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Majority Teachers' Perceptions of Urban Adolescents and Their Abilities: Probes from Self-Reflection and Teacher Autobiographies

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Abstract

This article presents a small scale, qualitative study of nine majority alternate-route teachers and the perceptions they hold about themselves as urban educators and their urban students' academic abilities. Data for this study was collected through self-reflective, written interviews and meta-reflective responses to two published teacher autobiographies. Culture shock theory was used to understand the evolution of the participants' perceptions through the responses they provided. The study's findings revealed that the participants underwent positive changes in their perceptions of themselves as urban educators and of their urban students' academic abilities. Implications highlight the value of using published teacher autobiographies in urban teacher education.

Keywords: alternate-route teachers, autobiography, in-service teachers, majority teachers, pre-service teachers, urban adolescents, teacher perception, teacher education

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Introduction

Education, recruitment, and retention of multiculturally-aware educators have been, and continue to be, a major preoccupation of multicultural education advocates in the US (Goodwin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sleeter, 2001). The unabated criticism made about teacher education programs is that they do not attract pre-service teachers of color and do little to prepare teaching candidates from the dominant white ethnic majority to work effectively with urban student populations (Goodwin, 2002). Given the persistent teacher shortage in urban schools, the need to recruit and train teacher candidates who understand the needs of urban adolescents and can relate to them is significant (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). This study seeks to achieve an understanding of the changing perceptions of nine “majority¹” alternate-route certification teachers in regard to urban students’ literacy abilities, through to biographic interviews and their meta-reflective responses to two published teacher autobiographies. As a case study of nine educators, the findings of the study are not intended to be generalized at a larger scale. However, the study can serve as a preliminary basis for a more comprehensive research on the use of self-reflections and teacher autobiographies to promote culturally responsive teaching. Teacher educators may benefit from the study’s implications, which focus on the role of teacher autobiographies in the shaping of majority teachers’ self-perceptions as educators of urban adolescents and of the opinions they form about their students’ abilities.

The Problem

Presently, the severe teacher attrition in urban schools has pushed teacher recruitment efforts beyond state borders, populating urban schools and teacher education programs with novice teachers who often come from remote states in rural America. These new recruits, many of whom are career changers, are placed in high needs urban schools while pursuing a Master’s in Teaching degree through alternative-route-to-certification programs (i.e., programs that permit candidates who already hold bachelor’s degrees to become teachers without the burden of having to finish a traditional education program) (Ng, 2003). In some instances, little consideration is given to the fact that these recruits may have been immersed in a Eurocentric system of education (Ramsey, 2004) and, therefore, may lack essential understandings of and sensitivities about culturally- and racially-different individuals (Sleeter, 1994), who might most likely populate their classrooms.

The racial/cultural contrast between the student and the teacher populations in urban schools leads to the need for teacher education programs to rethink their curricula so deeply ingrained in a Eurocentric tradition (Goodwin, 2002) through emphasis on liberal arts and academic content. While content knowledge plays a key role in a teacher’s success, the mutual teacher-student relationship is also indispensable. The cultural mismatch between urban students’ cultures and

¹ In this study’s context, the term “majority teacher” conveys the same meaning as Parker and Hood (1995) gave to “majority faculty” in their study of minority students and majority faculty and administrators in teacher education. Throughout this study, the term refers to teachers of ‘white Caucasian’ ethnicity. Occasionally, however, the term “white” is used especially in verbatim quotes or paraphrases to respect the original author’s thought and intent.

“majority,” pre- and in-service teachers’ cultures and beliefs has a significant impact on the educational outcomes for minority students of color (Sleeter, 2001). Studies of pre- and in-service teachers’ changing perceptions (like this one) of urban schools may, therefore, contribute important insights into the teaching and learning climate, on the one hand, and the prediction and prevention of teacher attrition in urban public schools, on the other. The extent to which new teachers’ perceptions change for the better or the worse may be a predictor of whether they will or will not stay in the new position. This study constitutes a modest contribution to the emerging scholarship on the state of alternate route certification programs in urban education, by focusing on “majority” pre- and in-service teachers’ changing perceptions of themselves as urban educators and of the academic abilities of their urban students.

Historically, pre-service teacher education programs are known for recruiting primarily young, white, middle-class females, far removed from the reality of the urban students they may be called to teach (Goodwin, 2002; Sleeter, 2001). In most cases, these “majority” in-service teachers (as they are called in this study) of urban students end up quitting before they reach five years in the profession (Tettegah, 2006), mostly due to lack of preparation as to how to work with urban student populations. To address this problem, different solutions have been proposed, including the introduction of multicultural education courses, the socialization of pre-service teachers in urban school settings, and the implementation of alternative route teacher certification programs (Haberman & Post, 1998; Neuman, 1994, Ng, 2003). Alternative-route certification candidates constitute the main focus of this study, due to their increasing presence in urban schools as well as the fact that the majority of the recruits come from the dominant “majority” society.

Alternative-route teaching certification candidates (i.e., many of whom are also career changers) face a double challenge: firstly as people who did not undergo traditional teacher education; and secondly, as people who are transitioning into the teaching profession from other career paths. According to some researchers’ speculations, teachers entering the profession through alternative route certification programs may leave in even greater numbers than their regularly certified counterparts due to “less preparation for dealing with demands and realities of the public schools, less formal training in teaching prior to entering the classroom and a greater likelihood of being placed in teaching situations that are more difficult” (Croasmun et al., 1997, n.p.). That is not to contradict research that says that there are alternate-route certification teachers who last longer, beyond the two-year teaching commitment in high needs urban schools (Kane, 2006). Efforts to close teacher attrition through alternative teacher recruitment need the concurrence of educational researchers in identifying new teacher recruits’ perceptions of their experience and the role that such perceptions play in their decision to either persevere or quit.

Background Studies and Theoretical Underpinnings

More recently, studies that have focused on pre-service teachers’ perceptions of urban students have reported mixed results. Some studies have observed positive changes in the candidates’ perceptions of teaching in urban schools as a result of doing fieldwork in culturally-diverse schools (Conaway et al., 2007; Groulx, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mason, 1999). Other studies, on the contrary, have found out that the teachers’ initial attitudes, biases, and perceptions of

ethnically-different students were reinforced rather than reconstructed as a result of multicultural awareness (Haberman & Post, 1992; Smith & Smith, 2007; Spooner-Layne et al., 2007).

Culture Shock

Although racial identity development theory has served as the major framework for understanding teachers' attitudes and beliefs about students from a different race and culture than their own (Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Cross et al., 1991; Tatum, 1992), other theories may be needed to help understand how these attitudes change across time and space. Some educational researchers have used the culture shock theory as a framework for understanding new teachers' changing perceptions of self, urban school culture, and urban students' personalities (Kron & Faber, 1973; McClean, 2006; Spooner-Lane et al., 2007). In many respects, alternative-teacher certification candidates are likely to undergo culture shock, like any person who enters a new culture for the first time. In racially diverse settings, racial biases and social prejudices may play a catalytic role in teachers' culture shock progression, especially when they are dealing with students from a different background than their own (Kron & Faber, 1973). According to Kalervo Oberg (1960), culture shock is solved in four phases: the honeymoon phase (also known as Euphoria), the rejection phase (also known as the crisis stage), the regression phase (known as early recovery, in positive cases), and the (full) recovery phase, which is achieved when affected individuals "begin to recognize and interpret subtle social cues, adapt, and eventually become bicultural as they accept and appreciate the unique qualities of a new culture" (McClean, 2006, n.p.). Majority teachers may be said to have achieved this stage once they outgrow their negative perceptions and learn to see the positive side of urban students:

Assumptions

A review of multicultural education research on teacher education provides important information on in-service and pre-service "majority" teachers' beliefs concerning educating urban children, especially minority students of color. The following assumptions reflect researchers' inferences about some of the dispositions that these teachers hold towards themselves and the students.

- Pre-service majority student teachers are fairly naïve and have stereotypical beliefs about urban children, such as believing that urban children bring attitudes that interfere with education (Sleeter, 2001, p. 95);
- Majority pre- and in-service educators may perceive themselves as having led a fairly privileged life, with a father who worked and a mother who stayed home and took care of the children (Ramsey, 2004);
- Many majority pre-service and in-service teachers are ambivalent about their ability to teach African-American children (Sleeter, 2001);
- Some majority pre- and in-service teachers claim to have grown up in households where education was valued and parents supported involvement in extra-curricular activities ranging from sports to music (Ramsey, 2004);

- Many teachers joining the profession, in addition to being predominantly “majority,” female, monolingual, and middle class, exhibit parochial attitudes and articulate a preference for teaching children like themselves in environments with which they are familiar (Goodwin, 2002); and
- “Majority” teachers often deny racial issues and differences all together, or they cast all of their students of color as “immigrants” (Ng, 2003).

What transpires in the above assertions is the likelihood that majority teacher candidates come from a different racial and cultural background than most urban students. As a result, multicultural education advocates believe that it is critical for these teachers to become sensitized to the cultural experiences of urban youth, which influence their approach to literacy and learning. Delpit (1987) argues that minority people of color are likely to hold non-monolithic perceptions of education, as their social position is determined by the racial, political, and historical contexts in which they live.

The Study

A small-scale qualitative study was conducted on nine in-service and pre-service teaching fellows purposefully selected (see below for details) from a cohort of twenty teaching fellows who were enrolled in an education course in summer 2008. Interviews and reader-response prompts to teacher autobiographies were used to investigate the perceptions that the “majority” teacher candidates – both in- and pre-service – being trained to work in urban secondary schools have of urban students and their academic abilities. Given the small sample of participants and the qualitative nature of the study, the findings are by no means intended to be generalized on all majority alternate-route certification candidates. Rather, the study makes a modest contribution to the critical debate concerning the recruitment, training and retention of teachers in high need urban school settings.

Research questions

The study focuses on four major questions seeking to understand the evolution of majority pre-service and in-service teacher candidates newly recruited to serve urban adolescents:

1. What prior knowledge shapes “majority” pre-service and in-service teacher candidates’ perceptions of urban students and their abilities?
2. How do in-service and pre-service majority teachers respond to the educational and teaching experiences of reflective urban educators from various ethnic backgrounds?
3. How receptive are in-service and pre-service majority teachers to the teaching philosophies that experienced teachers from across cultures have constructed for understanding and engaging urban youths?
4. To what extent do in-service and pre-service majority teachers recognize the importance of the use of autobiography as a tool to identify their own inherent biases?

Participants

In accordance with the qualitative paradigm guidelines, the participants were purposefully selected for this study; purposeful sampling selects information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 1990). Criterion sampling (i.e. based on researcher-set criteria and restricted only to cases that meet the criteria) was applied to a cohort of alternative-route teacher certification candidates enrolled in a graduate teacher education program at a graduate urban institution in summer 2008. Consistent with the aim of the study, participant selection was limited to individuals who described themselves as members of the majority social group and alternative-route certification candidates, who were either undergoing pre-teaching training or were in their first year of teaching at an urban middle or high school. Of the 10 participants who met the above criteria, nine participants comprised of 4 men and 5 women completed the study. In age, the men ranged from early 30's to mid 50's, whereas the women ranged from mid 20's to late 50's. Biographic data also indicated that all the nine-participants were native citizens of the United States and grew up either in rural towns, in the Mid-West, or in the suburbs of New York State. In terms of career history, the data indicated that the participants came from various professions, including: beauty/cosmetics, staff recruiting agency, freelance news writing, dancing/choreography, music, accounting, and private tutoring. One participant indicated that she came straight from college, whereas another specified that she had held "no real" job before.

Study Design and Methodology

Design

In conformity with naturalistic inquiry guidelines (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) and qualitative research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Okely & Callaway, 1992; Van Manen, 1990), this study examines: 1. participants' biographic interviews, and 2. their responses to two published teacher autobiographies, to gain an understanding of perceptions that pre-service and in-service "majority" teachers' perceptions have of urban students as well as of themselves as urban educators. Special attention is paid to the evolution of the teachers' perceptions of students' literacy abilities and the influence that these perceptions have on teachers' setting of expectations for their students.

While the use of autobiography as a research method in *urban* teacher education contexts is not as expanded (Ladson-Billings, 2000), its role in reflective pedagogy cannot be denied. The use of autobiography in teacher education has attracted the attention of a few educational scholars, like Burdell & Swadener (1999); Florio-Ruane & deTar (2001); and Schmidt (1999). Autobiographic testimonies of urban teachers are needed to enhance teacher training, recruitment, and retention of faculty in urban schools (Ng, 2003; Steinberg et al., 2004). Exploring the lives of racially diverse teachers "through reading and examining memoirs and autobiographies – [may] generate discussions about complex, multi-layered topics" (Calvillo, 2003, p. 51) that pertain to education, such as the connection between poverty, race, intelligence, and school performance.

