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# CHARACTERISTICS OF GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT STUDENTS TOWARDS LIFELONG LEARNING

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## Abstract

The aim of the study is to examine the lifelong learning characteristics of geography students in terms of effective variables, such as gender, grade, choosing the department voluntarily, being happy with your major, and the first goal after graduation. The study was conducted with 205 students who participated in the education and training activities at the Geography Department of a state university in Turkey in the fall semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. These students were in their first, second, third and fourth years of study. Information Form and Lifelong Learning Scale were used to obtain the data. In the evaluation phase, SPSS 22.0 program was used, and ANOVA analysis was performed besides the t-test. The results showed that the general attitude towards lifelong learning among the participants was positive. According to the mean scores of the scale sub-dimensions, lifelong learning characteristics were positive in terms of Love of Learning, Self-Direction, Resilience and Meta-Cognition. While lifelong learning characteristics of the participants did not show a significant difference in terms of gender and grade level, significant differences existed in terms of choosing the department voluntarily, being happy with your major and the first goal after graduation. In terms of the positive attitudes of the participants towards lifelong learning, it could be claimed that geography department students are ready for lifelong learning. Practices and curriculum arrangements in this direction could make positive contributions to lifelong learning awareness both at the university stage and after graduation.

***Keywords:*** Department of Geography, lifelong learning, love of learning, self direction, resilience, metacognition



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## 1. Introduction

Today, it is essential for individuals to acquire the skill of "learning to learn" and it has become necessary to access information from various sources, to use and evaluate them, and to use information and communication technologies (ICT) while doing this (Turan, 2005). In fact, this should be reflected in education policies and should be a part of the country's goals. Berberoğlu (2010) states that Turkey's strategic priorities should be to focus on being an information society, to create an information economy, and to use ICT effectively with lifelong learning on this path.

Learning is a lifelong process, and its meaning is increasing in today's information and communication age. The fact that the needs of the individual diversify and increase day by day requires them to be lifelong learners and highlights the importance of the concept of "lifelong learning". What makes lifelong learning advantageous is that it eliminates the importance of when, where and at what stage of life learning is done, in other words, it can be done anytime, anywhere and at any age. In that regard, lifelong learning has been examined for a long time in different studies in the literature (Kulich, 1982; Lengrand, 1975; Murphy, 2000; Tobias, 1999), which has established its theoretical background.

When the studies on the subject are reviewed, different studies from a variety of fields are found, which includes general structure of lifelong learning (Aspin & Chapman, 2000; Gouthro, 2022; Laal & Salamati, 2012; Steffens, 2015), lifelong learning studies in higher education (Brooks & Everett, 2008; Cendon, 2018; Peters & Romero, 2019), nursing (Davis et al., 2014; Gopee, 2001; Qalehsari et al., 2017) and medicine (Afonso et al., 2014). For example, Boburka et al. (2014) practiced how to integrate lifelong learning into the curriculum, while Su et al. (2012) investigated how to support university students' lifelong learning development for a sustainable future. Likewise, in the study conducted by Yli-Panula et al. (2020) on sustainable learning and teaching methods in geography, the ability to use ICT was stated among the most emphasized features. In Roulston's (2010) study, adults' participation in music education was evaluated and it was emphasized that learning in lifelong learning is never-ending. As seen in those studies, lifelong learning has a wide scope of meaning concerning different fields of science.

Although lifelong learning concerns different fields of science, the subject is also very valuable in terms of education. The fact that the process of educating the individual, which starts in the family, can continue both at school and at every stage of life, either formally or informally necessitates good management of the process on the way to becoming a lifelong learner. This is because individuals' views of lifelong learning could shape their learning effort, beliefs and even attitudes and affect the quality of learning. Therefore, many studies have been carried out to investigate lifelong learning and its impact on education. In the literature in Turkey, several studies (Diker Çoşkun, 2009; Dindar & Bayrakcı, 2015; Evin Gencel, 2013; Gökyer & Türkoğlu, 2018; İzci & Koç, 2012; Karaca, 2019; Karakış & Demirtaş, 2022; Şahin et al., 2020;

Şenyuva, 2013; Tunca et al., 2015) examined this issue. In order for university students to become lifelong learners, it is necessary to determine their lifelong learning tendencies. Afterwards, it is very important to organize education and training studies in this direction, to practice studies and to bring lifelong learning awareness to students.

