Empathy, Reflective and Creative Teaching of Chinese College EFL Teachers during Covid-19

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Abstract

Aim: This study determined the relationship between Chinese college EFL teachers' empathy, reflective teaching and creative teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology: This study used a descriptive, correlational design using surveys to determine the relationship between the three variables. This study was conducted online through the APP of "WENJUANXING" with 362 respondents. Purposive sampling was employed with the criteria that the participants may share a similar academic background of getting a Master's or Doctor's degree in English language studies, engaging in teaching a variety of English course types including general English, business English, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), exam-oriented preparatory courses, and academic English classes. They had undergone requisite teacher training prior to their English language teaching.

Results: A strong positive correlation exists between teacher empathy and creative teaching. However, there is a strong negative correlation between teacher empathy and reflective teaching, specifically in pre-reflection and surface reflection. Conversely, there is a strong positive correlation between teacher empathy and reflective teaching in pedagogical reflection and critical reflection. Additionally, a strong negative correlation is observed between creative teaching and reflective teaching in pre-reflection and surface reflection, while a strong positive correlation is found between creative teaching and reflective teaching in pedagogical reflection and critical reflection.

Conclusion: There is a robust positive correlation between teacher empathy and creative teaching, while a strong negative correlation exists between teacher empathy and reflective teaching, particularly in pre-reflection and surface reflection. In contrast, a strong positive correlation emerges between teacher empathy and reflective teaching in pedagogical reflection and critical reflection. Furthermore, creative teaching displays a strong negative correlation with reflective teaching in pre-reflection and surface reflection, but a strong positive correlation in pedagogical reflection and critical reflection.

Keywords: college EFL teaching, teacher empathy, reflective teaching, creative teaching

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has exerted a profound influence on various aspects of the world, encompassing health, economy, politics, diplomacy, culture, education, environment, and technology. In the realm of education, the global pandemic necessitated the closure of schools worldwide, leading to an immediate shift towards online or distance teaching, termed emergency remote teaching (ERT). This abrupt transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to virtual environments significantly impacted curriculum, teaching methodologies, and student achievements across academic disciplines.

Both educators and students encountered challenges stemming from this transition. The pandemic constrained teachers' ability to maintain student engagement and motivation in online classes (Alasmari, 2022). Challenges included inspiring and supporting students amidst physical distancing, hindering personal interaction that fosters rapport, emotional expression, and feedback. Correspondingly, students felt isolated, affecting their sense of community and participation (L. Li, 2022). Monotonous online learning environments posed engagement challenges (Xia et al., 2022).

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Teachers reported amplified stress, burnout, and mental health issues due to adapting to new technologies and pedagogies, managing online classes and assessments, balancing work-family responsibilities, and confronting health risks. They often felt undervalued, unsupported, and unrecognized. EFL teachers faced novel and extra stressful factors during the pandemic (Nazari et al., 2022). Similarly, students faced intensified workloads and challenges with online learning (L. Li, 2022).

The pandemic disrupted traditional teaching, prompting educators to acquire new skills, tools, and strategies for effective virtual instruction. The lack of online tutoring experience and technology support posed challenges for faculty (Sahito et al., 2022). Students also grappled with unfamiliarity with online learning technologies (L. Li, 2022).

Additionally, the pandemic eroded students' and teachers' commitment to education due to low morale, safety concerns, and personal reasons, influencing their satisfaction, purpose, and sense of belonging. Disillusionment and health worries regarding COVID-19 exposure were prevalent.

In light of these challenges, teacher empathy and empathy-enhancing techniques are pivotal in mitigating difficulties, enhancing student learning satisfaction, and language achievement. Emotional intelligence and empathy correlated positively with learner engagement (Zhang, 2022). Trust, empathy, and care for students influenced perceived teacher support (H. Liu and Li, 2023). Pandemic-induced successes in remote teaching at Stanford emphasized empathy as a driver of academic achievement (Anderson, 2023).

