THE VIEWS OF TURKISH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS ABOUT EFFECTIVENESS OF CLUSTER METHOD AS A TEACHING WRITING METHOD*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to find out Turkish pre-service teachers' views on effectiveness of cluster method as a writing teaching method. The Cluster Method can be defined as a connotative creative writing method. The way the method works is that the person who brainstorms on connotations of a word or a concept in abscence of any kind of limitations forms a cluster of words and then produces a text based on it. The study group consists 35 pre-service teachers attending the Department of Turkish Education in Dokuz Eylül University. The pre-service teachers have participated in writing activities that based on Cluster method for five weeks. At the end of this period, pre-service teachers' opinions about the method and the change of their writing skills are obtained by semi-structured interviews. At this research which is based on survey model the data was analysed under three themes named as "emotion, comparison and suggestion" that were determined by content analysis method. At the end of the research, 34 of the pre-service teachers stated that they have positive views on the Cluster method and 1 mentioned that she found it boring as a writing teaching method. While 29 students stated that the method contributed to the writing process, 4 students mentioned that the method has both positive and negative effects on the process and 2 student stated they disapprove of the method. Based on these numbers, it can be said that the overall student opinion on the method is highly positive.

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to determine the opinions of Turkish pre-service teachers about the effectiveness of the cluster method as a teaching method of writing. The cluster method can be described as an connotative creative writing method. By making a personal brainstorming purifying from all kinds of restrictions, creating clusters through connotations about a subject or concept, and then producing a text based on this cliché.

For this purpose, the problematic sentence of the research is as follows:

How are the views of Turkish pre-service teachers about effectiveness of cluster method?

How are the feelings of Turkish pre-service teachers about effectiveness of cluster method?

How are the views of the Turkish pre-service teachers about whether or not there is a difference before and after using the cluster method in writing skills?

What are the suggestions of Turkish pre-service teachers for better writing?

In the research conducted in the survey model, the data obtained from the semi-structured interview forms were analysed in three phases (emotion, comparison, suggestion) determined by content analysis from qualitative research methods.

The study group of the research constitutes 35 of the first grade students of Dokuz Eylül University Buca Education Faculty Turkish Education Department. First of all, the theoretical basis of the method and the way of application were explained to the students, followed by an application and writing activities with cluster method for two hours during five weeks.

In these lessons, five topics were given and students were asked to write essays with clustering method. In addition to emotional and enthusiastic issues, intellectual subjects were also selected; three emotion-weighted subjects and two intellectual-weighted subjects were identified. After the final writing study, semi-structured interview form was applied to reveal the opinions of pre-service teachers about the effectiveness of the method and the obtained data were analysed by content analysis.

When the findings of the students' opinion on the creative writing process with cluster method were examined, the following results were encountered:

A large proportion (as many as thirty-four of thirty-five students) of the students reported positive feedback on writing essays with this method, indicating that the application was pleasing. However, only one student stated that this practice is unnecessary.

When students were asked about dissatisfactory aspects of the method, 54% stated that they did not see any negative side, while 46% indicated that especially the subject selection could be more interesting. This does not appear to be a direct negativity of the method. When the students were asked to compare the method with previous writing

experiences, they again with a great rate of 82% stated that they wrote more comfortably with this method. 11% of the students stated that the method was both positive and negative in comparison with previous methods and 7% stated that this method made no difference.

One of the questions on the interview form was to find out which types of subjects (emotional-intellectual) students felt comfortable with this method, and 49% of the students stated that they had the same effect in both types, 37% of them said they wrote emotional issues and 14% said they wrote intellectual issues more easily. With regard to these numbers, it can be said that the method is more susceptible to emotion-focused issues.

Lastly, 23% of the students who were asked about the method stated that they do not have an opinion on this issue, while the other students had suggestions such as, longer duration of the activity, the subject selection should be different, students should write their own essays, share ideas among themselves, write on coloured and larger size paper, working with background music have come up. It can be argued that these suggestions of the students reveal their creative writing tendencies, which can be regarded as attaining the purpose of the method.

As a result, it has been seen that the students have developed positive opinions about writing with this method as a result of five weeks of application and that writing with this method makes them feel more free and easier to write. Even students who do not like to write and have negative opinions about writing have been seen to reflect opinions such as "The method is good but I do not like writing". It is also seen as a positive result that a considerable part of the students want these activities to last longer.

Similar studies reached in literature also include support of this study. Hamaratlı (2015: 103) indicates that in studying the effect of this method in foreign language teaching in Turkish, it is found that there is a significant difference in favour of the experiment group in which the cluster method is applied in the pre-test and post-test composition scores applied to the experimental group and control group. Hamaratlı also states that writing this essay using this method has contributed to the development of positive attitudes towards written expression.

