

The effectiveness of the creative writing instruction program based on speaking activities (CWIPSA)

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Abstract


This study aims to develop a creative writing instruction program based on speaking activities and to investigate its effect on fourth-grade primary school students' creative writing achievements and writing attitudes. The experimental method based on the pre-test/post-test model was used in this research. The research was conducted with 42 students, who were picked from fourth-grade primary school students studying in Ordu, Turkey in the academic year of 2014/2015. The students were divided into two groups: experimental group (21 students) and control group (21 students). CWIPSA was applied to the experimental group and the standard fourth-grade grade Turkish curriculum was applied to the control group. It was found that, as a result of the research, there was an increase in the control group students' scores for writing attitudes and creative writing achievements, as well as a significant difference between the control and experimental groups' scores for writing attitude and creative writing achievements, in favour of the experimental group.

Keywords: Creative writing, speaking activities, instruction program, creative writing achievements, writing attitudes.

Introduction

Language learning is based on four basic linguistic skills, which it aims to improve: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These are the basic skills that affect an individual's academic achievement throughout their academic lives and need to be used effectively both in day-to-day life and during their careers.

In addition to these four basic skills, creativity is another skill which language education aims to provide to individuals in the Turkish curriculum. As highlighted in the literature (Fishkin & Johnson, 1998; Honig, 2001; Runco, 2003), creativity can be defined in the broadest sense as "originality; going beyond the ordinary; the ability to think independently and versatily". There are two different views on creativity: the first one is that it is innate; the second one is that it is a skill that exists in everyone and can be improved and revealed. According to Runco (2003), everyone unequivocally accepts the creativity of people such as Michelangelo, Mozart and Mark Twain. However, as far as the creativity of children in the educational environment is concerned, children who are original and beyond the norm can be defined as being creative even though this is

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unbelievable to adults. Common behaviours that include the personality traits of people who have the ability to think creatively can be listed as follows:

- 1) Thinking differently than others: the most important behavioural trait of people with improved creativity is confidence.
- 2) Delaying judgment: individuals usually judge their thoughts without evaluating them and tend to classify and place their thoughts in a systematic manner, even doing it unwittingly most of the time.
- 3) Thinking flexibly: they think without rules, boundaries or principles. They do not see the world in black and white. They use the gray in every area of life and they are flexible.
- 4) Spontaneity: thinking fast, they make it possible for many ideas to reveal themselves without passing through the filter of logic.
- 5) Synthesizing: this is the ability to associate certain concepts, ideas and symbols with each other, using imagination and achieving new, creative and different results. The more such associations are performed, the more creative ideas come out (Temizkan, 2010: 624-625).

The way that the educational environment is organized is also important for the development of the creativity the educational programs aim to provide students with. Producing creative and original ideas is only possible in a free educational environment. It is important that students can communicate with their friends and teachers comfortably, that they know that they will not be judged for their ideas and that they can feel safe and at ease. Evaluation should not leave students just feeling good or bad about what that have done, it should inform learners about the valuable parts of their works and provide guidance for future actions (Brookfield, 2015). In addition, the second important factor is that methods and techniques which improve creative thinking are used in the learning-teaching process. As stated by Marzano et al. (1988), "creative thinking can also be taught with the aid of methods and materials especially designed for that purpose".

Students can mention their ideas through their speaking and writing skills, which are the narrative skills used in Turkish classes. Therefore, it should be an aim that, through speaking and writing activities, the skill of creativity is improved and creative ideas are revealed. One of the types of writing addressed in the Turkish curriculum is creative writing. Creative writing is the activity of reconstructing current knowledge, concepts, sounds, images and dreams in the memory and associating them with each other, therefore creating a new piece of writing; it is the transfer of an individual's feelings and thoughts about something onto paper, done freely, through imagination (Arthur & Zell, 1996). Based on the process approach commonly used in the literature (Akyol, 2012; Bayat, 2014; Çoşkun, 2009; Seban & Tavsanlı, 2015; Tekşan, 2013), creative writing studies should be performed in accordance with the steps of preparation prewriting, drafting and writing by organizing, editing and publishing/sharing. Sharples (1996) also suggested that creative writing activities should be performed within the cycle seen in Figure 1.