The choice of the two autobiographies used in this study was consistent with

the multicultural focus of this study in more than one way. First, the selected self-narratives represented points of view of both a “majority” educator and a minority educator of color. Second, the narratives reflected the teachers’ experiences working with culturally-diverse student populations. To this end, *Autobiography of a Teacher* (Ramsey, 2004), one of the two autobiographic texts selected for this study is a reflective autobiography of a “majority” teacher, Sarah Ramsey, and her commitment to educating herself about cultural diversity. The other text, Leroy Lovelace, is a first-person autobiographic interview account of Leroy Lovelace, a “minority” educator, and his experience teaching in two racially and socio-economically different educational settings. Lovelace’s story was published in Michele Foster (1997).

In her autobiography, Sarah Ramsey describes her journey of transformation from the rural, privileged life of a white girl living in a two-parent household, to her pre- and in-service teaching experience in multicultural school settings, where, on two separate occasions, she was a victim of a crime. The author credits these two incidents with being the reason why she decided to research and get more educated about multicultural issues in her doctoral work. Like Ramsey, Leroy Lovelace, who is African American, relates his journey of transformation in his understanding of race and schooling. Lovelace’s self-discovery journey started early when he attended private institutions both at the high school and college levels. Upon graduation, he became a teacher at Wendell Phillips High School in downtown Chicago, and later was selected to teach talented children in the Maine Summer Humanities Program. Lovelace recounts how the Maine experience helped him appreciate his work with urban students at Phillips, where he is known for his “caring, demanding classroom style [which] has helped keep countless kids in school and pushed many further than they thought they could ever go” (Monroe, 1992, n.p.).

Data collection and analysis

The data for this study was collected qualitatively through semi-structured written interviews and meta-reflective narratives. Preliminary interviews focused on the participants’ classroom experiences, as teachers, and were conducted prior to the reading of autobiographies.

Semi-structured, written interviews were completed by the participants both before and after reading the selected teacher autobiographies. For comparison purposes, exit interviews were conducted in the form of reader responses to the autobiographies at the end of the course. During the preliminary interviews, the participants were asked to share their: 1) expectations of urban youths’ literacy abilities prior to becoming teachers; 2) impressions of urban youths’ literacy abilities during their early days in the classroom, as pre-service (PSTp²) or in-service teacher (ISTp); and 3) assessment of urban youth’s literacy abilities after the first two marking periods, which extended over 91 days.

Participating teachers’ meta-reflective narratives (i.e., reflections on self-reflective narratives) provided data on the impact that reading and reflecting on the

² To preserve participants’ anonymity, the acronyms ISTp and PSTp will be used throughout the study analysis to represent *In-Service Teacher participant* (ISTp) and *Pre-Service Teacher participant* (PSTp)

two targeted teachers' autobiographies had had on their perceptions of their students' academic abilities.

The participants were invited to take part in a reader-response task, in which they were asked to read and respond to the two autobiographical narratives described earlier. Five response prompts were provided; they focused on: the reader's opinion about the author's account of his/her educational and literacy experiences; the educational insights gained from reading the selected autobiography; the participants' response to the author's interpretation of urban students' literacy abilities; their opinion of the author's understanding of the culture and lifestyle of urban minorities of color; and their personal assessment of the impact that reading these teacher autobiographies had on their self-perceptions as a teachers of urban youth.

Analysis

The data analysis followed qualitative research guidelines (Wolcott, 2001). Written interviews were analyzed separately from the meta-reflective narrative responses. After fitting the topics into the appropriate categories, the data inside each category was sorted out and assigned into subcategories. A close analysis of participants' prior and current expectations of students' literacy abilities helped to identify recurring patterns in their changing perceptions. Through pattern coding and thematic analysis of meta-reflective responses to the autobiographies, there emerged key areas that majority teachers need to adjust in order to understand urban students.

Findings

The participants' responses to the above prompts demonstrated an evolution, comparable to the culture shock trajectory, in the "majority" teachers' perceptions of their educator role as well as of the literacy abilities of urban students of color. The ecstatic feelings of landing a new/full time job were soon replaced by a crisis – a shock -- caused by a disappointing classroom reality. To manage the crisis, the teachers at first regressed to their own experiences to understand the situation at hand. Gradually, through guided reflections on the new experience, the participants showed signs of recovery from the shock slowly transitioning to an understanding of the students' aptitudes and attitudes towards learning.

Euphoria

The biographic data reflected a level of early excitement and anticipation – Euphoria – from the participants. As career changers, they looked forward to a positive departure from their previous occupations, as beauticians, recruiting agents, freelance writers, performing artists, accountants, musicians, private tutors, etc. Perhaps they saw teaching as a remedy to what was going wrong with the jobs they had chosen to leave behind. Apparently, however, this honeymoon stage was short-lived. The first contact with the students put them in a state of shock and dismay.

The Crisis

The participants' biographic testimonies reveal feelings of loss and disbelief regarding the students' attitudes and abilities upon first interaction with them. At this

stage, which can be likened to the “crisis” stage of culture shock, in-service teacher participants reported feelings of frustration with the students, and they blamed different entities – the system, the community, the students, or themselves -- for the situation. Examples of early commentaries follow:

ISTp1: They [urban students] have limited mastery of the English language and no sophisticated way of expressing their feelings[. . .]. They see the skills that I attempt to teach them as hurdles that I place before them, and [. . .] they knock them aside without regard for the intrinsic value in the knowledge that I am trying to give them;

ISTP 3: My students don’t feel as though school is really important. They know the game. They show up, do below the bare minimum, fail at least one of their classes, pull off a 2 on the state test and voila, they’re in the next grade. And the New York City Board of Education accepts that. That is what terrifies me. And sometimes I’m not sure how to deal with these students who seem to lack all motivation. This, too, terrifies me;

ISTp3: Many of my students use inappropriate language and behavior in the classroom or in a public setting, and are often unaware or uncaring of this. It’s an issue that I am very sensitive to [. . .]; and

ISTp4: [. . .] a lot of them didn’t have the self esteem to even try. It took me almost the entire year to realize that this was the reason they were failing. They considered themselves failures before they even began.

Perhaps, an important catalyst of the above commentaries is the influence of the teachers’ own beliefs, which are rooted into a deep cultural discontinuity between non-urban majority teachers’ and urban minority students’ lives, class, and race, as some of them remarked.

When asked to comment on students’ abilities, more than half of the participants expressed a state of disbelief through the use such emotional qualifiers as “appalled,” “shocked,” or “surprised” to express their indignation at the students’ extremely low-literacy performance. Some found the range of abilities among students surprising, while others were appalled by the lack of appropriate reading materials for the students’ levels. Examples of early commentaries include:

ISTp1: I was shocked at how violently students were opposed to literacy;

ISTp3: I was surprised at the range of ability. Many performed even farther below than I imagined;

ISTP 4: I was still surprised at how my seventh graders struggled with reading. Some read well, but many did not even know the basics of grammar;

ISTp7: Initially I was appalled by the number of children’s books stocked in the libraries of my school’s classrooms; and

IST8: I was shocked at what I was confronted with. When asked to write a paragraph, they wrote a sentence. Their topic sentences mostly began with “I think”. They struggled with the Basal Reader as the vocabulary was sophisticated.

In the above responses the respondents used the reality of the classroom to validate their early beliefs about the students. Each response points to something wrong either about the students’ attitudes towards literacy or their literacy aptitudes. Some teachers denounced the students’ defiant attitude; others found their low reading levels abnormal. Some form of intervention was necessary to pull these teachers out of their negative state of mind and place them on the path to recovery

Early recovery

Depending on whether there is adequate support system to facilitate new teacher socialization, the regression stage may either lead to abdication or recovery. The teachers in this study experienced the latter. Reflections through biographic interviews and reader responses over their new role and context opened them to the possibility of self awareness.

As a sign of “early recovery”, some in-service teacher participants confessed that it was difficult to look past their early beliefs to understand their students and where they came from. By the time of this study, in-service teachers had had the opportunity to spend more time with the students while also taking education courses. Based on the written responses, around 67% (6 out of 9) of the participants indicated that they started off with very low expectations of the students’ cognitive abilities. Some confessed to not thinking highly of their students, like in the following statements:

ISTp2: From the readings and conversations, I expected low abilities;

ISTp4: I knew many students would be performing below grade level;

PSTp5: I had limited expectations based on my own [personal] experience; and

PSTp9: I expected urban youths to be performing below grade level due to the scores received on the ELA and Math City exams for middle school published by the DOE³ and media reports.

For thirty-three percent of the participants (3 out of 9), however, the classroom reality reversed their rather optimistic expectations, as illustrated below;

ISTp3: I expected their ability to be equal to anybody’s;

ISTp1: My expectations were about realistic; and

³ New York City teachers use DOE as the short form for NYC Department of Education

IST8: I thought they'd at least be able to write a paragraph.

The recovery process for these teachers coincided with the beginning of the graduate course described earlier, which afforded them the opportunity to reflect more deeply on their early teaching experiences throughout the course and connect them to the autobiographic experiences related in the two teacher autobiographies. Progress in recovery was perceived in their responses to the "current impressions" prompt.

Progressing recovery

The participants' responses to the "current impressions" prompts indicated that, while not too high, their expectations had improved from their earlier teaching experiences to the time of the interviews. Some responses reflected a degree of understanding of their students and a commitment to be part of the solution to help them succeed. The following reflections reflect more understanding than criticism:

ISTp1: They read far below grade level, but don't mind when it is comfortable and meets their ability. They like to be successful.

ISTp3: The ability is there. What lacks is confidence and motivation. I feel like many of my students are doomed unless they get motivated.

ISTp7: Motivation rather than skill is the main detriment to their ability to learn.

PSTp 6: Higher enrolments; financial conditions, and parent education/involvement present a challenge toward achievement of student goals.

ISTp8: I know that they are incredibly literate in poetry, media, body language and I use these in a structured form to get the desired result of a structured piece of writing (essay, research paper).

Comparatively, there seems to be a noticeable change in the participants' pre-conceptions of students' abilities and their evolving re-evaluations of the latter. Gradually, the perceptions are shifting from stereotyping to acknowledgement of potential. The changing impressions have been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: *Teachers' Changing Impressions about Urban Students*

<u>Before Becoming Teachers</u>	<u>Early in the Teaching Profession</u>	<u>Later in the first year</u>
Low expectations	Range of abilities	Potential to do well
Limited expectations	Oppositional attitudes	Creative ability
Minimum expectations	Struggling learners	Lack of motivation
Realistic	Below-grade-level materials	Lack of support

Full recovery

The equivalent of “full recovery” in the culture shock trajectory was reached towards the end of the course, when the participants partook in reading, reflecting and relating to Ramsey and Lovelace’s teacher autobiographies. The responses to the autobiographies reflected a major shift in the participants’ perceptions of urban students, indicating an equal amount of admiration for both Ramsey and Lovelace.

The participants’ responses suggested that they had learned valuable lessons from both autobiographies, which represented respectively views of a majority and a minority educator. As a result of reading the autobiographies, the participants concurred on three problem areas that needed urgent focus during their new teacher journeys. Three themes representing the participants’ new perceptions of teaching urban students revolved around the need: 1) to examine oneself in relation to inherent racist beliefs; 2) to develop an understanding and knowledge of the students; and 3) to find a connection with students and set high expectations for them.

Transcending race and finding ways to develop an understanding of students’ culture. In relation to Ramsey’s story, her testimony helped the participants realize that to be successful, as majority teachers of urban student populations, they needed to reflect on whether they themselves hold racist beliefs and, if so, seek ways to break away from these beliefs and minimize cultural biases, stereotypes, and prejudices. As majority educators who have little experience with cultural diversity, most participants reported that they identified with Ramsey’s urban encounters:

ISTp2: I could definitely relate to this author. As I noted while discussing one of the other authors, all of my experience was in suburban schools, and I was put into an urban teaching environment, where many of my techniques just wouldn't work.

PSTp5: The first sentence of Ramsey's autobiography speaks volumes in itself: "Many of us do not realize the prejudices we learn by living our lives." This, I believe, is the common thread between Ramsey's experience and everyone else's, however they may differ.

ISTp6: This represents a "classic journey" of a privileged professional. I related to the author in so many ways, educationally and in the lack of diversity that handicapped her.

