which involves understanding concepts at a meaningful level rather than memorizing isolated facts. Creative teaching strategies encourage learners to analyze, interpret, and apply language, thereby fostering deeper cognitive processing.

For example, when students participate in storytelling or drama, they do not merely memorize vocabulary; they use language in context, which strengthens memory and understanding. Similarly, gamification reinforces learning through repetition and feedback, making it easier for students to retain information over time. Research confirms that engaging and interactive learning environments enhance memory retention and improve students’ ability to recall and use language effectively (Zainuddin et al., 2023; Tsai, 2024).

4.3 Transfer of Learning and Real-Life Application

Sustainable learning extends beyond the classroom by enabling learners to transfer knowledge to real-world situations. In English language education, this means being able to use language effectively for communication in diverse contexts.

Creative teaching facilitates this transfer by simulating real-life situations through role-play, problem-solving tasks, and project-based learning. These activities provide learners with opportunities to practice language in authentic contexts, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice. Studies show that experiential and activity-based learning approaches significantly enhance learners’ ability to apply knowledge in practical situations (Kolb & Kolb, 2023; Gillies, 2024).

For instance, a classroom activity that involves students acting out a marketplace conversation equips them with practical communication skills that can be used outside the classroom. This practical orientation is essential for achieving sustainable learning outcomes.

4.4 Development of Lifelong Learning Skills

Creative teaching not only improves immediate learning outcomes but also equips learners with skills necessary for lifelong learning. These skills include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and self-directed learning, all of which are essential in a rapidly changing global environment.

Through creative instructional strategies, learners develop the ability to explore, question, and construct knowledge independently. This aligns with contemporary

educational goals that emphasize learner autonomy and adaptability. Research suggests that students exposed to creative and student-centered teaching methods are more likely to become independent learners who can continue learning beyond formal education (Henriksen et al., 2023; Shearer, 2024).

4.5 Inclusivity and Differentiated Learning

Sustainable learning also requires that educational practices accommodate diverse learners. Creative teaching, informed by Multiple Intelligences Theory, ensures inclusivity by addressing different learning styles and abilities.

By incorporating a variety of teaching strategies such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities that teachers can reach a broader range of learners. This inclusive approach enhances participation and ensures that no learner is left behind. Evidence from recent studies indicates that differentiated and creative instructional practices improve both engagement and learning outcomes across diverse student populations (Bas, 2024; Ghaznavi et al., 2023).

5. Creative Teaching as a Driver of Motivation in English Language Learning

Motivation is a central determinant of success in language learning, influencing learners' engagement, persistence, and overall achievement. In English language education, where learners often encounter challenges related to proficiency, confidence, and interest, the role of motivation becomes even more critical. Creative teaching, provides an effective pathway for enhancing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by creating engaging, meaningful, and learner-centered classroom experiences.

5.1 Understanding Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation refers to the internal and external forces that initiate, direct, and sustain learning behaviour. In the context of English language learning, it determines the extent to which learners are willing to invest effort, participate in activities, and persist in overcoming difficulties.

Scholarly literature distinguishes between intrinsic motivation which is driven by interest and enjoyment and extrinsic motivation that is driven by external rewards such as grades or recognition. Recent studies indicate that intrinsically motivated learners tend to demonstrate higher engagement, deeper learning, and better academic outcomes compared to those who rely solely on extrinsic incentives (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2023; Liu et al., 2025). Therefore, fostering intrinsic motivation is a key goal of effective language teaching.

5.2 How Creative Teaching Enhances Motivation

Creative teaching enhances motivation by transforming the learning environment into an interactive and stimulating space where students actively participate in meaningful tasks. Unlike traditional methods that often lead to boredom and disengagement, creative approaches make learning enjoyable and relevant to learners' experiences.

Strategies such as storytelling, drama, collaborative learning, and gamification stimulate curiosity and interest,

which are essential components of intrinsic motivation. For example, gamified activities introduce elements of challenge, competition, and reward, encouraging learners to engage more actively with language tasks. Research shows that such interactive approaches significantly increase students' motivation and participation in English language classrooms (Tsai, 2024; Zainuddin et al., 2023).

Furthermore, creative teaching allows learners to experience success through varied activities that align with their strengths. This sense of achievement enhances their confidence and willingness to participate, thereby reinforcing motivation.

5.3 Learner Engagement and Active Participation

One of the most visible outcomes of motivation is learner engagement. Creative teaching promotes active participation by involving students in tasks that require interaction, collaboration, and problem-solving.

For instance, group discussions, role-play activities, and project-based tasks encourage learners to use language in authentic contexts. These activities not only improve language skills but also create a sense of belonging and involvement in the learning process. Studies have shown that classrooms that emphasize interactive and learner-centered approaches record higher levels of student engagement and motivation (Gillies, 2024; Henriksen et al., 2023).

