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Effects of creative writing activities on students' achievement in writing, writing dispositions and attitude to English.

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Abstract

This experimental study investigates the effects of using creative writing activities on 7th grade students' achievement in writing skill, writing dispositions and their attitude to English. One group pre and post test design was used in the study. The study was conducted during four weeks in 2012- 2013 academic year in an elementary school in the city centre of Denizli, Turkey. The study group was consisted of 17 female and 14 males in total 31 seventh grade students. When pre and post test results were compared it was found that students' achievement in writing skill was increased after the experiment. Students' writing disposition was also increased when compared to their levels before the experiment. However, students' attitude to English course was not increased after the experiment. Results indicate that using creative writing exercises has a positive effect on writing achievement and writing disposition in 7th grade English language classes in elementary schools.

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Keywords: creative writing; writing disposition; English course attitude; writing achievement.

1. Introduction

Creativity plays an important role in technological advance, in the social and behavioural sciences, and in the humanities and arts (Dudek, 2003; cited in Runco, 2004). Because of its role in innovation and entrepreneurship, creativity has become one of the key concerns of organizations and businesses (Runco, 2004). Creativity is 'the ability to come up with new ideas that are surprising yet intelligible, and also valuable in some way' (Boden 2001). The reflection of creative aspects of students in school environment can be seen mostly in the texts they produce by

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using writing skill. For this reason, creativity and writing skill are very close together and identical (Demir, 2013). Writing includes “creative thinking and relating new information with the prior knowledge and this make new information sense” (Lawwill, 1999; cited in Demir, 2013). Directly associated with creativity, creative writing means one’s putting his or her ideas and feelings about a particular topic on paper by using his or her imagination freely (Oral, 2012). Creative writing aids language development at all levels: grammar, vocabulary, phonology and discourse. It requires learners to manipulate the language in interesting and demanding ways in attempting to express uniquely personal meanings. In doing so, they necessarily engage with the language at a deeper level of processing than with most expository texts (Craik & Lockhart 1972). Writing can be viewed as a recursive process involving both cognitive and metacognitive processes. Task, environment, individual cognition and affective processes all impact on producing written text (Larkin, 2009). Writing has an important contribution to the development of other skills and also becomes a tool to express person’s feelings, thoughts and information. Writing should be perceived and evaluated not as a mechanical process but as a skill which covering understanding, thinking, developing and producing skills. In this sense, the process-oriented approach should be developed in the improvement of writing skills. Students should be expected to gain some various attainments such as planning, developing their products gradually, supporting ideas, evaluating their writing in writing process (MoNE, 2011). We need to find ways to integrate writing with other skills and activities, giving it more relevance and importance - and also making it more interesting. We need to use meaningful, realistic and relevant writing tasks, based on our learners' needs and interests. We may need to design individual tasks based on what individual learners need to write. In addition we should talk about writing with our learners, how we write well, why we write and for who, and what makes it difficult (Monis & Rodriques, 2012). Teaching creative writing – that is, encouraging students to write by drawing upon their imagination and other creative processes – may support writing development in all its components (Barbot, Tan, Randi, Donato & Grigorenko, 2012). Creative writing on the other hand can help to teach how to behave creatively in their lives (Sternberg, 2009: xvi). Eckhoff and Urbach, (2008) asserted that children’s imagination and creativity are quite advanced but components of an educational environment can either support or stifle children’s imaginative abilities. Creative writing gives opportunity to students to choose their own writing subjects and methods. The importance of creative writing is undeniable to improve the cognitive and communicative skills of children (Tompkins, 1982; cited in Essex, 1996). Creative writing is a chance to free your imagination in which people get satisfaction. Through creative writing, students can use their linguistic capabilities and go deeper and further that they cannot do in oral expression. They express more personal thoughts and mental images. Therefore, creative writing tasks are motivating both for L1 and L2 students (Harmer, 2004). Creative writing is characterized by originality and imagination rather than truthfulness or standardization of thoughts (Brookes & Marshall, 2004; cited in Temizkan, 2011). Everett (2005) indicates that a further role for creative writing in English: beyond assisting and enabling learning, it can also provide alternative ways of expressing and demonstrating learning. Raimes (1983) indicates that writing can help our students for those reasons; firstly writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that we teach, secondly when students write, they have a chance to be adventurous with the language to take risks, and lastly they become very involved with the new language; the effort to express ideas. There are many writing forms, some are creative, and some are not. However, all writing is creative writing because writing uses the materials of language, experiences, knowledge, textual sources, personal ideas and imaginings of the writer, bringing out something that did not exist before. All of the writings of students are important and any kind of writing is a creative act (McVey, 2008). İşeri and Ünal (2010) asserted that to acquire writing skill well enough, one should be developed in cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects. So, affective aspects of the students are also important and should be carefully considered while teaching them how to write creatively. Piazza and Siebert (2008) define dispositions as a broad construct within the affective domain in which writers bring to their writing such resources as self-discipline, perseverance in the face of difficulties, tolerance of ambiguity, autonomy, willingness to take risks, motivation, self-efficacy, and interest. They also explained that The Writing Dispositions Scale (WDS) is intended to be useful for providing explicit, descriptive subcategories of disposition that can serve researchers interested in investigating a well-rounded view of what is involved in learning to write. Baş (2012) also asserted that attitudes are also so valuable while we are talking about education especially about language education. He claims that “Developing positive attitudes toward English is one of the most important goals of English language education. Like in many other countries, English language education in elementary schools in Turkey is highly crucial. Evaluating the attitudes of students in English course is very important both for teachers and curriculum developers. At this point, the measurement of attitudes of students towards English course has a very vital importance”. Because of the fact affective factors can also be effective,

