

Preschool Teachers' Tendency Level of Lifelong Learning

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Abstract:

Recently, it has been seen that rapid changes have started to alter perspectives on education. With the development of information technologies, this change has started to make continuous education compulsory. The paradigm of continuous change and development in education is Lifelong Learning. Raising individuals who are inclined towards lifelong learning (LLL) leads to the development of new human characteristics that this change should produce. This study determines and compares the LL levels of preschool teachers to compare them by demographics. The research was conducted with a descriptive survey model among preschool teachers. In this context, it is understood that their level of LL is generally high, but they consider themselves inadequate in terms of foreign language proficiency. Among the variables examined in the study according to the age variable it is seen that the arithmetic means of the opinions of the age groups is close to each other, and there is no significant difference between the opinions of preschool teachers. However, it was determined that there was a significant difference according to gender, and marital status variables. According to the gender variable, male teachers have a higher tendency towards LL than female teachers. According to the marital status variable, single teachers have a higher tendency towards LL than married teachers, and their opinions differ significantly. Preschool teachers exhibit learning tendencies across all age groups and cultivate a learning culture.

Keywords: Pre-school, education, teachers, lifelong education, tendency

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INTRODUCTION

Our planet will not survive, if it is not a learning planet, and sustainable development will be achieved by learning through (Walters (2010). Constant scientific and technological innovation and change have a profound impact on learning needs and styles. Learning can no longer be divided into the time and place of acquiring knowledge (school) and the time and place of applying the acquired knowledge (workplace) (Fischer, 2000). Education is a comprehensive process that lasts from cradle to grave. It is widely accepted that learning takes place continuously and in a wide variety of contexts, both in the academic and non-academic environments of the university, and beyond in society, the workplace and the family (Kiley & Cannon, 2000). This perspective is conceptualized as "lifelong learning". Lifelong learning refers to intentional and focused learning that occurs throughout a person's life.

In various attempts to produce a clear account of the topic, it may be perceived the presence and operation of a particular preconception. In many scientific works on LLL, there seems to be an implicit acceptance of the notion that it is possible to arrive at some uniform descriptive definition of the term LLL. The common assumption particularly the earlier ones, seems to be that a clear agreement on the meaning and applicability of the term is inconceivable, possible and attainable (Aspin & Chapman, 2007). Lifelong learning is voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons. As such, it not only increases social participation, active citizenship, and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability. This approach recognizes that learning is not limited to childhood or the classroom but occurs throughout life and in a variety of situations. Lifelong learning is defined as a continuous process and multi-purpose learning activities carried out to improve one's knowledge, skills and competence (OECD, 2001), and contributes to the economic cohesion of societies, the "personal development and satisfaction" of individuals and "social inclusion and democratic understanding" (Aspin & Chapman, 2000).

The concept of lifelong learning was first used by Grundtvig in the 1800s (Wain, 2000), and until the 1970s, it was shaped within the concept of "adult education" and was considered a process that emphasized the significance of vocational education (cited in Evin Gencel, 2013). Lifelong learning also means providing people with second chances and advanced learning opportunities through the development of basic skills (Soran, Akkoyunlu and Kavak, 2006: 2). It is understood that lifelong learning competencies have become one of the most important topics for study these days (Oral & Yazar, 2015; Yaman & Yazar, 2015; Tunca et al., 2015; Ayaz 2016; Çetinkaya et al., 2016; Pınarcık et al., 2016; Babanlı & Akçay, 2018; Boztepe & Demirtaş, 2018; Yılmaz, 2018; Arslan, 2019; İncik, 2020; Gültekin & Yazar, 2021; Karakış, 2022; Karakış & Demirtaş, 2022; Korucu & Şahan, 2024).

Lifelong learning is a natural tendency to grow, develop, and continue learning. It can emerge by eliminating negative and unsafe thought and belief systems and fostering a

positive learning environment (McCombs, 1991). A tendency springs from a desire or motivation that provides the energy necessary for action (Crick & Yu, 2008). Individuals' willingness shows their tendencies. While skills reflect the cognitive dimension of individuals, tendencies reflect the affective dimension.

