**Research Article** 

## Assessment of Student – Lecturer Relationship in Public Relations Postgraduate Education in Turkey

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#### Abstract

In this study, it is aimed to analyse the relationship established between lecturers and students who receive postgraduate education in public relations with student perspective and to analyse case studies in order to improve this relationship. The lecturers of the public relations department are obliged to provide their students with expert prescriptions for the sector and business life, facilitate established communication, develop innovative solutions to problems and finally provide them with the knowledge and skills to help them become a practitioner of all processes of public relations as a communication technician. This responsibility can only be achieved by establishing an efficient relationship with the student. In this context, the current situation of the relations of the postgraduate students with the lecturers who have taken courses in public relations in our country has been examined and suggestions have been made in order to improve the relationship process. In research qualitative semi-structured interview method was used to collect data. During the interviews questions asked to students about their relationship with lecturers.

Keywords: Public Relations, Student-Lecturer Relationship, Communication.

Araştırma Makalesi

# Türkiye'de Halkla İlişkiler Lisansüstü Eğitiminde Öğrenci – Öğretim Üyesi İlişkisinin Değerlendirilmesi

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#### Öz

Bu çalışmada öğretim üyeleri ve halkla ilişkiler alanında lisansüstü eğitim alan öğrenciler arasında kurulan ilişkinin öğrenci bakış açısıyla ele alınarak çözümlenmesi ve bu ilişkinin iyileştirilmesi adına durum analizi yapılması amaçlanmıştır. Halkla ilişkiler bölümünde ders veren öğretim üyeleri öğrencilerine; sektöre ve iş hayatına ilişkin uzman reçeteler sunmak, kurulan iletişimi kolaylaştırmak, problemlere yenilikçi çözümler geliştirmek ve nihai olarak birer iletişim teknisyeni olarak halkla ilişkilerin tüm süreçlerine hakim birer uygulamacı olmalarına yardımcı olacak bilgi ve becerileri sağlamakla yükümlüdür. Bu sorumluluk ise ancak öğrenci ile verimli bir ilişki kurulmasıyla mümkün olabilmektedir. Bu bağlamda ülkemizde halkla ilişkiler alanında eğitim alan lisansüstü öğrencilerin ders aldıkları öğretim üyeleriyle kurdukları ilişki sürecinin geliştirilebilmesi adına önerilerde bulunulmuştur. Nitel araştırma yönteminin kullanıldığı çalışmada bulguların elde edilmesi amacıyla yarıyapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler sırasında katılımcı öğrencilere öğretim üyeleriyle kurdukları ilişkiye daie sorular yöneltilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Halkla İlişkiler, Öğrenci-Öğretim Üyesi İlişki, İletişim.

## Introduction

The concept of relationship, which can be considered as a combination of interaction and communication processes, is seen as an important phenomenon that shapes the individual's life and experiences in social life. Being in a relationship with a "thing" or "someone" signifies resemblance, partnership, and togetherness. Apart from the interpersonal communication dimension that shape social life, all interaction and communication processes that the individual enters with lecturers, other students and school personnel throughout his / her educational life cover their learning relationships. When the student – lecturer relationship is examined, the approach of the lecturer to the student, interactions inside and outside the class, teaching and learning desire, provision of in-class discipline and all similar efforts are indicative of the relationship between the individual and the academic success of the student.

Especially in the context of public relations education, the quality of the relationship to be established with lecturers becomes crucial. Because public relations training, which hosts all the processes of communication science from basic level to advanced level, requires two-way communication, reciprocity principle and the parties to reshape their methods in line with the feedback received (Işık, 2012, 23).

In this study, considering the importance of this indicator, the public relations postgraduate education program, which is thought to be more intense in the relationship between the lecturer and the student, was examined. As mentioned in the literature below, students have a variety of expectations in order to establish a healthy relationship with lecturers and achieve success. Although fulfilling these expectations is not considered as an adequate indicator for achieving academic success on its own, it is seen as an important contributor to public relations. Similarly, research in the field with the expectations of the students can also highlight different factors such as the development of personal relationships, being a role model that can lead the student to success, and the adaptation to the educational style that shows the degree of integration at the postgraduate level. In the scope of the research, the student's expectations were prepared for postgraduate public relations students and these questions were directed to a group of students studying at this level in our country.