writing dispositions and attitudes of students are also measured to see the effect of creative writing activities on these affective aspects.

1.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to determine the effects of creative writing activities on students' achievement in writing skill, their attitude to English course and their writing disposition in 7th grade English language class.

1.2. Problem Statement

What are the effects of using creative writing activities on students' achievement in writing skill, their attitude to English course and writing disposition in 7th grade English language courses?

The questions below are investigated to be able to answer the problem statement.

1. Is there any significant difference between students pre and post test scores obtained in writing test?
2. Is there any significant difference between students pre and post test results obtained from Writing Disposition Scale?
3. Is there any significant difference between students pre and post test results obtained from Attitude Scale?

1.3. Limitations

This study is limited to

1. 31 seventh grade students attending a state-elementary school who participated in the study,
2. The creative writing activities and exercises used during the data collection process and
3. four weeks time for the study.

2. Method

In this part research design, study group, data collection tools and experiment procedure is presented.

2.1. Research Design

One of the pre-experiments design one group pre and post test design (Büyüköztürk et al., 2013) was used to find out the effects of creative writing activities on achievement, writing disposition and attitude to English course. This design includes a pre test measure followed by a treatment and a post test for a single group (Creswell, 2003).

2.2. Study group

This study was conducted with 31 seven-grade students at the age of 13-14 years old attending a state secondary school in the city centre of Denizli, Turkey. While 17 (55%) of the participants were female, 14 (45%) of them were male.

2.3. Data collection tools

To assess the achievement of students in writing, a biography writing activity was given to students. In this activity students are requested to write a few paragraphs expressing his/her life about someone they know well and in the second part of the activity the students are also requested to give reasons why they have chosen that person. The writing papers are valued according to the "Scoring Profile" (Jacobs et al., 1981) by the researcher. The scoring profile consisted of 5 parts. The first part of the profile was scored for the content and the maximum point is 30 for this part. Second part of the profile was scored for organization and the maximum point is 20. Third part of the profile is for vocabulary and maximum point for this part is 20. Fourth part is for language use and maximum point is 25. Fifth and the last part of the profile is for mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing) and maximum point to get is 5.

