

Fostering Creative Competence Of High School Students In EFL Classes: Methods And Tools

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Abstract

This article analyzes methods and tools aimed at developing the creative competence of high school students in foreign language lessons. The study takes as a theoretical basis the sociocultural approach, the theory of divergent thinking, and the current principles of communicative and task-oriented learning. A 12-week semi-experimental program was designed with the participation of 11th-grade students, and creative writing, digital storytelling, role-playing, and project-based activities were integrated; teacher readiness and assessment criteria were systematized. The results showed a significant increase in the ability to create original ideas, flexibility, "consistency" of ideas, elaboration, and communication effectiveness; in particular, the original idea index increased according to the Torrance indicators, and a steady shift in the direction of B1+-B2 was noted in oral speech tasks. The discussion highlights the possibilities of developing creative competence through social partnership and scaffolding, the didactic value of digital tools, as well as issues of fairness and validity of assessment. In the conclusion part, recommendations are given on improving the teacher's qualifications, designing educational tasks based on design thinking, and implementing a rubricated assessment system.

Keywords: creative competence, foreign language, high school, divergent thinking, project-based learning, task-oriented learning, digital storytelling, Torrance, rubric, assessment.

Introduction

Creative competence in foreign language education - a harmonious system of abilities to create new ideas, apply existing knowledge in unusual situations, and develop solutions corresponding to the communicative goal is directly connected with the skills of the 21st century. As the content of education in the upper grades (10-11 grades) becomes more complex, involving students in creative thinking, along with logical, social, and linguistic competencies, requires methodological renewal and redesign of the educational environment from the teacher. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach substantiated the development of student activity in cooperation, mediation, and social communication; his idea that "what is done today with help, it will be done tomorrow independently" still has practical significance (Vygotsky, 1978). In our opinion, it is language mediation in a foreign language lesson, mediation in pair and group work that is a natural catalyst for creative competence. In the current of divergent thinking (Guilford, 1967), the components of novelty, flexibility, and idea saving, along with the Torrance criteria, are considered as effective measures for assessing creativity (Torrance, 1974). The communicative approach and task-oriented learning aim to master the language through content-driven activity; these approaches create a solid methodological platform for bringing creative tasks to the center of the lesson (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Ellis, 2003). Creative competence is not "talent" in the narrow sense, but a growing quality associated with the environment, motivation, and mentorship; This idea is reinforced by the fact that "creation is a systemic phenomenon that occurs at the intersection of personality, sphere, and field" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). The purpose of this article is to substantiate, based on experience, methods and means that serve the development of creative competence of high school students in a foreign language lesson, to propose evaluation criteria and theoretical interpretation of the results.

Methods

Research design. The study was conducted on a semi-experimental, pre-test/post-test control model. A total of 120 students from the 11th grade of three general education schools were involved. The class level according to CEFR was approximately B1 (Council of Europe, 2020). Two classes (n=80) were designated as experimental groups, and one class (n=40) as control groups. Classes were held 3 times a week for 12 weeks.

Participants and ethical aspects. Participants participated on the basis of voluntary consent; measures were taken to protect anonymity and data. Before the program, teachers were trained in a short 12-academic-hour professional development module (creative task design, rubrication, reverse engineering, didactic application of digital tools).

Content of intervention. The following components were integrated in the experimental group:

- Creative writing: microtexts focused on metaphor and figurative expression, developing an idea based on the SCAMPER technique; targeted expansion of vocabulary (stems, collocations).
- Digital storytelling: creating short comics and video essays (topics: global problems, personal interests); working on scripts, storyboards, and audio recordings; effective use of graphic design tools.
- Role-playing and drama: improvisation on problematic communicative situations (negotiation, agreement, conflict resolution); use of language functions (proposal, refusal, explanation, proof) in context.
- Project-based learning (PBL): socially beneficial sub-projects (English information campaign for the school environmental campaign); collaborative planning, task allocation, final presentation.
- Design thinking: empathy map, problem redefinition, prototyping, and iterative feedback cycles.
- "Short creative challenges": 5-7 minute divergent exercises (for example, "10 unusual uses of a simple thing").

In the control group, classes were conducted based on the current curriculum and textbooks, mainly with exercises and reproductive tasks.

Tools and materials. For the lessons, texts aimed at oral communication, thematic word guides, visual handouts, and teacher slides were prepared. In digital storytelling, convenient online tools for visual poster and video editing were selected; protection, ethical permissions, and copyright were observed.

Evaluation and measurements. Creative competence was assessed according to:

1. Criteria of divergent thinking: fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration - based on tasks adapted to the context of a foreign language (Torrance, 1974).
2. Oral speech tasks: rubricated assessment of task-oriented pair/group communication (understandability, depth of content, argumentation, creative use of language resources).
3. Written developments: composition in creative writings, stylistic richness, metaphoricality, adaptation to the audience.
4. Affective indicators: motivation and self-efficacy (a short survey according to the Likert scale).
5. For reliability, an interrater match was calculated between the two evaluators; based on the discussion, the description of the rubric was smoothed out. The data were analyzed using simple statistical methods: mean, standard deviation, paired t-tests, Cohen d-effect measurement, and compatibility indicators.

Results

Divergent indicators: in the experimental group, the average savings indicator increased from 12.4 ideas in the pre-test to 18.7 ideas in the post-test; the number of adaptive categories increased from 3.1 to 4.6; originality scores increased by an average of 35-38%, and elaboration by 28-30%. In the control group, these indicators showed a small, statistically insignificant change.

