



Examining the Lifelong Learning Competencies of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

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In today's technology-driven era, the significance of continuous learning has grown exponentially, as individuals are required to acquire and develop new information and skills. This need has given rise to the concept of lifelong learning, which emphasizes the ongoing process of learning regardless of age, time, and location. This study aims to investigate the lifelong learning competencies of teachers, who play a crucial role in the learning processes of individuals, considering various variables.

Convenience sampling was used to select 329 teachers, and they were administered the 'Lifelong Learning Competency Scale' developed by Hürsen (2011). The scale comprises sub-dimensions such as 'self-management competencies', 'learning to learn competencies', 'initiative and entrepreneurial competencies', 'knowledge acquisition competencies', 'digital competencies', and 'decision-making competencies'. Data analysis was performed with JAMOVI program using descriptive statistics, Independent Sample t-Test, ANOVA, Pearson Correlation Analysis and regression analysis.

The findings of the study indicated that teachers' lifelong learning competencies were at a high level, particularly the 'self-management competencies' sub-dimension, which demonstrated exceptional results. The remaining sub-dimensions also displayed high competency levels. Furthermore, the study concluded that teachers' lifelong learning competencies did not exhibit significant differences based on their gender, marital status, or the type of school they worked in.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, the rapid progress and continuous renewal of information have created the need for individuals to acquire and develop new knowledge and skills required by the age, by adapting to this situation both in their daily and professional lives. This has increased the importance of learning and learning environments that are not limited to age, place, or the completed vocational education, but can also be continued in professional life. Emphasized particularly in ensuring social development, continuous learning has taken its place in the literature as the concept of lifelong learning in recent years.

Through the need for new learning, changes in science and technology have revealed that continuing learning everywhere and at every age is crucial for the development of humanity (Akbaş & Özdemir, 2002). Continuous learning is a natural part of life in today's conditions. Toprak and Erdoğan (2012) define lifelong learning as the process of developing individuals' personal and professional competencies throughout life in line with their own wishes. Güleç, Çelik, and Demirhan (2012) state that lifelong learning enables individuals to keep up with social and cultural development and participate in the economy in every environment and time while the limitation of formal education is eliminated. Berberoğlu (2010) defines lifelong learning as the completion of missing and insufficient data in formal education or the discovery of previously undiscovered talents. Odabaş and Polat (2008) express that the European Union defines educational activities to improve knowledge, skills, and competence as lifelong learning. In the definitions of lifelong learning, all kinds of educational programs that individuals need in adapting to constantly changing and developing conditions both in their daily and professional lives attract attention.

Teachers are role models in terms of gaining lifelong learning skills in individuals; thus, the level of changing and developing competencies that they have is important (Gencil, 2013, p.248). Due to the increasing importance of lifelong learning, the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning under the Ministry of National Education was established in 2009 to plan and carry out studies on supporting and improving teachers' professional competencies in our country. In the "Turkey: Lifelong Learning Strategy Paper" by the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning under the Ministry of National Education, LLL competencies are listed as communication competencies in the mother tongue, communication competencies in a foreign language, basic competencies in mathematics and science-technology, digital competencies, learning to learn competencies, and entrepreneurial competencies (Doğan & Çalışkan Toyoğlu, 2019). In this context, this study aims to determine the views of teachers working in public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education regarding lifelong learning competencies.

METHOD

The study was conducted as survey research. Survey research is the process of collecting and analyzing data in order to determine the views of a certain group. It is a research method used to examine and analyze a subject or problem area (Büyüköztürk et al., 2020). In the study, the teachers' views on lifelong learning competencies were analyzed in terms of whether there was a significant difference according to gender, age, marital status, education level, length of professional life, type of school they work in.

Participants

The participants in this study are teachers employed in public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Ankara. The sampling method used was convenience sampling, which was selected to obtain a sample that was readily available and easily accessible. This approach was chosen to ensure practicality and cost-effectiveness in conducting the study

(Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 329 individuals included in the sample.

