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A Case Study on Preservice Teachers' Study Strategies

Öğretmen Adaylarının Çalışma Stratejileri Konusunda Bir Durum Çalışması

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Abstract
This study mainly aims at determining the pre-service teachers' study strategies. The data were gathered through a questionnaire from 226 students at the Faculty of Education in a University, in Ankara, Turkey. Prior to the main study, a pilot study was carried out with 336 students enrolled in different departments at the Faculty of Education. The results of the study indicated that pre-service teachers study mostly to achieve success which suggests that they employ a success-oriented study method. In addition, they reported that they prefer group study. Apart from this, a statistically significant difference was found between genders regarding the views towards study strategies and a significant difference was found between their fields of study regarding their views towards study strategies.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers, study strategies, teacher education.

Öz
Bu çalışma öğretmen adaylarının çalışma stratejilerine ilişkin görüşlerini belirlemeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırmada veriler, Ankara'da bir üniversitenin eğitim fakültesinde öğrenim gören 226 öğretmen adayına anket uygulanarak toplanmıştır. Bundan önce aynı fakültede farklı bölümlerde öğrenim gören 336 öğretmen adayı üzerinde pilot uygulama gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları öğretmen adaylarının daha çok başarı odaklı çalıştıklarını göstermiştir. Ayrıca öğretmen adayları grup çalışmasını tercih ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bunun dışında, adayların çalışma stratejilerine ilişkin görüşleri ile cinsiyet değişkeni ve yine öğrencilerin bu stratejilere ilişkin görüşleri ile alanları arasında anlamlı bir farklılık bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öğretmen adayı, çalışma stratejileri, öğretmen eğitimi.

1. Introduction

Numerous researchers and educationalists have focused their studies on searching for answers to the question of "how to teach" in recent years. It is sure that many other researchers and educationalists are seeking answers to the question of "how to learn". Effective teaching is considered to serve effective learning; thus, all these efforts have brought the concept of "teaching how to learn" to the agenda. Learning has a complex structure; therefore, it is not an easy concept to explain. It is known that many factors influence learning; hence, there may be various physiological, socio-cultural, economic and psychological factors that influence students' academic success. Among

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these, one the most important factors is using effective study methods (Küçükahmet, 1987; Can 1992; as cited in Yeşilyaprak, 2006).

During the literature review for this study, it is seen that there is an extensive research on study methods of students which investigates the issue in different aspects (e.g., Nonis and Hudson, 2010; Yalçın and Açıkgöz, 2009; Crede and Kuncel, 2008). In the related literature, study skills, study habits, and study attitudes are defined in different ways. According to Yıldırım et al., (2000), study skills can be defined as an effective use of certain techniques with the aim of learning. In a different aspect, Crede and Kuncel (2008) clarify some concepts on study methods. According to them, study skills refer to students' knowledge of appropriate study strategies and methods, and the ability to manage time and other resources to meet the demands of the academic tasks. Study habits typically denote the degree to which student engage in regular acts of study routines (e.g., reviews of material) occuring in an environment that is conducive to studying. Finally, study attitudes are usually used to refer to a student's positive attitude toward the specific act of studying, the student's acceptance, and approval of the broader goals of a college education. In this present study, on the other hand, study strategies as a concept are used since this covers skills, habits and also partly attitudes.

Study methods is a topic that is always a current issue and thus attracts attention. One of the most important reasons for this is that a relationship is considered to exist between individuals' study habits and their academic achievement. Students' study habits are important at any stage in education. For this reason, many researchers examine effective or productive study habits. Every student has different study habits and attitudes, and these habits and attitudes are one of the most important determiners in their academic achievement. Students' interest, curiosity, and willingness towards their courses, a conducive study environment and effective study habits, as well as close interest and support from the people around them for their success ease the process of learning and increase success while the reverse of all these conditions make learning difficult (Uluğ, 2000, p.5, as cited in Memiş, 2007a). Students' study habits and attitudes have a broad range. Many factors such as attitudes towards teachers, study methods, views towards homework, expectations from education, library use styles, arranging the study environment, relationships with parents and friends can be counted within this broad range. Still, one of the factors that influence students' success is desirable study attitudes and habits that they possess themselves (Küçükahmet, 2007).