The concept of lifelong learning remains unclear despite continuous research and studies, to explain and understand the basic factors and behaviors associated with it (Derrick, 2003; Tough, 1979). As a result, the concept of lifelong learning, particularly examining and assessing the lifelong learning tendencies of teachers, who should exhibit the highest level of such tendencies, has become a crucial area of research for their professional development. Özçiftçi and Çakır (2015) suggested that conducting a study in this field with preschool teachers was of great importance, especially considering that lifelong learning is a process that starts in pre-school. This research is limited to the opinions of preschool teachers working in Sakarya Province and the data of the 2023-2024 academic year. Drawing on these, this study investigates the level of teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning. Additionally, the study compares this trend across different demographics. To this end, the study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the level of teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning?
2. Does level of teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning differ statistically significantly by gender?
3. Does level of teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning differ statistically significantly by marital status?
4. Does level of teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning differ statistically significantly by age?

METHOD

The current study adopted the descriptive survey model, one of the quantitative research designs. The survey model is used to gain insights into the characteristics, behaviors, or opinions of a specific group (Büyüköztürk, 2012). Thus, in this study, a survey model was preferred to reveal the level of teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning.

Sample

There are 450 preschool teachers working in Sakarya Province in the 2023-2024 academic year. Of these teachers, 278 voluntarily participated in this study. They were reached through simple random sampling. To determine which data analysis techniques will be used in the study, the distribution of the data set was examined. To this end, skewness-kurtosis coefficients were computed. Field (2009) suggested skewness-kurtosis coefficients between -1.96 and +1.96 indicate a normal distribution. The coefficients were as follows: skewness=.81 (SE=.15) and kurtosis=5.75 (SE=15), showing that the data did not have a normal distribution. Based on these findings, non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney

U and Kruskal Wallis H) were employed. On the other hand, descriptive findings included minimum, maximum, values, arithmetic mean and standard deviation.

In this study, the Lifelong Learning Trends Scale developed by Erdoğan and Aarsal (2016) was used. The scale was applied based on all its dimensions, and the current research data were used to analyze whether these dimensions were effective again. The findings of these validity analyses are given in Table 1, Table 2, and Figure 1. This scale was developed based on a 29-item questionnaire, developed by Yaman (2014) and applied to teachers, which has a high level of reliability ($\alpha=.89$).

Validity and Reliability

The validity was evaluated through a confirmatory factor analysis in which goodness of fit indices were calculated. They are presented in Table 1 below. On the other hand, the standardized factor loadings are presented in Table 2, all of which satisfied the cut-off point of .40. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the factor structure of the scale was confirmed on the current data set (Hair Jr, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2019; Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). The path diagram for the confirmatory factor analysis of the scale is presented in Figure 1 below.

Table 1. Goodness of fit indices of LLL tendency scale

| Indices | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|-----|-------|-----|-----|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| χ^2/df | p | RMSEA | CFI | GFI | AGFI | NNFI | NFI | IFI | RMR | SRMR |
| 2.72 | .00 | .079 | .87 | .75 | .71 | .86 | .82 | .88 | .03 | .072 |

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is used to evaluate the model fit. An RMSEA value of $\leq .05$ indicates a good fit, while a value between .05 and .08 suggests an acceptable fit in the model. In this case, the RMSEA value of .079, with a p-value of .000, indicates an acceptable fit of the model.

Table 2. Standardized regression loadings

| Factor | Item | Factor loading |
|-----------------|---------|----------------|
| Native language | Natlan1 | .757 |
| | Natlan2 | .892 |
| | Natlan3 | .893 |

| | | |
|----------------------|------------|------|
| Foreign language | Flan1 | .921 |
| | Flan2 | .920 |
| | Flan3 | .917 |
| | Flan4 | .970 |
| | Flan5 | .869 |
| | Flan6 | .900 |
| Problem solving | Probsol1 | .697 |
| | Probsol2 | .823 |
| | Probsol3 | .861 |
| | Probsol4 | .854 |
| | Probsol5 | .826 |
| | Probsol6 | .707 |
| Digital competencies | Digital1 | .880 |
| | Digital2 | .892 |
| | Digital3 | .579 |
| | Digital4 | .846 |
| | Digital5 | .720 |
| Learning to learn | Learning1 | .738 |
| | Learning 2 | .851 |
| | Learning 3 | .748 |
| | Learning 4 | .798 |
| | Learning 5 | .789 |
| Citizenship | Citizen1 | .716 |
| | Citizen2 | .776 |
| | Citizen 3 | .807 |