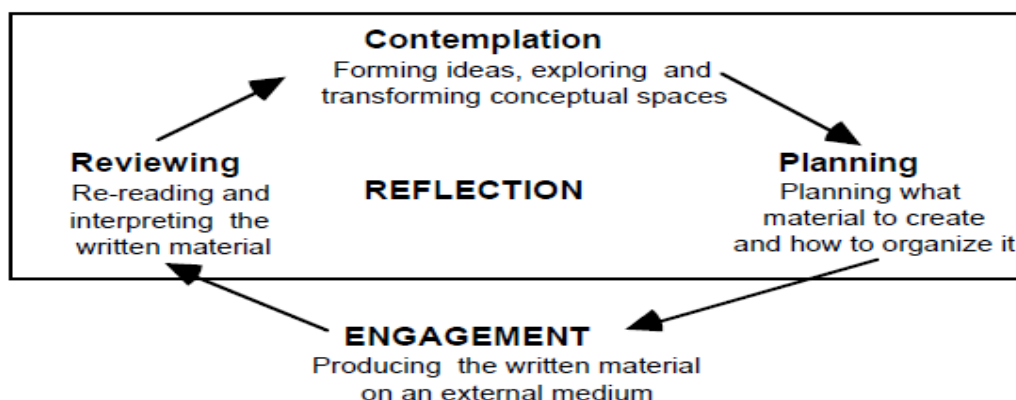


Figure 1. The cycle of engagement and reflection in writing (Sharples, 1996:7).

The process approach rather than the product approach should be adopted in creative writing because creative writing requires editing, planning and the exploration of thoughts without constraint. The importance of this approach in terms of children's writing development has been stressed in a recent global review of writing pedagogy (Dombey, 2013).

Utilizing speaking activities in the preparation step of the creative writing process not only enables speaking and writing skills to be managed in a holistic way but also for the improvement of creative ideas. In the preparation stage, the development of creative thoughts can be contributed to by generating ideas, discussing ideas and sharing through techniques such as brainstorming, creative drama, the station method, marketplace, crime scene investigation, debate and the six thinking hats technique. According to Marzano, Debra & Ronald (1990), if schools are to raise more skilful thinkers, far more thoughtful interaction must occur in classrooms, ranging from large group discussion of controversial issues to small group and paired problem solving.

Based on this it was aimed, in this study, to investigate the effect a creative writing curriculum based on speaking activities would have on students' writing attitudes and achievement levels for their creative writing skills. In order to be active, self-confident, independent, creative, social and show personal adaptation, individuals need to analyze ideas in their minds and to express them properly (Demir, 2010). It is thought that this research will reveal the effect of performing speaking and writing activities at the same time, based on the techniques that improve creative thinking in the educational environment and using the "preparation" stage effectively in the process approach to creative writing. It is possible to come across studies that investigate the effects of certain instruction methods and techniques (Creative Drama, Cooperative Teaching Method, Creative Writing Approach, etc.) in the literature (Colantone, Cunningham-Wetmore & Dreznes, 1998; Erdoğan, 2013; Maden & Durukan, 2010; Mayo, 1992; Vass, 2007). However, what was designed in this study is a holistic instruction program that includes multiple instruction methods for improving creative thinking. Accordingly, it is thought that investigating the effectiveness of the product will contribute to the branch.

1.1. Problem/Question: What effect does the creative writing instruction program based on speaking activities (CWTPSA) in primary school fourth-grade Turkish classes have on students' writing attitudes and creative writing achievements?

- 1) What is the effect of CWIPSA on fourth-grade students' writing attitudes?

- 2) What is the effect of CWIPSA on fourth-grade students' creative writing achievements?
- 3) Is there a significant difference between the experimental and control groups' creative writing achievements?
- 4) Is there a significant difference between the experimental and control groups' writing attitudes?

Method

The research design is a pre-test/post-test control group quasi-experimental design. Pre-tests were applied to 88 students in total, who were picked randomly from two different schools and four classrooms in Ordu central district. According to the pre-test results, one class, randomly selected among two peer classes, was assigned as the control group and the other as the experimental group. The data concerning the control and experimental groups according to the pre-test results are given in the tables below.

Table 1. *Experimental and control groups' writing attitude scores*

Groups	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Experimental group	21	123.14	17.94	40	.344	.733*
Control group	21	121.24	17.95			

* $p \leq 0.05$

P value was found to be “.733” as a result of the t-test. Since the *p* value was found to be higher than 0.05, there is no significant difference between experimental and control groups' writing attitudes. It can be said that the two groups were equal in terms of writing attitudes.

