



AN INVESTIGATION OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS' LIFE SKILLS IN TERMS OF VARIOUS VARIABLESⁱ

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Abstract:

This study aims to investigate whether preservice teachers' opinion about perspectives on life skills vary by gender, undergraduate program and grade level. It is a survey study. A total of 460 preservice teachers from the preschool education and classroom education departments of the Educational Faculty of Afyon Kocatepe University constituted the participants. The Life Skills Scale developed by Bolat and Balaman (2017) was used to collect the data. The scale consists of 30 five-point Likert-type items. The scale has five dimensions: coping with stress and emotions, showing empathy and self-awareness, decision making and problem solving, creative and critical thinking, and communication and interpersonal relationships. Bolat and Balaman (2017) found a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .90 for the scale. This study also found a Cronbach's alpha internal consistency of .90 for its sample. The data were analyzed using SPSS software. The one-group Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to analyze the distribution of the data, and the coefficients of skewness were examined. Since the dataset had a normal distribution, parametric tests were used. The unpaired t-test was used to determine whether the preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills vary by gender and undergraduate program. The one-way ANOVA test was used to determine whether their perspectives on life skills vary by grade level. The preservice teachers thought that they had the most creative and critical thinking skills. Compared to their male counterparts, the female preservice teachers had more positive perspectives about showing empathy and self-awareness. The preservice teachers' ability to cope with stress and emotions decrease as their grade level increases.

Keywords: life skills, preservice teachers, life skills scale

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1. Introduction

Life skills refer to positive behaviors that involve knowledge, attitudes and values. They are defined as the possession of particular skills or abilities to carry out tasks or fulfill purposes. The power of positive behaviors depends on the depth of one's skills (Subasree & Radhakrishnan Nair, 2014). Kennedy and Pearson (2014) define life skills as the competencies needed to survive and to enhance life. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997), life skills are customizable behaviors and positive skills that enable individuals to cope effectively with the necessities and difficulties of daily life. The WHO lists the skills of decision making and problem solving, creative and critical thinking, effective communication, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, self-knowledge, showing empathy, and coping with emotions and stress.

Societies today particularly need individuals who can use life skills effectively (Soran, Akkoyunlu & Kavak, 2006). It is of critical importance for modern-day individuals to have life skills and to use them in their lives. Life skills include entrepreneurship, critical thinking, decision making, plan making, career planning, empathy and cooperation. Individuals need to use life skills effectively to be successful in many areas. Life skills offer many advantages. Therefore, a transformation in educational programs is needed in order for schools to equip their students with these skills rather than knowledge. The first way to equip students with life skills is preventing negative behaviors, encouraging them to engage in positive behaviors and increasing their future expectations (Ibarraran, Ripani, Taboada, Villa & Garcia, 2014). For teachers to impart these qualities, they must be lifelong learners and constantly renew themselves. Ccert (2014) argued that teachers have a crucial role in equipping students with life skills. Teachers need to be self-supporting in their educational and professional lives and guide their students to access, study and use information (Ringsted, 1998). For this reason, the training provided to preservice teachers should equip them with life skills. In this regard, it is essential to determine preservice teachers' perceptions on life skills. This study examines preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills. It also investigates whether their perspectives vary by gender, undergraduate program and grade level. Accordingly, answers to these research questions were sought:

1. What are preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills?
2. Do preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills vary significantly by gender?
3. Do preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills vary significantly by undergraduate program?
4. Do preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills vary significantly by grade level?

2. Method

2.1 Model of the Study

This is a survey study. A survey study reveals respondents' beliefs, perspectives, characteristics, and previous or current behaviors (Neuman, 2007).

