

Views of Students Regarding Problems Encountered in Postgraduate Education: A Phenomenological Research*

Öğrencilerin Lisansüstü Eğitimde Karşılaştıkları Sorunlara İlişkin Görüşleri: Bir Olgu Bilim Araştırması*

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ABSTRACT

High-quality manpower is needed greatly in development process. A successful and qualified postgraduate education is rather important for especially underdeveloped and developing countries in order to raise this manpower that is highly needed. Due to these reasons, there is a need for giving importance to postgraduate education and solving the problems in the field (Sevinç, 2001). In this study, it is aimed to determine the problems that the individuals studying postgraduate education at Institute of Education Sciences encounter and to offer solutions concerning the problems encountered. In this study, qualitative research method and phenomenological research was used. The participants studied postgraduate education in different majors and departments in the Institute of Education Sciences at a state university. Data of the study was collected with semi-structured interview schedule designed by the researchers. The data collected in the study were analyzed by content analysis technique. The study findings revealed that postgraduate students had mainly problems of foreign language and Academic Personnel and Postgraduate Education Entrance Exam (ALES), problems of getting permission from their institution or school, communication problem with thesis supervisor and problem of toilsomeness of thesis writing process. In the conclusion section, recommendations regarding the problems encountered by students in postgraduate education are made.

Keywords: Postgraduate education, Problems of postgraduate education, Interview, Student's views

ÖZ

Kalkınma sürecinde, yüksek nitelikli insan gücüne büyük gereksinim duyulmaktadır. Gereksinim duyulan bu insan gücünün yetiştirilmesinde ise başarılı ve nitelikli bir lisansüstü eğitim, özellikle de az gelişmiş ve gelişmekte olan ülkeler için oldukça önemlidir. Bu nedenlerden dolayı lisansüstü eğitime gereken önemin verilip, alandaki sorunların da çözülmesi gerekmektedir (Sevinç, 2001). Bu araştırmada, eğitim bilimleri enstitüsünde lisansüstü eğitim gören bireylerin yaşadıkları sorunların belirlenmesi ve yaşanan sorunlara ilişkin çözüm önerilerinin oluşturulması amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmada nitel yöntem ve olgu bilim deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu bir devlet üniversitesi enstitüsünde farklı bölüm ve anabilim dallarında lisansüstü eğitim gören, katılımcılar oluşturmuştur. Araştırmanın verileri, araştırmacılar tarafından oluşturulan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu ile toplanmıştır. Verilerin çözümlenmesinde içerik analizi yönteminden yararlanılmıştır. Araştırmanın başlıca bulgularından elde edilen sonuçlara göre; öğrenciler yabancı dil ve ALES sorunu, çalıştıkları kurumlardan izin alamama sorunu, tez danışmanı ile iletişim sorunu ve tez yazma sürecinin yoruculuğu sorunu konularında görüşlerini dile getirmişlerdir. Sonuç bölümünde, lisansüstü eğitimde öğrencilerin karşılaştıkları sorunlara yönelik önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Lisansüstü eğitim, Lisansüstü eğitimin sorunları, Görüşme, Öğrenci görüşleri

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INTRODUCTION

In modern world where the information increases fast, the production and consumption of information is of great importance. Information age requires individuals not only to use information but also to produce and consume information so as to solve problems (Oğuz, 2004). Education systems bear tremendous responsibilities for the production, education and dissemination of information. (Karakütük, 2002).

Postgraduate education is a type of higher education that starts after the completion of undergraduate education and involves master and doctorate degrees (Ağralıoğlu, 2013). In Turkey, postgraduate education involves the stages of master degree, doctorate degree, specialty in medicine and proficiency in art. Postgraduate education comprises the activities of education, training, scientific researches and practices with respect to undergraduate education (Sevinç, 2001). The aim of postgraduate education and training is to raise researchers who are productive, responsive to the problems of country and highly creative individuals (Sayan & Aksu, 2005). Postgraduate education can be stated to be an education program, the aim of which is to teach individuals how to do research according to their interests consequent to their undergraduate education, to help produce science and to raise scholars (Nayır, 2011). Özmenteş and Özmenteş (2005) emphasized that any problem that was encountered throughout postgraduate education period had also an effect on student success by stating that needs, expectations and views of students affect their success. Thus, they remarked that postgraduate education curriculum shall be evaluated from students' points of view.