#### **Related Literature**

Students who have been welcomed positively by their teachers from primary school to higher education are seen to be more successful in academic sense (Niebuhr and Niebuhr, 1999). The phenomenon that leads to this situation is the need for emotional attachment and validation through the simultaneous and harmonious emotions of students, themselves and their teachers towards academic progress (Fouts and Poulsen, 2001, 15). The need to be appreciated, to be aware that their efforts will not be reciprocated and to be successful, can only be met with the relations that will be established with "the teachers".

Thus, Niebuhr and Niebuhr (1999, 4) stated in their study that teachers mentioned students work harder when they have the opportunity to get to know and –if possible - love them and that this is a factor that increases student success. The concept of "acquaintance", which can be shown as the key concept, contains different dimensions in its structure. In order to parse the postgraduate education process from primary

education to undergraduate education, it is estimated that there is much less class presence in the postgraduate education process than in previous periods and that the communication and interaction between lecturers and students are more likely to be at higher levels.

The advantages of these issues can be clearly seen in the study carried out by Tiberius (1986). In this study, it was stated that effective teachers were reliable, open, low-upper control, and that they adopted collaborative and interactive classroom management. In a class where these variables exist, students are more willing and active to take risks in learning situations and as a result they undergo a better learning process. If it is possible to draw a line between the previous education life and the postgraduate, the students at this stage are expected to have the ability to produce academic texts and have a certain competence in the field and are expected to be able to interpret the subject of the course at the same time. If these qualities and the advantages of the above-mentioned postgraduate class environment are assessed together, if a positive relationship is established with the lecturer, it is possible to assess that a significant increase in students' academic achievement is inevitable.

Similarly, Anık (2007, 164) stated that the lecturer should make a positive impression on the student with his / her personality and, in turn, he / she intends to take lessons from an advanced, reliable personality educator with empathy. According to the student, such a lecturer should consider whether the student is interested in the course and if he likes the course, encourage the student to participate in the course, respect their views, appreciate and communicate as much as necessary.

In the study conducted by Hill and et al. (2003, 16), the expectations of the students were listed in order to allocate a positive relationship between the student and the lecturer as follows:

Lecturers are expected to;

- Explain the lesson by reducing it to an understandable level,
- Prepare well for the course,
- Stick to the subject flow during the course, to organize the flow in a good way,
- Be aware of new developments and researches in the field,
- Be able to fuel the excitement of learning in class,
- Make the subject interesting.

Although these six articles do not provide the formula of a "perfect" lecturer – student relationship, they can be considered as a valuable listing in terms of understanding the expectations of the students. When assessed from a basic point of view, it can be said that the student can be more successful and connected in public relations courses where a course in compliance with these articles is determined. However, the fulfilment of such matters as "acquaintance" and "approval" mentioned in the paragraphs above is excluded from these articles.

In this context, there are different studies that affect the relationships between the students and the lecturers that affect the wishes, values, attitudes, beliefs and actions of the students (Chepchieng, 2004; Whitt et al., 2001). In the relationship between the student and the lecturer that contains formal and personal relations, there are many different values such as entrepreneurship, strategic perspective and leadership that the lecturer can add to the student, apart from transferring the knowledge and competencies in the field of public relations education process (Ngara, 1995; Karaca, 2017, 2; Soncu, 2017, 83).

Students' learning abilities and theory-practice skills are not sufficient for successful public relations education alone. In this process, the approach adopted by the lecturer towards the student is seen as a complementary element. Particularly, the close relationship with the lecturers in postgraduate programs such as public relations, in which the communication phenomenon is fully blended with theoretical practice, gives the students the opportunity to apply the communication theories they have learned during their undergraduate studies as well as the academic development of the students. Postgraduate and doctoral students who decide to choose whether academic career and sector path can increase their social, psychological and human capital through one-toone relations with lecturers along with their thesis studies. In fact, education in the field of public relations can only be achieved by taking advantage of the experience of the teaching staff, which can fulfil the specialist pre-schooler role of the students. Students will be able to have considerable knowledge about public relations problems and solutions through the way these experiences will be open (Broom, 1980,2). Similarly, students who want to undertake a mission to facilitate corporate communications need practical knowledge to become a successful intermediary and to be the founder and translator of the business association between the institution and the target audience (Broom and Dozier, 1986). In order to facilitate the problem-solving process, students need to benefit from the theoretical knowledge of the lecturers about defining and solving the problems. Finally, students who aim to undertake the role of communication technician should continue their education in an efficient relationship process as mentioned above in other roles (Toth et al., 1998, 146).

