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## RESEARCH ACTIVITY AS A STIMULUS FOR CREATIVE GROWTH: PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE COMPETENCE

### *Abstract*

In a rapidly evolving educational landscape, it is increasingly important to understand how current and prospective primary school teachers conceptualize and develop their creative competence. This study investigates teachers' perceptions, classroom practices, and the pedagogical conditions that support the emergence of a creative and research-oriented mindset among novice educators. The research employed semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers from various schools, identifying four key themes: personal interpretations of creative competence, its practical manifestations, the internal and external factors that support creative potential, and the role of research activities as drivers of professional growth. Special attention is given to how mini-research projects, collaborative tasks, and structured reflection influence teachers' self-awareness, confidence, and professional autonomy. The findings suggest that integrating research practices into everyday teaching not only expands pedagogical creativity but also cultivates a sustainable creative-research identity. This identity becomes a personal resource for professional development, rather than merely an external institutional demand, thus addressing a significant gap in the preparation of future educators.

*Key words:* research competencies, primary education, creativity, professional development, research activities

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## ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКАЯ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ КАК СТИМУЛ ТВОРЧЕСКОГО РОСТА: ВЗГЛЯДЫ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ НАЧАЛЬНЫХ КЛАССОВ НА РАЗВИТИЕ ТВОРЧЕСКОЙ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ

### *Аннотация*

В быстро меняющемся образовательном ландшафте всё важнее понимать, как нынешние и будущие учителя начальной школы концептуализируют и развивают свою творческую компетентность. В данном исследовании изучаются восприятие учителей, практика работы в классе и педагогические условия, способствующие формированию творческого и исследовательского мышления у начинающих педагогов. В исследовании использовались полуструктурированные интервью с учителями начальной школы из разных школ, в ходе которых были выделены четыре ключевые темы: личностное восприятие творческой компетентности, её практическое проявление, внутренние и внешние факторы, поддерживающие творческий потенциал, и роль исследовательской деятельности как

движущей силы профессионального роста. Особое внимание уделяется влиянию мини-исследований, совместных заданий и структурированной рефлексии на самосознание, уверенность в себе и профессиональную автономию учителей. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что интеграция исследовательских практик в повседневное преподавание не только развивает педагогическое творчество, но и формирует устойчивую творческо-исследовательскую идентичность. Эта идентичность становится личностным ресурсом профессионального развития, а не просто внешним институциональным требованием, тем самым устраняя значительный пробел в подготовке будущих педагогов.

*Ключевые слова:* исследовательские компетенции, начальное образование, творческие способности, профессиональное развитие, исследовательская деятельность

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## **ШЫҒАРМАШЫЛЫҚ ӨСУДІҢ СТИМУЛЫ РЕТІНДЕГІ ҒЫЛЫМИ-ЗЕРТТЕУ ҚЫЗМЕТТЕРІ: БАСТАУЫШ СЫНЫП МҰҒАЛІМДЕРІНІҢ ШЫҒАРМАШЫЛЫҚ ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІГІН ДАМУ ТУРАЛЫ КӨЗҚАРАСТАРЫ**

*Аңдатпа*

Бүгінгі тез өзгеріп жатқан білім беру кеңістігінде қазіргі және болашақ бастауыш сынып мұғалімдерінің өздерінің шығармашылық құзыреттілігін қалай түсініп, дамытатынын анықтау барған сайын маңызды бола түсуде. Бұл зерттеуде мұғалімдердің қабылдауы, сыныптағы жұмыс тәжірибесі және жас педагогтардың шығармашылық пен зерттеушілік ойлауын қалыптастыруға ықпал ететін педагогикалық жағдайлар қарастырылады. Зерттеу барысында әртүрлі мектептердің бастауыш сынып мұғалімдерімен жартылай құрылымданған сұхбаттар жүргізіліп, төрт негізгі тақырып айқындалды: шығармашылық құзыреттіліктің тұлғалық қабылдануы, оның практикалық көрінісі, шығармашылық әлеуетті қолдайтын ішкі және сыртқы факторлар, сондай-ақ кәсіби өсудің қозғаушы күші ретіндегі зерттеу қызметінің рөлі.

Ерекше назар шағын зерттеулердің, бірлескен тапсырмалардың және құрылымданған рефлексияның мұғалімдердің өзіндік санасына, өзіне деген сеніміне және кәсіби дербестігіне тигізетін әсеріне аударылады. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендей, зерттеу тәжірибелерін күнделікті оқыту үдерісіне енгізу педагогикалық шығармашылықты ғана дамытып қоймай, сонымен қатар тұрақты шығармашылық-зерттеушілік бірегейлікті қалыптастырады. Бұл бірегейлік кәсіби дамудың жеке ресурсына айналып, тек сыртқы институционалдық талап қана емес, сол арқылы болашақ педагогтарды даярлаудағы маңызды олқылықтың орнын толтырады.

