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Role of Local Governments in Life Long Learning

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Abstract

The learning process which used to be called apprenticeship and non-formal education previously, and which has become "lifelong learning" with the 2000s is in fact a reflection of the characteristics of the current era that we live in. Rapid changes that occur in social structure caused theoretical information to become more necessary in postindustrial societies to make the required innovations and political decisions, so that information has become a key concept. At this type of society, individuals are forced to learn throughout their lives in order to keep up with the society that they live in. Lifelong learning is defined as the entire learning activities that happen in an individual's personal, societal and employment perspectives, which continue throughout life with the aim of enhancing information, skills and competence. In summary lifelong learning is a process which starts with an individual's birth and ends with his/her death. In formal education lifelong learning is carried on according to a curriculum and outside school, it is mostly applied by giving certificates of competency based on work skills development and improvement. In addition to this, there are trainings where people can attend to improve their weak skills where they need or in areas to get more information and skills (talents). According to the "Adult Training Research" held by Turkish Statistical Institute, participation of Turkish population at age 18 and above in non-formal education is found to be 17%. These rates are very low when compared to western countries. The studies to improve lifelong learning have accelerated. Lifelong learning operations are being managed at first by Ministry of National Education, universities, municipalities, confederations, Turkish Employment Organization, syndicates etc. Especially the course varieties and participant rate in metropolitan municipalities, cities and districts have an important place regarding lifelong learning. Hence, at the report prepared for 2014-2018 period by Ministry of National Education the "Turkish Life Long Learning Strategy Document and Action Plan", the need for local governments to take effective role in lifelong learning is emphasized. Main objective of this study is to discuss the role of local governments in lifelong learning regarding the number of courses, participants, demographics of the participants and reasons for participation.

Keywords: lifelong learning; local governments; formal education; lifelong learning in Turkey

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1. Introduction

Sociologists make classifications of the society according to the technologies available and agree that there are five types of society. The last of these is conceptualized as post-industrial society, which produces knowledge by using the computer technologies. In this type of society, production of products has been replaced by the information and service sector, such as media, research and development, tourism, banking and finance, and technology. Individual, cultural or institutional changes make up one of the most crucial features of today's societies. These changes have rendered information more important in the everyday lives of people. Also, the need for the updating of this information has increased, pushing forward the concept of Lifelong Learning. Having gained importance for the last 50 years in EU countries in particular, Lifelong Learning has proved to be valuable especially in the 21st century.

In Turkey, influenced by the developments in the world, public education was under the administration of General Directorate of Apprenticeship and Training Education in the past, in 2011, its name and service policy were updated as General Directorate of Lifelong Learning. The purpose of the General Directorate has been proclaimed as doing studies for the purpose of "developing programs that can improve work and life skills and that can be applied always and everywhere, meeting the labor market's need for the qualified workforce, and enabling a conversion from the learning individual through the learning society to the learning Turkey."

Although the Ministry of National Education is responsible for the lifelong learning programs in Turkey, a number of organizations and institutions have an undeniable role in it, too. Among the partners of Lifelong Learning are universities, local administrations, Turkish Labor Agency (ISKUR), professional organizations, non-governmental organizations, and some other institutions. As can be seen, one of the partners of Lifelong Learning is local Governments. Especially such metropolitan municipalities as Istanbul and Ankara play an active and effective role in Lifelong Learning by reaching a very large number of people, as far as the types of training courses and the number of course centers are concerned.

The philosophical basis of Lifelong Learning studies is the attempt to enable the individuals to adapt themselves to our age, which is called information society, to possess the power to control their present time and future, and to take an active part in the economic and social processes. Lifelong learning process consists of the activities conducted throughout one's life with the aim of improving information, skills and competencies from the individual, civil, social and/or employment-based perspectives. Local administrations have found an important place for themselves among the leading actors of these activities. In this sense, the purpose of the present study is to discuss the role of local governments in lifelong learning with special consideration paid to Istanbul and Ankara as two important metropolitan centers of Turkey. The attempts of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality in this field have been organized in two basic branches, BELMEK and BELTEK. Within the scope of BELMEK, functioning since 1994, there are 31 branches of vocational and handicraft courses that have been organized at 6 main centers and 160 course places. 133.899 people have participated in BELTEK courses, conducted since 1999. A total of 1.800.000 people have attended the lifelong learning activities organized by ISMEK of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

