Teachers’ Lifelong Learning Competencies

Öğretmenlerin Yaşam Boyu Öğrenme Yeterlikleri

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Abstract

The professional competencies of English Language Teachers were determined in a research in 2007, and the research results showed that ELT Teachers’ competencies consisted of four main subgroups, namely Curriculum Competencies, Lifelong Learning Competencies, Social-Cultural Competencies and Emotional Competencies. As a result of the research, Lifelong Learning Competencies emerged as the most important competencies for ELT Teachers. Teachers’ lifelong learning competencies support sustainable development of students. Thus, teachers must also have lifelong learning competencies to acquire their roles and responsibilities. Depending on this result, teachers’ lifelong learning competencies are discussed in this paper in relation to sustainable development of teachers, students and society.

Keywords: Lifelong learning skills, teachers’ competencies, professional development.

Öz


Anahtar Sözcükler: Yaşam boyu öğrenme becerileri, öğretmen yeterlikleri, mesleki gelişim.

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Introduction

In the educational context, lifelong learning skills have become important international and national agenda and have been discussed in academia after the 1990s (Okumoto, 2008). The Commission of the European Communities (2007; Fontelles & Enestam, 2006) mentioned the list of indicators connected with monitoring progress in the field of education and training. The list includes five educational indicators which measure the benchmark of education. One of the educational indicators is related to participation in lifelong learning skills of individuals who are between the ages 24-26. It is known that lifelong learning is a way of personal fulfillment of people living and working in sustainable developing societies and individuals.

Lifelong learning skills create opportunities for individuals and society which contribute to the development of an inclusive society. Lifelong learning is also crucial for democratic, social, technological and economical development of societies. The individuals need lifelong learning skills for personal fulfillment and development in order to support active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. By the end of formal learning-teaching processes, the lifelong learning skills equip young people for adult life. The important question is how individual can acquire these skills. The answer is that schools must teach and improve these skills because individuals should have opportunities for the acquisition of lifelong learning skills in learning-teaching process.

Knapper and Cropley explain the meaning of the concept of lifelong learning as “The single crucial element in the notion of lifelong education is to be found in the word ‘lifelong’: it embraces a set of guidelines for developing educational practice (‘education’) in order to foster learning throughout life (‘lifelong)” (2000:9). According to Candy “lifelong learning takes, as one of its principal aims, equipping people with skills and competencies required to continue their own self-education beyond the end of formal schooling” (cited in Mourtos, 2003:1). These definitions indicated that lifelong learning can be fostered by means of educational system. Lifelong learning skills do not refer to the specific knowledge that the students acquire during their formal education process (Dong, 2004). It refers to acquiring knowledge and skills that they continue their own learning after the formal education process. LLS are the competencies of the individuals who apply these skills in their life process to gain new performance and follow all of the development related to their lives.

The concept of lifelong learning has five main features which create learning opportunities for the whole life process such as meeting the needs of learners and society, creating motivation for learners to learn, self-actualization of learners, introducing ways for creation and construction of knowledge, and developing learning skills of learners. Lifelong learning is a lifetime process of development including formal, informal and non-formal educations which accept the importance of promoting lifelong learning. School is the best place for developing individuals’ lifelong learning skills because no matter they are
children, young, mature and elderly, they have been in the school in their lifetime. However, a question might be asked. “Who is responsible for improving students’ LLS in the school?”

The answer is that teachers have the responsibility for equipping students with lifelong learning skills to become lifelong learners for themselves. It is necessary that teachers must have competencies about lifelong learning to improve not only their own LLS but also their students’ LLS. According to Theodosopoulous “in European level teachers’ competencies have been described and efforts been made to encourage their active participation in lifelong learning” (2010, 153). Thus, teachers must have Lifelong learning competencies in order to become lifelong learners in their lives and they must also become lifelong learning leader in the school and society. Teachers must have LLS related to acquiring their responsibilities and roles in educational system and society. LLS are the main competencies for teachers since they form a basis for sustainable development of teachers and students by means of learning and teaching. Thus, teachers have to know the acquisitions of lifelong learning skills for both themselves and their students.