*Түйінді сөздер:* зерттеушілік құзыреттер, бастауыш білім беру, шығармашылық қабілеттер, кәсіби даму, зерттеу қызметі.

### **Introduction**

This imperative extends particularly to the field of education, where fostering creative abilities in future primary school teachers through robust research competencies becomes crucial for shaping adaptable and imaginative generations (Pont et al., 2024) (Nufus et al., 2024). The integration of creativity into educational frameworks has gained significant traction, evidenced by its inclusion in international assessments like the 2022 PISA Tests, which evaluate creative expression and problem-solving across scientific and social domains (Pont et al., 2024). This emphasis underscores

a global recognition of creativity not merely as an innate talent but as a developable skill essential for future societal progress and individual adaptability (Kalogeratos et al., 2023). This discrepancy necessitates a focused examination of how pedagogical practices and innovative learning environments can effectively cultivate creativity within teacher education programs, particularly through the lens of developing research competencies (Swanzy-Impraim et al., 2023). Such an approach is vital to preparing educators who can transcend traditional teaching methodologies, fostering environments where students are encouraged to think critically, innovate, and develop their own creative potential, thereby contributing to a more dynamic and progressive society (Routray, 2021).

### **Methods and Materials**

This paper posits that by equipping future primary school teachers with strong research competencies, they can enhance their own creative problem-solving skills and effectively model these abilities for their students, thus addressing the persistent challenge of integrating creativity into compulsory education (Camaño & Pifarré, 2019) (Henriksen et al., 2017). This is critical as teachers often report feeling ill-equipped to facilitate student creativity, despite recognizing its importance (Kampylis et al., 2008) (Pont et al., 2024). This gap highlights the necessity for teacher education programs to move beyond theoretical discussions of creativity to implement practical, research-based strategies that empower future educators to integrate creative development into their pedagogical practices (Oppert et al., 2023). Addressing this deficit, this study explores the pivotal role of research competencies in nurturing the creative capacities of prospective primary school teachers, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical appreciation and practical application of creativity in educational settings. This allows them to move beyond conventional teaching paradigms, encouraging an educational environment where students are empowered to engage in critical thinking, foster innovation, and cultivate their own creative potential, thereby contributing to a more dynamic and progressive society (Oppert et al., 2023). Consequently, developing research competencies among future educators can serve as a catalyst for fostering creativity, equipping them with the tools to critically evaluate and adapt diverse teaching methodologies to cultivate imaginative and critical thinking in their students (Oppert et al., 2023). This study aims to investigate how fostering research competencies in future primary school teachers can enhance their creative abilities, ultimately impacting their pedagogical practices and the creative development of their students. This includes fostering an environment where teachers themselves are encouraged to be creative, as their own cultivated creativity is essential for inspiring it in their students (Pont et al., 2024). This exploration is particularly salient given that teachers' beliefs about creativity can significantly influence their instructional practices and their own development as creative educators (Gao & Qian, 2025). The development of such competencies not only enhances their pedagogical repertoire but also enables them to critically assess and adapt innovative strategies for fostering creativity within the classroom, thus directly influencing student outcomes (Eckhoff, 2011) (Tong, 2024). This suggests a need for teacher preparation programs to broaden student teachers' conceptualization of creativity, moving beyond narrow artistic interpretations to encompass its relevance across all disciplines (Sen & Sharma, 2009) (Pont et al., 2024).

The choice of a qualitative research method is motivated by the desire to obtain informal, authentic, and multifaceted statements from participants, which is particularly important in the context of studying creative abilities—a category closely related to personal perception, professional identity, and individual experience. The creativity of future teachers, which is formed at a pedagogical university, cannot be studied exclusively by quantitative means: a method is needed that allows us to “hear” personal meanings, see the hidden mechanisms of professional development, and compare internal motivation with external pedagogical conditions. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how prospective educators conceptualize, cultivate, and integrate creativity into their teaching methodologies, moving beyond superficial measures to uncover the underlying cognitive and affective processes (Miftachudin, 2022). In this regard, the

study employed a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of how current primary school teachers perceive the development of creative abilities in the training system for future colleagues, and how they themselves use research and creative practices in their work. The advantage of this approach was its flexibility: it allowed the interviewer to vary the order and wording of questions, clarify details, and respond to important comments without limiting respondents' answers to a formal framework.

*Participants*

Eight primary school teachers from five general education schools located in the different regions of Kazakhstan participated in the study. Their work experience ranged from 1 to 25 years, which allowed us to cover various stages of professional development—from young specialists to experienced teachers. Participants were selected using convenience sampling and snowball sampling, which facilitated access to reflective respondents who were interested in the topic.

The data collection period covered November 2023 to January 2024. In our case, we achieved depth and thematic diversity that reflects the real spectrum of pedagogical positions.