| | | |
|---------|-----------|------|
| | Citizen 4 | .785 |
| | Citizen 5 | .841 |
| | Citizen 6 | .807 |
| Culture | Culture1 | .641 |
| | Culture2 | .908 |
| | Culture3 | .808 |
| | Culture4 | .869 |
| Art | Art1 | .677 |
| | Art2 | .764 |
| | Art3 | .681 |

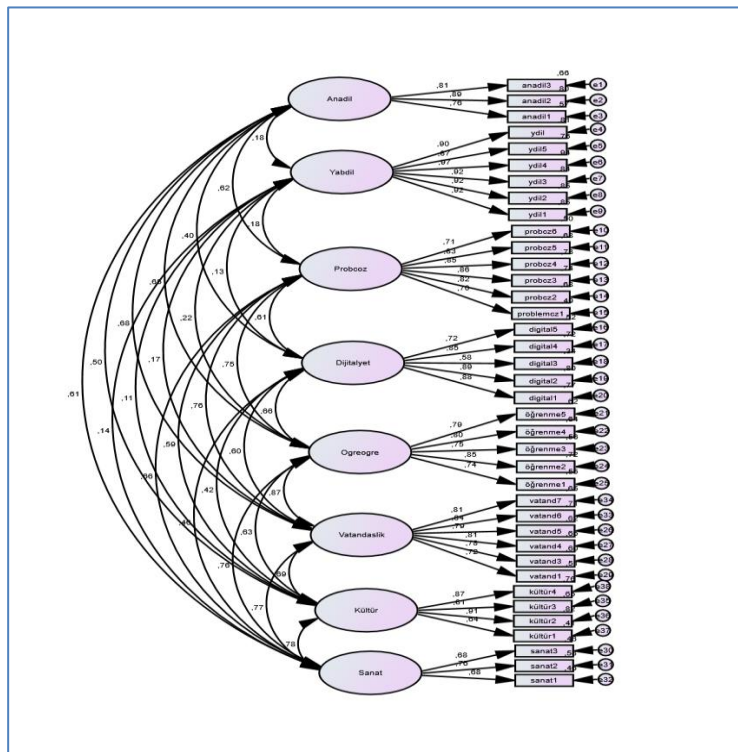


Figure 1. CFA path diagram

As for reliability, Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated, which emerged as $\alpha = .95$. This finding shows that the internal consistency of the scale is high. Ho (2006) suggested that $\alpha \geq .80$ was satisfactory.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient

| Scale | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha (α) |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Lifelong Learning Scale | 38 | .95 |

Research Ethics

This study adhered to the guidelines, including the principles and codes of conduct recommended by the American Psychological Association (APA). The necessary steps suggested by the institutional ethics committee were followed. In order to ensure confidentiality, participants' responses were anonymized to prevent the collection of any potential information that could identify the participants. Permission dated 11.01.2024 and numbered E.324652 was obtained from the Sakarya University Ethics Committee, and the study was conducted with preschool teachers working in Sakarya Province.

Findings

The sample of the study included 278 teachers, and Table 4 presents the demographics of the participant pre-school teachers.

Table 4. Demographics of the sample

| Variable | Group | n | % |
|----------------|--------------|-----|------|
| Gender | Female | 262 | 94.2 |
| | Male | 16 | 5.8 |
| Age | 25-30 | - | - |
| | 31-35 | 27 | 9.7 |
| | 36-40 | 127 | 45.7 |
| | 41-45 | 95 | 34.2 |
| | 46 and above | 29 | 10.4 |
| Marital status | Married | 269 | 96.8 |
| | Single | 9 | 3.2 |
| Total | | 278 | 100 |

As Table 4 shows, 94.2% (f=262) of the teachers who participated in the research were female and 5.8% (f=16) male. There was no participant who was between the ages of 25 to 30. Of the participants, 9.7% (f=27) were between the ages of 31-35, 45.7% (f=127) between the ages of 36-40, 34.2% (f=95) between the ages of 41-45, and 10.4% (f=29) were 46 and over. Lastly, 96.8% (f=269) were married and 3.2% (f=9) were single.