2.2 Universe and Sample

The universe of the study was the preservice teachers in the Educational Faculty of Afyon Kocatepe University. The sample consisted of 460 preservice teachers from the preschool education and classroom education departments. Information about the participants' gender, undergraduate program and grade level is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of the Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Options		Total
Gender	Female	376
	Male	84
	Total	460
Undergraduate	Classroom Education	145
	Preschool Education	315
	Total	460
Grade level	1 st year	27
	2 nd year	213
	3 rd year	157
	4 th year	63
	Total	460

Table 1 shows that, of the study's participants, 376 were females and 84 were males. Of them, 145 were from the classroom education department, and 315 were from the preschool education department. There were 27 freshmen, 213 sophomores, 157 juniors and 63 seniors.

2.3 Data Collection Tool

The five-point Likert-type Life Skills Scale developed by Bolat and Balaman (2017) was used to determine the preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills. The scale has a five-dimensional structure. The construct validity of the scale was first tested using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Bolat and Balaman (2017) found a Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of .90. An analysis of the reliability of the scale for the sample was also done in this study. Its results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability Coefficients

Factors	Cronbach's alpha
Coping with stress and emotions	.73
Showing empathy and self-awareness	.69
Decision making and problem solving	.79
Creative thinking and critical thinking	.75
Communication and interpersonal relationships	.76
Entire scale	.90

Table 2 shows that the alpha values were: .73 for the ability to cope with stress and emotions sub-dimension, .69 for the showing empathy and self-awareness skills sub-dimension, .79 for the decision making and problem solving skills sub-dimension, .75 for the creative and critical thinking skills and .76 for the communication and interpersonal relationships skill. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .90 for the entire scale.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS software. The one-group Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was first used to analyze the distribution of the data, and the coefficients of skewness were investigated. As the significance value of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test coefficients of skewness in Table 3 indicates, the data had a normal distribution. A *p* value larger than .05 in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test larger showed that the data did not significantly deviate from a normal distribution at this significance level. A skewness coefficient within the boundaries of $-1 < SC < 1$ indicated that the scores did not significantly deviate from a normal distribution (Büyüköztürk, 2007, p. 40). Therefore, parametric tests were used to analyze the data. The unpaired t-test was applied to determine whether the preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills vary by gender and undergraduate program. One-way ANOVA was used to determine whether these perspectives vary by grade level.

Table 3: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results and Coefficients of Skewness

Scale	n	p	S.C.
Ability to Cope with Emotions and Stress	460	.336	.818
Showing Empathy and Self-awareness	460	.134	.669
Decision Making and Problem Solving	460	.514	.150
Creative Thinking and Critical Thinking	460	.760	.356
Communication and Interpersonal Relationships	460	.600	.216
Entire Life Skills Score	460	.100	.865

3. Results

The means and standard deviations of the preservice teachers' scores on the scale were analyzed to investigate their perspectives on life skills and are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations of the Preservice Teachers' Scores

Scale	N	Min	Max	Mean	sd
Coping with stress and emotions	460	2.57	5	3.71	.645
Showing empathy and self-awareness	460	3.29	5	4.25	.437
Decision making and problem solving	460	2.43	5	4.27	.510
Creative thinking and critical thinking	460	2.80	5	4.40	.497
Communication and interpersonal relationships	460	2.75	5	4.27	.643
Life Skills Scale Entire Score	460	3.27	5	4.16	.436

Table 4 shows that the preservice teachers had the highest mean in the sub-dimension of creative thinking and critical thinking. This dimension was followed by decision making and problem solving, communication and interpersonal relationships, and showing empathy and self-awareness, respectively. They had the lowest mean on the dimension of ability to cope with stress and emotions. In other words, the preservice teachers felt that creative and critical thinking was their strongest life skill. However, they considered their ability to cope with stress and emotions to be at a lower level.