A literature review was conducted on lifelong learning in the field of geography in Turkey. Since the lifelong learning characteristics have not been sufficiently examined in the field of geography, this study was carried out to examine this issue from the perspective of the students of the geography department and to organize their education and training studies accordingly in the future. Within the framework of this determined purpose, answers to the following research questions were sought:

• Research Question 1: What are the mean scores of the geography department students in the lifelong learning characteristics?

• Research Question 2: Which variables affect the lifelong learning characteristics of the geography department students?

## 2. Method

### *2.1. Design and Sampling in the Research*

In the survey model, a questionnaire is applied to the sample group representing the population, and inferences are made about the population in line with the data (Öztürk, 2014). This study is also quantitative in nature and was designed in accordance with the survey model. The study was carried out with students studying at the Geography Department of the Faculty of Science and Letters of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University in the fall semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. The sample consisted of 205 students. The mean age of the participants in the sample is 20.83±2.83 (minimum: 18, maximum: 43), and their demographic and some academic characteristics are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics and Academic Background of the Participants

| Variables | | f | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 109 | 53.2 |
| | Male | 96 | 46.8 |
| Grade Level | Freshman | 51 | 24.9 |
| | Sophomore | 49 | 23.9 |
| | Junior | 53 | 25.9 |
| | Senior | 52 | 25.4 |
| Willingness to choose the geography department voluntarily | Yes | 94 | 45.9 |
| | Partially | 93 | 45.4 |
| | No | 18 | 8.8 |
| Being happy with your major | Yes | 128 | 62.4 |
| | Partially | 63 | 30.7 |
| | No | 14 | 6.8 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| First goal after the graduation | Teaching | 88 | 42.9 |
| | Graduate studies | 9 | 4.4 |
| | Academic career | 30 | 14.6 |
| | Any jobs in public sector | 59 | 28.8 |
| | Any jobs in private sector | 19 | 9.3 |

### *2.2. Data Collection Tools*

#### *2.2.1. Information Sheet*

This form included questions about gender, grade, willingness to choose the geography department voluntarily, being happy with your major and the first goal after graduation (Table 1).

#### *2.2.2. Lifelong Learning Scale (LLS)*

The reason for the development of this scale was to determine the lifelong learning levels of university students. The adaptation of the scale from the original (Drewery et al., 2017) into Turkish was carried out by Can & Bozgün (2020). The scale consists of a total of 12 5-point Likert-type items ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). A minimum of 12 and a maximum of 60 points can be obtained from the scale. The scale consists of 4 sub-dimensions: Resilience, Love of Learning, Meta-Cognition and Self-Direction (Can & Bozgün, 2020; Drewery et al., 2017).

### *2.3. Ethics*

Data collection was conducted with the verbal consent of the students included in the sampling and the permission of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University (Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee Decisions, 12.01.2023 Date and Session and Decision No: 01.26).

### *2.4. Data Collection and Analysis*

The data collection tools, which were applied to the students in 10-15 minutes, were applied collectively in the classroom environment. Missing data collection tools were not included in the statistical processes. Analysis of the data was carried out in the SPSS 22.0 program. As shown in Table 2, it was determined that the total and sub-dimensions of the scale showed normal distribution according to the specified values. In this direction, t-test, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to compare the mean scores obtained from the sample, and Bonferroni multiple comparison test was used to determine from which group the difference originated. The results of the "Reliability Analysis" conducted to test the reliability of the scales are given in Table 2 and the significance level was taken as a criterion of $p<0.05$.

Table 2. Reliability Values and Distribution Values of the LLS

| LLS and Its Sub-Dimensions | Cronbach Alpha Internal Consistency Coefficients | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resilience | 0.76 | -0.437 | 0.855 |
| Love of Learning | 0.77 | -0.687 | 0.549 |
| Meta-Cognition | 0.81 | -0.259 | -0.207 |
| Self-Direction | 0.77 | -0.789 | 0.764 |
| Scale Total | 0.81 | -0.415 | 0.423 |

In this study sampling conducted with geography students, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients of the sub-dimensions were 0.76 for Resilience, 0.77 for Love of Learning, 0.81 for Meta-Cognition, 0.77 for Self-Direction, and this value was determined as 0.81 for the whole scale.

## 3. Results

### *3.1. Results Regarding the First Research Question*

What are the mean scores of the geography department students in the lifelong learning characteristics?

