Enhancing Assertiveness Through Traditional Turkish Folk Dance

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the effects of assertiveness training programs through folk dances on high school students' assertiveness levels. Pre-test post-test with control group design has been used to examine. Furthermore, a questionnaire including one open-ended question asked students to learn their opinion on training and its effects on themselves. Experiment and control group participants were administered the Rathus Assertiveness Inventory, and experiment group participants received a two–hour assertiveness training program through folk dances per week over eight weeks. The study sample included 203 students who were in first grade in the same school. Results revealed that students in the experiment group had significantly higher assertiveness levels than those in the control group (P<0.05), and experiment group students defined that this assertiveness training program positively affected them and increased their awareness about themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings always need to communicate with others, which is expected positively. Developing this communication is concerned with social skills positively. Social skills include verbal and nonverbal behaviors and aim at understanding and transferring feelings and ideas correctly (Hall, Terrence & Murphy, 2019). One of these social skills is assertiveness. In literature, assertiveness is described by most of the researchers. According to these descriptions, the assertive person can be aware of and maintain their rights, can admire others' rights (Jakubowski-Spector, 1973), can signify his positive and negative ideas and feelings fairly (Lambertz & Blight, 2016; De La Torre et al., 2021) can say "no" common time and states can do eye contact while speaking and communicating, can hold head and shoulders high while walking, can attend communicating with common hand and body movements, can use gestures and mimics appropriately, can use tone of voice suitably, can direct others, is open to criticize and being criticized (Lindenfield, 1997; Alberti & Emmons, 1998; Whirter & Acar, 2000; Goldin-Meadow & Alibali, 2013; Hall, Terrence & Murphy, 2019).

Many researches support that assertiveness is affected by many factors such as environment, culture (Omura, Stone & Levett-Jones, 2018) and family and parental educational status (Sitota, 2018), and assertiveness can be learned later (Fukuyama & Greenfield, 1983; Florian et al., 1987; Carmona & Lorr, 1992; Speed et al., 2018; Patterson, 2022). The assertiveness training was born from "If people can explain what they want and tell others how to behave themselves, they can live better" (Alberti & Emmons, 1998). The purpose of assertiveness training is to help individuals change their attitudes towards themselves first and then to express their thoughts and feelings easily with self-confidence (Niusha et al., 2012; Lin et al., 2004; Obliagel, 2015). Research has shown that assertiveness training

enhances positive human relations, affects personality behavior positively, and increases positive personal reactions in people who join assertiveness training (Lambertz & Blight, 2016; Lee et al., 2013). The basic item of these training programs is volunteering, and it is important to have high motivation (Kessler et al., 1986; Aydın, 1991; Deniz, 1997).

Assertiveness training can be conducted by some techniques such as learning from the model, rehearsing or repeating the behavior, cognitive restructuring and behavioral homework (Ward & Holland, 1990; Cüceloğlu, 1991; Whirter & Acar, 2000; Kaya, 2001; Speed et al., 2018; Yoshinaga et al., 2018). The participants can rehearse or repeat the behavior technique through some activities such as drama, sports, and dance because these activities and recreative activities are natural enhancers of assertiveness and psychological characteristics (Gemi, 1997; Malebo et al., 2007).

Assertiveness training can be used in schools easily. These training programs will be effective if students have the opportunity and a suitable environment. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) content standards for physical education also emphasize teaching responsible personal and social behaviors to students of all abilities to help them develop an understanding of and respect for differences among people (NASPE, 2004). According to Johns, Crowley, and Guetzloe (2005), poor social skills in school are related to the following factors: (1) limited opportunities to learn, (2) negative academic and social concepts, and (3) social isolation. Therefore, the present study has chosen a school as a practicing area, and the training process is planned as an extracurricular activity. In some countries, dance has been a part of education and school curricula to move and enhance social skills (Carter, 1984; Graham, 1985). So, folk dances are accepted as the best way of enhancing assertiveness in this study. Folk dances are one of the activities that everyone can join easily, and dance can provide a student with an alternative means of communication. Folk dances have no difficulties as time, place, and equipment. Trainers can do folk dance training in an open-air environment or hall as a curricular or extracurricular activity. In addition, Turkey has a rich infrastructure in terms of folk dances. This richness gives researchers a chance to choose. Zeybek Dances, which belong to the Aegean Region, are selected for this study because they have characteristics that enhance assertiveness. Zeybek Dances symbolize bravery, intrepidity, and self–confidence.

