

Lifelong Learning Competency Perceptions of Teacher Candidates According to a Teacher Training Program*

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to analyze the competency perceptions of teacher candidates relating to life-long learning in terms of several variables within the scope of a teacher training program. The sample of this study consists of 965 teacher candidates having education in the 3rd and 4th grades in the Faculty of Education of Celal Bayar University in the 2014-2015 academic year. "The Life-long Learning Competency Scale", developed by researchers as a data collection tool and Screening Model were used in the study. Analysis of the data was performed with an SPSS 17.00 program. From the results obtained from this study, it is seen that a significant difference has been created in the "personal enterprise and entrepreneurship competency perception" attitudes of teacher candidates in terms of the gender variable. Hence, the reasons for these differences should be sought in detail by studies carried out in the future.

INTRODUCTION

In the present day when information has a rapidly increasing area of influence, the most important determinative factors in the development of societies are education, educated people and an educated work force. Education is a process beginning with the birth of an individual (Hursen and Birinci 2013). A close follow-up of improvement in one's career and self-renewal is possible merely with life-long learning. Life-long learning has a superior place among studies carried out in the field of education around the world as "life-long learning" is a concept that can be realized anywhere, and removes any limitation such as place, time, age, education level etc. The life-long learning concept mentioned frequently in recent years, is dealt with in the development plans, strategic plans and future-oriented politics of many countries. Even the European Union declared the year 1996 as a life-long learning educational year, and developed life-long learning projects including prospective targets by entering negotiations with member and candidate countries (Akbas and Ozdemir 2002; Poyraz and Titrek 2013).

Harpe and Radloff (2001) highlighted that students should be trained to become life-long learners in an information society emphasizing that both teacher and students should be equipped with information related to the subject of life-long learning. In doing so, teachers should be in

continuous interaction with their students in the teaching-learning process (Efilti and Coklar 2013). Learning opportunities have remarkable importance in the education process and take place via life-long learning (Ozcan and Uzunboylu 2012).

In a school focusing on life-long learning, a self-directed life cycle needs to be taught by means of learning by placing the student and his needs at the center (Demirel 2009). This situation enables the desire and will to learn to last throughout his lifetime (Ozcan 2011).

The training of individuals as life-long learners is only possible if the teachers themselves are life-long learners. Teachers both as a source of information and the ones transferring the same (Halis 2002) aim to induce a positive behavioral change in students by arranging planned education activities within the scope of a given program (Erden 1998). The reason for this is the radical changes in the functional definitions of work, skills and the concepts discipline with the arrival of the digital age (Jaros 2014).

In the teaching profession, which requires general culture, field information and professional information teachers have roles such as representatives, leaders, information sources, judges, negotiators, trainers, parents and consultants (Sisman 2003; Aytac 2015). Teachers should have some other competencies along with these roles. These competencies are generally expressed as "learning and teaching skills", "communication

skills”, “personality traits”, “modern and scientific thinking skills”, “teaching planning and implementation skills”, “effectively using information technologies”, “personal and professional improvement planning and performance” and “leadership skills” (Tan 2007).

Chapman et al. (2003) emphasized the necessity for developing the competencies of teacher candidates relating to life-long learning in education by referring to the importance of teacher education on reaching life-long learning societies. Teachers as life-long learners should constantly be doing research both in their areas of expertise and other fields of interest (Ozkartal 2014). Furthermore, they should “be curious”, “be interested in new developments and subjects”, “be information literates”, “have organizational skills”, “have learning skills”, “be researchers”, “have communication skills”, “use technology effectively”, “be creative”, and “have teamwork skills” as life-long learners (Demiralay and Karadeniz 2008; Titrek et al. 2013).

Quality in teacher education is determined by the quality of the teacher candidates, the quality of the education program, and the quality of the substructure, equipment and management (Eristi 2004). Accordingly, the education of qualified teachers can be acquired through the equipment of teacher education programs in accordance with the purposes and requirements of the age, as well as through reaching quality standards with integrity. The fact that teacher and teacher candidates have life-long learning competencies will enable them to effectively realize “being mediators in providing the social change role” attributed to them. From this point of view, it will be meaningful and significant to discuss life-long learning in a process where we increasingly feel the requirements thereof, particularly in terms of teacher candidates for teacher training programs. Moreover, the importance of life-long learning will be revealed in teacher-training institutions. In this respect, the general aim of this study is to deal with the competency perceptions for life-long learning of teacher candidates within the scope of teacher training programs. Answers to the following research question are sought to reach this general aim:

Is there any significant difference in the competency perceptions of teacher candidates for the life-long learning approach in terms of gender, grade levels, departments and academic average within the scope of a teacher training program?

