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**HOW TO INCREASE TEACHERS' QUALITY AND
PARTICIPATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING?**

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Abstract

Lifelong learning has become a main educational policy of European Union. Lifelong learning also is now seen one of the teacher competence that need to be developed in the initial and in-service teacher education. This study examines the views of teacher educators about improving teachers' quality and participation in lifelong learning regarding Europe 2020 strategy. This study is a qualitative research, and the data of the study was collected through face to face interviews with four teacher educators working at the Faculty of Education in Turkey. The interview questions comprised of Europe 2020 policy on lifelong learning strategy defined by European Commission. The data of the study was analyzed by thematic analysis technique. The results of the study showed that teacher educators have ideas that career guidance, flexible study opportunities, improving quality and transparency, and financial support are key elements for improving teachers' quality and participation in lifelong learning. Also, the teacher educators reported that teacher education programs should include lifelong learning competences defined by European Commission. Policy makers and teacher educators should consider these elements of lifelong learning in order to improve the quality of teachers and education in Europe.

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1. Introduction

Since 2011 European Union countries have taken some measures to solve the key identified problems in the European Union countries regarding education and training. These responses reflect Member States' positions in relation to the Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 targets and benchmarks. There are four thematic areas that are related to the Europe 2020 strategy: early school leaving, higher education, youth employment and vocational education and training and lifelong learning. Member States address the policy objective of increasing adult participation in lifelong learning by implementing a number of large scale initiatives such as improving career guidance, awareness raising, offering more flexible study opportunities and pathways, focus on low-skilled/low qualified groups and financial incentives for participation in lifelong learning. European policy also emphasizes the importance of development of qualifications framework and validation, and qualifications standards and quality assurance in order to improve the quality of lifelong learning (European Commission, 2013). Lifelong learning has been become a slogan of EU in order to justify, summarize, publicize, and popularize its values, ideas, and policies in the field of education and training in European countries (Dehmel, 2006). European Commission emphasizes that adult learning and lifelong learning should play a key role in the policies for competitiveness and employability, social inclusion and active citizenship. In this aspect, European Commission defined eight key lifelong learning competences that play a decisive role in building active citizenship, social cohesion and employability. The competences include basic skills of language, literacy, numeracy, information and communication technologies, learning to learn, and social and cultural awareness. The competences are seen as references for program planners, teachers, and scholars interested in lifelong learning (European Commission, 2006).

2. Problem Statement

The roles of teachers and schools are changing, and so teachers need to help students acquire the skills such as communication and collaboration, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, active citizenship, and lifelong learning (OECD, 2011). As a result, teachers' continuous professional development is highly important for increasing lifelong learning skills of students. Lifelong learning also is important for improving the quality of teachers because of the economic crisis, the need for new skills and demographic changes in European countries. Lifelong learning for teachers is considered to be essential aspect of professional development of teachers. In Europe, Community programs such as Comenius, Erasmus, and Socrates regarding lifelong learning have been implemented to improve teachers' competences (European Commission, 2007). In Turkey, the general teacher competences defined by the Ministry of National Education, which are compatible with European Commission, include personal and professional development regarding lifelong learning skills (MEB, 2017). There are many studies concerning lifelong learning competences of teachers and teacher candidates (Arsal, 2011; Bozat, Bozat & Hürsen, 2014; Garipağaoğlu, 2013; Gencel, 2013; Kuzu & Erten, 2016). The results of some studies showed that teachers' lifelong learning competences should be improved. For example, some studies indicated that teachers and teacher candidates do not have some lifelong learning competences such as communication in foreign language, citizenships, information and communication technology (Çelebi, Özdemir & Elçin, 2014; Gencel, 2013). The lifelong learning competences of teachers need to be improved by initial and in-

service teacher education programs. As a result, the main concern of this study is how to improve teachers' quality and participation in lifelong learning.

3. Research Questions

What are the views of teacher educators about improving teachers' quality and participation in lifelong learning regarding Europe 2020 strategy?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine how to improve teachers' quality and participation in lifelong learning, one of the education and training Europe 2020 strategy.