Table 1. *The Participants' Demographics*

Variable	Descriptive Features	n	%
Gender	Female	211	64 %
	Male	118	36 %
Marital Status	Single	78	24 %
	Married	251	76 %
Age	30 years and below	29	9 %
	Between 31-40	89	27 %
	41 and above	211	64 %
Education Level	Bachelor's	200	61 %
	Master's	129	39 %
Professional Seniority	1-10 Years	62	19 %
	11-20 Years	113	34 %
	21 Years and above	154	47 %
Type of the School They Work in	Preschool	60	18 %
	Primary School	119	36 %
	Secondary School	50	15 %
	General High School (Anatolian or Science High School)	48	15 %
	Vocational High School or Anatolian Technical Vocational High School	52	16 %

According to the data in Table 1, 64% of the participants were female and 76% were married. The ages of the participants showed that 64% were 41 years old and above, 27% were 31-40 years old and 9% were 30 years old and below. While 61% had a Bachelor's degree, 39% had a Master's. 47% had been working for 21 years or more, 34% for 11-20 years, and 19% for 1-10 years. In terms of school type, 36% had been working in primary school, 18% in preschool, 16% in vocational high school or Anatolian technical vocational high school, 15% in secondary school, and 15% in general high school.

Research Instruments and Processes

The study's data collection tools are the personal information form and the "Lifelong Learning Competency Scale (LLCS)" to measure teachers' competencies regarding lifelong learning. Developed by Uzunboylu & Hürsen (2011), the five-point Likert-type scale consists of six sub-dimensions: "learning to learn competencies", "self-management competencies", "initiative and entrepreneurial competencies", "digital competencies", "knowledge acquisition competencies", and "decision-making competencies". The internal consistency of the scale reliability was determined by calculating the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. The reliability coefficients found in Hürsen's (2011) and the current study are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Findings on Reliability

The Scale and Its Subdimensions	n	Hürsen (2011)	Current Study
LLCS	329	.96	.95
SMC	329	.91	.94
LLC	329	.91	.95
IEC	329	.91	.80
KAC	329	.81	.87
DC	329	.87	.90
DMC	329	.85	.91

Self-Management Competencies (SMC), Learning Learn Competencies (LLC), Initiative and Entrepreneurial Competencies (IEC), Knowledge Acquisition Competencies (KAC), Digital Competencies (DC), Decision-Making Competencies (DMC).

According to the data in Table 2, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for the scale is .96 while the reliability coefficients of the sub-dimensions vary between .80 and .95.

To gather the data, a questionnaire was distributed electronically to teachers employed in public schools under the Ankara Provincial Directorate of National Education. The researchers reviewed the participants' responses and proceeded with the analysis phase. A social sciences analysis software was employed to analyze the data, utilizing mean and difference tests. In order to assess the normality of the data, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients were examined. Table 3 presents the findings regarding the skewness and kurtosis coefficients.

Table 3. Findings on the Data Normality

The Scale and Its Subdimensions	n	Skewness	Kurtosis
LLCS	329	-0.51	0.70
SMC	329	-0.52	-0.16
LLC	329	-0.21	-0.77
IEC	329	-0.45	0.18
KAC	329	-0.83	0.90
DC	329	-0.66	0.05
DMC	329	-0.47	0.04

Self-Management Competencies (SMC), Learning Learn Competencies (LLC), Initiative and Entrepreneurial Competencies (IEC), Knowledge Acquisition Competencies (KAC), Digital Competencies (DC), Decision-Making Competencies (DMC).

Since the skewness kurtosis coefficients of the data are between -1 and +1.0, it is assumed that the data are normally distributed (Hair et al., 2013). Since the data were normally distributed, they were analyzed with parametric analysis methods. Independent Sample t-Test, ANOVA, Pearson correlation and regression analyses were performed for difference tests.

Ethic

The ethics committee application of the study was made to Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University Ethics Committee.

RESULTS

The findings of the study which aimed to examine teachers' views and attitudes toward lifelong learning competencies according to different variables, are presented here. The teachers' competency levels toward lifelong learning are given in Table 4.

Table 4. *Teachers' Attitude Levels Toward Lifelong Learning Competencies*

The Scale and Its Subdimensions	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
LLCS	329	4.15	0.43	High
SMC	329	4.22	0.58	Very High
LLC	329	4.13	0.61	High
IEC	329	4.14	0.45	High
KAC	329	4.20	0.67	High
DC	329	4.12	0.77	High
DMC	329	3.98	0.74	High High

Self-Management Competencies (SMC), Learning Learn Competencies (LLC), Initiative and Entrepreneurial Competencies (IEC), Knowledge Acquisition Competencies (KAC), Digital Competencies (DC), Decision-Making Competencies (DMC).

According to the data in Table 4, the teachers' mean score in the LLLCS was found to be at a high level ($x=4.15$). Analysis of the sub-dimensions revealed that the mean score in the 'self-management competencies' dimension was very high ($x=4.22$) and the mean scores in the other sub-dimensions were at a high level.