METHODOLOGY

Study Group

The sample of this study consists of 3rd and 4th grade teacher candidates with an education in teachig Turkish, Science, Social Sciences and Primary School in the Faculty of Education of Celal Bayar University in the 2014-2015 academic year. The whole sample was reached as the researcher works in the same faculty. Also, no sample selections were carried out.

It was determined that 548 (56.8%) of the teacher candidates were female, and 417 (43.2%) were male; 297 (30.8%) of students were in the 3rd grade, and 668 (69.2%) were in the 4th grade. It was determined that 231 (23.9) of the teacher candidates were Turkish teachers, 231 (23.9) were Science teachers, 243 (25.2%) were Social Sciences teachers and 260 (26.9%) were Primary School teachers. When academic average of the teacher candidates was examined, it was seen that 150 (15.5%) had an academic average between 2.01-2.50, 433 (44.9%) between 2.51-3.00, 326 (33.8%) between 3.01-3.50 and 56 (5.8%) had an academic average between 3.51-4.00.

Data Collection Tool

The study data were collected according to the “Life-long learning Competency Scale” developed by researchers. The scale is associated with the literature and consisted of four sub-dimensions: “learning to learn competencies”, “communication competencies”, “technological and digital competencies”, and “personal enterprise and entrepreneurship competencies”. 8 key competencies (Demirel 2009; Sahin et al. 2010; Uzunboylu and Sarigoz 2015; Rogers 2006) were used for naming the sub-dimensions of the scale. There were 31 articles in total on the Life-long Learning Competency Scale. The classification of articles on the scale used the 5-point Likert Scale, namely, “Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neutral”, “Agree” and “Strongly disagree”. All the statements on the scale were positive and they were graded with numeric values from 5 to 1 for “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree”. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of internal consistency calculated based on the article analysis for study reliability was determined as 0.95 for the whole scale. Moreover, the reliability coefficient was 0.90 for the first factor, 0.89 for the second

factor, 0.88 for the third factor, and 0.77 for the fourth factor. A 0.70 or higher reliability coefficient for a test was sufficient for the reliability of the test points (Ozdamli 2009; Hung et al. 2010; Buyukozturk 2006). In light of the obtained results, it can be stated that the scale is reliable both for the whole and for its sub-dimensions.

Data Analysis

In this study, the “Screening Model” was based on the aim of determining the competency perceptions of teacher candidates for the life-long learning approach within the scope of a teacher training program. Descriptive statistical methods and a SPSS-17 statistical package program were used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

In this part of the research, demographic data about the teacher candidates who participated in the survey, the data obtained about the scale and its sub-dimensions, and the statistical findings about this data are presented.

There are analysis results of the answers of the teacher candidates participating in the research to life-long learning competency scale depending on the demographic variable of the gender in Table 1. An independent t test was used to determine whether there was a difference in the life-long learning competency perceptions of teacher candidates in terms of gender. When the data in Table 1 are examined, no significant difference is seen in the learning to learn, communication, technological and digital, and general life-long learning competency perceptions ($p>0.05$) in terms of the gender variable. However, a significant difference ($p<0.05$) was found in the personal enterprise and entrepreneurship competency perceptions of female teacher candidates in terms of the gender variable.

