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Adult Literacy as Part of Literacy Campaign

SECİL EDA ÖZKAYRAN and ASLIHAN YETİS ABALI

Abstract

Literacy expresses the ability to understand and perform ordinary and simple actions in daily life. Therefore, being literate is necessary and important in every field for individuals to survive. The main purpose of the study was to reveal the importance of literacy in adult education within the scope of the literacy campaign started in 2018. Phenomenological design, as a form of qualitative research, was utilized in the study. The study group consisted of 24 adults participating in the literacy campaign in the city center of Bartın and at surrounding schools. Data was collected through interviews held with the participants. Data analysis was performed based on content analysis. When the data obtained was examined, the participants were observed to express that they had quite difficulty in running their errands in daily life and maintain their lives depending on other people since they were illiterate. It was also observed that illiteracy had adverse effects on adult psychology. Moreover, the study revealed that literacy is an ability which provides convenience in every phase of life.

Keywords: Adult Education, Literacy, Literacy Campaign.



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Introduction

A variety of definitions can be made for adult education. According to Geray (2002), adult education is a process designed systematically avoiding coincidences in learner-instructor relationship so as to improve skills, attitudes, behaviors and actions of individuals who do not attend school but have responsibilities imposed by the society or who have the potential to bear these responsibilities. As for Duman (2007), it expresses the activities that are created for adults and that do not involve professional fields. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] (2020), it comprises of the activities and systems developed to meet the learning needs that individuals, who are out of the compulsory education process and whose main responsibility is not going to school, can feel in any period of their lives. Furthermore, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (1985) describes adult education as systematic processes that are developed for adults regardless of content, level and method, and that enable these individuals to improve their personal abilities or professional skills, increase their knowledge, and mature their attitudes and behaviors. Hutchinson (1965) defines adult education as educational activities organized by relevant persons in order to activate, interpret and enrich lives of women and men (as cited in Okcabol, 2006). Adult education is briefly an educational process which is designed based on individual's needs, and in which all education models can be applied without content limitations.

Kellner (2000) describes the concept of literacy as *"to qualify in effective use of communicational symbols interpreted by the society"*. Literacy today is expressed as a part of communication. Apart from learning a language or expressing oneself, literacy is also required for interaction with others. It is necessary to indicate that literacy means reading and writing and more (Gul, 2007).

It is considered as an important goal also in Turkey that every individual has literacy, which directly affects the level of development, because being literate contributes to social, cultural and economic development of individuals and their society. Great efforts are made to achieve this goal. Literacy is undoubtedly necessary and significant in every field for individuals to survive (Oz, 2002). Therefore, in Turkey, offering education for each person in the society has always been primary, and literacy programs for adults have been in activity consistently.

In this context, many studies on literacy campaign have been conducted in Turkey. Some of these studies are presented below:

- National Schools and Literacy Campaign: As a result of the studies in National Schools between the years of 1928-1935, the literacy rate, which was 13% in males and 4% in females in 1927, was raised to 29,3% in males and 10,5% in females in 1935 (Kilic, 2017). National Schools were organized as Immobile National Schools, Mobile National Schools, Private National Schools, Village Overnight Classrooms and Public Reading Rooms. Mostly primary school teachers were assigned in these educational institutions, but also educated people in the society were attended in the first years. While these institutions were teaching literacy, they were also spreading Republic ideology and its objectives at the grassroots level (Kilinc, 2018).
- Turkish Armed Forces and Literacy Studies: In Turkish Armed Forces (Barracks), teaching literacy, giving rudiments and bringing in professional skills required by the

army to young males during their military service has always been a part of the military training (Bilir, 2005).

