



## ASL – Adult Self-Learning: Supporting Learning Autonomy in a Technology-Mediated Environment

### Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Turkey AATSTU Desk Research Report

**IO1:** Definition of an operative model for teaching learning low qualified adults in an online environment

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ADANA ALPARSLAN TÜRKES  
BİLİM VE TEKNOLOJİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ



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## Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Turkey

Over the past few years, adult learning has become prominent within the education literature in Turkey. Geray (2002, as cited in Karabacak, 2018) defines adult education as both “an extensive part of lifelong education” and also as “a methodical, systematic and organized process of education that is directed towards adults and those who are out of school” (p. 538). In Turkey, the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning (GDLL), which functions under the control of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), is in charge of the regular and systematic provision of this education to adult learners.

The history of lifelong learning in Turkey can be stated to consist of two periods: Pre – Republican and Post – Republican. The institutions which were responsible for providing education for adults within the scope of lifelong learning in the Pre-Republican period were those such as mosques, sects, medreses, janissary centers, akhi organizations, guilds and palace schools. In the Post-Republican period, public schools (Halk Mektepleri), public houses (Halk Evleri) and institutions offering night classes (Gece Dersleri) were established to educate a good many of people. Another significant action taken towards education in the Turkish history was the Village Institutes. They were founded to give teachers training who used to work in villages. The graduates of these village institutes contributed a lot to public education in the first years of the new Turkish Republic. The main objectives of adult education in that time were to maintain the Turkish culture unity and to train the manpower. Adult education became more institutionalized after 1960. Directorate General of Public Education (Halk Eğitim Genel Müdürlüğü) was founded in 1960 and then changed into General Directorate of Apprenticeship and Non – formal Education (Çıraklık ve Yaygın Eğitim Genel Müdürlüğü) in 1983 (Akçay & Yıldırım, 2013, p.1758).

The concept of lifelong learning has been a catchword and focus of attention in Turkey since 1980. As stated before, every step taken towards lifelong learning has been managed within the authority of the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning since 2011 and its project “Let Schools Get Life” could be suggested as the most important movement taken on the path of lifelong learning. Additionally, with the "Lifelong Learning Strategy Document" prepared according to the Ministry of National Education Strategy Plan in 2009, it was intended to provide different learning





environments for individuals to improve their knowledge and skills. In this respect, there are also many formal institutions providing lifelong learning service. Adult education training services in Turkey include (Şentürk & Duran, 2020, p.2):

- 1) Public Education Centers (HEM): Literacy courses, vocational courses, sociocultural courses
- 2) Vocational Training Centers (MEM): Apprenticeship, journeyman and craftsman training, short-term vocational courses
- 3) Practical Girls' Art School: Short-term vocational courses for girls
- 4) Private Education Institutions (Education and application school, business education center, science and art center)
- 5) Private educational institutions: Short-term vocational courses
- 6) Other institutions: Maturation Institute and Adult Technical Training Center
- 7) Distance education services: Open Primary School, Open High School and Vocational and Technical Open High School

Besides these organizations, higher education institutions play a major role in ensuring lifelong learning of many adults. In particular, thanks to the information age, continuing education comes into more prominence and universities have started to serve as an important means of lifelong learning through their continuing education centers as well as the undergraduate courses included in their formal curriculum. With these courses and programs, universities try not only to satisfy the educational needs of Turkish society but also prepare their young adult learners for leadership roles they will hold following their graduation from university. Since higher education has the potential of providing an ideal timeframe in which students are able to be engaged in leadership development both in the classroom, and through extracurricular activities, leadership needs to become a primary focus of higher education.

### **Adult Leadership and Leadership Research Studies Conducted in Turkish Educational Context**

Leadership is defined as “a process that begins with self and inspires and empowers others, teams, organizations to effect positive change” (Reeves et al., 2015, p.3). It is also described as the art and ability of inspiring, guiding, and directing people so that they ardently desire to do what the leader wishes. In this regard, leadership can be considered to have three components as the leader, the follower and the situation. The leader is supposed to possess the potential of affecting the attitudes of followers in order to reach the desired goal. The leaders are also expected to approach the different





situations considering all their dimensions so as to come up with right leadership style and alter his/her technique according to the environment to ensure maximum effect. The characteristics of an effective leader could be listed as follows (Ababa, 2008, p.4-8):