2. What is lifelong learning?

Learning takes place as formal education, non-formal education /or public education and informal education. The basic criterion of these classifications is the place where the learning takes place. Formal education is given at institutions charged formally with education and training. Non-formal education is purposeful from the perspective of the learner and planned from the aspects of learning targets, its time and support while it is not given by an education or training institution. Informal education may, however, take place anywhere. It is the sort of learning available in everyday life, in

the family, among the peers, in the media, and in different cultural settings. Today the world uses the concept of lifelong learning, covering these three types of learning.

According to the understanding accepted across the world, the basic purpose of lifelong learning is to ensure personal development, to enable social inclusion and to secure the active citizenship and employability. It is therefore possible to see these understandings in the definitions made about lifelong learning. The definitions have several common points; these are that the learning spans one's whole life; that it aims to make the individual's participation in social and economic life easier; that it intends to empower the individual in the face of the developing technologies; and that it plans to make the individual an active citizen in the society in which he/she lives. There are different definitions of lifelong learning. In one of them, lifelong learning is all the lifelong activities conducted with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competency from personal, social and employment perspectives.

According to EU documents, the concept of lifelong learning covers a long period from the pre-school period to the post-retirement years. For this reason, it consists of the formal education processes like university education, the non-formal education like the courses that offer technical skills and training, the vocational skills acquired at workplace, all the non-formal learning by which other types of information, understanding and skills are acquired, and the informal learning like the transfer of knowledge from grandparents to children.

The purpose of lifelong learning is the acquisition of skills, interests, information and competencies or the updating of the existing information. European Union defines the objective of lifelong learning as the advance of information and competency that will enable citizens to participate actively in the information-based society and in all the stages of social and economic life. Another purpose of lifelong learning is to provide the individuals with the power and ability to control their future. In this regard, lifelong learning makes it possible for people to update their information; to understand and comprehend the significant developments that affect and alter their lives; to expand their vision; and to extend their personal, vocational and intellectual levels consciously.

Lifelong learning continues all one's life. Considering the present time and the future, it is accepted that lifelong learning has four basic purposes. These are as follows: In the "Lifelong Learning Strategy Document in 2014-2018 Period", prepared by the Ministry of National Education in collaboration with all the partners, lifelong learning is defined as all sorts of learning activities conducted throughout life with the aim of improving skills, information and competencies from a perspective in connection with the personal and/or social employment.

Viewed from this aspect, lifelong learning is accepted to cover a wide range from birth to death, from classroom to street, to home, and from improving vocational skills to personal interests. Lifelong learning is not dependent on such variables as age, place, time, socio-economic level or education. Accordingly, lifelong learning contains all types of formal, non-formal and informal education.

3. Partners of lifelong learning in Turkey

There are a lot of actors that offer lifelong learning activities in the present practice in Turkey. The foremost actor is the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning under Ministry of National Education. Already serving under the name of General Directorate of Apprenticeship and Public Education, it started to offer services under the name of General Directorate of Lifelong Learning in 2011. The General Directorate serves as a locomotive in lifelong learning activities with its 1.334 units, consisting of 969 Public Training Centers, 331 Occupational Training Centers, 15 Advanced Technical Schools for Girls, 10 Practical Girls' Art Schools and 9 Tourism Training Centers. The other partners within the lifelong learning system are the other schools affiliated with Ministry of National Education, Early Childhood Training Centers, Continuing Education Centers of Universities, workplaces, society-based

institutions, ministries, municipalities, employees' and employers' federations, unions, universities, some public institutions and organizations (YOK, ISKUR, MYK, TURKAK, TUIK, KOSGEB etc.), non-profit organizations, foundations and religious institutions (Bicerli, 2012).