- 1971–72 Functional Literacy and Health Education Project (FOYSEP): Functional literacy programs, which were agreed to be tried in various parts of the world depending on the results of the World Conference of Ministers of Education organized by UNESCO for illiteracy in Tehran in 1965, were also applied in Turkey in 1971. Accordingly, a project called Functional Literacy (FOYSEP) was developed under the control of the Ministry of National Education. The purpose of the project was to end the barren literacy instruction in classes, approach public education as a whole, reach daily lives of adults, and associate health and production activities of villagers with literacy (Yildiz, 2010).
- 100th Year Literacy Campaign: The campaign started on the occasion of Atatürk's 100th birthday in 1981 was the second biggest campaign organized comprehensively after National Schools literacy campaign (Anameric & Rukanci, 2015).
- Support Campaign for National Education: Since 2001, studies called Support for National Education and Education Overcomes All Obstacles became the basis of educational services in making literacy campaigns successful besides practicing formal and informal education (Onal, 2010).
- At School as Mother and Daughter Literacy Campaign: Started in 2008 and ended in 2012, "At School as Mother and Daughter Campaign" (AKOK) focused on all illiterate adults, especially on women (Bulut, 2015).
- 2018 Literacy Campaign: Within the scope of the campaign, it was aimed to enable illiterate citizens to attend 1st Stage Adult Literacy Courses and become literate, and to lead them to 2nd Stage Adult Literacy Courses offering education at elementary level.

Due to these studies, the literacy rate, which was 10% during the foundation of the Republic, was 67.2% in 1980, 80% in 1990, 86.5% in 2000, and 88.1% in 2006. According to the 2019 data, literacy across Turkey (for those aged 15 and older) has reached 96,7% (Turkish Statistical Institute [TUIK], 2020).

In the past, individuals who could read and write their names and have their signature were described as literate. However, with the developing technology and needs, these limited criteria started to change. In 1951, UNESCO defined literate as "individual who has the ability to read and write an ordinary and simple statement in daily life upon understanding it". Later, in 1960s, the definition of literate was made as "individual who has the level of knowledge as someone with minimum 5-year of education, and who can easily read daily newspapers" (Gunes, 1992).

Methodology

In order to reveal the importance of literacy in adult education within the context of literacy campaign, phenomenological design as one of the qualitative research methods was utilized in the study. Phenomenological studies are aimed at phenomena about which knowledge is obtained but cannot be mastered in detail. It is utilized to research phenomena which sound familiar but cannot be internalized completely (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011).

The study group comprised of 24 adults attending courses in the city center of Bartın and at surrounding schools within the context of the literacy campaign started in 2018. The participants included 22 females and 2 males, and the average age was 60.

The data of the research was collected through an interview form. Following the literature review, the form was designed and then finalized upon receiving opinions of experts in the fields of Education and Turkish language. The form included personal questions as well as six open-ended key questions:

- Why did you want to participate in the literacy campaign?
- How does your illiteracy make you feel in daily life? What kind of obstacles or difficult situations do you face?
- What has prevented you from learning how to read and write so far? Why?
- What kind of advantages do you think literacy will provide? How?
- What is the first thing you would like to do after getting qualified in literacy?
- What do you think about the literacy campaign? How should literacy be taught to adults like you?

Participants were informed beforehand, and interviews were recorded as audio. In the interviews including six semi-structured questions, each participant was interviewed for 20 minutes on average.

The data obtained from interview forms in the study were examined through content analysis, and uploaded to electronic environment. Content analysis is defined as a systematic and repeatable technique in which several words of a text are paraphrased with smaller content categories through coding based on certain rules (Buyukozturk et al., 2016). For each question in the form, opinions obtained from the adults participating in the literacy campaign were investigated one by one. Expressions and opinions that were inadequate or meaningless were considered invalid. The data evaluated were coded as K1, K2, K3, ..., K24. The codes were created based on concepts from the research data instead of a premade code list, and themes were determined via computer-aided qualitative data analysis packaged software (QSR NVivo 8). Relevant comments of participants were presented exactly as stated.

Findings

The findings regarding the data obtained from the interview forms of participants are presented in this section.

Findings Regarding the Reasons for Participating in the Literacy Campaign

“Participants’ responses to the question of “Why did you want to participate in the literacy campaign?” were gathered under three main themes, which were “Independence, Basic Competence and Enthusiasm, Curiosity to Learn”. Thematic presentation of this question is given in Figure 1.