The fact that the respondents recognized themselves in Ramsey's story may have contributed to their admiration for the author's decision to learn about African American culture as a way to challenge her own beliefs. Thus, they wrote:

ISTp1: I like that Ramsey, instead of developing racist beliefs, took a class in African American studies to learn about *them*. She recognized that fear stems from the unknown and did her best to gain an understanding of African Americans. It is a very noble goal;

PSTp5: For while I am a white female who has interrogated her own cultural identity, perhaps I have not done it comparatively to others and their identities. This seems like someone who knows the lit, interesting...;

PSTp5: Through reflection we can understand who we are, why we are that way, and how we change everyone else's however they may differ; and

ISTp6: I can also relate to coming into an urban setting after being raised in a rural setting and having the same expectations. Although it is a culture shock, a teacher can't let their expectations slip because of their surroundings.

Unlike Ramsey's story, the cultural experiences and testimonies of Lovelace sometimes reflected a different worldview than the one held by the participants. Nevertheless, through transparency and professional integrity, Lovelace managed to convince these pre- and in-service teachers that good teaching has little to do with race; rather, it is fulfilled through setting high expectations for all students, demonstrating knowledge and finding a connection with the students.

Setting high standards for urban students. From the participants' responses to Lovelace's story, there emerged recognition of the value of a pedagogy that sought to cultivate human integrity and set high standards for all students. Apparently, one of the reasons why Lovelace received a remarkably high and detailed number of responses (80% or 7 out of 9 possible responses) was his uniform approach to teaching, regardless of students' racial or economic background. Lovelace's integrity led the participants to examine their own attitude towards urban students, like in the following reflections:

ISTp1: Mr. Lovelace has shown the value of his personal integrity. I often wonder, as a teacher of urban students, if there'll ever be common ground for ALL students [emphasis, not mine]. I also believe that without, at least acknowledging our biases, we will not effectively master the urban setting;

ISTp2: Mr. Lovelace is one of the exceptional teachers in the world. If there were more people like him everyone would be better off. Students would succeed more often, and teachers would find that their expectations were met. I think that we all need to unite together to uphold the standards that will help out students to be successful.

Developing high expectations for urban students and challenging students to meet them. Through Mr. Lovelace's testimony, the participants realized that a teacher may gain more respect through commitment to challenging urban students' oppositional attitudes toward learning and holding them accountable, while ensuring that his instruction was engaging. He challenged them to not go with the illusive persona that some students display to get away with the crime of laziness. It is encouraging to see that the participants seem to get and go with Lovelace's message, as reflected in these comments:

ISTp3: His [Lovelace] understanding of his students' needs and abilities seems to be right on target, but he also seems to have a firm grasp of what the students will try to get away with. I love that he understands this without making them seem troublesome. All students will reflect what you see in them and give it back to you;

ISTp4: I like how this teacher lays down a level of expectation and expects it to be followed. He also mentions how we can't let kids get away with pulling off the "feel sorry for me" trick;

PSTp5: I think this teacher was very connected to his students and their needs as students. He has a very inspirational story. His article makes me proud to be a teacher;

ISTp6: This is a wonderful, inspiring read. I appreciate the resolve that Lovelace had in his expectations for his students. And he was the same in his expectations whether teaching affluent students or the underprivileged. He enjoyed working hard because he loved to teach. As teachers, Lovelace's story clarifies . . . the ideal of engaging students to the degree that they value their own participation as part of the team; and

PSTp7: I really responded to Mr. Lovelace's ideas of involving and motivating all his students. He expressed what I think of as 'positive pride', and his intention was to instil this in his students, as well. That is a quality I would emulate.

Insights and meaning derived from reading and reflecting on Ramsey and Lovelace autobiographies show that the participants attained a deep level of self-awareness, social understanding, and personal responsibility. Table 2, below, summarizes the teachers' insights and meanings derived from the autobiographies in Table two.

Table 2. *Teaching insights and meanings derived from Ramsey and Lovelace autobiographies.*

<u>In relation to Ramsey</u>	<u>In relation to Lovelace</u>	<u>In relation to selves</u>
Expect cultural tensions	Know thy students	Expect challenges
Accept differences	Foster high expectations	Know thyself
Be prepared to adjust	Motivate the students	Reflect
Confront your fears	Find a connection with the learner	Seek growth

**Discussion and Implications:
Teacher autobiography and novice teacher perceptions**

Reading and responding to the selected autobiographies had a significant impact on the participants' self-perceptions as teachers. All the respondents appreciated Ramsey and Lovelace for their professional and deontological ethos. The responses reflected an overall appreciation for the educators, regardless of race or gender, for challenging the readers to get out of their comfort zones and be the agents for educational success in their classrooms. Reading about self reflective teachers not only sparked the participants to carry out self-examination; it also provided them with a new lens through which they could envision a new pedagogy of possibility. The following metareflections convey a heuristic tone:

- ISTp1: Reading through these autobiographies was very encouraging and enlightening. Reading these autobiographies helped me focus and realize that every teacher's experience is unique. They encouraged me to find my own "story" as an educator;
- ISTp2: It is validating to hear that some of the struggles the author faces are quite like my own. As a white teacher, it is especially interesting to hear what a black teacher has to say. Again, with respect to holding fast to rigorous standards, I think it is vitally important for all teachers to see that we must not fall victim to the

soft bigotry of low expectations! The next time I consider moving a due date, or cutting down a length requirement on a paper, I will think of Mr Lovelace and pause for thought;

- ISTp3: At times, I could definitely relate to the issues some teachers have faced. Additionally, I agree that it is crucial to establish your expectations with your students to inspire them to become active participants in their own learning;
- ISTp4: I felt the autobiographical accounts to be revealing as to the shaping of the teachers as educators. I appreciate that these educators have made realizations about themselves through much reflection, which in turn helps us to illuminate our own experiences;
- PSTp3: Since “Behind every face is a story,” I am glad I have had the opportunity to grow in my ability to learn more about the cultural stories of my prospective future students; and
- ISTp6: His [Lovelace] goal of full-class engagement reminds me of my best learning experiences and the teachers who really leave us with an indelible memory.

Ramsey and Lovelace’s autobiographies successfully answered questions and addressed concerns that probably “majority” teachers might not ask publicly, for one reason or another. Availing a private space to read and respond to the autobiographies seems to have provided the teachers with an opportunity to confront their personal challenges and achieve growth in their understanding of urban students.

Methodologically, the participants’ appreciation of the autobiographies validated the pedagogical potential of teacher autobiographies to inspire pre-service and in-service teacher candidates. The humanistic nature of Ramsey and Lovelace’s autobiographies engaged the participating in-service teachers into pondering and confessing their (mis)perceptions of urban students. By and large, the responses to autobiographies revealed the participants’ willingness and openness to learn from the experiences of inspirational teachers from across races and cultures. The participants’ responses suggest that at least two important lessons were derived from the autobiographies. First, Ramsey’s experience suggests that in order to better understand and communicate with people who are different, one must make an effort to learn about them. Second, Lovelace’s experience suggests that in an atmosphere of integrity and mutual respect, accountability, and self-discipline are likely to lead students of all backgrounds to success. In other words, racial awareness is not necessarily the only means, nor is it always the best means to engage urban students.

Conclusions

Culture shock is a common phenomenon likely to happen whenever a person transitions from a familiar culture to a foreign cultural environment, including the classroom. Kron and Faber (1973) have rightly remarked that culture shock is likely to indiscriminately affect a white middle-class, suburban teachers, who transfer

to inner city school, but also to a black teacher who transfers from an inner-city school to a white, rural or suburban school. As mentioned earlier in the assumptions, racial minority scholars and advocates tend to be offended when “majority” teachers make negative comments about urban children. This study has demonstrated that these sorts of comments may indeed be part of the culture shock process, and that they can be overcome. Through self-reflective responses to biographic interviews and teacher autobiographies, pre-and in-service majority teachers can challenge and change the negative expectations they have about urban youth’s literacy abilities and attitude towards learning.

The findings from the students’ responses to the autobiographies corroborate findings from previous research on the role of teacher autobiography in the preparation of multiculturally aware teachers (Fernandez, 2003; Wang & Yu, 2006). The autobiography provides a humane venue through which educators who “have made realizations about themselves through much reflection, [. . .] in turn help us to illuminate our own experiences” (ISTp4). As suggested by the proponents of autobiographical narratives in education (Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Gomez & Tabachnick, 1992; Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008; Witherell & Noddings, 1991), this study supports the notion that self-reflection and dialogue illuminated by teacher autobiographies can enhance “majority” teachers’ cultural sensitivity.

Further research is needed to test a tentative hypothesis generated from this study, namely the possibility that through self-reflections based on resilient teacher autobiographies, majority alternative-route teacher candidates might come to an understanding of urban students’ literacy potential and of the concessions that need to take place in order to thrive in an urban school setting.

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A Participatory Action Research Study of Nature Education in Nature: Towards Community-based Eco-pedagogy

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Abstract:

Contemporary nature education is exploring different ways to develop awareness for change and initiate action. Such educational activities go beyond creating understanding and awareness in order to develop a sense of commitment for individual and collective action. This participatory action research study aimed to improve teachers' sensitiveness towards nature, and to achieve environmental literacy and sustainability by inspiring community action and educational opportunities that support sustainable and thriving environments for a Community-based Eco-pedagogy. The study further explores the possibilities of helping the adults -through communication and collaboration with each other and their communities to re-evaluate and discover the diversity and importance of their surrounding environment while utilizing pedagogical strategies which will involve the participants to the in-depth study of the nature, history, the culture, the traditional customs, and the natural environment.

Keywords: Eco-pedagogy, Participatory action research, Community

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Introduction

The ecological crisis is the vital issue that faces all of humankind. Nature education is, therefore, crucial for the development of environmental consciousness and for strengthening the ability of the individuals and communities to resist the environmentally destructive forces of the crisis. Traditional nature education models often simplify environmental issues by not critically examining their social, cultural, and practical relevance (Day, 2000). In these models, learning about nature only occurs within traditional classroom settings (Gronomeyer, 1987). Community-based Eco-pedagogy (CEP) provides alternatives to traditional nature education (Elder, 2003; Kahn, 2010).

The literature is growing on the importance of nature and environmental education for adults (Kahn, 2010). However, enhancing environmental awareness and ecological knowledge through education alone does not guarantee environmentally-friendly action. Contemporary nature education is exploring different ways to develop awareness for change and initiate action. Such educational activities go beyond creating understanding and awareness in order to develop a sense of commitment for individual and collective action (UNESCO, 1997; Kahn, 2010). Community-based Eco-pedagogy has the potential to bring about action at individual, community and governmental levels by situating local knowledge within a critical pedagogy and social activism. CEP therefore needs to address all section of society for a collective action: individuals, local disadvantaged communities, public institutions, the private sector, schools, governments, policy-makers, unions and international organizations.

The primary purposes of this participatory action research study were to improve sensitiveness of adults particularly the teachers towards nature, and to achieve environmental literacy and sustainability by inspiring community action and educational opportunities that support sustainable and thriving environments for a Community-based Eco-pedagogy. CEP involves new concepts of creativity, ethics, and experiential and life long learning in which individuals would start seeing the nature as a “communion of subjects” and not as the mere “collection of objects” to which modern science reduces the world.

The study further explores the possibilities of helping the teachers through communication and collaboration with each other and their communities to re-evaluate and discover the diversity and importance of their surrounding environment while utilizing pedagogical strategies which will involve the participants to the in-depth study of the nature, history, the culture, the traditional customs, and the natural environment.

In addition, the study articulates various strategies for designing and implementing eco-pedagogy program that include sustainability, biodiversity, ecological restoration, scientific discourse on nature, environmental literacy to discuss the importance of nature education for adults, who can use ecological knowledge to facilitate social and environmental actions.

The Project and Research Setting

This study was a part of an outdoor nature education project financed by Turkish Science and Technologic Research Foundation (TUBITAK)¹. Within this project, developing an environmental education and CEP program was understood as “a process where concerned citizens, government agencies, industry, academia, community groups and local institutions collaborate to monitor, track and respond to issues of common community concern” (Whitelaw, Vaughan, Craig & Atkinson, 2003, p. 410). The project aimed at giving the project members the opportunity to both collect data and use the information generated to promote informed decision-making. It thus promoted sustainability at a local and at a wider level.

The project was conducted in two terms between 27.07.2009 and 15.08.2009 at the following locations: Kaz Mountain, Troia and Gelibolu National Parks, Bozcadada Island, Can and Ezine provinces, Pınarbaşı and Nusratlı villages, Karamenderes stream and Dalak water resource. (See Table-1).

The project management team at Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University has organized an environmental education and CEP program for the 40 project participants who were working as public school teachers at the different cities of Turkey. 26 professors, 4 research assistants from the departments of Education, Archeology, Zoology, Botanic, Physics, Chemistry, History, Geology, Agriculture, Fishery, and Geography participated in the development and evaluation processes of CEP program. 34 seminars, workshops, and evaluation activities were organized within the program including compost production from organic home waste, endemic vegetation of the city and its surrounding, importance and characteristics of river ecology, use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in environmental research and GIS applications, Ecologically Sensitive City Planning in Canakkale, Ethnobotanic, Visits to Local Water Processing Center and Atikhisar Dam, etc. (See Table-1).