Empathy, as defined by Eisenberg et al. (2014), refers to individuals' capacity to comprehend and share both positive and negative emotions experienced by others. Weisz and Cikara (2021) further elucidate that empathy involves understanding the perspectives and emotional states of individuals while attending to their well-being. Amicucci et al. (2021) emphasizes empathy's role as a significant component within interpersonal interactions. Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2004) assert that empathic individuals display persistent efforts to discern others' thoughts and respond to them, suggesting that empathy serves as an inner sentiment aiding in the anticipation of others' actions. Cialdini et al. (1997) affirm that empathy encompasses distinct capabilities beyond mere attitudes. Mercer and Reynolds (2002) view empathy as a multidimensional concept encompassing ethical, cognitive, emotional, and interactional aspects, widely theorized across various domains.

Studies have identified two primary categories of empathy: cognitive and affective (Stojiljkovi´c et al., 2012). Cognitive empathy involves comprehending others' emotional experiences (Blair, 2006), while affective empathy entails sharing others' emotional states (Reniers et al., 2011). Eisenberg et al. (2014) note that empathy is commonly recognized as a valuable social-emotional skill for interpersonal interactions. Research indicates that individuals can experience emotions such as pain or happiness upon perceiving similar emotions in others. Empathy's ability to predict psychological well-being in educational settings has been demonstrated (Vinayak and Judge, 2018; Wang and Guan, 2020). Empathy is significantly linked to psychological well-being as it encourages the consideration of others' perspectives, mitigates self-centered attitudes, and reduces selfish behavior, thereby enhancing overall well-being (Gazzaniga, 2008). Rajabi and Ghezelsefloo (2020) posit that EFL teachers' self-compassion fosters heightened empathy, kindness, and compassion towards others, ultimately reducing stress levels and enhancing psychological well-being. The positive correlation between self-compassion and psychological well-being has been empirically validated (Wang et al., 2022).

Insightful investigations have underscored the vital role empathy plays in fostering ethical, communal, and educational development for both educators and learners (Arghode et al., 2013). In educational contexts, Rogers (1995) posits that a teacher's capacity to internalize student reactions, coupled with a perceptive understanding of the learning process from the student's viewpoint, significantly augments the likelihood of effective learning (p. 157). Tettegah and Anderson (2007) define teacher empathy as the ability to engage with learners' concerns, grasp their perspectives, and comprehend the situations from their vantage point. Additionally, Cooper (2010) observes that teachers can transform a learning environment by addressing learners' needs and responding to their apprehensions. Ikiz's investigation (2009) reveals that empathetic teachers curtail student aggression, enhance psychological well-being, and mitigate violent behaviors. Serbati et al.'s study (2020) on exceptional educators accentuates the significance of teacher empathy, motivation, and learner collaboration in teaching exceptional students. Teacher empathy is influenced by various factors, including gender (Pidbutska et al., 2021) and attitude (Parchomiuk, 2019). Klassen et al. (2017) establish a connection between personality traits, like teacher agreeableness, and enhanced teacher empathy for effective instruction. Wink et al.'s examination (2021) of teachers' cognitive empathy, mindsets, and job burnout reveals that cognitively empathic teachers maintain positive attitudes toward learner performance, adeptly manage behavioral challenges, and employ problem-solving strategies. They further note that higher levels of cognitive empathy correlate with lower job burnout in educational settings. Cooper (2004) asserts that teachers with elevated empathy levels contribute to learners' self-efficacy and motivation. Hen's study (2010) demonstrates that

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self-efficient instructors exhibit notably high empathy and optimism toward students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. Lam et al. (2011) establishes a significant positive correlation between empathy and teacher-learner rapport among science educators. Gandhi et al. (2021) contend that teacher belief significantly influences teacher empathy and motivation. Weisz et al. (2021) ascertain that educators embracing the malleability of empathy exhibit reduced offensive behaviors and heightened empathy. Goroshit and Hen's research (2016) underscores the substantial relationship between instructors' self-efficacy, emotional self-efficacy, and teacher empathy. They uncover that teacher's self-belief acts as a mediating factor in the connection between teacher self-efficacy and empathy.

