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Research article

The Effective Communication Skills of Preservice Teachers: Challenges, Changes, and Future İmplications

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Abstract

This pre-experimental mixed design study comprised pre and post-self-report measures as well as the conduct of in-depth interviews with preservice teachers sought to ascertain the effect of an elective drama course on effective communication skills, identify challenges to effective communication faced by preservice teachers, and learn how student teachers perceived the course's impact about previous challenges and potential career implications. Pre-interviews and post-interviews, pre-test and post-test applications were carried out with preservice teachers majoring in early childhood education in their senior year. The findings revealed that the preservice teachers' effective communication skills improved significantly in the areas of ego-enhancing language, active/participative listening, and I message as a result of taking the drama course. The drama activities primarily assisted the participants in overcoming the emotional and interactional challenges that limited their ability to communicate effectively and provided guidance for the instructional process as well as for building relationships with parents, administrators, colleagues, and students.

Keywords:
effective communication, drama, preservice teacher

1. Introduction

Education must always be evolving to provide current and future needs-aware student teachers with the skills they need. It is imperative to acknowledge the significance of these skills, integrate them into the current educational framework, and attribute teaching faculties to oversee the acquisition of these vital skills by aspiring educators. Effective communication is one of the essential skills since it combines interpersonal and intellectual abilities to solve complicated issues (Brazell, 2013). Through teaching programs, future educators must be prepared for a profession that requires a high degree of professionalism and competence when interacting with students, parents, colleagues, and school administrators. Communication is a crucial skill for teachers, which denotes the development of a connection between people, problems, ideas, or more, implying the comprehension and exchange of concepts, information, customs, and values (Sharifirad et al., 2012). Given that learning is a byproduct of effective communication and that learning cannot take place in the absence of communication, effective communication skills are paramount for teachers to possess. That is because communication education must be an essential part of their curriculum and encouraging student teachers to reflect on their behavior and attitude when communicating in educational settings are required to support their professional development.

2. Theoretical foundation

It is common knowledge that recently graduated teachers struggle to become professionally competent in their new roles (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Heikonen et al., 2017; Meister & Melnick, 2003). Teachers face significant challenges when transitioning from school to the workplace because they are immediately tasked with high expectations and pedagogical responsibilities (Olson & Osborne, 1991; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). The ability to modify their subject matter expertise for varied teaching scenarios as well as contexts is expected of novice teachers. It could be challenging for educators, though, to strike a balance between the demands and realities of their jobs and the expectations and ideals of the teaching profession that were shaped during their schooling. Accordingly, Arif et al. (2023) reveal how inexperienced educators face communication difficulties when interacting with colleagues, students, parents, and managers, and Fuentes et al. (2017) highlight the communication challenges that many teacher candidates and even experienced educators face. The body of research emphasizes how teachers' ineffective communication skills prevent them from being prepared for collaborative work, building

relationships, and interacting with parents, students, colleagues, and administrators. According to Sidelinger et al. (2015), ineffective teacher communication reduces student engagement in the classroom, teacher and course satisfaction, and attendance. Ineffective communication between colleagues and upper management staff causes conflicts and job dissatisfaction, which worsens the learning and teaching culture and opportunities for educators to participate in school restructuring processes (Kheswa, 2015). School-home interactions decline when teachers lack the necessary skills to communicate clearly with families and are ill-prepared to work productively with them; parents are also unable to closely monitor their children's development and provide comprehensive guidance to their children (Epstein, 2001).

According to Fuentes et al. (2017), in order to help student teachers understand the importance of their role as communicators and help them develop their communication skills, it is necessary to give them specialized training that is practical rather than theoretical because of the nature of communication. Drama is one of the many teaching strategies that can be used to achieve the goal of making academic content less abstract and tangible. Students can use drama to elicit feelings and compassion by incorporating participant experiences (Buxton, 2011) and illustrating and criticizing others and their communication, both verbal and nonverbal (Arveklev et al., 2015). By engaging in drama activities, teacher candidates can acquire effective communication skills that they can use to respond to and initiate interaction for a range of purposes and contexts (Cremin & McDonald, 2013); they can also learn how to foster discourse, which in turn facilitates ongoing social interaction (Kao & O'Neill, 1998).