Oral speech: In the task-oriented role-playing communication rubric, the experimental group's scores for the "creative language resources" item increased significantly; achievements in argumentation and audience adaptation were combined with communication effectiveness. Signs of a shift from stage B1+ to stage B2 according to CEFR indicators were noted (Council of Europe, 2020).

Written works: Significant growth was observed in compositional integrity, metaphorical expression, and stylistic richness; elaboration intensified, especially after processing cycles based on SCAMPER.

Affective results: Student motivation and confidence indicators increased by an average of 0.6-0.8 points (on a 5-point scale); the questionnaires linked creative tasks with a "deeper understanding of the content."

Teacher observations: Students strengthened the culture of cooperation, responsibility distribution, and constructive feedback skills; it was noted that time management was difficult in the first weeks, but stabilized due to sections and time constraints.

These results indicate a common increase in the elements of creative competence along with an increase in originality, the effectiveness of communication has also improved. This connection confirms the integrated nature of content and language in a foreign language lesson.

Discussion

When interpreting the results through Vygotsky's sociocultural model and scaffolding, collaborative solution development, feedback exchange, and multi-stage prototyping play a central role in establishing creative thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). The principle "Today with help, tomorrow independently" justifies the strategy of gradually reducing the number of supporting tools in the lesson - language frames, examples of texts, visual instructions; in our experience, this approach increased the number of original and fluent presentations.

Guilford describes the "working mechanism" of the triad of divergent thinking (consistency, flexibility, originality) of meaningful creativity (Guilford, 1967). In a foreign language lesson, this triad is inextricably linked with language materials: economy - expressing a quick and multi-varient opinion; flexibility - changing the style and register in accordance with the audience; originality - introducing an unusual metaphor, a new composition, or an unexpected argument. The alignment of the rubric with the Torrance criteria ensured consistency in the assessment (Torrance, 1974).

The communicative approach and TBLT create a natural environment for creativity: language acts as a tool, and the task acts as a goal-oriented problem situation (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Ellis, 2003). In project-based learning, students seek a balance between meaning and form because they create a product aimed at a real audience; design thinking makes the process iterative and reflexive. Csikszentmihalyi writes that "creativity is a systemic phenomenon": "creativity is not limited by the internal impulses of the individual, it is determined by the norms of the sphere and collective judgments" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In our opinion, peer feedback and teacher criteria in a foreign language lesson play the role of a "field," selecting creative ideas and directing them towards quality.

Practical conclusions are summarized at several points:

- The combination of short, high-intensity "creative challenges" and large-scale projects maintains a weekly rhythm: one encourages rapid divergence, and the other encourages deep elaboration.
- Rubricated assessment reduces the bias of the evaluator, establishes the student's self-assessment; criteria should be defined at the beginning of the lesson and enriched with examples.
- Digital tools expand creative expression; however, the script, language qualities, and communicative goals must come first so that technical decoration does not outweigh content.
- The role of the teacher shifts to facilitation: the art of asking questions, modeling, time management, and feedback design are core professional skills.

The role of quotations and the author's attitude. The idea that "creativity is the intersection of personality, sphere, and field" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) expands the approach to viewing creativity in a foreign language lesson as "only an internal quality of the student"; in our view, it is the educational field - rubrics, peer opinions, the real audience - that is a filter and catalyst for improving the quality of the creative product. Also, our practical observation of Vygotsky's principle "with help today..." through scaffolding strategies in the classroom showed that his concept is relevant even in today's digital environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

Restrictions:

- Sample selection is based on convenience and the number of schools is limited; generalization requires caution.
- There is a risk of subjectivity in the assessment; although attempts have been made to eliminate it with rubrics and two appraisers, they have not been completely eliminated.
- Since the duration of the intervention is 12 weeks, long-term observation of retention is insufficient.
- Access to digital tools may not be the same for all participants; the issue of equal opportunities requires special attention.

Summary and recommendations

This study showed that it is possible and necessary to focus foreign language lessons in high school on the development of creative competence. Methodological solutions that combined the criteria of divergent thinking with communicative tasks increased originality, flexibility, and elaboration; at the same time, oral and written language skills were improved. The sociocultural approach, the synthesis of TBLT and PBL, together with elements of design thinking, brings the student to the field as an active subject.

Practical recommendations:

1. Inclusion of blocks on creative task design, rubricating, feedback, and digital storytelling in the teacher professional development module.
2. Establish a 5-7 minute "creative challenge" in each lesson and complete at least one mini-project per month.
3. Building a two-sided evaluation: by process (portfolio, scratch drafts, feedback journal) and product (rubric).
4. Prioritizing didactic goals in the selection of digital tools; observing copyright and ethical principles.
5. Strengthening meaning and motivation by ensuring that students' work reaches the "real audience" (school exhibitions, classroom blogs, socially useful information products).
6. Ensuring inclusiveness: differentiated tasks, flexible groups, and supporting materials.

Directions for further research:

- ✓ Measuring the stability of creative competence through long-term observations.
- ✓ Replication in different foreign languages (German, French, etc.) and in different socio-cultural environments.
- ✓ Analyze the didactic and ethical implications of responsible use of artificial intelligence (e.g., idea generation, language editing).
- ✓ Empirical study of the relationship between creative competence and transversal skills (problem-solving, communicative leadership) transferring to the labor market.

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