Table 2. *Experimental and control groups' creative writing pre-test scores*

Groups	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Experimental group	21	33.57	16.59	40	.329	.744*
Control group	21	31.90	16.23			

* $p \leq 0.05$

P value was found to be “.744” as a result of the t-test. Since the *p* value was found to be 0.05 higher, there is no significant difference between the experimental and control groups' creative writing achievements. It can be said that the two groups were equal in terms of creative writing achievements.

Data Collection Tools

“Attitude to Writing Scale (AWS)”, developed by Susar-Kırmızı (2009), was used in the study. The scale aimed to determine the attitudes to writing among students at fourth and fifth grades of primary school (Susar-Kırmızı, 2009). In the formation of the scale, primarily literature reviews and students' views were consulted. The first form of the itemized scale was presented to experts. To determine students' agreement level to these items, judgment of agreement to statements was presented in five scales in the Likert-type items: “Strongly Agree, Highly Agree, Agree, Agree Somewhat, Do Not Agree”. The pilot study of the 52-item scale was conducted on students at fourth and fifth grades of state and private primary schools ($n= 258$). To determine the construct validity of AWS, the data obtained in the pilot study were subjected to factor analysis. Before factor analysis was administered on the data from the pilot study, the suitability for factor analysis was

examined. For this, the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value was taken as the reference value. The first results of the analysis of AWS showed that the KMO value of the scale was 0.90. Based on the results obtained from this analysis, the scale was deemed suitable (Pallant, 2001; *in* Akkaya & Susar-Kırmızı, 2010). Whether the data came from multiple variables in normal distribution was tested using the Bartlett test of sphericity value. The result obtained from the Bartlett test of sphericity administered on the data was approx. Chi-square = 5864.589. The result of the Bartlett test of sphericity was found to be significant at 0.05 ($p= 0.000$).

Following these analyses, the data were found to be fit for factor analysis. Then, rotated factor analysis was administered. When 18 items were eliminated, the final form of the scale was given with the remaining 34 items. Factor eigenvalues of the items ranged between 0.50 and 0.86. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was found as 0.90. The weighted raw score that each student might get was a minimum of 34 and a maximum of 170. High total scores indicate that students have positive attitudes, while low total scores indicate that students have negative attitudes. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was found to be 0.87 in the research. Two other data collecting tools developed by Susar-Kırmızı (2011) were used during the research: "Open-ended question/subject of composition for creative writing" and "Evaluation Criteria for Creative Writing (ECCW)".

The students were asked to write compositions on the following subject at the beginning and the end of the program: "Assume that you are in a time tunnel. You can travel back or forward in time. To which period would you like to go? What kind of a world would you like to see in that period?" The compositions were evaluated according to the criteria given in Table 3.

Table 3. *Evaluation criteria for creative writing*

Criteria	Score
1 The content includes certain innovations out of the ordinary	20
2 A well-known element is expressed in a new way in the composition	20
3 There are original similes in the composition	15
4 The new ideas in the composition are clearly explained	10
5 Emotions and ideas in the composition are put forth effectively and fluently	20
6 The title is appropriate for the composition	15
Total	100

The data were collected in one hour classes, after necessary explanations had been made by the researcher, once before and once after the experiment. The compositions were analyzed by two different experts for the data analysis. The correlation value between the data obtained from the compositions individually graded by the researchers is " $r = .81$ ". It can be inferred that this value is the indicator of the reliability of the data obtained.

The Instruction Program Applied to the Experimental Group

The instruction program was applied by the researcher for 22 class hours (1 class hours= 40 minutes) over a period of 10 weeks. The researcher had 12 years' experience of teaching classes, as well as an academic specialty.