The attitude of the students to English course was evaluated with "Attitude Scale for Elementary English Course" which was developed by Baş (2012). Scale was consisted of 27 statements and a likert type with five degrees. 12 of the statements are negative and the rest 15 was positive. Baş (2012) claimed that the scale consisted of five dimensions with 15 positive and 12 negative items which make totally 27 items. As a result of the reliability and validity study applied to the scale; Cronbach's Alpha and Spearman-Brown split half correlation were calculated in the study and the Cronbach's Alpha value was found as 0.92. It was also found out that the sub-

dimensions of the scale were calculated to be changed between 0.77 and 0.93 values. The split half test correlation of the scale was found as 0.83.

To determine the writing dispositions of the students, “*Writing Disposition Scale*” which was developed by Piazza and Siebert (2008) and adapted into Turkish by İşeri and Ünal (2010) was used. The scale has three sub-dimensions as confidence, persistence and passion. The scale is composed of 93 items in total with each sub-dimension including 31 items. The scale is a five-rank Likert type. As a result of the reliability and validity study applied to the scale, the lastly version of the scale consist of 11 items, three of which are from confidence dimension, four of which are from persistence dimension and four of which are from passion dimension. However, after the adaptation process; the Turkish version of the scale consists of 21 statements; six of which are from confidence, four of which are from persistence and eleven of which are from passion sub-dimension and the Cronbach’s Alpha value for the whole scale was found as .893, for confidence sub-dimension .806, for persistence sub-dimension .749 and for passion sub-dimension as .914. Lastly, it is concluded that Turkish version of this scale can be applied to Turkish children age from 6 to 13 (İşeri & Ünal, 2010).

2.4. Procedure

In the first week, after introducing himself to students, the researcher gave information about the study to the students and said that only volunteers can take part in the study. Students are volunteered and both surveys, namely “*Attitude Scale for Elementary English Course*” and “*Writing Disposition Scale*” were distributed to students as a pre test. After that to measure students’ writing achievement, a biography writing activity was introduced and explained what is expected and given time to students to do this activity. This activity is also used as a pre test for writing achievement. Researcher has tried to create an enjoyable and safe environment for students by saying this will not affect your marks and no one can see the results. By doing this it is aimed to create a good relation between researcher and the students and make them comfortable.

In the second week, as a creative writing activity, students are again be assured that everybody are free to write how they want but the topic is given by the researcher. Researcher talked a bit of holiday because they were on the last weeks of the semester and students will be on holiday within four weeks. He said that you are going to go on a vacation and you are expected to write a text on a list what you want to take with you, what you are planning to do there, with whom and on which dates you will be there. Students used their imagination and dream at first then they decide where and when and with whom they will go, and write a few paragraphs about their imaginary holiday.

In the third week, a picture is brought to the classroom. In the picture there is a man near a lake who is doing something but not so clear what he is doing. And also two little children are staring at him behind the bushes. In this activity this picture is given to each student and students are expected to look carefully to the picture, and create a little story about that situation, who is the guy and children, why they are near the lake and so on. Students were free to create different situations and tell ideas about that.

In the fourth week, students were given four paragraphs which each of them are the first paragraphs of the stories. Students are supposed to develop a story with this introduction paragraphs and find a title for each of them. Lastly surveys and the biography writing activity was implemented again as a post test. When students’ age and their competence in the target language is considered; the creative writing activities used can be described as basic level and suitable for the competence level of the group.

During the implementation the teacher of the class has also attended. It was aimed to create a positive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere for students to produce creative texts. On the other hand, students were informed that each work is valued and there shouldn’t be any worry about marks and etc. Also, the researcher has always emphasized that the reason is not just to measure their writing achievement but to measure the effect of the activities implemented on their writing.

2.5. Data analysis

Data collected to examine the differences between the pre test and post test were tested and interpreted using the t-test for paired samples. One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test was used in order to test whether the data collected from the scale were conforming to a specific distribution (uniform, normal or poison). In the data analysis for one group pre test-post test design paired sample t test is used generally. Paired sample t test shows whether or not the mean of the pre and post test is significant (Borg & Gall, 1989; Roscoe,1975; cited in Balci, 2011).