Participants are identified by pseudonyms, and information about their age, teaching experience, and type of school is provided in Table 1 (see below), which allowed us to maintain confidentiality and ensure contextualization of the data for further analysis. The study's reliance on qualitative inquiry, particularly through semi-structured interviews, aligns with constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, enabling a nuanced understanding of teachers' perspectives on fostering creativity and the environmental factors influencing pedagogical practices (Swanzy-Impraim et al., 2023). To gain a deep and multifaceted understanding of pedagogical creativity in the context of research training, this study used hybrid thematic analysis (HTA). This approach allowed us to combine elements of both inductive and deductive analysis, which provided a more flexible and context-sensitive study of a complex phenomenon—the development of creative abilities in future primary school teachers.

Table 1. *Overview of participants*

Nickname	The class or age group of students with whom the teacher works	Teaching experience
Aigul	2nd grade	11 years old
Nurlan	3rd grade	10 years
Gauhar	1st grade	2 years
Zhanar	1st grade	14 years old
Alia	4th grade	13 years old
Dauren	4th grade	4 years
Indira	2nd grade	1 year
Madina	2nd grade	4 years

The essence of HTA lies in superimposing theoretically defined categories (deduction) on data obtained from interviews, while simultaneously tracking new, spontaneously emerging themes (induction). Thus, the analytical process took on the character of a lively dialogue between empiricism and theory, which made it possible to go beyond the given assumptions and enrich the understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The hybrid analysis methodology in this study was chosen deliberately as a tool that allows us to examine the development of creativity through the prism of personal pedagogical experience, as well as through the structure of research tasks that students perform in the learning process. This approach not only strengthened the reliability of the conclusions but also provided a more subtle, multidimensional interpretation of the collected data.

*The interview questions were aimed at exploring the following aspects:*

How do primary school teachers understand their own creative competence and how does it manifest itself in their everyday teaching practice? 2. What teaching conditions, in their opinion, are most conducive to the formation of a creative and research-oriented attitude among young professionals?

#### *Data analysis*

Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed using an automated online service, after which the transcripts were manually reviewed and refined according to the principle of verbatim transcription. This allowed us to preserve the style and meaning of the participants' statements as accurately as possible, including emotional nuances, pauses, repetitions, and informal expressions that are analytically significant.

In our study, this approach proved to be particularly significant: it allowed us not only to identify similarities and differences between teachers' practical experience and scientific models, but also to record new observations related to how elements of creative thinking and research activity manifest themselves in real school practice.

The analysis was carried out within the framework of a contextualist approach, which involves paying attention to the meaning of statements in their professional, personal, and cultural context. We consistently relied on the six stages of thematic analysis proposed by Brown and Clark (2016) (Clarke, V., Braun, V., 2016):

1. Familiarization with the data: multiple readings of transcripts, highlighting key statements, creating notes in the margins.
2. Coding: identification of recurring phrases, expressions, and themes related to the development of creativity, research activity, and barriers.
3. Searching for themes: grouping codes into broader semantic clusters (e.g., “teacher initiative,” “fear of error,” “influence of mentoring”).
4. Reviewing themes: rethinking the boundaries between themes, clarifying their core meaning.
5. Formulating theme titles: creating accurate, descriptive titles for each theme that reflect its content.

Preparation of an analytical report: description of topics with representative quotes, interpretation of meanings, comparison with theory. This rigorous iterative process ensured a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between creative competencies and research skills in the context of primary school teacher development. This process made it possible to identify the structural elements of pedagogical creativity, show how they are related to the research approach, and outline the conditions under which these qualities are most actively developed in future teachers. (Öztürk et al., 2025)

To ensure analytical depth and reliability of interview interpretation, the study used a phased approach to data coding based on a hybrid strategy. Three members of the research team worked with the transcripts, each contributing at different stages of the analysis. initial coding phase involved an open and inductive approach, where researchers independently generated codes directly from the raw data, identifying recurring concepts and emergent themes without imposing preconceived categories (Öztürk et al., 2025).

### **Results**

#### *Key themes identified during the interviews*

The aim of this study was to identify how primary school teachers understand their own creative competence, how it manifests itself in everyday teaching practice, and what conditions, in their opinion, contribute to the formation of a creative and research-oriented attitude among future teachers.

Analysis of the interviews revealed four main themes reflecting key aspects of professional perception, actual practice, and barriers to the development of creativity in primary education pedagogy. Each theme includes several sub-themes, which are presented and illustrated in quotes from participants (see Table 1).