Research with a range of cohorts demonstrates that involvement in drama activities enhances participants' communication skills. Elementary students' communicative-expressive skills improved and they were more expressive and elaborative when they took part in a drama project that emphasized dynamic communication, according to Hui and Lau (2006); Cojocariu and Butnaru (2014) contend that using drama techniques improved primary students' intercommunication, interknowledge, and sympathetic relationships and that drama has the potential to be a useful educational tool for improving students' communication skills; Charles and Kusanagi (2007) pointed out that in K12 settings, drama improves students' communicative behaviors and helps students understand how people communicate in a variety of ways. Studies involving preservice teachers demonstrated that graduate students' communication skills are enhanced by the use of gestures and body language in drama activities (Kalidas, 2014). Creative drama, according to Şengül and Ünal (2018), supports the development of communication skills, personal expression, nonverbal expression, and willingness to communicate. Athiemoolam (2013), Aykaç and Çetinkaya (2013), and Yüksel et al. (2020) all assert that drama in education improves the communication skills of prospective teachers. However, a comprehensive study has yet to be conducted that searches at teacher candidates' communication skills from a qualitative and quantitative perspective, the challenges they face when communicating, the effect drama has on their communication skills, and their implications for their future careers. The purpose of this research is twofold. The primary objective is to examine how a drama course affects preservice teachers' communication skills; the second uses qualitative methods to investigate preservice teachers' challenges in effective communication and the course's effectiveness about prior challenges and potential career implications.

The purpose of this study was to address the following research questions:

(a) What challenges in effective communication do student teachers experience?

(b) What are the student teachers' perceptions of the course's effect on prior challenges at the end of the course?

(c) What are the student teachers' perceptions of the course's effect on their potential career implications at the end of the course?

(d) How do student teachers' communication skills change after a 14-week drama course?

3. Research methodology

This pre-experimental mixed design study comprised pre and post-self-report measures as well as the conduct of in-depth interviews with preservice teachers sought to ascertain the effect of drama activities on communication skills, identify challenges to effective communication faced by preservice teachers, and learn how student teachers perceived the course's impact about previous challenges and potential career implications.

The context was an elective creative drama course at a teaching faculty of a Turkish university in the

Central Anatolia Region. Instruction by a drama teacher took place in a drama classroom in which 20-25 students attended for eighty minutes each session over the course of one academic semester, which lasted for fourteen weeks. Key components include (1) Introduction of the course program/ Introduction to Drama (2) Teaching core drama competencies (3) Contribution of drama to the development of key competencies (4) Drama strategies, and 11-week drama activities aimed at developing communication skills as explained in Table 1. Physical, vocal, or mental warm-ups were incorporated into each of the 11-week sessions, which started with introductory warm-up exercises. Reflections were included after each session. A total of twenty to twenty-five minutes were spent on starters and reflections.

Table 1
Themes and strategies/techniques used in drama sessions

Theme		Strategies/Techniques
1	Me as an individual	Mirror, improvisation, role play
2	The good and the bad	Roleplay, ımprovisation, split-screen, role on the wall
3	Storytelling	Narration, role play
4	Expressive voices	Brainstorming, corridor of voices, role play
5	Active listening	Improvisation, role play, freeze frame
6	Listening and cooperation	Soundscape/Sound Collage
7	Sound and gesture	Sound and Gesture Circle
8	Constructive criticism	Two Stars and a Wish
9	Emotıons	Mime, tableaux
10	Speaking eyes	Improvisation, role play, dance drama
11	Empathy	Freeze frames, individual/group role-play

3.1.Participants

The quantitative part of the study involved 47 PSTs (23 male and 24 female) who were majoring in early childhood education in their junior year and who enrolled in the drama course in the fall of the 2023–2024 academic year. In the qualitative phase, 13 students—seven males and six females—voluntarily participated in interviews at the start and finish of the course. The participants were chosen by convenience sampling.

3.2.Data collection

In October 2023 at the start of the introductory lecture, preservice teachers completed assessments, and again at the end of the course in January 2024. The Effective Communication Scale (Buluş et al., 2017) was used to gather survey data. The scale consisted of 34 items in five factors: Ego Enhancing Language (e.g., “I criticize those around me for their errors without causing them harm”), Active/Participative Listening (e.g., “I look people in the eye when I communicate”), Self-Recognition/Self-Disclosure (e.g., “As an individual, I find it easy to express myself”), Empathy (e.g., “Usually, I can relate to the other person”), and I messages(e.g., “I can express my emotions in a language that suits the other people in response to their bad behavior”). Internal consistency metrics measured by Cronbach alpha range from 0.73 to 0.85. The response options are presented on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

13 participants were interviewed in the researcher's office before the pre-and post-test procedures at the start and finish of the course. Participants were asked to share at the start of the course how they had experienced challenges with effective communication, as well as how the drama exercises had improved their communication skills in light of previous challenges and how they felt about the potential implications for their careers at the end of the course. To provide a deeper understanding, questions like "Could you give an example?" and "Can you explain?" are also asked. The interviews, which lasted 20 to 25 minutes, were audio recorded. The author transcribed every interview word for word.