Tekşan (2001: 165) suggests that the cluster method emphasizes the importance of creative writing in relation to the results of the study, in which the students study the effect of preliminary preparation in the development of written expression skills.

Anılan (2005: 72) points out that in the fifth grade Turkish language lesson in primary school; the cluster method examines the effect of the students on the development of written expression skills. In the experimental group where the cluster method is applied, it indicates that the students in the control group applied traditional teaching attained a meaningful difference in written expression skills in favour of the experimental group. Anılan suggests that teachers use this method in their lessons and that in-service training should be provided to teachers.

Of course, it will not be possible to transform the negative attitude towards writing in our country to positive. However, by choosing the correct and different method, students' interest in writing can be

increased and attitudes towards writing can be changed over time. Enriching the content and methodology of composition lessons that are based solely on the proverbial-maxim expression of secondary school and high school ages will bring positive developments in this respect.

As a result of this study, the following suggestions can be found:

1. Teachers can be given seminars on creative writing methods and techniques.

2. Researches can be done on whether there is a difference the efficacy of the cluster method between the above-mentioned visual learners and different learners.

3. Attitude tests can be conducted as a result of long-term studies of whether the cluster method and similar creative writing methods and techniques affect students' attitudes toward writing.

Keywords: Cluster method, writing - teaching, creative writing, pre-service teacher opinion

TÜRKÇE ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ SALKIM YÖNTEMİNE İLİŞKİN GÖRÜŞLERİ

ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Türkçe öğretmen adaylarının yazma öğretim yöntemi olarak salkım (cluster, kelime ağı) yönteminin etkiliğine ilişkin görüşlerini belirlemektir. Salkım yöntemi çağrışımsal bir yaratıcı yazma yöntemi olarak tanımlanabilir. Kişinin her türlü sınırlamadan arınarak bireysel bir beyin fırtınası yapması, bir konu ya da kavram hakkında çağrışımlar yoluyla salkımlar oluşturması, ardından da bu salkımdan yola çıkarak bir metin üretmesi şeklinde gerçekleşir.

Bu araştırmanın çalışma grubunu, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Buca Eğitim Fakültesi Türkçe Öğretmenliği Bölümü 1. sınıf öğrencilerinden 35 oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmanın uygulama sürecinde, öncelikle öğrencilere bir ders saatinde salkım yönteminin kuramsal boyutu ve uygulanışı açıklanmış öğrencilerle birlikte bir örnek uygulama yapılmış, ardından beş hafta süreyle iki ders saati boyunca salkım yöntemine dayalı yazma etkinlikleri yapılmıştır. Bu süreç sonunda yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formlarıyla Türkçe öğretmen adaylarının uygulanan yönteme ilişkin görüşleri alınmıştır. Tarama modelinde olan bu araştırmada yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formlarından elde edilen veriler, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden içerik analizi ile belirlenen üç temada (duygu, karşılaştırma, öneri) çözümlenmiştir. Araştırmanın sonucunda 35 deneğin 34'ü yazma öğretim yöntemi olarak salkım yönteminin hoşuna gittiğini, 1'i ise yöntemi sıkıcı bulduğunu belirtmiştir. 29 öğrenci salkım yönteminin yazma sürecine olumlu etkisi olduğu yönünde görüş bildirirken, 4 öğrenci hem olumlu hem olumsuz etkileri olduğunu belirtmiş, 2 öğrenci ise olumsuz görüş bildirmiştir. Bu sayılardan hareketle yönteme ilişkin öğrenci görüşlerinin ağırlıklı olarak olumlu yönde olduğu söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cluster yöntemi, kelime ağı yöntemi, salkım yöntemi, yazma öğretimi, yaratıcı yazma

Introduction

Writing is the expression of feelings, thoughts and knowledge in the mind in written form. Writing like reading has an important place in human life. Clear and comprehensible writing of emotions, thoughts and knowledge require developing various mental skills. Students learn to apply the rules of sorting, limiting, editing and writing thoughts through writing skills. Writing skills are directly related to listening, speaking and reading skills. Developing students' writing skills depends on continuous reading, writing and reviewing their writing. (MEB 2009: 17)

Writing in four basic language skills requires more proficiency than speaking, listening and reading. Problems of students expressing their emotions and thoughts in writing, which is more difficult to learn than other language skills, point to the lack of development of this skill (Takıl, 2016: 300).

