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RETHINKING FACULTIES OF EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING: UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the perspectives of undergraduate and graduate students who receive education in state university in Turkey regarding the transformation of faculties of education into lifelong learning environments. A qualitative research method was adopted, and data were collected in two main phases. In the first phase, written, open-ended responses were gathered from 70 undergraduate students from various departments who took the "Adult Education and Lifelong Learning" course over three consecutive academic terms (2022-2023 Fall, 2022-2023 Spring, 2023-2024 Fall). In the second phase, semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted in the 2023-2024 Spring term with 11 graduate students (5 with thesis, 6 non-thesis) from the Curriculum and Instruction department, all of whom are also in-service teachers. Data from undergraduate students were analyzed using inductive content analysis, while data from graduate students were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The findings indicate that both groups critique the theory-practice gap and demand an application-oriented curriculum. Other shared expectations include the evolution of the academic's role towards guidance and the faculty's integration with society. The graduate group also emphasized systemic issues, such as inter-institutional incoordination. Based on these stakeholder perspectives, the study presents a framework for transformation.

Keywords: Lifelong learning, faculty of education, teacher education, student perspectives, qualitative research.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is characterized by profound changes that necessitate continuous adaptation and development for both individuals and societies. In the contemporary knowledge society, the lifelong continuation of learning has become an imperative for career advancement and maintaining expertise (Dorfman-Furman, 2024). This paradigm, which moves learning beyond school walls to encompass the entire lifespan, positions lifelong learning (LLL) as a fundamental element of sustainable development (Terziev, 2015). This philosophy not only involves fostering a positive attitude toward personal and professional development (Sharma, 2021) but also offers a core conceptual framework for understanding the evolving functions of educational institutions in the 21st century (Demirel, 2009). In this context, higher education institutions (HEIs) assume a central role in the implementation of LLL policies (Knapper & Cropley, 1985). Universities are evolving from entities merely offering traditional diploma programs into centers that respond to societal and economic expectations by providing flexible learning opportunities (Smidt & Sursock, 2011). A review of the literature reveals that universities have developed diverse strategies to fulfill this role. These strategies include integrating LLL objectives into their institutional policies (Șavga & Livițchi, 2025), offering flexible learning pathways (Angwaomaodoko, 2025), designing professional development programs that blend formal, non-formal, and informal learning modes (Owusu-Agyeman, 2024; Candy, 1996), establishing industry-university partnerships (Otala, 1994; 1997), and creating technology-based networks that support personal learning ecologies in which students merge formal and informal learning (Koper et al., 2005; Peters & Romero, 2019). The fundamental aim of these efforts is to equip individuals not only with skills such as self-directed learning and metacognition (Dunlap, 1997) but also with 21st-century competencies, including digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-

solving (Mawas & Muntean, 2018). However, the integration of LLL into HEIs is not a seamless process. Studies indicate that even European universities are implementing this transformation at a slow pace due to a lack of workable strategies and funding (de Viron & Davies, 2014), and that the opportunities offered often remain focused on employment and career enhancement rather than citizenship development (Nesbit et al., 2007). Furthermore, it has been noted that an institution's heavy focus on research activities can hinder the transformation of its research results into educational products for a mass audience (Keller et al., 2023). This situation highlights that, although LLL is a universal principle (Kaplan, 2016; Jaldemark, 2020), each institution must develop unique strategies tailored to its specific context and challenges (Marcinkiewicz, 2020; Smidt & Sursock, 2011). This international literature reveals various LLL policies and implementation models (Law & Low, 1997). These global trends necessitate a rethinking of the role of faculties of education, which are at the heart of Turkey's teacher education system. Indeed, the most strategic actors in achieving the "learning society" ideal are the teachers who will transmit this philosophy to future generations. Therefore, the institution where a teacher is trained is expected to be a living example of a lifelong learning environment. Nevertheless, the literature in Turkey reveals criticisms that current programs are often overly theoretical (Zelyurt & Sucu, 2022) and that students expect more practical and innovative methods (Demirbolat, 2005). A significant portion of studies on LLL has focused on descriptively examining the existing tendencies or competencies of specific stakeholder groups (students, teachers, faculty members) (Gökyer & Türkoğlu, 2018; Hoşgörür, 2016; Kozikoğlu, 2014). Similarly, the general problems of graduate education are also frequently discussed topics (Karaman & Bakırcı, 2010; Kılınç et al., 2020).

Rapid developments in information and communication technologies are profoundly transforming social structures and professional competencies. In this dynamic era where knowledge is produced and becomes obsolete at a high velocity, the idea that individuals can sustain their entire careers with the skills acquired during their formal education has lost its validity (Ayçiçek & Yanpar Yelken, 2016). This new reality positions the philosophy of "lifelong learning" (LLL)—which refers to individuals actively participating in learning processes throughout their lives—as a central strategy for individual and societal development (Samancı & Ocakcı, 2017).In this transformation process, the role of teachers, who shape the future of societies, is of critical importance. For teachers to instill curiosity, inquiry, and a desire for continuous development in their students, it is essential that they first internalize these values as part of their own professional identity. It is therefore not surprising that a significant portion of the LLL literature in Turkey focuses on the dispositions of teachers and teacher candidates (Gündoğdu et al., 2016; Sirem, 2024). At this juncture, faculties of education, which are tasked with the mission of teacher training, emerge as the starting point for societal transformation. Consequently, it has become an imperative, not merely a choice, for faculties of education to move beyond being institutions that simply offer four-year programs and to restructure themselves as dynamic "lifelong learning environments" that promote continuous learning for all stakeholders. However, the extent to which faculties of education fulfill this role remains a significant point of discussion. The literature indicates that both faculty members and students criticize current programs for often remaining overly theoretical, lacking a strong practical dimension, and failing to exhibit the flexibility required by the modern era (Demirbolat, 2005; Zelyurt & Sucu, 2022). Student expectations are known to favor innovative, project-based approaches that foster critical thinking and provide greater opportunities for application (Demirbolat, 2005). This disparity between the targeted ideal and the current reality highlights a clear gap, necessitating an in-depth examination of its underlying causes. A review of the literature reveals that studies on LLL tend to address this problem in a fragmented manner. One branch of research focuses on examining the current lifelong learning tendencies and competencies of university students at a descriptive or correlational level (Duymuş & Sulak, 2018; Gökyer & Türkoğlu, 2018; Güven & Yıldırım, 2021; Kozikoğlu, 2014). Another branch centers on the perspectives and competencies of faculty members as the providers of the process (Ayçiçek & Yanpar Yelken, 2016; Hoşgörür, 2016). Similarly, the general problems of graduate education and student expectations are frequently analyzed (Aydemir & Çam, 2015; Bağrıacık Yılmaz

et al., 2017; Karaman & Bakırcı, 2010; Kılınç et al., 2020). However, there is a notable scarcity of research examining how the faculty of education, as an entire entity, can be transformed into a "lifelong learning environment." Specifically, studies are lacking that adopt a holistic and comparative perspective of the primary "recipients" of this process: the undergraduate teacher candidates and the graduate students (in-service teachers) who are re-evaluating the system through an academic and experiential lens.

The problem status of this research is further amplified by a recent paradigm shift in Turkey's teacher education policies. The Ministry of National Education's (MoNE) initiative to establish "Teacher Academies" to restructure professional development and pre-service preparation necessitates a re-evaluation of the traditional role and future position of faculties of education. This initiative may be viewed as an attempt to address the persistent theory-practice gap (Üredi, 2024) and the perceived inadequacies in pedagogical knowledge courses (Dönmez Yapucuoğlu et al., 2024), both frequently highlighted in the literature. On the other hand, this situation necessitates a redefinition of the roles of education faculties: in this new structure, will the traditional mission of faculties be diminished, or will it create an opportunity for them to establish a more distinct and complementary position? In this new context, it is foreseeable that the academies will likely focus on in-service training, practical skills, and the professional competencies specified by the MoNE. This situation necessitates that faculties of education assume a new, vital, and complementary role to this practice-oriented mission of the academies. Faculties can transcend the practical skills training provided by the academies to focus on helping teacher candidates and teachers construct more profound professional identities. This identity involves understanding the philosophy behind the techniques required for what Ural (2024) conceptualizes as the "passive transmitter technician" role. By equipping teachers with the competencies to become "reflective practitioners" who reflect on their own practices and "transformative intellectuals" who act with critical consciousness to advance the education system and society, faculties can fulfill this essential complementary function (Ural, 2024). While academies focus on technical skills, faculties can be repositioned as the institutions that cultivate teacher candidates' career commitment (Dursun & Tozoğlu, 2024) and career plans (Bayındır & Bolat, 2024), imparting the moral and intellectual dimensions of the profession. In an era where literature indicates an erosion of the teaching profession's prestige (Karakoyunlu, 2024) and confirms a strong link between professional satisfaction and mental well-being (Boyalıoğlu & Çobanoğlu, 2024), the role of education faculties is compelled to transform. In this context, it is understood that their traditional mission, focused on academic and pedagogical knowledge transmission, must be expanded to also equip teacher candidates against the affective and psychological challenges of the profession. Developing the internal resources that enable candidates to withstand the profession's challenges thus becomes at least as important as subject-matter knowledge. Foremost among these resources are a positive professional attitude, the resilience to face future difficulties, and a deep sense of commitment derived from the profession's intrinsic satisfactions. Therefore, in a system where academies may focus on technical skills, a fundamental mission of faculties can be redefined: to prepare candidates by explicitly equipping them with these psychological and affective competencies. This very requirement forms the core rationale for the necessity of transforming faculties of education into "lifelong learning environments." Because these affective qualities are not static information taught in a single course; they can only flourish within an institutional culture that presents learning as a way of life and promotes continuous development. When a faculty of education transforms into an LLL environment, learning ceases to be a mere prerequisite for graduation and becomes an integral part of one's professional identity. This environment offers candidates the chance to experience firsthand that the antidote to professional hardship is, in fact, continuous learning, renewal, and self-development. Thus, this transformation of faculties is not just an objective specific to the learning process, but also the most fundamental means of building the psychological resilience and professional commitment required by the profession.