There are a lot of research studies on postgraduate education in literature. In these studies, the problems encountered during postgraduate education was tried to be detected through different data collection tools and academic and personal problems were underlined (Çoruk, Çağatay & Öztürk, 2016; İbiş, 2014; Karakütük, Aydın, Abalı & Yıldırım, 2008; Özmen & Güç, 2013). When the research studies are examined, it is noticeable that some of the individuals who get postgraduate education in education institutes are academicians, teachers in public schools or private schools or specialists and the others working at different sectors. And a part of individuals who get postgraduate education is known to be only students working at nowhere. The perspectives and problems of individuals related to postgraduate education may differ as they have different occupations and working conditions. The problems that may be encountered by individuals who are graduates of the faculty of education and head towards academicianship may be different from the problems that may be encountered by individuals who are not graduates of the faculty of education and prefer academicianship in the faculty of education. Moreover, the problems of individuals who work at a public school, private sector or any area out of education may also become different. When literature is examined, the problems the students had during postgraduate education can be seen in studies on postgraduate education. In their

study in which they aimed to examine teacher candidates' expectations from the system and uncover the problems, Başer, Narlı and Günhan (2005) came to the conclusion that most of the postgraduate students considered that postgraduate education had to be received by every teacher. On the other hand, in a study conducted by Oluk and Çolak (2005), it was revealed that as that teachers did not use their legal permission to get postgraduate education, Ministry of National Education did not provide any financial support for postgraduate education and postgraduate education did not result in any salary increase. Sayan and Aksu (2005) found out that individuals who got postgraduate education without being academicians especially had problems of finding not enough time, weak contact and guidance by advisor and being pushed into the background throughout postgraduate education. In studies, it is noticeable that different problems were detected with regard to postgraduate education.

When the encountered problems are considered, it is quite apparent that contemporary postgraduate education curriculums that are knitted with scientific approaches, provide generations with high education efficiency and have the aim of raising prospering individuals are necessary. Considering these facts, the aim of this study is to detect problems encountered by the individuals getting postgraduate education in the institute of education sciences and to offer solution accordingly.

METHOD

Research Design

In this study, qualitative research method and phenomenology research were used as comments of the students who get postgraduate education in different majors and departments of the Institute of Education Sciences of a state university are detected. Data sources of phenomenology research design, the purpose of which is to reveal perceptions and experiences related to the facts of which individuals are aware, but about which they don't have in-depth information, are individuals and groups who may encounter, express or reflect the fact and interviews of basic data collection technique (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). According to Creswell (1998), phenomenology research is definition of a fact or an event exclusive to an individual. Exclusive fact or events in this study are problems encountered by students in postgraduate education.

Participants

In this study, purposeful sampling method was used as it is an effective method for revealing the circumstances in detail to reach extensive information and criterion sampling was practiced in this context. In the study, students who are currently getting postgraduate education were taken as criteria since the problems encountered by them are examined. Total 20 students, 10 master degree and 10 doctorate degree students, took part in the research. Participant students are currently getting postgraduate education in different majors and departments of the Institute of Education Sciences of a state university.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, the technique of semi-structured interview among qualitative research methods was used due to the aim of detailed examination of views of the students who are currently getting postgraduate education in different majors and departments of the Institute of Education Sciences of a state university about the problems they encountered during their education. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), interview is a dual conversation that is had with two or more people to get information in accordance with a certain purpose. The biggest convenience the technique of semi-structured interview provides a researcher is that interview is made depending on pre-prepared interview protocol which provides more systematic and comparable information (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). In this study, the technique of semi-structured interview was preferred since a format was necessary which enabled extra questions and explanations in order to detect what kind of problems students encounter throughout postgraduate education period and what their expectations about postgraduate education are.