Dancers wake up the audience honored by their tone of voice, mimics, and behaviors. Greeting each other is important in these dances. Dancers come into the dance area in order and with regular steps. During the dance, dancers keep their heads high and look forward. The body never leans forward. Individual dancing is also an opportunity to develop self–confidence. However, dance programs have not been examined as a power for developing social skills literature. The present study tested the effectiveness of an intensive eight–week dance program for promoting assertiveness.

METHODS

The present study used qualitative and quantitative methods to be more explanatory and reliable. Pre-test post-test with control group design was used to examine quantity. A questionnaire including one open-ended question asked students to learn their opinions on assertiveness training and its effects on themselves in terms of quality.

Participants

The study sample included 203 (X_{age} =15) (X_{male}=68, X_{female}=135) students who were in first grade in the same school. The study was carried out with students from similar cultures and environments and the same age group because environment and culture affect the level of assertiveness level (Kimble et al., 1984; Whirter & Acar, 2000; Şimşek, 2000) and the assertiveness level of students may differ if there is an age gap of 2 years (Kaya, 2001; Tataker, 2003).

During the determination of the study group, permission was taken from the Provincial National Education Directorate and the school's director which the application had been carried out. All 1st-grade high school students (N=203) joined the pre-test. Then 47 (X_{male}=20, X_{female}=27) introverted students and their families were informed about the study and asked if they were volunteers to participate in this study. Only 6 (X_{male}=2, X_{female}=4) students were willing to participate in the study. These students formed the experimental group. The other six introverted students (X_{male}=2, X_{female}=4) formed the control group.

Instrument

In this study, the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) was used to determine students' level of assertiveness. The RAS (Rathus, 1973) is a 30–item measure of global assertiveness. The RAS is one of the most widely used and accepted measures of assertiveness and has evidenced acceptable test-retest (.78) and split half (.77) reliabilities (Rathus, 1973) and validity with other self–report and observational measures of assertiveness and social skills (Quillin et al., 1977). In its Turkish adaptation (Voltan, 1980), the test reliability repetition coefficient was obtained using the Pearson Product Correlation Moments formula and r=0.92. The reliability coefficient was r=0.77 by two-half methods (Uğur, 1996). In this study, the reliability coefficient of RAS was Alpha=.78.

Implementation

The prepared assertiveness training program consisted of 8 sessions limited to 120 minutes. Before the planning of sessions, the basic assertiveness skills were found out. As a consequence of the sessions, students gained skills as follows.

First Session

The definition of introvert and assertive person was made. Positive and negative sides were told. In addition, they would gain the status of being aggressive, and how to take advantage of this surplus would have been determined in the future. The relationship between folk dances and assertiveness was explained to students who had difficulty understanding it and were informed about how they would benefit from folk dances.

Second Session

In this session, the upright posture and the appropriate tone of voice were emphasized. Expected posture was shown to students during the dance, and they were asked to do so. They were shown the aesthetics of dance with appropriate examples of music. Control of body movements and leg compliance according to music was achieved.

Third Session

In this session, students were given eye contact training. They were trained to dance in couples and look into each other's eyes while dancing. In addition, students sang the folk songs and folk dances they learned. The students who sang quietly were encouraged to upgrade their voices until they reached the appropriate tone. In another activity, each student sang the folk song individually as the others danced.

Fourth Session

In this session, students carried out an activity about criticizing and being criticized. Each student showed the dances they had learned to the others, and the audience group told them about their mistakes and the sides they liked. The student also sang the folk song while dancing.