Table 5. Descriptive findings

| Scale/ Dimension | N | Min. | Max. | \bar{x} | SD |
|------------------------------|-----|------|------|-----------|-----|
| LLL Scale | 278 | 38 | 188 | 3.91 | .44 |
| Native language proficiency | 278 | 3 | 15 | 4.38 | .57 |
| Foreign language proficiency | 278 | 6 | 30 | 1.55 | .85 |
| Problem solving | 278 | 6 | 30 | 4.40 | .53 |
| Digital literacy | 278 | 5 | 25 | 4.47 | .55 |
| Learning to learn | 278 | 5 | 25 | 4.23 | .60 |
| Citizenship | 278 | 6 | 30 | 4.29 | .58 |
| Cultural competence | 278 | 4 | 20 | 4.43 | .56 |
| Artistic competence | 278 | 3 | 15 | 4.24 | .66 |

As Table 5 shows, teachers' mean scores on the LLL scale were (\bar{x} =3.91; SD=.44), which indicated that teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning was "high." Teachers' mean scores on native language proficiency were (\bar{x} = 4.38; S.D. =.57) and on foreign language proficiency were (\bar{x} = 1.55; S.D. =.85), suggesting a high level of proficiency in the native language but low in the foreign language. The mean scores of participants on the remaining dimensions suggest that they have a high proficiency in problem solving, digital literacy, learning to learn, citizenship, cultural, and artistic competences.

Table 6. Comparison of teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning by gender

| Scale | Gender | n | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks | U | p |
|-------|--------|-----|-----------|--------------|------|------|
| LLL | Female | 262 | 137.06 | 35909 | 1456 | .04* |
| | Male | 16 | 179.50 | 2872 | | |

*p<.05

As Table 6 shows, male and female teachers' mean ranks differ significantly by gender ($U=1456.00$; $p<.05$). The mean rank for male teachers ($MR=179.50$) was significantly higher than that of female teachers ($MR=137.06$). Based on this finding, it can be argued that male teachers have a greater tendency to engage in lifelong learning.

Table 7. Comparison of teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning by marital status

| Scale | Marital status | n | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks | U | p |
|-------|----------------|-----|-----------|--------------|------|-----|
| LLL | Married | 269 | 139.09 | 37415 | 1100 | .64 |
| | Single | 9 | 151.78 | 1366 | | |

Table 7 compares teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning by marital status. The findings suggested that marital status did not create a statistically significant difference in teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning ($U=1100.00$; $p>.05$). The mean rank for married teachers was $MR=139.09$, while it was $MR=151.78$ for single participants. Drawing on this finding, it can be concluded, married and single teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning is similar.

Table 8. Comparison of teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning by age

| Scale | Age | n | Mean Rank | df | x2 | P | Difference |
|-------|-------------|-----|-----------|----|------|-----|------------|
| LLL | 31-35 years | 27 | 145.35 | 3 | 4.87 | .18 | - |
| | 36-40 years | 127 | 142.98 | | | | |
| | 41-45 years | 95 | 142.67 | | | | |
| | ≥46 years | 29 | 108.41 | | | | |

Table 8 compares teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning by age. The findings showed that the mean rank for teachers between the ages of 31-35 was $MR=145.35$, for teachers between the ages of 36-40 was $MR=142.98$, for teachers between the ages of 41-45 was $MR=142.67$, and it was $MR=108.41$ for teachers who are 46 and over. The Kruskal-Wallis H test finding, which was conducted to test the significance of the difference between the mean ranks, did not reveal a statistically significant difference in teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning ($H_{(3)}=4.87$; $p>.05$).