Active participation also reduces passive learning habits and encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning, which is essential for sustained motivation.

5.4 Reducing Anxiety and Building Confidence

Language learning is often associated with anxiety, particularly in speaking and writing tasks. Fear of making mistakes or being judged can significantly reduce learners' motivation and participation.

Creative teaching helps to create a supportive and non-threatening learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. Activities such as role-play, games, and group work shift the focus from correctness to communication, thereby reducing anxiety. Research indicates that interactive and creative teaching methods lower language anxiety and improve learners' confidence and willingness to communicate (Liu & Wang, 2024).

As learners become more confident, they are more likely to engage in language tasks, which further enhances their motivation and learning outcomes.

5.5 Autonomy and Self-Directed Learning

Another important aspect of motivation is learner autonomy this simply means the ability of students to take control of their own learning. Creative teaching fosters autonomy by providing opportunities for learners to make choices, explore ideas, and engage in self-directed activities.

For example, project-based learning allows students to select topics of interest, conduct research, and present their findings. Similarly, digital tools enable learners to practice language skills independently at their own pace. These experiences promote a sense of ownership and responsibility, which are key drivers of intrinsic motivation.

Recent studies suggest that when learners are given autonomy and opportunities for self-expression, their motivation and academic performance improve significantly (Shearer, 2024; Bas, 2024).

5.6 Impact of Creative Teaching on Academic Performance in English Language Education

Academic performance in English language education reflects learners' mastery of essential language skills like reading, writing, listening, and speaking and their ability to apply these skills effectively. Recent empirical studies by Sailer and Homner (2023) increasingly demonstrate that creative teaching strategies significantly improve students' academic outcomes by enhancing engagement, cognitive processing, and knowledge retention.

6.1 Creative Teaching and Improved Learning Outcomes

Creative teaching strategies promote meaningful learning by actively involving students in the learning process. Unlike traditional lecture-based methods, creative approaches such as storytelling, collaboration, and gamification encourage learners to construct knowledge through interaction and experience.

Recent empirical evidence shows that innovative teaching approaches in English language education led to improved learning outcomes and better academic achievement. For instance, gamified and interactive learning environments have been found to enhance students' engagement and overall language proficiency (Chan & Lo, 2024).

Similarly, studies on technology-enhanced and personalized learning environments reveal that combining creativity with interactive design significantly improves learners' achievement and learning experience in English language classrooms (Orozco & de Benito, 2025).

6.2 Cognitive Development and Higher-Order Thinking

Creative teaching fosters higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which are critical for academic success. By engaging learners in problem-solving tasks, simulations, and reflective activities, creative instruction enhances cognitive development.

Research indicates that gamified and creative learning environments stimulate deeper cognitive engagement, enabling learners to process information more effectively and apply knowledge in new contexts (Almufarreh, 2026).

These cognitive gains contribute directly to improved academic performance, as students move beyond memorization to meaningful understanding and application of language concepts.

6.3 Role of Engagement and Active Participation

Student engagement is a key factor influencing academic performance, and creative teaching plays a central role in enhancing it. Interactive strategies such as role-play, collaborative learning, and gamification increase learners' interest, attention, and participation.

Empirical findings show that gamified English language classrooms significantly improve students' motivation, participation, and interaction, which are essential for academic success (Safeer, Shafi, & Junaid, 2025). Moreover, increased engagement leads to sustained attention and deeper involvement in learning activities, ultimately resulting in improved academic outcomes.

6.4 Gamification and Academic Performance Enhancement

Gamification has emerged as one of the most effective creative teaching strategies for improving academic performance in English language education. By incorporating elements such as points, rewards, and challenges, gamification transforms learning into an interactive and motivating experience.

Cheng, Lu, & Xiao, (2025) carried out a quasi-experimental study which found that gamified instruction significantly improved students' reading proficiency and language enjoyment compared to traditional methods. Similarly, experimental research demonstrates that students exposed to gamified instruction outperform those in conventional classrooms in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension (Tayeh, Krishan, & Malkawi, 2024).

Furthermore, systematic reviews confirm that gamification enhances retention, motivation, and overall academic performance in English language learning (Ameen, 2026).

6.5 Confidence, Motivation, and Academic Success

Creative teaching also contributes to academic performance by improving learners' confidence and motivation. When students engage in enjoyable and meaningful learning activities, they develop positive attitudes toward learning, which enhances their willingness to participate and perform.

Studies indicate that gamified and creative instructional approaches increase learners' motivation and self-confidence, leading to better academic outcomes (Safeer et al., 2025; Safeer et al., 2024).

As learners become more confident, they are more likely to take risks, practice language skills, and actively engage in classroom activities, all of which contribute to improved performance.

