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The Evaluation of Competence Perceptions of Primary School Teachers for the Lifelong Learning Approach

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Abstract

The aim of this current study is to evaluate the competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers for the lifelong learning approach. The study was carried out with 91 out of 120 teachers teaching to the first year primary students at primary schools in Famagusta during the first term of the 2012-2013 academic year. In the study, it was found out that teachers participated in the research perceived themselves fully competent for the lifelong learning approach. It is also important to point out that between the ages of teachers who belong to different age groups and their perceptions of lifelong learning approach showed a meaningful difference. Also, there found a meaningful difference between the length of service of classroom teachers and their perceptions of lifelong learning approach. © 2011 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

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Introduction

Starting with the 19th century, education and learning have been made compulsory for certain age groups. Information exchange that exists in scientific and technical terms was quite slow in those days so the information and the skills gained via educational institutions were enough for a person throughout their lives. However, since the middle of the last century, the changes and the speed of development in science and technology have made information taught invalid and useless for people in the coming years (Akbaş & Özdemir, 2002; Hussein, 2010; Tuncay & Uzunboylu, 2010; Keser, Uzunboylu & Ozdamli, 2010; Tayfun & Arzu, 2012; Gorghiu, Gorghiu, Dogan & Gerceker, 2013). Thus change has become compulsory in most parts of the social life. Today, people who could

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reach the information, could arrange the information according to his/her position, could add more information onto the present one and who could spread it are accepted as strong people. Therefore, the profile of people has changed to be fitted into the needs of today's societies (Scans, 1991; Tüsiad, 1999).

There is no doubt to say that societies are in need of people who could improve themselves and have lifelong learning skills in the life of science and technology. The concept of lifelong learning claims the fact that an individual should continue their education since the day they were born. In other words, lifelong learning is defined as the activities that target to develop an individual's knowledge and competence throughout their lives socially as well as professionally (European Commission, 2002). When the relevant literature is reviewed, it could be seen that a number of researchers have dealt with the concept of lifelong learning differently. According to Jarvis (2004) lifelong learning is the whole of individual and institutional learning. Holmes (2002), on the other hand defined lifelong learning as an approach and a discipline. He expressed that it is not the same concept with receiving education or taking a course; he believed it is personal development, planned development, unplanned development and experience based development. While Kulich (1982) expressed that lifelong learning is something that offers the education to an individual throughout their lives, White (1982) claims that lifelong learning helps individuals to get ready to be able to manage their lives. Stehlik (2003), on the contrary, stated that lifelong learning is our learning approaches that we developed for new situations and teaches us how to learn out of school. Candy (1994) is another researcher who defined lifelong learning as a supportive process where individuals increase and strengthen their gained knowledge, values, skills as well as understanding. Also, this process helps individuals to use and practice them in the real world. It is important to point out that, in the literature, it was Paul Lengrand who for the first time mentioned about the lifelong learning approach in the UNESCO Conference with an article entitled "An Introduction to Life Long Learning" in 1970. In 1972 the International Commission of Educational Development published a report with a title of "The Present and Future of the World's Education" to emphasise the importance of lifelong learning. Doing this they, they made clear how significant the lifelong learning was. In the report, it was decided that education is a series of activities that would last lifelong with both legal and illegal channels to prepare individuals for a society that is not ready yet. Thus the following recommendations were offered:

1. Education should not be limited with school age and school buildings.
2. Education should be thought as a combination that covers both school education and education out of school which includes all the educational activities.
3. Educational activities should be more flexible.
4. Shortly, education should be designed as an existential continuity that is as long as life itself (Eurydice European Unit, 2000; Unesco World Report, 2005).

Within the lifelong learning, there are formal learning, informal learning, vocational education, technical education, in-service and out of service trainings. Therefore, it could be said that lifelong learning may take place at home, at work, at school or anywhere that an individual exists. Lifelong learning removes all the limitations related to the concepts of place, time, age, socio-economic level and education level and offers equal opportunities to an individual (Dinevski & Dinevski, 2004). Besides, lifelong learning that is a series of educational activities taking place everywhere for every individual does not only aim to make people gain knowledge and skills; it also aims to integrate them into the society and make them part of the social transformation (Jarvis, 2009; Demiralay & Karadeniz, 2008; Demirel, 2009). It is inevitable that in that process there is a big need for the teachers.