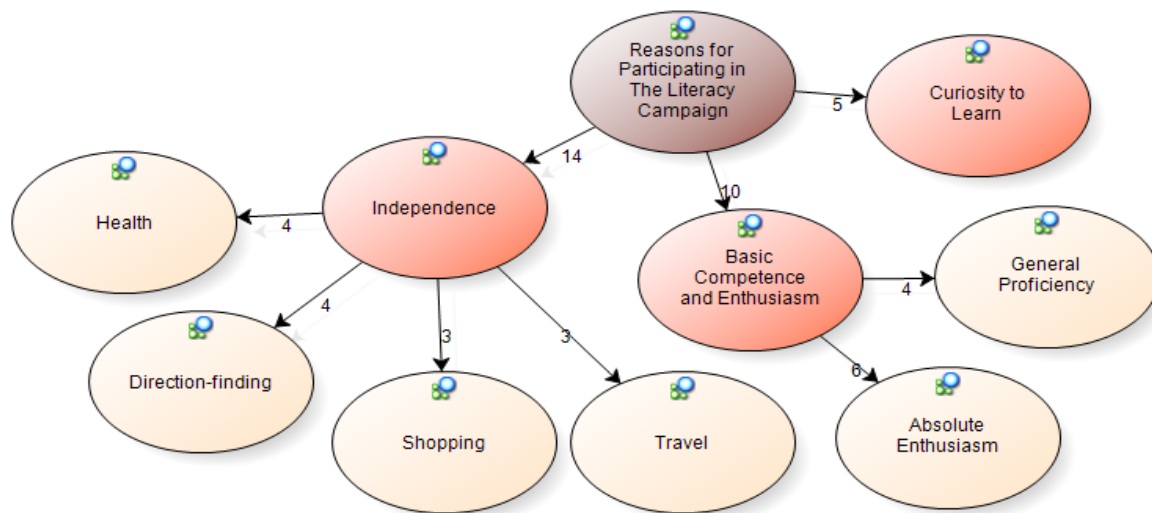


Figure 1. Reasons for participating in the literacy campaign

When Figure 1 is examined, it is observed that Independence theme has the highest number of opinions while Curiosity to Learn has the smallest number of opinions. Independence has six sub-themes as *Health*, *Direction-finding*, *Shopping* and *Travel*. Participant opinions in these sub-themes are as follows:

K10: “We have difficulty while waiting in the queue at the hospital. We can’t recognize the doctor’s name. To overcome these because I cannot go alone and wait for my turn; I need someone in any case, and they are not available all the time so it doesn’t work that way.” (Health)

K16: “My biggest dream is to travel alone so I want to learn how to read and write.” (Travel)

K22: “I have great difficulty while going somewhere. As I cannot read the signs, I cannot find where I am going on my own. When I ask someone, I sometimes receive unkind responses.” (Direction-finding)

K23: “I have difficulty even when I buy something in daily life. As I cannot read, I have to buy only by looking at the appearance or I need someone with me. I cannot make calculations; I cannot read the prices. I need someone to help me, otherwise, I often make mistakes.” (Shopping)

Under Basic Competence and Enthusiasm, there are subthemes of *Absolute Enthusiasm* and *General Proficiency*. Comments for these subthemes are as follows:

K19: “I want to read and write my name and surname, and I want to sign.” (General Proficiency)

K20: “I participated in the campaign as I want to learn how to read and write.” (Absolute Enthusiasm)

As it is observed in the comments, some of the participants attended the literacy campaign for basic proficiency to write their names or sign. For the last theme “Curiosity to Learn”, the participants indicated in their responses that they participated in the campaign only because they were curious about reading and writing.

Findings Regarding Daily Life Difficulties Caused by Illiteracy

The data obtained for the question “How does your illiteracy make you feel in daily life? What kind of obstacles or difficult situations do you face?” are presented in Figure 2:

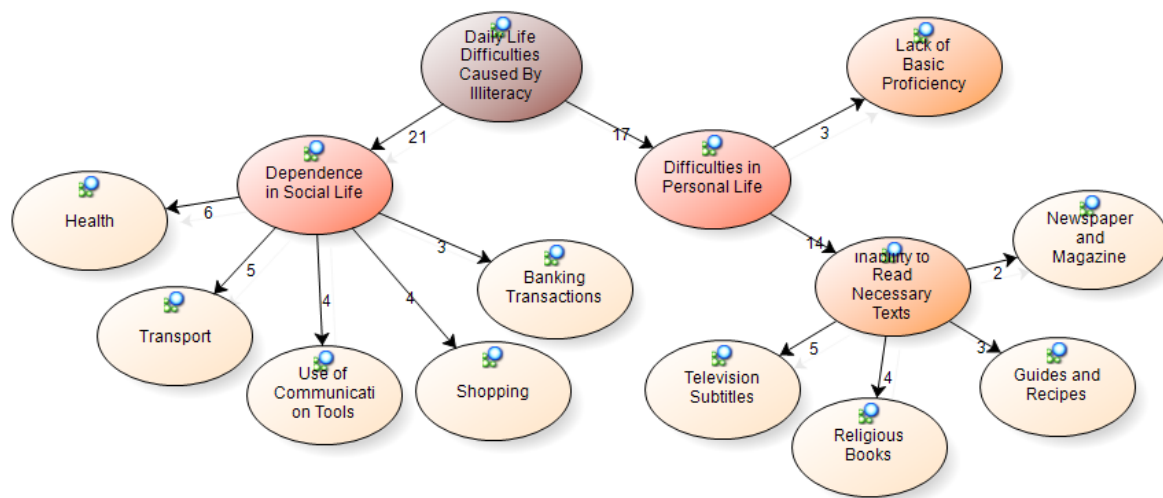


Figure 2. Daily life difficulties caused by illiteracy

When Figure 2 is examined, difficulties in daily life based on illiteracy are presented in two main themes as “Dependence in Social Life” and “Difficulties in Personal Life”. “Dependence in Social Life” theme involves the difficulties encountered in public places, and it is divided into subthemes as *Health*, *Transport*, *Use of Communication Tools*, *Shopping* and *Banking Transactions*. Comments regarding these subthemes mostly belonged to *Health*.

K3: “I have to be accompanied by someone while going somewhere. I cannot withdraw money from the ATM on my own. My husband does all the shopping.” (*Banking Transactions-Shopping*)

K5: “We go to the doctor but we do not know when it is our turn. If we ask someone, they scold us.” (*Health*)

K13: “I have great difficulty when I want to call someone because I cannot read. I need to ask someone for help. Also, it is very difficult for me to go somewhere.” (*Transport-Use of Communication Tools*)

K20: “I cannot feel comfortable. I cannot do anything I want to do because I have difficulty as I cannot read. I cannot go somewhere I want to go; I cannot do shopping. If I want to transfer money to my daughter, I need someone.” (*Transport-Shopping-Banking Transaction*)

“Difficulties in Personal Life” is related to more basic needs, and it is divided into two subthemes as *Inability to Read Necessary Texts* and *Lack of Basic Proficiency*. Some comments regarding *Inability to Read Necessary Texts* are as follows:

K10: “You cannot read the newspaper; you cannot read the sliding texts on television.”

K18: “I cannot read the sliding texts while watching TV. There are some books about our religion, and I cannot read them.”

Lack of Basic Proficiency involves inability to write names-surnames and to sign. Some relevant comments are given below:

K3: “I cannot sign, and I cannot get anything done on my own.”

K21: “You get sick; even at the pharmacy, they ask you to sign. You cannot go and buy anything alone, and everybody has their own errands to run. You always have to wait for others.”

When the responses to the question “How does your illiteracy make you feel in daily life?” are examined, it is observed that they generally feel *bad, unhappy, uneasy* and *dependent*. Some examples are as follows:

K11: “I feel bad, unhappy because I cannot stand on my own feet.”

K15: “I feel very bad because I cannot do anything on my own. I cannot go to the doctor; I cannot get on the bus; I cannot do shopping; I cannot recognize the numbers...”

Findings Regarding Barriers to Literacy Learning

The data obtained considering the question “What has prevented you from learning how to read and write so far? Why?” are presented in Figure 3.

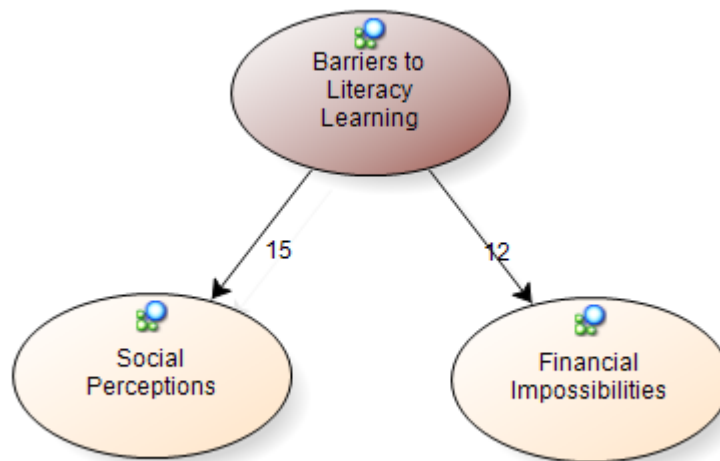


Figure 3. Barriers to Literacy Learning

When Figure 3 is examined, the barriers to literacy learning as stated by the participants are categorized into two main themes as “Financial Impossibilities” and “Social Perceptions”.

