

Creative Drama and Peer Relations: A Case of Migration

Yaratıcı Drama ve Akran İlişkileri: Göç Örneği

Büşra Tombak İlhan¹, Zeynep Rana Yıldız²

Keywords	Abstract
Creative drama	Friendship is one of the strongest social bonds fostering students' sense of school belonging. However, developing positive peer relationships can be challenging in complex contexts shaped by migration and increasing ethnic diversity. Existing literature tends to focus on students with migrant backgrounds in terms of academic underachievement, language deficiencies, or behavioral issues, while largely overlooking the role of peer relations—particularly cross-ethnic friendships—in their integration into educational systems. This study aims to examine the potential of a creative drama-based intervention to enhance peer relationships in a classroom setting where there are students of immigrant families. This quasi-experimental quantitative research was conducted in a public school located in Zeytinburnu, Istanbul, an area characterized by a high migrant population. The study group consisted of a class of 20 students (n = 20), including 13 students whose families had migrated from Syria, Afghanistan, and the Uyghur region. Sociometrics was employed as the primary data collection tool, and peer relationships among students from different ethnic backgrounds were analyzed before and after the implementation of the creative drama program. The data were analyzed using the sociometrics status classification framework developed by Coie, Dodge and Coppotelli. The findings indicate that creative drama activities increased social interaction among students, reduced patterns of exclusion, and contributed to the development of positive relational networks, particularly among students from diverse backgrounds. Overall, the results highlight the importance of pedagogical approaches that support social integration in multicultural classroom environments and provide evidence that creative drama can serve as an effective tool within inclusive education contexts.
Peer relations	
Migration	
Race	
Sociometrics	
Anahtar Sözcükler	Öz
Yaratıcı drama	Arkadaşlık ilişkileri, öğrencilerin okula aidiyet duygusunu güçlendiren temel sosyal bağlardan biridir. Bununla birlikte, göç ve artan etnik çeşitlilik gibi karmaşık bağlamlarda olumlu akran ilişkileri geliştirmek her zaman kolay değildir. Mevcut literatür, göçmen kökenli öğrencileri çoğunlukla akademik başarısızlık, dil yetersizliği ve davranış sorunları üzerinden ele alırken, akran ilişkileri ve özellikle ırklar arası arkadaşlıkların eğitim sistemine uyum sürecindeki rolü görece ihmal edilmektedir. Bu çalışma, yaratıcı drama temelli bir müdahale programının göç etmiş ailelerin çocuklarının olduğu bir sınıf ortamında akran ilişkilerini geliştirme potansiyelini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, İstanbul Zeytinburnu'nda göçmen nüfusun yoğun olduğu bir bölgede yer alan bir devlet okulunda yürütülmüştür. Çalışma grubunu, aileleri Suriye, Afganistan ve Uygur bölgesinden göç etmiş öğrencilerin de bulunduğu toplam 20 kişilik bir sınıf oluşturmaktadır (n=20; göçmen kökenli öğrenci sayısı=13). Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak sosyometri kullanılmış; farklı etnik kökenlere sahip öğrenciler arasındaki akran ilişkileri, yaratıcı drama uygulaması öncesi ve sonrasında analiz edilmiştir. Verilerin analizinde Coie, Dodge ve Coppotelli tarafından geliştirilen sosyometrik statü sınıflandırma çerçevesinden yararlanılmıştır. Bulgular, yaratıcı drama etkinliklerinin öğrenciler arası sosyal etkileşimi artırdığını, dışlanma örüntülerini azalttığını ve özellikle farklı kökenlerden öğrenciler arasında olumlu ilişki ağlarının gelişmesine katkı sağladığını göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak, çalışma çok kültürlü sınıf ortamlarında sosyal bütünleşmeyi destekleyen pedagojik yaklaşımların önemine işaret etmekte ve yaratıcı drama uygulamalarının kapsayıcı eğitim bağlamında etkili bir araç olabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır.
Akran ilişkileri	
Göç	
İrk	
Sosyometri	

¹ Corresponding Author, Yildiz Technical University, Faculty of Education, Educational Sciences Department, Istanbul, Türkiye, btombak@yildiz.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3732-5103>

² Yildiz Technical University, Faculty of Education, Science Education Department, Istanbul, Türkiye, zeyneprana.yildiz7@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9534-9696>

Introduction

Children of displaced families must spend most of their days in a new school, in a new classroom, in an unfamiliar educational system, with unfamiliar teachers and students. Their unfamiliar language, culture, educational system, and socialization styles make it difficult for them to adapt. With the massive wave of migration from Syria since 2011, the social adaptation and integration of children of displaced families has become a significant issue for schools and education.

According to 2025 statistics, approximately 900,000 children under temporary protection status in Türkiye (Presidency of Migration Management [PMM], 2025) face these challenges in schools. Children of displaced families were admitted to schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education under the "Law on Foreigners and International Protection" (6458) and its "Temporary Protection Regulation", ensuring their participation in education. However, the "Documentation of the Educational Response for Syrian Children Under Temporary Protection in Türkiye" (UNICEF, 2022) report indicates that serious problems remain regarding educational participation and integration. The fact that 35% of children of Syrian origin are not enrolled in education, their poor Turkish language skills, the lack of inclusive schools and curricula, and the lack of teacher training are among the primary educational challenges faced by children of migrant families.

