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Village Institutes and Life-long Learning

Seval Kocak^{a*}, Gulsun Atanur Baskan^a

^a Department of Education, Hacettepe University, Turkey

Abstract

Village Institutes is characterized as one of the most successful applications of the Turkish education history. “Life-long Learning” approach which constitutes the focus point of today’s educational system is associated with some concepts like new basic skills for everyone, more investment in human resources, innovation in learning and teaching, supporting learning, rethinking guidance and counseling, making learning close to houses (human life). In this study, Life-long Learning applications of Village Institutes have been evaluated based on determined eight principles in the Life-long Learning Decisions which have been accepted in 2002 by the member states of Memorandum and Council of Europe. As a result, in the educational systems of today, particularly emphasized practices and principles of life-long learning have been successfully applied in the Village Institutes.

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1. Introduction

History of Turkish education have been the scene of different applications with the effects of social, political, economic and cultural developments. One of the most important of these applications is “Village Institutes” project which has been acclaimed over the world in the first years of the Republic. This project is very important for having carried out the applications directed towards to “Life-long Learning” approach in those days which is one of the most important point of education system today.

Life-long learning is described as a concept which regards providing individuals the all necessary basic skills for lasting a qualitative life in the developing world. Ersoy and Yilmaz (2009, p.807) define life-long learning, regardless of whether it carries a formal property or not, as all events in learning which are carried out for developing knowledge on individual and social dimension and living a high level of welfare life. These definitions show that the applications for life-long learning approach are not only related with school or occupation, they are also in all aspects of life and related with events held throughout the whole of life.

In 2000 for carrying out this approach, six key messages have been listed in “Life-long Learning Memorandum” published by the European Commission. These have been studied under these titles: new basic skills for everyone, more investment in human resources, innovation in learning and teaching, supporting learning, rethinking guidance and counseling, making learning closer to houses(human life). In 2002 in “Life-long Learning Decisions” which have been accepted by the member states of Memorandum and Council of Europe some basic principles have been

* Corresponding Author name. Tel.: +905077453960

E-mail address: sevalkocak@hacettepe.edu.tr , sevalkocak85@gmail.com

determined on the light of these messages. These principles are indicated by Ersoy and Yilmaz (2009) by the following way;

1. Promoting literacy and providing continuing education opportunities,
2. Providing education opportunities which ensure the individuals' scientific, technological, social, cultural and economic development,
3. Providing opportunities for acquiring the individuals habit of living in unity, togetherness and solidarity,
4. Developing programmes introducing the national values and providing the ability of protecting and developing them,
5. Securing the methods requiring living and feeding in healthy
6. Providing the individuals spend their free time in an effective way,
7. Presenting opportunities to individuals for obtaining occupations which are suitable for economic developments,
8. Providing knowledge and skills to the individuals who have different skills and interests, which are necessary in that occupation fields

The aim of this study is analyzing Life-long Learning applications of Village Institutes in terms of these eight principles. In this way, the applications of Village Institutes through the life-long learning approaches have been analyzed.

The Life-long Learning Approaches in Village Institutes

“Village Institutions” which aim to raise talented children living in the village, who will be a teacher in their own village, to make village expertise by educating them in every field of both individual and social life, to increase production and richness to the highest level by enabling scientific knowledge to be used in daily life succeeded to raise their students in the well-supported way. Institutions that aims to get on with the cultural, art, sports and professional fields achieved this improvement by taking into account both regional requirements and individual talent, concern and needs (Kartal, 2008).

A continued education has provided in Village Institutions. The education has continued day and night, in summer and winter on lands and cultivated areas, in workshops and classes in accordance with flexible plans prepared according to the characteristics of the region. Education hasn't been limited to places, also continued in messes, dormitories, libraries, music and sport halls and practice schools. It has been given importance to “free reading” times in the institutions. They have enabled to introduce and discuss works that is appropriate for their levels by making them read. Village people whose vocabulary is limited, rate of literacy is low and spoken-written narration is inadequate, have been tried to be improved. Especially important steps have been taken in educating girls and raising woman educators (Başaran, 2006). In this respect, important practises have been carried out “to generalize literacy and provide continuing education opportunities” that are principles of life-long learning.