Table 2. Thematic table showing topics and subtopics

1. Personal understanding of creative competence	2. Demonstrating creativity in everyday practice	3. Factors contributing to the realization of creative potential	4. Research activity as a resource for developing creative thinking
1a. Creativity as flexibility of thinking and improvisation	2a. Author's assignments and elements of project work	3a. A supportive environment as a condition for professional growth	4a. Research as a way of rethinking one's own experience
1b. Creativity as a source of inner satisfaction from one's profession	2b. Creative solutions to unforeseen pedagogical situations	3b. Barriers and internal conflicts that limit creativity	4b. The role of reflection and analysis in forming a creative position
			4c. Research projects as a space for pedagogical freedom
			4g. Collective research as a source of ideas and exchange

The subsequent sections delve into these themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of primary school teachers' perspectives on creativity, highlighting both their personal engagement and the systemic influences on their pedagogical practices (Henriksen & Mishra, 2015) (Öztürk et al., 2025). This exploration seeks to identify critical areas for intervention and support, ultimately aiming to cultivate a more robust and innovative educational landscape for future generations (Öztürk et al., 2025).

*1a. Creativity as flexibility of thinking and improvisation*

When it comes to manifestations of creativity in the profession of a primary school teacher, the educators who participated in the study often associate this not with an abstract “creative position,” but with the need to adapt flexibly to the situation on a daily basis, make quick decisions, combining pedagogy, psychology, and common sense. In their statements, creativity is not only “non-standard tasks,” but above all a way to survive and grow in conditions of multitasking, emotional involvement, and constant unpredictable interaction with children.

One of the participants, a teacher with ten years of experience, describes it this way: “*It's exhausting, especially because I teach such young children. I have to think not only about how to explain the subject to them, but also about whether they have eaten, how they are feeling, and what their mood is like. It's no longer just teaching — it's as if you are a teacher, psychologist, nurse, and parent all at once...*” (Aigul)

Such statements show that creativity in primary school often arises out of necessity at the intersection of pedagogical and human tasks that cannot be predicted in advance. Here, creativity is improvisation not for the sake of originality, but for the sake of maintaining a lively connection with the child. Many participants also noted the internal contradictions of their profession: on the one hand, an exhausting workload, and on the other, a deep sense of meaning and satisfaction. This contradiction becomes a point of growth from which true pedagogical creativity is born.

“*Yes, it's hard work. But when you see a child suddenly begin to understand, or when after a year of learning they run up to you and hug you — you never forget that. That's what matters most.*” (Zhanar)

Despite the outward routine, participation in the lives of students is perceived as a territory of personal influence, where creativity allows one to see the child as a whole, to feel the moment and

respond to it not according to instructions, but in a human way. In this sense, creative flexibility becomes an indispensable tool for emotional stability and professional dignity.

Some participants raised the issue of the undervaluation of their profession, both in the eyes of society and within the system. They spoke about stereotypes (“long vacations,” “easy work”) that contrast with the reality of a multifaceted workload. However, even so, there was a sense of inner pride in their work and their contribution to the formation of a child's personality.

*“If you want to boost your self-esteem, go work in an elementary school. Because you'll walk past the classroom where you taught a year ago and hear, ‘Dauren agai!’ (Dauren)*

These statements reveal not only the perception of the profession as a challenge, but also as a source of meaning, joy, and recognition, which is directly related to how teachers develop and realize their creativity - not as an abstract category, but as a way of life in their profession. This comprehensive understanding of creative potential is paramount, as fostering creativity in educators directly correlates with their ability to inspire it in students, thereby cultivating a dynamic and adaptable learning environment (Pont et al., 2024).

*Ib. Creativity as a source of inner satisfaction from the profession*

Despite the fact that primary school teachers often describe their work as emotionally fulfilling and deeply meaningful, their statements often reveal fatigue, doubt, and even thoughts of possibly leaving the profession. This is especially evident in the stories of those who have been working in schools for ten years or more. They note that the nature of teaching has changed significantly in recent years, shifting toward formal requirements, reporting, and a constant race for results. As one participant with thirteen years of experience admitted, the work used to be focused on children: on what interested them, how to inspire them, how to build a living connection. Now, she says, everything revolves around control, data, documents, and pressure from the system. This is not just tiring — it destroys the very inner spark that brought many to the profession in the first place.

The idea of leaving school did not sound like an emotional gesture, but rather a thoughtful and anxious reflection. One of the participants admitted that she increasingly hears similar conversations from her colleagues: it is as if they are all “in the same boat,” and in that boat there is chronic stress, burnout, and a feeling of loneliness. It is important to note that it is not only experienced teachers who experience such feelings. Young teachers who are just starting out also face doubts. For example, one of the participants said that her first experience at school was so difficult that she seriously considered not returning to the profession. She was saved by chance: a temporary job at another school turned into a full-time contract and a completely different feeling about teaching. This story highlights how crucial the atmosphere in which a teacher finds themselves can be: a supportive environment can not only maintain motivation but also revive faith in one's pedagogical calling.

