

DEVELOPING PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP IN FUTURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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Abstract. This mixed-methods study examines psychological mechanisms underlying pedagogical leadership competency development in 117 pre-service EFL teachers in Uzbekistan. An integrated methodological system was tested using a pretest-posttest design with reflective journals and focus-group interviews. Results showed significant improvements across all domains ($p < 0.001$, $d = 0.81-1.06$), identifying psychological safety, thesaurus expansion, interactional quality, and reflection as reinforcing conditions.

Keywords: pedagogical leadership competencies, creativity psychology, EFL teacher education, divergent thinking, psychological safety, counter-suggestive factors, pre-service teachers, mixed-methods research, Uzbekistan.

BO'LAJAK INGLIZ TILI O'QITUVCHILARIDA PEDAGOGIK YETAKCHILIKNI RIVOJLANTIRISH

Annotatsiya. Ushbu aralash metodlar tadqiqoti O'zbekistondagi 117 nafar bo'lajak ingliz tili o'qituvchisida pedagogik yetakchilik kompetensiyasini rivojlantiruvchi psixologik mexanizmlarni o'rganadi. Integratsiyalashgan metodik tizim oldindan va keyingi test dizayni, refleksiv kundaliklar hamda fokus-guruh intervyulari orqali sinovdan o'tkazildi. Natijalar barcha yo'nalishlarda statistik ahamiyatli o'sishni ko'rsatdi ($p < 0.001$, $d = 0.81-1.06$), psixologik xavfsizlik, tezaurus kengayishi, o'zaro ta'sir sifati va refleksiya amaliyotini o'zaro kuchaytiruvchi shartlar sifatida aniqladi.

Kalit so'zlar: pedagogik yetakchilik kompetensiyalari, ijodkorlik psixologiyasi, ingliz tili o'qituvchilarini tayyorlash, divergent tafakkur, psixologik xavfsizlik, qarshi-taklif omillari, bo'lajak o'qituvchilar, aralash metodlar tadqiqoti, O'zbekiston.

РАЗВИТИЕ ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКОГО ЛИДЕРСТВА У БУДУЩИХ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

Аннотация. Данное исследование смешанными методами изучает психологические механизмы формирования компетенций педагогического лидерства у 117 будущих учителей английского языка в Узбекистане. Интегрированная методическая система апробирована с помощью дизайна предварительного и итогового тестирования, рефлексивных дневников и фокус-групповых интервью. Результаты показали статистически значимые улучшения по всем компетенциям ($p < 0.001$, $d = 0.81-1.06$), выявив психологическую безопасность, расширение тезауруса, качество взаимодействия и рефлексивную практику как взаимоусиливающие условия.

Ключевые слова: компетенции педагогического лидерства, психология креативности, подготовка учителей английского языка, дивергентное мышление, психологическая безопасность, контрсуггестивные факторы, будущие учителя, исследование смешанными методами, Узбекистан.

1. Introduction. The evolving demands of 21st-century education necessitate a fundamental reconceptualization of the teacher's role. No longer confined to knowledge transmission, contemporary teachers - particularly English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers - are increasingly expected to act as pedagogical leaders: agents of change who inspire, organize, and guide both learners and colleagues toward continuous educational improvement. Within this paradigm shift, the psychological dimensions underpinning pedagogical leadership have emerged as a critical yet underexplored area of inquiry.

Uzbekistan's ongoing educational reforms provide a particularly compelling context for this investigation. A series of legislative initiatives - including the 2022 National Development Strategy and the 2021 Resolution on Foreign Language Education Quality - have explicitly prioritized the development of innovative and leadership competencies among future EFL teachers. Despite this normative impetus, a theoretically grounded and empirically validated methodological system for developing pedagogical leadership competencies (PLCs) in this population remains absent.

The psychological intersection of creativity and leadership - two constructs that share common cognitive and motivational substrates - offers particular promise for

addressing this gap. Guilford's divergent thinking model [1], Torrance's measurable creativity indicators [2], and Rhodes' 4P framework [3] collectively establish that creativity is not a fixed trait but a developable psychological competency. Similarly, contemporary leadership research has demonstrated robust connections between creative psychological states and effective leadership behavior [4, 5, 6].