3.3.Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics 26 was used for all survey data analysis. A Shapiro-Wilk test was used to determine whether the data distribution was normal. In both the pre-and post-measurements, every variable under examination had a normal distribution ($p > 0.05$). The survey data was subjected to Paired-Sample T-tests to examine any changes in preservice teachers' effective communication skills. Effect sizes were calculated to help understand the magnitude of the effect and its practical significance. Cohen's d was used to represent the effect sizes, which are interpreted as small (d=0.2), medium (d=0.5), and large (d=0.8; Cohen, 1988). Significance was established at $p < 0.05$.

In the qualitative analysis, for a comprehensive grasp of the dataset's content, the author conducted a

thematic analysis in which the author reread textual data, listened to audio recordings, and took notes on the data. Following that, the author used coding to perform a methodical analysis of the data until every one of the data had been coded and the relevant data had been gathered for each code. To find areas of overlap and similarity between codes, the coded data was examined. Codes were changed to themes, and the connections between themes were investigated. The evolving themes were then examined in light of the coded data and the dataset as a whole. Consequently, the final themes were defined and given names.

4. Results

The results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses are presented in this section. In line with the research questions, the findings were arranged into four main sections: (1) Preservice teachers' opinions on the challenges in effective communication (2) Preservice teachers' opinions on the effects of drama course on the challenges in communication skills, (3) PSTs opinions in terms of the course's effect about their potential career implications, and (4) PSTs' perceived changes in their communication skills.

4.1.Preservice teachers'opinions on the challenges in effective communication

Preservice teachers were asked what challenges in effective communication they experience. Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews identified two key themes: Interactional challenges and emotional challenges.

4.1.1.Interactional challenges

Participants in general mentioned that they do not often engage in reciprocal conversation with peers or instructors; and that they have problems with how to approach people, initiate conversation, or meet peers. All participants acknowledged that the pandemic and earthquake had forced them to pursue online education, which had prevented them from interacting with peers and instructors in person. As a result, relationships have become colder and more distant. For example, one preservice teacher mentioned that, "Nobody greets each other. I never thought college would be like this" (Preservice teacher (PST) 06, female preservice teacher). A few participants admitted that they didn't know the names of some of their classmates. One participant (PST 01, female preservice teacher) shared, "Some of the students in my class have names I have never even heard of, much less spoken to". Many students commented that proper eye contact, smiles, and greetings are lacking among peers. Additionally, nearly half of the participants stated that they have no desire to meet new people:

Everyone converses only with their pals. They convey through their body language and appearance that they do not want to talk, even though we want to. (PST 04, female preservice teacher)

Most participants mentioned, that due to their lack of conversational interaction, they are unable to support teamwork and group communication. One preservice teacher spoke about groups in their classes:

When working in groups, we are unable to cooperate with others because only close friends would ever stand by one another. We ask them questions in the WhatsApp group, but they never respond. (PST 05, male preservice teacher)

Participants voiced that they usually lack mutual respect, care, and support for one another and cannot sustain a good class climate:

In some presentations, our friends are so disrespectful and do not listen that it is really difficult to present that assignment. Nobody listens to each other, some don't even listen to the teacher, how can there be proper communication? (PST 02, male preservice teacher)

Most participants—about half—revealed that they have some communication problems with their peers and instructors as they do not use the supportive language they need. A participant (PST 03, male preservice teacher) said " Even when it comes to answering questions in class, I hesitate. The teachers are stern and show no sympathy when I give a wrong answer*".*

Several of the participants commented on how they respond to each other face-to-face, the way they react to one another—consciously or unconsciously—is crucial to building rapport and understanding, which can pique their interest in interacting further but "There is a lack of curiosity about others… People don't try to talk to me even when I make an effort… They would realize how much fun I am if we could communicate". (PST 11, male preservice teacher)

4.1.2.Emotional challenges

Participants expressed their fear of being judged when conversing with others, speaking in front of the class, presenting homework, or responding to questions from instructors. People avoid greeting one another and hesitate to strike up a conversation for fear of being criticized. One preservice teacher mentioned, "As a third-grader, I haven't given a public speech yet.

I am afraid of addressing my friends or the instructor, I am afraid of not being able to express myself, of being funny, and of them judging me. In some classes, I do not answer questions, even if I know them, lest the teacher chastise me". (PST 13, female preservice teacher)

Most participants mentioned that people avoid greeting one another and hesitate to strike up a conversation for fear of being criticized: " To be honest, I'm awkward when I talk to new people because I feel like they'll judge me and their body language excludes me". (PST 08, female preservice teacher)

They stated that sharing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences with others is difficult because they are unable to build trust and form deeper relationships:

… To be honest, I'm nervous to talk to people because I think they'll think less of me and might misunderstand me. After all, they don't know me". (PST 10, male preservice teacher)

4.2.Preservice teachers'opinions on the effects of drama course on the challenges in communication skills

