

Prospective Teachers' Reasons: The Importance of Reading a Book

Öğretmen Adaylarının Kitap Okumanın Önemine İlişkin Gerekçeleri

Birsen DOĞAN*

Abstract

Prospective teachers play an important role in establishing the literacy proficiency of future generations. However, this situation also suggests such points as types of prospective teachers' attitudes towards reading and the reason of their reading. In order to investigate these points, this study was designed descriptively. An open-ended questionnaire was used to collect the data through 132 prospective teachers from Instructor Training Program of Education Faculty at Pamukkale University. The data was analyzed based on the rules of content analysis. The results about prospective teachers' views on the importance of reading were categorized into three themes as academic, social and personal reasons and each theme was presented by frequencies and percentages of participants' responses. The findings of this descriptive study indicated that prospective teachers viewed reading as important for academic, social and personal reasons. The academic theme is divided into three sub-themes as acquiring the knowledge, improving language skills and developing critical and creative thinking skills. The social theme is comprised of five sub-themes as appreciating alternative perspectives, participating in society, recognizing and understanding different peoples and cultures, learning about current events, establishing empathy. Finally, the personal theme is divided into five sub-themes as developing personal identity, organizing one's life, relaxation, experiencing enjoyment, happiness.

Keywords: Literacy, Reading attitude, Literacy behavior, Reading habits, Prospective teachers

Öz

Bugünün aday öğretmenleri, gelecek nesillerin işlevsel okuryazar olarak yetiştirilmesinde önemli bir sorumluluğa sahiptir. Ancak bu durum öğretmen adaylarının okumaya ilişkin nasıl bir tutuma sahip oldukları ile beraber, hangi gerekçelere dayalı olarak okudukları sorusunu da akla getirmektedir. Bu araştırma, sözü edilen soruya yanıt oluşturabilmek amacıyla var olan durumun betimlenmesine dayalı olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın verileri, Pamukkale Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Pedagojik Formasyon grubunda öğrenim gören 132 öğretmen adayından, araştırmacı tarafından hazırlanmış anket formu aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler,

* Assoc. Prof. Dr. Birsen DOĞAN, Pamukkale University, Education Faculty, Kınıklı/Denizli, Turkey.
(e-mail: bdogan@pamukkale.edu.tr)

içerik analizi tekniğiyle çözümlenmiştir. Araştırmada öğretmen adaylarının kitap okumanın önemine ilişkin gerekçeleri sırasıyla, akademik, sosyal ve kişisel olmak üzere üç tema şeklinde ortaya çıkmıştır. Akademik olarak adlandırılan tema; bilgiyi elde etme, dil becerilerini geliştirme, eleştirel ve yaratıcı düşünme becerilerini geliştirme olmak üzere üç alt temadan oluşmaktadır. Sosyal olarak adlandırılan ikinci tema; farklı bakış açılarını takdir etme, toplumda yer alma, farklı insanları/kültürleri tanıma ve anlama, güncel olayların farkında olma, empati kurma şeklinde beş alt temadan oluşmaktadır. Kişisel olarak adlandırılan son tema ise, kişiliğimi geliştirme, yaşamımı düzenleme, rahatlama, keyif alma ve mutlu olma şeklinde beş alt tema olarak ifade edilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Okuryazarlık, Okuma tutumu, Okuryazar davranışı, Okuma alışkanlığı, Öğretmen adayı

Introduction

Reading, which is important throughout the lifespan, contributes to growth and development by helping individuals to understand their personal and social worlds (Freire, 1983). Reading not only enhances personal, spiritual and mental development but also provides entertainment, inspiration and knowledge of how we view ourselves and others (Du Toit, 2001, p. 6).

Lone (2011) argues that regular reading shapes the intellect, refines emotions and prepares individuals for social, cultural and political life. It affects individual development and social progress. Staiger and Caser suggest that in addition to providing economic benefits, literacy significantly and positively influences the quality of individuals' intellectual and spiritual lives while enabling all segments of the population to participate in their countries' development (1983, cited in Du Toit, 2001, p. 5).