The mean scores of the participants from the LLS sub-dimensions, from high to low respectively were $4.20 \pm 0.63$ for Love of Learning, $4.15 \pm 0.65$ for Self-Direction, $4.14 \pm 0.50$ for Resilience, and $4.02 \pm 0.61$ for Meta-Cognition. Also, participants had a mean LLS total score of $4.14 \pm 0.48$ (Table 3).

Table 3. Scores from the LLS

| LLS and Its Sub-Dimensions | Number of Items | Mean | SD | Min.-Max. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Resilience | 4 | 4.14 | 0.50 | 2.25-5.00 |
| Love of Learning | 3 | 4.20 | 0.63 | 2.00-5.00 |
| Meta-Cognition | 2 | 4.02 | 0.61 | 2.50-5.00 |
| Self-Direction | 3 | 4.15 | 0.65 | 2.00-5.00 |
| Lifelong Learning Scale Total | 12 | 4.14 | 0.48 | 2.58-5.00 |

### *3.2. Results Regarding the Second Research Question*

Which variables affect the lifelong learning characteristics of the geography department students?

The lifelong learning characteristics of the participants were compared in terms of demographic and academic variables, and the results of the analysis are shown in Table 4. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the LLS sub-dimension in terms of gender and grade ($p>0.05$).

There was also a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants' Resilience (F=5.447 p=.005), Love of Learning (F=5.230 p=.006) and Self-Direction (F=3.702 p=.026) in terms of willingness to choose the geography department voluntarily. The Resilience point mean of the students who willingly chose the geography department was significantly higher than those who answered partially and no (Bonferroni p<0.05). The Love of Learning score mean of the students who willingly chose the geography department was significantly higher than those who partially answered (Bonferroni p<0.05). The Self-Direction mean score of the students who willingly chose the geography department was significantly higher than those who answered no (Bonferroni p<0.05) (Table 4).

It was found that the mean scores for being happy with your major were significantly different, which was Resilience (F=4.580 p=.011), Love of Learning (F=7.643 p=.001), Meta-Cognition (F=4.686 p=.010) and Self-Direction (F=6.441 p=.002). The mean score of Resilience of those who were being happy with their major was significantly higher than those who were partially being happy and those who said no (Bonferroni p<0.05). The Love of Learning, Meta-Cognition and Self-Direction point means of the students who were being happy with their major were significantly higher than those who were partially being happy (Bonferroni p<0.05) (Table 4).

The mean scores of Love of Learning (F=3.367 p=.011), Meta-Cognition (F=3.065 p=.018) and Self-Direction (F=4.078 p=.003) differed significantly in terms of the first goal after graduation. The Love of Learning, Meta-Cognition, and Self-Direction point means of those whose first goal was to pursue an academic career after graduation were significantly higher than those who wanted to work in any job in the public sector (Bonferroni p<0.05) (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of the Means of the Sub-Dimension Scores of the LLS by Variables