4.2.1.Interactional effects

Every participant reported feeling more conscious of the need to actively listen to and try to understand those around them, especially their peers. As an illustration, a preservice teacher pointed out, "After drama activities, I noticed that if I greet everyone I know and make eye contact, my friends seem more attentive and I can sense this from their body language". (PST 09, male preservice teacher)

Even though most participants noted they already demonstrated respect and care about others, their capacity to hear well and respond appropriately vastly improved:

When people communicate with me, I don't believe I am being disrespectful. However, I've seen that when I take into consideration other people's opinions, relationships improve. I noticed that my peers in my drama classes also got better. They are not as selfish as they used to be and are somewhat supportive when others interact with them". (PST 12, male preservice teacher)

The participants' greater understanding made it possible for them to listen well, respond appropriately, and collaborate meaningfully as they got to know each other and worked together during drama activities. Another preservice teacher stated:

I believe that getting to know others had the greatest impact on me. The more I got to know my classmates, the more I liked them. My friends and I are now working together more and supporting each other both inside and outside of the classroom. (PST 07, female preservice teacher)

One participant (PST 08, female preservice teacher) shared, "Each time I participated in drama activities, I was able to interact with friends I had never spoken to before, develop a closer friendship with them, and work together in groups. For example, a friend of mine whom I had never spoken to before wanted to hug me the other day in the canteen".

Some students' participation in the drama course resulted in more conscious efforts to use constructive criticism. Participants shared their personal experiences as well as their observations of others' efforts to uplift and improve others rather than tearing them down:

…I can say that the drama course taught me and friends of mine how to criticize things and point out people's strengths and weaknesses so they can improve without suffering harm. (PST 02, male preservice teacher)

Another student teacher (PST 13, female preservice teacher) shared, "I can now see how damaging language can be when it is used accusatorily. I attempt to communicate my ideas clearly and without using hurtful language, while also being mindful of other people's feelings." Certain participants proposed the idea of holding drama workshops for instructors, believing that they would benefit from constructive criticism:

Some instructors also need to take this course because they should understand how to use positive language without offending. (PST 10, male preservice teacher)

4.2.2.Emotional effects

Participants stated that they got to know themselves better after drama sessions. They asserted the awareness about their emotions, thoughts, wishes and needs, strengths and weaknesses, and skills:

I questioned myself during the drama activities. What do I like to do the most or what do I get angry at? What made me happiest, what were the breaking points in my life? Or what are the qualities I look for

in a friend? I found myself thinking about these. (PST 08, female preservice teacher)

Another participant (PST 02, male preservice teacher) voiced that he overcame his timidity during activities and shared, " During the activities, I realized how ready-made I am. I was created to improvise, I thought I couldn't do it at the beginning of this course. For example, I could also write poetry or a story".

Almost all participants reported that their fear of self-disclosure had subsided as a result of the drama course. They admitted to having difficulty sharing private information about themselves with others, as well as the impact of representations of themselves on one's public self-image:

Drama taught me to stop being afraid of what other people thought of me. I don't think twice about disclosing personal information about myself. It gave me hope. Despite my withdrawal, the drama made me feel more confident… I consider what might happen and I no longer feel fear when speaking up or taking part in events. My courage has grown. (PST 03, male preservice teacher)

Although most of the participants claimed to have adequate empathy before taking the drama course, they admitted that they gained a deeper understanding of another person and were able to comprehend another person's experience from that person's point of view:

We have reserved friends, and everyone in the class now tries to understand and be supportive of those who struggle to express themselves. I've also learned to put myself in their shoes. (PST 01, female preservice teacher)

Some students' participation in the drama course resulted in more conscious efforts to develop empathy. One participant (PST 02, male preservice teacher) said, "I think I've become more empathic; now when I speak, It feels good to think about how the other person might be feeling and modify my language accordingly".

Several participants suggested that the drama course not be elective and taken in the first semester, as this would have improved the opportunity to get to know oneself and each other better, allowing them to disclose themselves earlier:

I wouldn't explain myself to someone, even if they paid me. I was worried about how I would come across to others and whether I would look horrible… I was surprised when some of our quiet classmates joined in on role-playing or improvisation activities. I saw what they were capable of. It suggests that when the time is right, everyone can reveal who they are… But because of this course, I was able to express myself in various roles and realized that I wasn't a disgrace. Perhaps if we had taken the drama class in first grade, we could have communicated more effectively. (PTS 06, female preservice teacher)

4.3.PST opinions in terms of the course's effect on their potential career implications

Psts were asked what are their potential career implications for their communication skills after the drama course. Two major themes emerged from the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews: implications for the educational process and implications for the relationships between and among students, colleagues, parents, and management staff.