Teachers in the middle of their careers expressed similar thoughts. One participant candidly admitted that he could not imagine himself at school in fifteen years, even though his age would allow him to continue working for much longer. His words did not reflect a loss of interest, but rather a feeling of systemic stress that slowly but surely depletes internal resources.

Nevertheless, paradoxically, it is precisely these admissions that reveal what keeps teachers in the profession. Almost every participant in the study mentioned in one way or another that the creative component of their work is their personal resource for resisting burnout. The opportunity to come up with an unconventional assignment, observe the children's response, and feel like the author of the lesson - all of this provides the kind of inner satisfaction that cannot be measured by any form of reporting. When teachers see that a child has become enthusiastic, that something has worked out precisely because they decided to do it their own way, it is at that moment that they feel why they continue to work.

Thus, for many, creativity becomes not just a professional skill, but a form of survival within the system, a space of freedom within a regulated environment. And even when the thought of leaving arises, it is most often not related to a loss of interest in children or disappointment in pedagogy

itself, but is a reaction to the conditions in which this pedagogy has to be practiced. In these conditions, creative thinking is not a luxury or an addition to methodology, but a way to preserve oneself in a profession that, despite everything, remains deeply meaningful to them. The capacity for creativity among educators is crucial for fostering an adaptable learning environment and is closely tied to their professional well-being and longevity in the field (Anderson et al., 2021).

## 2. Expressing creativity in everyday practice

During the interviews, primary school teachers often spoke about manifestations of creativity in everyday practice not as something “additional” or optional, but as an integral part of their professional identity. This was especially evident in stories about creating their own original assignments and using elements of project work. These episodes demonstrated not only pedagogical skill, but also a deep inner satisfaction from the opportunity to create something of their own, meaningful and inspiring - both for children and for themselves.

### 2a. Author's assignments and elements of project work

Teachers emphasize the importance of the opportunity to develop their own assignments and implement project formats in the learning process as an important source of professional satisfaction and pedagogical self-realization. One respondent noted: *“For me, it’s about how free I am in how I structure a lesson. When you have the opportunity to come up with your own assignment, and not just follow the instructions, you feel like you are really teaching, and not just retelling the textbook”* (Gauhar). This remark emphasizes the holistic nature of creative work in the classroom, covering both professional and personal aspects.

Participants emphasized that such forms as mini-projects, creative assignments, or interdisciplinary modules allow children to truly open up, and the teachers themselves get a sense of involvement in something meaningful. One participant described it this way: *“When I give children the opportunity to create something, explore, or present their point of view, I get involved myself. It’s not just the transfer of knowledge, it’s a living process. It requires energy, but it also gives it back”* (Aliya). This statement especially highlights the connection between professional creativity and emotional stability: the author’s assignment becomes not only a means of learning, but also a resource for maintaining internal balance.

### 2b. Creative solutions to unforeseen pedagogical situations

The ability to react flexibly to unexpected situations in the classroom was one of the central themes in the teachers’ stories. They emphasized the importance of quick orientation, the ability to adapt, and finding unconventional solutions on the fly — as one of the key manifestations of pedagogical creativity. Teachers talked about how important it is to feel confident in yourself so as not to get lost when the lesson gets out of control, and the children’s behavior or questions require an immediate response. *“When children suddenly start arguing or someone starts crying, you can’t just continue according to plan. You need to be able to get involved, restructure the lesson, change the tone or the task. And if you have freedom, you can creatively get out of it,”* Zhanar explains.

Another participant emphasizes: *“Sometimes you come to class with one idea, and then you realize it won’t work. Then you have to come up with something on the spot so as not to lose the topic and keep the children engaged”* (Aliya). These observations emphasize that creativity in teaching is not always about beautiful projects or assignments. Sometimes it is about the ability to stay afloat in the unpredictability of school life.

Thus, the ability to creatively solve unexpected pedagogical situations is not only a professional skill, but also one of the resources of internal stability. It helps teachers feel competent, confident and included in the process, even when what is happening goes beyond the pre-prepared scenario.

## 3. Factors that contribute to the realization of creative potential

When discussing the factors influencing the implementation of creative potential, teachers identified a wide range of opinions reflecting their personal and professional experience. These statements turned out to be key to understanding what conditions promote or, on the contrary, hinder the manifestation of a creative approach in pedagogy. A deep understanding of this

multifaceted and context-dependent concept made it possible to identify a number of sub-themes that reveal both external and internal conditions that determine a teacher's readiness for experimentation, improvisation and professional creativity.

### **3a. Supportive environment as a condition for professional growth**

The study participants described a wide range of factors related to the category of external conditions that significantly affect their ability to grow professionally and realize their creative potential. At the center of these discussions was the problem of *autonomy*, which teachers consider one of the cornerstones of creative initiative. According to respondents, it is the level of trust from school management and the degree of freedom in pedagogical decisions that directly determine whether a teacher can realize himself as an author, researcher, and creator.