Research on children of migrant families in Türkiye has focused on language and social adaptation (Çolak & İşeri, 2022; Takır & Özerem, 2019; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2022) issues. It appears that these two fundamental needs for communication and integration are not met at the desired level, and intervention and support programs are inadequate. When examining the educational equality of children of migrant families, research conducted in Türkiye is quite limited. First and foremost, referring to these students as "Syrian" and "refugee" makes them the subjects of the migration process and labels them. However, these children are not the decision-makers of the migration process; they are the objects. Therefore, in line with international literature, the term "children of migrant families" is used in this study.

While many studies have been conducted on the language problems (Çolak & İşeri, 2022; Takır & Özerem, 2019), integration problems (Danış & Dikmen, 2022; Dumancı & Gür, 2022; Şahin, 2020), and the effectiveness of projects designed for these children (Sağın & Güllü, 2020; Nizamoğlu, 2022), studies on friendships are quite difficult to find. Friendships are an informal and effective process that supports students' integration into school. Children from immigrant families encounter bullying and exclusion at school (Fox & Stallworth, 2005), which negatively impacts the adaptation process. Creative drama is a type of dramatization frequently used in education and psychology because it increases self-awareness and contributes to social skills. This dramatization, which allows individuals to experience different aspects of social interaction and situations and circumstances different from their daily lives by assuming different roles, also strengthens social relationships. This study designed and implemented a creative drama program to support friendships.

The creative drama program designed for this study targeted interpersonal skills of students to boost friendship and social bonds among students. It was designed as a 6-week program and followed these themes respectively: interaction, communication, connection, feelings, problem solving, and sharing. The program was developed by the researchers (one of whom is an expert of curriculum design) and a creative drama tutor. It was implemented face to face at the drama room of the school, face to face with by the researchers and creative drama tutor.

The research employed a method different from the mostly descriptive studies in the literature. Designed with an experimental design, this study focused on friendships, which are crucial for the school process, and implemented creative drama activities that could support the adaptation of children from immigrant families. Another innovative aspect of the study is its use of sociometrics, a rarely used measurement tool in educational research. Sociometrics is a measurement tool that allows for the examination of friendships and social acceptance. The study examined the effects of creative drama on friendships in a middle school classroom with children from immigrant families using sociometrics. The research is based on the following questions:

- Is race an influential factor in middle school students' friendships?

- Can creative drama activities foster interracial friendships among students with immigrant families and those with native-born families?

Literature Review

Migration, Education and Social Relations

The civil unrest that began in Syria in 2011 led to the displacement of the local population (approximately 5.6 million people). Türkiye, geographically and culturally close to Syria and politically suitable for residence, is a leading destination for Syrians (UNICEF, 2022). As of 2025, there were 2.5 million Syrian citizens under temporary protection status in Türkiye (PMM, 2025). 238,000 individuals of Syrian origin became citizens of the Republic of Türkiye (General Directorate of Population and Citizenship Affairs, 2024). This intense wave of migration has a significant impact on educational settings, as well as various economic, political, and social impacts.

Participation in education is one of the first requirements for children of migrant families to adapt to the local culture, improve their living conditions, and complete their cultural, social, and economic integration. Globally, the primary school enrollment rate for children of refugee families is 92%, and the secondary school enrollment rate is 84% (UNICEF, 2022). In Türkiye, these rates are 61% for primary school and 23% for secondary school. While the "Law on Foreigners and International Protection" (Law No. 6458) provides the political basis for the participation of children from migrant families in education, cultural attitudes such as frequent family relocation, the obligation for children to work, and the protection of girls constitute obstacles to participation in education.

Children of Syrian origin who have overcome these barriers to participation in education also face various disadvantages in schools and classrooms. A fundamental factor among these disadvantages is the language barrier. The difficulty children whose native language is not Turkish experience in understanding teachers and peers leads to problems with achievement and social adaptation (Babayiğit & Karsantık, 2024). Children who use Arabic educational materials, whose home language is not Turkish, and whose families do not speak Turkish experience isolation in school. The Project for Supporting Inclusive Education for Children in the Turkish Education System (PIKTES), implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education and the European Union, aims to improve access to education and social integration for children from migrant families. The project aims to increase access to education and participation through financial scholarships, Turkish language support courses, and school subject support courses. The PIKTES project has been shown to contribute to Turkish language learning (Tiryaki & Oğraş, 2020) and their desire to attend school (Ulukuş & Tümtaş, 2023). However, it has been stated that more inclusive activities are needed to support children's social adaptation and integration (Turan & Solak, 2023; Ulukuş & Tümtaş, 2023).

Friends are an important factor that plays a role in the school adaptation and sense of belonging for all students, especially children of immigrant families (Copeland & Kamis, 2022). Children who can establish positive friendships are also observed to have higher levels of school adaptation, sense of belonging, and psychological well-being. For children from immigrant families, friends also play a key role in school adaptation and integration. Kurnaz and Kesten's (2024) study demonstrates the positive impact of friends on children from immigrant families learning Turkish and adapting to school. When Syrian children experienced difficulties with language or communication with teachers, their Turkish friends helped them, contributing to their adaptation and success. Considering that families' Turkish language proficiency is limited, their communication with teachers and other families is quite limited, and they are unable to support their children's integration into school (Yurdakul & Tok, 2018), the impact of friends supporting integration becomes even more significant.

The friendships formed between children from immigrant families and local children are referred to in international literature as cross-race friendship. Cross-race friendships contribute to the integration and psychological well being of minority-race children and the self-esteem of majority-race children (Anderson, 1999; Carson & Esbensen, 2013). Students with friends from different races are more liked by their peers and are perceived as more intelligent, athletic, better listeners, and leaders (Lease & Blake, 2005). While there is

no difference in grade level, the tendency to form cross-race friendships increases with age (Lease & Blake, 2005).

