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Impact of creative drama method on the French achievement of university students

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Abstract

Although students receive years of foreign language training, they cannot carry their knowledge into daily life. The objective of this research is to determine the impact of using creative drama, a realistic method, during the classes on their French achievement. The research has been conducted in a public university with French preparatory class students. Quantitative data collection method has been benefitted from during the research and a posttest control group quasi-experimental design method has been utilized. The findings of the research show that there has been a positive difference in the French achievement of teacher candidates of the experimental group. The findings pertaining to the journals of the teacher candidates in the experiment group indicate that the in-class education practices have been beneficial and effective. In the light of these findings it has been ascertained that creative drama has a positive effect on the French achievement of students.

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1. Introduction

Several methods have been used in foreign language education until today. Some of these have been abandoned as they have been found to be inadequate and search for new methods have continued. Unfortunately although the use of new methods in the curricula is being discussed in our country, the use of conventional method based on rote-learning is on-going. The conventional method addresses cognitive aspects more and thus can lead to the negligence of the emotional and kinetic aspects. This in turn increases the number of individuals who cannot use foreign languages in their daily lives in our country even though they receive foreign language education in their schools for many years. It is not sufficient anymore for students to receive information from their teachers in a school environment. In order to increase the achievement in classes students need to be taught on how they can access information, how they can use information, how they can play a more active role in education and in schools. In short “teaching them how to learn”. According to Kaf 1999, this can be ensured with the use of creative drama, a method which makes individuals more effective in the learning process, enables learning through doing and

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experiencing, contributes to individuals realizing themselves by making them more creative and productive individuals in short which contributes individuals to develop themselves in all aspects. Through the correct use of this method, students assume various roles and learn without knowing and by enjoying themselves. San (1991a) explains creative drama in education as giving a meaning and animating an experience, an event, an idea and sometimes an abstract concept or behaviour in "game-like" processes in which cognitive patterns are reviewed by individuals in a group work through benefitting from techniques such as improvisation, role-playing etc. theatre or drama. Creative drama is a natural process that places importance on the process not the result and in which the student can learn without worrying about scores.

2. Phases of creative drama

The steps of creative drama implementation consist of 3 phases: warming-up-relaxing, vitalization-improvisation and assessment. Each phase complements each other. Warming-up exercises are the first phase of creative drama. Correct implementationof this phase will also increase the productivity of the following phases. In this phase, students relax, get used to each other acquire the will to work together. The importance of this step cannot be denied as students also communicate with themselves and recognize their bodies. Relaxation works are realized sometimes after warm-up exercises and sometimes before the assessment phase and the use of music in these works ensure corporal and spiritual relaxation (Öztürk, 1999). The objective of warming-up and relaxation works is to discharge the energy accumulation in students and to relax them. In the improvisation and role-playing stage; students assume the roles of imaginary characters, experience the lives of characters they will probably never be and try the language they will need in daily life in a safe environment. Through these activities, their imagination activates and their empathy skills develop. Üstündağ, 1998a defines improvisation in the broad sense as a situation that arises suddenly without depending on any texts and as the person feels like and states that creative drama applications are works that bring out individual and group creativity the most. The improvisation stage contributes to students in; acquiring many learning experiences, in their multi-faceted development, their creativity, their understanding of subject matters more permanently, the development of their will and sensation for researching, in assuming more effective roles in education, in the better expression of themselves and in increasing their will to learn (Karakaya, 2007). During the assessment phase which is the final phase of creative drama, a critical evaluation of whether the targets and behaviours identified before the class have been acquired, the mistakes made, the correct paths followed are made. The assessment phase is an important step of drama as it develops the assessment skills of participants as well as their senses for sharing, for being open to criticism and for making constructive criticisms.