As a result of the difference analysis, no significant difference was found in the teachers' mean scores on the LLLCS according to their gender, marital status, and the type of school they work in. The results of the independent sample t-Test conducted to see whether the teachers' mean scores on the LLLCS showed a difference according to their education level are given in Table 5.

Table 5. *Comparison of the Teachers' LLLCS Mean Scores with Their Education Levels*

The Scale and Its Subdimensions	Groups	n	M	SD	T	p
LLCS	Bachelor's	200	4.10	0.44	-2.83	0.00
	Master's	129	4.23	0.40		
Self-Management Competencies	Bachelor's	200	4.14	0.60	-3.31	0.00
	Master's	129	4.35	0.51		
Learning to Learn Competencies	Bachelor's	200	4.07	0.63	-2.19	0.03
	Master's	129	4.22	0.58		
Initiative and Entrepreneurial Competencies	Bachelor's	200	4.10	0.46	-1.86	0.06
	Master's	129	4.20	0.45		
Knowledge Acquisition Competencies	Bachelor's	200	4.18	0.65	-0.60	0.55
	Master's	129	4.23	0.70		
Digital Competencies	Bachelor's	200	4.08	0.78	-1.26	0.21
	Master's	129	4.18	0.73		
Decision-Making Competencies	Bachelor's	200	3.93	0.75	-1.57	0.11
	Master's	129	4.06	0.72		

Based on the data presented in Table 5, there is a significant difference in the mean scores of teachers' LLLCS (Lifelong Learning Competency Scale) based on their education level. Specifically, teachers with a Master's degree (mean score: 4.23) exhibited a significantly higher LLLCS mean score compared to teachers with a Bachelor's degree (mean score: 4.10). Additionally, significant differences were observed in the mean scores of the sub-dimensions 'self-management competencies' and 'learning to learn competencies' based on teachers' education level. The mean score of teachers with a Master's degree significantly differed from the mean score of teachers with a Bachelor's degree in these sub-dimensions as well.

ANOVA Test was conducted to see if there was a significant difference among the teachers' LLLCS mean scores according to their professional seniority. Thus, the teachers' LLLCS total mean scores did not differ according to their professional seniority while the mean scores in some of the sub-dimensions differed according to it. The data on the sub-dimensions in which the LLLCS mean scores differed significantly according to professional seniority are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparison of the Teachers' LLLCS Mean Scores According to Their Professional Seniority

The Scale and Its Subdimensions	Groups	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Sum of Squares	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Difference
Self-Management Competencies	1. 1-10 Years	62	4.17	0.55	Within 2 Between 326 Total 328	4.13	0.017	2>3
	2. 11-20 Years	113	4.35	0.55				
	3. 21 Years and above	154	4.15	0.59				
Learning to Learn Competencies	1. 1-10 Years	62	4.01	0.62	Within 2 Between 326 Total 328	6.77	0.001	2>3-1
	2. 11-20 Years	113	4.29	0.61				
	3. 21 Years and Above	154	4.05	0.59				

Based on the data provided in Table 6, significant differences were observed in the mean scores of the 'self-management competencies' ($F=4.13, p<.05$) and 'learning to learn competencies' ($F=6.77, p<.05$) dimensions based on the teachers' professional seniority. Further analysis using the Post-Hoc test revealed that in the 'self-management competencies' dimension, teachers with 11-20 years of professional seniority (mean score: 4.35) displayed a significantly higher mean score compared to teachers with 21 years and above (mean score: 4.15). Similarly, in the 'learning to learn competencies' dimension, teachers with 11-20 years of professional seniority (mean score: 4.29) exhibited significantly higher mean scores compared to teachers with 1-10 years (mean score: 4.01) and those with 21 years and above (mean score: 4.05).

ANOVA Test was conducted to assess whether the teachers' mean scores on the LLLCS showed a significant difference according to age. The teachers' total LLLCS mean scores were found to not differ according to it. However, the mean scores in some of the sub-dimensions differed according to age. The data on the dimensions in which the LLLCS mean scores differed significantly according to age are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Comparison of Teachers' Lifelong Learning Competency Scale Mean Scores by Age

The Scale and Its Subdimensions	Groups	n	Mean. (x)	SD	Sum of Squares	F	p	Difference
Learning to Learn Competencies	a. 30 Years and Below	29	4.12	0.63	Within 2 Between 326 Total 328	3.33	0.037	b>c
	b. 31- 40 Years	89	4.27	0.61				
	c. 41 Years and Above	211	4.07	0.60				

According to the data in Table 7, the mean score in the LLLCS 'learning to learn competencies' ($F=3.33$, $p<.05$) was found to differ significantly according to the teachers' age. As a result of the Post-Hoc test, it was seen in the 'learning to learn competencies' dimension that the mean score of the teachers between the ages of 31-40 ($x=4.27$) was significantly higher than that of the teachers between the ages of 41 and above ($x=4.07$).