Interview form was tried to be suitable for the aim of the research by taking expert opinions. According to the feedbacks from experts; necessary corrections were made on the form, some questions were omitted and the form was put into final form. A pilot interview was made with a student who is currently studying for master degree in the department of curriculum development in the Institute of Education Sciences to test interview questions. After the interview recorded answers were written down. Content validity of the interview form to be used for research was detected and the questions were found sufficient with the pilot scheme. The questions in the interview form are respectively listed below:

1. What is your postgraduate education field? Why did you prefer this field?
2. Do you work at anywhere? Is your postgraduate education beneficial for your institution?
3. What is your job title in your institution?
4. Which stage of postgraduate education are you? (If you are studying for master degree: "Do you consider studying for doctorate?")
5. What was your reason to get postgraduate education? What were your expectations before education and to what extent were they fulfilled?
6. Was there any problem you encountered in terms of entrance requirements while starting your postgraduate education?
7. Are you getting your postgraduate education in your home city or any other city? What are the effects of this situation on your education?
8. Was there any problem you encountered during course stage?

9. Was there any problem you encountered during thesis stage?

10. Was there any problem you encountered other than these problems?

Data Collection Process

Research data were collected through semi-structured interview form. In such an interview, researcher can reach different data by exceeding hard limits of unstructured interview (Altınışık, 2002). Interview questions are generally asked to an interviewer systematically and in a fixed order (Berg, 1998). During interview, interviewer is allowed to answer questions at his/her will and some extra explanations can be made about the topic when required (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

Research data were collected with interviews had in the Faculty of Education Sciences at a state university between the dates of September 14th – 20th 2015. Interviews took 40 to 120 minutes. A suitable place was prepared for the interview in accordance with the permission of participants, data were recorded with recorder and 20 participants were interviewed. At the beginning of the interview, a copy of questions was given to the participants so that they could examine them. Questions were asked to each participant in a different order.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data collected from interviews made and completed with NVivo, a computer-based data analysis program, and through content analysis which is the most used method among the types of qualitative analysis. Content analysis is a method that is generally used for the analysis of written and visual data. A deductive way is followed in this method. In content method, researcher firstly develops categories related to research subject (Silverman, 2001).

In semi-structured interview, the answers given by the students to the questions were analyzed through content analysis and each answer were written down. Collected data were digitized and research findings were given as tabular.

Reliability and Validity of Research

Relevant literature was examined for the reliability and validity of this research and those were made (Odom et al., 2005) :

- Researcher flexibility was provided.
- Support of another researcher was received at the coding stage of data and cooperative study was made.
- Data about when and with whom the interview was had and how long it took were recorded as tabular.
- Enough time was spent on field by making in-depth interview with participants and making researches of relevant documents.

FINDINGS

In this part, findings obtained from the answers of participants are shown. Answers were analyzed and loadings were examined.

First question was aimed at determining what their postgraduate education fields was and why they preferred that field.

20 participants stated the departments where they got postgraduate education as below:

- 4 (2-phd. student, 2-master student), curriculum development
- 1 (master student), special education
- 1 (phd. student) education sociology
- 1 (phd. student), education administration
- 1 (master student) computer and instructional technologies education
- 1 (master student) social sciences education
- 1 (phd. student) Turkish education
- 3 (1-phd. student, 2-master student) psychological services in education
- 1 (phd. student) fine arts education
- 1 (master student), preschool education
- 5 (3-phd. student, 2-master student) assessment and evaluation

Students stated their reasons to get postgraduate education as below:

- To be interested in (4-phd. student, 3-master student)
- The specialize in educational sciences (2-phd. student)
- To be an academician (1-master student)
- Not want to work at Ministry of National Education (2-phd. student)
- To gain a sociological perspective (1-phd. student)
- Similarity to undergraduate education (1-phd. student, 1-master student)
- To examine shifts from education to society (1-phd. student)
- To study in a field other than his-her undergraduate field of study (1-master student)
- To specialize in educational sciences (3-phd. student, 6-master student)

Second question was aimed at determining whether they worked in any institution and if they worked, whether their postgraduate education was beneficial for their workplace.