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Lifelong learning has recently emerged as a key paradigm increasingly influencing education system worldwide. Poyraz and Titrek (2013) argued that more importance should be attached to the lifelong learning paradigm in Türkiye. On the other hand, preschool education is a critical level that is constantly and rapidly changing. Thus, it is inevitable for preschool teachers to constantly improve themselves, which emphasizes the significance of investigating their tendency to engage in lifelong learning. Previous research suggested that teachers had a high tendency to engage in lifelong learning (Kavtelek, 2014; Özoğlu, 2019). Consistently, an abundant literature suggested that teachers had a high tendency to engage in lifelong learning (Bilici & Bağcı, 2020; İncik, 2020; Yaman, 2014; Yenice & Tunç, 2019; Yılmaz, 2018; Yılmaz & Başkaya, 2018). However, studies on teacher candidates showed that they had moderate (Arslan, 2019; Gencel, 2013; Güçlü et al., 2013) and low (Tunca et al., 2015) tendencies to engage in lifelong learning.

According to 2021-2022 MoNE teacher statistics, there are 79,952 preschool teachers in preschool education institutions, 74,335 (92.97%) of whom are female and 5,617 (7.03%) of whom are male. The high rate of male teachers' opinions may be related to male teachers in preschool education preferring to be administrators rather than active teachers in the classroom. The demand for postgraduate education in administrative roles can also be considered as a reason for the increase in lifelong learning tendencies. In Yaman and Yazar (2015) and Gültekin & Yazar (2021), it was determined that there was no significant difference between male and female teachers' lifelong learning tendencies. There is also the possibility that female preschool teachers' roles outside their profession (e.g. motherhood) may play an inhibiting role in their lifelong learning tendencies. Moreover, in their research Avcı et al. (2019) argued that the pre-school teaching program is chosen by female students and that male pre-service teachers state that they experience various gender difficulties in their choice of this program, in the education process and in their assignments. According to Koçak and Kaygusuz (2019), although there are varied opinions about the teacher's professional knowledge and skills and their communication with children, the majority of teachers think that women should be teachers in education.

Moreover, the findings also suggested that male teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning was higher than that of female teachers, which was consistent with the previous research (İncik, 2020; Karakış, 2022; Karakış & Demirtaş, 2022, Tunca et al., 2015). These findings are similar to the results of the current study. However, other studies showed that female teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning was higher than their male counterparts (Bilici & Bağcı, 2020; Bulaç & Kurt, 2019) or there was no difference between males and females (Arslan, 2019; Boztepe & Demirtaş, 2018; Oral & Yazar, 2015; Yılmaz, 2018).

Another finding of the study was that the marital status of teachers did not have a significant influence on their tendency to engage in lifelong learning. This finding is consistent with previous literature (Babanlı & Akçay, 2018; Çetinkaya et al., 2016; Pınarcık et al., 2016). The number of female and married preschool teachers is quite high in the sample, and they have family responsibilities. This association could be due to the fact that their responsibilities at home might be a hindrance to engaging in lifelong learning.

Lastly, the finding suggested that age did not have a statistically significant influence on teachers' tendency to engage in lifelong learning. This finding was consistent with the previous literature showing that different age groups have a similar level of tendency to engage in lifelong learning, (Çetinkaya et al., 2016; Erdener & Gül, 2017; Erten & Kazu, 2016; Kavtelek, 2014).

Providing individuals with a chance for lifelong learning through various courses, activities, and projects, as well as increasing awareness of lifelong learning can mitigate anxiety and hopelessness (Ceviz Kübra, 2022). Such courses can be considered key practices in terms of creating a culture where the LLL tendencies of preschool teachers, as well as all segments of society, can be enhanced. On the other hand, further research should be carried out to reveal factors that hinder the LLL tendencies of married and female teachers. Furthermore, solutions should be developed based on findings.

Various metaphorical studies in the literature on the perception of teachers reveal that teachers are likened to mothers (Aydoğdu, 2008; Çelikten, 2006; Cerit, 2008; De Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Saban, 2004; Kırıl, Kırıl, & Başdağ, 2013). It is expected that the teacher should take on the role of a mother; therefore, the teacher is often expected to be a woman and fully embody the mother metaphor, especially in the preschool years when the need for a mother is intense. In the study by Topuz and Erkanlı (2016), in which the roles attributed to women and men in the context of gender, were revealed through the metaphor method, the metaphors of mother and friend were reported for women, while the metaphors of manager and head were reported for men. Therefore, it can be stated that both married teachers and female teachers' orientation towards basic roles at home rather than administration also affects their tendency to engage in lifelong learning. The need for continuous self-renewal of male and married teachers who aspire to become administrators explains their high lifelong learning tendency.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMONDATIONS

The findings of the current study are limited to the perceptions of preschool teachers working in Sakarya Province. There are not enough studies in the literature on preschool education and preschool teachers' lifelong learning tendencies and attitudes. This is the strength and the unique aspect of this research. Therefore, it can be suggested that qualitative and quantitative research related to this topic should be conducted.