Information and technological developments show that school is not the only place for learning the subject-matter knowledge in the formal learning-teaching system. Therefore, school must be a place where an individual must gain the LLS during the formal learning-teaching process. Thus, establishing effective school can be depending on lifelong learning competencies of teachers. If teachers have LLC students become lifelong learners “from cradle to grave”. According to Jarvis (2009, 12-13) “teachers must also recognize the art of teaching.” Art of teaching means that teachers should have LLC in order to acquire teaching roles and responsibility in the school. It is known that competencies are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes related to professional development in any area or field. Teachers’ LLC consist of many skills that improve learning and teaching in the school. In this study, teachers’ LLC include skill development of teachers and students about lifelong learning. LLS are the main competency area for teachers and they include two sub-skills Sub-skills include two sub-skills such as Teachers Lifelong Learning Skills and Teachers Lifelong Learning Skills Related to the Students’ Lifelong Learning Skills. Teachers will be responsible for promoting their professional development and students’ development (Iorga, 2010) in educational system by means of their LLC. The results of this research and all of the discussion were carried out based on this idea.

Method

In this study, teachers’ lifelong learning competencies were determined in two main stages. The first stage includes determining the English language teachers’ competencies in 2007, and the second stage includes determining teachers’ lifelong learning competencies. English language teachers’ (ELT) competencies were determined in 2007 by means of Conventional Delphi Technique by the researcher (Selvi, 2007). The research results showed that English language teachers’ competencies were composed of four main subgroups; Curriculum Competencies, Lifelong Learning Competencies, Social-Cultural Competencies and Emotional Competencies. The results of this research are different than the traditional teachers’ competencies such as professional competencies, social-cultural competencies and field competencies. The research in 2007 shows that the lifelong learning competencies emerged as the most important competencies related to teachers’ competencies of ELT. In 2009, the Lifelong Learning Competencies of ELT were reanalyzed and discussed by ten teachers who work at primary and high schools. The group of teachers worked together and discussed the Lifelong Learning Competencies of ELT by means of face to face brainstorming meeting. The brainstorm technique was applied during the group discussion, and they decided that all teachers must have LLC same as ELT lifelong learning competencies. At the end of the brainstorming study, ELT lifelong learning competencies were converted to teachers’ LLC by teachers’ views as seen in Table 1. At the end of teachers’ analysis and discussion, very little changes occurred in lifelong learning competencies of ELT, and so they were converted to
teachers’ LLC for all teachers. Based on the research result, teachers’ lifelong learning competencies are discussed in this paper in relation to sustainable development of teachers, students and society.

Findings

The result of the research is related to teachers’ lifelong learning competencies (TLLC) consisting of 32 items which are necessary for teachers and students as seen in Table 1. Teachers’ lifelong learning competencies consisting of two sub-skills areas are as seen in Table 1. The first one is related to teachers’ own lifelong learning skills and the second one is related to the roles of teachers for the development of students’ lifelong learning skills in learning-teaching process. Teachers’ own lifelong learning skills and teachers’ lifelong learning skills related to students’ learning can be seen in Table 1 from the most important ones to the least important ones.

Table 1
Teachers’ Lifelong Learning Competencies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Item Scoring 81% or Higher Levels of Agreement</th>
<th>Percentage of Agreement</th>
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Teachers own Lifelong Learning Skills

1. Being aware of one’s own abilities as a teacher ........................................ 98
2. Dealing with professional publication ......................................................... 96
3. Being aware of one’s own abilities as an individual .................................. 96
4. Determining one’s own educational needs as a teacher ................................. 95
5. Cooperating with colleagues and professional organizations in order to develop LLC ................................................................. 94
6. Being aware of students’ learning problems .................................................. 94
7. Evaluating one’s own teaching competencies as a teacher .............................. 93
8. Benefiting from in-service teacher training opportunities as a teacher .......... 92
9. Participating in scientific activities (course, symposium, seminar, conference) ................................................................. 92
10. Behaving in accordance with professional ethics .......................................... 92
11. Using technologies in professional life ......................................................... 90
12. Benefiting from colleagues’ experiences ...................................................... 90
13. Searching in-service teacher training opportunities ...................................... 89
14. Getting feedback from concerned people (families, school masters, inspectors, other teachers) about one’s own teaching performance as a teacher ................................................................. 84
15. Cooperating with other teachers, professionals and parents for improving students’ learning to learn competencies ........................... 81