4. Lifelong learning in Turkey with statistical figures

While calculating the “lifelong learning rates”, the rate of those, who attend any course or non-formal education program within the last four weeks and those between the ages of 25 and 64 who attend a formal educational institution, in the same age group is taken as the basis. Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) calculates rates from the answers to its question in the Household Workforce Questionnaire, “Have you ever taken any private course or attended an educational program or course apart from formal education within the past four weeks ending with the reference week? (Foreign language course, Computer course, Tailoring course, University exam course, Public Personnel Selection Examination course, AOF course, drivers' course, seminar, etc.)” However, comparisons and analyses are carried out by Eurostat. Therefore, the statistics produced by Eurostat are taken as the basis for the data. When the rates of attending the lifelong learning activities, the sexes and ages of the participants, and the barriers to lifelong learning are examined, it would not be wrong to say that Turkey still has a big distance to cover.

According to the lifelong statistics produced by Eurostat, the rate of attending the lifelong learning activities is low in Turkey. Figure 1. compares the lifelong learning rates of the EU with those of Turkey between 2006 and 2012. While the figures have increased in years, the rate of those who participated in lifelong learning activities in Turkey is 3.2% according to the data of the year 2012.

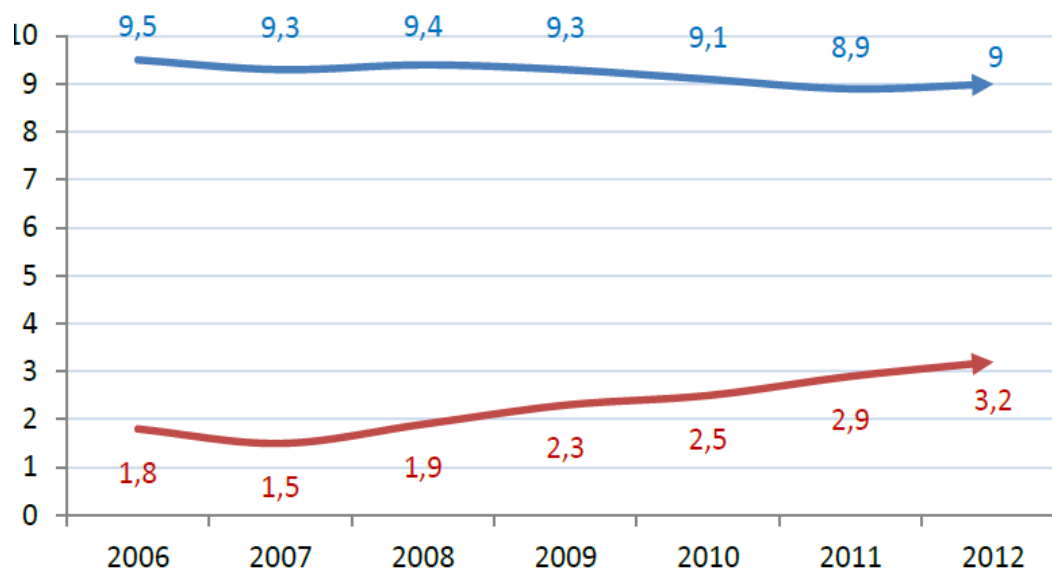


Figure 1. Participation rate of lifelong learning in Turkey and EU(27)

Source: Ministry of Education, Lifelong Strategy Document 2014-2018

It can be seen in Figure 1. that between 2006 and 2012 a change in the rate of participation in lifelong learning in the EU countries and Turkey is observed. While the rate of participation in lifelong learning was 1.8% in Turkey in 2006, it rose to 3.2% in 2012. On the other hand, while the rate of participation in lifelong learning was 9.5% in the EU countries (27) in 2006, it dropped to 9% in 2012.

Although an increase was observed in the rates of participation in lifelong learning programs over the past 7 years, it is still behind the EU by 1/3 with its 3.2% level of participation.