Taking the meanings that we load 21.century teachers with into consideration, a teacher should well know the processes of how to gain knowledge, choose and get benefit as the result of the changes today's world occurring in the flow of knowledge and thus replacing old knowledge with the new one. Because for the technological opportunities that came along with the information era to contribute to the education mainly depends on the success of the teacher. The more successful is the teacher in using technology and knowledge, the more successful they become (Hagger, Burn, Mutton & Brindley, 2008; Pieri & Diamantini, 2010).). Teachers should add more to what they gained and learnt before they started their teaching career; in short, they should renew themselves to cope with the changes in the field of education.

When the literature reviewed, it was discovered that there are studies in the Turkish Republic of Northern

Cyprus carried out about the evaluation of the competence perceptions of the second year primary school teachers and secondary school teachers for the lifelong learning approach; however, it was also discovered that there is no research done on the evaluation of the competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers for the lifelong learning approach. This is why this current study was carried out to find out about the competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers for the lifelong learning approach. To reach the targets of the study, answers are looked for the following questions:

- In general, how are the perceptions of the first year primary school teachers for the lifelong learning approach?
- Is there a meaningful difference among the competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers at different age groups for the lifelong learning approach?
- Is there a meaningful difference among the competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers with different length of services for the lifelong learning approach.

2. Methodology

Participants

This study is carried out with the first year primary teachers in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. 91 out of 120 first year primary teachers who work in the schools in Famagusta during the 2012-2013 academic years answered the questionnaire. 79% (n=72) of the teachers who answered the questionnaire were females and 20.9% (n=19) were males. 34% (n=31) of the participants were between 22 and 26 years old, 13.2% (n=12) of them were between 27 and 31 years old, 18.7% (n=17) of the participants were between 32 and 36 years old, 15.4% (n=14) of them were between 37 and 41 years old, 11% (n=10) of the participants were between 42 and 45 years old, 7.7% (n=7) of them were 46 years old and over. From the results obtained from the study, it could be seen that most of the teachers who participated to the study were between 22 and 26 years old.

Data collection instruments and application

In this study, the scale of “Lifelong Learning Competence” was used. It is a scale that was developed by Uzunboylu and Hürsen in 2010-2011 in order to identify the competence perceptions of the first year classroom teachers towards the lifelong learning approach. There are two parts in the questionnaire. The first part which is formed by the researchers themselves covers personal information about the gender, age, length of service and educational level of the teachers. The second part, on the other hand, includes statements about the competence perceptions of teachers for the lifelong learning approach. Besides, the scale is designed according to Likert that has “never”, “little”, “moderate” statements. There are 51 statements and 6 sub levels. Cronbach’s value of the questionnaire is calculated as (0.967).

After obtaining the permission from the Ministry of National Education and Culture, meetings were held with the school directors. Then the school directors and researchers together determined on the certain days that questionnaires would be implemented. On the days determined, the researchers went to schools and informed the teachers about the scale before implementing the questionnaires.

Data analysis

The data gathered from the study was analysed by the SPSS 20 programme. Besides, SPSS 20 programme, percentage, mean, standard deviation, One Way Aanova and LSD tests were used for the analysis. The values obtained from the study were interpreted by the 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results

3.1. Competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers for the lifelong learning approach

The average points of the teachers for the lifelong learning approach was identified as M=4.24, SD=.476. The results of the study showed that the first year primary school teachers completely perceived themselves competent about the lifelong learning approach.

3.2. Competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers at different age groups for the lifelong learning approach

Statistical results of the competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers for the lifelong learning approach are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers belonging to different age groups for the lifelong learning approach

	Age	N	M	SD
Competence Perceptions According to Life Long Learning	22-26	31	4.44	.447
	27-31	12	4.26	.528
	32-36	17	4.04	.435
	37-41	14	4.34	.406
	42-45	10	4.11	.438
	46 and over	7	3.77	.313
	Total	91	4.24	.476

Competence perception points of the teachers for the lifelong learning was M=4.44, SD=.447 for the teachers who were between 22 and 26 age limits, M=4.26, SD=.528 for the ones between 27 and 31, M=4.04, SD=.435 for the teachers who were between 32 and 36, M=4.34, SD=.406 for the ones between 37 and 41, M=4.11, SD=.438 for the teachers who were 42 and finally 45 and M=3.77, SD=.313 for the ones 46 and over.