Thus, one of the participants, Aigul, noted:

*"It all depends on the leadership, because a lot of what we have to do comes from the top, doesn't it? ... I think the government plays a big role in this, because it is the government that dictates how we run our school."* This statement highlights the perception of limited autonomy as a barrier that hinders initiative and stifles professional inspiration. Lack of freedom of action leads not only to formal performance of duties, but also undermines the sense of personal efficacy, which in turn hinders intrinsic motivation for creativity and innovation.

Zhanar's reflections further clarify this relationship:

*"If you don't have that level of autonomy, it's really hard to really impact your self-efficacy because it really impacts how you think you can do your job, and that's always going to have a negative impact on well-being."*

Thus, a supportive environment is not only the availability of physical resources or administrative support, but also *the institutional recognition of the teacher's right to creatively solve pedagogical problems*. When a teacher is given space for initiative, experimentation and critical reflection on his or her practice, this creates the foundation for his or her professional growth and the development of a research position. Otherwise, the lack of autonomy creates a feeling of alienation and leads to professional burnout.

Taken together, the respondents' opinions indicate that the supportive environment should be considered in a systemic perspective: from educational policy and school management to cultural norms of professional interaction. It is in this interaction that external and internal factors come together to form a holistic infrastructure that promotes or hinders pedagogical creativity.

### **3b. Barriers and internal conflicts that limit creativity**

The second cluster of factors identified by the study participants concerns internal elements that shape the perception of one's own professional state. These elements reflect the complex internal dynamics of teachers – their feelings, personal circumstances, attitudes and expectations – and largely determine the teacher's ability to creatively express themselves in their professional activities.

One of the most sensitive aspects raised in the interview was the impact of personal life on professional effectiveness. As Aigul noted:

*"The personal life of teachers... if you have things going on in your personal life that are not conducive to your well-being, it will obviously have a negative impact on your work. So school management needs to understand that teachers are human beings... we are human beings with our own feelings, and that also needs to be respected before attacking a teacher."*

This comment highlights the close relationship between the emotional state of the teacher and his readiness for creative thinking. When attention is focused on overcoming personal difficulties or emotional burnout, the space for creativity is significantly narrowed. Internal conflicts, tension and lack of psychological resources become barriers to inclusion in the creative process, especially in conditions where the teacher is required to quickly adapt and make unconventional decisions.

Additional depth to the analysis is given by the statement of Gaukhar, who touched on the topic of job satisfaction as the most important internal factor influencing the overall professional state:

*"The biggest thing, obviously, is job satisfaction. I think that's a very broad term... if you feel satisfied with your job, it's likely to help you feel better in the workplace and better as a teacher."*

But she also points to a contradiction: high levels of intrinsic motivation and professional satisfaction can be blocked by excessive workload and inefficient work organization. When systems within a school don't maintain balance, even the most inspired teachers lose the opportunity to be creative due to a lack of time, energy, and recognition. Meetings, reporting, formal demands—all of this creates *an internal conflict between the desire to create and the need to survive* under overload.

#### **4. Research activity as a resource for the development of creative thinking**

Within the framework of this topic, various aspects of research practice were analyzed, which teachers perceive as significant incentives for the development of their creative potential. Despite certain intersections with other topics devoted to professional well-being and creative activity, research activity has its own unique value as a space for professional freedom, self-reflection and intellectual growth.

Six subthemes emerged from the interviews, demonstrating how participation in research work helps to rethink one's own pedagogical position, form new professional meanings and enhance creative thinking. Teachers noted that it is through research that they begin to look at their usual practice differently – as an object of analysis, transformation and experimentation. This gives the work meaning, causes internal motivation and stimulates the search for non-standard solutions.

##### *4a. Research as a way to rethink one's own experience*

Participants emphasized that research activities not only contribute to professional development, but are also a way of meaningfully interacting with one's own practice. For many teachers, participation in research becomes a form of *rethinking everyday experience*, in which there is an opportunity to stop, analyze what is happening, and identify the deep patterns of one's own pedagogical work.

One of the key factors that teachers identified as hindering this reflective process was workload and time pressure – barriers that not only impact on overall wellbeing but also hinder engagement in analytical and research practice. As one participant, Indira, noted: *"I would have time to do all the paperwork required. It's a big problem not having time to do the paperwork required. Oh, just no paperwork or less paperwork... either give me time or reduce the amount of paperwork."*

Such statements point to the need to *redistribute resources* – time, organisational and emotional – so that teachers have the opportunity to engage in research analysis of their practice not as an additional burden, but as a full-fledged part of their professional life.

One of the respondents, Dauren, highlights this contradiction: *"As much as I care about my well-being, I know I'm going to have to work hard on Monday, and I'm already kind of stealing Monday from myself to get it right."*

Such internal conflicts between the desire to develop and objective limitations prompt us to think about the need to create conditions in which *reflection and research* will become an integral part of pedagogical activity. Teachers view research not as an abstract scientific procedure, but as a tool that allows them to see their own practice in a new light, recognize recurring patterns, find areas for growth, and restore the meaning of their professional mission.