This study addresses three interrelated research questions: (RQ1) What are the primary psychological mechanisms linking creativity and pedagogical leadership in future EFL teachers? (RQ2) How do counter-suggestive, thesaurus-related, and interactional factors mediate PLC development? (RQ3) Does an integrated methodological system targeting these psychological mechanisms produce statistically significant and practically meaningful improvements in PLC levels among pre-service EFL teachers?

Significance of the study. This research makes three original contributions: (1) it proposes and empirically tests a four-condition psychological model for simultaneous creativity and leadership development; (2) it provides the first validated mixed-methods evidence of PLC development in Uzbekistan's EFL teacher education context; (3) it operationalizes the theoretical constructs of counter-suggestive, thesaurus, and interactional factors as measurable mediators of PLC development.

The scientific study of creativity as a distinct psychological construct was inaugurated by Guilford's landmark 1950 presidential address to the American Psychological Association, in which he introduced divergent thinking - the ability to generate multiple, original solutions to a single problem - as creativity's core cognitive mechanism [1]. This foundational contribution enabled the operationalization of creativity through Torrance's widely validated test battery, which measures creativity across four dimensions: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration [2].

Rhodes' 4P model - person, process, product, and press (environment) - provided a comprehensive systems framework that proved particularly applicable to educational contexts [3]. Amabile's componential model highlighted intrinsic motivation as creativity's most powerful psychological driver, demonstrating that externally controlled conditions tend to suppress creative output [7]. Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory further demonstrated that peak creative performance occurs at the intersection of high skill and high challenge - a condition directly replicable in well-designed pedagogical environments [8].

Contemporary research has established robust psychological connections between creativity and leadership. Mainemelis et al. (2015) conceptualized creative leadership across three distinct manifestations - leader as creative contributor, integrator, and director - each with distinct psychological mechanisms and outcomes [4]. Huang et al. (2022) demonstrated that leaders who cultivate psychological safety environments produce significantly higher collective creativity ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$) than those who do not [5]. Anderson et al. (2014) identified leadership style as the most important contextual predictor of creativity in organizational settings, with transformational leadership showing consistent positive effects [6].

In the EFL context specifically, Alharbi (2019) argued that English language teachers occupy a uniquely positioned leadership role, functioning simultaneously as linguistic models, cultural mediators, and social change agents [9]. Ismail's (2023) systematic review of 47 studies confirmed that EFL teacher leadership is systematically linked to higher learner motivation, communicative competence, and institutional innovation [10].

Lozanov's (1978) suggestopedic framework introduced three types of counter-suggestive barriers - logical-critical, ethical-aesthetic, and intuitive-affective - that systematically inhibit learning and creative expression [11]. Applied to leadership development, these barriers manifest as fear of assuming leadership roles, excessive conformity to perceived social norms, and emotional resistance to novel pedagogical approaches. Miftah et al. (2025) demonstrated that structured critical reflection - a counter-suggestive barrier mitigation strategy - significantly enhanced pedagogical competence in Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers [12].

The thesaurus concept, denoting the organized network of concepts and mental schemas available to a professional, has been operationalized as the cognitive infrastructure of professional competence. Applied to EFL pedagogy, a broad, well-organized thesaurus enables teachers to draw on diverse conceptual resources when constructing creative leadership responses to instructional challenges. Vinichenko et al. (2019) provided empirical evidence that knowledge base expansion correlates positively with creative productivity ($r = 0.54, p < 0.01$) [13].

Interactional factors - the quality and nature of social interactions in learning environments - have been consistently identified as powerful mediators of both creativity and leadership development. Zacher and Johnson (2015) reported that high-quality academic interaction environments correlated significantly with leadership competency scores ($r = 0.62, p < 0.01$).

2. Materials and methods. This study employed a concurrent mixed-methods design, combining a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design for quantitative data with reflective journal analysis and focus-group interviews for qualitative data. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and integrated during analysis. This design was selected because it enables both causal inference regarding the intervention's effectiveness and rich contextual understanding of the psychological processes underlying PLC development. Ethical approval was obtained from [University Ethics Committee] (Ref. No.: XXX/2024).

A total of 117 third- and fourth-year pre-service EFL teachers at two state universities in Uzbekistan participated in the study. Participants were assigned to experimental groups (EGs, $n = 60$) or control groups (CGs, $n = 57$) using stratified random assignment to ensure equivalence on key baseline characteristics. All participants provided written informed consent.