Key to the important points mentioned above, the current research, beyond just a search for a general ideal, holds significant contemporary relevance in providing a roadmap from the voice of stakeholders on how faculties of education can transform themselves into indispensable LLL environments in this new era. In this context, the present study aims to provide a framework for the process of transforming faculties of education into LLL environments by analyzing the current situation comprehensively from the perspective of undergraduate and graduate students. The study aims to prepare the ground for future steps to be more targeted, efficient, and effective by revealing existing problems and needs directly through the voice of stakeholders. The findings of the study have the potential to provide an important basis for restructuring and improvement efforts by program development specialists, education faculty administrators, and policymakers. Especially in a period when the MoNE is undertaking new structurings like the Teacher Academies, this study offers suggestions on how faculties of education can define their role in this new system more proactively and indispensably.

The main problem of this study is: "What should an ideal faculty of education for lifelong learning be like, key to the views of undergraduate and graduate students?" The general aim of the research is to provide a stakeholder-centered framework that sheds light on the process of transforming faculties of education into LLL environments by analyzing the current situation comprehensively from the perspective of undergraduate and graduate students.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine in-depth the perspectives of undergraduate and graduate students on the transformation of faculties of education into lifelong learning environments and to establish a framework for the qualities an ideal faculty should possess. In line with this general aim, the study sought to achieve the following sub-objectives:

- To explore the components of an ideal lifelong learning environment from the perspective of undergraduate students (teacher candidates).
- To identify the adequacies and deficiencies of current teacher education programs within the context of lifelong learning, based on the experiences of graduate students (in-service teachers).
- To develop recommendations on how an ideal faculty of education should be structured in terms of curriculum, pedagogical approach, institutional culture, and societal role.
- To present a holistic conclusion by analyzing the common, similar, and divergent aspects of the views of undergraduate and graduate students.

Research Problem and Sub-Problems

The main research problem of this study is the question: "What should an ideal faculty of education for lifelong learning be like, based on the perspectives of undergraduate and graduate students?"

Within the framework of this main problem, answers to the following sub-problems were sought during the different data collection processes of the research:

Research Question for Teacher Candidates (Undergraduate Students):

1. What can be done to give faculties of education the quality of a “Lifelong Learning Environment”? What are your views on this subject?

Research Questions for Graduate Students (In-service Teachers):

1. What, in your opinion, is lifelong learning?
2. What are your thoughts on the place of lifelong learning in teacher education programs, in terms of aims, content, teaching-learning processes, and assessment?

3. What should the profile of a lifelong learning teacher candidate be like?
4. In the context of lifelong learning, what should the professional competencies of teacher candidates be?
5. How can teacher candidates be well-equipped in terms of general culture within the context of lifelong learning?
6. How can teacher candidates be well-equipped in terms of professional knowledge (pedagogy) within the context of lifelong learning?
7. How can teacher candidates be well-equipped in terms of subject-matter knowledge within the context of lifelong learning?
8. What should a lifelong learning academician be like?
9. What should a lifelong learning teacher be like?
10. In the context of lifelong learning, what should the interaction be like between academicians, teachers, and teacher candidates?
11. In terms of lifelong learning, what should the interaction be like between Faculties of Education, other CHE (Council of Higher Education) units, and Ministry of National Education (MoNE) institutions?
12. In Turkey, what is the role and function of Faculties of Education in the lifelong learning process? What should it be?
13. In Turkey, what is the role and function of Ministry of National Education institutions in the lifelong learning process? What should it be?
14. How should curricula in Faculties of Education be structured within the scope of lifelong learning?
15. How can teacher candidates, graduate students, teachers, and academicians contribute to the goal of a "lifelong learning society"?
16. For an entrepreneurial and productive society, what are your views on the importance of inter-institutional (CHE and MoNE) cooperation, and what can be done to promote joint activities?
17. In the lifelong learning process, what should the interaction be like between Faculties of Education, other CHE units, and MoNE institutions?
18. What can be done to give Faculties of Education the quality of a "Lifelong Learning Environment"? What are your views on this subject?
19. Are there any other topics you would like to add or suggest?

METHOD

This section provides information regarding the research design, study group, data collection instruments and process, data analysis, and the trustworthiness (validity and reliability) studies of the research.

Research Design

The research adopts a qualitative research design, as it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of individual experiences and perceptions regarding a specific phenomenon. It utilizes a **case study** design to elicit rich, multi-layered perspectives from participants regarding the phenomenon of the "ideal faculty of education."

Study Group

The study group consists of two main groups determined through convenience sampling, a purposeful sampling method:

1. A total of 70 undergraduate students (teacher candidates) from various departments at a state university's faculty of education, who took the "Adult Education and Lifelong Learning" course during three consecutive academic terms (2022-2023 Fall, 2022-2023 Spring, 2023-2024 Fall).
2. 11 graduate students (5 with thesis, 6 non-thesis) from the same university's Department of Curriculum and Instruction during the 2023-2024 Spring term, all of whom are also active in-service teachers in various educational settings.

Data Collection Instruments

Research data were collected using two distinct instruments developed by the researcher and aligned with the nature of the study groups.Undergraduate students were asked to provide written, open-ended responses to a single question "What can be done to give faculties of education the quality of a 'Lifelong Learning Environment'?". Data from the graduate students were collected through in-person focus group interviews guided by a 19-question semi-structured form.

The semi-structured interview form, designed to elicit multi-dimensional and in-depth responses to the main research problem, follows a systematic structure progressing from general and conceptual questions to individual roles, institutional structures, and policy recommendations. The initial part of the form aims to establish the theoretical foundation by eliciting participants' core perceptions of "lifelong learning" and their descriptions of ideal "teacher candidate," "teacher," and "academician" profiles. Secondly, the form probes the specific competencies an ideal teacher candidate should possess, examining four key dimensions: general professional competence, general culture, pedagogical knowledge (professional knowledge), and subject-matter knowledge (field knowledge). The interview form then transitions from individual roles to analyzing the interaction networks within the system, questioning the interaction at both the micro-level (academician-teacher-teacher candidate) and the macro-level (Faculty of Education-CHE (Council of Higher Education)-MoNE). Finally, the form focuses directly on solutions and policy recommendations, seeking participants' concrete suggestions on how curricula should be structured, how all stakeholders can contribute to a "lifelong learning society," and ultimately, how to achieve the main research problem of establishing faculties of education as 'Lifelong Learning Environments.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the qualitative data, two different analysis techniques were employed, appropriate to the distinct nature of the datasets and the data collection instruments. Inductive content analysis was adopted for the data collected from undergraduate students. Given the exploratory nature of this dataset (a single open-ended question), there was no predetermined theoretical framework. Therefore, the goal was for themes and categories to emerge directly from the data itself, in a "bottom-up" approach. Descriptive analysis was used for the data obtained from the graduate students through focus group interviews. Due to the structured nature of this data collection process (a 19-question semi-structured form), the interview questions themselves constituted the basic categorical framework for the analysis. Participant statements were coded and summarized under these predetermined thematic headings in a "top-down" approach.

Trustworthiness

Various strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. To ensure the content validity of the focus group interview form, it was submitted for expert opinion to two academicians in the field of Curriculum and Instruction and was finalized based on their feedback. To ensure

dependability, the researcher conducted repeat coding at different times to check for consistency between the emergent codes and themes. The decision to prolong data collection over four consecutive academic terms was a conscious methodological choice aimed at increasing the depth and reliability of the findings. This strategy provided an opportunity to observe the consistency of emerging themes across different groups, contributing to a richer and more saturated dataset. To enhance confirmability, direct participant quotations are provided in the findings section, and all methodological processes have been described in detail to ensure transferability.