> Students are generally advised to develop themselves, and therefore, their study skills, in the areas of time-management, arranging the study environment, planning the period of study, note-taking, active listening, effective reading, summarizing, and motivation (Yeşilyaprak, 2006). The basic study skills can be described in the following way: Basic study skills are simple, commonly used strategies, such as highlighting and taking notes. The effectiveness of study strategies depends on the thought involved in making decisions about what is important enough to highlight, include in notes, or use in organizing ideas (Moreland, Dansereau, & Chmielewski, 1977; J.Wiley & Voss, 1999; as cited in Eggen & Kauchak, 2001, p.339).

Sansgiry, Bhosle and Sail (2006) explain strategic studying as the knowledge and application of effective study skills or techniques by students. They list many study strategies including Know-Want-Learn (KWL), Survey-Question-Read-Recite-Review (SQ3R), summarizing and note taking, using graphics and self-questioning. Researchers indicate some interesting points regarding this point. According to Cusimano (1999), for example, abbreviations and symbols should be used as much as possible and outlines are another useful method for note taking. Cusimano (1999) also points out that there is not just one skill needed for academic success which is very considerable for learners. As stated by Gettinger and Seibert (2002), studying has certain features. According to their view, firstly, studying is skillful, which requires training and practice with specific techniques that help a learner acquire, organize, retain and use information. Secondly, studying is intentional, which indicates that effective studying requires not only the knowledge and application of skills, but volition as well. Thirdly, studying is highly personal and individualized. Finally, studying involves a self-regulatory dimension. These show that more than one factor constitutes students' study skills. These skills shape individuals' study habits or methods. Individuals learn differently so they also study in different ways. Thus, study strategies used by learners might vary in the studying process. Such factors as individuals' lives, experiences etc. may play a role in the formation and development of their study habits. Additionally, the effects of help and advice from the family, friends and teachers can be counted. It can be said that teachers have an important responsibility and role in developing students' study habits, skills and attitudes. The following arguments explain this clearly:

> Teachers can help learners become more effective strategy users by encouraging them to think about and discuss when and why a specific strategy is effective, modeling the process and the thinking involved for

students, and having students practice with specific topics (Carpenter, Levi, Fennema, Ansell, & Franke, 1995; Rickards, Fajen, Sullivan, & Gillespie, 1997; cited in Eggen & Kauchak, 2001, p.339).