Methodology

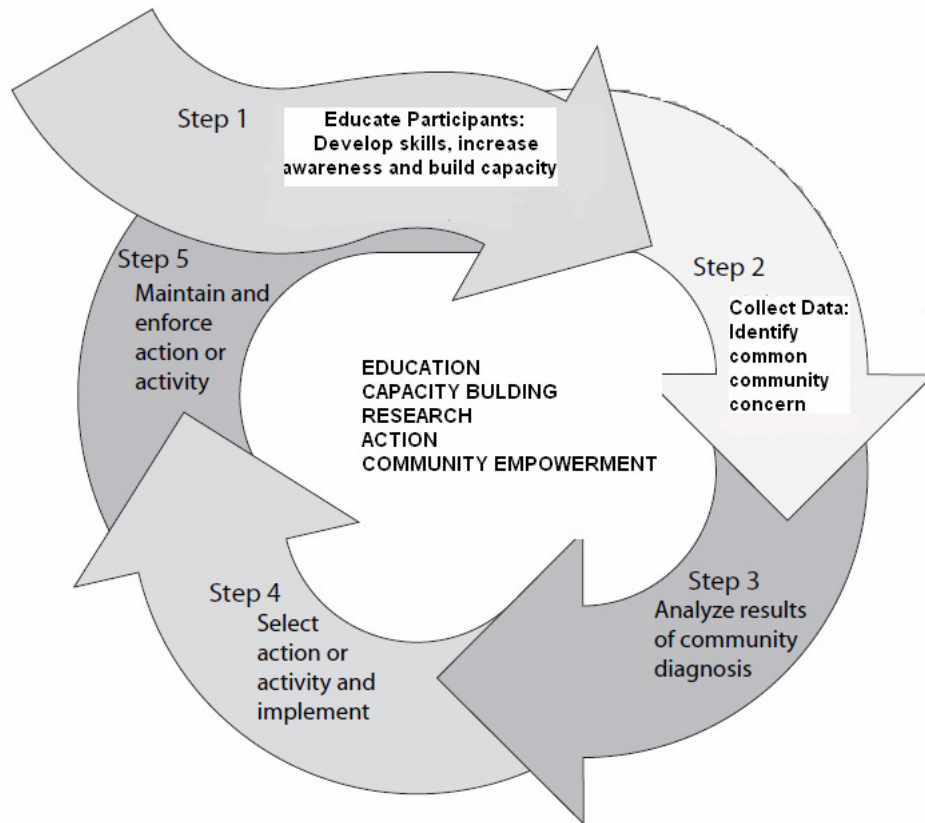
This study is a participatory action research that focuses on the effects of the researchers' direct actions of practice within a participatory community with the aim of improving the conditions of the community or an area of concern (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Participatory action research involves utilizing transformative methods of planning, taking action, observing, evaluating (including self-evaluation) and critical reflection (Burns, 2007; Brydon-Miller, 2002). It is a collaborative method to explore new ideas and implement action for change.

By implementing the CEP program, the project team aimed to develop a 5-step community action and empowerment model (Figure-1). This community-driven model designed to build project participants' capacity to address the issues of common community concern about exploitation of nature and environmental sustainability.

¹ For more information: <http://www.tubitak.gov.tr/home.do?ot=1&sid=803&pid=800>

Figure1. *Community action and empowerment model for environmental sustainability*



Fundamental to the model is a critical analysis identifying the underlying social, economic, and political forces which lead to the growing destruction of the ecosystem. The model provides individuals and communities with the pedagogical framework necessary to acquire the skills and resources to plan, implement, and evaluate nature and ecology related actions and policies.

By designing and using this model, the project team aimed to promote environmental change by helping project participants in acquiring the skills needed to accomplish environmental change themselves and by mobilizing project members and agencies to eliminate characteristics of the community that promote environmental problems.

Data Collection

In the study, participants' perceptions of environmental sustainability and CEP were assessed and documented each phases of the project both in theoretical seminars and practical activities in nature. Participants completed open-ended surveys. They also completed detailed reaction papers about their experiences. Photographic and videotaped images were also captured throughout the nature trips, workshops and seminars. Semi-structured and open ended interviews were conducted to let the participants reflect on their experience in developing an environmental consciousness and ecologically friendly practices.

Table 1. Sources of Data

Interviews	Initial semi-structured interviews Group reflective interview Open ended interviews
Documents	Written reports and assignments Survey Results Field notes
Observations and debriefings	Observation notes Reflexive writings Debriefing notes
Videotaping	Seminar activities Mentor-mentee meetings

Data Analysis

Data were thematized through the common qualitative practice of coding in order to attach relevant labels to segments of the data sources. Both deductive and inductive coding occurred as fieldnotes, transcripts, videotapes and survey results were reviewed and labeled with codes that emerged from the data. Initial codes were collapsed into theme codes which represented ideas that came from the data. Narrative text was attached to each theme code by displaying color-coded segments on index cards that could be physically manipulated.

At this point in the analysis, there were two general themes developed: 1- Capacity building for knowledge accumulation and community awareness, and 2- Advocacy for community empowerment and change

Knowledge accumulation for capacity building and community awareness

Knowledge accumulation for capacity building and community awareness has become an increasingly important part of environmental sustainability. Unfortunately, the reality in many areas of Turkey is that, due to lack of communication between universities, public schools and local communities, there are large gaps in connecting theory with practice to develop community awareness.

In order to eliminate the gap between theory and action, the CEP program in this project provided project participants who were public school teachers with the practical and theoretical opportunities to bring about action at individual, school and community levels by situating local knowledge within a critical pedagogy and social activism.

At the end of the project, almost all participants indicated that the CEP program help them recognize the importance of designing public school curriculum for finding practical ways to develop community awareness which addresses all section of society for a collective action to develop environmental consciousness:

individuals, local disadvantaged communities, public institutions, the private sector, schools, governments, policy-makers, unions and international organizations. As part of the process of developing community awareness, university professors provided the project participants with skill and knowledge-based training in their particular project area. This initial training allowed the teachers to have a clear and concrete understanding of the community action process, along with specific activities included in the curriculum of the CEP program, helping them identify and focus on a specific area of work. The following represent the teachers' reflections which best exemplify some their success experiences in building capacity and developing community awareness:

As part of the "Endemic Vegetation of Canakkale and its Surroundings" and "Forest Ecosystem and its Characteristics" activities, the participants went to the Dalak Water resource to collect plants and analyze their morphological properties in order to learn more about biodiversity. At the end, the participants tried to identify what these plants were. One of the elementary school teachers, who participated in the these activities, indicated that

Learning about endemic plants by collecting and analyzing them with my group members at the Dalak Water resource was very interesting and educative for me. I personally did not know that there is such a great plant population in Canakkale. The professor from the botanic department told us that there are 12000 plant species only in Turkey. We should educate the students at our schools to work together to protect these natural treasures.

Through learning in nature by doing, the participants moved beyond their classroom experiences. This knowledge accumulation promises to enhance future learning in regards to environmental sustainability.

Another science teacher who participated in the activities mentioned the importance of knowledge sharing for community awareness:

Local communities and school teachers need to be educated on environmental conservation and the importance of sustainable development in Canakkale. Our students at public schools and their parents should be encouraged to gain further knowledge and detailed understanding of environmental issues. We can achieve this by helping them to participate in outdoor educational activities in nature and acquire skills in identifying, preventing and resolving environmental problems like we did in this project.

During and after every project activity, participants engaged in dialogue about concerns and issues they want to address and choose a focus area that has meaning to their learning. For example, at the "Compost production from organic home waste" activity, the participants engaged in dialogue about how to dispose of home waste to protect the environment in simple and tangible way. For the activity, the participants collected organic waste from the hotel's kitchen and filled them in barrel with 30 lt. In addition, an oxygen system was installed into the barrel. The participants were divided in five groups and a thermometer was given to each group. Groups measured the barrel's temperature every morning during 10 days and analyzed the heat change at the end. One teacher who participated in the activity indicated that

This activity was one of the best ways to get our students to protect the environment and to show them the impact of their actions on the world around them. Compost producing is a simple and applicable method. It affected me and I would apply this method with my students at my school.

Another teacher mentioned that the activity help them understand how the waste that has been fermenting in the compost pile supply rich organic matter that may benefit the soil by improving the soil structure, aeration and water preservation.

Another CEP related learning opportunity was the “Stream Ecology, its Properties and Importance” activity. At the activity, the participants were divided into five groups. They caught invertebrate larva with sieve in stream and classified larva to family level by species identification paper. Participants were took water specimen from stream and measured some water properties such as PO₄, NO₃, Ca by using chemical kits. One of the participants said that with this activity they learned how to connect classroom learning to the nature.

Catching insect larva, identifying them and conducting water analysis activities which we performed at Karamenderes Stream affected me and my perception of learning by doing. I have never done such things before. Especially, water analyses will help me and my students relate the Biology course to the Chemistry lessons in my school.

In their reflection papers, almost all participants mentioned the importance of project activities and how these activities would radically change their perception of curriculum and classroom practice.

Advocacy for community empowerment and change

Throughout the project, CEP program involved educating and organizing project members to serve as advocates of community empowerment and change for environmental sustainability. The project seminars and activities stressed on importance of defining, designing, and implementing a community action research to determine the main causes of an environmental problem and outline the resources necessary to solve it. This process was an important step where university professors and public school teachers work together to design and implement strategies that can be used to assess the extent of the environmental problem. Furthermore, by identifying an issue and developing strategies, the participants critically analyzed and identified the underlying social, economic, and political forces creating the environmental problems. For example, at the “Electrosmog and Environmental Health” seminar, the participants learned about the theory of magnetic area and later they measured various electrical tools such as hair dryer, refrigerator, various mobile phones etc at laboratory. Then, in Bozcaada Island, the magnetic area of wind turbines was measured by the participants. They found out that the wind grandstands had much more magnetic effect on nature and bird migration than many electrical tools. On the other hand, the participants compared the limitations and opportunities of wind energy with what they have learnt about limitations of thermal energy at Çan 18 March Fossil-Fuel Thermal Power Plant.

After the project seminar, one of the school teachers argued that

Coal fueled power stations produces the most important greenhouse gas, CO₂, which is a major contributor to the global warming. In addition, particulates from the power plant can be harmful and have negative health impacts on local people. Even though wind grandstands may have magnetic effect on nature and bird migration, they are much more nature and health friendly alternative energy source than coal fueled power stations. As we have seen in Bozcaada, if Canakkale uses its wind and solar energy capacity properly, the city would not need any other energy source for many years. I think the university and public schools should inform the local community about the importance of clean energy sources.

The example above demonstrates the teachers' reflections which best exemplify their success experiences in developing environmental consciousness and in providing alternative solutions to the ecological problems.

Another CEP related learning opportunity was the "Our ecological foot prints: How did we live 100 years ago, how do we live now?" seminar. At the seminar, the participants analyzed sea turtles' life circles and ovulation ceremony to better understand the crucial process of sustainability of lives of endangered animals. The seminar is given by a professor from the Biology department who is the head of sea turtle research and recovery center where a research network of biologists, educators, community groups and state representatives is committed to an integrated, regional center that ensures the recovery and sustainable management of sea turtle populations. One of the participants identified the seminar as follows:

It was fascinating to learn about the *Caretta caretta* sea turtles' ovulation ceremony and striving of junior turtles to arrive the sea. It is a crucial process for sustainability of their life. I have understood that there is a wonderful balance at nature during our activity.

The seminar involved the project participant in selecting, planning, and implementing an action to address their issue of concern on sustainability of sea turtles' lives. Here participants used the findings of their analysis to determine solutions to the issues they have chosen to address and ways to develop community awareness and action. The project participants identified the characteristics of a community action plan as follows: (1) achievable, (2) having the potential for sustainability, and (3) bringing members of local communities, academicians, students, agencies, and NGOs to change their community for the lives of sea turtles.

One of the school teachers who participated in the seminar argued that

The seminar was really informative and I am grateful for what I am learning about environmental sustainability and for what I am learning about what I can do to make a difference. If we want to effectively protect the lives of sea turtles, we need to find imaginative ways for people to come together and develop new strategies and policies. I will encourage my students to be advocates to develop and implement community action and strategies for environmental protection for endangered animals that may be in the form of

outreach, media advocacy, development of a model policy, or advocating for a policy.