Cunningham and Stanovich (1988, cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006: p. 9) stating that "reading not only influences reading achievement but also increases general knowledge". Additionally, Krashen (1993) argues that people who read frequently possess stronger overall literacy skills, such as larger vocabularies, improved writing ability, better spelling and increased knowledge of grammatical and punctuation rules. Majid and Tan (2007) found that children needed reading to develop language skills and to pass tests successfully. Furthermore, Siegel, Borasi and Fonzi (1998) claim that reading significantly contributes to mathematics understanding. Similarly, Gallik (1999) found that students' academic success was associated with their reading skills.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) note that reading is a social practice that is important for communication, for participating in life outside of one's immediate circle and for understanding the world (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Baker and Wigfield (1999), claim that two primary reasons for reading are to share what you learn with friends and family members and to meet others' expectations and fit into a group (1991, cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006: p. 10). Reading enhances enthusiasm and the development of self-confidence (Oakey, 2007; Guthrie and Alvermann, 1999, cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006: p. 9).

However as emphasized by Yılmaz (2009) nowadays literacy without mental enthusiasm is having no meaning. The significant point for an individual is being a literate who is conscious and functional based on critical reading. Critical reading and thinking are conditioned to intellectual development (Kuzu, 2013). It is seen that reading activating critical thinking is an activity which will be lifelong used by an individual (Sever, 1998).

Studies indicate that many individuals in Turkey seldom read books (Karaşahin, 2009; Kuş and Türkyılmaz, 2010; Odabaş, Odabaş and Polat, 2008; Oğuz, Yıldız and Hayırsever, 2009; Yılmaz, 1995; Urgan, 2008). Sağlamtuñç (1990) and Yılmaz (1995) developed a classification of book readers based on the criteria of the frequencies of book reading suggested by American Library Association (ALA, 1978). According to this classification, a low frequency reader reads 1 to 5 books per year, a low-middle frequency reader reads 6 to 11 books per year, a high-middle frequency reader reads 12 to 20 books per year, and a high frequency reader reads more than 21 books per year. A reading map based on a study of 6,212 individuals in 26 provinces in Turkey reveals that individuals read an average of 7.2 books annually (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010). This result indicates that individuals in Turkey read books at low level.

In addition to this, Turkey ranked 28th out of 35 countries in 2001 based on international rankings of reading skill of Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), (Ministry of National Education, 2003). Similar to this study, the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicated that Turkey ranked 34th out of 41 countries in 2003; 37th out of 56 countries in 2006; 41st out of 65 countries in 2009 (Çelen, Çelik and Seferođlu, 2011) and 42nd out of 65 countries in 2012 (<http://pisa.meb.gov.tr/>). The results also show that besides low levels of book reading, the Turkish population does not exhibit adequate reading skills. This situation focuses attention on teachers, who play an important role in developing reading skills and habits.

Teachers have a responsibility to encourage students to read. Cecile (2010) argues that teachers should read to develop their careers, maintain their knowledge of children's literature and encourage their students to read by acting as role models. A teacher's interest in reading affects students' motivation to read and their subsequent rate of reading (Applegate and Applegate, 2004). Wiesendanger, Braun and Perry (2009), who analyzed teacher, student and program characteristics in reading classes, found that teachers were significant role models. Students who shared their love of reading with their teachers in the classroom also tended to enjoy reading (Nathanson, Pruslow and Levitt, 2008). Von Sprecken and Krashen (1998) found that teachers who often make reading activities in their classrooms had students who read frequently. Yılmaz (2009) claims that teachers have crucial role in improving students' reading habits in such societies having parents with low level of consciousness and sensitivity about reading a book. Our examination of teachers' reading habits, reported in *Turkey's*

Reading Habits Report Card, found that 33.4% of teachers regularly read books, 63.3% occasionally read books and 3.3% never read books (Children's Foundation Children's Literature School, 2006).

Prospective teachers' reading interests and habits are crucial if they are to serve as role models for children and adolescents (Saracaloğlu, Bozkurt and Serin, 2003, p. 150). Therefore, identifying the reasons that prospective teachers read and understanding their views on reading can contribute to improvements in reading programs.