4.3.1.The educational process

Participants stated that if a teacher can share personal information about himself/herself credibly, this will serve as the foundation for students' self-disclosures:

Teachers and students can have a good relationship and students will be more comfortable expressing themselves if we are more sincere and tell the students about our attitudes, feelings, and thoughts. I believe they would be more successful if they felt more at ease during class. (PST 11, male preservice teacher)

Many of the participants expressed that if teachers were more forthcoming with their personal information, it would foster a better atmosphere for education as learners become more at ease asking and responding to questions as well as participating in class discussions. One preservice teacher (PST 04, female preservice teacher) shared, "As a teacher, I can be expressing my ideas and feelings about the class, myself, or whatever for students to feel more at ease during class and to ask me questions or respond to my questions… This entails active participation and, eventually, increased learning". (PST 12, male preservice teacher)

Most of the participants disclosed that drama games get students energized, engaged, and ready to work in their groups and enhance teamwork and communication and they would probably use this method for their classes:

Through the drama method, firstly students entertain during class as they play games and during role-plays or improvisions, when they split into groups

and they will work together, they communicate with each other even though they do not know or like each other. (PST 03, male preservice teacher)

Participants indeed most liked the warm-up activities to be made use of in their classes. "When students first meet, I can use warm-ups I learned here so they can get to know each other and themselves better. So that they can form better relationships and a warm class climate."(PST 13, female preservice teacher)

The drama method refreshes the learning environment according to the participants and the teacher can draw children's attention and get them involved in activities. One participant shared, "Drama makes an authentic atmosphere so students do not easily deconcentrated or bored. They can engage, participate, and actively listen to the teacher… I will certainly make use of drama in my classes" (PST 01, female preservice student)

Nonverbal communication skills and the importance of listening were also addressed by participants. According to their statement, they now place greater emphasis on using gestures and eye contact to draw students' attention, elicit answers to questions, and motivate listening during classroom instruction:

Facial expressions like nodding or giving a smile of agreement should be used to encourage students to speak or furrowing of the eyebrows to show displaying nervousness may upset students… These are as important as what the teacher says. (PST 05, male preservice student)

Drama's potential help to solve communication problems among students was also another matter of concern. Some participants talked about empathy and drama's contribution to students' caring and understanding of others:

Drama activities taught me to understand others, in the same way my students could understand what other students especially lazy or reserved ones feel or think and behave accordingly. Using drama in class, they may not use humiliating language for other students if they fail or have problems actively participating. (PST07, female preservice student)

Because of their negative college experiences, nearly all participants place the utmost importance on empathy and positive criticism for their future careers. They frequently addressed their potentially lazy, reserved, or misbehaving students:

In the course of our work, we must ascertain the causes of misbehavior on the part of students. Do they struggle with friends or family? After we have the answers, we must work to stop the bad student behaviors without harsh criticism. (PST 05, male preservice teacher)

Many participants noted that they would not use language that constantly finds flaws or conveys disapproval when they interact with their students, citing their increased ability to use language that highlights both strengths and weaknesses. One of them voiced, "All students have both successes and failures. We can't discount their abilities or knowledge. We can assess our students on both their strengths and weaknesses so they can improve and learn from their mistakes. They won't progress in class if they are ashamed of the things we assert to them". (PTS 06, female preservice teacher)

Most of the participants stated that even in higher institutions students generally lack of necessary listening skills. They asserted a need to role model or teach students how to become active listeners:

Even though it may appear that the students are listening, they occasionally hear but do not comprehend. It is our responsibility as educators to act in a way that motivates students to actively listen. We need to make an effort to get to know them by name, maintain eye contact, and demonstrate our interest in the topics they are talking about. (PST 03, male preservice teacher)

4.3.2.The relationships with/among students, colleagues, parents, and management staff

Participants seemed very aware of their future roles as teachers to educate the students, communicate with the parents, and collaborate with other teachers and administrators. Some of the participants discussed how to have successful interpersonal interactions in a teacher-student relationship and how these interactions affect students' motivation and success. They also discussed empathy and teachers' attitudes and how these factors affect interpersonal relationships in the classroom:

I realized how important empathy is in the relationship between the teacher and the students… I must first get to know my students well, and learn their names and social background. And then listen to them carefully, try to understand them, and put myself into their shoes. When they do not study, listen to me, or give wrong answers to my questions, I must use constructive language not to hurt them but to

encourage them if I want a good relationship and eventually success. (PST 03, male preservice teacher)

Several student teachers also discussed how good the relationships that exist between administrators and other educators affect how well teachers perform in their field and how they employ active and beneficial methods of instruction. A participant mentioned, "If we do not form a quality communication with our colleagues or the principal, it will probably cause conflicts and give rise to dissatisfaction and demotivation… For a good school climate, all the staff should have a sense of empathy, supportive language, and a desire to get to know others well. So that they can work collaboratively". (PST 06, female preservice teacher)

Preservice teachers also urged drama activities to teach them lessons for their future interactions with parents while exchanging thoughts and knowledge regarding the progress of the kids both at home and at school. As parents become more involved in teachers' practices and problems arise as a result of these interventions, effective communication with parents is said to be increasingly important:

Parents these days want to know everything that happens in class. WhatsApp groups are so engaging for teachers because parents ask whatever and whenever they want. There are arguments in these groups and even face-to-face… Teachers must know to send true messages to parents not in a blaming way providing insights into one another's perspectives. (PST 09, male preservice teacher)

Participants also stressed the collaboration with parents to ease problem-solving, allow expression of feelings and thoughts, and enhance understanding of teachers' and parents' expectations:

When there is a problem with the student, school–home collaboration is important. Teachers and parents must express their thoughts mutually and teachers must listen to the parents actively to solve the problems… What teachers and parents expect must be spoken and handled with good intentions and empathy to cooperate and be in true dialogue. (PST 10, male preservice teacher)

Some participants expressed a need for reciprocal listening. Both the teacher and the students should pay attention to one another, listen, and make an effort to comprehend, respect, use, and read body language appropriately. One of them (PST 11, male preservice teacher) mentioned, "Students will follow suit when their teacher pays close attention to what is being said, uses appropriate body language, and conveys that he/she respects and cares about the topic at hand. This will encourage students to listen to one another, make friends, and work together harmoniously".

4.4.PSTs' perceived changes in communication skills

Changes in the effective communication skills of preservice teachers following the drama course are reported in Table 2. While every post-test score was greater than the pre-test score, only four of those scores were statistically significant at the 5% confidence level.

Table 2
Pre- and post-test of Effective Communication Skills Scale

	Mean (pretest)	Mean (posttest)	T	p
Ego Enhancing Language	3.72	3.91	-2.208	.032*
Active/Participative Listening	4.00	4.29	-3.000	.004*
Self-Recognition/Self-Disclosure	3.36	3.52	-1.383	.173
Empathy	3,92	4.04	-1.143	.259
I message	3.57	3.87	-3.725	.001*
Whole Scale	3.75	3.96	-3.146	.003*

In a nutshell, effective communication skills of preservice teachers showed a moderate improvement, as indicated by a medium to large effect size ($t(44)= -3.14$, $p =0.003$, $d=0,60$). The ego-enhancing language scores of preservice teachers showed improvements with a small-to-medium effect size ($t(44)= -2.20$, $p =0.032$, $d = 0.42$). For preservice teachers' active/participative listening scores and I message scores ($t(44)= -3.72$, $p =0.01$, $d = 0.72$) medium-to-large effect sizes were also noted ($t(44)= -3.00$, $p = 0.004$, $d = 0.60$). There were no significant differences in self-recognition/self-disclosure and empathy scores (Self-recognition/self-disclosure p=0.17; empathy p= 0.25). The findings indicate that participants felt stronger about their capacity for effective communication following the drama course especially in employing ego-enhancing language and I message as well as active/participative listening skills.

5. Discussions

This study set out to accomplish two goals. The primary objective was to examine how a drama course affects preservice teachers' communication skills; the second used qualitative methods to investigate preservice teachers' challenges in effective

communication and the course's effectiveness about prior challenges and potential career implications.

The global outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has severely disrupted education worldwide, including graduate teacher education. Aside from the pandemic, the earthquake that struck Turkey in 2023 forced students to enroll in online courses. The professional education classes that needed to be attended in person have been canceled. Communication between peers and instructors has therefore suffered because it primarily relies on face-to-face interaction (Chiarchiaro et al., 2022). In line with earlier studies on the benefits of drama activities, this study found that preservice teachers' effective communication skills were lower at baseline (d = 0.6) but increased following a one-semester drama course, as represented by a medium to large effect size. In a study conducted with preservice teachers, Kalidas (2014) concluded that participating in drama enhanced students' communication skills and gave them access to a whole new world through the practice of body language, gestures, and music. According to Dickinson et al. (2016), drama is a creative, emotionally impactful, and pedagogically effective way to help students build their interpersonal and communication skills for engaging in dynamic interactions with others. Drama fosters harmony, participation, and interaction which reduces anxiety in students (Partab, 2012). It also improves students' communication skills, which benefits group discussions and gets rid of shyness (Aydeniz & Ozcelik, 2012; Aykaç, 2013). Furthermore, it boosts students' self-confidence by giving them the ability to communicate effectively (Aykaç, 2013). Drama in the classroom, according to Phillips (1999), encourages speaking among students and provides opportunities for nonverbal interactions through gestures and facial expressions. By taking on roles, students who are hesitant to speak up or who are not used to working in groups may expand their everyday identities.