Whether there was a meaningful difference among teachers' competence perception points towards lifelong learning or not One Way Anova test was used. The results of the test were presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Competence Perceptions of Teachers towards Lifelong Learning According to Their Length of Service

	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean Square	F	P	Explanation
Competence Perceptions According to Life Long Learning	Between Groups	3.808	5	.762	3.903	.003	P<0.05 Significant
	Within Groups	16.584	85	.195			
	Total	20.302	90				

As seen in Table 2, there was a meaningful difference ($F_{(5,85)}=3.903$, $P<0.05$) between the ages of teachers belonging to different age groups and their competence perceptions towards lifelong learning. LSD test was used in order to find out between which groups there was a difference. The results of the LSD test showed that there was a meaningful difference between the teachers belonging to the 22-26 age range and the teachers belonging to other age groups.

3.3. Competence perceptions of the first year primary teachers who have different length of service towards lifelong learning

Statistical results of the competence perceptions of the first year primary school teachers according to their length of service for the lifelong learning approach are presented in Table 3 below

Table 3. Competence Perceptions of the First Year Primary School Teachers According to Their Length of

Service towards Lifelong Learning

	Length of Service	N	M	SD
	1-5	28	4.46	.450
Competence	6-10	17	4.20	.500
Perceptions	11-15	16	4.09	.436
According to Life	16-20	15	4.33	.432
Long Learning	21 and over	15	3.92	.329
	Total	91	4.24	.476

Competence perception points for the lifelong learning of the teachers who participated in the study was $M=4.46$, $SD=.450$ for the ones who had between 1 and 5 years length of service, $M=4.20$, $SD=.500$ for the teachers who had between 6 and 10 years length of service, $M=4.09$, $SD=.436$ for the ones who had between 11 and 15 years length of service, $M=4.33$, $SD=.432$ for the teachers who had between 16 and 20 years length of service and $M=3.92$, $SD=.329$ for the ones who had 21 and over years length of service.

The results of the One Way ANOVA test that was carried out to find out whether there was a meaningful difference or not among the competence perceptions of the teachers who participated in the study are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Competence Perceptions of the Teachers According to Their Length of Service towards Lifelong Learning

	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean Square	F	P	Explanation
Competence	Between	3.405	4	.851	4.309	.003	$P<0.05$
Perceptions	Groups			.198			Significant
According to	Within	16.988	86				
Life Long	Groups	20.392	90				
Learning	Total						

As seen in Table 4, there was a meaningful difference ($F_{(4,86)}=4.309$, $P<0.05$) between the length of service of the teachers and their competence perceptions towards lifelong learning. LSD test was used in order to identify between which groups there was difference. According to the results of the LSD test, there was a meaningful difference for the favour of the teachers who had between 1 and 5 years length of service. The teachers who had less length of service had higher competence perceptions comparing to the ones with more length of service. The findings of the study showed that the teachers who were younger and had less length of service had higher competence perceptions towards lifelong learning.

3. Discussion & Conclusion

When the findings related to the competence perceptions for the lifelong learning of the teachers who participated in the study viewed, it was found that the first year primary school teachers consider themselves fully competent about the competence perceptions for the lifelong learning approach. Likewise, Özcan (2011), found that the fourth and fifth year primary school teachers who work for the schools in TRNC, in general, consider themselves competent about the lifelong learning. Besides, the findings of the study claimed that the teachers who were younger and had less length of service had higher competence perceptions towards lifelong learning. Özcan (2011), in his study, discovered a meaningful difference in favour of teachers who had between 11 and 15 years length of service. Those teachers in his study classified as “obtaining knowledge” and “digital competence perceptions”. According to Demirel’s study (2009) 21. Century’s lifelong learning concept stresses the fact that every individual should develop themselves both academically and personally in their management system. Therefore, with this purpose teachers as well as directors should prepare both academic and personal plans.

When the literature is reviewed, it is quite obvious that teachers should continuously update their knowledge in the presence of rapid knowledge production. It is also emphasised that teachers should be very effective in guiding people to be able to reach the knowledge (Numanoğlu, 1999; Yurdabakan, 2002).

In-service training courses should be arranged by the Ministry of National Education for the future years in order to increase teachers' perceptions towards lifelong learning approach especially for the older teachers with more length of service. Besides, researchers, in the studies that will be carried out afterwards, should more focus on the impacts of the factors of length of service and age on the concept of lifelong learning. They should also discuss the importance of the factors. It is also quite important to find out what the competence perceptions of the preschool teachers and academics that work for the higher education are. Searching all these will form integrity in the literature.

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