This re-evaluation process fosters a deeper understanding of pedagogical phenomena, transforming routine tasks into opportunities for intellectual exploration and creative problem-solving (Sanz & Garca-Snchez, 2012).

##### **4b. The role of reflection and analysis in the formation of a creative position**

The teachers who participated in the study repeatedly emphasized that it is the ability to reflect on their own teaching experience—not just to act, but to analyze why and how they act—that becomes the starting point for the formation of their creative position. This is not about formal reflection for reporting, but about a genuine, deep need to understand themselves, the children, how and why they teach.

Many of them associated reflection with the influence of others: colleagues, students, parents. Attentive and respectful communication with colleagues, joint discussion of difficult cases and exchange of experience, in their opinion, not only help to cope with difficulties, but also become a mirror in which new ideas and creative approaches are born. Madina, for example, noted that in a school with strong support, she feels like a “living teacher” who has the energy to create. But as soon as this support disappears, teaching becomes survival: *"If you're in a good school, teaching can be amazing. But in another school, it's not the same job at all."*

Nurlan also voiced a similar thought. For him, not only professional help is important, but also simple human warmth: *"When you know that there are people nearby who can joke, laugh, and catch you at the right moment, it becomes easier to work. Then ideas come more freely, and you want to try something new."*

However, reflection is not always a comfortable process. It often arises from internal conflict, especially when working with difficult children. Aigul, for example, said that the lack of discipline destroys the very possibility of teaching: *"If there is no behavior in the classroom, there will be no learning. Then everything you do loses its meaning, and you no longer think about development - you think about how to survive."*

Analyzing their own reactions in such situations, trying to understand their limitations and looking for new ways - all this the teachers called part of their creative development. The level of interaction with parents was no less important. Dauren emphasized that respect from students' families is not just pleasant, but gives a sense of significance, which becomes a resource: *"I'm lucky - my parents respect my work. That means a lot."* Reflection also occurred at more subtle levels, such as in the perception of physical space. Dauren mentioned how the atmosphere in the team changed after the leaders refurbished the staff room: *"There were sofas, a circle where you could just sit and talk. People started to linger, communicate, discuss... And it really works. This place became ours."*

All these statements have one idea: creativity in pedagogy is not only about coming up with an interesting task. It is about the ability to stop, observe, think. About the ability to see your practice as a living process, where mistakes are not failures, but reasons for growth. It is this kind of reflection that makes a teacher not just an executor, but the author of his professional history.

#### *4c. Research projects as a space for pedagogical freedom*

In many interviews, teachers emphasized that research activity became for them not so much a professional obligation as a personal territory of freedom – something like “your own corner” within the system, where you can breathe. The opportunity to take on a project that makes sense for you personally was perceived as a chance to get out of the constant reaction mode and regain control over your own professional development. It wasn't just about doing research for the sake of a tick or a report. Teachers said that through research work they restored a sense of authorship: “this is mine, I came up with it, I am behind it.” In conditions where the daily routine often weighs down – paperwork, endless planning, reporting – such projects become a kind of refuge. An opportunity to focus on something truly meaningful, something that is not dictated “from above,” but is born from one's own interest and need. At the same time, the topic of fatigue was heard – not only physical, but also psychological. Thus, Gaukhar shared how she wakes up in the middle of the night with thoughts about school: *"I can't sleep. My notebook is by my bed. I wake up and it's all about school. I write it down and try to fall asleep again. It doesn't work. My sleep is terrible."* These words are direct evidence of how intense stress and the lack of boundaries between work and personal life undermine even the most motivated teachers. Against this background, research activities can become not just a way to improve qualifications, but *a tool for restoring balance*. A project that a teacher chooses on his own initiative often becomes a point of internal balance - because in it you don't have to do anything, but create.

Indira raised an important point:

"Teachers need time to live for something other than school. To have things that are not related to grading and planning at home." Research, if it is organized competently and taking into account the interests of the teacher, can perform precisely this function - *to break away from routine and return interest*. Especially when it comes to micro-research in one's own class or to the analysis of topics to which the teacher has a personal attachment. Such projects often become a resource - that very source of energy that is so lacking when work fills the day, evening, and weekends.

Some participants also talked about the physical side of well-being – the need to maintain health, go to the gym, take a walk in the morning before school. All of these are forms of self-care. In this sense, research projects can be seen as a form of *professional self-care*. This is not abstract scientific work, but an opportunity to relive, rethink, and rework your teaching experience. To pause and ask yourself: "*Why am I doing this? What is important in this? What can be changed?*"

As a result, research in the eyes of many teachers is not only an activity for the sake of results, but also an internal space where one can be oneself. It is a territory of freedom – and therefore creativity.