Akkaya (2011: 313) points out that writing is not generally liked by children, since it depends on the paper layout, the obligation to follow grammar rules, and the tedious learning of writing techniques. For this reason, he indicates that it is necessary to take advantage of the creative writing approach in order to make writing a pleasurable pursuit. Kırmızı Susar (2009: 53), on the other hand, often says that we are ignorant of developing children's imagination and creativity, and thus a child, who drowns between boring and meaningless rules, finds remedy by eschewing to write. According to Türkel (2011: 2), one of the important features that writing education should develop is creativity; but teaching of writing processes is largely ignoring it. He supports his view with both his expert opinions in literature and his observations of student opinions in his lectures on writing education for many years. According to Türkel, the weight of the subjects in the writing studies done at the primary education level constitutes the writings based on the proverb or the explanation of the maxim about certain days and weeks. Türkel emphasizes that this situation oppresses creativity instead of supporting it, and he also indicates that not only the students but also the attitudes of the adults to write are not at the desired level.

It has been pointed out that the attitudes of the students on this subject have generally developed in negative direction in many studies about writing, which is one of the basic language skills required to be given to the students in the Turkish teaching program. Anılan and Gültekin (2006: 6) point out that there is a high relationship between written expression skill and academic achievement, and emphasize that researches on written expression appeal that there is a great deal of trouble in making written expression works and that new methods are needed for the development of writing skills.

In the composition lessons at schools, the clustering method(word network), which is a method that can both affect students' attitudes toward writing positively and can improve their writing skills, is used as the Turkish equivalence of the word cluster or clustering in English. Anılan (2005: 37) stated that Durukafa used Clustering notion in his work called "Cluster Method Creative Composition" for the first time in our language in 1992, and Tekşan got his Turkish equivalent of the notion in 2001 as "word network" (TR., kelime ağı). From the researchers conducting this study, Türkel prefers to say "cluster method" (TR, salkım yöntemi) in his lectures and suggests this name to be used in the Turkish literature.

It is explained based on the above sources that writing is a more problematic and more featured area than other language skills. In addition to this, it can be deduced that the act of writing needs more to use creativity by looking at the artistic creations of the people whom we call the writer and the poet. It can be thought that the creativity that the writing process needs so much cannot be revealed or even supressed due to the writing teaching approaches in the schools. As the experts have indicated above; the concerns like plan, grammatical rules, paper layout etc. may be preventing the

natural creativity, enthusiasm, and the flow of emotion of the person. From these points, it can be said that the writing process requires the processes and techniques by which students can express their emotions, thoughts and excitements, and operate their imagination freely.

Clustering is a method of free connotations that resembles a regular, non-linear brainstorming. In other words, it is a common function of imaginary thinking (the brain), with the connections established by the connotations of new ideas and imagination (Rico, 2000, quoted by Anılan, 2005: 38).

The clustering method, which Durukafa (1992) introduced as a creative writing work and preferred to name it as clustering, can be described as reflecting the creative thinking to the writing process. The creative thinking process is related to using the skills of the right hemisphere of the brain and the students do not use this half-sphere much in the writing process. For this reason, the attitude towards composition writing with the cluster method has the ability to change from the basic. In the compositions written by the students according to this method, the lively and natural use of metaphors, the features like creative tension which can be clearly felt, are clearly observed. The main idea of the clustering method, which provides positive development in writing; is not to suppress the natural rhythmic interaction of the two halves of the brain and to ensure that it works without hindrance and more natural writing (Temizkan quoted from Durukafa 1992, in 2010: 13). According to Durukafa's observations, creative thinking is suppressed in traditional writing processes, emotions and thoughts cannot emerge in the natural flow. The clustering phase, which is applied in the first stage of the method, is aimed at removing this suppression, revealing the enthusiasm and feelings.

Tekşan (2001: 98) states that the cluster method develops imaginative thinking and enables creative ideas to be formed, which means that the most important feature of this method is that everything is free, that it is not right and wrong, and that it also feeds the imagination.

Smith and Greenberg (2000) point out that the cluster method is a writing tool that can make drawings and scribbles love to be more productive for those who are more visually oriented.

Hamaratlı (2015: 83) puts in the order the application steps of the cluster method as follows:

● Students are given a piece of blank paper,

● For a while they are told to close their eyes and think without limiting themselves,

● Students are asked to write the key word (which can be a word phrase) in the middle of the paper,

● It is said that they must circle every word that comes to their minds around the keychain by typing every connotation,

● Students can check their writing for a while, and can add and subtract,

● Then a second blank sheet is given to the students,

● Finally, the connotations are organized and poured into the writings.

In the process of clustering and first writing, students can write enthusiastically, without paying attention to grammar and spelling, and in the third stage they correct it by checking the appropriateness of the texts written.