The unpaired t-test was conducted to determine whether the preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills vary by gender. The related statistics are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of the T-Test of Whether the Preservice Teachers' Perspectives on Life Skills Vary by Gender

Dimensions	Gender	N	X	Ss	sd	t	p
Coping with Stress and Emotions	Female	376	3.71	.630	458	.451	.626
	Male	84	3.78	.711			
Showing Empathy and Self-awareness	Female	376	4.27	.438	458	2.236	.026
	Male	84	4.15	.420			
Decision Making and Problem Solving	Female	376	4.28	.514	458	.358	.721
	Male	84	4.26	.495			
Creative Thinking and Critical Thinking	Female	376	4.39	.498	458	.662	.509
	Male	84	4.43	.490			
Communication and Interpersonal Relationships	Female	376	4.28	.631	458	1.256	.210
	Male	84	4.19	.691			
Entire Life Skills Scale	Female	376	4.16	.430	458	4.256	.568
	Male	84	4.13	.461			

Table 5 shows that the preservice teachers' perspectives on showing empathy and self-awareness vary significantly by gender ($t_{(458)}=2.236$, $p<.05$). In this dimension, the mean of the female preservice teachers ($X=4.27$) was higher than that of the males ($X=4.15$), indicating that the female participants' perspectives on showing empathy and self-awareness were more positive.

Table 5 also shows that the preservice teachers' perspectives in the other dimensions of the life skills scale did not vary significantly by gender ($t_{(458)}=-.451$, $t_{(458)}=.358$, $t_{(458)}=.662$, $t_{(458)}=1.256$, $t_{(458)}=4.256$, $p>.05$). In other words, the preservice teachers of different genders had similar perspectives on all the dimensions of the life skills scale except for showing empathy and self-awareness.

The unpaired t-test was conducted to determine whether the preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills vary by undergraduate program. The related statistics are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Results of the T-Test of Whether the Preservice Teachers' Perspectives on Life Skills Vary by Undergraduate Program

Dimensions	Undergraduate Program	N	X	Ss	t	p
Coping with Stress and Emotions	Preschool Education	315	3.76	.644	.231	.021
	Classroom Education	145	3.61	.637		

Showing Empathy and Self-awareness	Preschool Education	315	4.26	.446	.712	.477
	Classroom Education	145	4.23	.418		
Decision Making and Problem Solving	Preschool Education	315	4.25	.519	1.22	.222
	Classroom Education	145	4.32	.491		
Creative Thinking and Critical Thinking	Preschool Education	315	4.37	.519	1.25	.661
	Classroom Education	145	4.46	.440		
Communication and Interpersonal Relationships	Preschool Education	315	4.29	.595	.999	.281
	Classroom Education	145	4.22	.735		
Entire Life Skills Scale	Preschool Education	315	4.16	.439	4.84	.628
	Classroom Education	145	4.14	.429		

Table 6 shows that the preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills on the dimension of coping with stress and emotions vary significantly by undergraduate program ($t_{(458)}=.231$, $p<.05$). The mean of the preschool education preservice teachers' perspectives on the dimension of coping with stress and emotions ($X=3.76$) was higher than that of the classroom education department ($X=3.61$). In other words, the perspectives of the preschool education preservice teachers were more positive than those of the classroom education preservice teachers in the dimension of ability to cope with stress and emotions.

Table 6 also shows that the preservice teachers' perspectives on the other dimensions of the life skills scale did not vary significantly by undergraduate program ($t_{(458)}=.712$, $t_{(458)}=1.22$, $t_{(458)}=1.25$, $t_{(458)}=.999$, $t_{(458)}=4.84$, $p>.05$). The perspectives of the preservice teachers from different departments were similar on all the dimensions of the scale except for the dimension of ability to cope with stress and emotions.