In research, all the participants were indicated to be working. As seen in Figure 2, the view that postgraduate education is beneficial for their workplace was stated by the participants. The views of the participants are as below:

- 3 (phd. student), it contributed to my institution
- 1 (master student), to prepare projects on behalf of my institution
- 7 (6-phd. student, 1-master student), education is a part of my job
- 2 (1-phd. student, 1-master student), to make researches on behalf of my institution

- 7 (5-phd. student, 2-master student), to apply learned information at workplace
- 1 (master student) it enabled me to specialize in my institution

That all of the participants stated their postgraduate education had positive impacts for their institution can be accepted as an indicator which shows that, whether master or doctorate degree, postgraduate education achieves its objectives.

Third question was aimed at determining what job titles of the participants in their institutions were.

The participants stated their job titles in their institution as below:

- 1 (master student), teacher (private school)
- 13 (9-phd. student, 4-master student), research assistant
- 1 (phd. student), lecturer
- 5 (master student), teacher (public school)

That individuals who get postgraduate education in the Institute of Education Sciences are academicians and teachers is an expected situation. Since, the objective in figure 3 was to give information about the institutions the participants worked at, such information was necessary.

Fourth question was aimed at determining which stage of postgraduate education the participants were and whether the ones who got master degree considered getting doctorate's degree later.

The participants stated their stages in postgraduate education as below:

- 2, master course stage
- 8, master thesis stage
- 10, consider getting doctorate degree
- 1, doctorate course stage
- 9 doctorate thesis stage

That all of the participants who had master degree considered getting doctorate degree can be accepted as an indicator showing that they want further specialization in the area.

Fifth question was aimed at determining what their reasons to get postgraduate education were and what expectations of them had been before starting and to what extent their expectations fulfilled.

The participants stated their reasons to get postgraduate education as below:

- 1 (phd. student), necessary for my job
- 2 (1-phd. student, 1-master student), to make academic study
- 11 (5-phd. student, 6-master student), to improve myself
- 1 (phd. student), to raise good educators
- 12 (7-phd. student, 5-master student), to be academician
- 1 (master student), to be a good teacher

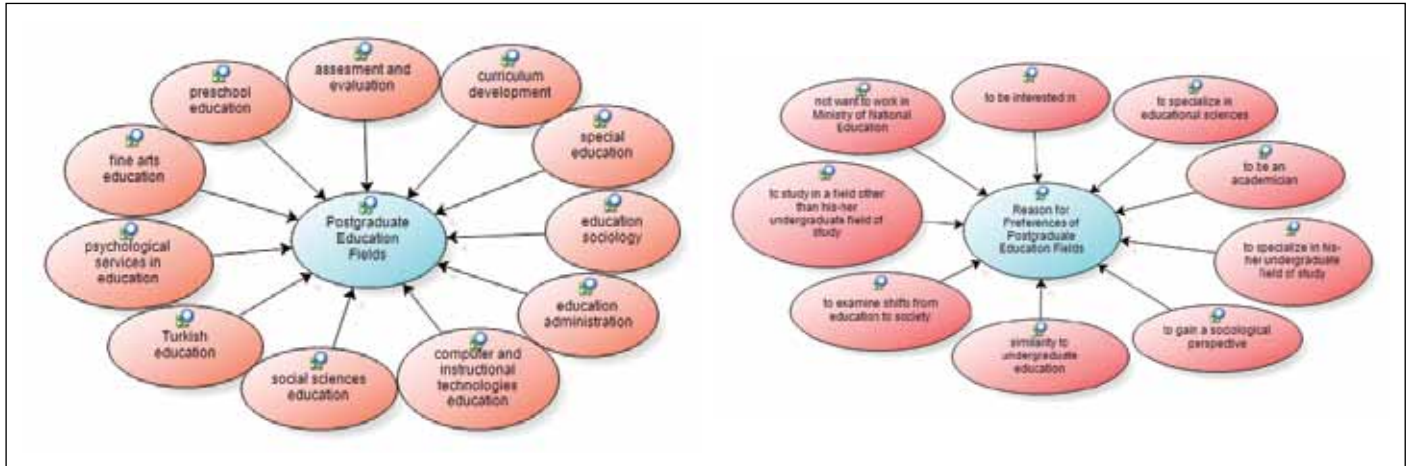


Figure 1: Postgraduate education fields of participants and their reasons to prefer these fields.