In their reflection papers, the project participants identified one of the main goals of the project as raising awareness. By raising awareness, they would be encouraged to gain further knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and of their roles in overcoming the problems. Almost all participants mentioned the importance of the project activities and how these activities enabled and encouraged them to participate in the community action for environmental sustainability and nature protection. They also mentioned that they would implement what they have learnt in the project in their schools to develop a change of perception and attitudes towards environment and nature, which should then motivate the students to actively participate in and continue towards environmental sustainability.

Conclusion

Outdoor nature education project with Community-based Ecopedagogy activities can provide a number of benefits and opportunities for universities, public schools and the local communities. These projects can benefit local communities and public schools through promotion of public participation, the engagement of students, teacher and parents in local environmental issues, and the development of social capital to achieve environmental sustainability. By situating local knowledge within a critical pedagogy and social activism, these projects can help universities to bridge the gap between academia and society.

The current project helped project participants to understand their own complex situation by learning the political, economic and social factors which lead to the growing destruction of the environment. The project activities encouraged the project participants to recognize the importance of designing university programs and public school curriculum for finding practical ways to develop community awareness which addresses all section of society for a collective action to develop environmental consciousness. As part of the process of developing community awareness, university professors provided the project participants with skill and knowledge-based training in their particular project area. This initial training allowed the participants to have a clear and concrete understanding of the CEP program. But awareness-raising activities alone cannot lead to sustained change. The project stressed on importance of defining, designing, and implementing a community action research to determine the main causes of an environmental problem and outline the resources necessary to solve it.

In order to develop a sustained change, Local communities and governments should increase the emphasis on environmental education in schools and should raise environmental awareness and educate students on the importance of environmental conservation. Universities should continue their partnership work with public schools and NGOs to incorporate CEP program into the formal university and public school curriculum.

Table 1. *Project Time-table (Environmental Education and CEP Program)*

Date	Time	Event/Activity	Location
27.07. 2009	13:00- 14:00	Introduction and drama activity	CATOML (Canakkale Turizm High School)
27.07. 2009	17:30- 18:30	Introduction to First aid	CATOML
27.07. 2009	14:00- 17:00	Compost production from organic home waste	CATOML
27.07. 2009	19:30- 21:30	Vertebrates living in and around of Canakkale-Theoretical	CATOML
27.07. 2009	22.00- 23.00	Participatory observation activity	CATOML
28.07. 2009	10:00- 12:00	Endemic Vegetation of Canakkale and its surrounding	Dalak Water Resource
28.07. 2009	13:00- 16:00	Forest Ecosystem and its characteristics	Dalak Water Resource
28.07. 2009	17:00- 18:30	Nature protection and the role of insects in biological control	Dalak Water Resource (2. term Bozcaada)
29.07. 2009	8:30- 10.30	Canakkale and Weather	ÇATOML
29.07. 2009	10:30- 12:30	Importance of Nature in Food Production in Canakkale: Ezine Cheese ve Canakkale Cheese Halva and their importance	Ezine
29.07. 2009	14:30- 18:00	River Ecology, importance and characteristics	Pınarbaşı Village
30.07. 2009	08:00- 19:00	Historical Importance of Canakkale	Gelibolu Peninsula
31.07. 2009	8:30- 10:00	Development of National Parks in terms of protection and use policies	ÇATOML
31.07. 2009	10:30- 13:00	Importance of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in nature research and GIS applications	COMÜ Faculty of Engineering
31.07. 2009	14.00- 15.00	Fishery Museum	Faculty of Fishery
31.07. 2009	16:00- 19:30	Historical Troia National Park: From Prehistoric Era to Today	Historical Troia National Park
01.08. 2009	9:00- 12:00	Natural or Human-made Magnetic Space and environmental health	Faculty of Education
01.08. 2009	13:30- 15:00	Ecologically Sensitive City Planning in Canakkale	Faculty of Education
01.08. 2009	15:30- 18:00	Exploring Naval Museum and Arceology Museum	Naval Museum, Arceology Museum
01.08. 2009	21:30-	Astrophysics and finding direction at night,	ÇOMÜ Ulupınar Observatory

	23:00	Are we alone at the Universe?	
2.08.2 009	8:30- 10:30	Geological History and Structure of Canakkale Theory	ÇATOML
2.08.2 009	10:30- 13:00	Geological History and Structure of Canakkale Practicum	Ayvacık, Nusratlı Village
2.08.2 009	14:30- 16:30	Practicum	Ayvacık, Nusratlı Village
02.08. 2009	21:30 22:30	Interactive Presentation Activities	ÇATOML
03.08. 2009	08:30- 10:00	Visiting Local Water Processing Center and Atikhisar Dam	Çanakkale-Çan Road
03.08. 2009	11:00- 16:00	Can 18 March Thermal Power Plant and Can Coal Reserves, Water Reserves	Çan
03.08. 2009	17:00- 19:00	Ethnobotanic	ÇATOML
03.08. 2009	21:00- 23:00	Under water and See Ecology	Bozcaada
04.08. 2009	9:30- 11:00	Ecotourism	Bozcaada
04.08 2009	13:00- 19:00	Under water and See Ecology	Bozcaada
04.08. 2009	22:30- 23:00	Interactive Presentation Activities	ÇATOML
05.08. 2009	09:00- 11:00	Our ecological foot prints: How did we live 100 years ago, how do we live now?	ÇATOML
05.08. 2009	11:00- 12:00	Compost production from organic home waste	ÇATOML
05.08. 2009	12:00- 14:00	Evaluation	ÇATOML

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Geography Teachers' Usage of The Internet For Education Purposes

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine geography teachers' use of the Internet for education purposes and the extent to which Turkish Internet sites can fulfill the needs and requirements of geography teachers' Internet usage. Research is carried out using the screening method. Data were collected by means of a measurement tool that was developed by the researcher (questionnaire form) over the Internet. The study group consists of 174 teachers, who filled out and submitted the questionnaire on a volunteer basis, and all participants were members of an Internet forum, "Geography Teachers of Turkey" (Turkiye Cografya Öğretmenleri), that was created for the purpose of information sharing among geography teachers. Frequency, percentage correlation, and arithmetic mean were used, as appropriate, for the purpose of analyzing the data. Study results indicate that geography teachers use the Internet most frequently for the purpose of geography education in order to acquire documents that can be used in teaching geography. The study further indicates that geography teachers least frequently for purpose of classroom applications with direct Internet use and for assessing students' studies.

Keywords: Geography, Geography teachers, Teaching geography, Internet

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Introduction

Defined as a web or network that interconnects hundreds of thousands of computers around the world – thereby ensuring information exchange among them (Yüzer, 2006) – the Internet is technology that emerged from the people's needs of storing, sharing and easily accessing the information. Beyond this, the scope of information expands exponentially each day. Thanks to this technology, people are able to access information in many fields easily, cheaply, rapidly and safely. Today, many people looking for practical answers to geographic, social, economic, political, and environmental questions and information has made computer-aided information use, namely Internet use, an important part of our daily lives (Bevainis, 2008).

The rate of Internet usage is increasing globally and daily. According to 2008 end-of-year data, 21.1% of the world's population uses the Internet. While English is the most frequently used language on the Internet, with a 29.4% share, Chinese is second with 18.9%, and Spanish is third with 8.5%. Turkish does not rank in the top ten. With 26,500,000 users, Turkey ranks 6th in Europe's in terms of Internet users and 36.9% of Turkey's population actively uses the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2008).

As per the results of the study that was carried out by Tuik in April 2008, 35.8% of household members with age between 16-74 in Turkey use the Internet. 55.2% of Internet users use the Internet at home, 38.4% use Internet at work while 24.2% use Internet at Internet cafes. In terms of education level, highest Internet usage rate is that of collage, university graduates and graduates of higher education, with 87.2%. Among household members who used the Internet in January - March 2008, 76% used the Internet for reading newspapers and magazines, 74% used the Internet for sending and receiving e-mails, 69.7% used the Internet for instant messaging, and 65.2% used the Internet for downloading or listening to music.

In studies that were carried out for the purpose of determining the Internet behavior or Internet usage patterns of students of various academic levels and those of teachers of various disciplines, research and learning on the Internet has been among the most frequent behaviors and patterns (Oral, 2004; Atıcı & Dikici, 2003; Orhan & Akkoyunlu, 2004; Açıklın & Duru, 2005; Rüzgar, 2005; Balcı & Ayhan, 2007; Toprakçı, 2007; Tokcan, 2009). Teachers' use of the Internet for the purposes of learning and teaching process is also on increase constantly since 2002 (Erdem, 2008). Nonetheless, there are also findings to the effect that teachers have been incompetent in terms of integrating Information Technologies into their learning and teaching processes (Demiraslan & Usluel, 2005).

In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education makes considerable investments to ensure that teachers are able to make more efficient use of information technologies. While 2802 ICT classes were conducted in 1999 and 3000 in 2005, campaigns were organized to ensure that teachers are able to buy computers, as well (Gülbahar, 2008).

The Internet provides a mechanism for communicating with millions on the computer and many services – such electronic mail, forums, usenet news groups, online chat, audio-video conferencing, file transfer protocol (FTP), telnet, and

websites (World Wide Web) – are offered over the Internet (Kalbag, 2000). Among all services provided over the Internet, websites are the most popular part of the Internet. Websites provide information in any field in interesting ways via the use of words, pictures, illustrations, voices, and images. In addition, information is offered to an unlimited number of users over the Internet at fairly low costs in virtual platforms, making the web an unrivalled form of entertainment and consumption (Lateh & Raman, 2005).

Internet sites constitute the largest library of the world (Becker, 1998), and compared to conventional libraries, they have advantages such as the ability to provide up-to-date information at all times, serving multiple students simultaneously, and the ability of providing several references for any subject (Pitman, Gosper & Rich, 1999)

There has been growth in Internet use in the last ten years, as well as in its potential as a platform for purposes of learning and teaching (Chalmers & Keown, 2009; Açıklan & Duru, 2005). Internet-based communication technologies such as www, video conferencing and e-mail allow cooperation and collaboration among the teachers and students who are geographically apart and far away from one another. At the same time, the complementing role of Internet-based learning environments to structural learning and teaching strategies should not be underestimated (Hurley, Proctor & Ford, 1999). On the other hand, many new opinions are pointed out and the Internet's and computers' place in future education systems is discussed in order to further qualify this service (Tuncer, 2007).

Internet use in schools helps teachers and students to mutually share information, to discuss the opinions of other users, and to communicate with people from different locales in common interest areas. At the same time, with Internet use, students acquire the skills needed for searching and researching themselves, or without guided instruction. Given that appropriate techniques were applied, acquired skills can be later transformed into behavior of using information more efficiently (Akbaba, Altun & Altun 2000).

One of the important contributions of the Internet to the learning and teaching process is the Internet's lending itself well to implementation of student-centered approaches, because students are able to access many references they need to resolve the problems they were assigned by themselves comfortably on the Internet (Motschnig-Pitrik, 2001).

Understandably, the importance of Internet use for purpose of geography teaching in elementary and secondary education is growing (Houtsonen, Kankaanrinta & Rehunen, 2004). The Internet has become an important reference for convenient access to rapidly changing information, planning learning and teaching activities, and the use of new information and documents for the purposes of these activities. With the atmosphere that it provides for presenting and spreading geographical data, the Internet has rapidly become an important component of geography learning and teaching processes in secondary education (Lateh & Raman, 2005).

Geography education requires constantly up-to-date data, and information, documents, and photographs pertaining to geographical forms and processes around

the world. In this sense, the Internet makes considerable contribution to geography teachers for access to climate and meteorological images and geographical data, and carrying our research (Bishop, Hubbard, Ward, Binkley & Moore, 1993).

One of the components of the elementary school and secondary school education program that was reformed and implemented in Turkey in 2005 was declared to be more efficient and productive use of the information technologies. It is pointed out that the program's purpose was not to ensure mere use of information technologies but to use information technologies efficiently and productively for achieving a greater purpose (Ministry of National Education, 2005).

Likewise, when reviewed, the geography class education program includes recommendations to the effect that in-classroom and out-of-classroom activities should include Internet research in order to secure achievements that would be determined as appropriate for each class level, and use of many data or documents from the Internet (such as population, climate, agriculture, and industrial data, satellite pictures). Nonetheless, it is not safe to say that geography teachers are able to use the Internet efficiently for purposes of learning and teaching geography in schools (Artvinli, 2007; 97).

In this study, the purpose is to determine geography teachers' use of the Internet for education purposes and the extent to which Turkish Internet sites can fulfill the needs and requirements of geography teachers' Internet usage. In this context, answers to following questions were sought:

1. What the locations and languages do geography teachers participating in the study use to access the Internet?
2. What Internet sites do they use for purposes of geography education?
3. What is the frequency of their using the Internet for geography education purposes?
4. To what extent do Turkish Internet sites fulfill teaching and research needs of geography teachers participating in the study?