While the purpose of lifelong learning is stated as enabling the individual to sustain his or her life in a quality way and to acquire skills and information to adapt to the different periods of his or her life, the rate of the participants who are above the age of 55 contradicts this statement. While 21.1% of those in the age group of 25-34 take place in lifelong learning activities, the rate of those in the age group of 55-64 who take place in such activities is 4.4%. This rate is 25.6 for the same age group in the EU countries. It appears that the rate of participants in the age group of 25-34 is twice as high as that of those in the age group of 55-64. When the variable of age is examined in terms of Turkey, the rate of participants in the age group of 25-34 is five times as high as that of those in the age group of 55-64. This indicates that learning ends at an early age in Turkey, and the importance of lifelong learning has not been grasped yet. When the data are analyzed on the basis of sex, the rate of women who attended the lifelong learning activities in 2011 is 10.5%, while that of men is 17.7%. These rates are 39.9% for women and 40.7% for men in EU countries. A consideration of lifelong learning on the basis of sex emphasizes that women are at a more disadvantageous position than men.

There are a multitude of barriers to participation in lifelong learning activities. The most frequently-cited ones are familial responsibilities (57.9%), the high expense of the educational activities (42.9%). 28.8% of the participants have reported that the long distance between their house and the place of training is a barrier to their participation in the activities. Also, 20.1% of them have said that they cannot attend such activities because their working hours coincide with the time of activities.

When the statistics are assessed, it appears that the rate of participation in lifelong learning in Turkey is low (3.2%). Age is an important variable, and the rate of those above the age of 55 who have attended the activities is 4.4%. When the sexes of the participants are assessed, women have a lower rate of participation. Among the foremost reasons for not participating in the lifelong learning are the familial responsibilities, the high cost of the activities, the distance to the place of the course and the coinciding of the working hours with the time of the course. However, 47.7% of the participants in the questionnaire have stated that there is no reason for them not to participate in the lifelong learning activities.

5. Local governments and lifelong learning

The legal ground of the lifelong activities of the municipalities, one of the leading actors of lifelong learning, is laid by the 5216-numbered Metropolitan Municipality Law and 5393-numbered Municipality Law.

Metropolitan municipalities, especially those of Istanbul and Ankara, and provincial and district municipalities play an active role in lifelong learning studies. It was after the local elections in March 1994 that metropolitan municipalities took an active role in education activities. It appears that Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Ankara Metropolitan Municipality have institutionalized their activities in field of adult education since then. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality launched its adult education activities under the name of Istanbul Arts and Occupational Education Courses (ISMEK) in 1996. Likewise, Ankara Metropolitan Municipality conducts its adults' education activities under Municipality Technical Training Courses (BELTEK) and Municipality Hand Skills and Occupational Courses for women (BELMEK).

Local administrations' attempts at the education of the adults serve to make employment easier and develop the adaptation capacity. They cover all the attempts to direct the new migrants from rural to urban sites and the urbanites to urban occupations, to educate them, to provide them with an occupation, to enable them to communicate with the city and city-dwellers, and thus to become part of the urban life by adopting the urban culture. In short, these are all the attempts towards solving the problems faced by them in the process of adaptation to the urban life. They may be towards solving all

the problems faced in the city, ranging from finding an occupation to urbanization, adaptation in the city and integration (Ersoz, ISMEK. ibb.gov.tr/ISMEK-el-sanatlari-kurslari/.../file/.../halisyunusersoz.do).

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality has opened Art and Occupational Training Courses (ISMEK) since 1996 with the aim of enhancing the quality and efficiency, raising qualified staff eligible for labor force market, and contributing to family budget and home economy. ISMEK courses are organized as occupational technical courses, computer technologies, handicrafts, Turkish Islamic arts, musical training, language education, social and cultural educations and sports educations. With these courses, occupational, technical, social and cultural, sportive and artistic courses are opened for those who want to have an occupation and to get a promotion in their occupations (Dogan, 2012:46). ISMEK has provided nearly 1.800.000 people with the chance for education and learning through its courses in 348 branches at 235 course centers in 38 districts of Istanbul (<http://ISMEK.ibb.gov.tr/default.aspx>).

One of the basic qualities of these courses is that majority of the participants in the courses are housewives (84.4%) (Ersoz, 2007). Another quality of these courses is their variety of choices. These courses range from office management and secretariat through printing, cloth dyeing and diction to horticulture, skin care, traditional Turkish tile-making and Ottoman language courses. In order to allow the individuals to adapt to the developing technology, such trainings and educations as computer and language educations are given besides health-sports trainings for a healthy life and musical educations (Dogan, 2012).