Participants indicated the greatest barrier to their literacy as *Financial Impossibilities*. Some related comments are as follows:

K2: “We were 7 siblings. My father was poor so he could not have the chance to send us to school.”

K14: “We had struggle for life. We were orphaned at a very early age. When my dad passed away, we had to earn a living for the family so we could not go to school.”

As for *Social Perceptions*, the participants stated that they could not attend school because of the conception that girls should not be educated. Relevant comments are given below.

K22: “They said that girls do not study, their job is their home, so they never enrolled me for school.”

K23: “My father said that boys go to school, they bring home the bread, girls do not.”

Findings Regarding Advantages of Being Literate

The data obtained for the question “What kind of advantages do you think literacy will provide? How?” are presented in Figure 4.

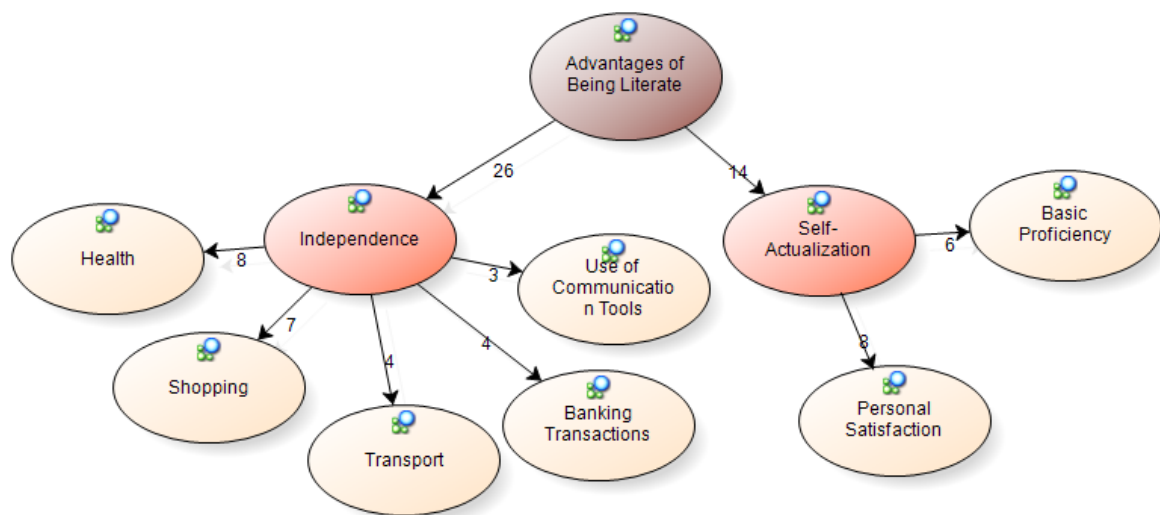


Figure 4. Advantages of being literate

When Figure 4 is examined, it is observed that the advantages of literacy are themed as “Independence” and “Self-actualization”. Independence is divided into subthemes as *Health*, *Shopping*, *Transport*, *Banking Transactions* and *Use of Communication Tools*. Participants expressed that independence would provide advantages mostly for *Health* and *Shopping*. Some examples are stated below:

K13: “I will act as I wish. I will be able to use my phone and go shopping.” (*Shopping*)

K11: “I want to go to the doctor on my own. I want to get an appointment and wait for my turn alone because I do not want to live dependently.” (*Health*)

K12: “We will know the addresses and go somewhere as we wish. Just as a blind who cannot see, we are the same because we do not know where we are going. As a kid learns how to walk and rejoice, we are like that.” (*Transport*)

K15: “My kids and grandkids live far away from me. I can hear their voice as long as they call me. I cannot call them as I am illiterate. Now, I will talk to them whenever I want. I can meet my own needs in daily life. I will not get lost when I go somewhere.” (*Use of Communication Tools*)

K20: “I will handle my banking transactions on my own.” (*Banking Transactions*)

“Self-actualization” is divided into subthemes of *Personal Satisfaction* and *Basic Proficiency*. Relevant comments are given below.