While race influences friendship selection, classroom organization is another factor that influences this selection (Epstein, 1983; Hallinan, 1980; Lease & Blake, 2005; Schmuck, 1963). Dispersed classroom organizations that emphasize teacher-centered socialization, create inclusive interaction opportunities, or prioritize the majority encourage students to form friendships of the same race or different races (Epstein, 1983). Teaching methods, architecture, seating arrangements, school location, and student selection criteria determine students' potential friends. Hallinan and Teixeira (1987) note that interracial friendships are negatively impacted in classrooms where segregation is based on standardized tests, basic skills, or mastery of the curriculum. In classrooms where academic achievement is the primary basis of discrimination, advantaged groups avoid friendships with disadvantaged groups. The classroom environment, including factors such as teaching, seating arrangements, structure, attitudes, and socialization, shapes the friendships of children from immigrant families.

Creative Drama and Social Relations

Drama is a holistic activity that encompasses the individual's inner and outer worlds, the environment, the mind, the individual and the community, the current situation, and future possibilities (Burton, 1981). Creative drama, on the other hand, is the improvisational form of drama. In creative drama, children experience the joy of improvisational drama while working and playing, and are also encouraged to express themselves (Siks, 1958). Creative drama activities develop children's executive functions such as memory, shyness, problem solving, and cognitive flexibility (Çiftçi & Aykaç, 2020). They also enrich their perspectives by experiencing different roles and different sides (Tosun, 2018). Creative drama helps deepen the understanding of difficult concepts such as religion and culture (Tosun, 2018). Migration is also a complex and multifaceted concept that is difficult to grasp at first glance. The reasons for migration, the migration and integration process, the attitudes of the local population, and the impact on migrant groups are difficult to grasp at a glance. Schools and clinics use creative drama for therapeutic and educational purposes in such challenging situations (Courtney, 1981). Creative drama helps students develop a deeper understanding of this concept by experiencing different perspectives.

Repeated creative drama sessions help individuals overcome negative self-perceptions and build healthier self-awareness by accepting themselves, their resources, and the internal and external influences of life (Freeman et al., 2003; Way, 1967). Individuals who develop a positive self-image establish healthier social relationships. Creative drama is widely used because it enhances social skills (Courtney, 1995). Through dramatization, role reversal, and discussion, students gain different perspectives (Siks, 1958), learning different perspectives and the realities of life through different roles (Way, 1967).

Rather than being a transformative program, creative drama is a process that improves self-awareness and social and emotional skills. A study by Freeman, Sullivan, and Fulton (2003) found that an eight-week creative drama session did not have a transformative effect on students' self-concept, problem behaviors, or social skills. However, creative drama combined with music and poetry therapies produced promising effects on general, social, and academic skills (Yücesan & Şendurur, 2017). Creative drama is particularly effective when combined with time-consuming interventions.

Creative drama is a promising method for improving the language and adaptation skills of children from immigrant families. It has been shown to reduce language anxiety (Galante, 2018; Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013) and improve writing (Anderson, 2012) and speaking (Korkut & Çelik, 2018) skills. In this study, creative drama was used to develop communication, adaptation, and problem-solving skills in a classroom with a large number of children from immigrant families. The primary purpose of the study was to understand the impact of creative drama on students' friendships.

Method

Study Design

The research was designed as a quasi-experimental quantitative study. Experimental studies aim to measure the effect of an independent variable on another variable (Creswell, 2007). In this study, friendship relationships were selected as the dependent variable, and the creative drama program was selected as the independent variable. Because random sampling was not possible, the impact of the creative drama program on friendships was measured using a quasi-experimental study.

In the first phase of the study, a creative program was developed to contribute to friendships in a classroom with immigrant students. The 6-hour creative drama program, developed under the guidance of creative drama instructor Pinar Zenderlioğlu, included activities on communication, harmony and trust, problem-solving, cooperation, solidarity, and home sharing. The creative drama program was implemented with 7th-grade middle school students in a drama room located at the school during school hours. A sociometrics scale was used as a pre- and post-test before and after the application. Every phase of the research is carried out in alignment with the ethical principles, granted permission by Yildiz Technical University Ethics Committee dated 27.12.2022 and numbered 2022/12.

Sample

The research aimed to understand the effect of creative drama on students' friendships in a class where there are children of immigrant families. To reach this aim, the study employed two phase sampling. In the first phase, teachers were interviewed to determine the sample of the study. In the second phase, students of Class 7-B were implemented create drama program. Both phases are explained as:

Participants for Needs Analysis

There are two groups of sampling adopted in the research. The first group is the voluntary teachers of the public middle school in Zeytinburnu, Istanbul. The teachers were visited at the school and invited to participate in the study with explanations of the aim and methods. 5 teachers (3 male, Turkish, Social Studies, Mathematics; 2 female, Science, English) accepted to participate in the study and preliminary interviews were made with them. The preliminary interviews with teachers about the classroom in question revealed low academic achievement and the presence of cliques and exclusions within the classroom. This classroom, lacking unity among students, was deemed suitable for investigating interracial friendships.