BELTEK courses conducted by Ankara Metropolitan Municipality in collaboration with Gazi University have been at service since 1999. The basic purpose of BELTEK courses is to equip the urbanites with information and skills, to ensure their adaptation to the urban life, and to raise man force for small and medium sized enterprises. Among the BELTEK's vocational and technical education courses conducted in two-month and three-month programs, there are first aid and occupational-work accident courses, computer-assisted drawing, computer use, worker's health and work security, natural gas and central-heating plumbing, and patient's and elderly care. In this sense, 133.899 people have taken place in these courses so far, 84.812 being men and 49.087 women; of these participants, 81.973 graduated from the programs by taking their participation and achievement certificates.

BELMEK was structured in 1994 with the policy of prioritizing courses for women. To this end, it has so far aimed to spread the awareness of culture, art and aesthetics; to preserve and develop the cultural heritage; to equip women with new information and skills; to enhance the family budgets; to bring women in the habit of living together and working in a planned way; to strengthen the sense of friendship, solidarity and confidence in the society and to enable them to spend their time in a productive way. BELMEK has provided nearly 250.360 women with vocational courses and handicraft courses through its courses in 31 branches at 160 course centers in 6 main districts of Ankara. These programs are intended to make women, and thus the family, strong in the society. Therefore, these courses are preferred by young girls and women more as a means of preparing dowry or being in contact with others than as a means of acquiring an occupation.

6. Discussions

A proverb says that "there is no age limit to learning", pointing in a sense to the importance of lifelong learning since centuries ago. One of the basic qualities of our age is that the need to learn today is far more necessary than it has ever been. However, the statistics imply and even clearly indicate that the importance of lifelong learning has not been well understood in Turkey and a good level of awareness has not been achieved. The rate of participation in lifelong learning was 3.2% in 2011 and 2012. There is, therefore, a need to raise this rate and for this, there is a need to expand this awareness.

According to the studies and evaluations conducted, it is advisable to organize lifelong learning activities in places as close as possible to the learners and to offer the services at a local level. This makes the local administrations more functional in terms of learning. It is known that the quality, effectiveness and accessibility of the services offered are extremely important for the women who are the receivers of this service in particular. Therefore, the fact that both ISMEK and BELMEK courses spread across the whole city affects the accessibility in a positive way.

However, local administrations' attempts towards adult education are largely organized like a hobby for the purpose of socialization and development of hand skills. For this reason, the variety of the courses should be updated to the necessities of age and emphasis should be placed on vocational and technical training branches towards employment. The importance of local administrations for the urbanization of the individuals and their active participation in all the processes of the city, namely for their social inclusion, should be considered in all studies. One of the most important subjects discussed for Turkey is the need to organize lifelong learning activities in a systematic and centralized way. For the 2014-2018 Lifelong Learning Strategy Document, prepared with the participation of all the partners, to be put into practice seems to be of significance in this regard.

It is necessary to make effective planning and to consider the needs of "information society" while making these plans. Providing vocations with up-to-date information through this process should be a priority. Employment-guaranteed courses should be more prioritized. Particular action should be taken for the women, who are the essential receivers of the ISMEK and BELMEK courses, to find a place for themselves in the employment area.

Familial responsibilities are often cited as one of the reasons for not attending the courses. Qualitative and quantitative research should be conducted to survey into the subject and some arrangements should be made towards the sharing of these responsibilities between the family and the state. Likewise, the long distance to the course place, the cost of the course and the availability of the courses within the office hours are among the barriers to lifelong learning. Measures should be taken to eliminate these barriers.

As a result, the low rate of participation in lifelong learning activities in Turkey makes it necessary to take measures. Therefore the partners of this program are indirectly loaded with important responsibilities. It appears that local administrations, especially Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, offer their public services at the local level in a direct and effective manner. What should be done from now on is to increase the rate of employability, to review the variety of courses according to the requirements of age, and to ensure the accessibility of the groups who feel social exclusion.

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