Limitations of the Study

This study, by its qualitative nature, does not aim for generalization and is limited to the faculty of education at a specific state university. The potential effect of participants' demographic characteristics on their views was not systematically analyzed. Furthermore, the perspectives of academicians were consciously excluded from the scope of this study to maintain a clear analytical focus on the "education recipient" perspective.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained from the two primary study groups of the research are presented under separate headings, corresponding to the distinct analytical methods employed for each. First, the themes derived from the inductive content analysis of the undergraduate students' views are presented. This is followed by the findings derived from the descriptive analysis of the graduate students' perspectives. As a result of the inductive content analysis applied to the open-ended responses from the 70 undergraduate students, four main themes emerged. These themes are: (1) The Restructuring of Instruction, (2) The Learning Climate, (3) Individual Development and (4) The Faculty's Societal Role.

Findings Regarding the Perspectives of Undergraduate Students

Findings Related to the First Theme

Table 1. Categories and Codes Related to the Restructuring of Instruction (f=119)

Category / Sub-theme	Code	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Strengthening Practical Education	Ensuring Theory-Practice Integration	18	5.8
	Extending and Advancing the Timing of Internships	12	3.9
	Learning by Doing and Experiencing	10	3.2
Diversification of Teaching Methods	Moving Away from Traditional/Rote-Learning Methods	14	4.5
	Active Learning and Interactive Courses	11	3.5
	Technology Integration	9	2.9
Enrichment of Curriculum Content	Interdisciplinary Approach and Courses	13	4.2
	Life and Career Skills Courses	8	2.6
	Diversification of Elective Courses	7	2.3
Restructuring the Assessment System	Moving Away from Exam-Oriented Assessment	9	2.9
	Process and Project-Based Assessment	8	2.6

The most dominant category under this theme is the "Strengthening of Practical Education." Participants almost unanimously agree that the current education is disconnected from the realities of the field and forces them into a passive reception of knowledge. The most frequently repeated code, "Ensuring Theory-Practice Integration" (f=18), lies at the heart of this problem. Students attribute their sense of being unprepared for the profession primarily to this theory-heavy structure.

> *"When we look at our education system, we see that education is theory-heavy and not reflected in practice. In faculties of education specifically, and as students in general, we are accustomed to passively receiving information." (S2, 2022)*

> *"The school only gives us theoretical information. It is up to us to blend this information with life and apply it in our own lives." (S6, 2022)*

"Internship" (practicum) practices are cited as the most concrete example of this theory-practice gap. Participants believe that confining internships only to the final year is insufficient for transferring the theoretical knowledge accumulated over 3-4 years into practice and that this will create serious problems upon entering the profession.

> *"Currently, university faculties of education define application/internship courses in the final year. Students take theoretical courses for perhaps 3 or 4 years. When they enter professional life, this situation will cause certain problems as they do not have sufficient experience." (S16, 2023)*

Not only the timing of the internship but also its quality and duration were subjects of criticism. One participant stated that although the current internship provides some experience, "it is not sufficient preparation for teaching" and noted that the assignment of students to different schools creates inequality of opportunity:

> *"Frankly, although the 2-semester internship we do in the 4th year gives us a lot of experience, it is not sufficient preparation for teaching. Especially, the fact that some groups end up in good schools while others end up in relatively worse schools creates significant differences." (S17, 2023)*

As a solution to these problems, participants advocated that internships and practical experiences should be spread throughout the entire educational process, rather than waiting for the final year. The most fundamental demand is for this experience to begin right from the start of their education.

> *"Course content should not be limited to theoretical information; students should be given the opportunity to experience practical applications and real-life situations starting from the 1st year." (S15, 2024)*

> *"The internship should not be left only to the final year but should be spread throughout the entire education." (S5, 2024)*

Additionally, it was emphasized that this transformation should not only involve replanning internships but must also include the pedagogical approach of all courses in the faculty. An ideal faculty of education must move students away from being passive listeners and adopt an application-oriented structure that encourages them to "learn by doing and experiencing."

> *"Education should proceed in line with a constructivist approach... students should be encouraged to learn by doing and experiencing, and education should be application-oriented. Fulfilling and supporting needs like various laboratory applications and internship opportunities is important." (S1, 2022)*

Furthermore, the "Diversification of Teaching Methods" category, supported by the "Moving Away from Traditional/Rote-Learning Methods" code (f=14), strongly demonstrates participants' dissatisfaction with current pedagogical approaches. Students demand methods that make them active, motivated, and ensure permanent learning, instead of courses where they are passive listeners. One participant expressed this expectation as follows:

> *"Instead of teaching lessons with a rote-learning approach and giving exams, making it enjoyable with materials and activities appropriate to the student level supports lifelong learning..." (S9, 2022)*

Similarly, another participant emphasized that constructivist approaches like "discovery learning" should be adopted instead of traditional techniques such as "direct instruction or expository teaching":

> *"Especially instead of using learning techniques like direct instruction or expository teaching, it would be more beneficial to employ discovery learning techniques." (S19, 2023)*

In addition to pedagogical methods, the "Enrichment of Curriculum Content" (f=13) also emerged as a critical expectation. Participants argued that education should not be limited to a single field of knowledge but should cultivate teacher candidates as multi-faceted individuals. This has led to demands for adding life skills and interdisciplinary courses to the curriculum:

> *"In faculties of education, a teacher should be given not only courses related to their field, but also courses such as language education, physical education, entrepreneurship, technology, and gardening." (S6, 2022)*

This demand for enrichment includes not only taking additional courses but also ensuring that existing courses are taught with an interdisciplinary approach. One participant explained this with a concrete example of how different fields can be interrelated:

> *"For a solid values education, I think history, art, and literature should be widely used in all departments. For example... a math teacher, while teaching the concept of natural numbers, could draw on the science of history to impart values like scientific thinking and rationality." (S35, 2023)*

Finally, another significant expectation under this theme is the "Restructuring of the Assessment System." The code "Moving Away from Exam-Oriented Assessment" (f=9) highlights the negative impact of the current assessment system on students. Participants believe that exams reduce learning to "grade anxiety" and damage the motivation for lifelong learning.

> *"The traditional education system... is a monotonous and unengaging approach to education. In this system, students experience anxiety about passing exams rather than learning. This limits 'lifelong learning' and alienates students from learning." (S16, 2023)*

As a solution to this problem, participants demanded the adoption of alternative, process-oriented assessment methods, such as projects, portfolios, and presentations, which allow students to demonstrate their developmental processes and diverse abilities:

> *"By using various assessment methods such as projects and presentations, not just exams, students can be enabled to reveal their different skills and abilities." (S15, 2024)*

Findings Related to the Second Theme

Table 2. Categories and Codes Related to the Learning Climate (f=75)

Category / Sub-theme	Code	Frequency(f)	Percentage(%)
Role of the Academic Staff	Being a Role Model and Guide	15	4.8
	Guidance and Career Counseling	12	3.9
	Generational Gap and Communication Issues	7	2.3
Improvement of the Physical and Social Environment	Social Spaces Supporting Collaboration and Interaction	10	3.2
	Strengthening Physical Equipment and Infrastructure	9	2.9
	Curiosity-Arousing and Accessible Environments	7	2.3
Institutional Functioning	Adoption of LLL as an Institutional Principle	8	2.6
	Supporting Student Initiatives (Clubs, etc.)	7	2.3

This theme reflects the idea that learning is shaped not only in classrooms but also within the faculty's general atmosphere, institutional culture, and network of stakeholder relationships.

In line with the findings, at the center of the ideal learning climate is a redefined profile of the academician. "Being a Role Model and Guide" (f=15) is the most dominant code in this theme. Participants argue that academicians must first live the philosophy of lifelong learning themselves and reflect this attitude onto their students. Consistency between words and actions is seen as a prerequisite for being a role model.

> *"Faculty members who have developed themselves and continue to learn while teaching will make a huge difference for students. It is not very likely to expect someone to apply something that you do not apply yourself..." (S1, 2022)*

> *"The first step in actualizing lifelong learning may be possible when our faculty members embrace lifelong learning. Therefore, our faculty members have a great responsibility. They are obliged to keep up with the times by following innovations." (S2, 2024)*

The role of the academician is not limited to following current information but also includes establishing a deeper, guidance-oriented relationship with the student. One participant noted that voluntary interactions outside of class provide an invaluable opportunity to witness "life experience" beyond academic knowledge. As a direct contrast to this ideal approach, the traditional practice of "writing down definitions and leaving the class" was criticized as an inefficient method that wastes the student's time.