The concept of reflective teaching finds its origins in the seminal works of Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983). An eminent figure in the realm of reflection, Dewey (1933) conceptualized reflective thinking as a deliberate, thoughtful, and ongoing process characterized by the examination and questioning of ideas and actions. Beyond mere rote levels of thinking, various terms such as productive, reflective, and critical (1984) have been employed to define higher-order thinking. Reflective thinking, as posited by Norton (1997), involves the analysis, judgment, and contemplation of ongoing and past events. This process encompasses both reflection-on-action, involving the contemplation of events post-occurrence, and reflection-in-action, entailing the contemplation of actions during their enactment (2016).

According to Zeichner and Liston (2013), the engagement of a teacher in reflective teaching hinges on their exploration of the philosophical underpinnings and values that inform their teaching practices. Teaching is not merely a manifestation of instructors' acquired skills and knowledge; it is a manifestation of their conceptualization, thinking processes, and beliefs regarding classroom teaching. Schon's model (1983) underscores that teachers can engage in reflective thinking about their teaching practices at various junctures—before, during, and after lessons. Such reflective practices heighten educators' awareness of classroom dynamics and foster the recognition of critical thinking, analysis, and self-assessment as integral aspects of pedagogy. Reflective teaching involves the deliberate recall, consideration, and evaluation of experiences, often with broader educational goals in mind (1990).

In the context of language teaching, reflective teaching entails a critical examination of pedagogical practices, the generation of innovative ideas to enhance teaching, and the practical implementation of these ideas (2007). According to Farrell (2014), reflective teaching empowers instructors to engage in critical thinking, make informed decisions, and scrutinize their teaching methods. It has been noted that combining structured professional tasks with reflective teaching practices allows pre-service educators to cultivate their teaching agency and identity (2016).

Over the past decades, research investigations have explored the connections between reflective teaching and other teacher-related variables, including job performance (2021), resilience (2021), emotion regulation (2021), and work engagement (2021). For example, Han and Wang (2021) examined the relationship between work engagement and teacher reflection among Chinese EFL teachers, finding a positive role of reflection in enhancing work engagement. In a study conducted within the scope of this research, Soodmand Afshar and Moradifar (2021) explored the correlation between reflective teaching and job performance among Iranian EFL teachers, with SEM analysis indicating a predictive role of reflective teaching in job performance. Similarly, Soodmand Afshar and Hosseini Yar (2019) discovered a significant positive correlation between participants' job performance and reflective teaching, underscoring that critical thinking about teaching practices enhances job performance. Investigating reflective teaching in the Iranian EFL context, Ayoobiyan and Rashidi (2019) demonstrated that reflective teaching predicted teacher resilience, with the metacognitive reflection subscale serving as a potent predictor. Correspondingly, Fathi et al. (2021) observed a positive predictive link between reflective teaching and teachers' emotion regulation among Iranian EFL instructors. A recent study by Abdar and Shafaei (2022) delved into the relationship between Iranian EFL instructors' teaching style and reflective teaching, unveiling a positive association between these variables.

Creative teaching has the capacity to invigorate, imbue meaning, and foster realism within the learning process. It is defined as the "development and utilization of innovative, inventive, or novel teaching methodologies" (Educational Resources Information Center [ERIC], 2017). This pedagogical approach entails educators crafting innovative curricula and adapting teaching strategies to cater to the specific needs of their students, thereby emphasizing knowledge attributes and the teaching milieu to attain learning objectives (Reilly et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2022).

According to Palaniappan (2009) and Jasni et al. (2020), creative teaching is intimately connected with a diverse array of techniques and methodologies that incorporate elements of creativity, fostering effective interactions between teachers and students (Tan and Goh, 2007; Palaniappan, 2009). The efficacy of such interaction lies in creatively transmitting meaningful knowledge (Rinkevich, 2011), enhancing teaching through adaptability (Sawyer,

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2004), and facilitating the transfer of accessible knowledge, thereby motivating and inspiring students to explore and innovate (Mariani and Ismail, 2015).