Method

A figurative method based on the screening model that aims to represent the current conditions accurately has been used in this study, which aims to determine geography teachers' use of the Internet for geography education purposes.

Research Participants

The research participants consist of 174 teachers, who participated in this study and filled out and submitted the questionnaire on a volunteer basis. All participants were members of the Internet forum ,“Geography Teachers Union of Turkey” (Türkiye Coğrafya Öğretmenleri Birliği), which was created for the purpose of sharing information among geography teachers. Information pertaining to the personal and vocational details of the study group is given in Table 1.

Table 1. *Personal and Vocational Information of Teachers Constituting Study Group*

		f	%
Gender	Women	53	30.
	Men	121	69.
Education Level	Graduate	112	64.
	Post Graduate (with Dissertation)	37	21.
	Post Graduate (without)	25	14.
Experience	0-5	24	13.
	6-10	48	27.
	11-15	45	25.
	16-20	29	16.
	21+	28	16.
School Served	Common High school	60	34.
	Anatolian High school	46	26.
	Anatolian Teachers' High school	11	6.3
	Science/Social Science High school	13	7.4
	Vocational/Anatolian Voc. High	26	14.
	Multi-Curriculum High school	18	10.
	Total	174	100

69.5% of the study group consists of men, with 30.5% women. In review of education level correlation, graduates is the largest group (64.4%), post graduates without dissertation is the second largest (21.2%) and post graduates with dissertation is third largest (14.4%). In terms of experience correlation, the largest group has 6 to 10 years experience (27.6%). The second largest group has 11 to 15 year experience (25.9%). The third group is those with 16 to 20 years experience (16.7%), while those with 21+ years experience is the fourth (16.1%). Those who have 0 to 5 years experience are in the last group (13.8%). In review of correlation of schools served by geography teachers, those who serve in common high schools are in the largest group (34.5%). The rest serve in (in decreasing order): Anatolian high schools (26.4%); vocational / Anatolian vocational high schools (14.9%); multi-curriculum high schools (10.3%); Anatolian Teachers' High Schools (6.3%); Science High Schools (6.3%); and finally, in Social Science High Schools (1.1%).

Data Collection

Data have been collected over the Internet by means of the questionnaire that was developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consists of three sections. The 1st section consists of questions aiming to determine personal and vocational information of the teachers participating in the study, their locations of Internet access and language. The 2nd section aims to determine Internet sites used by geography teachers for the purpose of geography education. In this section, Internet sites are listed and grouped in eight groups.

The 3rd Section aims to measure geography teachers' patterns and frequency of using the Internet for geography education purposes and the extent to which Turkish Internet sites can fulfill their needs and requirements. In this section, there are 11 items on a 5-level Likert scale that describe geography teachers' Internet usage for purpose of geography education. For creating the questionnaire, 25 geography teachers in the study group were asked about their purpose for using the Internet for geography education. The questionnaire was finalized upon receipt of expert opinion.

Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the the questionnaire was calculated to be Alpha=0.88. The 11 items included in the questionnaire are as follows:

- I-1. Acquiring documents (planning, PowerPoint presentations/animations, activities, measuring and assessment tools, etc.) that can be used in geography teaching
- I-2. Sharing documents (planning, PowerPoint presentations/animations, activities, measuring and assessment tools, etc.) that I prepared with my colleagues
- I-3. Accessing scientific information that can be used in geography teaching
- I-4. Accessing scientific information on teaching strategies, methods, and techniques that can be used in geography teaching
- I-5. Accessing up-to-date information (economic, cultural, political, etc. developments) that can be used in geography teaching
- I-6. Accessing figures and numeric data that is updated periodically (population, agriculture, industry, climate, etc.)
- I-7. Making in-classroom activities by direct use of the Internet
- I-8. Guiding students for out-of-classroom activities and ensuring that they acquire information from different primary information sources
- I-9. Assessing students' studies
- I-10. Becoming acquainted with legal arrangements that concern my vocation
- I-11. Opinion exchange with my colleagues

Analysis of the Data:

Data collected in the study were analyzed using the SPSS 13 statistics program. For analyzing the data, frequency, percentage correlation and standard deviation were examined as appropriate for the purpose of the study.

In comparison of the arithmetic mean of questionnaire:

Interval width = (Series Width) / (Number of Groups to be made) formula was used and point intervals were calculated as $4/5 = 0.80$ (Tekin,1996). Accordingly, scale intervals were determined as follows: never (1.00-1.79), rarely (1.80-2.59), sometimes (2.60-3.39), often (3.40-4.19) and always (4.20-5.00).

Findings

Findings for the First Question

Findings on location and language used by geography teachers to access the information on the Internet are given in Table 2, below.

Table 2. *Location and Language used by geography teachers participating in the study to access the Internet*

		f	%			f	%
Point of Access	Home Only	20	11.5	Access Language	Turkish	119	68.4
	School Only	8	4.6		Turkish and other languages	55	31.6
	School and Home	146	83.9		Total	174	100
	Total	174	100				

83.9% of geography teachers participating in the study are able to access the Internet both at home and in the school. 11.5% can access the Internet only at their home while 4.6% of geography teachers are able to access the Internet at school only. 68.4% of geography teachers participating in the study stated that they were able to access Turkish language Internet sites only, while the remaining 31.6% have mentioned that they are able to access both Turkish and other language Internet sites.

Findings for the Second Question

Findings on the Internet sites used by geography teachers for geography teaching are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3. *Turkish language Internet sites used by geography teachers participating in study for geography teaching*

Internet sites	Do you use these?			
	Yes		No	
	f	%	f	%
Ministry/Directorate of National Education website	152	87.4	22	12.6
Governor's Office website	82	47.1	91	52.9
Websites of other government institutions	158	90.8	16	9.2
Municipality websites	97	55.7	76	43.7
Private companies' websites	147	84.5	27	15.5
Civil organizations' websites	104	59.8	70	40.2
Teachers' websites published by individuals/groups	171	98.3	3	1.7
Forum websites for sharing information	167	96	7	4

98.3% of teachers participating in the study use teachers' websites published by individuals/groups for purposes of geography education. Forum websites for sharing information are used by 96% of teachers participating in this study, while websites of other government institutions are used by 90.8%. These are followed by websites of the Ministry/Directorate of National Education (87.4%), private companies' websites (84.5%), and civil organizations' websites (59.8%), in respective order. Municipality websites (55.7%) and governor's office websites (47.1%) are least popular.

Findings for the Third Question

Findings on frequency of use of geography teachers participating in this study for purposes of geography teaching are given in Table 4 below.

Table 4. *Frequency of use the Internet by geography teachers participating in the study for purpose of geography education*

	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total		\bar{X}	Ss
	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%		
I-1	104	59.8	53	30.5	14	8	1	.6	2	1.1	174	100	4.74	.76
I-2	45	25.9	42	24.1	47	27	30	17.2	10	5.7	174	100	3.47	1.21
I-3	90	51.7	51	29.3	25	14.4	8	4.6	-	-	174	100	4.28	.87
I-4	69	39.7	50	28.7	36	20.7	18	10.3	1	.6	174	100	3.96	1.03
I-5	84	48.3	70	40.2	14	8	5	2.9	1	.6	174	100	4.32	.79
I-6	75	43.1	55	31.6	30	17.2	12	6.9	2	1.1	174	100	4.08	.99
I-7	20	11.5	13	7.5	47	27.0	55	31.6	39	22.4	174	100	2.54	1.24
I-8	35	20.1	58	33.3	53	30.5	22	12.6	6	3.4	174	100	3.54	1.05
I-9	10	5.7	18	10.3	53	30.5	52	29.9	41	23.6	174	100	2.44	1.13
I-10	66	37.9	49	28.2	31	17.8	22	12.6	6	3.4	174	100	3.84	1.16
I-11	80	46	65	37.4	17	9.8	11	6.3	1	.6	174	100	4.21	.90

It is seen that frequency of Internet use of geography teachers participating in this study can be discussed in three groups (always, often, rarely). Respectively acquiring documents that can be used in geography teaching, accessing up-to-date information, accessing scientific information in the field of geography, and opinion exchange with colleagues are included at the “always” interval while in the “often” interval, there are accessing figures and numeric data that are updated periodically, accessing scientific information on teaching strategies, methods and techniques, becoming acquainted with legal arrangements that concern my vocation, ensuring that students acquire information from primary sources of information, and sharing documents that I prepare. On the other hand, frequency of participating geography teachers’ use of Internet for in-classroom applications by means of direct Internet use and assessing students’ studies are observed to be “rare”.

Findings for the Fourth Question

Findings on the extent to which Turkish Internet sites are able to fulfill the needs and requirements of geography teachers for purpose of teaching geography are given in Table 5, below.

Table 5: *Extent to which Turkish Internet sites are able to fulfill the needs and requirements of geography teachers for the purpose of teaching geography*

	Highly Sufficient		Sufficient		Somewhat Sufficient		Insufficient		Highly Insufficient		Total		\bar{X}	Ss
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
I-1	49	28.2	69	39.7	50	28.7	5	2.9	1	.6	174	100	3.91	.85
I-2	37	21.3	80	46	41	23.6	13	7.5	3	1.7	174	100	3.77	.92
I-3	20	11.5	51	29.3	86	49.4	16	9.2	1	.6	174	100	3.41	.83
I-4	31	17.8	53	30.5	67	38.5	20	11.5	3	1.7	174	100	3.51	.97
I-5	42	24.1	41	23.6	72	41.4	17	9.8	2	1.1	174	100	3.59	.99
I-6	40	23	60	34.5	55	31.6	18	10.3	1	.6	174	100	3.68	.95
I-7	8	4.6	11	6.3	59	33.9	68	39.1	28	16.1	174	100	2.44	.98
I-8	18	10.3	35	20.1	70	40.2	35	20.1	16	9.2	174	100	3.02	1.09
I-9	8	4.6	22	12.6	49	28.2	53	30.5	42	24.1	174	100	2.43	1.12
I-10	44	25.3	78	44.8	37	21.3	12	6.9	3	1.7	174	100	3.85	.93
I-11	66	37.9	74	42.5	28	16.1	4	2.3	2	1.1	174	100	4.13	.84

Geography teachers who participated in this study find Turkish language Internet sites somewhat sufficient for purpose of geography teaching when the Internet is used for ensuring that students make use of primary sources of information. They find Turkish

language Internet sites insufficient for use in terms of in-classroom applications involving direct use of the Internet and of accessing students' studies. They find Turkish language websites sufficient in the remaining eight categories.

Conclusion and Discussion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study, which aims to reveal geography teachers' use of the Internet for purposes of geography education and teaching. 83.9% of geography teachers participating in the study have access to the Internet, both at home and in the school. The remaining 16.1% lacking Internet access either at home or in the school can be interpreted as a restricting situation in terms of education and learning. Because a low percentage of ability in geography teachers' access to the Internet while using languages other than Turkish would considerably limit access to geography education and teaching of other countries, Turkish language Internet sites are of great importance in this context.

Most popular Internet sites used by geography teachers participating in this study are websites published by teachers (98.3%). It is noteworthy that governors' office and municipality websites are least popular among the teachers for use in geography teaching and education because these websites, owned or published by the highest local administrative units and authorities in regions, usually feature a separate section that introduces geographical specifications of settlement(s). Nonetheless, low popularity of these websites among geography teachers for purposes of geography teaching may be because the content of these websites are insufficient. Studies carried out in this regard point out that governors' office websites have many omissions and misleading geographic information (Arıbaşı & İnel, 2008; Yürüdü, 2008; Sezer, 2009).

While acquiring document(s) that can be used for purposes of geography teaching is the leading purpose of use for geography teachers participating in this study, it is also noteworthy that sharing document(s) prepared by one ranks ninth in the list. This situation can be interpreted as teachers prefer to use documents created and shared by other teachers instead of creating their own documents, or as they don't have the tendency of sharing documents they created.

High popularity of Internet use for purpose of accessing up-to-date information can be interpreted as geography teachers are eager to make use of up-to-date information in geography teaching. Accessing scientific information ranks third in the list in terms of frequency of Internet use and this means geography teachers participating in the study are eager to follow scientific advances in their field over the Internet. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Internet use for purpose of encouraging students to make use of primary sources of information is not in "always" but in "often". In other words, while teachers use the Internet as a source of reference for accessing information in their field, themselves, they do not consider the Internet to be a primary source of information for their students. In fact, geography teachers find Turkish language Internet sites to be somewhat sufficient for purpose of access to primary sources of information by their students. On the other hand, they find Turkish language Internet sites to be sufficient for accessing primary sources of information.