This study was done to find out prospective teachers' reasons of reading a book. Therefore, it was aimed to answer the questions: "Why prospective teachers read a book?" and "How the reasons of prospective teachers' reading a book can be categorized?"

Methods

Research Design

This descriptive study was done based on a qualitative methodology. Descriptive studies examine the characteristics of the research focus (Borg, Gall and Gall, 1993). In this study, data were collected using a questionnaire that included both closed- and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were used to obtain demographic information, while an open-ended question was used to identify teachers' thoughts regarding the importance of reading. The analysis classified participant responses into three categories and calculated frequency and percentage values for the different categories and subcategories of response.

Participants

Students who were enrolled at Pamukkale University in the Faculty of Education Instructor Training Program during the fall semester of the 2010 to 2011 academic year participated in the study. Students in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences who wish to teach middle school apply to the Instructor Training Program in their 3rd or 4th year. The program accepted 833 students (433 third-year students and 380 fourth-year students) with grade point averages above 2.50, and 132 of these prospective teachers (97 females and 35 males) volunteered to participate in the research. The average age of participants in the sample was 21. The demographic information of the participants is given in the Table I.

Table 1. The Distribution of Participants Based on Major and Gender

Major	Women		Men		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Chemistry	11	11.34	1	2.86	12	9.10
Physics	12	12.38	4	11.43	16	12.12
Biology	13	13.40	2	5.71	15	11.36
Mathematics	11	11.34	5	14.29	16	12.12
Sociology	14	14.43	5	14.29	19	14.39
Philosophy	13	13.40	4	11.43	17	12.88
Turkish language and literature	13	13.40	6	17.14	19	14.39
History	10	10.31	8	22.85	18	13.64
Total Summary	97	100.00	35	100.00	132	100.00

Data Collection Tool

The data were collected using a questionnaire designed by the investigator that consisted of two sections. Questions in the first section provided demographic information, such as the participant's age, genders and major. In the second section, participants were asked to complete an open-ended statement ("Reading a book is important to me because...") to obtain their opinions regarding the importance of reading. Four experts were consulted during the preparation of the questionnaire. Two specialists (a program development specialist with a doctorate in educational programs and instruction and 19 years of experience and a science training specialist with a doctorate in educational science and certificates in quantitative and qualitative research methods) reviewed the questionnaire content. Two Turkish language instructors in the Faculty of Education with graduate degrees in Turkish language and literature reviewed the language used in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was used in the present study was tested in a pilot study with 35 participants.

Data Collection

The data were collected during the fall semester of the 2010 to 2011 academic year. All study participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously. They were informed that participating in the research would not affect their grades or their ability to graduate and that the collected data would not be provided to anyone outside the study. Participants were asked to respond truthfully to ensure the validity of the research. The researcher distributed questionnaires to participants in the classroom and collected the questionnaires after participants had sufficient time to express their thoughts.

Data Analysis

After the data were collected, the questionnaires were numbered from one to 132, and participants' demographic information was analyzed using the SPSS program. Demographic data were entered into the program sequentially, and the results were analyzed to obtain frequency and percentage values. Participant responses to the second part of the questionnaire were transferred to a data form, and 504 separate responses were obtained. The number of responses was greater than the number of participants because each participant provided more than one response. Participant responses were analyzed using a content analysis technique that involved the separation, inclusion and interpretation of recurring topics, problems and concepts (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), which enables the researcher to discover previously unknown themes and dimensions (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006). The data were coded into categories such as knowledge acquisition and the development of alternative perspectives. Inductive analysis was used to identify themes by evaluating recurring codes (Stake, 1995), and three different themes of development (academic, social and personal) emerged. To establish the reliability of this study, a program development specialist from the Faculty of Education at Pamukkale University recoded all of the data under the themes. Reliability was calculated using the formula " $Reliability = \frac{Agreements}{Agreements + Disagreements}$ ", with a 92% agreement level adopted as the criterion for satisfactory reliability (Miles and Huberman, 1994). After differences in coding were resolved, reliability increased to 96%. Frequency counts for the codes and themes were tabulated. The following section of the paper presents the tabulated data, which were categorized based on the identified themes, followed by individual responses that directly support the categorization and accurately reflect participants' opinions and experiences (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006). Quotations from participant responses are followed by the questionnaire number associated with a particular participant (in parentheses). The final section of the paper discusses and explains the study findings.