Sample Group to the Creative Drama Implementation

The study sample was created using the criterion sampling method. Criterion sampling involves selecting a sample group based on a specific characteristic or criterion that serves the research purpose (Cresswell, 2007). The sampling criterion determined for this study was the presence of children from families who had migrated within the classroom. To reach the best sample group, the school district, school and classroom were deliberately selected to reach a classroom where there are children of immigrant families and friendship ties needed improvement. Zeytinburnu was selected as the district of study due to the high concentration of migrant families. The school was selected as a state Imam Hatip (Religious) middle school due to the high number of children from migrant families. The classroom, on the other hand, was selected after needs analysis interviews with teachers.

In the middle school with a high number of migrant students, the classroom with the highest number of migrant families was selected. The classroom in question contained 20 students, 7 of whom were Turkish and 13 of whom were children of migrant families. The information of race is obtained through Personal Information Form handed to the students. All of the students were female.

Table 1

Race of students' families

	Turkish	Syrian	Afghan	Uyghur
P1		*		
P2	*			
K3			*	
P4		*		
P5	*			

P6		*	
P7			*
P8			*
P9		*	
P10	*		
P11		*	
P12	*		
P13		*	
P14		*	
P15	*		
P16			*
P17		*	
P18	*		
P19	*		
P20		*	

Implementation Process

The implementation process consisted of two phases: The needs analysis and the intervention program. The needs analysis phase started with the interviews with teachers. Interviews were conducted at a state Imam-Hatip (religious) middle school located in this district. They took 17-32 minutes, done face-to-face by the researchers at the school to select the class, determine the socialization needs of students and the design the creative drama program. To ensure that the Drama Intervention is designed in a realistic and functional way suitable for the target audience, the needs analysis was conducted before the implementation. This analysis aimed to thoroughly determine the group's general friendship relationships and classroom dynamics. This way, sampling was aimed to fit the research aims in the best way.

The implementation process of the study was designed by the researchers and a professional creative drama tutor. The sessions and activities were planned to improve the friendly relationship among students as well as self and environment awareness as a critical step to improve interpersonal skills. The creative drama program was designed as displayed in Table 2. The program was reviewed by one curriculum and instruction (Assist. Prof. Dr.) and one creative drama expert (Instructor).

Table 2

Creative drama design

Session Number	Focus	Objective
1	Meet your friend	To know group members, introduce oneself, communicate with peers
2	Communication	To search for ways of effective communication, to realize the significance of focusing in communication, to realize the significance of listening
3	Connecting and trust	To discuss the concept of harmony and connecting, to realize the effect of connect on groups, to show interest to be in tune with group, to behave according to joint goals with the group, to discuss the concept of trust in group
4	Senses and feelings	To communicate through senses and feelings
5	Problem solving	To search for functional and constructive attitudes, to experience harmony and solution-oriented with group friends
6	Helping, solidarity, and sharing	To experience helping behaviour and its significance, to experience helping, asking for help and being helped

Creative drama sessions were implemented with the school administrators and teachers' consent, planned in a way not to cause delays or shortages in curriculum. They were mostly implemented in social studies course, as the teacher expresses they were ahead of the curriculum plan. Also, lunch breaks and some recess time was utilized with the full consent and enthusiasm of the students to continue the activities.

Data Collection Tools

The study used one fundamental and two supplementary data collection tools. The fundamental data collection tool of the study was a sociometrics instrument, a quantitative data collection tool, as a pretest and posttest. Sociometrics is a quantitative social interaction measure (Avramidis & Wilde, 2009) and is frequently used to measure the social relationships of students with learning disabilities or differences (Child & Nind, 2013). In this study, sociometrics was used to understand friendships among racially diverse students and the impact of a creative drama program on these relationships. The sociometrics instrument, used before and after the 6-week creative drama program, serves to quantitatively scan social relationships and understand relationship networks. The sociometrics instrument used in this study asked students to list their three best friends in class and at school, respectively. This measure measured intra-racial and interracial friendships within the classroom, social acceptance, and mutual friendship. The sociometrics scale asked students to write their best three students as:

Table 3

Sociometrics scale

No	Best friends in classroom ^a	Best friends at school
1	_____	_____
2	_____	_____
3	_____	_____

Note. The explanation above the form was explained as: "Please write the first and last names of your three classmates that you enjoy spending time with the most or feel closest to, in order of importance (1st, 2nd, and 3rd), in the space below."

The supplementary data collection tool was a semi-structured teacher interview form and personal information form handed to students. Classroom sociology (Tombak İlhan & Gündüz, 2023) is a complex and difficult concept to understand, thus the interview questions were prepared by the researchers. The interview form included questions about the classroom sociology, relationships among students, inter-racial relationships, groups in the classroom and the communication style of the students. The first draft was composed of 17 questions, 10 of which were the main questions on interracial friendships, friendship groups, interracial interactions and the climate of the classroom. 7 questions were the probe questions that focused on 'how' students interacted within and inter-races. The form was tested for reliability and validity by two experts, one in the department of Curriculum and Instruction (Assist. Prof. Dr.), and one in Educational Sciences (Prof. Dr.). To reach consistency between experts, the revised form was sent back to them and both experts confirmed the revised version of the form that consisted of 14 questions (9 main, 5 probing). The interview was not included in data analysis process, was only utilized to confirm the class selection and understand the needs of the students for creative drama intervention design. Thus, a pilot interview was not preceded in this study, but tested in a pre-test form with a non-participant student in the same school. Qualitative data obtained from preliminary interviews with participants during the needs analysis process were subjected to descriptive analysis. This analysis process formed the basis for identifying the key problem areas that the intervention program would focus on and shaping the content accordingly. This interview process was not included in the main experimental data analysis (hypothesis testing) process of the research; it was only used as a preliminary assessment to validate participant selection and understand the contextual needs of the participants regarding the intervention design.