Sawyer (2011), alternatively, evaluates creative teaching based on instructors' capacity to harness their imaginative faculties and employ engaging methodologies while upholding the values of originality and discernment. Imagination, as defined, is a cognitive faculty that surpasses spatial and temporal constraints to construct mental images, an amalgamation of personal experiences. It encompasses the perceptual ability to visualize dynamic processes, involving processing, transformation, reorganization, and mental innovation. This imaginative faculty affords individuals the capacity to generate novel ideas even in uncharted territories, which subsequently manifest in their work, life, and future aspirations (Chen and Yuan, 2021). Closely associated with creativity, imagination exerts a favorable influence on teachers' creative teaching (Chen and Yuan, 2021), contributing significantly to innovation and idea generation.

Amabile (1983) postulated that a creative environment is cultivated when several conditions are met, including valuing enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences, creating a sense of belonging for students, and encouraging active student engagement. Additionally, Torrance (1961) devised an intelligence test to gauge creative thinking, identifying four key elements of creativity: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. Similarly, Cheng (2001) proposed an assessment framework for creative teaching based on five dimensions: creative teaching ideas, proficiency in creative teaching, divergent thinking capabilities in teaching, motivation for creative teaching, and creativity in teaching performance. Sawyer (2011) further introduced imagination as an evaluative metric for creative teaching, coupled with the attributes of originality and discernment.

This study focuses on Chinese college EFL teachers, aiming to develop a faculty development program for the post-pandemic era. Variables include teacher empathy, reflective teaching, and creative teaching. Empathy enables understanding student emotions, fostering relationships, and addressing difficulties. Reflective teaching involves refining practices through reflection, and creative teaching adapts strategies to evolving student needs. This research's outcomes will guide the holistic development of college EFL educators in the post-pandemic era.

Existing literature lacks a comprehensive exploration of the interconnectedness of teacher empathy, reflective teaching, and creative teaching, particularly during the pandemic. The study addresses this gap, offering insights into effective teaching strategies promoting student engagement, academic success, and teacher development.

Research Questions

This study determined the relationship between teacher empathy, reflective teaching, and creative teaching of Chinese college EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it sought to answers the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of participants in COVID-19 pandemic in terms of
   1.1. Sex;
   1.2. English teaching experience;
   1.3. Highest educational attainment;
   1.4. Academic qualifications; and
   1.5. Academic rank
2. What is the level of empathy among Chinese college EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What is the reflective teaching of Chinese college EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What is the creative teaching of Chinese college EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What is the relationship between the level of teacher empathy and reflective teaching?
6. What is the relationship between the level of teacher empathy and creative teaching?
7. What is the relationship between teachers' reflective teaching and creative teaching?

Hypothesis

Given the stated research problem, the following hypotheses were tested:
Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between teacher empathy and reflective teaching
Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between teacher empathy and creative teaching.
Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between teachers' reflective teaching and creative teaching.

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METHODS

Research Design

This study used a descriptive, correlational design using surveys to determine the relationship between empathy, reflective teaching and creative teaching of Chinese college EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Population and Sampling

This study was conducted at 20 universities with 362 respondents. Respondents in the study possess a common academic foundation, having attained Master's or Doctoral degrees in English language studies. They have experience teaching diverse English courses, spanning general English, business English, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), exam-focused preparatory courses, and academic English classes. Prior to their English language teaching roles, they underwent essential teacher training.

Instrument

Three survey questionnaires were used to collect the necessary data in this study. Said instruments were validated by experts in the field.

Data Collection

Data collection, reading, and analysis were conducted in alignment with the study's objectives and in accordance with research protocols.

Treatment of Data

Data analysis involved employing various computational methods, including frequency distribution, weighted mean, multiple regression, and covariance. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized for processing the collected data. The procedure encompassed assessing reliability and validity, calculating descriptive statistics, conducting Pearson's r correlation analysis, and creating a path analysis diagram to explore significant factors influencing reflective and creative teaching. This systematic approach ensured the study's robustness and validity. The utilization of SPSS 27.0 facilitated a comprehensive examination of the relationships between empathy level, reflection, and creative teaching among participants.