| Variables | | Resilience Mean (SD) | Love of Learning Mean (SD) | Meta-Cognition Mean (SD) | Self-Direction Mean (SD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | | | | | |
| | Female | 4.10 (.46) | 4.18 (.59) | 4.01 (.55) | 4.11 (.65) |
| | Male | 4.18 (.53) | 4.21 (.66) | 4.03 (.66) | 4.17 (.64) |
| | t | t = -1.099 | t = -.322 | t = -.151 | t = -.634 |
| | (p) | p=.273 | p=.748 | p=.880 | p=.527 |
| Grade Level | | | | | |
| | Freshman | 4.10 (.47) | 4.25 (.62) | 4.08 (.62) | 4.12 (.59) |
| | Sophomore | 4.29 (.46) | 4.27 (.58) | 4.00 (.58) | 4.27 (.48) |
| | Junior | 4.11 (.47) | 4.15 (.60) | 4.00 (.60) | 4.21 (.71) |
| | Senior | 4.06 (.56) | 4.10 (.69) | 4.00 (.69) | 3.98 (.74) |
| | F | F=2.059 | F=.884 | F=.250 | F=1.972 |
| | (p) | p=.107 | p=.450 | p=.862 | p=.119 |
| Willingness to choose the geography department voluntarily | | | | | |
| | Yes (1) | 4.25 (.47) | 4.34 (.57) | 4.10 (.62) | 4.25 (.57) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Partially (2) | 4.06 (.46) | 4.06 (.61) | 3.96 (.58) | 4.08 (.63) |
| No (3) | 3.91 (.64) | 4.09 (.78) | 3.91 (.60) | 3.85 (.94) |
| F | F=5.447 | F=5.230 | F=1.440 | F=3.702 |
| (p) | p=.005 | p=.006 | p=.239 | p=.026 |
| Bonferroni | 1>2 1>3 | 1>2 | | 1>3 |
| Being happy with your major | | | | |
| Yes (1) | 4.21 (.48) | 4.32 (.51) | 4.11 (.57) | 4.26 (.55) |
| Partially (2) | 4.05 (.47) | 3.97 (.73) | 3.83 (.62) | 3.92 (.68) |
| No (3) | 3.85 (.60) | 4.00 (.71) | 4.07 (.70) | 4.02 (.98) |
| F | F=4.580 | F=7.643 | F=4.686 | F=6.441 |
| (p) | p=.011 | p=.001 | p=.010 | p=.002 |
| Bonferroni | 1>2 1>3 | 1>2 | 1>2 | 1>2 |
| First goal after the graduation | | | | |
| Teaching (1) | 4.17 (.51) | 4.26 (.53) | 4.01 (.56) | 4.18 (.59) |
| Graduate studies (2) | 4.05 (.51) | 4.25 (.61) | 3.94 (.46) | 4.25 (.74) |
| Academic career (3) | 4.27 (.44) | 4.43 (.48) | 4.31 (.53) | 4.47 (.61) |
| Any jobs in public sector (4) | 4.00 (.49) | 3.97 (.74) | 3.86 (.66) | 3.92 (.66) |
| Any jobs in private sector (5) | 4.26 (.46) | 4.14 (.67) | 4.13 (.62) | 4.07 (.68) |
| F | F=2.117 | F=3.367 | F=3.065 | F=4.078 |
| (p) | p=.080 | p=.011 | p=.018 | p=.003 |
| Bonferroni | | 3>4 | 3>4 | 3>4 |

## 4. Discussion

The following results and discussion can further the understanding regarding the two research questions. First, when the results of the first research question are evaluated, the sub-dimension lifelong learning characteristics of the geography department students are positive in terms of "Self-Direction, Resilience and Meta-Cognition" and particularly "Love of Learning". Gökyer & Türkoğlu (2018) found that the sub-dimensions of "motivation" and "lack of curiosity" were lower; while the other two sub-dimensions, "Persistence" and "Lack of learning in regulation'', higher lifelong learning tendencies were determined. In the study conducted by Şahin et al. (2020), it was stated that the tendency of prospective teachers in terms of "Motivation" towards learning was high. Different scales have been used in previous studies. It could be argued that the results of the previous studies contained differences from geography students, which was based on the difference in scale.

In this study conducted with geography students, in addition to the sub-dimensions of "Love of Learning, Self-Direction, Resilience and Meta-Cognition", the general mean of the scale also showed that the lifelong learning tendency was positive. Similar study results that evaluated the lifelong learning tendency of university students as high exist in the literature. For example, in the study conducted by İzci & Koç (2012), a strong lifelong learning sensitivity was found among prospective teachers. Again, the research by Evin Gencel (2013) determined that the participant prospective teachers considered themselves adequate lifelong learners. In addition, Karaca (2019) stated that the participants understood the importance of continuous development

and were motivated. It can be said that the general lifelong learning tendency shows parallelism with these studies.

There are studies reporting contrasting results as well. For example, in the study conducted by Tunca et al. (2015), lifelong learning tendencies of prospective teachers were found to be low. Again, Diker Çoşkun (2009) found that university students had low lifelong learning tendencies. The results of these two studies differed from the lifelong learning tendencies of the geography department students. Although the results of the research differ from each other in the relevant literature, being a lifelong learner is a positive feature that a person should have in his/her professional life after university. As stated by Laal & Salamati (2012), lifelong learning creates individuals who adapt to change, who are lifelong learners and who are aware of changes.

Results for the second research question revealed the variables that affect lifelong learning among geography students. As the results showed, gender did not affect students' lifelong learning characteristics in this study. In the study conducted by Tunca et al. (2015) using the "Lifelong Learning Tendency Scale", it was found that lifelong learning tendencies did not differ in general in terms of gender, only the mean score of men was significantly higher in the "Lack of Curiosity" sub-dimension. Similarly, Dindar & Bayrakcı (2015) revealed that gender did not create a general change in lifelong learning tendencies, only women scored higher than men in the "Curiosity" sub-dimension.