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

The study findings indicate that teachers' mean scores in the domain of 'Attitude Levels Toward Lifelong Learning Competencies' were generally high. Specifically, the mean score for the 'self-management competencies' sub-dimension was exceptionally high, while the mean scores for the sub-dimensions of 'learning to learn competencies', 'initiative and entrepreneurial competencies', 'knowledge acquisition competencies', 'digital competencies', and 'decision-making competencies' were also at a high level.

Regarding the factors analyzed, no significant differences were found in teachers' attitudes toward lifelong learning competencies based on gender, marital status, or the type of school they work in. However, there was a significant difference based on their education level. Teachers with a Master's degree demonstrated significantly higher attitude levels toward lifelong learning competencies compared to those with a Bachelor's degree. This difference was particularly evident in the 'self-management competencies' and 'learning to learn competencies' sub-dimensions, where the mean scores of teachers with a Master's degree significantly differed from those of teachers with a Bachelor's degree.

Overall, the teachers' attitude levels toward lifelong learning competencies did not exhibit significant differences based on years of professional seniority. However, significant differences were found in certain sub-dimensions. Specifically, in the 'self-management competencies' sub-dimension, teachers with 11-20 years of professional seniority demonstrated a significantly higher mean score compared to teachers with 21 years and above. Similarly, in the 'learning to learn competencies' sub-dimension, teachers with 11-20 years of professional seniority displayed a significantly higher mean score compared to teachers with 1-10 years of experience and those with 21 years and above.

These findings suggest that teachers with 11-20 years of professional seniority exhibit higher levels of lifelong learning competencies and are more open to new learning experiences compared to those who are new to the profession and those who have been working for 21 years or more.

The teachers' attitude levels toward lifelong learning competencies were observed to not differ significantly according to age in general, but in the 'learning to learn competencies' subdimension, the mean score of teachers between the ages of 31-40 was significantly higher than the mean score of teachers between the ages of 41 and above.

Kazu and Erten (2016) conducted a study on teachers' lifelong learning competencies and found that teacher competencies were at a significantly high level. They also discovered that female teachers had higher knowledge acquisition and digital competencies compared to male teachers. The same study revealed a decline in knowledge acquisition and digital competencies with increasing age. However, the level of learning to learn, decision-making, and lifelong learning competencies remained consistent across different years of work experience. Moreover, the study found no significant differences in teacher competencies based on education levels but did observe variations according to the type of school where teachers were employed.

Similarly, Özçiftçi and Çakır (2015) reported higher lifelong learning tendencies among female teachers compared to male teachers. Şahin and Arcagök (2014) did not find gender differences in the sub-dimensions of lifelong learning competencies but identified significant variances based on professional seniority and education level. Torun and Seçkin (2021) investigated lifelong learning competencies and observed significant differences based on gender and school grade level but not according to age, education level, and seniority. Other studies by Babanlı (2018), Ayra (2015), Diker Coşkun, and Demirel (2012) also indicated significant differences in competencies based on gender.

Demirel, Sadi, and Dağyar (2016) found that teachers' lifelong learning competencies were high and did not differ significantly based on gender, years of work, or school type. Yıldız Durak and Tekin (2020) noted no significant differences in teachers' lifelong learning tendencies based on gender and professional seniority but did observe variations based on age and education level.

The collective findings from these studies highlight the importance of lifelong learning processes for teachers to continuously enhance their professional skills and adapt to evolving technology. It emphasizes the need to support teachers' lifelong learning practices, plan education based on needs analysis conducted by relevant institutions, and make lifelong learning the fundamental policy of national education. It is crucial to enrich and integrate lifelong learning practices with information and communication technologies, as well as foster collaboration between universities and educational institutions to improve the quality of lifelong learning processes.

To gain a deeper understanding, future research can be designed to explore the variables of gender, age, marital status, education level, professional seniority, and school type through qualitative methods alongside quantitative approaches. This would provide a comprehensive examination of teachers' lifelong learning competencies and their implications.

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