Ethical Considerations

Before commencing the research, the dissertation author obtained participants' consent. Participants voluntarily completed the questionnaires and were informed of the research purpose. Anonymity was maintained, as no names were required. Participant privacy and data confidentiality were strictly upheld for this study.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The participant demographics reveal a predominant female presence, constituting 69.3% (251) compared to 30.7% (111) male respondents. This gender distribution is reflective of the broader context of college EFL teaching in China. Notably, 40% (144) of participants had over a decade of teaching experience, while 30.4% (110) and 29.8% (108) had 6-10 years and less than five years/five years, respectively. This experience distribution underscores participants' substantial teaching background.

The majority of respondents held a Master's Degree (91.2% - 330), with a smaller proportion possessing a Doctor's Degree (8.8% - 32). This aligns with the stringent selection system for doctoral programs in China. Additionally, participants held diverse academic ranks: professors (30.7% - 111), lecturers (54.7% - 198), and teaching assistants (14.6% - 53). This distribution reflects the academic advancement system within Chinese higher education.

The overrepresentation of female respondents is consistent with the gender demographics of EFL teaching in China and resonates with fields such as healthcare and education. The distribution of teaching experience indicates balanced participation, possibly influenced by experienced educators' interest in the research due to their expertise during the COVID-19 pandemic. The imbalanced distribution of academic qualifications reflects the rigorous selection system for doctoral degrees in China, where only a small proportion of young individuals earn doctorates. The varying academic ranks among participants mirror the academic promotion system, hinging on factors like qualifications, teaching ability, research achievements, and service contributions, underscoring the academic

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recognition's significance. This multifaceted profile highlights the diversity and academic commitment of the participant cohort.

Empathy of Chinese college EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic

Teacher empathy is a crucial aspect of effective education, enhancing the teacher-student relationship and fostering a conducive learning environment. This quality encompasses various dimensions, including perspective taking, empathic concern, and personal distress. The following table provides insights into these dimensions, presenting the weighted mean scores, verbal interpretation, and ranking for each indicator. This analysis sheds light on the extent to which teachers exhibit empathy in their educational practices.

Table 1. Teacher Empathy

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. **Perspective Taking Scale**	2.79	Agree	2
2. **Empathic Concern Scale**	2.59	Agree	3
3. **Personal Distress Scale**	2.83	Agree	1
Composite Mean	2.74	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 1 provides an overview of the outcomes concerning teacher empathy assessment, gauged through three distinct indicators: the Perspective Taking Scale, Empathic Concern Scale, and Personal Distress Scale. The indicator "Personal Distress Scale" attains the highest score, registering a weighted mean of 2.83. Subsequently, the "Perspective Taking Scale" garners a weighted mean of 2.79, followed by the "Empathic Concern Scale" with a score of 2.59. Remarkably, all three subscales fall within the agreement category. The composite mean, reflecting the aggregated score across these three dimensions, stands at 2.74, firmly positioning itself within the "Agree" classification on the scale.

The composite mean indicates a general alignment of teachers with the principles of empathy, as assessed through these scales. The high ranking on the Personal Distress Scale suggests that teachers often encounter situations where they are attuned to recognizing and responding to students facing challenges. This could reflect their deep empathic nature, where they emotionally connect with students undergoing distress. The teaching profession is known for its inherent stress, with implications for both teachers and students (Hinds et al., 2015). Studies consistently highlight teacher stress as an enduring concern, encompassing aspects like burnout, anxiety, and depression (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). The Perspective Taking Scale, ranking second, underscores teachers' emphasis on understanding students' viewpoints. This practice fosters connections, patience, and a positive learning milieu. Morin (2023) contends that stepping into students' perspectives enhances compassionate and effective responses. Such efforts validate students, boosting engagement and motivation. The third-ranking Empathic Concern Scale doesn't indicate a lack of empathy; rather, the quality of teacher-student relationships profoundly affects teacher well-being. Positive relationships foster positive emotions, rewards, and satisfaction, guarding against burnout (Milatz et al., 2015). Emotional connectedness is pivotal for both student outcomes and teacher well-being.

Reflective Teaching of Chinese College EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic
Reflective teaching is a pivotal practice that empowers educators to enhance their teaching methodologies and promote continuous professional growth. It involves a spectrum of reflective processes, ranging from pre-reflection to critical reflection, that enable teachers to critically evaluate and refine their instructional strategies. The subsequent table offers an overview of these reflective teaching indicators, presenting their weighted mean scores, verbal interpretations, and rankings. The legend provides a clear understanding of the interpretation ranges, facilitating an assessment of the extent to which reflective teaching is integrated into the educational context.