On the other hand, there are also studies stating that gender is an effective variable on lifelong learning characteristics. Diker Çoşkun (2009) concluded that female students had a higher tendency to lifelong learning. Similarly, Şahin et al. (2020) found a difference in favor of women in terms of lifelong learning tendency. İzci & Koç (2012) indicated a significant difference in the lifelong learning views of prospective teachers regarding gender, all of which could lead to the conclusion that the current study differs from earlier studies in terms of gender.

The grade level variable did not differentiate the lifelong learning tendencies of the geography department students. Similarly, in the study of Diker Çoşkun (2009), no difference was observed at level of grade. Dindar & Bayrakcı (2015) concluded that age and grade differences did not create an effective change. It can be said that the results of the current study strengthen the results of the previous studies in terms of grade level. Contrary to these results, however, in the study conducted by Tunca et al. (2015), it was found that grade level creates a significant difference in lifelong learning tendencies, and it was lower especially in the freshman year than other years.

According to the variable of willingness to choose the geography department voluntarily, the lifelong learning characteristics of the geography department students showed significant differences. When the sub-dimensions are examined, lifelong learning levels differed in terms of "Resilience, Love of Learning and Self-Direction". The mean scores of those who chose the department willingly were significantly higher. It can be interpreted that choosing the geography department voluntarily affects lifelong learning positively. In the study conducted by Karakış &

Demirtaş (2022), with pre-service teachers, a weak positive relationship was reported between satisfaction with the choice of teaching and their desire to develop their own careers. In the literature, no research that evaluates lifelong learning in terms of the variable of willingness to choose the department voluntarily was conducted. Therefore, it can be said that there is a need for new studies that take this variable into account.

In the study, being happy with your major was also considered as a variable. Students' "Resilience, Love of Learning, Meta-Cognition and Self-Direction" sub-score means were higher than those who were being unhappy and partially happy. This result can be interpreted as being happy with your major is related to and positively affects lifelong learning. In a study conducted by Afonso et al. (2014), it was concluded that physicians who were satisfied with their careers invested more in lifelong learning and were highly motivated. It may be useful to examine the effects of different variables such as being happy and career satisfaction, particularly in new studies about lifelong learning in the field of education. Thus, the research results can be interpreted more clearly.

As the last variable, the participants' first goals after graduation were examined. The first target variable after graduation affected the "Love of Learning, Meta-Cognition and Self-Direction" levels of the geography department students. Students whose first goal was to pursue an academic career were found to have higher levels of "Love of Learning, Meta-Cognition and Self-Direction" than those who wanted to work in any job in the public sector. These results could imply that students aiming for an academic career are stronger lifelong learners in these sub-dimensions.

Boburka et al. (2014) worked on the design of a classroom activity that taught the value of lifelong learning and practiced how this could be done in the curriculum. Students who listened to the career biographies of faculty members had stronger beliefs than those who did not. It was concluded that listening to career biography had positive effects on lifelong learning. In the research of Karaca (2019), an evaluation was made in terms of the first goal variable after graduation and the lifelong learning tendencies of dentistry, pharmacy and medical students who wanted to join the business life immediately were found to be lower than those who considered specialization or graduate education. In the study of Diker Çoşkun (2009), the lifelong learning level of university students was compared with their desire to study for graduate school and their belief in future job success. As a result of the study, the level of lifelong learning was found to be higher for those who wanted to do graduate work and believed that they would be successful in business life in the future. This situation could indicate that lifelong learning tendencies of those who want to continue their education after graduation are high. Further investigation of this preliminary trend can provide new and reliable comparisons.

## 5. Conclusions

As stated by Laal & Salamati (2012), lifelong learning has a benefit that enriches life, supports the feeling of life satisfaction, and makes individuals active. As emphasized in the studies in the

literature, it is very important for an individual to learn lifelong, to be able to use what they have learned in different situations, and to overcome problems and produce solutions. Considering that this experience should be gained during university education, teaching plans, and learning environments should be arranged in a way that encourages lifelong learning. Again, as stated by Laal & Salamati (2012), another benefit of lifelong learning is for careers and new career doors are always open to lifelong learners and these people are always above their own fields. Considering these aspects, geography students are also ready for this. Based on this conducted study, implementation studies and curriculum arrangements can provide valuable contributions to students during the university process and after graduation. To become a lifelong learner, it would be appropriate for policy makers and practitioners to consider these scientific studies.

The data in this study were collected in a department of a university in Turkey. This is the most important limitation of this study. Therefore, future studies need to be conducted in different countries, regions, universities, or departments. Re-evaluations through larger samplings and considering different variables may yield useful results.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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