The Personal Information Form also prepared by the researchers included nationality, family members number, parent occupation and education levels questions. The form was developed by the researchers and two experts reviewed the form.

Data Analysis

The pre- and post-test sociometrics scales were analyzed by calculating the Liked Most (LM) and Liked Least (LL) scores, in accordance with the sociometrics analysis used by Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982). Additionally, the Social Impact (SI) score (the sum of the LM and LL scores) and the Social Preference (SP) score (the subtraction of the LM score from the LL score) were calculated and standardized for each student.

Since the research sample did not exceed 30, nonparametric tests were used to analyze the effects of students' nationality and creative drama training on LM, LL, SI, and SP scores. Analyses were conducted using the SPSS 22.0 software package.

In addition to the most liked and least liked scores, students' friend preferences were visualized using the Canva Web 2.0 tool to understand the friendship network within the classroom. During the visualization, a separate relationship network was created for each student before and after the creative drama program, based on their initial friend preference.

The interview and the personal information form as the two supplementary data collection tools were analyzed descriptively within data analysis process. The interviews were transcribed, coded and descriptively analyzed to determine the sampling in the best way to reach the research objectives. The codings were not themed as the analysis results were not included in the hypothesis testing process. The personal information form, on the other hand, was descriptively analyzed to understand the races, family backgrounds of the sample. The race was descriptively included in hypothesis testing to understand the inter-racial friendships.

Results

The results of the study are grouped under two headings. The first section examines the impact of family profiles on friendships using a sociometrics scale. The second section examines the impact of the creative drama program on friendships using sociometrics scales administered before and after the program.

Preliminary Interviews and the Context of the Class

The analysis of the preliminary interviews with teachers outlined the general context of the classroom. The teachers outlined that there were multiple different races in the classroom, as in *"Afghan, Syrian, Turkish and Uyghur. Students are from different races and it affects the classroom climate"* (Turkish teacher, male). As the English teacher (female) pointed, *"there are only two groups, I guess. The other just are in the classroom. I don't even think that they know each other well"*. Students were mostly socializing in their groups, which were formed *"according to races, unfortunately. Especially, Syrians. They are only hanging out with each other."* (Social studies teacher, male). Teacher interviews outlined that the Class 7-B *"has the most differentiation and groupings among the others"* (Mathematics teacher, male). Students formed groups of friendships, talking in their mother language with each other. Moreover, there are conflicts among groups and they did not socialize with each other. Class 7-B did not have unity and positive relations among students, as the teachers emphasized.

Peer Relations and Race

A sociometrics scale was administered to a classroom in Zeytinburnu, Istanbul, where a large number of children from immigrant families were enrolled, using scores for being liked very much, being liked less, social influence, and social preference. The study class included 13 children from immigrant families and 7 from Turkish families. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to examine whether friendships in this classroom, where immigrant families predominated, varied according to family profile. Because the study sample size did not exceed 30 and the distribution was not normal, the Kruskal-Wallis test (Büyüköztürk, 2013), a nonparametric test that allows for the examination of continuous dependent variables, was used. The test results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Kruskal-Wallis Test Results of Race and Friendship

Race		Turkish	Syrian	Afghan	Uyghur	sd	χ^2	p
Liked Most	Mean Rank	10.71	10.72	12.33	1.5	3	2.77	.428
Liked Least	Mean Rank	11.57	10.11	11.33	4	3	1.66	.645
Social Impact	Mean Rank	12.21	9.5	12.67	1	3	4.03	.257

Social Preference	Mean Rank	10.14	10.56	10.5	12.5	3	.145	.986
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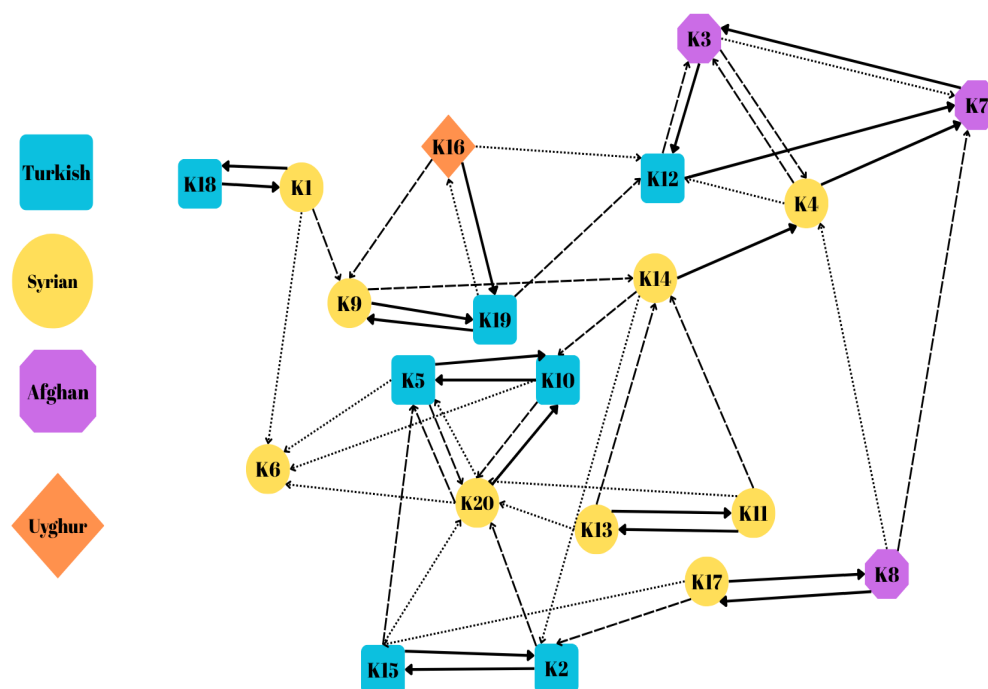
The Kruskal-Wallis test results, shown in Table 4, indicate that whether or not the participating students' families migrated did not significantly affect their scores for being liked very much, being liked less, social impact, or social preference. Having Turkish, Syrian, Afghan, or Uyghur families did not significantly change their scores for being liked most ($\chi^2=2.77$, $p=0.42>0.05$), being liked least ($\chi^2=1.66$, $p=0.64>0.05$), social impact ($\chi^2=4.03$, $p=0.25>0.05$), or social preference ($\chi^2=0.14$, $p=0.98>0.05$).