Results

Participants' Opinions Regarding the Importance of Reading

The analysis classified prospective teachers' thoughts regarding the importance of reading into three categories: academic reasons, social reasons and personal reasons. In particular, 37.50% of the participants stated that they read for academic reasons, 32.54% stated that they read for social reasons and 29.96% stated that they read for personal reasons (see Table II). It should be noted that each category may have a reason of one participant as some of them mentioned more than one reason. In other words, the number of participants' responses may be greater than the original number of participants in the table.

Table 2. Frequencies and Percentages for the Categories of Reasons Provided by Participants

	Women		Men		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Academic Reasons						
Acquiring knowledge	47	9.33	21	4.16	68	13.49
Improving language skills	54	10.72	19	3.77	73	14.48
Developing critical and creative thinking skills	37	7.34	11	2.18	48	9.52
Subtotals	138	27.39	51	10.11	189	37.50
Social Reasons						
Appreciating alternative perspectives	38	7.54	17	3.37	55	10.91
Participating in society	40	7.93	11	2.19	51	10.12
Recognizing and understanding different peoples and cultures	26	5.16	7	1.39	33	6.55
Learning about current events	12	2.38	1	0.20	13	2.58
Establishing empathy	9	1.79	3	0.59	12	2.38
Subtotals	125	24.80	39	7.74	164	32.54
Personal Reasons						
Developing personal identity	44	8.73	22	4.37	66	13.10
Organizing one's life	21	4.16	9	1.79	30	5.95
Relaxation	20	3.97	6	1.19	26	5.16
Experiencing enjoyment	16	3.17	6	1.19	22	4.36
Happiness	7	1.39	0	0	7	1.39
Subtotals	108	21.42	43	8.54	151	29.96
Totals	371	73.61	133	26.39	504	100.00

Academic Reasons

The first subcategory within the category of academic reasons was "learning and gaining knowledge", which was based on participant responses such as "Reading a book is a way to learn", "Gaining knowledge is required for effective action", "People are able to talk about, understand and interpret what that they know about", and "In short, a book is a vehicle for knowledge" (23).

The second subcategory was "improving language skills", which included the ability to speak fluently and eloquently, understand what was read, expand vocabulary and use language rules correctly. Speaking accurately included language skills such as correct pronunciation appropriate word choices and producing grammatical

sentences. Eloquent speaking included fluent and expressive speech that follows speaking conventions. Like a poem, painting or musical piece, eloquent speech can be considered a product of human intellect and enjoyment (Başaran and Erdem, 2009). Some participants expressed the importance of reading in the following statements: *"Because I learned Turkish later in life, sometimes I did not speak well. I would get stuck. But this problem disappeared after I started reading books. For this reason, I will never stop reading"* (91); *"In addition, reading not only allows us to gain knowledge, but it also enables us to effectively convey this knowledge to others. In other words, a literate person's speech is both fluent and pleasing"*(41). Other participants identified the need for an extensive vocabulary: *"I believe that people's interactions are largely mediated through speech and that a limited vocabulary is insufficient for communication. Thus, I read to enhance the eloquence and effectiveness of my speech"*(47). In addition, some participants emphasized the importance of understanding what is read: *"Reading enables us to learn to read more quickly, to understand a topic more quickly and to use language more appropriately"* (27). One participant emphasized the importance of accurately following grammatical rules: *"I realized that I was able to order the words in a sentence more appropriately"* (74).

The third subcategory was "developing critical and creative thinking skills". Critical thinking enables us to criticize, establish cause and affect relationships and interpret phenomena. Participants' statements regarding this subcategory associated reading with the development of thinking: *"Reading is necessary to learn about what interests us and to analyze events based on cause and effect relationships"*(69). In addition, participants stated: *"Reading develops my imagination. I imagine myself in the story and am able to put myself in the place of one or all of the characters in the book"* (60); and *"Unlike watching TV, where everything is presented to me, I use my imagination to experience the story when reading a book"* (105).