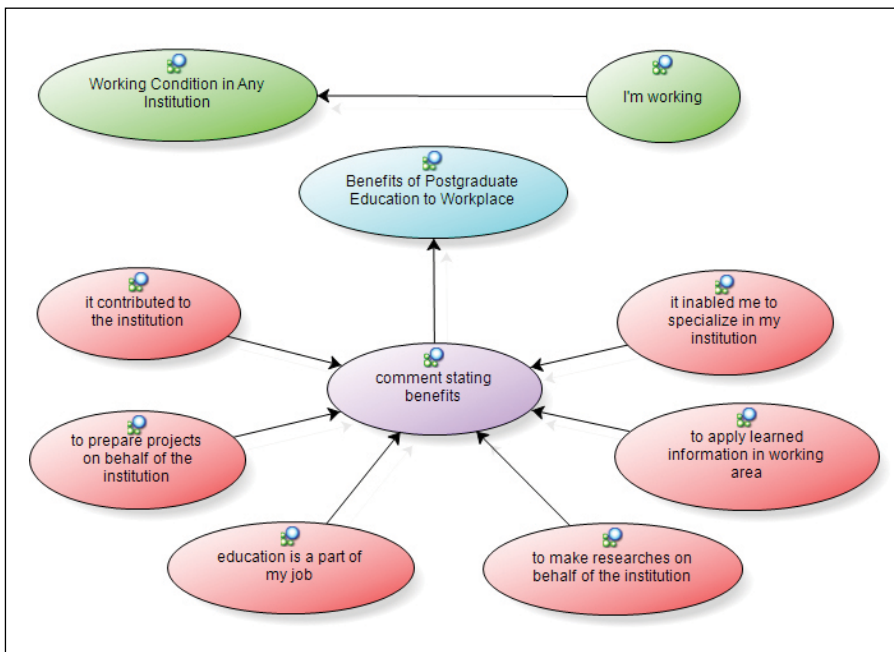


Figure 2: Views of participants about whether their postgraduate education was beneficial for their workplace.

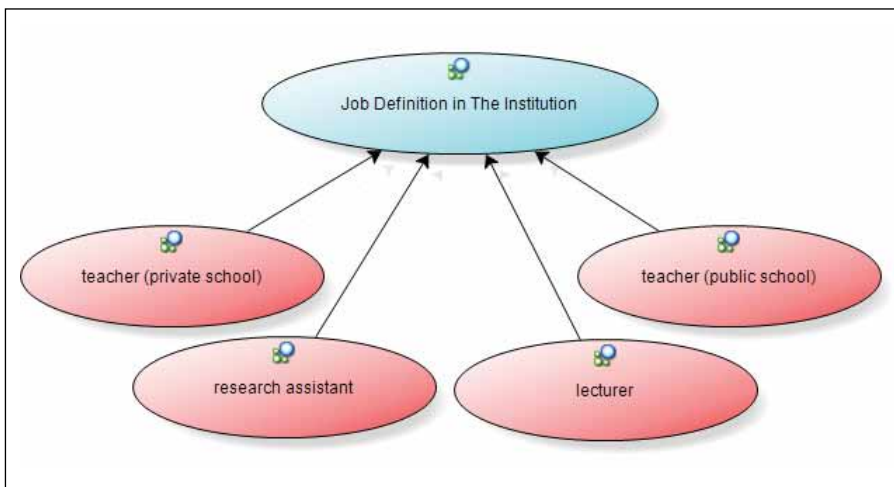


Figure 3: Job titles of the participants in their institutions.