Table 4. *The creative writing instruction program based on speaking activities*

Applying the pre-test and the attitude scale				
Week /Class hour	Subject	Method – Technique	Type of Text	Evaluation
Week 1 1 class hour	Examination of Discussions, Criticism and Conversations	Direct instruction, question-answer	Discussion, Letter	Multiple-choice test
Week 1 1 class hour	Examination of Letters, Stories, Tales, etc.	Direct instruction, question-answer	Story, Tale	Multiple-choice test
Week 2 1 class hour	Examination of Fable, Poem, Writing	Direct instruction, question-answer	Fable, Poem	Multiple-choice test
Week 2 1 class hour	Writing rules in respect to the process approach	Question-answer, practice	
Week 3 2 class hours	If I were to Talk to My Favourite Artist	Gossip	Letter	Peer/self-evaluation
Week 4 2 class hours	I am Building a New School	Six Hats Thinking Technique	Story	Peer/self-evaluation
Week 5 2 class hours	I am the Protagonist of a Tale	Marketplace	Tale	Peer/self-evaluation
Week 6 2 class hours	In the Realm of Animals	Case Study	Fable	Peer/self-evaluation
Week 7 2 class hours	Love of Atatürk/Mother/Father/Nature etc.	Brainstorming	Poem	Peer/self-evaluation
Week 8 2 class hours	Travel to a New Planet	Creative Drama	Tale	Peer/self-evaluation
Week 9 2 class hours	Contribution/Harms of Social Networks to our lives	Debate	Discussion	Peer/self-evaluation
Week 10 2 class hours	The Place of Technology in our Lives	Station Method	Student selection	Peer/self-evaluation
Week 11 2 class hours	Publishing-Sharing	Publishing/Sharing		
22 Class Hours	Applying the pre-test and the attitude scale			

As seen in Table 4, the researcher gave lectures on types of writing in the first two weeks of the instruction program to the experimental group. For eight weeks, speaking activities that improve creative thinking and activities for producing ideas and designing what to write (preparing a draft) were performed in the first class hour; the second class hour was allocated to writing and evaluation of writing by students. Peer and self-evaluation methods were used as the evaluation method.

On the other hand, the Turkish curriculum was applied to fourth-graders with no change.

Analysis of Data

The arithmetic mean, standard deviation, t-test and effect size were calculated in the quantitative data analysis. The SPSS 13 software package was utilized in the calculations.

Findings

Data concerning the second sub-problem are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *T-test results for experimental group's writing attitudes*

Groups	n	m	sd	df	t	p
Pre-test	21	121.23	17.95	40	.3.88	.000*
Post-test	21	142.95	18.30			

* $p \leq 0.05$

The p value was found to be “.000” as a result of the t-test. Since it is $p \leq 0.05$, a significant difference was found between pre-test and post-test scores for writing attitude of the experimental group. As for the means, it is seen that the pre-test attitude scores were “ $m= 121.23$ ” and the post-test attitude scores were “ $m= 142.95$ ”. It can be said in respect to this finding that the instruction program based on the speaking activities that improve creative thinking contributed to writing attitude positively. In addition, it was determined that the effect size calculated (Cohen’s $d= 1.23$) was on a high level.

Data concerning the first sub-problem are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. *T-test results for experimental group's creative writing achievements*

Groups	n	m	sd	df	t	p
Pre-test	21	33.57	16.59	40	5.49	.000*
Post-test	21	63.09	18.17			

* $p \leq 0.05$

As a result of the t-test, p value was found to be “.000”. Since it is $p \leq 0.05$, a significant difference was found between pre-test and post-test scores for creative writing of the experimental group. As for the means, it is seen that the pre-test achievement was “ $m= 33.57$ ” and the post-test achievement was “ $m= 63.09$ ”. It can be said in respect to this finding that the instruction program based on the speaking activities that improve creative thinking contributed to the creative writing achievement positively. In addition, it was determined that the effect size calculated (Cohen’s $d= 1.73$) was on a high level.

Data concerning the third sub-problem are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. *T-test results for experimental and control groups' creative writing achievements*

Groups	n	m	sd	df	t	p
Experimental group	21	63.09	18.17	40	5.716	.000*
Control group	21	36.19	11.60			

* $p \leq 0.05$

P value was found to be “.000” as a result of the t-test. Since it is $p \leq 0.05$, a significant difference was found between experimental and control groups' post-test scores for creative writing. As for the means, it can be seen that the experimental group was “ $m= 63.09$ ” and the control group was “ $m= 36.19$ ”. It can be said in respect to this finding that

the instruction program based on the speaking activities that improve creative thinking made a significant difference in creative writing achievement. In addition, it was determined that the effect size calculated (Cohen's $d= 1.80$) was on a high level.