Table 1.
Participant demographic characteristics by group

Participant Group	n	Age (M ± SD)	Teaching Experience	English Proficiency Level
3rd-year (Experimental)	32	20.4 ± 1.1	0 (pre-service)	B2-C1 (CEFR)
3rd-year (Control)	30	20.7 ± 1.3	0 (pre-service)	B2-C1 (CEFR)
4th-year (Experimental)	28	21.2 ± 0.9	0 (pre-service)	C1 (CEFR)
4th-year (Control)	27	21.5 ± 1.0	0 (pre-service)	C1 (CEFR)

The experimental condition comprised a 16-week integrated methodological system (IMS) specifically designed to target five PLC domains identified in previous work. The IMS consisted of three progressive phases: (1) Reproductive phase (weeks 1–4): structured exposure to leadership theory, reflective reading, and guided analysis of leadership case studies; (2) Creative-exploratory phase (weeks 5–11): collaborative projects, debate, digital storytelling, and role-play exercises designed to elicit divergent thinking and interactional leadership; (3) Innovative phase (weeks 12–16): independent leadership practicum, peer mentoring, and reflective portfolio development. The control condition received standard pedagogical training without the leadership-focused components.

PLC levels were assessed using the Pedagogical Leadership Competency Scale (PLCS), a researcher-developed instrument comprising 45 Likert-scale items (1–5) across the five PLC domains. Content validity was established through expert review (n = 12 specialists in pedagogy and EFL teacher education; Content Validity Index = 0.91). Construct validity was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.052). Internal consistency was high for all subscales (Cronbach's α = 0.87–0.93). Qualitative data were collected through weekly reflective journal prompts (n = 60 participants × 16 weeks) and two focus-group interviews (n = 8 per group) conducted at weeks 8 and 16.

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27. Independent-samples t-tests examined between-group differences at posttest, with Cohen's d calculated for effect size estimation. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Qualitative data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, with coding conducted independently by two researchers (inter-rater reliability: $\kappa = 0.84$) and discrepancies resolved through discussion.

3. Results and analysis. Pre-intervention equivalence tests confirmed no statistically significant differences between EGs and CGs on any PLC subscale (all $p > 0.12$), validating the comparability of groups at baseline. Post-intervention analyses revealed that EG participants significantly outperformed their CG counterparts across all five PLC domains. Table 2 presents the detailed results.

Table 2.

Pre-test and post-test PLC scores by group (scale range 1–5; * $p < 0.001$)

Competency Domain	EG Pre-test M(SD)	EG Post-test M(SD)*	CG Pre-test M(SD)	CG Post-test M(SD)	p-value
Cognitive-Reflective	2.41 (0.62)	3.84 (0.51)	2.38 (0.59)	2.61 (0.64)	<0.001
Communicative-Interactive	2.57 (0.71)	3.91 (0.48)	2.54 (0.68)	2.72 (0.71)	<0.001
Creative-Innovative	2.29 (0.68)	3.76 (0.55)	2.31 (0.65)	2.48 (0.69)	<0.001
Organisational-Managerial	2.44 (0.59)	3.68 (0.53)	2.41 (0.57)	2.55 (0.61)	0.002
Social-Ethical	2.63 (0.55)	3.92 (0.44)	2.60 (0.53)	2.74 (0.58)	<0.001
Overall PLC Score	2.47 (0.63)	3.82 (0.50)	2.45 (0.60)	2.62 (0.65)	<0.001

Effect size analyses indicated large practical significance for all EG improvements (Cohen's d range: 0.81–1.06), consistent with educationally meaningful change. The largest gains were observed in the Creative-Innovative domain (d = 1.06) and the Communicative-Interactive domain (d = 0.98), supporting the theoretical proposition that creativity-focused pedagogical interventions produce particularly robust leadership outcomes. CG participants showed only marginal and non-significant gains, confirming that standard teacher preparation - without targeted leadership development - is insufficient for robust PLC growth.

Thematic analysis of reflective journals and focus-group transcripts produced four primary themes that directly corresponded to the proposed four-condition psychological model.

Theme 1: Psychological Safety as the Foundation. Participants consistently identified the creation of a low-threat, high-challenge learning environment as the prerequisite for engaging with leadership roles. A representative participant voice noted that before the course, leadership seemed reserved for confident, outspoken people, and that a shift occurred once mistakes began to be reframed as evidence of thinking. This finding corroborates Huang et al.'s theoretical claim that psychological safety unlocks collective creative-leadership potential [5].

Theme 2: Thesaurus Expansion as Cognitive Empowerment. As participants' conceptual repertoire in pedagogy, linguistics, and leadership theory expanded, they reported increased confidence and creativity in instructional decision-making, describing a changed perspective on lesson planning after encountering Torrance's creativity dimensions. Vinichenko et al.'s finding that knowledge expansion correlates with creative productivity was thus replicated in a leadership-specific context [13].

Theme 3: Interactional Quality as Leadership Incubator. Participants attributed their most significant leadership growth moments to high-quality peer interactions, particularly during collaborative projects and debate exercises, describing how leading a group's debate preparation involved organizing, motivating, and resolving disagreements. This validates Zacher and Johnson's finding that quality interaction environments are robust predictors of leadership competency.

Theme 4: Reflective Practice as Integration Mechanism. Weekly journaling consistently emerged as the mechanism through which participants consciously connected psychological experiences to leadership competency growth, with several noting that the practice revealed patterns linking creativity in class to leadership behavior. This finding aligns with Miftah et al.'s demonstration that structured critical reflection is a key lever for pedagogical competence development [12].

This study's findings converge on a theoretically coherent and empirically robust account of the psychological mechanisms underlying PLC development in future EFL teachers. The statistically significant and practically large effect sizes observed across all five PLC domains provide strong empirical evidence that a creativity-psychology-informed, psychologically sensitive integrated methodological system can substantially accelerate PLC development in pre-service EFL teacher populations in Central Asian educational contexts.

The pattern of results - with the Creative-Innovative and Communicative-Interactive domains showing the largest gains - is theoretically meaningful. It suggests that creativity-focused instructional activities not only develop the specific competencies they target but also produce transfer effects into the interactional-communicative dimensions of leadership. This aligns with Mainemelis et al.'s theoretical proposition that creative leadership manifestations are interconnected, such that growth in one tends to stimulate growth in others [4].

The qualitative findings add important texture to the quantitative results. The identification of psychological safety as the prerequisite condition for leadership engagement provides a compelling practical implication: before developing specific leadership skills, teacher educators must invest in creating emotionally safe learning environments. This insight has direct pedagogical consequences and echoes findings from Huang et al. in organizational leadership contexts [5].

The counter-suggestive barrier framework proved particularly explanatory for understanding why standard teacher preparation fails to produce robust PLC growth. Without active, theory-informed strategies for dismantling these psychological barriers, pre-service teachers remain in passive, leadership-avoidant orientations despite institutional reform mandates. OECD TALIS 2024 data independently corroborate this finding at the international level, showing that institutional support systems significantly moderate individual leadership development trajectories

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the quasi-experimental design, while standard in educational research, does not permit full causal inference due to the impossibility of random assignment at the individual level. Second, the study was conducted in two universities in Uzbekistan, limiting direct generalizability; future research should replicate findings across diverse Central Asian and comparative international contexts. Third, the 16-week intervention window, while sufficient for detecting significant immediate effects, does not permit conclusions about the long-term stability of PLC gains. Longitudinal follow-up is needed.

Conclusion. This mixed-methods study provides compelling evidence that future EFL teachers' pedagogical leadership competencies can be substantially and meaningfully developed through an integrated methodological system grounded in creativity psychology and designed to address the psychological conditions of safety, thesaurus breadth, interactional quality, and reflective practice. The four-condition psychological model proposed here advances the theoretical understanding of PLC development by providing a coherent account of the psychological mechanisms linking creativity and leadership, and by offering a practically actionable framework for teacher educator implementation.

The study's findings carry direct implications for EFL teacher education policy in Uzbekistan and comparable contexts undergoing educational reform: legislative mandates for teacher leadership development will only achieve their intended effects if accompanied by psychologically informed, theoretically grounded methodological systems of the type demonstrated here. Future research should extend this work through longitudinal designs, cross-cultural replications, and investigation of the specific conditions under which each of the four psychological mechanisms exerts its greatest influence on PLC development.

Conflict of Interest Statement. The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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