Social Reasons

Some participants stated that they read not only to benefit themselves but also to benefit others and better participate in society. The first subcategory was "appreciating alternative perspectives". This subcategory is related to the idea that reading modifies people's perspectives and influences their worldviews, which is reflected in the following statements: *"Reading a book broadens my perspectives by allowing me to make better decisions and look at situations from many angles"* (7) and *"I enjoy reading because I learn about new topics and am able to change my perspective"* (123).

The second subcategory was "participating in society"; in which reading was viewed as a way to interact with other members of society by sharing what was read: *"Reading is a way for me to join the social life around me. It helps me overcome my introversion and communicate with other people"* (110). Some participants also stated: *"Reading is important when conversing with other people"* (61); and *"I like conversing with my friends about the books we read"* (72).

The third subcategory was "recognizing and understanding different peoples and cultures". Participants stated that respecting others was an important value that held societies together and promoted peace and harmony: *"Reading opens doors to different worlds"* (49); *"Not everyone has the chance to live in different cultures; however, a person can learn about different cultures by reading books about them. Reading also broadens our little world and shows that there is more to the world than just our experience"* (50).

The fourth subcategory was "learning about current events", which related to knowledge of daily events and understanding the world: *"Newspapers, magazines, journals and books help us become aware of the world"* (131); and *"Reading allows us to be informed about daily cultural, social and political events"* (132).

"Establishing empathy" was the final subcategory: *"Reading provides one with the ability to have empathy. For example, when we read about a hero in a book, we try to put ourselves in his/her place. This is important because it allows us to understand the people in our daily lives"* (32); and *"By putting myself in the place of the heroic characters in a book, I am able to live as those characters. By trying to understand the feelings of these characters, I develop empathy. Later, by applying this knowledge to my daily life, I am able to improve my interactions with people"* (81).

Personal Reasons

The first subcategory was "developing personal identity", which included discovering oneself, acquiring self-confidence and self-respect, appreciating personal idiosyncrasies and developing one's personality: *"As I learn about different things when reading, I discover myself. I learn about what interests me, either as a child or as an adult. Therefore, reading introduces me to myself. I read not because I want to learn about different things but to learn about myself. I can see my weaknesses, and I am able to smooth out my rough edges and soften my character when necessary, like a sculptor"* (45). Emphasizing how reading can enhance a sense of security, another participant stated: *"Reading is the basis for gaining self-confidence"* (94). Other participants stated: *"I feel different from others when I read"* (2); and *"I read because I consider reading to be fundamental for understanding my own character"* (83).

The second subcategory was related to "organizing one's life", the idea that reading was essential for living our lives and enhancing the standard of living: *"It is necessary to read newspapers, magazines or at least basic signboards. To me, reading is a necessity, like water, food and air"* (36) and *"Every book that I read expands my knowledge base and enhances my lifestyle"* (34).

The third subcategory was "relaxation": *"When I read, all of my day-to-day problems disappear"* (18); *"I become so immersed in a book sometimes that I do not want to let go of it. It is as if I lose all of my troubles while I'm reading"* (60); and *"This way, I feel relaxed, and the thoughts that bother me depart"* (48).

The fourth subcategory was "experiencing enjoyment": "It is so pleasant to lose myself in the mystery of a book" (79); "In this age of technology, we are able to acquire massive amounts of information from the Internet. However, none of the ways in which the internet can provide knowledge equals the pleasure obtained from the knowledge that comes from reading a book" (100).

The final subcategory was "happiness": "I'm happy every time I learn something new from a book and am able to use this knowledge in my life" (76); and "I feel better when I read. Happiness fills me, and I feel as if I have accomplished something very important" (89).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored prospective teachers' reasons for regarding reading as important and found that participants' reasons could be categorized as academic, social and personal. These categories indicate the attitudes comprising of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components. Present-day society needs individuals who are critical thinkers, creative, problem solvers, investigators and interrogators. Bringing up an individual requires educating equipped teachers. The standards of teachers include field knowledge, general culture knowledge and professional knowledge. As mentioned by prospective teachers, academic, social and personal contribution of reading has a direct relation with given standards. Therefore, reading is crucial to be a successful teacher.

