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The Effect of Drama in Education on Language and Communication Skills of Children Between 48-60 Month-Old

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The purpose of present research is to explore the effect of drama on language and communication skills of preschool children between 48-60 months. In this study pre-test, post-test control grouped experimental design has been utilized on collectively 64 children; 32 children from test group and 32 children are from control group. Research data have been compiled via Language and Communication subtest of "Psychological Observation Form for Preschool Children". In data analysis descriptive statistics, independent samples t test, two-way ANOVA form mixed measures have been used. Research findings have manifested that drama education improves language and communication skills of children.

Introduction

Language and communication skills are the kinds of abilities that improve human mental faculties such as learning, thinking, comprehending, questioning, problem-solving and faculties that enable the expression of feelings and thoughts, social interaction through communicating with others, integration with outer world and transmission of culture to the next generations. Furthermore it has great contribution on the fulfillment of needs and desires, betterment of social relations, building cooperation and handling conflicts (Aşıcı, 2003; Atay, 2009;Güneş, 2010). On accounts of all these reasons, starting from early ages language and communication skills need to be improved and supported via various educational programs (Ergin, 2003). That is related to the fact that language and communication skills, when treated collectively with other developmental fields, shall assist in raising healthy individuals. It can reasonably be argued that one of the most salient functions of preschool education institutions is developing language and communication skills of children. Parallel to this aim it is required to select the best methods that appeal to the nature of child, enable face-to-face interaction and create real-to-life teaching and learning environments (Görgülü, 2009).

Drama activities are amongst these environments that might contribute to acquisition of language and communication skills during preschool period (Alber and Foil, 2003; Bulut,

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2011; Erkoca Akköse, 2008; Furman, 2000; Maden, 2010;Mages, 2008;Maley, &Duff, 2010; Ormancı and Şaşmaz Ören, 2010; Tutuman, 2011). Drama in education might assist children in using language with all its aspects such as speaking, listening and establishing verbal and nonverbal communication (Toye and Prendville, 2000).

While teaching, drama activities encourage children to experience emotions actively. Children are in need of language to create imaginary situations, animate and terminate these situations and put their feelings into words throughout this process (Toye and Prendiville, 2000). In busy class environments, children most of the time miss the opportunity to express themselves. Drama experience in education enables the children to use their language skills through integrating with games, stories, role-plays and drama activities and verbal self-expression. Through drama the child can be in any place of drama activity as any person within different time periods and events and by manipulating a variety of speaking styles, s/he can grasp the chance for self- expression and social communication (Çömertpay, 2007).

In education drama activities also play vital role in word acquisition and gain in children. Throughout this process it is likely that children meet a new subject they have not encountered before. This experience may enable the children to learn new words by repeating the words they encounter for the very first time (McCaslin, 2006). In the next stages these skills continue to improve as children imitate the people around, participate in other children's games and establish communication. The acquisition of those skills are further strenghened while children use language and gain the awareness of words, sound and language structures (Alber and Foil, 2003).

When participating in drama activities children also gain speaking, thinking, listening, narrating skills and abilities to build verbal and physical communication with one another. During these activities children learn how to express themselves freely since through learning new words and making sentences, they discover novel ways to establish communication. The child can attain all these skills while making plans within drama activity, solving dramatic problems, forming and playing the roles and trourugh natural reactions while interacting with the group. The child can also learn nonverbal communication thanks to drama activities. For instance during body movements, the child discovers how to establish communication by moving different parts of the body like head, face, eyes and arms (Adıgüzel, 2010; Rooyackers, 2009).

Acquisition of communication skills before age six is greatly linked to the development of language. On that account it is vital that these skills be supported collectively or individually via a bunch of methods and techniques as well as structured and tailored programs. That is because a child capable of listening and speaking effectually takes one step ahead in developing effective learning strategies and acquisition of reading-writing skill just as s/he develops healthy social relations (Sevinç, 2003).

As relevant literature is analyzed it is detected that the number of studies on the effects of drama activities over language development or skills or the impact of drama education on communication skills is rather limited. Thus it is considered that present research shall render contribution towards this aim. In a few studies in relevant literature the effects of drama education on children's receptive and expressive language development, the quantity of words used by children and their use of nouns, verbs and conjunctions and their communication skills have been examined (Akoğuz, 2002;Arnas Aktaş, Çömertpay and Sofu, 2007; Çömertpay, 2006; Gönen and Dalkılıç, 2000;Görgülü, 2009; Solmaz, 1997, Uyar 1995). Since in this study language and communication skills are two variables analyzed as a unity it

differs from the rest of studies in literature. It is believed that present research shall assist in spreading drama activities amidst preschool institutions; suggestions formed in line with research findings shall guide preschool teachers and constitute the subject of new studies that shall be presented to develop communication and language skills.

Based on all these aspects, the purpose of current research is to analyze the effect of preschool drama activities on language and communication skills of 48-60 month-old children.