The purpose of the research

The aim of this research is to determine the opinions of Turkish pre-service teachers about the effectiveness of cluster method as a teaching method of writing. For this purpose, the problematic sentence of the research is as follows:

How are the views of Turkish pre-service teachers about effectiveness of cluster method?

Sub Problems:

How are the feelings of Turkish pre-service teachers about effectiveness of cluster method?

How are the views of the Turkish pre-service teachers about whether or not there is a difference before and after using the cluster method in writing skills?

What are the suggestions of Turkish pre-service teachers for better writing?

Method of the Research

In the research conducted in the survey model, the data obtained from the semi-structured interview forms were analysed in three phases (emotion, comparison, suggestion) determined by content analysis from qualitative research methods.

In qualitative research, data obtained through observations, interviews, or documents are examined and analysed through descriptive or content analysis. H. Lasswell is regarded as the creator of the content analysis (Öğülmüş, 1991: 213).

Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011: 227) point out that the main purpose of content analysis is to reach concepts and connotations that can explain collected data. After conceptualizing the collected data to achieve this purpose, it is organized in a logical way according to the emerging concepts and accordingly the themes describing the data are determined.

The study group of the research constitutes 35 of the first grade students of Dokuz Eylül University Buca Education Faculty Turkish Education Department. First of all, the theoretical basis of the method and the way of application were explained to the students, followed by an application and writing activities with cluster method for two hours during five weeks. In these lessons, the topics "Love", "Music", "Logic takes you from point A to point B, but imagination takes you to everywhere", "Ignorance is happiness" and "Football" were given and students were asked to write essays with clustering method. In addition to emotional and enthusiastic issues, intellectual subjects were also selected; three emotion-weighted subjects and two intellectual-weighted subjects were identified. After the final writing study, semi-structured interview form was applied to reveal the opinions of pre-service teachers about the effectiveness of the method and the obtained data were analysed by content analysis.

Findings

As a result of the analysis made, the feelings and thoughts of the pre-service teachers about the process are presented in the following tables.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentages of Experiential Group Students' Experiences and Feelings Related to Experimental Process

Theme	Definition	Codes	F	%
Emotion	Enjoyable aspects of the method	Positive feelings and thoughts (Funny, pleasant, I used my creativity, it opened up my horizons, I enjoyed it, it gave me a free environment, I was comfortable while writing, it made it easy to write, I was concentrated, efficient, good results in short time, useful, I wrote fast and fluently)	34	97
		Negative emotions and thoughts (Boring, I didn't enjoy, unnecessary)	1	3

Sample sentences for Table 1 are as follows:

"Composition makes writing more fun." (1)

"I think it was a good practice to freely say our ideas. It was a pleasure not to have a word limit. Overall, I like it. " (7)

"I wrote very different striking words by clustering method, I like it very much." (16)

"While being creative some situations that I loved came to my mind involuntarily. I mean I had fun. " (22)

"I was very pleased that I was writing freely the things that the words connote to us." (32)

"Writing something is fun, but I do not need a method, I see it as a waste of time." (2)

Table 2. Frequency and Percentages of Experiential Group Students' Experiences and Feelings Related to Experimental Process

Theme	Definition	Codes	F	%
Emotion	Enjoyable aspects of the method	Positive feelings and thoughts (There is not any negative side.)	19	54
		Negative emotions and thoughts (Time was short, topic selection and topics were boring, I think it is useless, it takes time, it is hard to write in an instant.)	16	46

Sample sentences for Table 2 are as follows:

"The issue that I didn't enjoy was that we were not able to apply our wishes. I think we should be able to choose the subjects. " (6)

"The subjects given from time to time did not appeal to me, so it was difficult for me to produce ideas." (25)

"It was hard for me to cluster on some issues." (8)

"The work was great and fun." (2)

"There is no trouble when it comes to words, but it was hard to get my head around when writing about a sentence or thought." (35)

Table 3. Frequency and Percentages of Experiential Group Students' Experiences and Feelings Related to Experimental Process

Theme	Definition	Codes	F	%
Comparison	Writing skill difference before and after cluster method	Positive feelings and thoughts (I felt more free, I wrote more comfortably, I could write more regularly, I was integrated in narration, where I had touble - I could use my patience, my creativity improved,- I could write effectively and in a short time.	29	82
		Both positive and negative emotions and thoughts (It's good to set concepts in advance, but not depend on them, the composition becomes better, but it takes more time, has more positive contributions, but it's hard to write in an instant, my expressions became clearer but it took more time)	4	11
		Negative emotions and thoughts (I did not see the benefit, waste of time)	2	7

