

## **Enhancing Language Activities in L2 Support Lessons (German) Through Creativity in Primary School**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Creativity plays a critical role in enhancing language activities in second language support lessons, particularly in primary school settings. This study explores the integration of creative techniques, such as appliqué and comics, in German as a Second Language (L2) instruction, emphasising their potential to facilitate linguistic creativity and comprehension. By combining visual arts with language tasks, students engage more deeply with linguistic material, transitioning from basic word responses to more complex sentence structures. The research draws on both classroom interventions and ongoing fieldwork to demonstrate the effectiveness of these methods in promoting language development and cultural awareness in young learners.

*Keywords:* Appliqué, comics, creativity, language development, primary school, second language support lessons, visual literacy

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In the context of modern education, creativity is increasingly recognised as a crucial skill, not just within the arts but across all areas of learning. The Common European Framework of Reference for Visual Literacy (Wagner & Schönau, 2016) underscores creativity as an essential 21st-century skill that extends beyond traditional artistic activities. For primary school students, particularly those learning German as a second language, creative methods provide valuable tools for exploring linguistic

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patterns and making sense of their environment and experiences (Schäfer, 2001). By combining visual arts with speaking and writing tasks, teachers can significantly enhance language learning for young students, fostering both linguistic creativity and deeper engagement with the material (Moraitis 2018; Okonska et al., 2018).

This study focuses on the integration of creative techniques, specifically appliqué and comics, in German as a Second Language (L2) support lessons for primary school students learning German. In this study, the appliqué technique refers to a creative and tactile activity in which learners design visual representations of narrative content by cutting and assembling coloured paper figures and motifs onto a background surface. This process transforms textual input into a visual and material form, enabling learners to reinterpret and reconstruct story elements through aesthetic composition. It functions as a linguistic scaffold, fostering verbal interaction, descriptive language, and narrative coherence by anchoring speech and writing tasks in concrete, self-created imagery. Appliqué, which involves cutting and pasting figures and motifs onto a surface, serves as a particularly effective medium for young learners to express their ideas, engage with the ideas of others, and promote discourse (Abraham, 2014). The comic technique, by contrast, involves guided visual storytelling through sequences of drawings combined with short texts or dialogues. In this approach, learners create narrative structures (characters, actions, and dialogues) around thematic prompts such as hero journeys. The integration of visual and verbal elements supports narrative thinking, sequential organisation, and pragmatic language use, while encouraging creativity and multimodal expression in L2 learning contexts. The study investigates how these creative activities can be used to enhance linguistic creativity, moving students from one-word responses to more complex sentence structures and improving their overall language skills.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Creativity in education has been the subject of extensive research, particularly in its role in language development. According to the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education's report, creativity is defined as "imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value," (Great Britain, 1999, p. 30). This broad understanding of creativity allows for its application across various domains, including language learning. In primary education, creativity is seen as a means of engaging students in a way that traditional methods may not, facilitating both cognitive and emotional development.

Previous studies have demonstrated that integrating creative arts with language instruction can lead to significant improvements in language acquisition, particularly for young learners (Okonska et al., 2018). Moraitis (2018) emphasises that activities combining artistic production with language tasks not only enhance linguistic skills but also promote

a deeper connection to the material, making learning more meaningful and enjoyable for students. This is particularly important in L2 instruction, where engagement and motivation are key to overcoming the challenges of learning a new language.

Wagner and Schönau (2016) and other scholars like Schäfer (2001) have highlighted the importance of visual literacy and its role in supporting language development. Visual arts, such as appliqué and comics, provide a multimodal approach to learning, enabling students to express themselves creatively while also engaging with linguistic material (Tark, 2024). This approach is particularly effective in multilingual classrooms, where students may have varying levels of language proficiency. By using visual arts, teachers can create differentiated, learner-oriented lessons that cater to the needs of all students, regardless of their language abilities.

## METHODS

To examine linguistic and creative developmental processes, a mixed-methods design was employed, combining qualitative-exploratory approaches with quantitative measures such as sentence-length counts. This study combined classroom interventions with ongoing field research to explore the impact of creative techniques on language learning in L2 support lessons. Data collection included parental questionnaires, interviews with parents and workshop facilitators (at the Berlin site), interviews with student teachers (at the Rostock site), audio recordings and photographic documentation of the children's creative work, as well as passive and participatory observation.

The school-based intervention was conducted over two 45-minute lessons in a primary school in Rostock, Germany. The participants included 13 children from migrant backgrounds, divided into two subgroups based on their language proficiency. Each subgroup was supervised by two student teachers in their 3rd or 4th semester of teacher training. The lessons combined fable reading with appliqué work and included a writing task in which the children were asked to create a continuation of the fable. The activities were designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing for differentiation based on students' language proficiency levels.

