The Integration of Creative Writing into Academic Writing Skills in EFL Classes

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ABSTRACT

Writing is regarded as the most challenging task and the most difficult language skill among EFL students. Students need to employ different cognitive strategies in order to convey the meaning to the reader. Due to the complexity of the process, students display negative attitudes towards writing and the level of success is low. This study investigates B2 level creative writing and its impact on the success level of students in academic writing. The study included 15 students, 10 of them are females (%66,7) and 5 of them are males (%33,3). The t-test results obtained from midterm and final exams indicate that students' success level improves in academic writing skills. Participants' pretest and post test results revealed that creative writing help them develop critical thinking skills and when SCAMPER method is used, students' problem solving skills are promoted.

Key Words: Creativity, Creative writing, Writing anxiety, Higher education, EFL writing.

1. Introduction

Creativity is defined as the ability to produce something novel, original, appropriate, high in quality, innovative, unusual, and truly valuable (Snow,1986; Amabile, 1988; Torrance, 1965; Rothenberg, 1990; Lucas,2001; Robinson, 2001). Many scholars and educators believe that every individual has a potential to be creative and a completely uncreative person does not exist (Amabile, 1996; Cropley, 1997; Maley, 2006; Kaufmann & Sternberg, 2010). To reveal this exised potential of creativity, several theories were emerged. Among these theories, Graham Wallas (1926) claimed that creativity occurs in a four-cycle problem solving process. These are respectively preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. In preparation process, the individual gathers relavant information. After collection the necessary information, the individual unconsciously generate new ideas by putting the problem aside. The illumination process is the generation to solutions to the problem. It is also called as 'Aha!' or 'Eureka!' process. The unconscious ideas become conscious in illumination stage. Verification is defined as testing the validity of the proposed solution. Accordingly, creative potentials of individuals may be enhanced and fostered by continuous encouragement, providing necessary conditins and relevant training.

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In language teaching and learning, we need both creative teachers and students in order to increase the level of success and motivation. Creativity is a rainbow which reflects the colours inside individuals. However, creativity research in second and foreign language is unfotunately rare, especialy in writing context. As a skill, writing is considered to be the most difficult to improve and students have a resistance system towards writing. Many studets give up before starting to write or they postpone it as much as possible because writing is taught as a mechanical skill and this causes fatigue, decrease in motivation and failure.

Creative writing was emerged as a reaction to product-process in the late 19th century. It was a reform movement in education and process-oriented. At the beginning of 20th century, the compositions written at Harvard University have been accepted as examples of creative writing (Myers, 1993; Bishop,1994). In her interview with Babaee, Maley defines creative writing as any kind of writing which has an aesthetic rather than pragmatic purpose. He further claimed that creative writing boosts learners' self-esteem, gives them permission to play with language, develop awaraness, engages learners deeply in the process and it is enourmously enjoyable so it is motivating (Babaee, 2015).

Many teachers have several problems during writing classes such as low motivation, high level of anxiety, less effort, low interest, procrastination, etc. However, the biggest problem is that students wait for inspiration to produce a written product and this results in triggering the negative factors mentioned above. Creative writing approach can be an alternative way to evoke inspiration and prevent negative factors students have as it promotes students to gain their identity and self-discovery without any fear of intimidation, teacher-dictated topics, grammar correction, critical comments or grades (Bilton & Sivasubramaniam, 2009). Depending on these concerns, the study tries to answer following research questions:

1. Does creative writing help increase academic success of EFL students?
2. Is SCAMPER technique effective to brainstorm ideas among EFL students?

2. The Study

2.1. Methodology

This study was conducted in one group pre test post test experimental group design. After the midterm results were obtained, the participants were given a pre test which evaluated their creative thinking skill. After the pretest was administered, participants started creative writing training program. The treatment was conducted as an extracurricular activity and it took four weeks. Every week, students recieved two hours of creative writing training and completed different activities. While completing these activities, SCAMPER (Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to other use, Eliminate, Reverse) method was used to develop original ideas. When all creative writing activities were completed, students were given a post test which was the same as pretest. Their pre test and post test results were compated to each other. Also their midterm and final quiz results were compared to check the progress.

2.2. Participants

The sampling of this study consisted of 15 students who were studying in B2 module (Vantage) at English Preparation School at Beykent University. Their deparments were different from each other. There were 10 female studens (%66,7) and 5 male students (%33,3) participated in the study. They were voluntarily participated in the study and informed that they were not given any extra points when they completed the creative writing tasks.