Fifth Session

In this session, students did some activities to express their ideas in "I message" and self–defense. The activity studied in the previous session was repeated on the new figures. This time, students expressed their sentences as "I think ..." or "I would be ...". Students who had been criticized or praised learned to respond to criticism and praise.

Sixth Session

In this session, leadership and group managing activities were performed. Students became leaders in order, and they taught the dances they had learned to others. In this activity, the leader's role was to start the dance, stop when necessary and give the appropriate commands.

Seventh Session

In this session, complimenting and responding to the compliment were studied. The dances, which included one man and one woman, were emphasized. Students responded to the compliment with their body language and facial expressions, shown through folk dances.

Eighth Session

In this session, emotional reactions were studied. Students focused on unhappiness, happiness, anger, and excitement and expressed these emotions through war and wedding-themed dances. At the end of the session, students' opinions about the study were considered and asked if they found the study useful for themselves.

Data Collection and Analysis

Assertiveness scores belonging to the working group were obtained by the RAS. SPSS was used in the analysis of data. Non-parametric Wilcoxon Test was used to determine the significance of the difference between the pre-test and post-test results. This test was selected because the number of students who volunteered to participate in the research was insufficient. Students' opinions on assertiveness training and its effects on themselves were collected by a questionnaire including one open-ended question prepared by the researchers.

## RESULTS
Quantitative Result

As a result, it was found that the students who participated in the folk dance program on enhancing assertiveness had significantly higher levels of the Rathus Assertiveness Scale at the end of the process. (See Table–1, Graphic–1, Table–2 and Graphic–2).

Table 1. Experimental group pre-test/post-test significance

	Pre-Test/Post-Test
Z	-2,201
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0,028*

* P<0.05

According to Table 1, the post-test scores of the experimental group are significantly higher than the pre-test scores (t=2, p=0.05).
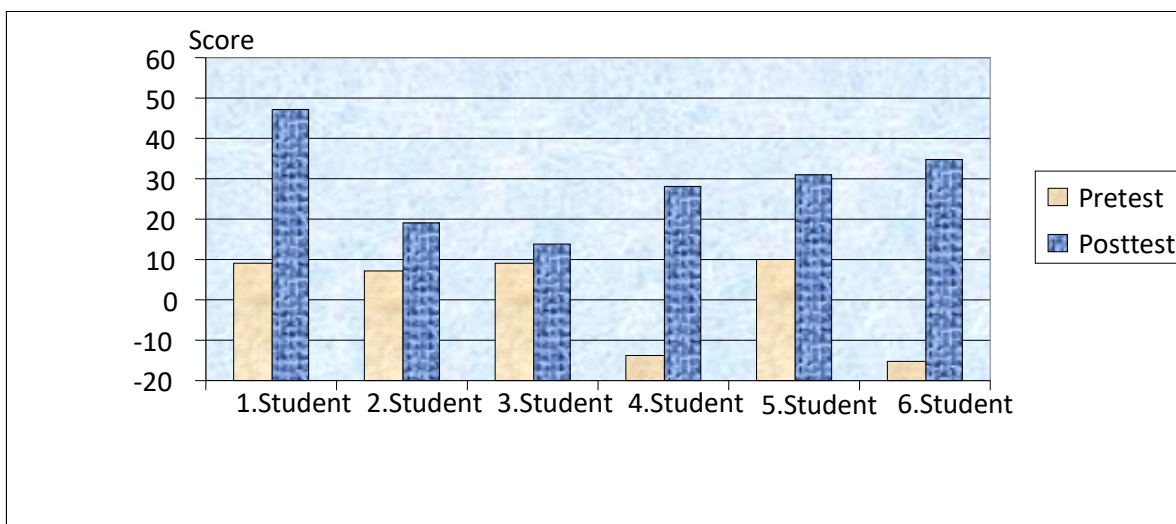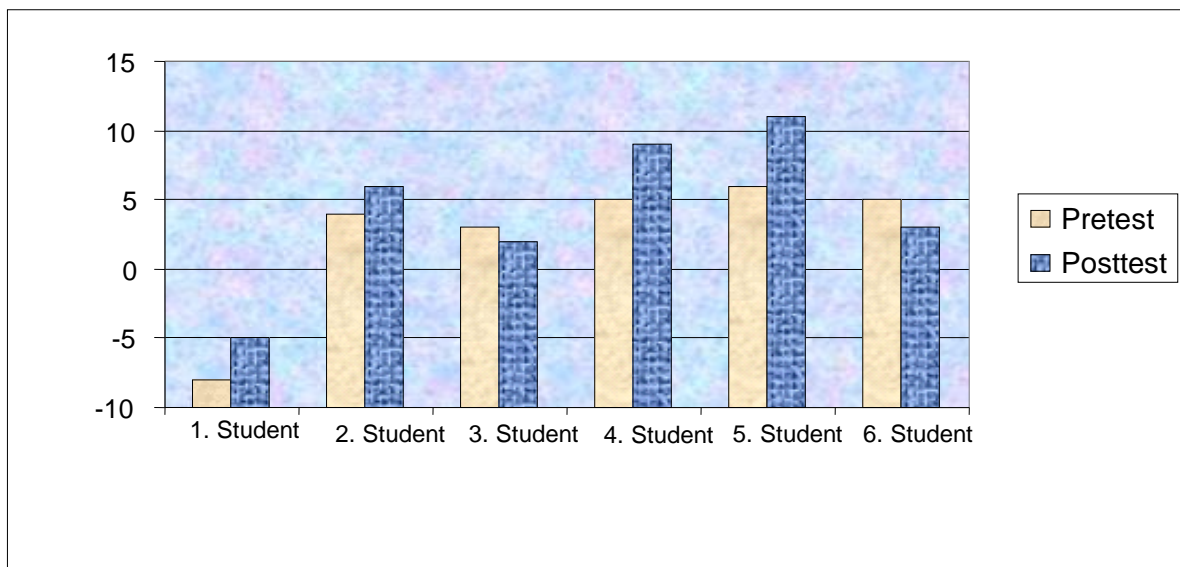
Graphic 1. The Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of The Experimental Group