> *"It is for voluntary students to spend time with faculty of education instructors at specific days and times... In this process, the student will have both improved the student-teacher relationship and gained knowledge on many subjects. In addition to the knowledge accumulation within the faculty, the student will develop in more than one way as they will witness the teacher's life experiences." (S17, 2023)*

> *"If teachers enter the class, write a definition, teach the lesson, and leave, that lesson cannot be productive. Therefore, that lesson contributes nothing to the students and serves no purpose other than wasting the student's time." (S6, 2022)*

One of the biggest obstacles to this ideal academician-student relationship was shown to be the "generational gap" (f=7). Participants expressed that even if some faculty members are technically proficient, their inability to understand the learning styles and communication methods of the new generation negatively affects the learning climate and reduces motivation.

> *"Our teachers are extremely competent, knowledgeable, and masters of their craft, but there is one point they miss: There is a large generational gap between them and the student group they are facing... From what I have observed, such attitudes do not affect the student positively; on the contrary, they bore and disturb them greatly." (S2, 2022)*

The second pillar of the learning climate is the faculty's physical and social infrastructure. The code "Social Spaces Supporting Collaboration and Interaction" (f=10) reflects the idea that learning does not only happen in classrooms and that informal interactions are at least as important as formal lessons. Participants stated that social spaces should be designed where students can come together, discuss freely, and learn from one another.

> *"There should be areas within the faculty where teacher candidates can spend time, socialize, and chat. This way, they become more social and can exchange information with each other." (S10, 2024)*

This demand for interaction also extends to the physical structure of the classrooms. The classic row seating arrangement is thought to impose individual learning and hinder collaboration. Instead, flexible classroom designs that allow for group work and communication were proposed.

> *"Designing the desks for group work rather than in rows allows teacher candidates to develop their skills and work in groups. This also develops sociability and communication." (S3, 2022)*

The code "Strengthening Physical Equipment and Infrastructure" (f=9) emphasizes the necessity of access to the basic tools of lifelong learning. Participants stated that easy access to information is an encouraging factor for learning; in this context, they expressed the critical importance of computer labs open to all students, high-speed internet access, and libraries with rich resources.

> *"Students should be provided with internet access; furthermore, students should be given the opportunity to access computers, and there should be a sufficient number of computers in the faculty. Students should be able to enter these computer rooms freely. This way, the student can access information easily..." (S3, 2022)*

> *"An environment where information is easily accessible and resources are diverse will also be encouraging for learning. Providing a library, computers, and internet access within the faculty or classrooms will better meet this need." (S1, 2022)*

The final component that completes the learning climate is the faculty's institutional philosophy and administrative support. Participants argued that lifelong learning should not be left to the individual efforts of faculty members or students, but that it must be an institutional principle (f=8) adopted by the faculty administration and reflected in all processes. This means the subject must cease to be an elective course and become part of the institution's core mission.

> *"In faculties of education, lifelong learning should be embraced to the point of becoming a principle." (S5, 2022)*

> *"...we can emphasize its importance even more by making the adult education and lifelong learning course compulsory and comprehensive, rather than elective, thus increasing the students' seriousness and interest in the course..." (S8, 2022)*

It was emphasized that one of the most concrete outputs of this institutional principle should be the active support of student initiatives (communities, clubs, etc.) by the administration (f=7). Students see their own self-established communities and projects as one of the most dynamic and effective areas of lifelong learning. However, it was stated that for these initiatives to succeed, the faculty and university administration must encourage students and provide them with material/moral support.

> *"Students should also do projects with teachers to promote lifelong learning; I think help can be requested from the rectorate and deanship for this. Projects that will encourage students in these subjects should be prepared." (S18, 2023)*

> *"It could be establishing various communities for lifelong learning... students who do not want to be limited to their own department can join the communities of other departments and achieve lifelong learning through the activities in these communities." (S7, 2022)*

Findings Related to the Third Theme

Table 3. Categories and Codes Related to Individual Development (f=64)

Category / Sub-theme	Code	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Learner Autonomy	Increasing Internal Motivation and Curiosity	16	5.2
	Self-awareness and Personal Development	11	3.5
	Instilling "Learning to Learn" Skills	9	2.9
Acquisition of 21st Century Skills	Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	12	3.9
	Creativity and Entrepreneurship	10	3.2
	Information and Media Literacy	6	1.9

This theme shifts the focus of the ideal faculty of education from programs and physical spaces directly to the student. Participants emphasized that the faculty's fundamental mission should not only be to equip students with professional knowledge but also to enable them to discover their potential as individuals and acquire the core competencies required by the 21st century.

The findings illustrate that the foundation of lifelong learning consists of the individual's internal motivation, curiosity, and assumption of responsibility for their own learning. Indeed, "Increasing Internal Motivation and Curiosity" (f=16) is the highest-frequency code within this theme. Participants expressed that they view learning not as an external obligation or a source of grade anxiety, but as a "way of life."

> *"In lifelong learning, learning should be a way of life rather than an obligation. The education provided in faculties of education needs to be in a way that does not make students averse to learning." (S40, 2023)*

The fuel for this way of life is curiosity. Participants argued that curiosity and a desire for inquiry are prerequisites for learning, and that the faculty should nurture this natural inclination.

> *"First, it is necessary to make students active; they need to be in a constant state of curiosity, open to continuous change and development, and always engaged in inquiry. Because learning does not happen without researching, being curious, and asking questions..." (S18, 2023)*

> *"An individual must first be curious and interested, and they must know how to learn by understanding and internalizing the information... individuals must have internal motivation." (S5, 2022)*

Participants identified the current traditional education and assessment system as the biggest obstacle to this internal motivation. A strong criticism was voiced that grade anxiety, in particular, alienates students from learning and damages their motivation.

> *"The traditional education system... is a monotonous and unengaging approach to education. In this system, students experience anxiety about passing exams rather than learning. This limits 'lifelong learning' and alienates students from learning." (S16, 2023)*

In contrast, it was stated that fostering the individual's self-awareness is necessary for the development of learner autonomy. One participant emphasized that individuals must first recognize themselves and their weaknesses, and that education must support this awareness.

> *"First, every individual needs to recognize themselves, know where their weaknesses are, and courses should be taught accordingly, giving the individual certain responsibilities; the individual needs to motivate themselves." (S3, 2022)*

The second pillar of individual development is equipping students with high-level skills to process information, not just acquire it. The codes "Critical Thinking and Problem Solving" (f=12) and

"Creativity and Entrepreneurship" (f=10) clearly reveal this expectation. Participants argued that the faculty should teach them to inquire and solve problems rather than to memorize.

> *"Students should also be taught learning and innovation skills, that is, critical thinking and problem solving. We must make them aware by touching upon their benefits and what they will contribute to our development." (S5, 2022)*

> *"A problem can be posed in class, and by thinking about it and getting solution proposals from everyone, skills like problem-solving and looking from different perspectives can be acquired." (S15, 2024)*

It was stated that passively accepting information weakens the ability to question and make decisions; instead, students should be instilled with the habit of constantly asking "why and how":

> *"The 'I don't know, X knows' mentality will weaken the ability to question and make decisions in the tasks one encounters. The student must be taught that 'why' and 'how' questions must be asked." (S23, 2023)*

In addition to critical thinking, students want to transition from being consumers of information to producers of it. In this context, they demanded that creativity and entrepreneurship skills be actively integrated into the curriculum.

> *"...to acquire production skills, they can be enabled to actively produce information. For example, preschool education students could be enabled to develop a new preschool education approach model through various observations, interviews, and research." (S2, 2022)*

> *"Also, drawing from my own field, an environment must be created in courses where we can think creatively, express our ideas freely, and work by researching." (S3, 2022)*

One participant summarized this expectation by pointing to the contribution of creative thinking to an individual's life planning and societal production:

> *"I think raising entrepreneurial individuals is important for building a society of productive people who generate new ideas. Entrepreneurship is the competence of the individual to change their ideas and thoughts and turn them into new ideas; if we raise creative-thinking individuals, they can become inventive and direct their own life planning by taking risks." (S15, 2023)*

Findings Related to the Fourth Theme

Table 4. Categories and Codes Related to the Faculty's Societal Role (f=42)

Category / Sub-theme	Code	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Integration with Society	Service to Society and Social Responsibility Projects	14	4.5
	Involving the Public and Other Stakeholders in the Faculty	9	2.9
Maintaining Relations with Alumni	Continuing Education Programs for Alumni	11	3.5
	Alumni-Student Networks and Guidance	8	2.6

This theme centers on the idea that the faculty of education must step outside its walls to integrate with society and expand its sphere of responsibility. Participants argue that an ideal faculty must transcend being an internally focused educational institution and take on active responsibilities towards the local community and its alumni.