However, Zimmerman (1998; as cited in Gettinger and Seibert, 2002) indicates that although students are expected to apply study skills while completing homework or preparing for tests, teachers typically devote little time to providing explicit instruction in such skills. Streveler, Hoeglund and Stein (2003) investigated study strategies of academically successful students at the Colorado School of Mines. Data was collected through a questionnaire (N=285). The study showed that there is a relationship between certain study strategies and academic success is a compelling argument for students to hone their study skills. Similarly, Nneji (2002) investigated study habits of Nigerian university students (N=441). A questionnaire including 35 items was administered to university students to gather the data. The results based on descriptive analysis indicated that students devoted a reasonable length of time to reading; some students used memorization technique; majority of the students depended on their course handouts or lecture notes as the main sources of information and read mostly for the purpose of passing examinations or tests. It was also found that university students read to absorb information as given by their lecturers and not necessarily to search for new or additional information. It was concluded that although university students in Nigeria read mostly for the purpose of passing examinations and they did not seem to pursue their studies correctly and thoroughly, they were found to be diligent. Bay, Tuğluk and Gençdoğan (2004) investigated study skills of university students (N=773). Specifically, the study tested whether there were differences among students' motivation, time management, exam preparation and overcoming exam anxiety according to gender, class, instructional style, and department that the student attended. The data were collected through a 5-point Likert scale comprising 26 questions that was developed by the researchers. According to the obtained results, no difference was found on the gender variable regarding possession of study skills among students. Although significant favorable differences were found on the class variable among senior students, these differences were also found significant among students at different departments. Erdamar (2010), in her study aimed at investigating how student teachers' attitudes, self-perceptions of success, and positive perceptions of their faculty and lectureres are associated with their grade and study strategies. The sample was composed of a total of 746 students attending five different departments of Gazi University, Vocational education Faculty through Study Attitudes Inventories and Study Inventories. The results showed that attitudes towards studying, perceiving oneself as successful and positive attitudes towards lecturers are important factors in predicting whether teacher candidates use effective study strategies. In a different study on study habits, Robinson, Drozd and Saarnio (1994) investigated whether there is a relationship between gender and identity and study habits. 50 males and 82 females were presented with the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and with a modified version of the Study Habits Inventory. Sansgiry, Bhosle and Sail (2006) conducted research to examine factors such as academic competence, test competence, time management, strategic studying, and test anxiety, and to identify whether these factors could distinguish differences among students, based on academic performance and enrollment in the experiential program. This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design and was conducted by administering a questionnaire to students enrolled in all 4 years of the PharmD program at the University of Houston. The researchers mainly found that academic performance was significantly associated with factors such as academic competence and test competence. It was also found that students who were enrolled in their experiential year differed from students who were enrolled in their second year of the program on factors such as test anxiety, academic competence, test competence, and time management skills.

As can be observed, researchers investigated study skills and habits at different educational stages with different instructional methods and found interesting results. The results of some of the research studies (e.g. Bay et al., 2004) showed that students at higher education also lacked certain study skills. As stated by Bökeoğlu et al., (2007), faculties are institutions where university students lead an important part of their lives which takes up an important portion in the process of the transition from adolescence to maturity roles and where they form the basis of their future lives. For this reason, faculties function as more than just educational institutions. Therefore, it becomes more important to research into the quality of life at faculties for students' academic and personal development. In this respect, this study can be considered to have important contributions to developing concrete suggestions and collecting students' opinions, while it aims to generate a general idea about students' study strategies in the education faculty in a higher education. Therefore, this study aims to determine preservice teachers' study strategies and their perceptions of this topic. With this basic aim, the answers to the following questions were sought: (1) What are preservice teachers' views about their study strategies? (2) Do preservice teachers' study strategies differ according to the gender variable? (3) Do preservice teachers' study strategies differ according to the field of study that they pursue? (4) Is there a relationship between the teaching profession and study strategies according to

preservice teachers? (5) Is there a relationship between the teaching profession and study habits according to preservice teachers?

2. Method

At the initial stage of this descriptive type study, the related literature was reviewed. Following this review, the researcher first asked students who attended the course called "Planning and Evaluation in Instruction" to write down their views about their own study methods. The students were asked to brainstorm on the topic and make a list of the ideas that came to their minds about "study methods and habits". At the next stage, the researcher developed a questionnaire form based on the written documents containing preservice teachers' opinions and the related literature. At the third stage, expert opinion was consulted regarding the questionnaire form. The questionnaire was studied by four experts on the field. With new arrangements, the questionnaire was prepared for implementation. The questionnaire was composed of three sections. The first section included personal information comprising two questions on gender and the field of study. The second section comprised a 44-item inventory of study methods and habits. The inventory was of 3-point Likert scale: (3= always, 2=sometimes, and 1=never). In the third section, three independent questions were included. These questions asked students to evaluate their study methods and habits and to relate these to the teaching profession. In the development process, the inventory initially comprised 44 items and it was administered to a total of 336 preservice teachers enrolled in different departments in a faculty of education. The data obtained was subjected to reliability analysis (corrected-item total correlation). The items above .20 was tried to be included in the calculation of correlation. With the final arrangements, the 44 items on study methods in the beginning decreased to 25 items. The calculation for 25 items yielded a very high reliability coefficient (Alpha=.8336).