The extracurricular field site was a Berlin library, where a recurring workshop on comic creation was observed over the course of one year. The workshops were attended by 7 to 12 primary school children, including native German speakers and recently arrived Russian-speaking children. The sessions were guided by workshop facilitators using the "Hero's Journey" framework, based on Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In contrast to the Rostock intervention, the Berlin workshop focused exclusively on the creation of comics as a means of narrative and linguistic expression.

Analysis of the major part of the collected data followed a multi-stage qualitative process: audio recordings and interviews were systematically transcribed and coded,

observation notes and photographic materials were analysed using qualitative content analysis, and the results from the different data sources were triangulated. Interviews with parents and workshop facilitators in Berlin and with student teachers in Rostock served to verify interpretations and to compare the observed language development with earlier sessions. This approach produced a comprehensive picture of the learning processes, which was regularly validated through member checking with the participants.

To control for potential confounding factors such as language barriers and additional learning effects from the writing task following the creative activity, a comparison group at the Rostock school worked on the writing task without the appliqué activity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the classroom interventions indicate that the integration of creative techniques, such as appliqué and comics, can significantly enhance language learning in L2 support lessons. The visual and hands-on nature of these activities made them accessible and engaging for all students, including those with lower language proficiency. The use of appliqué, in particular, allowed students to express their ideas visually, which facilitated their ability to articulate these ideas verbally and in writing.

One of the key outcomes of the intervention and the extracurricular ASL workshops in Berlin was the improvement in students' ability to construct complete sentences. Initially, many students were only able to produce one-word responses or very short sentences. As they engaged with the appliqué and comics activities, they began to use more complex sentence structures, both orally and in writing. This was particularly evident in students like "Michael" and "Ella" (pseudonyms), who were initially reserved in their language use but showed significant progress in their ability to express themselves by the end of the intervention. The students initially began to produce quantitatively longer sentences and to link sentence elements more frequently by incorporating conjunctions and connecting words such as "then," "and," "because," and "that," while increasingly using new or previously individually infrequent nouns. Their utterances demonstrated greater coherence, shifting from isolated one-word sentences to short narrative sequences that combined description, cause, and consequence. At the Berlin site, sustainable progress was observed, facilitated by the longer implementation period and the deliberate use of a broader range of connecting words in sentences, as well as a focus on the oral and written production of coherent stories. Quantitative measures of sentence length and lexical growth at both the Rostock and Berlin sites support these qualitative observations. In contrast, the comparison group at the Rostock school, which worked on the writing task alone without any accompanying creative activity, showed no clearly observable improvement in sentence complexity or lexical diversity. However, as the school-based intervention was limited to only two 45-minute lessons, the long-term sustainability of these effects remains uncertain.

The use of fables combined with appliqué proved to be particularly effective in activating language use. Fables, with their relatable content and moral lessons, provided a rich context for students to engage with the language. By creating appliqués that illustrated the fables, students were able to connect the visual and linguistic aspects of the lesson, which helped them better understand and use the language.

The findings also highlight the importance of creativity in promoting linguistic and cognitive development in young learners. The creative activities not only improved language skills but also fostered independence, self-confidence, and identity formation. These outcomes are consistent with the broader literature on creativity in education, which emphasises its role in supporting holistic development in children.

While the data indicate a clear association between the creative activities and language gains, causality must be interpreted with care. The classroom and workshop contexts introduced multiple interacting factors, such as peer collaboration, increased exposure to German input, and teacher feedback, that may have complemented the effects of appliqué and comics. Efforts were made to address this through the inclusion of a comparison group engaging in the same writing task without creative scaffolds. Nevertheless, research in the field of aesthetic education for primary school children suggests that creative methods and techniques play a significant role in children's learning, identity development, and exploration of the world, and can thus serve as catalysts for more active and creative language use. In this regard and in comparison with the previously obtained results at the Berlin site, through the contrast with the control group at the Rostock site, and via member checking, the relationships between the employed methods and the observed outcomes can be at least partially confirmed.

## CONCLUSION

The integration of creative techniques such as appliqué and comics in L2 support lessons offers a powerful tool for enhancing language learning in primary school students. These activities engage students in a multimodal learning experience that supports both linguistic and cognitive development. The findings from this study suggest that such creative approaches can help students progress from basic language use to more complex sentence structures, improving their overall language proficiency.

Moreover, the use of visual arts in language instruction promotes a more inclusive and differentiated learning environment, catering to the diverse needs of students with varying language abilities. By fostering creativity, teachers can create more engaging and effective language lessons that not only improve language skills but also contribute to the broader development of the child.

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