The code "Service to Society and Social Responsibility Projects" (f=14) is the most significant component of this theme. Participants believe that faculties should open their academic expertise and rich resources (technology, laboratories, human resources) to public access. The most concrete suggestion that emerged is for faculties to function like "public education centers," organizing courses and seminars for the community.

> *"The Guidance and Psychological Counseling department should provide training and seminars on topics like pre-marital education... for both students and the local community." (S19, 2023)*

> *"Faculties of education should open courses modeled after public education centers. Not just for academic development, but courses that develop life-enhancing skills in art, sports, technology, etc. These courses should be located on campus." (S21, 2023)*

Participants believe that faculties, in this role, are better equipped and potentially more effective than existing public education centers:

> *"The resources and technologies in a faculty of education are more advanced than those in public education centers. An adult who wants to learn a language might benefit more from receiving this education from faculty instructors." (S9, 2024)*

It was stated that this societal role should be fulfilled not only by the institution but also through student-led social responsibility projects. A desire to reach disadvantaged groups and rural areas was prominent.

> *"I think the dissemination of lifelong learning environments should start from the villages. There is a large group of both children and adults here who cannot benefit from education... Literacy courses could be opened to increase the literacy rate in villages." (S4, 2022)*

> *"Lessons can be given... by teacher candidates to students with disabilities or those who are distant from education for various reasons. In this way, we can instill the awareness that... education continues no matter what happens in life." (S3, 2022)*

The faculty's role was not seen as limited to education; it was also expressed that it should be a center that enriches the cultural life of the region.

> *"For the cultural development of society, cultural festivals on subjects like music, art, and literature should be organized. The duty of organizing these festivals should be given to faculties of education." (S1, 2024)*

> *"Every faculty of education should establish institutions like book cafes in areas where social life is intense." (S1, 2024)*

Another important dimension of the faculty's societal role is its responsibility towards its own alumni. Participants stated that learning does not end with graduation and that the faculty must continue its support during this process. The code "Continuing Education Programs for Alumni" (f=11) reflects the strength of this expectation. Students, especially those in their final year, expressed a distinct anxiety about falling behind educational innovations after graduation.

> *"Since I am a 4th-year student, my educational life will end this term... after I graduate, new courses and new things may be added to the program. I will not be able to learn them. For this reason, graduates must be offered continuous education opportunities." (S2, 2024)*

Therefore, it is seen as a critical need for the faculty to offer continuous education and update programs for its graduates:

> *"Faculties of education can provide advanced-level education for students who continue teaching after graduation. This way, graduate students can refresh their professional knowledge and learn new teaching methods. In this way, they can advance in their careers." (S30, 2023)*

> *"In this regard, faculties of education can organize courses and seminars under the name of lifelong learning after we graduate. Thanks to this, we can improve ourselves, adapt to the era, and also be more well-equipped and innovative for our students." (S31, 2023)*

This relationship is envisioned not just as a one-way flow of information from the faculty to the graduate, but also as a mutual learning network to be established between alumni and current students. In this model, a dynamic communication where both sides learn from each other is proposed.

> *"Communication should be established between students actively studying in faculties of education and students who have graduated... A graduate student, while continuing their profession, can receive support from current students regarding course materials. In this way, the graduate student continues their profession in an innovative and open-to-learning manner. They can develop each other in this field reciprocally." (S32, 2023)*

Findings from Graduate Student Perspectives

In this section, the responses provided by the 11 master's students (in-service teachers), who were in their coursework phase, to the semi-structured interview questions were analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. The findings are shaped around participants' experiences, their critiques of the current system, and their recommendations for an ideal state, all framed by the research's main questions. To enhance readability, the findings are presented under four main headings, which group together related questions. Each heading is followed by a table showing the frequency distribution of the codes derived from the responses, as well as an interpretation of the findings.

3.2.1. Perceptions Regarding the Concept of Lifelong Learning

Table 5. Categories and Codes Related to the Definition of Lifelong Learning (f=21)

Category / Sub-theme	Code	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Definition of Lifelong Learning	Being a continuous and lifelong process	8	38.1
	Occurring outside of formal education (school)	5	23.8
	A process of personal development, renewal, and self-discovery	4	19.0
	Being based on individual needs, interests, and willingness	2	9.5
	Aiming to contribute to and benefit society	1	4.8
	Being an approach that offers equal opportunity	1	4.8
TOTAL		21	100.0

In response to the first interview question, participants demonstrated a strong consensus in defining lifelong learning, primarily identifying it as a continuous and lifelong process. The notion that learning extends from cradle to grave and cannot be restricted to a specific time frame was emphasized.

> *"Individuals continue their development from birth until death. It is necessary to emphasize the continuity of development." (Teacher 1, Thesis-Based)*

> *"Lifelong learning can be defined as learning that continues throughout life, not just within a specific timeframe. The saying 'education has no age' also comes to the forefront in this context." (Teacher 1, Project-Based)*

> *"Lifelong learning is one of the fundamental concepts that is not limited to schools; it can take place at home, at work, in all areas of life; and shows that it can be continued without any barriers, regardless of age, social, or economic status." (Teacher 2, Project-Based)*

Secondly, it was frequently expressed that lifelong learning occurs outside of formal education (school). Moreover, participants defined the process not merely as an activity of information acquisition, but also as a philosophical journey of personal development and self-discovery.

> *"It is a form of learning that is given to out-of-school learning and where the individual is central." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

> *"In general terms, I think it means striving not to be the same person today as you were yesterday... In short, to discover. To discover both ourselves and the world, that is lifelong learning." (Teacher 3, Thesis-Based)*

> *"In short, we can call it a person's adventure or journey in this world. That is to say; throughout their life, a person does not only perform the act of learning in the institution called school, but in every area of life... in interaction, one both learns and teaches." (Teacher 5, Project-Based)*

The Profile and Competencies of the Lifelong Learning Educator

This section of the research addresses participants' views on the ideal educator profiles who have internalized the lifelong learning philosophy. To this end, the responses to questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 on the semi-structured interview form were combined and analyzed under this heading, as they exhibited a common thematic integrity. This question group comprehensively investigates the ideal profiles of the "teacher candidate," "teacher," and "academician," as well as the general culture, professional knowledge (pedagogy), and subject-matter (field) knowledge competencies these profiles should possess in the context of lifelong learning. Therefore, the findings in this section reveal the competencies, mindset, and professional stance that participants attribute to these three key stakeholders.

Table 6. Categories and Codes Related to the Ideal Educator Profile

Category / Sub-theme	Code	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
The Ideal Educator Profile	Continuous Development	16	17.0
	Holistic Development (Art, Psychology, Travel, etc.)	12	12.8
	Application, Experience, and Pedagogical Content Knowledge	11	11.7
	Positive Professional Mindset and Values	10	10.6
	Personal Qualities (Curiosity, Critical Thinking, Humility)	10	10.6
	Being a Role Model	9	9.6
	Professional Identity	8	8.5
	Using Non-University Resources (Courses, Certificates, etc.)	8	8.5
	Digital Skills and Technology Literacy	6	6.4
	Communication Skills	4	4.3
TOTAL		94	100.0

Participants' views indicate that the ideal educator profile must possess a mindset open to continuous development and innovation. When defining this profile, the "I'm appointed, I'm done" mentality observed among current teachers and attitudes that link professional development solely to material gain were sharply criticized.

Participants define this ideal profile as an individual who constantly renews themselves, sees their profession as that of a "societal architect," and is always ready for change:

> *"A lifelong learning teacher should have an attitude of constantly improving themselves, effectively managing learning processes, and setting an example for students. ...they must have the ability to adapt to changing educational environments and the different needs of students." (Teacher 1, Project-Based)*

> *"A lifelong learning teacher must not forget that they are the architect of society and must act accordingly. They must always be hungry for learning. They must always be improving themselves. They must be ready for societal and technological change." (Teacher 2, Project-Based)*

The biggest obstacles to this ideal are the negative mindsets participants observed in their colleagues. The first of these is the "I'm appointed, I'm done" attitude, which stops the learning process after starting the profession or reaching a certain seniority.