2.1. Participants

The universe of this study comprised the students at the Faculty of Education in a University in Ankara, Turkey and the sample was formed by the students at Faculty of Education at the same university (N=226) who took courses in the summer semester in their academic programme. 138 (61%) of the participants were female and 88 (39%) were male. Of the participants, 184 (81%) were enrolled in departments with mainly verbal focus and 42 (19%) were enrolled in departments with mainly analytical focus.

2.2. Data Collection Process and Analysis

The questionnaire which was used as data collection instrument was given its final form and it was administered to the participants enrolled in various departments who attended the summer programme. A different procedure was used for the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data in the data analysis. For the first sub-problem, the SPSS (11.0) package program was used and percentage, frequency, and means were calculated. Intervals in the scale are as follows: (1:never) 1.00-1.66 (2:sometimes) 1.67-2.33 (3:always) 2.34-3.00.

For the second and third questions, t-test calculations were run. For the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, content analysis was performed. First, the data obtained from 226 students were transcribed one by one, and then, expression frequencies were calculated for the most frequently expressed ideas by the students. The frequency densities of the data were calculated and tabulated. In the preparation of the table, the fields about the issues mentioned by the preservice teachers were gathered and their frequencies were calculated.

3. Findings

In this section of the study, the findings are presented in the order of sub-problems. The first sub-problem of the study was determined as "What are preservice teachers' views about studying strategies?". The results based on the analyses of related question showed interesting points. The highest percentage (71%) that the preservice teachers "always" reported was item 8 (I study to become successful). The nearest percentage (68%) to this item was observed in item 9 (I distinguish the important areas of the topic with ease while I am studying). The other items that the preservice teachers intensely reported were item 7 (I go on studying by making sure that I learn the concept, etc. that I did not understand), item 10 (I study by keeping notes most), item 12 (I underline the important points in the reading material with color pen) and item 24 (I use different study techniques according to the lesson). On the other

hand, the highest percentage (79%) that the preservice teachers "never used" reported was item 22 (I study best individually). The arithmetic means also show that students agree with the study method stated in the 22nd item (I study best individually) at the lowest level ($\bar{x}$ = 1.22), and they agree with the study method at the eighth item (I study to become successful) at the highest level ($\bar{x}$ =2.67). This result shows that preservice teachers generally prioritize the goal of achieving success in their studies. Related to this, the preservice teachers were also asked in the questionnaire the level at which they found the study skills effective. The distribution of the responses on this issue is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage Values Regarding the Views of Preservice Teacher about Effectiveness of Study Strategies

Effectiveness level	f	%
Very effective	38	17.1
Quite effective	137	61.7
Undecided	34	15.3
Somewhat effective	12	5.4
Not effective at all	1	.5
Not answered	4	1.8
Total	226	100.0

As can be seen in Table 1, study methods employed are generally viewed as "effective"by preservice teachers. A little more than three fifths (62%) of the preservice teachers indicated that their study methods were effective.

The second sub-problem in the study was determined as "Do preservice teachers' study strategies differ according to the gender variable?". The findings about this sub-problem are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviation and t Values Regarding the Preservice Teachers' Views about Study Strategies According to Gender

Gender	*N*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*<0.05
Female	134	56.11	6.01	219	6.32	.000*
Male	87	50.63	6.72			

A study of Table 4 shows that the mean score of female preservice teachers from the study skills scale is higher than the mean score of male students. A t-test was run to test the significance of this difference, and a difference was found between the mean scores of the two groups in favor of female preservice teachers at the significance level of .0001. This finding shows that there is a difference [$t_{(219)}$ = 6.32, p<.05] in study methods and habits between genders. This result is different from the results of the study conducted by Bay et al. (2004). No significant difference was found on the gender variable among university students' study skills that they possessed (Bay et al. 2004). However, in the study by Memiş (2007b), the study orientation scores of the female students were higher than those of male students. This suggests that finding of this present study is consistent with some of the findings reported in research in literature, but not consistent with some others.