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Table 2. Reflective Teaching

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. **Pre-reflection**	1.96	Disagree	3
2. **Surface Reflection**	1.94	Disagree	4
3. **Pedagogical Reflection**	2.90	Agree	1
4. **Critical Reflection**	2.86	Agree	2
Composite Mean	2.41	Disgree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The table summarizes indicators of reflective teaching along with their weighted means, verbal interpretations, and ranks. Pre-reflection and surface reflection demonstrate disagreement with weighted means of 1.96 and 1.94, respectively. Pedagogical reflection holds the highest weighted mean at 2.90, indicating agreement, followed closely by critical reflection at 2.86. The composite mean is 2.41, reflecting disagreement overall. The legend clarifies the interpretation scale based on numerical ranges.

The ranks of the indicators show that participants have progressed beyond pre-reflection and surface reflection, actively engaging in pedagogical and critical reflection. However, the composite mean indicates a level of disagreement, indicating potential for further fostering reflective teaching in the instructional culture. Barriers to EFL teachers embracing reflective teaching are multifaceted. Teachers grapple with heavy workloads and time constraints that impede reflective practices (Exploring Reflective Practice Among College EFL Teachers in Saudi Arabia – AWEJ, n.d.). The demands of lesson planning, grading, and administrative duties leave scant time for self-reflection and professional growth. Moreover, inadequate formal training and guidance in reflective teaching methods hinder effective implementation (Dheresa, 2022). The mindset required for critical examination of one's beliefs and practices may encounter resistance or discomfort among some EFL educators (Al-Suhaibani, 2019). Additionally, limited awareness of reflective teaching benefits and processes poses challenges (DeLuca et al., 2022). Lastly, the need for openness and vulnerability in sharing thoughts, experiences, and challenges deters some EFL teachers due to fears of judgment (Farrell & Stanclik, 2021). Despite these hurdles, prioritizing reflective teaching is pivotal. By addressing these obstacles and seeking support and professional development, EFL educators can bolster their teaching efficacy, fostering ongoing enhancements in their classrooms.

Creative Teaching of Chinese College EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic

Creative teaching serves as a dynamic approach to fostering engaging and innovative learning experiences within educational settings. It encompasses diverse methodologies and strategies that inspire students' curiosity and stimulate their active participation. The subsequent table provides an overview of the indicators associated with creative teaching, featuring their weighted mean scores, verbal interpretations, and rankings. The accompanying legend offers a comprehensive guide to interpreting the scores, facilitating an understanding of the extent to which creative teaching practices are integrated into the pedagogical landscape.

Table 3. Creative Teaching

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Creative planning for Teaching	2.95	Agree	4
Creative Teaching Methods and Strategies	2.97	Agree	3
Creative presenting for Teaching	3.04	Agree	1
Comprehensive Assessment	3.03	Agree	2
Composite Mean	3.00	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 provides an overview of respondents' perspectives on various dimensions of creative teaching. Based on weighted means, verbal interpretations, and ranks, the indicators' evaluations are presented. "Creative presenting for Teaching" receives the highest rank (1) with a mean of 3.04, signifying agreement. "Creative Teaching Methods and Strategies" follows (2) with a mean of 2.97, also indicating agreement. The "Comprehensive Assessment" indicator ranks third (3) with a mean of 3.03, reflecting agreement. Lastly, "Creative Planning for Teaching" ranks fourth (4) with a mean of 2.95, indicating agreement. The Composite Mean is 3.00, aligning with the "Agree" range.

The top-ranking indicator underscores the significant focus teachers place on creatively delivering their instruction. This involves employing engaging activities, multimedia resources, and innovative teaching techniques to enhance student learning appeal. Creative presenting stimulates student motivation and learning enjoyment. Such methods effectively capture student attention, making the learning process more engaging (Rivera, 2021). This approach also fosters critical thinking by prompting analysis and evaluation of creatively presented information (Admin, 2023), thereby deepening understanding and practical application.