- a) Search for opportunities for change and improvement
- b) Experiment and take risks
- c) Envision the future
- d) Enlist others to follow
- e) Foster collaboration
- f) Fostering team work
- g) Empower followers
- h) Lead by doing
- i) Build commitment to action
- j) Recognize contributions
- k) Celebrate accomplishments
- l) Foster Conflict Resolutions

When the relevant literature is reviewed, it is apparently seen that the majority of research on leadership in Turkish context was carried out to reveal the leadership characteristics of adults who have such managerial positions as school principals. According to Canbaz (2019), the reason behind the bulk of research on particularly administrators could be explained with the developments in the field of science and technology in the 21st century which require schools to develop their skills to be able to adapt the latest changes and to survive as an organization. For this reason, organizations need transformational leaders who are able to make effective decisions in unexpected changes, cope with the problems encountered, and take the best action in accordance with the change. The leadership characteristics displayed by school administrators therefore become very important in achieving the goals set in educational organizations.

The studies conducted on the leadership traits of school administrators are mainly designed as descriptive research based on quantitative research methodology from the perspectives of the teachers working at the same school. For instance, in his study, Kiriş (2016) investigated the relationship between school administrators' transformational leadership features and teachers' occupational self esteem according to primary, elementary and high schools teachers' perceptions. The researcher





concluded with a positive and significant relationship between school headmasters' transformational leadership features and teachers' occupational self esteem. Additionally, the perceptions of teachers about the headmasters' transformational leadership features were found to differ significantly in terms of teachers' working institutions, ages, gender and their experience in their job.

In another study, Kocaoğlu (2016) investigated the relationship between strategic leadership characteristics of school principals and strategic planning practices at schools from the perspectives of kindergarden teachers. Strategic leadership was found to be a significant predictor of strategic planning practices and school principals were suggested to give more importance to social networking as part of their strategic leadership.

Even though it is not as much as the number of school managers-related studies, the literature includes research studies on the leadership traits of primary, secondary or high school teachers. To illustrate, Atman (2010) investigated the effect of leadership traits of teachers working at vocational high schools on their classroom management skills. The result of the study showed that leader teachers were more successful in class management. The rates of classroom participation, student success and motivation were higher in classes of these teachers. It was also observed that personal and professional competencies of teachers were effective factors in displaying their leadership skills.

When the studies carried out to seek the leadership traits of students are taken into consideration, it is recognized that they are really few in number and most of them focus on secondary or high school level students. According to Yaman (2013), the research studies on higher education students have mainly concentrated on how these young adults are affected by religious beliefs, political preferences, employment and unemployment and harmful substance use. For this reason, adult leadership remains as a less covered and controversial topic in Turkish literature. However, leadership should become a primary focus of particularly higher education since tertiary education can provide an ideal timeframe in which students are engaged in leadership development both in the classroom, and through extracurricular activities. In line with the identified leadership traits obtained from the worldwide studies, the leadership traits of young adult learners need to be identified, discussed and developed through credit-bearing courses, co-curricular or extra-curricular activities. These courses or activities should aim to develop the following leadership traits in young adult learners (Erpalabıyık, 2018, p.26):





- Problem solving
- Goal setting
- Decision making
- Team working
- Awareness of individual and group values
- Written and verbal communication skills
- Social and moral responsibility and a sense of commitment
- Self-regulation
- Knowledge of leadership

### **Leadership Development Practices in ATU**

In the context of ATU, there are two undergraduate courses that basically aim to foster students' knowledge on leadership. The course “*Leadership and Motivation*” is offered to the senior students studying Management Information Systems. Within this elective course, organizational behavior theories, concepts, and skills to lead and motivate individuals and groups are provided and the world of leadership and motivation is explored. The course also aims to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and foundations of leadership in organizations and help them to gain both the theoretical and practical skills necessary for success in both their personal and professional lives. When students successfully complete this course, they are expected to be able to critically assess a leadership scenario and identify the pertinent theories, to create a practical, personal definition and philosophy of leadership, and to gain an understanding of leadership and motivation competencies ([https://obs.atu.edu.tr/oibs/bologna/ders\\_ayrinti.aspx](https://obs.atu.edu.tr/oibs/bologna/ders_ayrinti.aspx)).