Broom and Smith describes communication fachilator role as "facilitate communication between an organization and its publics". According to them purpose of this role is to encourage two-way dialogue between an organization and its publics (1979). The communication facilitator plays an important role in helping organizations practice two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). And communication technician role focuses on the actual production and dissemination of public relations materials (Broom and Smith, 1979). Technician tasks include writing press releases, creating fliers, and updating media lists (Broom and Smith, 1979). Unlike practitioners in the other roles, this role is not involved with identifying or solving problems (Broom and Smith, 1979).

In addition, one of the most prominent aspects of the relationship between the student and lecturer in postgraduate education is the understanding of "role model" (Ngara, 1995; Ronning, 1997). Thus, the perspectives of the students, who adopt the lecturer as a role model in the field of public relations, developed theories, sample practices and discipline in general are the reflections of the thinking of the lecturer in which s/he is a role model. Here, it is known that while positive role models can be seen as a guiding and motivating factor to the student, students who feel that they do not care about the relationship and interaction they have with the lecturers can develop negative thoughts and attitudes about the course and the field in general (Williams, 1986; Piekos and Einsiedel, 1989).

Within the scope of literature, the following questions were answered in this study: In the public relations postgraduate programs;

• What are the effects of lecturer-student relationship on the process of learning and especially for the specialization in the Public Relations? (RQ 1)

- What are the effects of the students' expectation from lecturers and fulfilling these expectations on the learning & specialization process? (RQ 2)
- What is the effect of lecturer's overall performance on the learning & specialization process? (RQ 3)
- Does it really effective the lecturer's approaching style, capacity to encouraging to attend the course, given value to students and ability to make them feel this value? (RQ 4)

• Is there any significant effect of lecturer's personal characteristics (charismatic, fair, joyful etc.) on public relations learning & specialization process. (RQ 5)

## Methodology

In this study, where qualitative research method was used, semi-structured interview method was used to collect data. During the data collection process, one-on-one meetings were held with the participants. During the interviews, participants were asked questions about their relationship with lecturers inside and outside the class.

During the analysis of the data, the data recorded with an audio recording device was converted into one-to-one text after more than one listening. Then, all views were collected and an overall assessment was made.

In the context of validity and reliability, given that each period of education consists of four months and that the course process in postgraduate education consists of only two semesters, the time allocated for the research process was limited and this situation was taken into consideration as a factor which reduced the validity of the data collection method. Similarly, the sample group of the research was selected from a limited number of students and a single postgraduate program selected from among the many active postgraduate courses in our country. Therefore, the research does not provide a general validity with its results and contains subjective judgments of the students. However, the study can be described as a guide to future research on the subject. The study has an original study feature on the relationship between the student and the lecturer in postgraduate education in our country. During the interviews, the questions addressed to the participants were utilized from Christiansen's (2002) study in educational sciences and California University's surveys on teacher - student relationship aimed to address to issues in the study (2003) about student's expectation by Hill and et al. and the study (1999) about lecturer's quality by Niebuhr and Niebuhr.

Despite the fact that the student lecturer relationship was involved in the study in research process interviews were conducted only with students. Studies involving interviews or questionnaires with lecturers will help to address the issue more extensively in the future.

These question asked to participated students:

- What do you think and feel about the L1/L2/L3/L4?
- What do you think about the L1/L2/L3/L4's performance during the course?

- Are there any inconveniences you have observed with the content of the lessons?
- Do you think that the lecturers have a positive impact on your development? If so, which lecturer is affecting you on what subject?
- Do you think that the lecturers has a negative impact on your development? If so, which lecturer affects you in this respect?"
- "Do you think the lecturers are treating personally?
- "Do you think the lecturers care about you?"
- "What requests do you make to the lecturers so that you can pass a more successful semester?"

During the interviews, participants were reminded that voice recording was being taken and they could leave the interview at any time, and questions were asked in a similar tone not to direct the participants. At the same time, in order to protect the participants, the universities where the participants were receiving education and the courses they took were kept confidential.