The second-highest indicator, "Comprehensive Assessment," highlights the value placed on creative and comprehensive evaluation methods. This involves diverse and flexible assessments beyond conventional testing, ensuring effective student learning assessment. EFL teachers require language assessment literacy to implement comprehensive practices (Fitriyah et al., 2022), involving appropriate test design and result interpretation. Language assessment content representativeness is vital (Hsieh, 2016), involving evaluation and peer feedback to ensure accurate measurement of language proficiency.

The robust but slightly lower scores for "Creative Planning for Teaching" and "Creative Teaching Methods and Strategies" signify their importance in teaching practices. These results underscore teachers' commitment to innovative lesson planning and versatile teaching approaches. Overall, the composite mean and indicator scores underline the prevalence of creativity in teaching, reinforcing its role in enhancing teaching effectiveness and creating student-centered, engaging learning environments.

The relationship between teacher empathy and reflective teaching

The following data describes the relationship between teacher empathy and reflective teaching. Table 4 presents the Significant relationship between teacher empathy and reflective teaching.

Table 4. Relationship Between Teacher Empathy and Reflective Teaching

Perspective Taking Scale	rho-value		p-value	Interpretation
Pre-reflection	-.595**		<.001	Highly Significant
Surface Reflection	-.580**		<.001	Highly Significant
Pedagogical Reflection		.564**	<.001	Highly Significant
Critical Reflection		.508**	<.001	Highly Significant
Empathic Concern Scale				
Pre-reflection	-.364**		<.001	Highly Significant
Surface Reflection	-.336**		<.001	Highly Significant
Pedagogical Reflection		.453**	<.001	Highly Significant
Critical Reflection		.348**	<.001	Highly Significant
Personal Distress Scale				
Pre-reflection	-.600**		<.001	Highly Significant
Surface Reflection	-.646**		<.001	Highly Significant
Pedagogical Reflection		.507**	<.001	Highly Significant
Critical Reflection		.503**	<.001	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

The findings of Table 4 unveil a significant relationship between reflective teaching and teacher empathy. Enhanced reflective teaching in pre-reflection and surface reflection correlates with reduced teacher empathy, while improvement in pedagogical and critical reflection associates with increased empathy. This dynamic link highlights how self-awareness and introspection impact teachers' empathetic capacity. In-depth pedagogical and critical reflection aligns educators with students' needs and emotions, fostering empathy. Conversely, surface-level reflection

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may disconnect teachers from students' perspectives, leading to lower empathy. These results emphasize reflective teaching's role in nurturing an empathetic learning environment. Educational institutions can enhance this dynamic by offering professional development, mentorship, and self-assessment opportunities, fostering continuous reflection and empathy to enrich the educational experience.

Relationship between teacher empathy and creative teaching
   The following data illustrates the relationship between teacher empathy and creative teaching. Table 5 shows the correlation between teacher empathy and creative teaching.

Table 5. Relationship Between Teacher Empathy and Creative Teaching

Perspective Taking Scale	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Creative planning for Teaching	.543**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative Teaching Methods and Strategies	.527**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative presenting for Teaching	.458**	<.001	Highly Significant
Comprehensive Assessment	.508**	<.001	Highly Significant
Empathic Concern Scale			
Creative planning for Teaching	.397**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative Teaching Methods and Strategies	.419**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative presenting for Teaching	.413**	<.001	Highly Significant
Comprehensive Assessment	.465**	<.001	Highly Significant
Personal Distress Scale			
Creative planning for Teaching	.484**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative Teaching Methods and Strategies	.515**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative presenting for Teaching	.509**	<.001	Highly Significant
Comprehensive Assessment	.548**	<.001	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

   Table 5 illustrates the connection between teacher empathy and creative teaching. The computed rho-values reveal a strong positive correlation, supported by p-values below the alpha level. This signifies a significant relationship, indicating that higher teacher empathy corresponds to improved creative teaching. This outcome aligns with findings from several related studies.