Teachers’ Lifelong Learning Skills Related to the Students’ Lifelong Learning Skills

16. Helping students improve their learning strategies .......................................... 93
17. Helping students improve their reading and comprehension skills ................ 94
18. Helping students improve their listening skills .............................................. 94
19. Helping students improve their writing skills .............................................. 92
20. Helping students improve their effective study skills ..................................... 92
21. Helping students improve their critical thinking skills ................................... 91
22. Helping students be aware of their learning styles ........................................ 91
23. Helping students improve their searching skills ............................................ 91

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24. Helping students improve their skills for effective time using
25. Helping students improve their self-assessment skills
26. Helping students improve their learning skills
27. Helping students improve their problem solving skills
28. Helping students improve their ICT skills
29. Determining readiness level of the students
30. Determining students’ learning styles
31. Supporting students’ participation in decision making process in class and school
32. Helping students to use their own learning strategies

As seen in Table 1, teachers’ lifelong learning skills were determined by at least 81% agreements of teachers. The percentage level of agreement did not change in the second stage of the research by the brainstorm group consisting of 73 ELT teachers and professors within three Delphi rounds during the first stage of the research. The brainstorm group approved of the skills for all other teachers who work in primary schools and high schools. At the end of the brainstorm meeting, the brainstorm group modified only items 5, 15, 16, 28 and 32, and they made minor changes in TLLC.

Research results clearly presented that two main sub-dimensions emerged related to TLLC. The first one is teachers’ own lifelong learning skills and the second one is related to the roles or duties of teachers in order to develop students’ lifelong learning skills in the school. This finding states that teachers should have competencies related to the development of lifelong learning skills which are necessary for both students and teachers. Teachers’ own lifelong learning skills that are the first sub-dimension of TLLC include fifteen items and these are related to developing teachers’ lifelong learning skills. Teachers’ own lifelong learning skills are related to personal and professional development of teachers. For example, the skills “Being aware of one’s own abilities as an individual” points out the personal development of teachers as individuals. The skill “Dealing with professional publication” is also related to the professional development of teachers. These skills reflected that teachers need personal and professional development in order to gain their own LLC. The first dimension of TLLS suggests that teachers’ own LLS are the main skills for teachers to master their capabilities and potentials as teachers.

The second sub-dimension of TLLC that includes seventeen items is related to students’ learning and these are related to developing students’ lifelong learning skills. TLLS which consist of teachers’ responsibilities and roles are related to developing students’ lifelong learning skills. It is clearly seen in Table 1 that these skills are based on teachers’ ability of teaching, communication and interaction with the students. These skills aim to develop students’ learning to learn abilities. For example the items “Helping students improve their listening skills” and “Helping students improve their searching skills” refer to the development of students’ learning to learn and self-direct learning skills. If students acquire these skills, they become lifelong learners in their lives. Teachers should teach and improve their students’ and their own learning abilities and skills. Students’ individual preferences of learning and abilities of learning to learn are strongly bound to students’ learning strategies and students’ learning styles. Every student brings a different set of experiences and knowledge related to his/her learning into the classroom. This kind of support in educational systems, which is related to lifelong learning skills of students, may develop students’ own learning strategies in the process of learning.

Discussion

The general framework of teacher competencies were explained in nine different dimensions as “field competencies, research competencies, curriculum competencies, lifelong learning competencies, social-cultural competencies, emotional competencies, communication competencies, ICT competencies and environmental competencies” (Selvi, 2010, 167-168). These competencies are very important for teachers in terms of professional and personal development. Thus, lifelong learning has become one of
the main issues for worldwide knowledgeable society and individuals. It is known that 1996 was the "European Year of Lifelong Learning," and UNESCO also pointed out that lifelong learning is among the main issues for planning the future of individual and society. Economical, cultural and technological changes lead individuals to review their own lifelong learning needs. LLS are main tools for individuals as teachers or students planning and managing for their future effectively. It means that teachers and students can design their own future based on their lifelong learning skills.