2.1Elements in the creative drama process

As in the implementation phases; the elements in the creative drama process build up a whole that affect and complete one another. These elements can be listed as working environment, game group, the work itself and the leader. Creative drama implementations can be realized everywhere whether indoor or outdoor. However the working environment needs to be prepared prior to the implementation taking into consideration every detail and condition that may create negativity. Even changing a classroom that has a classic order can be approved as a positive element that will relax students and thus change their achievement and their perception of the class. Other elements that may affect creative drama implementations are the ages, gender, interest, needs and skills of the student group. Although the differences among individuals may seem negative at first glance, they are positive factors that build on the richness of drama studies. The important point here is for the leader to have the skills for developing an environment and activities that will take into account the characteristics of the students. When identifying studies, activities that will enable students to express themselves in the best way possible, that are not complex and that can be encountered in daily lives need to be chosen. During this selection, the differences of students in the working group also need to be taken into account. We can say that the most important element in the creative drama process is the leader, in other words the teacher. The leader should be constructive when communicating with participants and should provide the opportunity for participants to express themselves as they feel. The leader needs to explain the students that the characters they will establish are unique

tothem, that they should feel free and that the activity is not being realized for scores. It should also be explained that the objective is not to put up a good theatre show but to create a meaningful learning environment.

2.1.1 Creative drama in language classrooms

It is necessary to ensure the active participation of students to foreign language classes. In foreign language classes in which creative drama methods are used, students actively participate in the learning process; moreover, as it is a process implemented in a group the participation of more students is ensured and shy students are motivated. Research conducted in recent years put forth that creative drama is an effective method in foreign language education. In his study where he researches the effect of creative drama on active vocabulary and speech development in English classes, Tokmakçıoglu (1993) states that creative drama applications positively affect the active vocabulary and speech development of students. Paksoy (2008) has determined in his study that drama has had an important effect in the development of English class students' self-esteem and speaking skills.Aynal (1989) has analyzed the dramatization technique on foreign language education and has stated that it is a more successful technique in reaching cognitive objectives compared to conventional methods. In his study where he researches the achievement of 8th grade students in English classes, Uzer (2008) has determined that the achievement level of test group students receiving education through creative drama has increased. In his study, Kılıç (2009) has emphasized that student' speaking levels and their approach towards speaking English has developed through drama techniques. No matter which method is used in foreign language education, the method that is used needs to appeal to the sense organs and ensure students to use the language (Tarcan, 1997). In this sense, as it provides the opportunity for using all sense organs, creative drama holds an important place in language education (Üstündağ, 1998b). The products introduced by students during a creative drama process are data that have been produced at that moment and cannot be called right or wrong (Ömeroğlu Turan & Can Yaşar, 1999; San, 1996b). This method decreases the concern of students in "doing wrong" and increases the motivation to learn. Students acquire the skill of placing themselves in someone else's shoes through the creative drama technique and can express their own feelings and opinions in the role of someone else. Creative drama which is a natural learning tool contributes to students' corporal and spiritual development. As students find more opportunities for using the language in foreign language classes where creative drama activities are conducted compared to conventional language classes; their verbal skills such as expression, recognition, explanation, reasoning, persuasion, convincing, planning, anticipation and decision-making are more developed (O'neill &Lambert, 1990). In this way, students can apply the verbal skills they acquire in their real lives.

Looking at researches conducted in terms of area, it is seen that creative drama is applied more in pre-school and among young age groups. Works on the effect of creative drama on the French language is not encountered much. For this reason it was decided to conduct this study using the creative drama technique with teacher candidates in the university preparatory classes. The main aim of the study is to determine whether drama has an extended impact on French preparatory class students' French achievement scores.

3. Methodology

The sample of this research is composed of 31 French preparatory class students in the 17-20 age group during the 2010-2011 education period in a state university in Ankara. A control group (N=15) and an experiment group (N=16) was randomly selected using appropriate sampling techniques. A total of 9 hours of education during 3 weeks was provided to the control group by conducting activities foreseen by the programme and to the experiment group by adding creative drama activities to the foreseen programme. Classes with the experiment group started with the warm-up-relaxation activities and continued with improvisation-vitalization and assessment that form the phases of creative drama. A quasi-experimental design method was used in the research. In order to measure the students' achievement level, to see the difference in the achievement of control group students with the group in which creative drama method was applied and to put forth whether the subject matters taught have been understood,