Method

Research model

Dependent variable of this research is children's language and communication skills and independent variable is drama education provided to children. In order to determine the effect of preschool drama program on language and communication skills of children pre-test, post-test control grouped experimental design has been utilized.

Participants

64 children aged between 48 and 60 months old have been recruited from two preschool Education instutions which have smilar qualişties in terms of physical and facilities. Simple random sampling method has been used in selection process. 32 children attending to one of these preschool institutions have constituted test group while the remaining 32 children formed control group.

In test group 47% of children (n= 15) are girls, 53% are (n= 17) boys. Their age varies between 50 to 60 months. Age average is 57.47, standard deviation is 5.56. In control group %50 of children (n= 16) are girls, 50% are (n= 16) boys. Their age varies between 52 to 60 months. Age average is 58.11, standard deviation is 5.25.

It has been reported that of the research participants, 35.8% of children's mothers are college graduates, 60.5% of children's fathers are college graduates; 54.4% of children's mothers are housewives, 26.2% of children's fathers are workers; 86.3% of children come from nuclear families, 42.7% of children are without sisters/brothers; of all the children in test group 38.5% and of all the children in control group 35.6% have attended a preschool institution one year earlier.

Instrument

In this research "General Information Form" developed by researchers have been employed in order to gather certain information on the child and family (gender of the child, date of birth, education of parents, profession, family structure, number of children in family, having received preschool education or not). So as to measure children's language and communication skills *Language and Communication* subtest of "Psychological Observation Form for Preschool Children" has been utilized.

Psychological Observation Form for Preschool Children is a developmental observation form prepared by Turkish Psychological Association Preschool Education Commission (2000) to examine 36-78 month-old children. Composed of eight subtests (enrollment to preschool institution, basic habits, behaviors while playing, social-emotional behaviors, behaviors in educational activities, language and communication, drawing, challenging/problematic

behaviors) and 137 items, this form not only contains items that describe current behavioral and emotional status of the child but also items that exemplify behavioral and communication patterns s/he develops.

Observation form is completed by psychologists, trainers and teachers who have direct connection with the children in preschool care and education centers and the items reflect their personal observations. "Language and Communication" subtest of this form is made up of items related to the language development of the child, the way language is used in social communication and the way child expresses himself/herself. In "Language and Communication" subtest there are 12 positive and 2 negative items amounting to total 14 items. In this form behaviors to be observed are evaluated in a 5-point scale composed of categories, "Never (1) – Rarely (2) – Occasionally (3) –Often (4) – Always (5)". In this test, negative behaviors are graded reversely. The lowest score to receive from Language and Communication subtest is 14, the highest score is 70. In this 5-grade Likert test the highness of scores indicates positivity whilst the lowness of scores indicates negativity.

To calculate the sum of observation form, Cronbach-Alpha coefficient is .89, for Language and Communication subtest it is .92.

Procedure

For the children composing study group, measurement instrument has been applied as pre-test and post-test. Subsequent to pretest application, Education program prepared by researchers have been applied to children in test group for 14 weeks twice a week. Before the application of this program children have been met in the presence of their teachers, informed about the education to be provided and it has been attempted to comfort them about this application. Prior to preparing this program, literature analysis has been performed on the language and communication skills of 48-60 month-old children, next, the kind of objectives and acquisitions parallel to their developmental level have been designated and learning conditions for the activities have been presented. Education program involves movement activities, pandomime, role playing, improvisation and creation of story based plays. Due to the youngness of children and objectives of the applications, these activities have been performed in children's own classrooms by dividing the whole group in two seperate small groups consisting of 16 children. In the aftermath of each activity, an evaluation has been made to allow students to make their own statements on their opinions and feelings regarding role plays. Considering the concentration length of children each session has lasted approximately 30 minutes. In the execution of drama activities story cards, photographs, pictures, masks, puppets, objects and similar materials have been utilized with the aim of increasing children's attention span, providing visual enrichment in activities and concretizing abstract subjects. Particularly in movement activities, nonverbal music CDs and rhythm instruments have been employed.

Data Analyses

Pretest and post-test data obtained via Language and Communication subtest of Psychological Observation Form for Preschool Children from the sample consituted of experimental and control group have been analyzed by employing descriptive and parametric statistics. In order to detect if there is a meaningful difference between Language and Communication pretest average scores of the test and control group children constituting sampling group, independent samples t test has been used. To the end of detecting if language and communication skills of test and control group children varied with respect to receiving

drama education program, two-way ANOVA for mixed measures have been employed (Büyüköztürk, 2011).

Results

The findings related to the research conducted to analyze if language and communication skills of children varied with respect to receiving or not receiving drama program in preschool education have been presented in following tables. In Table 1, t test results of pretest score averages obtained by test and control group children from Language and Communication subtest of Psychological Observation Form for Preschool Children have been provided.

Table 1. t Test findings of language and communication pretest scores of children in test and control groups

Variable	Test Group		Control Group		t	df	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Language and Communication Skill	53.75	6.40	54.41	5.68	0.43	62	.666	0.11

Table 1 manifests that the difference between Language and Communication pretest score averages of children in test and control groups is statistically insignificant, $t_{(62)}= 0.43$, $p>.05$, $d= 0.11$. This finding proves that with respect to their language and communication skills, children in test and control group are the same before and after the application.