The other course “*Organizational Behavior and Leadership*” is offered to the second-year students of Business Administration Department and also the third-year students studying Political Science and Public Administration. The course aims to teach the tools of the effective organizational behavior based on the psychology discipline. These tools are stated to be based on the managing diversity, attitudes and job satisfaction, emotions, personality and values, perception, motivation, groups, teams, communication, leadership and power. When students successfully complete this course, they are expected to be able to learn human relations in organizations and emerging issues, learn the importance of human relations skills in organizations, describe how organizations manage diversity effectively, explain the relationship





between attitudes and behavior, identify the sources of emotions and moods, and describe personality, the way it is measured, and the factors that shape it ([https://obs.atu.edu.tr/oibs/bologna/ders\\_ayrinti.aspx](https://obs.atu.edu.tr/oibs/bologna/ders_ayrinti.aspx)).

In addition to the credit-bearing courses, the unit of Career Planning Application and Research Center also arranges campus events such as “Leaders on Campus”, “Leaders Talk”, and “Distinctive Leadership” in order to raise students’ awareness of leadership and give them inspiration on how to become an effective leader in a specific field.

With the aim of creating an entire culture of leadership for students across the university, the following strategies can be suggested:

- *Student leadership groups* can be formed in all departments. With the guidance of teaching staff in departments, students are able to come up with ideas for events and together turn these ideas into reality.
- A *summer program* on leadership learning for undergraduate students can be initiated and during the program students can be provided with opportunities to join research project teams or community service practices as well as attending seminars and workshops.
- *Co-curricular certificate programs* could be offered during either fall or spring semesters as a two-hour workshop over four or five weeks or a one-day intensive workshop. In these programs, students can be trained on learning to lead, team skills or organizational leadership.
- *With the growth of online technologies*, students could be supported with blogs, forums, webinars, and open educational resources where extra materials on leadership could be made accessible to them.
- *Networking opportunities with other student leaders* to share ideas and strategies and being a part of other student leader groups in the school can provide another support group for a leader action. Collaborating with a university in the neighbourhood or if this is impossible, developing networks with other leaders by means of Skype or other means of online communication can also provide fresh ideas and allow for the sharing of resources.

### **SWOT Analysis: Barriers and Opportunities**







According to the SWOT analysis, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of adult education in Turkey can be summarized as follows:

**Strengths:**

1. Community Education centers in Turkey are located in various districts and are valuable for adult people of all ages. The informal education provided in these centers are free of charge and provide a wide range of courses. They are main providers of non-vocational and informal education.
2. The education centers have readily available modules for the courses, and these courses have diverse learning materials and are instructed by experienced people in the field.
3. The community education centers are available not only in big cities but also in towns.
4. The courses provide learners with practical education in physically convenient conditions. They have a pool of trainers and educators; they provide courses both in their own facilities and with the cooperation of other institutions.
5. The centers realize screening programs to identify the needs of adult learners, record their findings, and provide courses accordingly.
6. Educational needs of adult learners are identified systematically and recorded in a database created by these community education centers.
7. Turkish Employment Agency provides financial supports for adult learners who would like to gain experience and expertise in a specific field.
8. There are even courses focusing on subjects such as web designs, computer operations, IT and hardware, photoshop, typing, etc.

**Weaknesses:**

1. There should be a minimum number of people to start and continue a course. Participation is mandatory.
2. Some materials are not specifically designed for online platforms.
3. The content is not planned or adapted according to students' individual needs.
4. There is a lack of flexibility in terms of timetable, educational content and materials, exam procedures, etc.
5. There is a lack of systematic and continuous support or time slot for learning.
6. The programs are not interdependent.





7. The programs and other learning facilities do not have interdisciplinary approach.

### **Opportunities:**

1. Community education center and Turkish Employment agency have a wide range of network all over the country. They have the necessary infrastructure to reach more adult learners.
2. Community education centers are available even in very small regions of the country.
3. Adult Learning Programs are supported by the National Education Ministry continuously.
4. There is a rise for the use of portable devices such as smart phones and tablets to support learning of adult learners and online teaching, driven by the current pandemic crisis.
5. Based on the necessity felt due to the pandemic crisis, more courses could be introduced to encourage online teaching methodologies and online teaching platforms.

### **Threats:**

1. Trainees' low education levels have negative effect on trainee's drop out levels and course effectiveness.
2. Subsidized courses might undermine the trainee's drop out rates attending freely available courses.
3. Adaptation of low qualified adults to online and digital learning platforms has effects on the efficiency of the courses.





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