There are analysis results of the answers of the teacher candidates participating in the research to life-long learning competency scale depending on the demographic variable of the grade in Table 2. An independent t test was used to determine whether there was a difference in the life-long learning competency perceptions of teacher candidates in terms of their grade lev-

Table 1: t-test analysis result of answers given to the Life-long Learning Competency Scale (LLCS) by the teacher candidates in terms of the gender variable

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	S.d.	t	p
Life Long Learning	Female	548	134.0511	13.68532	1.22	0.22
	Male	417	132.9712	13.59455		
Learning to Learn Competency	Female	548	55.2956	6.13053	0.81	0.42
	Male	417	54.9688	6.26049		
Communication Competency	Female	548	39.3504	4.47678	1.89	0.06
	Male	417	38.8082	4.35687		
Technological and Digital Competency	Female	548	25.9818	3.23538	-0.11	0.91
	Male	417	26.0048	3.35266		
Personal Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Competency	Female	548	13.4234	1.49330	2.45	0.02

Table 2: t-test analysis result of answers given to the Life-Long Learning Competency Scale (LLCS) by teacher candidates in terms of the grade variable

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	S.d.	t	p
Life Long Learning	3 rd Grade	297	132.8215	13.61606	-1.16	0.25
	4 th Grade	668	133.9237	13.66098		
Learning to Learn Competency	3 rd Grade	297	54.9158	6.19745	-0.80	0.43
	4 th Grade	668	55.2605	6.18247		
Communication Competency	3 rd Grade	297	38.8215	4.34941	-1.38	0.17
	4 th Grade	668	39.2470	4.46412		
Technological and Digital Competency	3 rd Grade	297	25.8182	3.33500	-1.09	0.27
	4 th Grade	668	26.0689	3.26189		
Personal Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Competency	3 rd Grade	297	13.2660	1.37052	-0.82	0.41
	4 th Grade	668	13.3473	1.51920		

el. When the data in Table 2 are examined, no significant difference is seen in the learning to learn, communication, technological and digital, personal enterprise and entrepreneurship, and general life-long learning competency perceptions ($p>0.05$) in terms of the grade variable.

There are analysis results of the answers of the teacher candidates participating in the research to life-long learning competency scale depending on the demographic variable of the department of education Table 3. Variance analysis was used to determine whether there was a difference in the life-long learning competency perceptions of teacher candidates in terms of department. When the data in Table 3 are examined, no significant difference is detected in the

technological and digital competency perception sub-dimension ($p>0.05$) in terms of the department of education variable. However, a significant difference is found in the learning to learn, communication, personal enterprise and entrepreneurship, and general life-long learning perceptions ($p<0.05$). The Science department teacher candidates have lower points with respect to the teacher candidates in the Primary School, Turkish and Social Science departments.

There are analysis results of the answers of the teacher candidates participating in the research to life-long learning competency scale depending on the demographic variable of the academic average in Table 4. Variance analysis was used to determine whether there was a dif-

Table 3: One Way Anova test analysis result of answers given to the Life-Long Learning Competency Scale (LLCS) by teacher candidates in terms of the department variable

	Variance source	Sum of squares	Sd	Mean square	F	p
<i>Life Long Learning</i>	Between groups	3151.646	3	1050.549	5.722	.001
	Within groups	176452.721	961	183.614		
	Total	179604.367	964			
<i>Learning to Learn Competency</i>	Between groups	444.298	3	148.099	3.905	.009
	Within groups	36443.695	961	37.923		
	Total	36887.994	964			
<i>Communication Competency</i>	Between groups	541.575	3	180.525	9.435	.000
	Within groups	18387.426	961	19.134		
	Total	18929.001	964			
<i>Technological and Digital Competency</i>	Between groups	60.092	3	20.031	1.861	.134
	Within groups	10341.841	961	10.762		
	Total	10401.934	964			
<i>Personal Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Competency</i>	Between groups	30.847	3	10.282	4.783	.003
	Within groups	2065.924	961	2.150		
	Total	2096.771	964			

Table 4: One Way Anova test analysis result of answers given to the Life-Long Learning Competency Scale (LLCS) by teacher candidates in terms of the academic average variable

	Variance source	Sum of squares	Sd	Mean square	F	p
<i>Life Long Learning</i>	Between groups	1305.515	3	435.172	2.346	.071
	Within groups	178298.851	961	185.535		
	Total	179604.367	964			
<i>Learning to Learn Competency</i>	Between groups	360.985	3	120.328	3.166	.024
	Within groups	36527.008	961	38.009		
	Total	36887.994	964			
<i>Communication Competency</i>	Between groups	64.434	3	21.478	1.094	.351
	Within groups	18864.567	961	19.630		
	Total	18929.001	964			
<i>Technological and Digital Competency</i>	Between groups	48.267	3	16.089	1.493	.215
	Within groups	10353.666	961	10.774		
	Total	10401.934	964			
<i>Personal Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Competency</i>	Between groups	13.427	3	4.476	2.065	.103
	Within groups	2083.344	961	2.168		
	Total	2096.771	964			