In the constructivist approach, it is important that students have access to information from primary sources and later construct the learning experience themselves (Şimşek, 2004; Turoğlu, 2006). While the Internet is considered as an important source of information for access to primary sources, geography teachers find that Turkish language websites are insufficient; this is an important finding.

Another important finding is that geography teachers' Internet use for the purpose of sharing information and opinions with their colleagues ranks fourth in the list in terms of frequency of use. This can be interpreted as teachers serving in different locations in the country who are able to become acquainted with different practices and endeavor to create solutions for the problems they encounter in the vocation and during geography teaching from different perspectives.

Accessing statistical figures and numeric data that are updated at certain intervals and using such updated data in classes are especially important in the fields of social and economic geography. Today, accessing many data of this type over the Internet is possible. Accessing statistical figures and numeric data that are updated at certain intervals is fifth in frequency of geography teachers participating in this study is an important and positive finding in this sense. According to geography teachers, Turkish language Internet sites are sufficient to fulfill this purpose.

Teachers participating in this study also use the Internet for the purpose of accessing scientific information on teaching strategies, methods and techniques to be used in geography teaching. This can be interpreted as geography teachers may have preferred the most important communication tool of our age for purposes of learning new teaching approaches introduced by the reformed geography teaching program and following up with ever-changing information in the field of learning and teaching.

Most are aware that legal requirements are constantly amended, changed and updated in the field of teaching and education, as in many other disciplines. The Ministry of National Education publishes and announces laws and regulations that concern teaching as a vocation, education programs, teaching and learning processes, etc. at their website. It is essential that teachers effectively use the Internet in order to become acquainted with legal arrangements described in the foregoing. It is noteworthy that geography teachers participating in this study use the Internet for this purpose "often".

Frequency of Internet use for the purpose of in-classroom applications having found partially, which is almost rarely, can be interpreted as a negative situation. However, it must be noted that lack of Internet access in many schools within our country is another reason for such low prevalence. In a study carried out by Demirci (2008) on 14 students, 3 of the teachers said that they used the Internet in geography lessons once a month, 2 of teachers said that they used the Internet once a semester, while 9 teachers said that they never used the Internet. Geography teachers participating in the study find the Internet insufficient in terms of this purpose.

The purpose with the lowest Internet usage frequency among the teachers participating in this study is assessing students' studies. Likewise, geography teachers find Turkish language Internet sites insufficient for purpose of this type of use. However, one of the most important competences that needs to be provided to the

students, as per the education program of 2005, is effective use of information technologies. At the same time, teachers and students are expected to submit and receive their homework over the Internet and teachers are expected to provide guidance to students in homework preparation and delivery (Ministry of National Education, 2005). Geography teachers may use e-mail for the purpose of submitting performance and project works to the teachers and teachers' sending corrections and comments back to the students.

Findings in relation to in-classroom applications making direct use of the Internet and assessing students' studies can be interpreted as a deficiency among the geography teachers in use of the Internet for teaching-education process.

The following recommendations can be made in the light of conclusions above:

The Internet is vital technology in the teaching-learning process. For teachers to be able to make efficient use of this technology, it is essential that they are provided proper in-service training.

Although access to the Internet is not costly, there are still teachers who are unable to access to Internet either at their home or in the school. In order to eliminate this negative situation, the Ministry of National Education must take relevant measures.

Today, references on the Internet are of great importance. However, it is essential that these references are reliable. In terms of contribution to learning and the teaching process, government institutions must especially observe and ensure that all information in their websites is reliable.

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Identifying students' learning style preferences regarding some variables in the EFL classroom: The case of Turkey

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Abstract

During the past decade, the identification of students' learning style preferences has gained importance in educational research. This study aimed at identifying the individual perceptions of the learner style preferences of Turkish EFL learners. Using learning style preference categories and a 28-item language learning preference questionnaire adopted from Willing, the authors focussed on a group of 60 students at the ELT Department, Onsekiz Mart University. As a further step, the emphasis was also placed on the variables such as sex, attendance to prep class and schools graduated. In doing so, the study sought to find out whether these variables were likely to have an impact on students' learning style preferences. Results showed the learning preferences of students in different learning style preference categories. The data obtained also revealed that a meaningful correlation was found with regard to the difference between the schools graduated and students' perceptions of learning style preferences.

Keywords: Learning Style, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Turkish Students

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Introduction

With Turkey's recent efforts geared towards the full membership of European Union and thus the country's consequent contact and communication with other nations, there has been a great interest among Turkish in English communicative competence. In order to cover this need, Turkish Ministry of Education has started to shift the focus of language instruction given at undergraduate level from the country's traditional grammar-based style of language instruction to the one that is more communication-based. These classes turn out to be merit for the language instruction as they involve a variety of classroom activities intended to encourage a great deal of interaction between both teacher-student and student-student. However, the implementation stage of these activities has not been without its problems. We do feel that one of the most important needs regarding the English education of Turkish school system is the identification of Turkish students' learning style preferences and the variables that are likely to have an impact on these preferences.

In recent years, as a result of the shift from a traditional instructional paradigm to a learner-centred approach towards language learning/teaching, coming to terms with the way students learn has been of vital importance and has been the key to educational improvement. During the past decade, educational research has focused on the identification of a number of factors that account for some of the differences in how students learn (Reid, 1987). One of these factors, learning styles or learning preferences, is broadly described as "cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment" (Keefe, 1979). There is no doubt that students perceive information in different manners. While some students prefer to learn individually, independent of their peers and teachers, others might enjoy interaction and relationship with them. Therefore, it is believed (e.g. Reid, 1987; Celce-Murcia, 2001) that learner styles or learning preferences basically refer to the different ways of how students take in and process information. To render learning and teaching process effective, teachers should arrange teaching activities that are compatible with the particular ways through which students are willing to learn any subject matter like English.

In most cases, teachers are worried that their teaching methods do not match their students' individual learning needs. Because most of the language teachers are not aware of their students' preferred way of language learning styles and are still reluctant to consult learners in introducing language learning activities in EFL classroom. Teachers, therefore, need to involve students actively in the teaching/learning process and explore the ways their students prefer to learn the language, hence being able to teach in a way that is appealing to most students. In addition, this information can be invaluable source for material and syllabus designers in devising a language learning syllabus that is supposed to be in line with students' perceptions and experiences.

Literature review

Considerable research in the area of students' learning style preferences has been conducted. In his well-known study, Knowles (1982) divides learning styles into four major categories: *analytical learning styles, concrete learning styles, communicative learning styles, and authority-oriented learning styles.*

Later, Willing (1988) used the same classifications in a study on learning style preferences among EFL learners. This study was administered to adult immigrant ESL learners in Australia in order to learn about their preferred methods of learning. On the basis of their responses, students were put into one of the four categories. For instance, subjects who had a preference for "studying grammar" were classified as analytical learning style learners. Those who indicated a preference for "learning by using games, pictures, and videos" were classified as concrete learning style learners.

In a large-scale study, Reid (1987) asked 1,338 students with different language backgrounds to identify their learning style preferences. Her study generated substantial results. She reported that there exists a high correlation between ESL students L1 and their learning style preference. She came to the conclusion that variables such as age, sex, level of education, TOEFL score are related to differences in learning style preference. In a parallel study, Hayashi and Cherry (2004) examined learning preferences of Japanese students of English by using learning preference categories first described by Knowles in 1982. Their study indicated that "the subjects in the study could not be placed neatly in any single preference category" (2004, p. 83).

Among recent studies is one by Kavaliauskiene (2003) that attempted to examine learners' preferences of the methodology of learning a foreign language. Results of her study showed that learners are concerned with passing their exams and getting good marks rather than improve their language skills for academic purposes. It follows that a group of studies aimed at investigating the correspondence between the learners' preferences and teachers' perceptions of them are worth mentioning as they revealed contradictory results. The data obtained from the studies conducted by Bada and Okan (2000) and Stapa (2003) suggested a need for a closer co-operation between students and teachers as to how learning activities should be arranged and implemented in the classroom. However, in the other set of surveys particularly carried out by Barkhuizen (1998) and Spratt (1999) it was found that the teachers' perceptions did not surprisingly match those of students.

In line with the studies illustrated above, a recent study conducted by Riazi and Riasati (2007) strived to investigate the learning styles preferred by the Iranian EFL learners. Compared to the previous studies, it was claimed "to attempt to examine the extent to which teachers are aware of the students' learning preferences" (Riazi and Riasati (2007, p. 5). The study showed the pressing need for such a detailed and comprehensive study of the learning preferences of Iranian EFL learners as it also reflected teachers' perceptions of the students' learning preferences as well as the students' individual preferred ways of language learning.

Along with all the surveys briefly revised above, the present study aims at identifying the individual perceptions of the Turkish students' learning preferences

involved in ELT classroom. In doing so, the main emphasis is placed on the variables that are likely to have an effect on their preferences. To this end this study with the following goals and objectives was designed.

Objectives of the study

The present study intended to investigate the learning style preferences of the Turkish EFL students in relation to different variables. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions within the framework of this fundamental purpose:

1. What are the distributions of the students' learning styles in relation to the most frequent preferences and the least frequent preferences?
2. Do the students' perceptions of their style preferences differ in relation to sex?
3. Do the students' perceptions of their style preferences differ as to whether they attended the prep class?
4. Do the students' perceptions of their style preferences differ in relation to the schools from which they graduated?

Methodology

Participants

Sixty language learners (38 males and 22 females) took part in the study. The students were asked to express their views regarding the extent of their awareness of their learning style preferences. The data were collected from 4 classes of the English Department, Faculty of Education, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey. Below, Table 1. provides general background information on the students with reference to sex, the type of secondary school and attendance to prep class:

Table 1. *Distribution of students in relation to sex, the type of secondary school and attendance at prep class*

<i>The characteristics of students</i>		f	%
Sex	Male	38	63.3
	Female	22	36.7
	<i>Total</i>	60	100.0
The school attended	<i>*Teacher High School</i>	15	25.0
	<i>*Anatolian High School</i>	17	28.3
	<i>*General High School</i>	28	46.7
	<i>Total</i>	60	100.0
Attendance at prep class	<i>Yes</i>	39	65.0
	<i>No</i>	21	35.0
	<i>Total</i>	60	100.0

Instrument

The instrument used in the study was 28-item language learning preference questionnaire adopted from Willing (1998). It consisted of one version designed for students. Students taking part in the study were supposed to state how they prefer to learn the language. Each item in the questionnaire indicated a statement of a learning preference, for example, *I like to learn English by talking in pairs*, followed by four choices *no / a little / yes / very much*. In addition, the following table provides substantial information in order to exemplify how the items involved in the questionnaire are classified in the light of their corresponding learning style. Furthermore, as can be seen in the section of the results, with the rating scale used in the study the students' learning preferences relating to their agreement or disagreement with the items in the questionnaire were displayed (Table 3 and Table 4).

* Teacher High School, Anatolian High School and General High School all refer to major secondary Turkish state schools.

Table 2: *The classification of learning preferences*

<i>The classification of learning preferences</i>	
Concrete Learning Style	<i>20. I like to learn English by seeing them.</i>
	<i>22. I like to learn English words by doing something</i>
	<i>3. In class, I like to learn by games.</i>
Analytical Learning Style	<i>1. In class, I like to learn by reading.</i>
	<i>18. I like to learn many new words.</i>
	<i>17. I like to study grammar.</i>
Communicative Learning Style	<i>28. I like to learn by watching / listening to native speakers of English.</i>
	<i>24. At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English.</i>
	<i>27. I like to learn by talking to friends in English.</i>
Authority-Oriented Learning Style	<i>6. I want to write everything in my notebook.</i>
	<i>9. I like the teacher to give us problems to work on.</i>
	<i>11. I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes.</i>

Procedures for data collection and analysis

The English version of the questionnaire was provided with students to complete during their class session. However, instruction as to how to complete the questionnaire was given in Turkish in order to avoid any misunderstanding. The required data were collected in one session.

Results

The findings gathered from the study were investigated under the four headings below.