The third sub-problem in this study was "Do preservice teachers' study strategies differ according to the field of study that they pursue?". The findings related to this sub-problem are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviation and t Values Regarding Study Strategies According To the Field of Study that Students Attend

Group	*N*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*<0.05
Verbal fields	179	53.40	6.86	219	2.66	.010*
Analytical fields	42	56.30	6.23			

Table 3 shows that the preservice teachers' mean score on the study strategies scale in the programs with analytical focus is higher than those in the programs with verbal focus. To test the significance of this observed difference, a t-test was run and a difference was found between the mean scores of the two groups in favor of students in the departments with analytical focus at significance the level of .0001. This finding indicates that there is a difference in the study strategies between fields of study that preservice teachers pursue [$t_{(219)} = 2.66$, $p<.05$]. This result is similar to the results of some studies. For instance, Bay et al. (2004) found significant differences in the study methods among university students according to the field of study.

The fourth sub-problem in the study was "Is there a relationship between the teaching profession and study strategies according to preservice teachers?". The findings on this sub-problem are presented in Table 4. The most frequently mentioned issues have been included in the table.

Table 4
The Positive Factors That Affect Studying According to Preservice Teachers

- Study environment (orderliness, comfort, quiet, etc.) (n=98)
- Course (interest in the lesson/course, content, type of lesson, etc.) (n=40)
- Tools-equipment-sources (n=29)
- Teacher (behaviors, lesson delivery style etc.) (n=27)
- Topic (amount, relationship with daily life, beneficiality, comprehensibility, applicability, interest in the topic, how interesting the topic is) (n=21)
- Motivation (n=19)

As Table 4 shows, the results of the analysis of preservice teachers' responses related to the factors that affect their studies, which indicates that they focus on the study environment the most, and thus they view that environment is important for effective study. In addition to the items presented in the table, preservice teachers mentioned some other issues as revision and doing practice (n=9), planned, systematic or organized studying (n=8), note-taking (n=7), summarizing (n=7), using the computer and the Internet (n=4), focusing their attention, using study techniques, studying with a group, and individual study.

All of these results indicate that preservice teachers emphasized the study environment as the most important factor in studying. While these results are consistent with some studies reported in the related literature, it is observed that there are differences between the findings.

The fifth sub-problem in the study was "Is there a relationship between the teaching profession and studying strategies according to preservice teachers? If so, how do they explain this relationship?". A majority of preservice teachers stated that the teaching profession and study strategies were related. Very few students did not state an opinion on this topic. However, an examination of the responses of the students who related the teaching profession with their study strategies showed that the students interpreted the relationship between these two elements from different viewpoints. Below, some examples are given stated by preservice teachers.

> "It may be necessary to inform students about how to study when we start the teaching profession*"* (PT-10).
>
> "The teacher is the most influential person in a students' life about studying. If the teacher guides students regarding this topic, then students will be influenced and use the appropriate study method" (PT-22).
>
> "Teachers' knowledge of the appropriate method for a student is most important with respect to being knowledgeable about all the methods, guiding the student and setting an example to the students" (PT-33).
>
> "Teachers should instill study habits in students and this can be achieved when the teacher employs various study methods and habits" (PT-79).
>
> "A teacher is a person who studies well and knows the study techniques very well. A good teacher facilitates an effective instructional environment for students by using effective study methods and techniques" (PT-95).
>
> "An effective teacher who has sufficiently knowledgeable about study habits should raise awareness on this topic" (PT-99).
>
> "A teacher is also a guide. S/he should inform students about how to prepare for lessons" (PT-130).
>
> "It is the teacher who encourages students to study" (PT-149).