ference in the life-long learning competency perceptions of teacher candidates in terms of their academic average. When the data in Table 4 are examined, no significant difference is seen in the technological and digital, personal enterprise and entrepreneurship, communication and general life-long learning competency perceptions ($p>0.05$) of the teacher candidates in terms of the academic average variable. However, a significant difference is found in the learning to learn competency perceptions dimension ($p<0.05$). Teacher candidates with averages of 3.01-3.50 have higher life-long learning competency perception points.

DISCUSSION

At the end of the study, it was seen that the competency perceptions of teacher candidates for the life-long learning approach did not change according to gender. However, the personal enterprise and entrepreneurship competency point averages showed a difference in favor of females. This result is also seen to be consistent with the literature (Kilic 2014; Gencel 2013; Sahin et al. 2010; Sarigoz 2015; Diker Coskun 2009). A significant difference was found between male and female students in favor of female students in the studies performed. In a study carried out by Leathwood and Francis (2006), the gender factor was considered to be the most important factor affecting the life-long learning process (Hursen 2011).

It was seen that competency perceptions of teacher candidates for the life-long learning approach did not differentiate in terms of grade. In a study carried out by Kirby et al. (2010), it was determined that grade was not relevant in life-long learning. However, it was seen in the present study that 4th grade students had higher point averages than 3rd grade students. This result can be interpreted as the life-long competency perceptions of teacher candidates enhanced as their grade advanced. Karakus (2013) emphasized in her study that the life-long learning competencies of students were enhanced as their grade advanced. Oral and Taha (2015) stated in their study that awareness relating to life-long learning enhanced as the students' grade advanced.

No difference was detected in the technological and digital competency sub-dimension in terms of the department of education. However, a difference was found between the learning to learn, personal enterprise and entrepreneurship, communication and general life-long learn-

ing competency perceptions. The Science department teacher candidates had lower points with respect to the teacher candidates in the Primary School, Turkish and Social Science departments. From the teacher candidates' points of views, it can be stated that teacher candidates in programs in which Math courses are emphasized have lower perceptions with respect to programs where non-Math courses are emphasized. In a study performed on teacher candidates with an education in different departments by Oral and Taha (2015), it was concluded that students with an education in Social Sciences or non-Math departments had higher perceptions with respect to students with an education in Science and Math and general Math departments. Similar results were obtained in a study carried out by Sahin et al. (2010). From these studies, it can be stated that students with an education in non-Math departments are more sensitive to learning to learn, personal enterprise and entrepreneurship, communication, and life-long learning competencies compared to students in Math departments. On the other hand, in a study carried out on life-long learning by Kozikoglu (2014), significant differences were found between students with an education in different departments in favor of students with an education in Math departments in terms of the program type demographical variable.

No significant difference was found between the technological and digital, personal enterprise and entrepreneurship, communication, and general life-long learning competency perceptions in terms of the average variable of the teacher candidates. However, a significant difference was found in the dimension of learning to learn competency perceptions. Teacher candidates with averages of 3.01-3.50 have higher life-long learning competency perception points. From this point, it may be stated that the importance of the learning to learn competency, which is an important sub-dimension in the life-long learning approach, becomes increasingly apparent as the averages of the teacher candidates increase because the learning to learn, synergy and novel literacy fields are crucial indications of quality in teacher education (Basturk and Yucel 2004).

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results obtained from this study, it is seen that a significant difference has been created in the "personal enterprise and entrepreneurship competency perception" attitudes of

teacher candidates in terms of the gender variable. Also, significant differences were found between the “learning to learn competencies perceptions”, the “communication competency perceptions”, the “personal enterprise and entrepreneurship competency perceptions”, and the general “life-long learning perceptions” in terms of the department variable. Hence, the reasons for these differences should be sought in detail by studies carried out in the future, and teacher-training institutions should make the required arrangements in this direction.

Courses to obtain the life-long learning competency in particular should be incorporated into the education programs of the courses given by the Faculty of Education.

NOTE

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