For these teachers, research becomes not just a way to collect data, but an internal journey: Who am I as an educator? Why am I doing this? What do I want to change? These questions require courage. And it comes from feeling like you are not falling apart, but standing firm. In this way, inner resilience and personal well-being are not a backdrop, but part of the growth process itself. Through inquiry, a teacher can not only improve their practice, but also gain a better understanding of themselves, gain confidence, renew their motivation, and finally *speak with their own voice* – not because they have to, but because it truly matters. This holistic perspective underscores the intertwined nature of professional efficacy and personal well-being, highlighting that a teacher's capacity for innovation and pedagogical exploration is significantly influenced by their overall life context and internal state (Öztürk et al., 2025).

### **Discussion**

This study employed semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' holistic perspectives on well-being, investigating the interplay of factors both within and beyond their control. A significant strength lies in its detailed and nuanced examination of the concept directly from teachers' viewpoints, addressing a gap in prior empirical research. The application of thematic analysis facilitated the identification of consistencies and discrepancies with existing knowledge, while also yielding novel insights. Furthermore, this research offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating a structured HTA approach, ensuring analytical rigor through independent coders for both inductive and deductive stages, and a predefined coding strategy to enhance consistency and credibility. The insights from qualitative investigations with primary school teachers further illuminate this connection, highlighting that a teacher's capacity for innovation and pedagogical exploration is significantly influenced by their overall life context and internal state (Öztürk et al., 2025). When teachers experience personal stability and support, they are more likely to embrace new ideas, take risks, and develop their professional voice. Conversely, external stressors and internal conflicts can impede professional growth, turning research activities into burdens rather than opportunities for development. This holistic approach not only enhances teacher well-being but also cultivates the confidence and motivation necessary for creative exploration and the development of research competencies among future educators. This comprehensive understanding of teacher well-being, which extends beyond merely addressing burnout to fostering flourishing, is increasingly recognized as central to effective educational reform and innovation (Emeljanovas et al., 2023) (Shu, 2022). The findings confirm that primary school teachers' perceptions of their professional role and creative competence are shaped by a complex interplay of personal experience, pedagogical reality, and organizational context. As the interviews revealed, creative activity does not exist in isolation from a teacher's overall well-being; on the contrary, it is closely linked to their internal state, team dynamics, workload structure, and personal circumstances.

Many participants candidly shared feelings of stress and being overworked. However, they do not perceive the profession itself as thankless. Instead, they find it meaningful but increasingly demanding. Teachers emphasized that remaining engaged, motivated, and fostering a creative approach depends on their ability to practice self-care, establish boundaries, switch off effectively, and recuperate. These individual strategies align with Ozturk et al.'s findings on adaptability and reflection, which enable educators to preserve internal resources and maintain long-term professional well-being.

The topic of work-life balance warrants special attention in our study. Teachers noted that overload and chronic stress act as barriers not only to productivity but also to creativity. They stressed that pedagogical creativity requires time, quiet, and a sense of inner freedom. When an entire day is consumed by routine tasks and formal duties, there is simply no energy left for reflection and experimentation.

At the same time, it became clear that "external" factors such as management structure, regulations, and workload, along with "internal" elements like satisfaction, self-confidence, and a sense of professional meaning, are inextricably linked. Teachers do not compartmentalize their lives into 'work' and 'private' spheres; rather, they experience it as a unified whole where the positive or destructive influence of one segment immediately resonates in another. Consequently, the concept of integrity emerged as central to our interpretations: to discuss the development of a teacher's creative and research orientation, it is essential to view them holistically - as a personality, a professional, and an individual within the broader context of their life. An important, yet often underestimated, aspect revealed in the interviews was the topic of teachers' personal lives. Most teachers rarely have the opportunity to discuss it in a professional setting, let alone within the context of methodological or organizational analysis. However, it is precisely within their personal lives that the inner state, which either fosters or extinguishes creative initiative, is formed or undermined. Our respondents highlighted that effective leadership should acknowledge this broader context—not by interfering, but by recognizing that behind every teacher is an individual with their own circumstances, resources, and boundaries.

### **Conclusion**

The study's findings underscore that fostering creative and research competencies in primary school teachers is not an automatic outcome, but rather a product of intentional effort across organizational, interpersonal, and emotional dimensions. Without dedicated attention to these areas, a teacher's creative potential may remain underdeveloped. Consequently, initiatives aimed at cultivating a creative and research-oriented mindset must be grounded in respect for professional experience, the establishment of a psychologically secure environment, and the provision of resources that support deliberate pedagogical growth.

Developing the creative abilities of future primary school teachers through research competencies is paramount for cultivating adaptable and effective educators who can navigate the complexities of modern pedagogical environments (Rubenstein et al., 2017).

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