An important finding that emerged from the study is that the prospective teachers primarily read for *academic reasons*. They were thus more likely to read to acquire information than for their own *personal* or *social* development. Academic reasons included acquiring knowledge, developing language skills, and developing critical and creative thinking skills. This result is also supported by the results of other studies (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1988 cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Gallik 1999; Krashen, 1993; Majid and Tan, 2007; Siegel, Borasi and Fonzi, 1998).

Prospective teachers also chose to read for social reasons, with reading contributing to developing social perspectives, participating in society, understanding different peoples and cultures, learning about current events and establishing empathy. The results gathered by this study are significant as showing similarity with other studies done in different countries (Baker and Wigfield, 1999; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Meek, 1991 cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Finally, prospective teachers read for personal reasons: to develop a personal identity, organize their lives, relax, and experience enjoyment and happiness. These findings are similar to characteristics identified by Howard (2011) and Oakey (2007) such as imagination, escape, enjoyment, happiness, relaxation and confidence. Prospective teachers mentioned that reading helped them to solve personal problems and understand themselves.

The present study found that prospective teachers regarded reading as important for academic, social and personal reasons. These categories were similar to the categories of educational performance, social and personal reasons identified by Howard (2011), although Howard's research was based on data from focus groups composed of teenagers, whereas the present study employed survey data from prospective teachers.

Encouraging people to read benefits society. In *To Read or Not to Read* (Endowment for the Arts, 2007) and *Literacy Changes Lives* (Dugdale and Clark, 2008), the authors argue that reading is essential for cultural and civic enrichment because good readers are also good citizens. Because employers prefer to hire proficient readers, these readers are more likely to enjoy economic success, happiness and life satisfaction.

The results related to the personal reasons in current study indicated that a few prospective teachers enjoyed reading a book. Prospective teachers should read to become good role models and promote good reading habits. Cremin et al (2008a) found that teachers who were role models for reading had a positive effect on the development of reading skills in students who were unenthusiastic about reading. As Yılmaz (2009) noted, a teacher with exemplary reading habits is more likely to influence students than a teacher who does not read. To foster the enjoyment of reading, educators should follow the example of the United States, Great Britain and Scotland and create "literature circles" in which four to six students discuss the books they read on a regular basis (Allan, Ellis and Pearson, 2005), as well as Internet and face-to-face reading groups. Formerly, literature circles were known as students' book clubs in classrooms but nowadays they are defined as small cooperative discussion groups in which its members selecting to read same novels, poetries or books (Daniels, 2002). It was suggested that literature circles not only help to improve skills of comprehending what is read but also help to enhance motivation and willing of reading (McElvain, 2010). Additionally, literature circles enable individual to gain self deciding skill by the help of discussion of reading, analyzing and selecting a book (Bloom, Lipsett and Yocom, 2002).

Consequently, it was seen that prospective teachers as teachers of future need to gain love of reading and reading skills before they start to help students to gain these. It can be said that such activities as literature circles can help prospective teachers to gain love of reading and so to transfer this to their students.

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EK - 1

Değerli Öğretmen Adayı,

Bu form, öğretmen adaylarının “okumaya yönelik gerekçelerini belirlemek” amacıyla yapılacak bilimsel bir araştırmaya veri toplamak için hazırlanmıştır. Form iki bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölüm, size ait kişisel bilgileri kapsamaktadır. İkinci bölüm ise açık uçlu bir sorudan oluşmaktadır. Bu soruya yanıt olarak, okumanın sizin için neden önemli olduğunun gerekçelerini yazmanız istenmektedir.

Elde edilen veriler bilimsel araştırma amacıyla kullanılacaktır. Sonuçların güvenilirliği sizin vereceğiniz samimi yanıtlara bağlıdır. Katkılarınız için teşekkür ederim.

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Birsen Doğan

I. Bölüm

Kişisel Bilgiler

Yaş:

Sınıf:

Cinsiyetiniz: Kadın () Erkek ()

Program Türü: Normal Öğretim () İkinci Öğretim ()

Fakülte:

Bölüm:

