ENHANCING CREATIVE COMPETENCE IN FUTURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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Abstract: This article examines the developmental stages of creative competence in future English language teachers. The research identifies three essential phases-motivational-cognitive, activity-based, and reflective-analytical-each contributing to the teacher's creative and professional development. Emphasis is placed on the integration of digital tools, interactive tasks, and reflective practices. The article explores both local and international academic perspectives and offers practical examples in English language teaching. It also suggests new approaches such as the “Creativity Sandbox Model” to encourage innovation in pedagogical practices.

Keywords: creative competence, future English teacher, development stages, reflection, innovative education, motivation, communicative methods, digital tools.

In recent years, the development of creative competence among prospective English language teachers has become a key priority in Uzbekistan’s education system. Presidential Decree No. PQ–5117 (May 19, 2019) emphasizes the need to introduce innovative teaching methods and prepare teachers who are capable of thinking creatively and using communicative strategies effectively.

Creative competence is now viewed as a core component of the modern teacher’s professional identity. It goes beyond subject knowledge, encompassing the ability to design engaging lessons, apply innovative methodologies, and inspire creativity in students. For English teachers, this competence is crucial in transforming traditional classrooms into dynamic learning environments.

Creative competence refers to a teacher’s ability to approach teaching innovatively, generate original ideas, solve problems flexibly, and foster creativity among students. According to Amabile (2018), intrinsic motivation is the driving force behind creativity. Similarly, Lubart (2021) and Robinson (2020) highlight creativity as an essential skill for 21st-century educators.

Following the frameworks proposed by Kolb (2019), Anderson (2021), and Begmatova (2023), the development of creative competence can be broken down into three interconnected stages:

1. Motivational-Cognitive Stage. At this stage, the future teacher develops internal motivation and a personal understanding of the value of creativity. This phase involves answering key questions such as:

Why is creativity necessary in teaching?
How can I inspire creative thinking in my students?

This phase relies heavily on intrinsic motivation. Amabile (2018) states, "Creativity does not stem from external rewards but from internal desire and self-expression." Accordingly, teachers must find personal meaning in innovating their lessons.

Classroom Techniques:

Story Completion Tasks: Encourage learners to invent and narrate endings.
“What if...?” Questions: Stimulate divergent thinking.
"Imagine the Situation" Scenarios: Spark imagination and linguistic creativity.

These strategies lay the groundwork for creative engagement by treating students as active contributors rather than passive listeners.

2. Activity-Based Stage. In this stage, future teachers apply creative methods in real teaching contexts. Based on Kolb's experiential learning theory, knowledge is best acquired through direct experience. Richards (2020) suggests that learners truly acquire language only when they are involved in its creation.

Effective Activities: Role Plays – Simulate real-life communication;

Creative Writing – Encourage linguistic experimentation;

Problem-Solving Tasks – Promote critical and creative thinking.

A task like "If I were a teacher, I would…" allows students to practice conditional grammar while proposing innovative teaching ideas. Such tasks simultaneously foster linguistic competence and pedagogical imagination.

Teachers should also adopt the role of facilitators-guiding rather than instructing, supporting learners in shaping their own creative expressions.

Digital Integration: Using platforms like Padlet, Canva, Jamboard, or Genially transforms the classroom into a virtual creativity lab. According to Anderson (2021), digital environments serve as incubators for creative thought and expression.

3. Reflective-Analytical Stage. The final stage focuses on evaluating and improving one's creative teaching practices. Reflection is not a conclusion but a continuous process of self-assessment and growth.

Golovko (2020) defines reflection as "the re-understanding of personal experience that leads to new pedagogical insights."

Reflective Tools:

Learning Journals: Teachers document their teaching experiences;

Peer Feedback: Encourages collaborative evaluation;

Self-Assessment Forms: Promote metacognition and accountability.

For example, using prompts like "After my lesson today…" or "What I could improve next time…" in English encourages both language practice and self-analysis.

Creative Extension: The "Creativity Sandbox Model". As an addition to the traditional three-stage model, this paper proposes the Creativity Sandbox Model-a flexible, safe environment where future teachers are encouraged to experiment with lesson ideas without the fear of failure. This "sandbox" could be implemented as a virtual platform or physical space within teacher training institutions.

This model aligns with Craft's (2019) idea that schools should nurture "possibility thinking" and reduce the constraints that limit innovation.

The development of creative competence in future English language teachers is a multi-layered, continuous process that must begin during teacher education. The three stages-motivational-cognitive, activity-based, and reflective-analytical-serve as a roadmap for fostering innovation in teaching practices.

Only by combining intrinsic motivation, experiential learning, reflective thinking, and digital innovation can we prepare teachers who are not only linguistically proficient but also creatively empowered. The inclusion of creative spaces, such as the Creativity Sandbox, further enhances the transformation of future educators into agents of change within the education system.

Ultimately, creative competence is not just a skill-it is a mindset, a habit of thought that enables teachers to lead classrooms where ideas flourish, problems are solved imaginatively, and language learning becomes a joyful, purposeful experience.

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