One of the most important aspects of the institutes is that they not only train teachers, but also agriculture and health professionals, particularly making research on modern agriculture activities which could be used in modern social life, that “work comes before words”, in other words, learning by experience is relied on (Özkan, 2008). Moreover, the most suitable activities had been realized regarding the sources of income, cultural aspects and social needs of the region and it has been ensured that the means determined in the light of scientific research were used. The institutes had carried out these activities with different and flexible training programs, which had been prepared in accordance with the sources of income in the region they had been established. Thus, the principle of “providing individuals with vocational opportunities suitable to economic developments” has been implemented. Besides economy, the improvement of different individual skills had been achieved; arts, sports and different cultural activities had been given value. Thus, toward life-long learning, the principles “providing educational opportunities where the individual will be able to improve in scientific, technological, social, cultural and economic fields” and “providing individuals having different skills and field of interests with the knowledge and abilities required for that particular fields” had been applied.

In his address on March 1st, 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stressed the essential points in education/training activities. In that speech, he underlined the need for life-long learning:

“The means to be used in education and training should turn knowledge into an active and applicable device bringing success in real life, rather than an unnecessary decoration, a means of pressure, or a hobby of civilization...”

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The weekly, monthly and seasonal study plans in the institutes had been prepared taking into consideration the regional aspects, the level and number of students, the number of teachers, the production fields of the region and existing tools-devices. Beginning with the construction of institute buildings, all works have been realized with the great effort, cooperation, solidarity, and the belief of achieving together, by individuals. All works required for the institutes have been carried out in cooperation for the community “imece” and thus have been created out of nothing. Thus, the principle of “creating opportunities for individuals where they will be able to learn to live in unity, cooperation and solidarity” had been the basis of the institutes’ success.

Students’ health and nutrition had been followed with care by presidents elected among them. The presidents, in charge of their relevant fields of cleanliness-tidiness, dormitories, laundry, library, bakery and technical works, had carried out their task in full responsibility. Moreover, great importance had been attached to nutrition and cleaning, without missing meals under normal circumstances (Yılmaz, 2008; Başaran, 2006). Despite limited means, the principle of “securing the means required by healthy living and nutrition” had been tried to be applied, and the importance of these habits had been passed on to students.

The institutes have aimed to remove the gap between the people and the elite, and raised elites from the public. They sought to improve and spread Turkish folklore, language, art and prepared all their activities taking into account the regional aspects, customs and traditions of their region. They have proceeded with respect to human, labor, success and differences, and fed individuals with nice feelings such as love, respect and tolerance. They have brought up many respected educators and intellectuals following the principle of “developing programs with the aim of raising individuals who recognize their nation and values and who are equipped with the ability of protecting and improving them”.

In Village Institutes, which had been nested with life and where theory and practice had been regarded integral parts, it had been ensured that students spent their leisure time with sports, arts, entertainment activities and free reading hours. Moreover, the cooperatives managed by students had great importance concerning production, application and providing income (Başaran, 2006). Thus, it can be said that there had been activities suitable to the principle of “ensuring that individuals spend their leisure time efficiently”.

2. Conclusion

One of the most important educational organisations, “Village Institutes” has accomplished carrying out the applications through the life-long learning approach which is a focus point of today’s educational systems.

As a result, it is seen that Village Institutes have developed literacy; provided continuing educational opportunities; provided individuals cultural, social, economic and professional developments; created experimental learning environments; developed programmes for protection and development of national values. In addition to these, it can be said that these institutes have provided environments to the individuals which are suitable for the necessity of healthy life, carried out activities for enriching leisure times in the most effective way, provided knowledge and skills to the individuals for developing their different abilities. It is understood that all of them is a product of a very strong cooperation and solidarity.

Proving a nation can stand up after a war, especially aiming to make the villagers realized that they can develop with their own power, Village Institutes, has had the applications for life-long learning approach and has

implemented the principles in those years which have been put forward in 2000s. These principles have been indoctrinated through flexible education programmes as well as experimental learning; sophisticated people have been educated in individual, professional, cultural and social sense.

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