K1: “When I go somewhere, I cannot write my name, I cannot sign. It will enable me to do these.”

K7: “I will stand on my own feet.”

Findings Regarding the First Things to Do after Being Literate

The data obtained for the question “What is the first thing you would like to do after getting qualified in literacy?” are stated below.

Some of the participants’ wishes to do after learning literacy are “travelling alone, writing a letter, attending a course for Quran and reading it in Turkish”. In addition, there are varying responses like “reading books/newspapers/magazines, using communication tools independently, getting a driver’s license, handling banking transactions independently, shopping alone and signing”. Some statements supporting these data are as follows:

K2: “I will write a letter to my grandkids.”

K5: “I will get the driving license; I want to drive a car.”

K13: “I want to use my phone easily.”

Findings Regarding Participants’ Evaluation of the Literacy Campaign

The data obtained for the question “What do you think about the literacy campaign? How should literacy be taught to adults like you?” are presented in Figure 5.

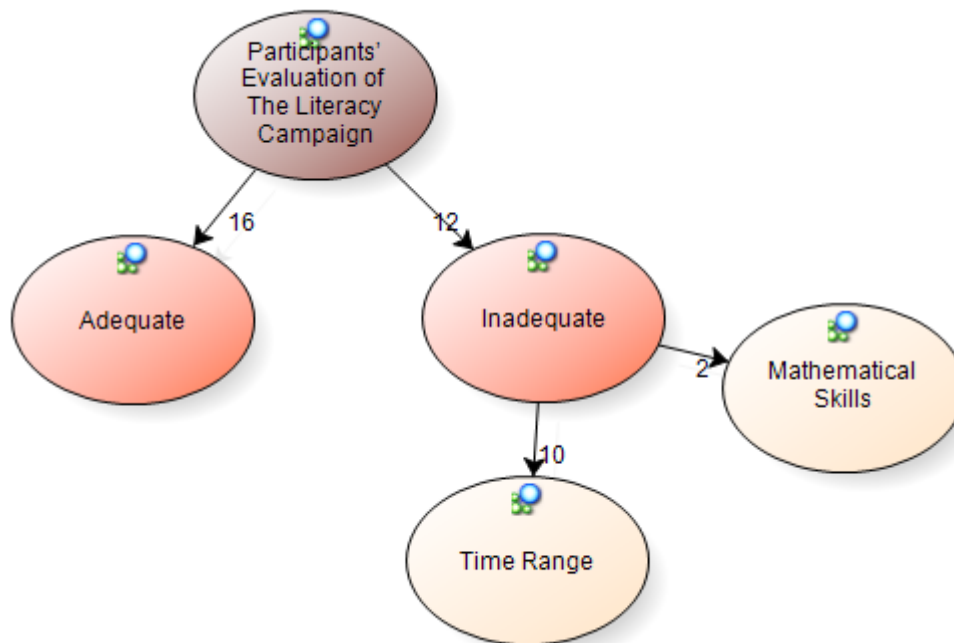


Figure 5. Participants’ evaluation of the literacy campaign

Participants attending the literacy campaign mostly found it adequate and useful. Some of their opinions are as follows:

K1: “I find it quite helpful. This education is enough for us.”

K6: “I find it adequate. We do not need anything else.”

K7: "I find it good and adequate."

K12: "We thank our government. I find it quite useful and adequate. I am very content with it."

K16: "I think the course is adequate and nice. I am very pleased."

Participants who found the literacy campaign inadequate stated that the duration was short, and it was necessary to be taught basic math skills. Some comments are given below.

K3: "I would learn better if it lasted longer. The duration is too short."

K10: "I find the course very good but it is a bit inadequate because we need math courses, as well."

K15: "I wish the duration would be longer. As we get older, we forget very quickly. In that way, we would not forget."

K22: "It may be better if it lasts longer because we have difficulty in learning and forget quickly."