> *"A teacher shouldn't be of the mindset, 'I'm appointed, I'm done.' Like, 'I'll get my salary, I've already studied for so many years, took the KPSS (Public Personnel Selection Examination). Now it's time to relax.' They should be constantly trying to move themselves forward." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

> *"One shouldn't just pull aside saying, 'I'm old now, retirement is approaching.'" (Teacher 5, Thesis-Based)*

The second criticized negative attitude is the approach that links all efforts for development to a material compensation ("extra course fees"), rather than seeing it as a personal journey. Participants noted that even endeavors like graduate education are belittled by this perspective:

> *"The first sentence is always: 'What's going to happen now? Are you getting a raise? Will you get extra course fees? Aren't they already giving you a pay grade increase? What's the point of bothering?'" (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

Participants were unanimous that the ideal educator's competencies cannot be limited to a single field of knowledge but must encompass holistic development. This competency includes a wide spectrum, from affective traits to interdisciplinary knowledge. One participant underscored this totality by stating that alongside basic individual characteristics like "being affectionate, patient, tolerant," a teacher must also possess advanced professional qualities such as "understanding their students' differences and psychology, and planning instruction":

> *"Besides individual characteristics like being affectionate, patient, tolerant... teachers must also have professional qualities such as understanding their students' differences and psychology, planning instruction..." (Teacher 1, Project-Based)*

This holistic perspective was further concretized by another participant. In their view, teachers should draw from different disciplines such as art, sports, psychology, and philosophy to better grasp their students' worlds, and should even possess vital practical skills like "first aid":

> *"They can attend training in philosophy and psychology to understand their students' psychology. They can get involved in a branch of art. They can attend courses like drama, painting, music, folk dances... I think the most important is first aid." (Teacher 1, Thesis-Based)*

Participants believe this interdisciplinary competency is not merely an "add-on" but is also part of the teacher's responsibility to be a role model. Cultural development and a habit of reading were particularly emphasized as fundamental qualities a teacher must possess:

> *"Teacher candidates must develop themselves at least a little in the fields of art and music. They must love reading and be an example to their students." (Teacher 2, Project-Based)*

Finally, the idea that this multifaceted development is not just a professional necessity but also a path to individual fulfillment and "opening up to the outside world" was prominent. One participant expressed that having a hobby transforms learning from a mere duty into an intrinsic source of motivation:

> *"And they absolutely must have a hobby. I see people with hobbies as being open to the outside world. They have an activity, a pleasure. They have something they love. They do it just because they love it." (Teacher 3, Thesis-Based)*

It was also stated that subject-matter knowledge must be supported by pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)—that is, the knowledge of "how to teach it"—and that current programs are deficient in this regard.

> *"We already receive a very intensive amount of subject-matter knowledge. We even learn more than we will ever teach. Where we fall short is this: How are we going to teach this mathematics? I mean, I think there should be a course for every branch, like a 'mathematics teaching strategies' course." (Teacher 3, Thesis-Based)*

> *"But, for example, where we were lacking, what I would have wanted to develop more during university, was... I might have mastered that subject, but how am I going to explain it, how will I convey it..." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

> *"In the context of lifelong learning and subject-matter knowledge, a teacher candidate must be competent, well-equipped in their field, and able to transfer this knowledge to the other side comfortably." (Teacher 1, Project-Based)*

The research findings illuminate the distinct profiles of stakeholders who have internalized the LLL philosophy. Within this framework, the lifelong learning teacher candidate possesses a proactive mindset, viewing the university not as the final destination of their professional journey, but as its starting point. Conscious of the insufficiency of undergraduate education alone, this candidate does not merely settle for coursework; they volunteer in non-governmental organizations, participate in certificate programs, utilize digital resources as learning tools, and actively seek practical experience. Moving beyond a narrow career goal of "just getting appointed," they embrace the responsibility for continuous development required by the profession and pursue opportunities to translate theoretical knowledge into practice. The lifelong learning academician assumes the most critical role in enabling the teacher candidate to achieve this profile. The ideal academician is an intellectual who bridges the gap between theory and practice. They are not merely lecturers, but are personally "doers" and learners; they "descend to the field" by visiting schools, conduct collaborative projects with teachers, and research the actual problems of practice. Possessing intellectual humility, this academician remains open to criticism regardless of their title and accepts that they can learn from everyone. They do not confine themselves to specializing in a narrow field; rather, they reflect this interdisciplinary perspective onto their students by also engaging with diverse areas such as art and philosophy. The final output of these processes, the lifelong learning teacher, is a practitioner who accelerates, rather than halts, the learning process after entering the profession. This teacher rejects mindsets such as "I'm appointed, I'm done" or those that link professional development solely to material gain. Especially against the feelings of professional "stagnation" and "burnout" encountered in challenging conditions, they keep themselves constantly active through graduate education, in-service courses, and new projects. Aware that their role transcends merely transferring content, they also educate parents, serve as role models for their students, and view themselves as "architects of society." They actively collaborate with colleagues, provide guidance to junior teachers, and do not hesitate to share their professional knowledge. These three profiles nourish and complete one another, constituting the essential elements required for the institutionalization of a lifelong learning culture.

Structuring Teacher Education Programs (Questions 2, 14)

This section of the research focuses on the participants' views regarding the current state and ideal structure of curricula within faculties of education. To this end, responses to Question 2 ("What are your thoughts on the place of lifelong learning in teacher education programs?") and Question 14 ("How should curricula in Faculties of Education be structured within the scope of lifelong learning?") on the semi-structured interview form were combined and analyzed under this heading due to their direct relationship. This question group encompasses criticisms regarding the extent to which current programs reflect the LLL philosophy and concrete suggestions (curriculum, methods, internships, etc.) on how an ideal program should be designed. The findings in this section reveal the participants' main criticisms of the programs and their demands for structural reform.

Table 7. Categories and Codes Related to Teacher Education Programs

Category / Sub-theme	Code	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Structuring Teacher Education Programs	Increasing Emphasis on Application	8	30.8
	Programs' Inadequacy in Instilling LLL Awareness and Skills	6	23.1
	Restructuring Internships (Early Start, Expansion)	5	19.2
	Interdisciplinary Approach	4	15.4
	Increasing Community Service and Field-Based Practices	3	11.5
TOTAL		26	100.0

All participants stated that the biggest problem with undergraduate programs is that they are overly theoretical and disconnected from practice. It was emphasized that this situation leads teacher candidates to start the profession unprepared and that the knowledge acquired remains "utopian and on paper."

> *"I do not think that teacher education programs are adequate within the scope of lifelong learning. I generally think university programs are theoretical. I believe that when teacher candidates start the profession, they acquire the teaching competence through the process." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

> *"I find it insufficient. Because I see the deficiencies in the real-life skills of the trained teacher candidates. They have more of a 'ready-made' expectation. Their life energy is low." (Teacher 1, Project-Based)*

The most fundamental suggestion to solve this problem is to spread internships throughout the entire process, starting from the early years of education. Participants voiced the inadequacy of internships conducted only in the final year.

> *"Also, I don't find it sufficient for the internship period to be only in the final year for the students... Systematically, starting from the first year, what can each student do? This should be considered." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

This view was supported by referring to the medical school model:

> *"I think internships should increase much more. That is, internships can be done in the 3rd-4th years. In fact, a large part of the courses could be in the form of internships. Just like in medical schools... I mean, practical, not so much in the technical dimension, but I think our teacher candidates should learn by experiencing." (Teacher 5, Thesis-Based)*

In addition to internship reform, the idea of establishing an "Application School" within the faculty emerged strongly as a more structural solution. Participants argued that these schools should be of a quality demanded by the public and structured to include all grade levels.

> *"There should be an application school within this faculty of education for an individual. I definitely think so. And it shouldn't be thought of like... Demand, meaning it should be at a level demanded by the public..." (Teacher 3, Thesis-Based)*

> *"And as you said, within the universities... just like there are nurseries... I think there should be more different areas. Not just preschool, but other levels too. There should be schools, application schools." (Teacher 1, Thesis-Based)*

Criticisms directed at the programs were not limited to the theory-practice balance; it was also highlighted that the programs are inadequate in instilling LLL awareness. Participants stated that this concept was not sufficiently focused upon during their undergraduate education:

> *"When I recall my own student years, I don't remember the concept of lifelong learning being mentioned at all. Only some of our professors constantly advised us to read books related to education, go to museums, theaters, seminars. They told us that our job wouldn't end when we graduated and got appointed, that we would have to constantly improve ourselves. These statements are related to lifelong learning and fall within this concept. The advice they gave was in this direction. But they didn't say anything else about it. They didn't mention the concept either. There was no other work done either." (Teacher 3, Thesis-Based)*

> *"I think the role of Faculties of Education in our country in terms of Lifelong Learning is not sufficient; graduating them with education in a specific timeframe reduces the efficiency of teacher candidates..." (Teacher 1, Project-Based)*

As a solution, it was argued that programs should be structured to be more personalized and interdisciplinary. Suggestions included courses based on students' individual interests (like "hobbies") and employing alternative assessment methods such as portfolios:

> *"...I think every student could acquire at least one hobby. And at the end of the 4th year, all students could exhibit the work they have done... an elective course completely oriented towards application, process assessment, and... portfolio... based assessment." (Teacher 4, Thesis-Based)*

In addition to these suggestions, radical structural reforms were also voiced to directly address the needs of MoNE's non-formal education. In this context, the idea of opening a new major program, such as "Lifelong Learning Teaching," was prominent:

> *"Within the scope of lifelong learning in Faculties of Education; teachers should be trained by creating a special minor or major program in this field... Also, teachers who will carry out the teaching activities within the scope of MoNE's lifelong learning should be trained through a separate major program via Faculties of Education." (Teacher 4, Project-Based)*

Inter-Institutional and Stakeholder Interaction and Systemic Problems

This section of the research focuses on systemic level problems, institutional roles, and stakeholder relationships, moving beyond individual and programmatic barriers to the lifelong learning ideal. To this end, the responses given to questions 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, and 18 on the semi-structured interview form, which exhibit strong thematic coherence, have been analyzed holistically under this heading. This comprehensive question group encompasses interaction problems experienced at the micro-level (academician-teacher-candidate) and macro-level (Faculty of Education-CHE-MoNE), critiques of the current roles of these institutions, stakeholder contributions to societal goals, the importance of inter-institutional cooperation, and structural transformation proposals related to the main research problem. The findings in this section reveal the participants' criticisms of the current system and their expectations for institutional-level reform.