One-way ANOVA was used to determine whether the preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills vary by grade level. The related statistics are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Results of the ANOVA Test of Whether the Preservice Teachers' Perspectives on Life Skills Vary by Grade Level

Dimensions	Grade Level	N	X	S	F	p	Significant Difference
Coping with stress and emotions	1 st Year	27	3.94	.68	4.341	.005	1 st Year-4 th Year
	2 nd Year	213	3.79	.66			
	3 rd Year	157	3.64	.58			
	4 th Year	63	3.54	.64			
	Total	460	3.74	.64			
Showing empathy and self-awareness	1 st Year	27	4.37	.43	2.163	.092	-
	2 nd Year	213	4.29	.43			
	3 rd Year	157	4.19	.46			
	4 th Year	63	4.23	.37			
	Total	460	4.25	.43			
Decision making and problem solving	1 st Year	27	4.34	.54	1.120	.341	-
	2 nd Year	213	4.28	.49			
	3 rd Year	157	4.22	.54			
	4 th Year	63	4.35	.44			
	Total	460	4.27	.51			

Creative thinking and critical thinking	1 st Year	27	4.52	.47	1.376	.249	-
	2 nd Year	213	4.39	.51			
	3 rd Year	157	4.36	.49			
	4 th Year	63	4.47	.42			
	Total	460	4.40	.49			
Communication and interpersonal relationships	1 st Year	27	4.18	.72	.515	.672	-
	2 nd Year	213	4.24	.64			
	3 rd Year	157	4.29	.62			
	4 th Year	63	4.32	.64			
	Total	460	4.27	.64			
Entire Life Skills Scale	1 st Year	27	4.26	.49	1.293	.276	-
	2 nd Year	213	4.18	.45			
	3 rd Year	157	4.11	.41			
	4 th Year	63	4.15	.39			
	Total	460	4.16	.36			

Table 7 shows that the preservice teachers' perspectives on the dimension of coping with stress and emotions varied significantly by grade level ($F_{(5-342)}=4.341$, $p<.05$). In this dimension, the first-year preservice teachers had the highest mean ($X=3.94$), followed by second-year ($X=3.79$), third-year ($X=3.64$), and fourth-year ($X=3.54$), respectively. Significant differences were found between first year and fourth year, and second year and fourth year in the dimension of coping with stress and emotions, indicating that the preservice teachers' ability to cope with stress and emotions weakens as their grade level increases.

Table 7 also shows that no significant differences were found in the other sub-dimensions of the life skills scale by grade level ($F_{(5-342)}=.092$, $F_{(5-342)}=.341$, $F_{(5-342)}=.249$, $F_{(5-342)}=.672$, $p>.05$). In other words, the perspectives of the preservice teachers in different years of study were similar on all the dimensions of the scale except for the dimension of ability to cope with stress and emotions.

3. Conclusion and Discussion

This study investigated whether the preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills vary by gender, undergraduate program and grade level. It found that the preservice teachers feel that creative and critical thinking is their strongest life skill. They considered themselves to have only moderate level ability to cope with stress and emotions. This is similar to the results of a study by Şen (2009), which reported that preservice Turkish teachers have moderate level critical thinking skills.

The preservice teachers' perspectives on life skills were compared by three variables. Their perspectives varied significantly by gender in the dimension of showing empathy and self-awareness. The female preservice teachers' perspectives on showing empathy and self-awareness were more positive. This is similar to the results in the related literature (Karakaya, 2001; Yıldırım, 2001; Duru, 2002; Erçoban, 2003; Rehber, 2007; Ekinçi & Aybek, 2010).

This study found that the preservice teachers' perspectives on coping with stress and emotions varied significantly by undergraduate program. In the dimension of

coping with stress and emotions, the mean of the preschool education preservice teachers was higher than that of the classroom education preservice teachers, indicating that the preschool education preservice teachers had more positive perspectives on the ability to cope with stress and emotions. Their higher likelihood of being assigned to teach as a public servant may be one of the reasons for this.

The preservice teachers' perspectives on the dimension of coping with stress and emotions varied significantly by grade level. In this dimension, the first-year preservice teachers had the highest mean, followed by the second-year, third-year and fourth-year preservice teachers, respectively. Significant differences were found between first year and fourth year, and second year and fourth year in this dimension, indicating that the preservice teachers' ability to cope with stress and emotions weakens as their grade level increases.

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