## **Data Analysis and Findings**

During the data analysis process, sequential codes were given to the participants (P1, P2, P3, P4) and the lecturers (1, 2, 3, 4) who entered the courses. According to this:

Participants	Lecturers
Participant 1 / P1	Lecturer 1
Participant 2 / P2	Lecturer 2
Participant 3 / P3	Lecturer 3
Participant 4 / P4	Lecturer 4

**Table 1:** List of Participants and Lecturers

The performance of the lecturer 1 in the courses is appreciated by all participants. According to this, while P1 expressed his views as *"The content of the course, the lecturer's knowledge, the way of expression and his approach to the student are great. I feel like I'm a student of \*1.";* P2 stated *"The course is handled in a very interactive way, so we can hear many examples, books, etc., so my interest in the course and focus is on the highest level. The lecturer's approach is very friendly and energetic."* If the relationship of the lecturer 1 with the students is examined, it can be seen that some of the principles listed in the above sections are in place. Thus, the interactive processing of the course, lecturer's dominance in the field, sincerity and generally the style of lecture is appreciated by the participants and connects the students to the course.

Although the performance of lecturer 2 in the courses is generally appreciated, the participants stated that the courses may be more effective if the subjects are not constantly being repeated. P3 expressed his views in this regard as follows; "Our lecturer is equipped but can also address different issues.", and P1 stated that, "The topics covered in the course are good. Classes are usually enjoyable. But we repeat ourselves too much. I can't feel I've learned anything new in class." As mentioned in the literature, one of the most prominent expectations of the lecturers is to follow the innovations and developments in the field. As stated previously, students at postgraduate level have a certain level of competence in their fields, but not as much as lecturers, and have already completed the bachelor's degree based knowledge education. Therefore, although it can be said that the students enjoy the lessons, it is seen that the students

need to process different and postgraduate-level topics, which they believe to add value to themselves and provide new information about public relations.

The participants expressed that although the subjects of the lecturer 3 taught in their courses were interesting and helpful, there were some problems in the course and the relation between the student and lecturer. P4 stated that *"The lecturer says we don't ask to talk, but when we want to talk, it's not given much. I mean, we always get that kind of criticism, but usually he likes to talk himself."* and P1 expressed his views as *"The lecturer teaches the course as it should be, and the subjects are fun and interesting. However, although he wants us to participate, he does not give us much right to speak. When we assess the subject among us in the class, he draws the attraction back to himself." In contrast to the first two cases, there is a criticism of the direct approach of the lecturer. Students complain about the control of class and course flow. As mentioned in the literature, activities aimed at providing postgraduate level discipline where student-lecturer interaction and one-to-one relations are more intense, are considered as a blaming attitude and an approach to keep the course under control, and even if the subject is interesting, it is considered as the factors driving the student away from the subject.* 

According to the views of the participants, although it is accepted that the lecturer 4 is well-equipped, the lack of sufficient effort and attention in the lessons is considered a disturbing situation for the participants. Such that, P2 stated: *"Due to his nature he is a little cold tempered, but I am used to it because I have taken lessons before. Despite the lack of resources, he is very knowledgeable and occasionally transfers it. He leaves a little more responsibility to the student, but I'm not complaining about it, and I take advantage of it in terms of learning."* 

P2 stated that the lecturer –in his own words - was "cold tempered" and stated that he was more comfortable because he took lessons from the lecturer in previous periods. However, P1 interprets this attitude of the lecturer as *"The lecturer addresses the issues superficially. After a while, the responsibility rests entirely on the student through the PowerPoint presentations".* The point that is criticized here is that the lecturer does not make the subject interesting in his lectures and does not show the excitement and desire that students expect. Public relations is a discipline that can be conveyed in an interesting way through a large number of examples of events and practices. However, reducing the course to one-sided presentations continued with student presentations may be beneficial in terms of developing participation and presentation techniques, but it weakens the students' general view of the course and the lecturer.