Table 2. Control group pre-test/post-test significance

	Pre-Test/Post-Test
Z	-1,472
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0,141*

* P<0.05

According to Table 2, no statistically significant difference was found between the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group (t=2, p=0.05).

Graphic 2. The Pre-Test And Post-Test Scores Of The Control Group

Qualitative Result

Six students were asked their opinions on assertiveness training and its effects on themselves. Summaries of the opinions of the experimental group are given below.

'Before joining this study, I was feeling very ordinary. But standing upright, having self–confidence, knowing what I want, expressing my discomforts to others, and speaking to others easily made me happy. I see myself as important now. Thank you' V.C.

'Before I joined the study, I was wondering whether the study would benefit me. But I was lucky to have joined. Sometimes, I had problems applying what I learned, but finally, I managed. The changes in me were noticed even by my friends. It makes me happy. Formerly, I could never express my discomfort, but yesterday, on a class trip, my friends' talking too loudly disturbed me, and I could tell them this with appropriate language. Our teacher was even surprised. Also, I understand folk dances are so nice. Thank you for everything' K.I.

'I think activities that were done in this study were formative. First, I realized how important self–confidence is in human life. In this study, I became more confident in many issues. We have made both educational and entertaining activities here. We have learned many things without getting bored. That is why I am glad to have participated in these activities. I believe this study will help me during my life' B.Ü.

'The activities have been so funny since the beginning. I believe we learned so many things while having fun. After the day we started doing the activities, some positive changes occurred in my behavior. The instructor's comments made me notice the power I already have. Therefore, I would like to thank

you. My interest in folk dances, which I have not tried before, also increased. I think this study should last longer. But even in this period, we have achieved a lot' M.K.

'I have gained positive achievements in this study. Especially upright posture. I did not know that standing upright gives people more confidence or is more important. Also, I have realized the importance of using hands, arms and face mimics and having meaningful glances' G.D.