Data concerning the fourth sub-problem are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Data concerning experimental and control groups' writing attitude scores

Groups	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Experimental group	21	142.95	18.30	40	3,263	.002*
Control group	21	123.23	20.79			

* $p \leq 0.05$

P value was found to be “.002” as a result of the t-test. Since it is $p \leq 0.05$, a significant difference was found between experimental and control groups' post-test scores for writing attitude. As for the means, it can be seen that the experimental group was “ $m= 142.95$ ” and the control group was “ $m= 123.23$ ”. It can be said in respect to this finding that the instruction program based on the speaking activities that improve creative thinking is a factor that makes a significant difference in writing attitude. In addition, it was determined that the effect size calculated (Cohen's $d= 1.03$) was on a high level.

Discussion, Results and Recommendations

According to the findings of the research, it was found that there was an increase in the writing attitude scores of fourth-grade students who undertook CWTPSA, as well as a significant difference between control and experimental groups' scores for writing attitude in favour of the experimental group. Studies on the effect of creative writing activities on writing attitude (Ak, 2011; Beydemir, 2010; Conroy, 2009; Erdoğan, 2013; Maden & Durukan, 2010) support the findings of this research. However, examining the characteristics of this program and the informal researcher observations may give clearer ideas about the increase in the attitude scores since different programs/methods are applied for creative writing activities in every study. It can be said that techniques such as the six hats thinking method, snowball, marketplace, drama, etc. utilized in the opinion generation stage of CWIPSA contributed to students' willingness to participate in the class.

It is also worth noting that selecting the composition subjects from those that attract students' attention (travel to a new planet, if I were to talk to my favourite artist, I am building a new school, etc.) is an important factor for them to enjoy writing activities. If students write about something that draws their attention, their motivation will increase and they will want to write (Anneralla, 2000; Bruing & Horn, 2000; Daly & Sharko, 2010). Moreover, it was observed that they felt excited/happy about having a small-scale magazine at the end of the program (see Annex 2). It can be concluded that these aspects of CWIPSA were the reasons why the experimental group's writing attitude scores increased and were different than the control group's. The increase in the experimental group's achievements in creative writing might have affected their attitudes in a positive way, just as Demir (2013) determined that students with high writing competence are generally good at creative writing.

According to the findings of the research, it was found that there was an increase in the creative writing achievement scores of fourth-grade students who had undertaken CWTPSA, as well as a significant difference between control and experimental groups' scores in creative writing achievements in favour of the experimental group. Similar studies in the literature (Beydemir, 2010; Colantone, Cunningham-Wetmore and Dreznes,

1998; Conroy, Marchand & Webster, 2009; Erdoğan, 2013; Maden & Durukan, 2010; Wendell, 1992; Susar, 2008; Vass, 2007) support the results of this research. Studies showed that students' creative writing achievements increased over a certain period when creative writing activities were performed. Each individual has the power of creative thinking; however, the creativity of students can improve with the support of teachers and the exercises and techniques within the process (Runco, 2003). Cunningham and Allington (1994) argue that practice of writing stages by teachers is a critical factor for revealing successful authors. The process approach was adopted in CWIPSA and the speaking activities that improve creative thinking were conducted along with a holistic program, including multiple methods and techniques in which students could express their ideas actively and in cooperation. One class hour during the writing activities was allocated to speaking activities and the idea generation stage. It was observed that students had fun with the methods and techniques selected for the speaking activities. In the research by Akkaya (2014), the idea that "creative writing can be perceived as a game or enjoyment by the students" was suggested.

Creating a class environment in which students could feel free and comfortable in the speaking activities was of great importance. Original ideas were supported during the activities and students were encouraged to believe that none of their thoughts would be viewed as extreme, ridiculous or wrong and that there were no boundaries for their imagination.

They were provided with the chance to share their ideas and sentences with their friends during the writing stage from time to time. In the examination of compositions, original ideas were emphasized and criticized in a constructive way by the researcher.

According to the research results, the following suggestions can be made for practitioners and researchers in respect to the creative writing instruction.

- 1) Methods and techniques that ensure students' active participation in the class and which students will enjoy should be used in creative writing studies.
- 2) Original subjects that will attract students' attention should be chosen for creative writing studies.
- 3) Creating a class environment in which students can feel free and comfortable during writing instruction is of great importance.
- 4) The process approach should be adopted in creative writing activities and applied along with the speaking activities.
- 5) Enough time should be spared for the preparation, planning, evaluation and sharing stages of the process approach.
- 6) Creative writing activities should be given enough time in language education.
- 7) CWIPSA's effectiveness in wider student groups can be separately investigated.



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