The participants gave variable answers to the question "Are there any inconveniences you have observed with the content of the lessons?". P1 stated for lecturer 4 as, "In the class, we discuss philosophers' thoughts within the framework of public relations. However, the lecturer does not add much, and because I think that not every philosopher has a thing to do with public relations, some adaptations remain superficial, forcing or on shaky ground." and said for lecturer 2 "I think the lecturer 2 has made things personal." Although other participants' inconveniences are not as intense as P1, but are parallel to the responses given regarding the performance of the lecturers in the courses. The main point of view here is that the lecturer acts according to various values and prejudices in his / her approach towards the students. Although

it is known that one of the most basic teachings in public relations education is to stand out from the negative prejudices and to be embracing the masses, it is seen as a worrying situation for the lecturer to create a negative perception in the minds of the students.

P2 stated on the impact of the interest of lecturers on course performance as follows:

"When I see that the lecturers are interested in us, that they are trying to teach something, and that they are concerned about our success, at least my attention and attraction to the lesson increases in order not to waste this effort of the lecturer. But when I see that the lecturer does not care much about the lesson, I do not care much about the lesson and I aim to achieve the minimum success."

And P1 expressed his views as follows;

"In general, I show performance in my classes to improve myself. But I'm affected a little negative in the courses of lecturer 3. I don't participate the courses with enthusiasm... The lecturer 1 teaches subjects very dense in the courses but when we are overwhelmed, he can make jokes and talk about different things to tease us. I can say that this happens very rarely in the lecturer 3, and I don't think lecturer 4 has that kind of concern."

Here, it is observed that there is a complete compatibility between the literature and the data obtained from the interviews. Such that, the striking point in the views is reciprocity. Accordingly, students show interest and effort in the course as the lecturer strives. So much so that, as mentioned before, it is seen as one of the main building blocks of public relations-especially with a sense of perfection. The other point to emphasize is the pleasure from the lessons. Teaching "fun" topics and making the course interesting is seen as a factor that increases the interest of the students and also increases the sympathy of students towards the lecturer.

The answers to the question "Do you think that the lecturers have a positive impact on your academic development? If so, which lecturer is affecting you on what subject?" are as follows.

P1: "Of course I do. As a person who plans an academic career, my interest in lecturers is not only the course, but also how they carry their academic identity. In this respect, I always try to take examples of the lecturers who make the best of their profession, and be like them. In this respect, 1 is my idol."

P3: "I think it all affects. I get all kinds of information on different subjects from all of them. I meet different topics and I'm affected very positively in the academic sense." P4: "I find the knowledge of lecturer 2. and lecturer 1 very impressive, especially lecturer 1, and I think that the documents that lecturer 3 gave us to be read for the course are very efficient." The views on the impacts of the lecturers are similarly consistent with the literature. The "role model" phenomenon mentioned previously stands out clearly, and it has been demonstrated that the lecturer has an important responsibility for shaping the future of the students and for the formation of perceptions in the field of public relations.

To the question "Do you think that the lecturers has a negative impact on your academic development? If so, which lecturer affects you in this respect?" P2 gave the following answer: *"I just don't know what to do only in the lessons of lecturer 3. We'd* 

like to say something. he tells himself, then he complains about our ideas. When we say the same thing, he says things like I said it. These create a negative environment." P1 expressed his views to this topic as follows:

"If there were examples such as lecturer 1 in front of me, for example, I would have seen lecturer 4 and oversimplify the profession of academics. And that would reduce my motivation. When students make jokes between them, lecturer 3 rarely involves but he doesn't involve in the jokes, and he is constantly nervous and have a fear to say something wrong. lecturer 4 on the other hand, does not care about whether the students are bored or to make a joke to relieve the stress."

P4, on the other hand, gave a general answer and stated that "I mean, if the lecturer feels that he trusts me or shares something like that, I can say that I perform differently just not to embarrass him." P3 has stated that there is no negativity. The views expressed in this regard are in parallel with the earlier interpretations. The general complaints of the students are that the course control is at a high level and the topics are not made interesting. As mentioned earlier, given the literature again, the flexibility of the education method in communication-oriented public relations programs and the transfer of the curriculum through interesting current events and examples are considered to be factors that improve the quality of education.