Sample sentences for Table 3 are as follows:

"With this method, I saw that ideas became easier in my mind.. While I was writing in previous studies, I felt that I had to follow a pattern. But I realized that what I thought is wrong and that this technique is a liberating way of writing." (25)

"It makes it easier to write and start writing. It was very difficult to find the first sentence and to enter the writing in the previous writing methods, whereas in this technique I can write more effectively and in a shorter time because we have already created a scheme." (28)

"In comparison with the previous writing styles, I think it is a much more effective method and facilitates the next stage in writing the words that the words evoke in our minds. However, if we do not have any information about the subjects, the eager to write is becoming more difficult." (32)

"Writing in this way has had a positive effect on me. I didn't strain and I narrated my ideas better. It was easier to make the first scheme and then to post it."

"I do not think the methods are very different. Well thought out but at least I can say for myself that it is a waste of time." (2)

Table 4. Frequency and Percentages of Experiential Group Students' Experiences and Feelings Related to Experimental Process

Theme	Definition	Codes	F	%
Comparison	Comparison of the effectiveness of the cluster method in terms of being intellectual or emotional	More effective in writing ideas	5	14
		More effective in writing emotional matters	13	37
		Evenly effective in both	17	49

Sample sentences for Table 4 are as follows:

"It was easy to write spirals on emotional posts, but it was harder for me to write. I can write my ideas more comfortably rather than my feelings." (10)

"Writing on emotional issues was easier for me, but it was a bit difficult when it came to logical issues. Because we need to have a little knowledge of logical issues." (32)

"I believe that with the cluster method more effective things in emotional matters can be written. I do not think that the intellectual issues are appropriate for this method." (6)

"It does not matter whether the issue is emotional or intellectual; our previous ideas about the issues make it easier to write in both of them." (12)

Table 5. Frequency and Percentages of Experiential Group Students' Feelings and Thoughts Related to Experimental Process

Theme	Definition	Codes	F	%
Proposal	How is it possible to make your writing work more enjoyable?	No idea.	8	23
		Different topic selection.	6	17
		Students' decision on topics.	5	14
		Activity should last for a period of time.	7	20
		Sharing ideas among students in the class.	3	9
		Suggestions about materials used in the class.	6	17

Sample sentences for Table 5 are as follows:

"It can be very different and wide-ranging issues for being more pleasant."(33)

"Maybe we also should have the freedom to choose a subject. Thus, we can benefit from our experiences." (7)

"It could be enough for this activity to last a little longer. …" (35)

"We can share our vocabulary with each other. We can also try to write a story with this method." (10)

"It can be written in music accompaniment (for motivation purposes and subject)." (24)

"In fact, writing on coloured paper may be more interesting with this technique, only coloured paper. (23)

"There will be no problem if we write on the computer." (17)

"I think a larger paper can be used." (4)

"It can be made more fun by giving relevant visuals to the subject. For example, when the soccer theme is processed, the offside can be viewed on the video. "(21)

Results and Recommendations

Results

When the findings of the students' opinion on the creative writing process with cluster method were examined, the following results were encountered:

A large proportion (as many as thirty-four of thirty-five students) of the students reported positive feedback on writing essays with this method, indicating that the application was pleasing. However, only one student stated that this practice is unnecessary.

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Lastly, 23% of the students who were asked about the method stated that they do not have an opinion on this issue, while the other students had suggestions such as, longer duration of the activity, the subject selection should be different, students should write their own essays, share ideas among themselves, write on coloured and larger size paper, working with background music have come up. It can be argued that these suggestions of the students reveal their creative writing tendencies, which can be regarded as attaining the purpose of the method.

As a result, it has been seen that the students have developed positive opinions about writing with this method as a result of five weeks of application and that writing with this method makes

them feel more free and easier to write. Even students who do not like to write and have negative opinions about writing have been seen to reflect opinions such as "The method is good but I do not like writing". It is also seen as a positive result that a considerable part of the students want these activities to last longer.

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Of course, it will not be possible to transform the negative attitude towards writing in our country to positive. However, by choosing the correct and different method, students' interest in writing can be increased and attitudes towards writing can be changed over time. Enriching the content and methodology of composition lessons that are based solely on the proverbial-maxim expression of secondary school and high school ages will bring positive developments in this respect.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, the following suggestions can be found:

1. Teachers can be given seminars on creative writing methods and techniques.

2. Researches can be done on whether there is a difference the efficacy of the cluster method between the above-mentioned visual learners and different learners.

3. Attitude tests can be conducted as a result of long-term studies of whether the cluster method and similar creative writing methods and techniques affect students' attitudes toward writing.

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