2.3. Data Collection Instruments

In order to collect data, the researcher administered a pre test and post test. Pre test, post test and the tasks were checked according to creative writing criteria (Küçükali, 2014). Pre test and post test included writing a short story by given set of words. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher also obtained midterm and final writing quiz results to compare and contrast the success during the process. The researcher also analyzed the tasks to identify the effect of SCAMPER on generating ideas.

Introduction:	Effective introducing sentence
Content:	New and different (Meyer et al, 2006)
	Use of imagination
Words:	Adjectives / Five sense words (Soytekin, 1988)

Table 1: Creative Writing Criteria.

First Week's Activity
The students were expected to invent a new animal by using combine and put to other other use techniques from SCAMPER to brainstorm and develop ideas.

Second Week's Activity
Students were shown a set of pictures which were different from each other and the were expected to create a story by using substitute, combine and reverse techniques from SCAMPER method to develop ideas.

Third Week's Activity
Students were expected to listen a soundtrack and imagine what is happening and write a description of the scene by using combine and adapt techniques from SCAMPER to create ideas.

Fourth Week's Activity
Students were expected to rewrite the fair tale Cinderella, but this time make the story so that the shoe fit one of the icky sisters. What does Prince Charming do? How does Cinderella cope with it? What about the Fairy Godmother? (obtained from www.creativewritingprompts.com) Students used substitute, adapt, modify and reverse techniques from SCAMPER to develop ideas.

3. Findings

Paired sample t-test was used to analyze the means and significant levels obtained from pre test and post test. According to paired samples t-test results of pre test and post test, participants got higher scores when mean results were compared. The results demonstrates that there is a significant difference between pre test and post test at a higher level (*M*= -4,80, *SD*= 1,01, *p=,000*).

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 PRETEST	16,1333	15	2,19957	,56793
POSTTEST	20,9333	15	1,66762	,43058

Table 2: Means of Pre test and Post test.

Paired Samples Test

| | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair1 PRETEST - POSTTEST	-4,80000	1,01419	,26186	-5,36164	-4,23836	-18,330	14	,000

Table 3: The significance between pre test and post test.

Another paired sample t-test was administered to analyze the means and significance levels obtained from midterm and final results. T-test results indicated that there was a significant difference between midterm and final exams of participants (*M*= -1,40, *SD*=1,68 , *p*= ,000).

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 MIDTERM	15,8000	15	1,65616	,42762
FINAL	21,2000	15	,94112	,24300

Table 4: Means of midterm and final exams.

Paired Samples Test

| | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 MIDTERM - FINAL	-5,40000	1,68184	,43425	-6,33137	-4,46863	-12,435	14	,000

Table 5: The significance between midterm and final exams.

According to t-test results, the researcher answered the research questions positively and it was revealed that creative writing approach significantly increased students' academic success. When pre test and post test were compared, there was also a significant difference between them. This results also indicated that students' creative thinking skills and creative writing skills were developed thanks to SCAMPER method.

Some researches have been conducted to explore the effect of creative writing on students' foreign language proficiency. One study focused on the use of creative writing to improve students' writing skills in English. The results of the study indicated that creative writing training had a positive effect on students' writing skills and contributed a lot to their proficiency development (Tütüniş & Küçükali, 2014) . Another study demonstrated the use of poems to foster EFL/ESL students' creative writing skills. The results of the study revealed the fact that using poetry facilitated students' creativity and helped them increase confidence during the process (KırKgöz, 2014).

As it is noted above, the results of the present study testify the findings of some previous studies that creative writing training has positive effects on students' writing skills. Moreover, creative writing gives students an opportunity to share their own feelings and helped them build up their confidence.

4. Conclusion

Creative writing is an effective way not only for students but also for teachers in writing courses. For students, it gives a lot of opportunities for students in terms of improving academic success. T- test results revealed the fact that students' academic writing skills developed to a great extent when they received creative writing training. The increase in the rate of academic success leads to boost self-esteem and contributes to students' personal development. Because students feel proud to present their original ideas. Therefore, it can be considered as a factor to increase motivation among students. In addition to this, their critical thinking and problem solving skills are fostered when SCAMPER is used as brainstorming technique. They learn different kinds of strategies to create an original product. It is an opportunity to help students identify their audience and build awareness of the genre structure.

When students are motivated to write, the degree of satisfaction among teachers will be higher during writing classes. When students and teachers are highly motivated, writing lessons will be more enjoyable, the academic success will be increased and negative factors such as, anxiety, fear of failure, unwillingness to write, may be prevented. It can be suggested that creative writing approach can be integrated into EFL writing classes and the syllabus of English language course for all schools, from primary to tertiary, may be revised and creative writing activities can be implemented in curriculum. For further research, a control group can be included to investigate the complete effect of the approach and a more detailed creative writing rubric may be developed and used to evaluate creative writing tasks.

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