European Union redefined teaching profession based on lifelong learning competencies of teachers and “these competencies refer both to the initial and continuing development of the teachers, as well as to the kind of schools they should work and characteristics they should promote their students” (Theodosopououlos, 2010, 154). Thus, similar to Theodosopoulous’ study, the results of this study show that teachers have the responsibility to develop their own LLS and students’ LLS in the school. Teachers must encourage their students’ self-consciousness, flexibility, self-direct, independence and student-centered learning (Kogan, 2001). It means that teachers should monitor all of learning-teaching process that help acquire, maintain and develop teachers’ LLC and students’ LLS. Lifelong learning competencies of teachers can help to develop students’ self-direct learning methods. In educational contexts, TLLC can create positive impact on developing students’ lifelong learning skills. Teachers must improve their Lifelong learning competencies while studying in the school. Thus, teachers need to acquire lifelong learning competencies that provide them and their students with the opportunity for self-development and self-actualization by means of learning in life process.

The research results show that teachers’ lifelong learning skills consist of self-direct learning skills, ability of seeking out and access to knowledge, critical thinking skills, lateral thinking skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving skills, ability of planning projects, ability of evaluating alternatives, ability of working in teams and ability of working collaboratively with their colleagues and students. However, the lifelong learning skills are not limited to these skills and they were also defined as lifelong learning competencies by the teachers. Especially self-direct learning is the main and central skills for the lifelong learning of teachers and Theodosopoulous’ (2010) research reflects that self-direct learning comes up as the central feature of lifelong learning of teachers. Teachers should further improve, maintain and update their LLS during the lives of individuals. These results are very important for teacher trainees, teacher trainers and teachers for their future professional development. For example, problem solving skills, team work and collaborative work are very important for lifelong learning and future development of all professions.

It is seen that teachers’ lifelong learning competencies consist of teachers’ lifelong learning skills and skills about developing students’ lifelong learning skills. Teachers must have lifelong learning competencies in order to acquire their roles and responsibilities and also improve students’ LLS. In educational contexts, teachers’ lifelong learning competencies refer to sustainable development of teachers and students by means of learning. Sustainable development of teachers and students is based on lifelong learning skills of them. The results of the research seen in Table 1 reflected the important matter about TLLC that are composed of two main skills development of teachers. The first one is related to teachers’ own lifelong learning skills and the second one is composed of teachers’ responsibility related to developing students’ lifelong learning skills. The numbers of items concerning with teachers’ own LLS and TLLS related to students’ learning skills are almost the same number. It means that half of TLLS is related to becoming lifelong learner as teachers for professional development and the other half is related to teachers’ skills about their roles and responsibilities to make students become lifelong learners in the school. It can be concluded from this result that TLLC consist of teachers’ own LLS and students’ lifelong learning skills. The result also suggests that teachers’ roles in the learning-teaching process should be reviewed based on the idea and the concept of lifelong learning.

The Lifelong learning refers to the paradigm sifted through in educational arena. Lifelong learning is not a preparation for life for an individual, but it is a part of individual’s life itself. This idea refers to a
paradigm review in education and learning, and a new perception of these concepts is required. The paradigm review also refers to teachers and students’ attitudes towards teaching and learning. Lifelong learning needs to occur in many learning settings such as in family education, training institutions and informal education at home, at work at any time and anywhere in the life process of individual. In the formal education, system all teachers and their students need to develop their understanding of the concept of lifelong learning in order to improve their own lifelong learning skills. Lifelong learning skills must be gained by everyone in educational systems in order to strengthen the learning skills of individuals.

Teacher training colleges should have important responsibility in developing TLLC. According to Dong (2004), teacher trainees have to master self-learning methods and self-learning skills in order to meet the demands of their future professional lives. Ryan (2007, 202) stated that teacher trainees “epically in relation to taking responsibility for their own learning, the outcomes for these students in term of their learning were significant.” However, teacher training colleges, faculties or institutes may not be able to equip the teacher trainees with lifelong learing skills and knowledge that they need during the whole professional period. Teacher trainees need lifelong learning skills which supply essential tools for future professional careers in order to become self-learners and develop students’ LLS.

References

Geniş Özet

Öğretmenlerin Yaşam Boyu Öğrenme Yeterlikleri