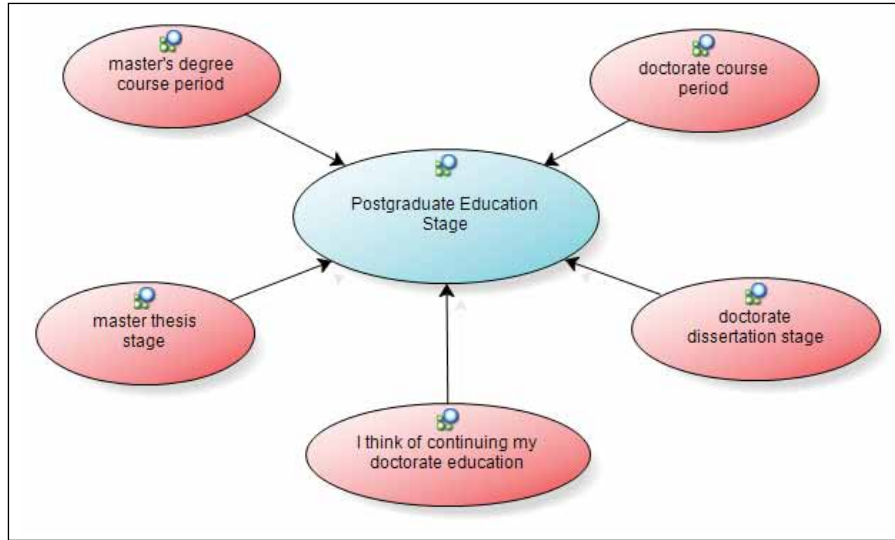


Figure 4: Postgraduate education stages of the participants.

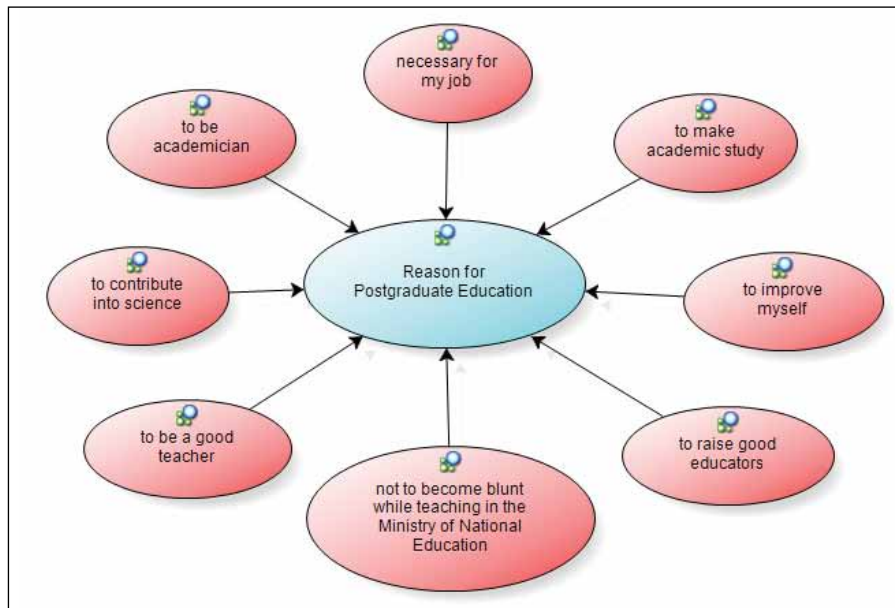


Figure 5: Views of the participants about their reasons to get postgraduate education.

- 1 (phd. student), to contribute into science
- 1 (master student), not to become blunt while teaching in a state school

Differentiation between the reasons to get postgraduate education can be associated with different perspectives of individuals. Information about the expectations of the participants from postgraduate education and the degree of fulfillment is given in Figure 6:

The participants stated their expectations and degree of fulfillment as below:

- 1 (phd. student), expectation for research (fulfilled)
- 6 (2-phd. student, 4-master student), expectation for getting qualified education (fulfilled)
- 6 (2-phd. student, 4-master student), expectation for taking lesson from prominent names of field (fulfilled)

- 2 (phd. student), expectation for progression by virtue of lecturers (1 fulfilled, 1 unfulfilled)
- 1 (phd. student), expectation for making joint projects with lecturers (unfulfilled)
- 1 (master student), expectation for taking qualified course (fulfilled)
- 3 (2-phd. student, 1-master student), expectation for having comprehensive knowledge of the field (fulfilled)
- 1 (phd. student), expectation for studying cooperatively (unfulfilled)
- 1 (master student), expectation for academic publishing (unfulfilled)
- 1 (phd. student), expectation for attending scientific community (unfulfilled)