7. Challenges of Implementing Creative Teaching in English Language Education

Despite the proven benefits of creative teaching, its effective implementation, particularly in the Nigerian context, faces significant structural, pedagogical, and contextual challenges. Joshua and Lusa, (2024) carried out a study that highlight these barriers which limit the successful integration of innovative teaching strategies in English language classrooms.

7.1 Inadequate Teaching Resources and Infrastructure

One of the most critical challenges affecting the implementation of creative teaching is the lack of adequate instructional resources and infrastructure. Creative teaching often requires access to teaching aids, digital tools,

and flexible classroom environments, which are limited in many Nigerian schools.

Empirical studies show that insufficient teaching materials, lack of instructional technologies, and poor classroom facilities significantly hinder effective English language teaching in Nigeria (Effiong, 2024).

Similarly, research on English language education in Nigeria emphasizes that limited access to digital tools restricts the adoption of innovative strategies such as multimedia learning and gamification (Igiri & Ngwoke, 2025).

7.2 Large Class Sizes and Classroom Management Issues

Overcrowded classrooms remain a major obstacle to creative teaching. Many public schools in Nigeria operate with high student-teacher ratios, making it difficult to implement interactive and learner-centered approaches effectively.

Studies indicate that large class sizes reduce opportunities for individual attention, participation, and feedback, all of which are essential for creative teaching (Uche, 2023).

In such environments, teachers are often forced to rely on traditional lecture-based methods, thereby limiting creativity and student engagement.

7.3 Multilingual Complexity and Language Interference

Nigeria's multilingual nature presents unique challenges for English language teaching. Learners often come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, leading to interference from first languages, which affects comprehension and communication.

Recent research in the *International Journal of Multilingualism* shows that linguistic diversity, although valuable, complicates teaching practices and affects students' academic performance in English (Eze & Amoniyon, 2025).

Additionally, studies highlight that language interference and limited exposure to English outside the classroom make it difficult for teachers to implement communicative and creative teaching strategies effectively (Adakonye, Ojiweh, & Bello, 2024).

7.4 Teacher Preparation and Professional Development Gaps

Effective implementation of creative teaching requires well-trained and professionally competent teachers. However, many English language teachers lack adequate training in innovative pedagogical approaches.

Research by Idowu and Ogundeko, (2024) indicates that teacher education programmes in Nigeria often emphasize theoretical knowledge over practical teaching skills, resulting in limited capacity to apply creative teaching strategies in real classrooms.

Furthermore, a recent study on teacher resilience shows that educators face continuous challenges in adapting to modern teaching methods due to insufficient professional development opportunities (Kwoku, Alaku, & Stephen, 2025).

7.5 Curriculum Constraints and Examination-Oriented System

The structure of the Nigerian education system, which is heavily examination-oriented, poses another significant challenge. The emphasis on standardized testing often encourages rote learning rather than creative and communicative approaches.

Scholarly findings suggest that rigid curricula and assessment systems limit teachers' flexibility to experiment with innovative teaching strategies, thereby discouraging creativity in the classroom (Ajadi, 2024).

As a result, teachers tend to prioritize syllabus coverage and exam preparation over meaningful and interactive learning experiences.

7.6 Socio-Economic and Institutional Constraints

Socio-economic factors such as inadequate funding, poor policy implementation, and limited institutional support further hinder the adoption of creative teaching practices.

Studies highlight that systemic challenges within the Nigerian education sector which include insufficient funding and weak policy frameworks affect the quality of teaching and learning (Obera, Ugboja, & Sule, 2023).

These constraints reduce teachers' motivation and limit their ability to innovate in the classroom.

8. Conclusion

Creative teaching plays a vital role in promoting sustainable learning in English language education by enabling learners to move beyond rote memorization toward deep understanding, long-term retention, and meaningful application of language skills in real-life situations. Through learner-centered strategies, students are provided with opportunities to learn in ways that match their individual strengths, thereby making learning more effective and enduring. In addition, creative teaching significantly enhances students' motivation and academic performance by increasing engagement, participation, and confidence in language use. When learners are exposed to interactive and stimulating classroom strategies mentioned above, they become more actively involved in the learning process, which ultimately leads to improved academic outcomes in English language education.

9. Recommendations

1. English language teachers should integrate creative teaching strategies that include storytelling, role-play, collaborative learning, and gamification etc., into classroom practice to enhance students' motivation and support sustainable learning outcomes.
2. Continuous professional development should be encouraged to equip teachers with the skills required for implementing these innovative approaches effectively.
3. Educational policymakers and curriculum developers should promote learner-centered and flexible curricula that support creativity in teaching and learning. This includes providing adequate instructional resources, incorporating technology into English language education, and reducing excessive emphasis on examination-oriented practices to allow for more meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

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