Table 8. Categories and Codes Related to Institutional Relations and Systemic Problems

Category / Sub-theme	Code	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Systemic Problems	Inter-Institutional (MoNE-CHE-Faculty) Disconnect and Lack of Cooperation	18	23.4
	Critique of In-Service Training (Quality, Access, Relevance)	11	14.3
	Application-Based Ideas for Collaboration	10	13.0
	Inadequacy of Academician-Teacher-Candidate Interaction	9	11.7
	Suggestions for Teacher Development	8	10.4
	Critique of Current Faculty Role (Passive, Appointment-Focused)	7	9.1
	Necessity for Faculty Integration with Society	7	9.1
	Transformation of Physical and Social Environment	7	9.1
TOTAL		77	100.0

This heading addresses the systemic problems perceived as the biggest obstacles to the lifelong learning ideal. One of the highest frequency codes in the analyses, "Inter-Institutional Disconnect" (f=18), indicates that participants' statements reflect a strong consensus that there is no functional integrity among CHE, MoNE, and Faculties of Education; rather, a significant lack of coordination and inefficient bureaucratic processes weaken the interaction between these institutions.

Participants stated that due to this disconnect, faculties of education remain "ineffective and dysfunctional" within the current system, and the solution lies in acting with "common sense":

> *"In today's system, unfortunately, Faculties of Education are ineffective and dysfunctional in the lifelong learning process... Actually, this education requires a holistic approach where both the ministry and the education faculties come together in a common structure and carry out this process with common sense and will." (Teacher 4, Project-Based)*

Participants' views suggest that perceived incompatibility between institutions underlies this lack of coordination. Specifically, the MoNE's initiative to establish "Teacher Academies" was interpreted in this context as a structure separate from, rather than a collaborative step reinforcing, the role of faculties.

> *"If the national education trusted the academy [faculty of education], it wouldn't resort to this 'teacher academy' system now... this means I don't trust the professors here or anyone else [in terms of the education provided]. After graduating from the faculty, one needs another round of training in the MoNE academy to become a teacher." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

This perceived institutional incompatibility was presented as evidence that

> *"there is no healthy communication" even in a shared mission like teacher training (Teacher 5, Project-Based).*

The institutional disconnect manifests not only at the policy level but also concretely in the complete isolation of academicians from teachers in the field. Participants emphasized a deep chasm between the campus where theory is produced and the school where practice occurs. One participant summarized this with their own striking experience:

> *"I am in my 9th year of work, and I have never encountered an academician from any university in any of the institutions I have worked at... Teachers are a segment with almost no interaction with academicians." (Teacher 6, Project-Based)*

Another participant noted that teachers could potentially serve as a "bridge" between these two structures but are unable to fulfill this role due to the existing "disconnect":

> *"There is a serious disconnect, especially between academicians and the public. We teachers are actually like a bridge... But we cannot provide that bridge either." (Teacher 3, Thesis-Based)*

Participants identified inefficient bureaucratic processes as one of the main reasons for this lack of interaction. One participant, stating that the current functioning proceeds through "creating traffic via official letters about situations," expressed that the solution could be achieved by appointing "one representative between institutions":

> *"One thing I've noticed, especially regarding cooperation with my own institution and public education centers. Traffic is created via official letters about situations. From now on, proceeding through carefully prepared protocols will remove the obstacles in front of education. Because... communication should be ensured through one representative between institutions using bilateral relations, and visits should be made occasionally..." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

Finally, as a solution to this fragmented structure, participants argued for the need for a comprehensive legal framework that leaves no room for arbitrariness and clearly defines the roles of all stakeholders:

> *"Our country's education problem is our common responsibility; within this understanding, there is a need for a legal framework where the authorities and responsibilities of these aforementioned institutions are accurately and clearly defined." (Teacher 4, Project-Based)*

One of the most concrete and dominant components of the institutional problems theme consists of criticisms directed at the in-service training provided by the MoNE. The "Critique of In-Service Training" (f=11) code reflects participants' strong views that the content of these trainings needs updating, should better respond to teachers' needs in the field, and that difficulties in accessing especially face-to-face programs should be addressed.

Participants stated that the current in-service trainings are insufficient in both quality (content) and quantity (number), outdated, and lack responsiveness to the actual needs of teachers:

> *"Definitely, in-service trainings are insufficient. Both face-to-face and online. Meaning, insufficient in quantity, insufficient in quality. Outdated, narrow scope. Looking back over the years, there's museum education there. There's something within the scope of the Fatih Project. Always the same trainings." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

One participant concretized this quality issue by sharing their experience of attending a training whose title seemed current but whose content was completely irrelevant and useless:

> *"I applied for an in-service training... I thought it would be about current technologies. I started the training. It was about power adapters, computer cables, etc. A training that would be of no use to me whatsoever." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

It was expressed that online trainings, in particular, often remain a mere formality and are found inefficient as they fail to ensure active participation from teachers:

> *"Many in-service trainings, instead of being delivered face-to-face, are uploaded to the EBA or ÖBA platform. From there, the teacher often just plays the video, doesn't listen or watch. They just leave it running while doing other things. I don't think productivity can be expected there." (Teacher 5, Thesis-Based)*

While online trainings are found inefficient, there is serious criticism regarding the accessibility of face-to-face trainings, which are considered higher quality. Participants stated that participation in

these trainings is difficult and often depends on connections, and that the same individuals repeatedly benefit from these opportunities.

> *"The face-to-face ones are hard to enroll. As soon as they open, the application deadline ends, it's impossible to catch them." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

> *"Face-to-face in-service trainings are very good. It's also very difficult to attend them... The attendees are always the same people, similar." (Teacher 4, Thesis-Based)*

One participant conveyed this difficulty of access through their personal experience:

> *"For example, I currently have about 10-15 applications for face-to-face training in MEBBİS right now. But I always get rejected." (Teacher 4, Thesis-Based)*

In response to the existing systemic problems and institutional disconnect, participants proposed structural models for collaboration that go beyond abstract wishes. These proposals aim to integrate theory with practice, enhance inter-institutional interaction, and clarify roles.

Chief among these proposals is the idea of academicians "descending to the field." As a solution to their criticisms that academicians are disconnected from the field and thus remain theoretical, participants advocated that academicians should actively visit schools, communicate with teachers, and conduct research with real data from the field.

> *"Academicians can actually descend to the field from where they are. They can be in communication with teachers. Teachers can assist in academic studies by sharing their experiences in school and in the classroom with academicians." (Teacher 2, Thesis-Based)*

> *"Teachers are a segment with almost no interaction with academicians. For this reason, I think faculties of education should have academicians who descend to the field, who breathe the classroom and school atmosphere. This way, they will see the difference between theory and practice." (Teacher 6, Project-Based)*

The vital importance of this interaction was emphasized with the words, *"Because when academicians are not in the field, the knowledge remains theoretical."* (Teacher 4, Project-Based)

The second major structural model proposed is the adaptation of the university hospital model of Medical Faculties to other faculties. Participants suggested that just as medical faculties serve the community directly through university hospitals, faculties of education (and even other faculties like agriculture) should establish units that provide direct services to the public in their respective fields of expertise. This is seen as a step that would strengthen the faculty's societal role.

> *"Just as the university hospital serves the public within the scope of the medical faculty, I think every faculty should establish units for community service." (Teacher 1, Thesis-Based)*

> *"For example, considering Aydın, I believe it would be beneficial for the faculty of agriculture to provide information on agriculture to individuals engaged in production in Aydın's villages." (Teacher 1, Thesis-Based)*

Finally, participants argued that these collaborations and divisions of labor should be removed from being arbitrary or optional. It was stressed that the solution lies in a binding legal framework that clearly defines the roles, authorities, and responsibilities of the institutions. This is seen as a prerequisite for institutionalizing the understanding of "common responsibility."