5. Research Methods

The participants of the study are four teacher educators who work at the Faculty of Education in the University in the north of Turkey. All of the teacher educators taken part in the study have experience on teacher education, and they are interested in lifelong learning. Also, they have doctorate degree on education and at least 5-year experiences in university as a teacher educator.

This study is a qualitative research, and the data of the study was collected through face to face interviews with four teacher educators. The interview questions comprised of Europe 2020 policy on lifelong learning strategy defined by European Commission. During the face to face interview, two main questions were asked to participants. The first question is related to increasing teachers' participation in lifelong learning, and the second question is about improving quality and transparency of lifelong learning. The data of the study was analyzed by thematic analysis technique. The answer of the teachers about interview questions were recorded by video recorder after that they were transcribed by the researcher and one experts on qualitative research methods. As a result of the consensus on the ideas, the thematic areas of the data were identified

6. Findings

The findings were presented as a part of the two themes: Theme 1 is related to increasing teachers' participation in lifelong learning, and Theme 2 is about improving quality and transparency of lifelong learning.

Theme 1: Increasing teachers' participation in lifelong learning

Teacher educators reported that media, government, and non-governmental organizations such as teachers' union should cooperate on improving teachers' participation in lifelong learning. Green (2002) indicated that governments have some roles for lifelong learning such as setting the objectives and targets. The teacher educators stated that guidance and counseling service should be provided to teachers for their career plans. Also, they reported that Ministry of National Education in Turkey should design distance education programs for teachers, and the quality of internet access in schools should be improved. Distance education programs can improve teachers' skills, knowledge, and dispositions that are necessary to succeed in a world (Burns, 2011). Finally, the government should provide teachers with financial support for lifelong learning. Sample answers of the teacher educators regarding Theme 1 are presented:

“I think that the cooperation among government, Ministry of Education, non-governmental organizations such as unions, associations on education are important for teachers’ participation to lifelong learning”

“My idea about this question is that government need to allocate budget for lifelong learning, and teachers should get extra money in addition to their salary.”

“Teachers who participated in lifelong learning program should have opportunities such as professional degree, extra money, and tenured appointment.

“I think the government should support teachers for lifelong learning by giving extra-money and professional degrees.

Theme 2: Improving quality and transparency of lifelong learning

The teacher educators reported that the professional development of teachers after their participation to a lifelong learning program should be monitored and evaluated by the school management. Teachers need to have additional competences such as information and communication technologies and self-regulated learning, and lifelong learning competences defined by European Commission. Lifelong learning programs need to be designed according to need assessment that is based on teachers’ professional needs. The teacher educators also reported that after completing a lifelong learning program, teachers should receive a certification with international validity. In-service and preservice teacher education program should include courses and activities regarding lifelong learning. Dolan (2012) stated that initial teacher education curriculum should include lifelong learning as a compulsory component of teacher education. Also, the teacher educators stated that teachers had to be motivated to participate to lifelong learning program. Finsterwald et al. (2013) showed the significant role of motivation for improving the quality of lifelong learning programs. Some examples of the teacher educators’ answers about theme 2 were following:

“I think that monitoring the performance development of teachers is important for lifelong learning. School management should plan lifelong learning programs for the teachers, and evaluate its effectiveness.”

“In 21st century, teachers need to have not only competences on teacher profession but also competences on information technologies, lifelong learning, self-regulated learning, problem solving and thinking skills.”

“I think that school management should establish a unit responsible for lifelong learning, and it observe and evaluate the increase of teachers’ performance.”

“I think the Ministry of Education should organize seminars, conferences and in-service education programs for teachers regarding lifelong learning.”

7. Conclusion

According to the results of the study, teacher educators have ideas that career guidance, flexible study opportunities, improving quality and transparency, and financial support are key elements for improving teachers’ quality and participation in lifelong learning. Also, the teacher educators reported that teacher education programs should include courses, activities on lifelong learning, and improve preservice teachers’ lifelong learning competences defined by European Commission. Policy makers and teacher

educators should consider these elements of lifelong learning in order to improve the quality of teachers and education in Europe.

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