In the replies given to the question "Do you think the lecturers are treating personally? Although P3 and P4 have no views on the personal behaviour of lecturers, P1 and P2 differ in the views of the other two participants. P2's views on the topic is "I don't think I am treated personally but I think this is being done to others. For example, some students are more prominent in some classes. I'm linking this to the personality of the lecturers. (...) He doesn't do anything to me, but I think he treats his favourite students differently, especially lecturer 2." P1's view on this topic is "I think lecturer 2 acts like this when grading the exams." Here, it is observed that the students are suffering from injustice, albeit through a single lecturer. This includes the assessment that the students have fair demands for the academic staff to approach the students as well as for the distribution of grades. Such that, in the field of public relations, which has a considerable wide-ranging literature on ethics, comments that emphasize the digression from ethical principles in the field of education are considered to be another worrying element.

While the answer given by P1 to the question "Do you think the lecturers care about you?" is *"The care of lecturer 1 feels like he cares about us."* P2 expressed his views as lecturer 1, lecturer 2, and lecturer 4 are care about their students but he is hesitant about lecturer 4. p3 thinks that lecturer 1, lecturer 2, and lecturer 3 are absolutely care about him, he thinks lecturer 4 gives him very little care. Finally, P4 thinks all lecturers care about him.

Finally, the participants were asked the question "What requests do you make to the lecturers so that you can pass a more successful semester?" The four collective answers are as follows:

P1: "Lecturer 4 can pull the strings a little more. Lecturer 3 can teach the lesson as he said, I mean, it would be better if he didn't say "you do not say anything" after talking throughout the course. I don't have any comments about the other two."

P2: "Lecturer 1 is very good at teaching; thus, I cannot say anything to him but the translation homework could be somewhat different. I don't think it can reach its aim. I don't think the translation of the book will be published. It could be converted into an overall assessment. Lecturer 4 behaves a little hesitant and although I like his classes, I cannot reach the sincerity I did with the lecturer 1. And for the lecturer 2, he should mention different topics, I think he needs to make an assessment from different angles, he keeps repeating the same things..."

P3: "I expect lecturer 4 to develop a little more in terms of resources and to draw other frames on different topics. I expect the lecturer 3 to show a little more theoretical part in practice and give some little more examples. I expect the lecturer 2 to take a little more of the present and past combination, not just as a term but as a whole. I see no problems with the lecturer 1.

P4: "I think lecturer 4 (...) needs to expand the course from the point of view of one source, but plenty of resources. As for lecturer 3, I agree with a participant A. The lecturer could give more than he can give in the class, but I think he's irritated and afraid of something. maybe that's why he can't do it. I think lecturer 2 may also mention more in the context of the course, but I find it enough that I don't have much of a problem. I find lecturer 1 quite good enough, so maybe he can extend the class a little longer, that's all..."

Here, it is a factor that should be taken into consideration that the comments brought by the students are shaped in line with the personal perceptions and expectations towards the lecturers. Thus, in interviews with different class and different students, the researchers will be able to reach different results.

#### Conclusion

In this study, the relevant literature was first scanned in order to examine the relationship between students and lecturers in public relations postgraduate education and then semi-structured interviews were held with selected public relations postgraduate students.

It is necessary to emphasize that interviews are made up of subjective judgments of students. The findings are listed as follows in a way that is compatible with research questions:

 $\bullet\,$  Students have the awareness of the positive qualities of the lecturers who attend their classes. (RQ 1 - RQ5)

• The expectations of the students and the approaches of the lecturers sometimes do not match, and therefore students can or did feel drift away from the courses. (RQ2)

• A rigorous discipline and excessive control of the courses can drift students away from the course, especially in the postgraduate level and in a field of communication such as public relations. (RQ 4)

• Making the courses interesting both links the student to the course and increases the "charisma" of the lecturer. (RQ4 - RQ5)

 $\bullet\,$  The interest in the course is increased in proportion to the efforts of the lecturer. (RQ 3)

• Lecturers are perceived as role models that will guide the students in real sense (RQ 1 - RQ 4)

- Students have expectations of the lecturers to be fairer in both grading and management of the mutual relations. (RQ 2 RQ 5)
- Students have expectations for the follow-up of literature and developments in the field. (RQ 2)

Considering these results, the development of research in a process with the participation of lecturers after the improvement of these articles has the potential to enable the preparation of an "education model" that will increase the quality of public relations education at the postgraduate level in our country.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>This part has been kept confidential by the researcher since it reveals the school name of the student.

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