Preservice teachers assessed themselves as having the strongest active-participative listening skills and the weakest self-recognition/self-disclosure skills before the drama course. This is in line with a different study that looked at the impact of teacher candidates' cognitive emotion regulation styles on their communication skills (İhtiyaroğlu, 2018). Trust, interpersonal solidarity, and dynamic relationships are all positively connected with self-disclosure (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Wheeless, 1978). Before engaging in drama activities, Preservice teachers were asked about the challenges to effective communication. A thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews showed that preservice teachers found it difficult to communicate their innermost feelings, thoughts, and reflections to other people because they were unable to build stronger bonds of trust.

A small but not significant improvement was observed in self-recognition/self-disclosure scores of PSTs after the drama course even though almost all of the participants felt that they got to know their thoughts, emotions, personal characteristics, personal values, strengths, and weaknesses better and their fear of self-disclosure had been overcome and they found it easier to divulge personal information to others as a result of the drama course. The course's duration could be one factor contributing to the absence of notable changes in self-recognition/self-disclosure. For students who had not had much previous contact, a two-hour drama course per week for eleven sessions may not have been sufficient to foster the personalization and direct relationships necessary for self-disclosure in communication. Greater changes in preservice teachers' self-recognition/self-disclosure may necessitate more prolonged and more specific interventions. These interventions are beneficial for future teachers as through teachers' self-recognition they recognize their values and biases that might color their perception of others and assess the effects of their behavior on students (Hamachek, 1999). Meanwhile, self-disclosure enhances pupil opinions of emotional learning (Sorensen, 1989), increases the clearness of the material provided for students (Downs et al., 1988), and provides a highly individual means of student-teacher communication (Fusani, 1994). Drama activities are important for self-recognition/self-disclosure, according to Altınova and Çiftçi (2013), as the individual who sincerely shares his feelings and thoughts during drama sessions realizes that feeling these emotions does not have a negative effect and that feeling these emotions is normal. This relief improves students' self-confidence and positive self-perception allows explaining themselves more easily, and develops a sense of trust in other group members, the work environment, and the leader.

Preservice teachers scored the highest on active-participative listening items at baseline which is a substantive finding, as research found out that graduate students evaluate their active listening skills as very good, and they receive the highest scores in active listening in similar research (Gün, 2018; İbekçi & Çetintaş, 2022; Söğüt et al., 2018). Furthermore, preservice teachers' active-participative listening

scores showed significant improvements, as indicated by medium-to-large effect sizes. These outcomes align with the findings of McNaughton et al. (2008), who discovered that role-plays helped preservice teachers show statistically significant improvements in their active listening skills. Dereli (2018) studied how a creative drama-based program for personnel relations education affected the communication skills of prospective teachers and found out that prospective teachers' active listening scores improved significantly after the training. This finding is also quite intriguing because in-depth interviews revealed the challenges preservice teachers faced before the drama sessions, such as a deficiency in conversational interaction, making eye contact, smiling, greeting others, and listening and responding to others in a way that enhances peer understanding and promotes cohesiveness in groups. Nobody can ignore the importance of listening to the communicative effectiveness of teachers because, teachers who actively listen to their students can create a learning environment in the classroom, improve their pedagogical choices based on their ability to listen, and set an example of good listening behavior for their students (Bozik, 1987). Empathy is an important element of active listening it as it relates to developing an emotional bond with someone else via recognition, caring, emotion, and awareness. Even though the majority of participants said they had sufficient empathy before enrolling in the drama course, they acknowledged that they were able to understand other people's perspectives and developed a deeper understanding of other people. To listen to someone's worries is to hear them with an open mind, without trying to solve their problems specifically. However, as opposed to the significant changes in active listening scores of PSTs, changes suggested only a slight improvement in empathy scores even though, according to Thompson (2018), mastering the art of active listening can help one better comprehend the needs, feelings, perceptions, ideas, and desires of others. If the people they love listen to them with empathy, students are more inclined to learn cognitive strategies like paying attention, taking organized notes, making associations, asking meaningful questions, gathering information, and focusing on their main idea (Vitalaki & Katsarou, 2021). During in-depth interviews conducted before the drama exercises, participants revealed that they struggle with public speaking, asking and answering questions, and giving presentations because their peers and instructors lack the necessary empathy. Given the previous results, it can be inferred that teacher candidates may not be aware of or recognize themselves enough, leading them to believe that they are good listeners and empathetic to others, while others fall short in these domains.