Discussion and Recommendations

In this study, it was identified how adults perceive the 2018 literacy campaign and why they could not be literate until then. When the gender of participants in the campaign was taken into consideration in the study, it was observed that the number of females were higher. This situation can be explained with the effect of social gender roles and perceptions. Based on the social roles assigned, women as the disadvantaged group are led to household chores instead of going to school and learning how to read and write. The right to education, which is a basic need, has not been considered as a necessity for women, and their rights have been revoked. They have been left to live being dependent on someone. In the study by Alica (2015), strengthening and literacy learning of women were emphasized, and it was determined that women got strengthened psychologically and cognitively when they united during their education, performed an intellectual activity with others who had similar problems, and shared their experiences.

The study revealed that women participated in the campaign mostly because of problems they encountered in their daily lives. Being illiterate makes a person dependent on others and disadvantaged in utilizing health services, finding directions, shopping and travelling. For instance, an illiterate person cannot go to the hospital alone and recognize when it is their turn. Besides, while travelling, they cannot identify the bus to get on or they go in the wrong way and get lost as they cannot read the signs. These situations affect individuals' psychology adversely, and the disadvantaged person feel themselves inadequate.

Participants explained the daily life difficulties caused by illiteracy as "Dependence in Social Life" and "Difficulties in Personal Life". Dependence in social life stands for that individuals cannot behave on their own in public places while maintaining daily life. Some errands, which are actually considered ordinary for a literate person, such as carrying out banking transactions, shopping, using communication tools, and utilizing health and transport services mean dependence for an illiterate person. According to Miser (2002), as similar to the research results, the literacy level that enables an individual to be functional in life includes the ability to fill in tax forms on the computer, use ATM machines, send emails

over the computer or cellphones, and utilize electronic household appliances. As for difficulties in personal life, participants indicated that problems occurred since they could not read or write. They stated that they could not read the texts that would be helpful for them. Besides, they could not write texts or sign when necessary. These cases caused problems for individuals in their daily lives. Moreover, illiterate participants stated that they felt bad, unhappy, inadequate and uneasy due to the problems they faced in daily life.

Participants expressed two reasons for remaining illiterate until then. These were financial impossibilities and social gender perception. It was observed that most of the participants were members of multi-child families. In these families with a high number of kids, boys' education is given priority. Since there is a social perception as "boys bring home the bread", boys are given their right to education. Similar results were obtained in the study conducted by Gokce (2016), and a connection was revealed between the reasons for women's nonattendance in literacy courses and their culture and social life. The reasons they indicated are based on the facts that education is defined as a masculine field in their culture, and women have a limited living space where they cannot often encounter literacy practices.

As for advantages that literacy would provide, participants asserted independence and self-actualization. Considering the difficulties encountered in daily life, they believed that they would get independent and free when they became literate as they would be able to run their errands as shopping, using communication tools, performing banking transactions, and utilizing health or transport services. They would savor living independently by doing their stuff on their own. Likewise, they would gain self-confidence actualizing themselves.

Regarding the things to do when they became literate, varying responses were received. Some would like to feel independent, act individually, and travel as they wished. Some wanted to learn how to write and send letters to their beloved ones to share their feelings. Besides, there were participants who would like to realize their dreams. For example, there were aunts who wanted to get a driver's license. Moreover, some participants desired only personal satisfaction by learning how to read and write. Similar results were also obtained in a study conducted by Babayigit and Gokce (2018). In the study, it was indicated that adults attended literacy courses to run daily errands, read Quran, book or newspaper, handle stuff at the hospital, and not to get conned.

In addition, it was indicated in the study that basic math skills should be taught within the context of the literacy campaign. The adults expressed that they had great difficulty while shopping because they could not recognize numbers. Consequently, they could not make calculations and complete their shopping on their own. It reveals the importance of the study that these comments are taken into consideration while curricula of literacy campaigns are being developed. Yildiz (2010) conducted a study on math skills of adults attending the first stage literacy courses. Considering the research findings, more than 90% of the attendants could not perform the four operations, which is also parallel to the findings of this study.

The interviews held within the scope of the research revealed that most of the attendants in the literacy campaign were females. Social gender roles and perceptions had an impact on this situation. Seminars and awareness-raising programs should be organized today in order for these aggrieved women not to experience inequality of opportunity in education also in the future. Furthermore, it is observed that the participants mostly

encounter difficulties in daily life. If adults are scolded when they need to ask questions or request help in their social life as they are illiterate, it makes their lives much harder. Therefore, besides literacy campaigns, public service ads and informative campaigns can also be conducted to increase toleration in the society.

Notes

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