The mean ranks of the scores for being liked very much, being liked less than, social impact, and preference for students with Turkish, Syrian, Afghan, or Uyghur families were quite close to each other. Because there was no statistically significant difference between these scores, pairwise comparison tests were not conducted. When the effect of students' family profiles on their friendships is visualized (Figure 1), it is evident that there are groupings among the students. Students mostly included peers of their own race in their friend groups. All students except P16, P18, P17, P12, P4, and P9 made at least one of their friend preferences within their own race. However, mutual interracial friendships (P17 and P8, P18 and P1, P9 and P19, P5 and P20, P10 and P20) indicate that nationality is not a specific criterion for friendship. Students developed both interracial and interracial friendships.

An examination of friendship networks reveals that students codenamed P20, P6, and P12, who formed interracial friendships, were quite popular. P20, in particular, was selected as one of the top three friends by six different students, four of whom were from different races. P6 was also listed as one of the top three friends by four different individuals, two of who were from different races. P12 was listed on the top three friend lists by four people, three of whom were from a different race. Of these three students, P6 declined to include her friend list on the pre-sociometrics scale. However, a look at the post-sociometrics scale (Figure 2) reveals that P6's friend preferences are interracial. Students who prefer interracial friends appear more likely to be preferred by their peers from a different race. Students like P15, P13, P11, and P14, who preferred friends more from their own race, were generally preferred by their peers from their own race.

Figure 1

Pre-Sociometrics Friendship Circles



When students' friend preferences are examined, it appears that nationality is not a viral criterion for friendship, but when students prioritize nationality in forming their own friend groups, they tend to form

lower interracial friendships. In other words, when students choose friends of their race in the first place, it is less likely that they build interracial friendships. The comfort in within-race friendships may keep students away from trying new relationships. The preliminary sociometrics distribution of friendships indicates that interracial friendships and mutual friendship preferences are common. Friendships with first-choice reciprocity, such as P18 and P1, P9 and P19, and P17 and P8, demonstrate that race is not the sole criterion for friendship preferences. It seems that they also regarded other features than race in their friendship preferences, which reflects the complex structure of friendship preference and building process. Students understandably do not only consider race while making friends. However, it is still a significant criterion, as could be understood from Figure 1.

Creative Drama and Social Relations

Creative drama contributes to social skills by increasing self-awareness. The creative drama program designed for this study focused on communication, harmony and trust, problem solving, cooperation, and solidarity. The impact of the creative drama program on classroom friendships was measured with a sociometrics scale administered as a pre- and post-test.

Students' LM, LL, SI, and SP scores before and after the creative drama program were compared using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The test results are presented in Table 3. The creative drama intervention produced a statistically significant difference in the students' scores for Liked Most ($z=-3.924$, $p=.00$), Liked Least ($z=-3.928$, $p=.00$), Social Impact ($z=-3.923$, $p=.00$), and Social Preference ($z=-3.922$, $p=.00$). This significant difference, which occurred before and after the creative drama program, was observed to be negative for Liked Least Liked and Social Impact. In other words, students started to decrease the magnitude of least liking each other. The preferences are broadened and more students are accepted into friend zones. Since all Less Liked and Social Impact scores were negative, this difference is understandable. Creative drama intervention was an intervention that positively affected social relationships for all students.

Table 5

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results Before and After Creative Drama