   A sustainable society necessitates a profound understanding, actionable concepts, and effective interventions beyond prevalent agendas to imaginatively envision preferable futures that enhance well-being (Srinivasan, 2017). Fostering this imaginative capacity demands a creative agency that is both innovative and compassionate. Sosa (2019) asserts that advancing knowledge and transforming empathy and creativity education are pivotal in enabling individuals to pose impactful questions, generate novel ideas, and make judicious choices in daily life. Nurturing creativity demands genuine empathy and a willingness to acknowledge that educators learn alongside learners as they explore new creative avenues (Sosa, 2019).

Relationship between teachers' reflective teaching and creative teaching
   The following data describes the relationship between teachers' reflective teaching and creative teaching. Table 6 presents the significant relationship between reflective teaching and creative teaching.

Table 6. Relationship Between Reflective Teaching and Creative Teaching

Pre-reflection	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Creative planning for Teaching	-.465**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative Teaching Methods and	-.535**	<.001	Highly Significant

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Strategies			
Creative presenting for Teaching	-.518**	<.001	Highly Significant
Comprehensive Assessment	-.549**	<.001	Highly Significant
Surface Reflection			
Creative planning for Teaching	-.532**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative Teaching Methods and Strategies	-.513**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative presenting for Teaching	-.477**	<.001	Highly Significant
Comprehensive Assessment	-.564**	<.001	Highly Significant
Pedagogical Reflection			
Creative planning for Teaching	.581**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative Teaching Methods and Strategies	.611**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative presenting for Teaching	.563**	<.001	Highly Significant
Comprehensive Assessment	.540**	<.001	Highly Significant
Critical Reflection			
Creative planning for Teaching	.575**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative Teaching Methods and Strategies	.572**	<.001	Highly Significant
Creative presenting for Teaching	.526**	<.001	Highly Significant
Comprehensive Assessment	.538**	<.001	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 22 outlines the correlation between reflective teaching and creative teaching. The calculated rho-values indicate a robust inverse relationship, accompanied by p-values below the alpha level. The table underscores a significant and intriguing connection between reflective teaching and teacher creativity. The outcomes suggest that as reflective teaching advances in pre-reflection and surface reflection domains, there is a corresponding decline in teacher creativity. Conversely, an enhancement in pedagogical and critical reflection domains correlates with an improvement in teacher creativity.

This notable correlation implies that through active engagement in reflective teaching practices, educators can cultivate their creative thinking and problem-solving abilities. Suphasri & Chinokul (2021) contend that reflective practice is integral to teacher education, yet some pre-service teachers might struggle to effectively incorporate it. By honing their reflective practice skills, educators can amplify their creativity and teaching efficacy. DeLuca et al. (2022b) propose that challenging established norms and nurturing a self-assessment pedagogy can facilitate reflective teaching. Self-assessment and critical reflection empower teachers to refine both their creativity and instructional effectiveness. Nurfaidah et al. (2017b) establish a positive correlation between pre-service EFL teachers' reflective capacities and their empathy levels, implying that higher empathy levels may drive greater engagement in reflective practices, including creative teaching.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The findings indicate respondents experienced notable personal distress but displayed active involvement in pedagogical and critical reflection, along with a strong recognition of creative teaching. Those with over a decade of teaching experience demonstrated enhanced empathic concern, greater disagreement regarding pre-reflection and surface reflection, and superior performance in comprehensive assessment. Moreover, participants with extensive experience and teaching assistants excelled in comprehensive assessment. The study unveiled highly significant connections among teacher empathy, reflective teaching, and creative teaching.

Building upon these insights, a comprehensive teacher development program can be devised to address these aspects effectively. The program could encompass structured modules aimed at alleviating personal distress through mindfulness and stress management techniques. Workshops on enhancing pedagogical and critical reflection could be offered, emphasizing practical strategies for fostering deeper introspection. Training sessions focusing on

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empathy cultivation can be designed, particularly for experienced educators, to harness their expertise while bolstering their empathic skills. Furthermore, collaborative initiatives could be established, encouraging diverse teaching staff, including teaching assistants, to collectively excel in comprehensive assessment methods. The program's integration of reflective teaching and creative pedagogies can foster a nurturing educational environment and propel continuous improvement in both teaching quality and student experiences.

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