'In the first session, it was not credible when the instructors told us about assertiveness and what we would do in this study. I did not believe the folk dances would change me. But this study changed me. Now that I am walking upright, I can comfortably contact everyone. I do not hesitate to communicate with the girls' E.Ö.

DISCUSSION

Statistically, significant differences were found between the pre-test and post-test results of the experimental group (See Table–1 and Graphic–1), and no statistically significant differences were found between the pre-test and post-test results of control group students (See Table–2 and Graphic–2). This result makes the researcher's hypothesis, "The students who attend the assertiveness curriculum by Turkish folk dances training have higher levels than those who do not attend," correct.

There is little research on folk dances and assertiveness relationships in the literature. However, dance educators and therapists have explained the benefits of creative movement and dance for children and adults of all ages (Gilbert, 1992; Stinson, 1988) including self–image (Jette, 1981; Hos, 2005; Burgess et al., 2006; Morales-Sánchez et al., 2021), self–esteem (Joyce, 1994; Stinson, 1988; Hos, 2005; Schwender et al., 2018; Dale et al., 2019; Stojiljkovic et al., 2020; Tan & Thiagarajan, 2020; Morales-Sánchez et al., 2021), self–concept (Blackman et al., 1988), self–control (Stinson, 1988), social competence (Lobo & Winsler, 2006) and emotional intelligence (San-Juan-Ferrer & Hipola, 2020). These results can be because folk dance studies are group studies. Students join in a friendship in the natural environment of the folk dance studies. Previous studies reveal that students with a friendship group have a higher assertiveness level than students who do not have a friendship group (Uğur, 1996).

In addition, folk dances positively affect the person's body image satisfaction because dance provides the opportunity to use and recognize the body better. It is also a result of increasing assertiveness level. Studies also support that high body image satisfaction students have high assertiveness levels (Uğur, 1996). With a structured intervention resulting in improved assertiveness skills, blind or partially sighted individuals can effectively communicate with others and feel more in control of their lives (Harrell & Strauss, 1986). The assertiveness training is effective in increasing the communication skills of the students. Assertiveness training increased students' assertiveness, happiness level, and academic success (Hojjat et al., 2016). Malebo et al. (2007) examined whether young black adults who participate in sports differ in psychological well–being and psychosocial development from those who do not participate actively in sports. As a result, they found that students who participated actively in sports had significantly lower levels of negative effects, somatic symptoms, symptoms of depression, and pessimistic life orientation and significantly higher levels of positive effects, sense of coherence, and self–efficacy beliefs. In another study, Gemi (1997) found that students who participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, concerts and folk dance have higher assertiveness than those who don't participate.

It is recommended that school counselors should carry out assertiveness training curricula for students who have low assertiveness levels. They can study with physical education teachers or art therapists such as dance, painting, and drama in these curricula. Also, in schools, more importance should be given to leisure activities and encouraging participation of students with at least one activity such as dance and making them feel this experience is seen as more important and will be better for their development.

CONCLUSION

Students shared positive experiences and personal growth resulting from the training, such as increased self-confidence, improved communication skills, and enhanced assertiveness. The study's findings support the researcher's hypothesis that assertiveness training via folk dances leads to higher assertiveness levels. While limited research directly links folk dances to assertiveness, the text

highlights how group-based folk dance studies create a supportive environment that fosters friendships, potentially contributing to improved assertiveness.

Additionally, the research discussed the broader literature on the positive effects of creative movement and dance on various aspects of individuals, such as self-image, self-esteem, self-concept, self-control, social competence, and emotional intelligence. It emphasizes the potential of folk dances to influence body image satisfaction, further enhancing assertiveness levels positively. This research suggests that school counselors should implement assertiveness training curricula incorporating activities like dancing, painting, and drama to support students with low assertiveness levels. It also advocates for schools to prioritize leisure activities, encouraging student participation and emphasizing their importance in personal development. This research underscores the potential benefits of assertiveness training through folk dances and its broader implications for personal growth and development.

Funding and Conflicts of Interest

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