For the children in test and control groups, pretest posttest score averages and standard deviations received from Language and Communication subtest of Psychological Observation Form for Preschool Children are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Language and communication pretest-posttest score averages and standard deviation values received by children in test and control groups

Variable	Group	n	Pre Test		Post Test	
			M	SD	M	SD
Language and Communication Skill	Test	32	53.75	6.40	62.31	5.24
	Control	32	54.41	5.68	58.69	5.54

As Table 2 is analyzed it surfaces that Language and Communication pretest score average of the children in test group is 53.75 and posttest score average of the children in test group is 62.31 (achievement score 8.56) whilst Language and Communication pretest score average of the children in control group is 54.41 and posttest score average of the children in control group is 58.69 (achievement score 4.28). As the averages of obtained scores are analyzed it is detected that Language and Communication subtest achievement score of children in test group is higher than students in control group; in another saying the increase in Language and Communication scores of the children in test group after they receive drama education is greater.

ANOVA findings pertaining to Language and Communication pretest-posttest score averages of children in test and control groups are as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. ANOVA findings pertaining to language and communication pretest-posttest scores of children in test and control groups

Source	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Group (Test/Control)	1	70.508	1.28	.263	.020
Measurement (Pretest-Posttest)	1	1319.695	126.04	.000	.670
Group x Measurement	**1**	**146.633**	**14.01**	**.000**	**.184**
Error	62	10.471			

The difference in total averages of Language and Communication pretest-posttest scores received by test and control groups is statistically insignificant, $F_{(1,62)}= 1.28$, $p>.05$, $\eta^2= .020$. Regardless of the group of research participants there is a significant difference in Language and Communication score averages after the application, $F_{(1,62)}= 126.04$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2= .670$. It has also been detected that results of common effect (group x measurement) test conducted to see if creative drama education has a significant effect on children's language and communication skills development are also found to be significant, $F_{(1,62)}= 14.01$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2= .184$. It has also been found out that compared to the students in control group, the changes from pretest to posttest indicating the development of language and communication skills were significantly higher in children of test group and that drama education had a major effect in improving language and communication skills of students.

Discussion

Present research has been conducted with the aim of detecting effect of drama education on language and communication skills of 48-60 month- old children and obtained findings have proved that drama activities improve such skills in children. This study showed that children in test group showed greater improvement in language and communication skills compared to control group children. This finding might be attributed to the facts that children in test group received drama training in addition to preschool education and applied drama education contained several activities directly supporting language and communication skills. By means of these activities children acquire a chance to go through many experiences which in return consolidate their knowledge levels and skills.

Thanks to its natural and real-like environments, drama education positively contributes to children's communication skills and language development.. While acting, children feel required to listen to each other in order to be better understood and state their words more attentively. This requirement might enable the children to acquire proper speaking habits by naturally driving children to concentrate on their voice tone, diction and speaking speed (Arnas Aktaş, Çömertpay and Sofu, 2007). Aside from that, in drama activities children's body language and active movement of their body may also affect their vocabulary and use of drama activities in vocabulary teaching may act as a motivator factor for children's learning (Alber and Foil, 2003).

As relevant literature is analyzed it is possible to come across research findings indicating that drama education improves children's language development and communication skills. Arnas Aktaş, Çömertpay and Sofu (2007) in their co-study have provided 8-week long creative drama training to 6 year-old preschool children. They have found out that the number of words, and employment of nouns, verbs and conjunctions used by children having received creative drama education have increased. Çömertpay (2006) has similarly reported that as a result of creative drama activities aiming at language acquisition, the number of words children use in a sentence increased and children uttered longer sentences and that the number of adjectives, nouns, noun phrases and verb phrases used by children has risen. Gönen and

Dalkılıç (2000), via a 13-week long supplementary education program provided for 60-72 month-old children, have discovered that drama program in education leaves positive effect on children's language development. Uyar (1995) and Solmaz (1997) have also underlined that receptive and expressive language development of children is emprowered by drama education. Görgülü (2009) in his research has reported that during preschool period, drama-assisted cooperative learning activities constitute an effective approach in the development of communication skills. Akoğuz (2002) has concluded that creative drama provides a meaningful difference in the betterment of communication skills.

As manifested above findings of current research are supportive of results obtained from previous literature studies.

Suggestions

It has been detected in current study that drama education provided for 48-60 month-old preschool children has positive effect on language and communication skills of children.

Based on the findings of this research following suggestions have been provided to increase the effect of preschool drama education on the development of children's language and communication skills.

It may be suggested that when preschool teachers feel a need to improve children's language and communication skills, they can make use of activities that mix daily program activities with educational drama activities

By identifying drama application competencies of preschool education teachers, education on planning and application of drama activities can be provided via in-service training programs for teachers demanding such assistance.

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