As in the given examples, some preservice teachers emphasized in their comments that they should primarily know study strategies very well in order to act as guides to their students. Some of them stressed the tight link between the teaching profession and study strategies in their explanations. On the other hand, it was observed that some preservice teachers interpreted the relationship between the teaching profession and study methods from a different viewpoint. For instance, one preservice teacher mentioned the importance of the teacher's approach in the following way: "*Students' attitude and behaviors towards the lesson are closely related to the teachers' attitude and behaviors* (*PT*-24)". A similar comment was stated by another student in the following way: "*Teachers' way of delivering the lesson and their rapport with their students affect students' ovation to study and their methods of study* (*PT*-34)". Some other preservice teachers focused on the importance of effective study in the teaching profession. One preservice teacher stated the following on the topic: "*Teaching is a profession which requires effective studying and aims to teach effectively and effective learning. In this profession, the more effective study skills are used, the more effective learning activity is realized* (*PT*-38)", and another one stated the following: "*Teaching necessitates continuous study, research and self-renewal (PT-74)*". Yet another preservice teacher stated the following: "*The teaching profession necessitates systematic study. For this reason, it is a must to develop a systematic study habit* (*PT*-77)".

In some other preservice teachers' views which have not been included here, it can be observed that the relationship between the teaching profession and study skills was explained from different dimensions. One student teacher's response to this question may explain this clearly: "*The teaching profession is related to study skills because there are such necessities in this profession as orderliness, research, and studying regularly (PT-59*). Thus, this preservice teacher interpreted the topic of the teaching profession and study skills differently. Some preservice teachers, though very few in number (N=14), stated that there was no relationship between the teaching profession and study skills. Finally, some student teachers (N=18) did not respond to this question.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Research reviewed so far shows that preservice teachers' studying strategies are very important for them. In order to achieve their goals related to their education, they need to use study strategies in an effective way. However, as Gall et al.,(1990; as cited in Yüksel, 2006) stated, study skills developed by students during their education from elementary to higher education level are generally inefficient and inappropriate to them. In this point the research conducted by Erdamar (2011) can be reviewed. Erdamar (2011) examined the study strategies of student teachers (n=746) attending vocational education faculties and whether these habits are affected by certain variables such as department, year of study. The results showed that student teachers' study strategies were at a moderate level. It was also observed that study strategies scores were higher for freshman students than for senior students. In the related literature it is also observed that similar studies (e.g. Yip, 2009; Tomes, Wasylkiw and Mockler, 2011) on study strategies of university students also has been conducted and provided considerable points in this issue.

In a case, effort is made towards preservice teachers to equip them with a rich foundation in knowledge and background for the teaching profession. At the same time period, preservice teachers perform their roles and responsibilities using different study methods in the process of getting prepared for their profession. In this respect, study methods, strategies or habits gain importance.

The results of this study may contribute to the related literature regarding forming an idea about preservice teachers' study strategies. Since the findings of the study have been discussed in detail within the findings section of the paper, this section will highlight some general results and suggestions. Although the generalizability of the results of this study is limited because it was conducted in one university with a limited number of participants, it is thought that it can shed light on the topic. In order to obtain more generalizable results, new research with a larger sample can be conducted. Bay et al. (2004) suggested in their study to introduce activities related to instructional guidance to students who enter universities. An addition to this suggestion could be to offer instructional guidance to students at all stages when they need in their freshman year. Robinson et al. (1994) suggested that "We all need to be more sensitive to the nature of the students' behaviors and how that impacts on their academic achievement." In this respect, new developments on this topic could be facilitated considering the views of preservice teachers about study methods and habits. As suggested by some researchers (e.g. Sansgiry; Bhosle and Sail, 2006; Robyak, 1977), an effective counseling service on these issues could gain importance.

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