3. Findings

Table 1. Analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores for writing test (WT), writing disposition scale (WDS) and attitude scale (ATS)

Test	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Pre-test Scores of WT	31	63.55	7.09	-7,067	0,000
Post-test scores of WT	31	70.26	9.26		
Pre-test Scores of WDS	31	59.06	14.26	-4,964	0,000
Post-test scores of WDS	31	68.45	16.36		
Pre-test Scores ATS	31	97,19	17.61	1,694	0,101
Post-test scores ATS	31	90,94	23.24		

Hypothesis 1 tested in this experiment stated that there is a significant difference in the pre and post-test score of the group on the writing test. The one sample K-S test was used in order to determine which statistical technique should be used to point of whether there was a significant difference between pre and post test scores. The analysis of the results of the one sample K-S test revealed that the study group's pre test scores (K-S (Z)=0.770; $p>0.05$) and post test scores (K-S (Z)=0.857; $p>0.05$) were within a normal distribution. Therefore, the t-test for paired samples, which is a parametric test, was used.

The analysis of study group's pre and post test scores for the writing test are presented in Table 1. This table shows that the study group's mean pre test score was 63.55 and the standard deviation was 7.09. The study group's mean post-test score was 70.26 and the standard deviation was 9.26. Table 1 reveals that the difference between the pre and post-test scores of the study group was statistically significant ($t=-7,067$; $p<0.05$). Consequently, Hypothesis 1 was accepted.

Hypothesis 2 tested in this experiment stated that there is a significant difference in the pre and post test scores of the group regarding writing disposition scale. The one sample K-S test was used in order to determine which statistical technique should be used to point of whether there was a significant difference in the pre and post test scores of the group regarding their writing disposition. The analysis of the results of the one sample K-S test revealed that the study group's pre-test test scores (K-S (Z)=.523; $p>0.05$) and the post-test scores (K-S (Z)=.646; $p>0.05$) were within a normal distribution. Therefore, the t-test for independent samples, which is a parametric test, was used.

The analysis of study group's pre and post test scores regarding their writing disposition are presented in Table 1. This table shows that the study group's mean pre test score was 59.06 and the standard deviation was 14.26. The study group's mean post-test score was 68.45 and the standard deviation was 16.36. Table 1 reveals that the difference between the pre and post-test scores of the study group regarding their writing disposition was statistically significant ($t=-4,964$; $p<0.05$). Consequently, Hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Hypothesis 3 tested in this experiment stated that there is a significant difference in the pre and post test scores of the group regarding attitude to English course. The one sample K-S test was used in order to determine which statistical technique should be used to point of whether there was a significant difference in the pre and post test scores of the group regarding their attitude to English course. The analysis of the results of the one sample K-S test revealed that the study group's pre-test test scores (K-S (Z)=.563; $p>0.05$) and the post-test scores (K-S (Z)=.519; $p>0.05$) were within a normal distribution. Therefore, the t-test for independent samples, which is a parametric test, was used.