5.1 Listing 10 most frequent preferences and 10 least frequent preferences respectively

Table 3. *Ten most frequent preferences (the number in parentheses is the ratio of the subjects who circled yes or very much to all the subjects answering the item)*

1. In class, I like to learn by reading. (%94)
2. I like to learn by watching / listening to native speakers of English. (%91)
3. I like to learn English words by seeing them. (%88)
4. I like to learn many new words. (%86)
5. I like to learn English words by doing something. (%85)
6. At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English. (%83)
7. I like to learn by talking to friends in English. (%83)
8. I like the teacher to let me find my mistakes. (%82)
9. I like the teacher to help me talk about my interests. (%82)
10. In class, I like to learn by conversations. (%81)

Table 4. *Ten least frequent preferences (the number in parentheses is the ratio of the subjects who circled yes or very much to all the subjects answering the item)*

1. I want to write everything in my notebook. (%33)
2. At home, I like to learn by using cassettes. (%36)
3. I like to study grammar. (%38)
4. I like the teacher to give us problems to work on. (%41)
5. I like to learn English with the whole class. (%43)
6. In English class, I like to learn by reading. (%45)
7. I like to study English by myself (alone). (%45)
8. I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes. (%47)
9. In class, I like to listen to and use cassettes. (%48)
10. I like to learn English by talking in pairs. (%51)

The statistically significant results relating to the students' perceived learning preferences displayed in Table 2 and Table 3 deserve some comment. To start with, the overwhelming majority of the students (%94) were convinced about the importance of reading activities taking place in the classroom. Additionally, %91 of the students reported that they preferred to learn by watching / listening to native speakers of English. On the other hand, the small number of the students (%33) pointed out that they wanted to write everything in their notebooks. Similarly, only %36 of the students indicated that they tended to learn by using cassettes at home.

More importantly, the small percentage of the students (%38) felt satisfied with the study of grammar.

A closer look at the 10 most frequent preferences and the least frequent preferences above indicates that one can not draw the conclusion that there is a single Turkish learning style. The subjects tend to have a preference for Communicative Type (items 2, 6, 7 and 10 in Table 2), but at the same time they also display a preference for Concrete Type (items 1 and 4 in Table 2), Analytical Type (items 3 and 5 in Table 2) and Authority-Oriented Type (items 8 and 9 in Table 2). Moreover, Table 3 enables us to identify the least frequent preferences as Analytical Type (items 2, 3, 6 and 7) and Authority-Oriented Type (items 1 and 8).

It follows that the classification of the students' learning preferences make the room for a further consideration of the learning types in accordance with the different variables such as sex, the prep school and the school graduated. At this point, it is pertinent to say that the results are intended to shed light on the possible relationship between the students' perceived learning styles and some variables that are likely to have a considerable impact on the students' ways of preference. In this context, Table 4 below attempts to examine statistically the existence of such a relationship between students' sexes and their perceptions of learning style preferences.

Table 5. *The findings regarding the difference between students' sexes and their perceptions of learning style preferences*

		n	\bar{X}	SK	t	Sig.
Concrete Learning Style	Female	38	9.1316	2.24	.442	.660
	Male	22	8.8636	2.29		
Analytical Learning Style	Female	38	7.7105	2.25	.112	.911
	Male	22	7.7727	1.71		
Communicative Learning Style	Female	38	9.1579	3.02	.372	.711
	Male	22	8.8636	2.81		
Authority-Oriented Learning Style	Female	38	8.0263	1.80	.550	.585
	Male	22	7.7273	2.37		

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

In the Table 5 above, the findings regarding the difference between students' sexes and their perceptions of learning style preferences were displayed. The students' views were treated as the four distinctive sub-dimensions and then interpreted along with the tables available. In this respect, as the table makes it clear, the students' views of learning style preferences did not differentiate in any sub-dimension concerning the variable of sex. Moreover, the values involved in the Table notably indicate that the means of students' views are quite close to each other. Therefore, no significant difference was found between the students' views of learning style preference and their sexes at the level of 0.05.

Table 6. *The Findings Regarding The Difference Between Students' Attendance at Prep Class and Their Perceptions of Learning Style Preferences*

		n	\bar{X}	SK	T	Sig.
Concrete Learning Style	Yes	39	8.9231	2.29	.364	.717
	No	21	9.1500	2.20		
Analytical Learning Style	Yes	39	7.5385	2.01	.898	.373
	No	21	8.0500	2.18		
Communicative Learning Style	Yes	39	9.0513	2.86	.124	.902
	No	21	8.9500	3.17		
Authority-Oriented Learning Style	Yes	39	7.8462	1.96	.640	.525
	No	21	8.2000	2.09		

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 6 illustrates the findings regarding the difference between students' attendance at prep class and their perceptions of learning style preferences. The students' views of learning style preference were investigated on the basis of the four sub-dimensions. The findings indicated that the students' views of learning style preference did not show any difference in any sub-dimension in terms of students' attendance at prep class. The values in the table also suggest that the means of the students' views were close to each other. Thus, a meaningful difference was not found between the students' sexes and their views of learner style preference at 0.05 level.

Table 7. *The findings regarding the difference between the schools graduated and students' perceptions of learning style preferences.*

		Sum of Squares	SD	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Concrete Learning Style	Between Groups	37.400	2	18.700	4.091	.022*
	Within Groups	260.533	57	4.571		
	Total	297.933	59			
Analytical Learning Style	Between Groups	.968	2	.484	.111	.895
	Within Groups	248.765	57	4.364		
	Total	249.733	59			
Communicative Learning Style	Between Groups	50.559	2	25.279	3.158	.050*
	Within Groups	456.291	57	8.005		
	Total	506.850	59			
Authority-Oriented Learning Style	Between Groups	.501	2	.250	.059	.942
	Within Groups	240.082	57	4.212		
	Total	240.583	59			

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 7 displays the findings regarding the difference between the schools from which the students graduated and their perceptions of learning style preferences. Along with the relevant data illustrated within the table, the student views of learning style preference were interpreted with reference to the four sub-dimensions concerned. As the table makes it clear, the views of the students who graduated from the different secondary schools had differences in various sub-dimensions in relation to learning style preference. The students reported different views as to learning style preference in the sub-dimensions of Concrete Learning Style and Communicative Learning Style. Thus, a meaningful difference was noted between their perceptions in these sub-dimensions and the variable of secondary school from which they graduated at 0.05 level.

In terms of the results of 'Tukey Test' which was conducted in order to identify the difference between students' views in respect of the schools from which they graduated, a meaningful difference between the views of the students who graduated from the Anatolian and other secondary high schools was found in favour of the students who graduated from the Anatolian and Teacher High Schools in relation to the sub-dimension of Concrete Learning Style. At the same time, with reference to the sub-dimension of Communicative Learning Style, a meaningful

difference was found in favour of the students of the Anatolian High School compared with the other state high schools. Table 8 below highlights the findings involving the meaningful differences on the basis of Tukey test results.

Tablo 8. *Tukey HSD results regarding the difference between the schools graduated and students' perceptions of concrete style and communicative style*

Dependent Variable	(I) school graduated	(J) school graduated	Mean Difference (I-J)	SD	Sig.
Concrete learning Style	Anatolian High Teacher School	General High School	-	.68	*.029
		Anatolian High School	1.79762(*)	.68	.044
	General High school	Anatolian Teacher High School	-	.75	*.029
		Anatolian High School	1.86275(*)	.75	.995
	Anatolian High School	Anatolian Teacher High School	1.9762(*)	.68	*.044
		Anatolian High School	1.86275(*)	.75	.995
		General High School	-.06513	.65	.995
		General High School	.06513	.65	.995
Communicative Learning Style	Anatolian Teacher High School	General High School	1.19048	.90	.393
		Anatolian High school	-.96078	1.00	.606
	General High School	Anatolian Teacher High School	-1.19048	.90	.393
		Anatolian High School	-	.86	*.043
	Anatolian High School	Teacher Anatolian High School	.96078	1.00	.606
		General School	2.15126(*)	.86	*.043

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

On the other hand, as is obvious from table 7 above, a meaningful difference was not found between students' views of the sub-dimensions of Analytical Learning Style and Authority-Oriented Learning Style and the schools from which they graduated at 0.05 level. On the basis of this data, it is possible to make the point that the students had fairly similar opinions in connection with these two sub-dimensions.

Discussion

This study has attempted to explore the underlying characteristics of Turkish students' learning preferences in EFL classroom. Following the identification of this case, the next step is to develop a set of recommendations. The data obtained from the participants' opinions indicate that an overwhelming majority of the participants show a preference for some methods of learning that are associated with Communicative

Learning Style. Given this tendency on the part of the students, however, it is not fair to place the participants into a single language style preference as is apparent in the results of the survey. Interestingly enough, the participating students displayed a preference for Concrete Type, Authority-Oriented Type and Analytical Type at the same time, which in fact turns out to be a contradiction. This apparent contradiction may be attributed to the co-existence of two different factors: firstly, as the participating students are English majors, they are more likely to regard English as a means of English rather than a dry study of grammar, and secondly, in spite of the students' perceived tendency towards communicative style, the ongoing problems involved in the Turkish education system such as large classes, teacher centred educational style and multi-level classes put some constraints on the effective use of Communicative Style in the classrooms and in turn lead students to discover the alternative styles for educational purposes.

Hayashi and Cherry (2004) conducted a similar study which attempted to investigate the characteristics of Japanese students' learning preferences in EFL classroom. Their study also drew the same conclusion in the sense that Japanese students displayed different preferences for their learning styles. The results of their study revealed that Japanese students' favoured learning style was Authority-oriented because of some cultural factors such as 'Japanese collectivism', or 'a general shyness and unwillingness' among Japanese students to take risks although they showed a preference for Communicative Style.

Another significant point emerging from the results of the study concerns the Analytical Type which was ranked as the least important learning style by the participants. One reasonable suggestion for the students' dislike for Analytical Style methods might well be linked with the traditional structure of the Turkish education system that is still criticized for being based on memorization rather than on the students' creativity and active participation in the courses. Eventually, such a passive and one-way educational style experienced by those students is likely to hinder the efforts to construct their analytical learning styles.

With regard to the difference between students' sexes and their perceptions of learning style preferences it is possible to indicate that the perceptions of the students of English as to their learning style preferences are independent of the variable 'sex'. In other words, the sex as a variable does not influence the students' views' of their learning style preferences.

In terms of the difference between students' attendance at prep class and their perceptions of learning style preferences we can draw the conclusion that the opinions of the students of English about learner style preference did not differentiate in relation to the variable of their attendance to prep class. This can possibly result from the fact that the participating students are likely to have similar background knowledge level prior to the higher education.

The most significant finding elicited from the participants is concerned with the difference between the schools graduated and the students' perceptions of learning style preferences. The results of the Anova (F) test reveal that the students have different views as to learning style preference in the sub-dimensions of Concrete Learning Style and Communicative Learning Style. One can argue that the effective

or inadequate use of course materials such as pictures and videos in the schools concerned may have impact on the difference involving Concrete Style. In this case, students who are exposed to learning language by 'doing' or 'seeing' are supposed to benefit much from Concrete Learning Style. Of course, the availability of these materials like 'video' necessary for developing Concrete Learning Style is a crucial criterion regarding students' preferences together with its effective application in practice. On the other hand, the other reason in this framework can be linked with the issue of the amount of the experience in using these kinds of materials and peculiar methods of learning by 'doing' or 'seeing' which students are expected to have during their secondary school education. As for the reason for the other meaningful difference concerning Communicative Style, the schools in question can vary in both employing the teaching materials effectively and implementing different teaching hours. In this respect, the number and effectiveness of the facilities catered for the language needs of students by different schools can determine students' tendency towards using Communicative Learning Style. Thus, it should be noted that the quality of the training exposed to the participants in one of these secondary schools has do with the extent to which the students have the potential to use their individual learning styles throughout their higher education.

Recommendations

The principal recommendation arising from this research is to develop greater awareness about the identification of the Turkish students' different learning preferences, which in turn bring about the multi-level language classes. This calls for, in particular, a close cooperation between students and lecturers in designing and implementing the course syllabus and subject matter by taking into account of the students' different learning needs and language potentials. In a similar study investigating a group of Turkish students' language learning preferences, Bada and Okan (2000, p. 10) pointed out that "effective language teaching and learning can only be achieved when teachers are aware of their learners' needs, capabilities, potentials, and preferences in meeting these needs."

Another concern in this context is to foster students' analytical learning styles which are seen as the least important, as discussed in the previous section, in comparison with the other types of learning. One obvious step towards meeting this challenge is to encourage Turkish students to take active part in the lessons where English teachers are expected to free students from the constraints of traditional teacher-centred classrooms and engage them in purposeful, for instance, problem-solving or brain-based learning activities. Additionally, providing these students with professional strategy training (e.g., teachers, schools, universities) in line with their learning preferences might be helpful in both raising their awareness of the nature of the major learning styles and compensating for the lack of students' skills in using some of these styles.

Finally, some directions for further research are suggested. We need to carry out similar studies in different regions of Turkey in which the learning skills of Turkish students are investigated and compared. In addition, another study is needed in order to ascertain how other variables such as motivation relate to learning style preferences.

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Miscellany

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