> *"Regarding this issue; there must be compulsory cooperation between CHE and the Ministry of National Education, a legal regulation should be made concerning this, and*

the responsibilities and authorities of these two institutions, which are parties to lifelong learning, must be clearly determined." (Teacher 4, Project-Based)

"Our country's education problem is our common responsibility; within this understanding, there is a need for a legal framework where the authorities and responsibilities of these aforementioned institutions are accurately and clearly defined." (Teacher 4, Project-Based)

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, and RECOMMENDATIONS

This study conducted an in-depth examination of the perspectives of undergraduate and graduate students, two key stakeholder groups at different levels of the process, regarding the transformation of faculties of education into lifelong learning environments. The research findings reveal that both groups hold a critical view of the current teacher education system, although their critiques and proposed solutions differ based on their respective positions (teacher candidate versus in-service teacher/graduate student). The findings are structured around shared perceptions of problems and diverging solution proposals.

An examination of the findings from both groups reveals strong commonalities in expectations for an ideal faculty of education. The most robust and shared finding is the dissatisfaction expressed by both groups regarding the overly theoretical nature of university education and its disconnect from practice. This finding corroborates a frequently highlighted issue in the literature, recognized as a fundamental problem in teacher education programs (Dönmez Yapucuoğlu et al., 2024; Zelyurt & Sucu, 2022). While undergraduate students indicated feeling unprepared for the profession due to inadequate internships, graduate students (teachers), confirming this situation through their professional experiences, emphasized starting their careers like "fish out of water" and having to acquire real competencies through trial and error in the field. Both groups concur that academicians must transcend the traditional role of "information transmitter." The expectation is for academicians to be "role models" and "guides" who inspire and direct students. Indeed, the literature also underscores the role of mechanisms like coaching and guidance in promoting LLL in higher education (Dorfman-Furman, 2024). Participants argue that education should not be confined solely to academic and subject-matter knowledge. This view aligns with research findings suggesting that universities should integrate formal, non-formal, and informal learning modes while supporting staff professional development (Owusu-Agyeman, 2024). Both undergraduate and graduate students perceive a disconnect and lack of coordination among the institutions comprising the education system (Faculty, CHE, MoNE). The graduate group diagnosed the problem at a macro level as strategic misalignment between CHE and MoNE. Both groups believe that the faculty's responsibility should not end with graduation. Undergraduate students expressed concern about missing out on curricular innovations after graduation, while graduate students, who are teachers, identified the provision of continuous professional development programs for alumni by faculties as a concrete need.

Despite significant commonalities between the two groups, the difference in experience stemming from their respective positions creates important variations in how they diagnose problems and in the nature of their proposed solutions. Problem identification among undergraduate students is generally from a student perspective and at the faculty level (boring classes, exam anxiety, inadequate social spaces). In contrast to the faculty-level focus of undergraduates, the graduate group raises broader systemic issues. These include strategic misalignments between MoNE and CHE, the perceived quality of in-service training, and perceptions regarding objectivity in appointment processes. This difference in perspective is also reflected in the proposed solutions. Undergraduate students' suggestions are often more creative, student-centered, and geared towards micro-level applications. Graduate students' proposals, however, focus more on structural, policy-oriented, and macro-level reforms (establishing the "Application School" model, amending the Teacher Profession Law). While undergraduate students tend to view lifelong learning primarily as a means for personal development and gaining a competitive advantage regarding their career plans—a finding consistent with Bayındır

and Bolat's (2024) observation of teacher candidates focusing on career paths—graduate students (teachers) see it as a professional necessity for adapting to a rapidly changing world. This latter perspective is supported by Dorfman-Furman's (2024) definition of LLL as crucial for maintaining expertise.

Synthesizing all these findings, a **framework for the "Ideal Faculty of Education for Lifelong Learning"** emerges from the participants' viewpoints. With reference to this framework, an education faculty embodying lifelong learning should integrate theory and practice through structures like "Application Schools," thereby offering students field experience from their initial years and facilitating academicians' engagement in collaborative projects with teachers by "descending to the field." It aims for holistic development by enriching educational content not only with academic knowledge but also with art, technology, psychology, and 21st-century skills, aligning with studies emphasizing the role of these skills in supporting LLL (Mawas & Muntean, 2018). At the institutional level, it should act in concert with MoNE and CHE based on "common sense" to shape policies, while positioning itself not merely as a diploma-granting institution but as a "center for knowledge and development" serving the community. Finally, such a faculty must be a dynamic institution that supports the continuous development of its students and alumni throughout their lives via organized programs and established guidance networks.

Discussing this framework becomes even more significant, particularly in the context of the Ministry of National Education's (MoNE) current policy initiative towards establishing "Teacher Academies." Although this development might initially be perceived as challenging the traditional role of education faculties, when evaluated in light of this research's findings, it appears to present a strategic opportunity for faculties to transform themselves into indispensable lifelong learning environments. The theory-practice gap, one of the most dominant findings of the research, lays the groundwork for a natural division of tasks between MoNE Academies and education faculties. While the Academies are expected to focus on in-service training, addressing teachers' immediate, practical, and "how-to" professional needs, faculties of education can complement this structure by providing the pedagogical philosophy, critical perspective, and research-based knowledge—answering the "why" question. This highlights the role of faculties in equipping teachers with the qualities of a "reflective practitioner," who contemplates their own practice, and a "transformative intellectual," who acts with critical consciousness to advance the education system and society, moving beyond the "passive transmitter technician" role conceptualized by Ural (2024).

Furthermore, considering recent findings indicating a decline in the societal prestige of the teaching profession (Karakoyunlu, 2024) and that teacher candidates' mental well-being directly impacts their commitment to the profession (Dursun & Tozoğlu, 2024), the role of education faculties becomes even more critical. While academies focus on technical skills, one of the most fundamental missions of faculties could be to equip teacher candidates with the psychological and affective competencies needed to enhance their commitment and resilience towards the profession. This entails a strategic division of labor essential for the shared goal of cultivating qualified teachers through lifelong learning. In terms of this division, while academies might undertake practical training focused on in-service and professional skills, faculties of education should remain central to a holistic approach in pre-service education, integrating theory, critical thinking ("why"), and intensified practice ("how") through structures like "Application Schools."

Recommendations

Based on the research findings and discussion, the following recommendations are proposed for the transformation of faculties of education into lifelong learning environments, targeting practice, policy, and future research:

1. To address the prominent theory-practice gap, "Application Schools," co-managed with the MoNE, should be established within each faculty of education. These schools should be

designed as centers where undergraduate students can observe and practice from their first year, and where academicians can conduct research and development activities.

2. Official platforms and incentive mechanisms should be created to enable academicians to visit schools periodically ("descend to the field") and teachers to participate in seminars and workshops at universities. This is one of the most effective ways to bridge the institutional disconnect and ensure a mutual flow of information.
3. Faculties should utilize their areas of expertise to organize programs for the local community (e.g., art workshops, technology courses, family education). Additionally, active alumni networks should be established that offer continuous professional development seminars for graduates and facilitate guidance relationships between current students and alumni.
4. It is recommended that the cooperation between CHE and MoNE be moved beyond current voluntary initiatives and placed on a more structured foundation. Developing a legal framework that clearly defines the authorities, responsibilities, and cooperation mechanisms of both institutions would contribute to the production of more systematic, sustainable, and holistic policies.
5. To encourage teachers' academic development and lifelong learning motivation, it is recommended that the career stages system within the Teacher Profession Law be reconsidered. In this framework, recognizing the completion of thesis-based master's and doctoral degrees as a qualification criterion for "expert teacher" and "head teacher" titles, either in addition to or as a complementary element to the specified years of service, is thought to significantly contribute to the continuous development of teachers.
6. To reinforce the principle of meritocracy in appointments to positions such as school administration, it is recommended that having completed graduate studies in relevant fields like Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Administration be considered an important criterion, and candidates possessing this qualification be prioritized.
7. Phenomenological studies could be designed to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of the lived experiences revealed in this study (e.g., "stagnation," "theory-practice conflict," "institutional disconnect").
8. To test the prevalence and validity of the themes and recommendations identified in this qualitative study within a larger population, quantitative (survey, etc.) and mixed-methods research involving larger samples from different universities could be conducted.
9. Comparative stakeholder analyses, incorporating the perspectives of academicians, faculty administrators, and policymakers—who were excluded from the scope of this research—could be undertaken to achieve a holistic understanding of the issue and contribute to the development of more comprehensive policy recommendations.

Ethics and Conflict of Interest

All ethical rules were observed at each stage of the research. The author declares that he acted in accordance with ethical rules in all processes of the research. The author declares that they do not have any conflict of interest with other persons, institutions or organizations.

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