The analysis of study group's pre and post test scores regarding their attitude to English course are presented in Table 1. This table shows that the study group's mean pre test score was 97.19 and the standard deviation was 17.61. The study group's mean post-test score was 90.94 and the standard deviation was 23.24. Table 1 reveals that the difference between the pre and post-test scores of the study group regarding their writing disposition was not statistically significant ($t=1,694$; $p>0.05$). Consequently, Hypothesis 3 was rejected. There are many factors affecting students' attitude to any course. Studying only one skill may not affect attitude so easily. On the other hand when it is considered that the study has continued only for 4 weeks, it can also be hard to change an attitude. This could perhaps stem from the fact that the time allocated for the study was not sufficient to change an attitude positively.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the study show that the application of creative writing activities is effective in increasing 7th grade students' writing achievement in English. On the other hand, it is also found that using creative writing activities has a positive effect on writing dispositions of 7th grade students. Based on these results, it can be suggested that creative writing activities can be used in 7th grade English course to increase students' achievement in writing skill and let them to write more. But the mean score obtained from attitude scale of the 7th grade students who are attending English course has decreased after the experiment. But this change isn't statistically significant. However, it can be said that studying only writing skill may not affect attitude to a course so easily. On the other hand when it is considered that the study has continued only for 4 weeks, it can also be said that this amount of time is not enough to change an attitude. This could perhaps stem from the fact that the time allocated for the study was not sufficient to change an attitude positively. Colantone, Cunnigham-Wetmore and Dreznes (1998) in their study which was used writing creative programme in 3 different schools for 8 weeks time and within the pre and post test design, analysis strategies and creative writing was used in the study. According to post test results, creative writing skills and the writing fluency of the students have increased. This study's result aligns well with the present study's writing test results. Dai (2010) in the study which aiming to explore the teaching of creative writing in English to sophomores in a university of China suggested that the creative writing course allowed students the freedom to explore different aspects of their lives; their language proficiency improved. It has not only changed students' attitudes towards writing, but also helped them grow and know each other better. Erdoğan (2012) in the study to find out the effects of creative writing, collaborative creative writing and writing practices of Primary Turkish Education Programme on student's written expression, attitude towards writing and opinions of teachers' and students' regarding to the course has found that as a result between the gain scores of experimental and control groups in favour of writing expression and attitude towards writing significant differences supporting the experimental group. Between the gain scores of 1st and 2nd experimental groups in favour of writing expression and attitude towards writing significant differences were found supporting the 1st experimental group. Duran (2010), in the research the effect of creative writing techniques on the development of written expression skills of students in the first stage of primary education was analyzed conceptually. It was found out that the development of writing skills of students in the first stage of primary education was affected positively by the activity which was prepared in accordance with the creative writing techniques. Duran's study also aligns well with the present study findings. Both studies claim that writing skill of students are positively affected by creative writing activities. Kuvanç (2008) indicated that using creative writing activities was effective on the increase of vocabulary of the students; Mollaoğlu (2002) highlights that after implementing the creative writing skill, there was an improvement on the German vocabulary repertoires of the students. Akkaya (2011) in a study to show the effectiveness of creative writing techniques on the students' attitudes in Turkish Course has done and the experimental group were divided into two creative writing lessons and

information provided about techniques. Experiment group, 8 weeks, were conducted in two hours in a week writing creative writing techniques. According to the findings, as a result of the statistical analysis of data gathered in research it is revealed that the exercises related to creative writing affected the attitudes of the students towards writing positively. But in the present study, it is found that attitude to English course are not changed positively. Tütüniş and Küçükali (2014) have conducted their study to find an answer to the question ‘Can we improve our students’ writing skills in English if we apply creative writing techniques as a classroom process?’. As a result they have claimed that the creative writing training had a positive effect on students’ writing skills. There is a significant difference between the experimental and the control groups. The results reveal that the experimental group benefited highly from the study. This study also claims that creative writing activities had a positive effect on student’s writing skill so that both studies support each other’s findings. Tüfekçiöğlü (2010), in the study named “examination of writing skill in terms of some variables” found that composition writing success of participants which is related with gender and noting conditions is also related with their writing disposition. Tüfekçiöğlü’s findings and this present study’s findings go well with each other because this study claims that writing disposition is also affected by creative writing activities. Aktaş (2009) indicated the study which aiming at evaluating A2 level Writing ability based on creative writing approach of European Language Portfolio in Common European Framework in Italian Language it has been found that the writing processes and the competence perception of learners became effective. Aktaş’s study also goes well with the present study in terms of writing process. Similar researches can be done in the native language of students. And also in this study attitude and writing disposition variables are taken into account only and measured the effect on them but for further research some other variables such as writing fluency, attitude to writing can also be studied. Consequently, some suggestions can be done for the English language teachers; creative writing activities are suggested to be integrated in writing classes in English language classes. And writing skill should be valued as much as other skills and be carefully studied on this skill. It is also suggested that the syllabus of English language course for elementary schools in Turkey may be revised and implemented some creative writing activities.

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