Preservice teachers demonstrated significant improvements in ego-enhancing language skills (d = 0.42) and I message skills (d = 0.72). It is feasible to consider ego-enhancing language and I message to be complimentary elements of successful communication. Similar to ego-enhancing language that highlights others' shortcomings without making them seem weak or as though they can compensate for them, I messages do not have the negative effects that come with you messages and allow the listener to be helpful and considerate rather than angry (McWhirter & Voltan-Acar, 2005). Accordingly, effective communication involves not passing judgment on the listener, but rather explaining how the listener's undesirable behavior affects the environment and the feelings of others; speaking in a way that does not disparage, degrade, or insult another person's qualities without making the other person feel weak and unworthy. For people to be aware of their feelings and to communicate those feelings honestly, they must first listen to themselves, which makes self-recognition and self-disclosure essential for I messages and ego-enhancing language (Kubany et al., 1992). In interviews conducted before drama sessions, participants stated that they are harshly criticized by peers and instructors and do not receive any encouraging words. After taking part in the drama course, some students claimed to have tried to apply constructive criticism. The participants discussed both their personal experiences and what they perceived as intentional attempts on the part of others to create rather than destroy. These results are supported by Aykaç and Keski's (2014) findings that drama for moms enhanced their use of language with their kids and helped them get past communication obstacles to communicate effectively. Similarly, Dereli (2018) observed that student teachers' ego-enhancing and I message scores significantly improved following their involvement in creative drama-based training. Most of the participants claimed to have gained knowledge on how to utilize drama games as a means of self-expression, networking, and getting to know one another. Using drama games in the classroom helped students become more enthusiastic, involved, and prepared to work in groups, which will benefit them in their future careers. Another issue addressed by preservice teachers is the potential of drama to foster empathy and caring in students, as evidenced by

research by McNaughton (2004) who discovered that students who participated in drama games demonstrated improved communication, empathy, expressiveness, and teamwork. As per the participants' reports, educators can reenergize the learning environment and grab students' interest by using the drama method. Adedina (2021), who defines drama as a mirror of self-examination and evaluation, particularly in understanding human motivation and behavior that can promote effective learning, highlights the connection between drama in education and entertainment.

The significance of listening, and verbal and nonverbal communication were also covered by the participants. They emphasized the positive language they would use in the classroom to foster genuine relationships with their students because they are aware of the effects language has on communication, as noted by Mottet et al. (2004), who stated that pupils are far more inclined to have conversations with instructors who are open and self-aware and using positive language. Participants also mentioned that they would emphasize using gestures and eye contact more when teaching to get students' attention, elicit answers to questions, and promote listening. Preservice teachers asserted they were going to encourage their students to listen to one another and speak openly because that is what they learned from drama activities. To create a sense of belonging in the educational setting and to establish a connection with students' individual and social stories, listening is an essential part of teaching. Listening, according to Gallagher & Ntelioglou (2013), is a vital part of teaching to connect with students, and their personal and cultural narratives and to create a community in class, and drama serves as a medium for students whose voices have been silenced to be heard. The importance of teachers as friends, mentors, rule enforcers, and gatekeepers of academic success is highlighted by Davis (2001). An adverse relationship between a student and their teacher can hinder the student's academic progress, whereas a positive relationship can be an added advantage. It is imperative, for these reasons, to examine the factors that affect the formation of relationships between students and teachers as well as how these relationships can act as sources of social motivation to support students' learning and academic success.

Given that effective communication is essential for building relationships not only with students, but also with parents, colleagues, and other school staff (Backlund & Black, 1988), participants also emphasized the importance of having effective communication with supervisors, colleagues, and parents to build active and cooperative relationships that would benefit students' success in the future. According to Bakic-Tomic et al. (2015), negative relationships are shaped in all directions by the communication that occurs between coworkers, students, administrators, and parents. Dialogue, successful cooperation, and mutual satisfaction are influenced by interpersonal skills such as empathy, relationship building and maintenance, and effective interpersonal communication. Fuentes et al. (2017) suggest that teachers should set out on a knowledge search to better understand their students, parents, colleagues, and administrators to develop effective communication skills. Since teachers are communicators, their success is largely dependent on how well they can convey ideas, attitudes, and values.

6. Conclusions

Drama classes in teaching faculties have the potential to improve preservice teachers' utilization and development of communication skills as drama activities convey a setting for communication skills. Significant progress was noted by student teachers in the fields of ego-enhancing language, active/participative listening, and I message. Participating student teachers experienced that they had emotional and interactional challenges to effective communication. The drama course offered ways to get over these challenges and gave the chance to improve one's understanding of oneself and others, get over shyness, use supportive language, build stronger relationships, and collaborate more successfully. The study's conclusions showed that engaging in dramatic activities can help students overcome challenges and improve their ability to communicate effectively.

Drama's impact on preservice teachers' communication skills has been the subject of partial inquiries in previous years. This is the first study that, to the best of my knowledge, focuses on the communication challenges faced by pre-service teachers, how the drama course affects those challenges and their future career implications. The study's findings add perspectives from student teachers to expand the corpus of research showing how drama affects communication challenges.

All things considered, this study on the intersection of drama and communication skills can influence the field of education by encouraging the creation of cutting-edge methods for overcoming communication challenges and improving the

communication skills of preservice teachers through either drama courses or workshops/programs to promote productive relationships and successful student learning outcomes in their future careers.

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