the same achievement test regarding the subject taught was applied to both groups at the end of each class. In the preparation of achievement tests that were used as data collection tools; targeted achievements and the opinions of French instructors in the school where the research is being conducted were predicated on and calculation tools using 'fill in the blanks' were prepared by the researcher according to the achievements that are desired to be measured. In order to determine the difference between averages in the analysis of quantitative data collected, a t-test among parametric analysis methods and ANCOVA test were applied. Moreover in order to enrich quantitative data with qualitative data, the students in the experiment group were asked to keep a journal on how they feel during the class at the end of each class. Findings based on the journals of teacher candidates in the experiment group indicated that the educational applications in the classroom have been beneficial and effective.

4. Results and discussions

The research sought to find answers on whether the creative drama method had an effect on the French learning achievement of university students and whether there was a meaningful difference between the achievement levels of the experiment group in which education is provided to French Teaching preparatory class using the creative drama method and the control group students in which education is provided as foreseen by the normal programme.

3 achievement tests have been applied to the experiment and control groupstudents during the implementation process. The descriptive statistics results of the applied scale of experiment and control group students, the mean of test scores *(X)*, standard deviation (s), whether the scores show a normal distribution – Shapiro-Wilk – and the skewness kurtosis coefficients have been calculated and given in Table 1.

Table 1.Descriptive statistical results of achievement test scores

Instrument	Group	n	$\overline{X}$	S	Shapiro-Wilk (p)	SC-KC
Achievement Test Score_ Experimental	Test 1	15	16,14	2,18	0,071	-0,317; -,174
	Test 2	16	18,37	1,500	0,847	-0,470; -1,063
	Test 3	14	17,29	1,59	0,588	-0,413; 0,353
Achievement Test Score _ Control	Test 1	13	11,38	4,17	0,05	-1,89; 4,12
	Test 2	13	11,85	4,26	0,919	-0,035; 0,010
	Test 3	15	14,87	2,77	0,668	-0,142; -0,754

According to Table 1 in which descriptive statistical results are provided, the test scores applied to the experiment and control groups show a normal distribution; therefore, parametric tests need to be applied in testing the hypothesis.

In order to test the hypothesis of the research, a t-test was applied to the achievement test scores of the 3 tests that were applied to the experiment and control group students during the research by controlling the assumptions and the results of the analysis have been provided in Table 2.

Table 2. T-test results pertaining to the achievement test scores of experiment and control group students

Instrument	Group	n	$\overline{X}$	S	sd	T	p
Achievement Test Score	Experimental	45	17,33	1,94	84	6,592	**0,000**
	Control	41	12,80	3,99			

According to Table 2 there is a statistically meaningful difference between the score averages of the 3 applied achievement tests. Looking at the averages in order to understand to which group's advantage this difference belongs to, it can be seen that the experiment group students are more successful than the control group students. According to this result it has been determined that the creative drama method applied to the experiment group has had a positive effect on the achievement of students.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This research aimed to set forth the effect of the creative drama method applied to the French preparatory classes in the university on the achievement of students. According to statistical calculations it can be said that the creative drama method has a meaningful effect on the achievement of students. According to information acquired from the journals of students who participated in creative drama studies, it is thought that students have enjoyed classes, their interest towards the class has increased, they have both enjoyed themselves and learned, and that they have realized a more meaningful learning as they associate their acquired information through implementation with their daily lives. Moreover, according to group discussions and observations made by the researcher, an impression that many shy students have expressed themselves more easily by blending with their friends during the process and that their communication with others has strengthened has been made. According to the data obtained from the research, it is thought that more place should be given to creative drama applications in faculties that train foreign language teachers in particular.

The results show that the experiment group achieved better results than the control group. Also some recommendations for future studies are given below;

- The effectiveness of the method can be strengthened by increasing the number of samples and the duration of creative drama implementations.
- The effect of the gender factor on the creative drama method can be studied.
- The effect of creative drama on the approach of students towards French classes can be studied in longer-term studies.

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