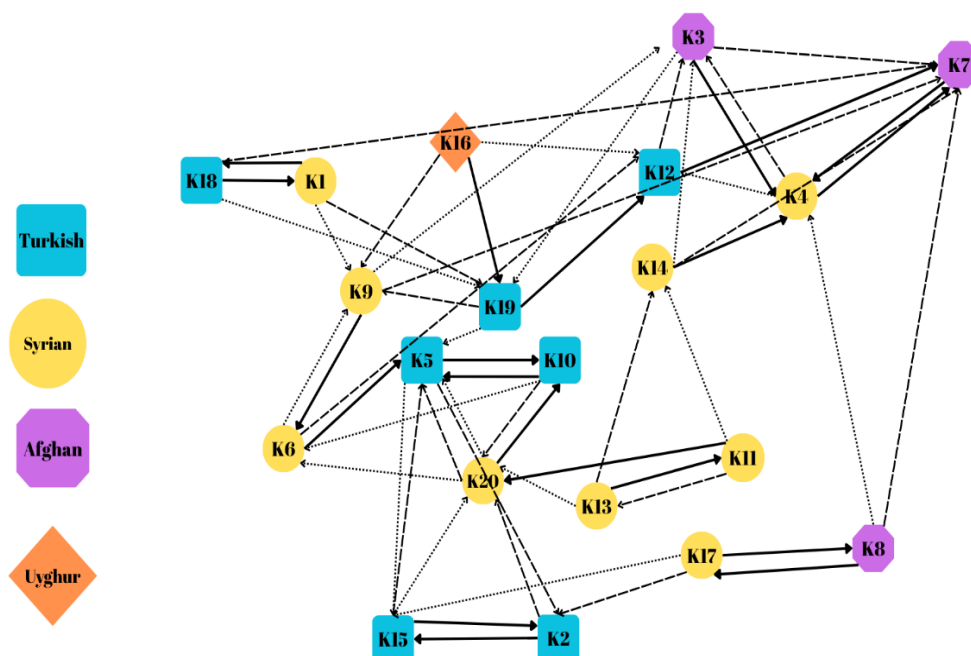
Post test-Pre test		n	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	z	p
LM	Pozitive ranks	20	10.5	210		
	Negative ranks	0	.00	.0	-3.924	.00
	Ties	0	0			
LL	Pozitive ranks	0	.00	.0		
	Negative ranks	20	10.5	210	-3.928	.00
	Ties	0	0			
SI	Pozitive ranks	0	.00	.0		
	Negative ranks	20	10.5	210	-3.923	.00
	Ties	0	0			
SP	Pozitive ranks	20	10.5	210		
	Negative ranks	0	.00	.0	-3.922	.00
	Ties	0	0			

When the effect of the creative drama program was examined by students' family profiles, no significant difference was observed ($p_{LM}=.065$, $p_{LL}=.54$, $p_{SI}=.11$, $p_{SP}=.866$). The fact that students' nationality did not create a statistically significant difference in the impact of creative drama may be attributed to the comprehensiveness of the creative drama activities. Students' friendships were positively affected by the creative drama intervention, regardless of their nationality.

The distribution of students' friendships after the creative drama intervention was visualized using Canva (Figure 2). The students' positions in the figure were not changed during the visualization to facilitate comparisons before and after creative drama. This is expected to make the difference in the distribution of relationships among students more easily observable.

Figure 2.

Friendship Circles after Creative Drama Program



The distribution of friendships following the implementation of the creative drama program appears to have become more complex, encompassing more reciprocal relationships. While students did not completely change their friendship preferences, they did include different peers in their relationship groups. P1, P3, P6, and P9 added new interracial friends to their lists, which they had not included in their top three preferences during the pre-sociometrics. P7, P3, P4, P19, P18, P5, and P9 were preferred more than they were during the pre-sociometrics. For example, P7 was highly preferred by peers from different races. Similarly, P3 received more preferences from people from different races. P3 and P7 were in a group with intense reciprocal relationships with P12 and P4 before the creative drama program. This interracial friendship group appeared to be more popular after the creative drama program. The relationship network of P8, who had only one-way relationships with this group, remained unchanged after the creative drama program. It is noteworthy that the network of P12, P4, P3, and P7 expanded after the creative drama program, while P8 did not. Similarly, P1, P13, P16, P17, and P18 did not expand their network. These students maintained strong bilateral reciprocal friendships before and after the creative drama program. Their second and third friend preferences were not reciprocated. The network of students who did not engage in reciprocal preferences remained unchanged after the creative drama program. P20, who was popular among interracial students, maintained this popularity.

The creative drama program did not directly transform students' interracial friendships. For example, P5, who included P20 and P6, who were of a different race, in her top three friend preferences before the creative drama program, chose P15 and P2, who were of her own race, over P20 and P6 after the creative drama program. P5, who had changed her preferences to her own race, still preferred people of a different race after the creative drama program, expanding her network. In other words, even though individual preferences shifted to racial groups, her interracial networks expanded.

Discussion

Türkiye has faced a big migration movement from Syria since 2011. Almost 2.5 million Syrians migrated to Türkiye, and 900 thousand children aged between 5-17 study at schools. The existing literature depicts

language and social adaptation issues (Çolak & İşeri, 2022; Kiremit et al., 2018; Takır & Özerem, 2019; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2022), indicating that integration is not completed actively at schools. Although a number of studies focused on language barriers and inclusion (Çolak & İşeri, 2022; Daniş & Dikmen, 2022; Dumancı & Gür, 2022; Şahin, 2020; Takır & Özerem, 2019), few studies targeted friendship relations of students whose families migrated. Social exclusion by peers makes the integration of these students more difficult (Aşkın, 2025; Karataştan & Akcan, 2023). Studies reveal that students whose families migrated or racially minority students are more likely to have more negative peer relations, less friends, experiences of exclusion and bullying, but they are integrated with inclusive methods of teaching (Alpaydın & Aktaş, 2021). To tackle with integration difficulties, this study creative drama as an intervention program to improve peer relations among students.

The study was conducted in a classroom in Istanbul, Zeytinburnu where the immigrant population is high. The classroom is at a religious state school and has 20 female students, 13 of whose families migrated and 7 of them are Turkish. The classroom was composed of multi-variety of ethnic backgrounds, depicted in Table 1. Although this enabled to analyze a social environment where the number of students whose families migrated, the distribution of each ethnicity was not similar, as a limitation of the study. For further studies, it is recommended to include similar numbers of students from different ethnic backgrounds. However, in this study, the existing distribution is not intervened to understand the natural situation of migration in education and the effect of creative drama on natural classroom settings.

