Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Education

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RESEARCH USE LEVELS AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMPETENCIES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

BARIŞ USLU

Introduction

It is an established fact that the rapid changes and developments have occurred in the 21th century in all areas, especially science and technology. Individuals' knowledge level quickly becomes insufficient for living in the information age thanks to the continuous increase of knowledge (Polat & Odabas, 2008). For this reason, people, no matter their occupational group, educational or income levels, must always improve their knowledge and qualifications to perpetuate their personal and vocational development (Torres, 2004). Accordingly, today's people need a lifelong learning process which lets them attain knowledge according to their need and use it in a productive way to maintain their development personally and professionally (AASL/AECT, 1998).

Lifelong learning as the term refers to the supporting process which helps to increase and strengthen the knowledge, values, skills and personal understanding gained throughout individuals' whole lives, and allows them to implement it in real life (Candy, 2002). According to this definition, lifelong learning can be supposed as a basic guiding tenet for educational systems rather than simply a part of them (Bagci, 2011). Thus, learning experiences should be designed by teachers to improve students' skills for getting lifelong learning competencies such as learning to learn, self-management, decision making in all educational levels but basically in elementary education (Dunlap & Grabinger, 2003). In order to create this situation in elementary schools, teachers should be role models for their students in developing lifelong learning competencies continually, and so should possess very high-level lifelong learning competencies for professional efficiency. Therefore, examining elementary school teachers' lifelong learning competencies and these competencies' relationship with variables such as teachers' age, seniority, educational status and educational research usage are determined as the subject of this research.

Conclusion

This research showed that the lifelong learning competencies of elementary school teachers are at high levels. The LLLCS was applied to 300 middle school teachers in Turkish Republic of North Cyprus when the scale was developed by Uzunboylu & Hursen (2011) and got similar results. According to Selvi (2011), 81% of teachers view lifelong learning capacities as important for their profession and this ratio specify that teachers' lifelong learning competencies should be at high level. On the other hand, teachers are service as effective role models for students in many areas by having very high lifelong learning competencies in the 21th Century (Dunlap & Grabinger, 2003). Thus, teachers should have very high level lifelong learning competencies not only for their professional development but also improvement of their students' learning.

Another result is that the relationships of teachers' lifelong learning competencies with their frequency of following educational research, performing educational research, following periodical publications and educational status are significant, and relationships of acquiring information and digital competencies with age and seniority are significant and negative. These relations are supported by lots of studies (Coolahan, 2002; Ozturk, 2011) about lifelong learning, teacher professional development and educational researches. Based on this finding, older teachers may need to improve some of their lifelong learning competencies so they need to put extra effort on following publications related to educational research and transforming the knowledge comes from educational research to learning activities more than younger teachers.

Additionally, significant predictors for teachers' lifelong learning competencies are following educational research, performing educational research and educational status according to regression model. Studies made by Hemsley-Brown & Sharp (2003) and Lessing & de Witt (2007) present parallel results with this research about teachers' educational research use. To this end, teachers may learn how to make research and how to use results of educational research if they pursue graduate education after their bachelor degree. Hence, teachers can benefit from educational research much more after completing higher educational degrees and improve their lifelong learning competencies.

Furthermore, according to results, some education activities including digital competencies should mostly be designed for experienced teachers' continuous professional development. In pre-service education, more courses about scientific research can be added to provide basic knowledge

related to usage of research by all teacher candidates. Teachers also should be encouraged to attend graduate education which assures much more opportunities about using or performing educational researches for increasing their professional efficiency.

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