In Turkish society, because female teachers often possess nurturing qualities, they can be more patient with children than men, and children can feel more comfortable expressing their needs. However, it is not appropriate for children's caretaking to exclude considerations of their moral development, particularly for the self-care of girls. The majority of teachers believe that more teachers should be women.

While the study successfully identifies patterns in the lifelong learning dispositions of preschool teachers, it does not adequately discuss how these insights can inform educational policy or professional development programs. Expanding the concluding section to include recommendations for teacher training initiatives, institutional support mechanisms or policy changes would make the study more applicable to real-world educational settings.

Furthermore, highlighting how institutions can address barriers to lifelong learning for educators, especially in early childhood education, will increase the impact of the study. It is important that teachers working in the field of preschool education have high lifelong learning tendencies in terms of the development of the early childhood field. This increases the likelihood that both male and female teachers are ready for future innovations, paving the way for the development of this field and the effective implementation of new educational programs and policies. Teachers acquiring learning to learn skills and digital competencies, among other skills, result in the impression that the application of contemporary educational principles and methods in early childhood education, as well as the removal of obstacles to its development, can lead to important opportunities. Undoubtedly, openness to change and development is the key to success in this globalized world.

CONCLUSION

Lifelong learning has started to emerge as a paradigm that is one of the most important reflections of today's social, cultural, and technological developments on education. In particular, pre-school education is the first stage of lifelong learning. Therefore, the level of lifelong learning dispositions of preschool teachers is important for developing the learning disposition of the new generation. Preschool teachers are the first group of teachers who will teach this culture to children. Therefore, this study aims to determine the lifelong learning tendencies and levels of preschool teachers. In this context, one of the specific aims is to determine whether there is a significant difference between the opinions of teachers according to gender, age, and marital status variables. In this context, in addition to determining the general level of lifelong learning dispositions of preschool teachers, it is important to assess their levels in various dimensions.

Native language proficiency, foreign language proficiency, problem-solving, digital literacy, learning to learn, citizenship, cultural competence, and artistic competence are among the key dimensions of lifelong learning dispositions that are specifically addressed as research objectives.

According to the results of this study, it can be argued that preschool teachers generally possess a strong inclination towards lifelong learning and have a culture that is quite open to it, but they perceive their native and especially foreign language proficiency as quite inadequate.

While some studies related to this issue indicate that women are more prone to lifelong learning, others conclude that male teachers are more prone to lifelong learning. The results of this research are also in favor of male teachers. Preschool education is a field with a predominantly female teacher profile. Therefore, male teachers in this field are preparing themselves for managerial positions. He/she has to be open to learning and striving continuously. In this case, male teachers in the field of preschool education are more open to lifelong learning.

It was also found that young and single teachers were more inclined towards lifelong learning than older and married teachers. This is undoubtedly a new culture and a new imperative. Young people can adapt to this culture more quickly. This is also reflected in the results of this research. Acquiring the culture of lifelong learning has become a necessity for all teachers, especially the new generation of preschool teachers, so they can effectively engage in relevant behaviors and practices.

As a result, it can be stated that it has become a necessity to include courses that will teach and promote a culture of lifelong learning in all areas of teacher education, not only in the preschool field.

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Data Availability Declaration

The data can be shared upon request.

Author Contributions

Author Contributions:

The sole author of this research, Turan Çakır, was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology formulation, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Furthermore, [Turan Çakır] took charge of drafting the initial manuscript, revising it critically for vital intellectual content, and finalizing it for publication. The author has read and approved the final manuscript and takes full accountability for the accuracy and integrity of the work presented.

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