Friendship choices of both immigrant and local students were complicated. The pre-test sociometrics revealed students preferred both in-race and cross-race friendships. Race did not have a significant effect on students' LM ($\chi^2=2.77$, $p=.42>.05$), LL ($\chi^2=1.66$, $p=.64>.05$), SI effect ($\chi^2=4.03$, $p=.25>.05$), and SP ($\chi^2=.14$, $p=.98>.05$). The reciprocal friendships created small circles, which are linked to only one or two peers who nominated the members of these circles. When students had reciprocal nomination of the first choice, less peers were linked to them. Strong friendship relations, generally between two peers, were less likely to connect others. These strong reciprocal friendships were both in-race and cross-race, which indicated a positive climate for cross-race friendships.

Students who preferred cross-race friendships and who indicated at least 2 friends on sociometrics were more likely to be liked by the others. Although Graham and Cohen (1997) found that cross-race friendship nomination is less likely to be reciprocal, students who preferred cross-race friendship were more likely to be nominated as close friends by their peers. They were more popular and nominated by more peers than most of their friends. Cross-race friendship is helpful to reduce delinquent behavior (Anderson, 1999; Carson & Esbensen, 2013). Students who have cross-race friends are reported to have better social skills, which increase their likelihood of nomination.

Classroom activities, organization, attitude towards students and socialization patterns are effective in student socialization (Epstein, 1983; Kuzu Jafari et al., 2018). The instructional methods, the architecture, seating arrangement, the location of the school and student selection criterion are effective in determining potential friends. Hallinan and Teixeira (1987) found in classrooms where there is a segregation focus on standardized tests, grades, basic skills and mastery of the curriculum, white students do not prefer blacks as their best friends although blacks accept whites. As such, repeated creative drama sessions help individuals to overcome the negative perceptions of self-consciousness and build a healthy self-consciousness through accepting the self, realizing one's resources, internal and external influences on life (Freeman, et al., 2003; Way, 1967). In the study, the creative drama program has been successful in improving students' social relations. The LM ($z=-3.924$, $p=.00$), and SP ($z=-3.922$, $p=.00$) scores of students increased significantly while LL ($z=-3.928$, $p=.00$) and SI ($z=-3.923$, $p=.00$) decreased after the creative drama implementation. The increase in LM and SP means students started to like each other more, and preferred each other as friends more, respectively. The decrease in LL and SI means that liking the least someone is less dense, and students are less salient in their groups. Actually, this is an interesting pattern as if LM increases and LL decreases by similar amounts, SI (LM + LL) might stay stable. The fact that SI decreased suggests that the reduction in negative nominations was larger than any increase in positive nominations. The creative drama program positively affected students peer relations, regardless of their races. The effect of creative drama sessions were inclusive of Turkish, Syrian, Afghan and Uyghur students non-discriminatively. This result outlines the inclusive nature of creative drama (Yoder, 1986), and the probability of using it in diverse settings.

Conclusion

Studies reveal the requirement of interpersonal skills be improved for integration in multi-race classrooms (Bulut et al., 2018; Kuzu Jafari et al., 2018). Children of displaced families experience difficulties in communication and relationship building (Levent & Çayak, 2017). Yet, there are very limited number of studies focusing on friendships of children of displaced families and interracial friendships. Thus, this study was designed to integrate sociometrics and creative drama as an innovative method of research and implementation, respectively. The 6-week implementation program of creative drama focused deliberately on communication skills, inclusion and trust, emotions and feelings, problem solving, cooperation, solidarity and sharing. After the implementation program, students indicated more various selections of friends (Figure 2). They expanded their friendship circles and were nominated by more peers as friends.

Students who had reciprocal strong friendship ties did not change their preferences much. They were the least affected ones in both nominating different and/or cross-race friends and being nominated by more and/or cross-race peers. The fact that early adolescents remain in a small balloon of choices (Creswell, 2007) was apparent in the analysis. They had reciprocal nomination as the first choice both with their in-race and cross-race peers. This strong tie was not broken after the creative drama program, which cannot be understood as a weakness. It is likely that they benefited from the program, although this benefit cannot be understood through the research methods employed in this study.

The development of friendship circles after the creative drama implementation is a promising result of the study, especially for classrooms and schools with diverse backgrounds. Creative drama is not a transformative program, but a process for self-awareness, social and emotional skills. Although it was found ineffective on students' self-concept, social skills and problem behavior in some studies (Freeman, et al., 2003), the results of this study demonstrate the positive impact of creative drama on peer relations from different backgrounds. The disadvantages of migration and minority can be improved through creative drama programs.

Author's Note

An earlier version of this study was presented as an abstract at the TURKCESS 2024 Conference (Prizren Ukshin Hoti University, July 11–13, 2024) and published in the conference abstract book. This manuscript has been significantly expanded and revised for journal publication.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

B. Tombak İlhan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Implementation, Writing original draft, Review & editing.

Z. R. Yıldız: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Implementation, Writing original draft, Review & editing.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Authors declare no conflicting interest to declare regarding this manuscript.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Pınar Zenderlioğlu, an excellent creative drama teacher and guide for her time and endeavors throughout the experiment process.

Funding

This work was supported by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) under Grant 1919B012205395.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All stages of the research were carried out in accordance with ethical principles. At the meeting of the Yildiz Technical University Ethics Committee dated 27.12.2022 and numbered 2022/12, it was decided that this study complies with the ethical rules. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Declaration of AI Usage Statement

No AI is used for any purpose in the processes of research design, data analysis or manuscript preparation.

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