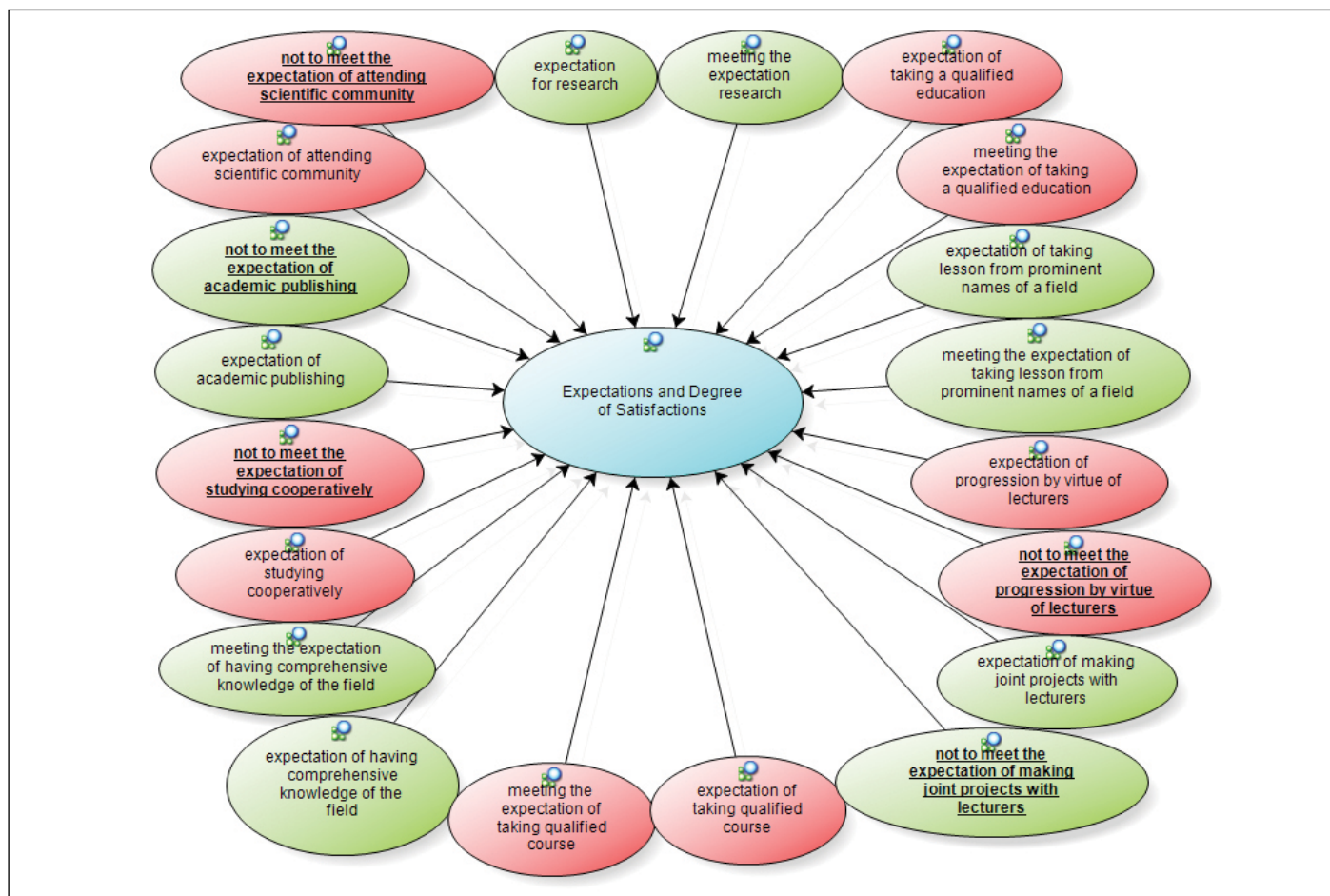


Figure 6: Views of the participants about their expectations from postgraduate education.

As seen in Figure 6, it is impossible to make a comment that expectations of all the participants from postgraduate education were fulfilled or will certainly be fulfilled. In spite of disadvantages, whether the differentiation of expectations from postgraduate education or unfulfillment of some expectations, postgraduate education continues.

Seventh question was aimed at determining whether they encountered any problem related to admission requirements at the beginning of postgraduate education.

The participants stated the problems they encountered as below:

- 3 (1-phd. student, 2-master student), foreign language problem
- 1 (phd. student), validity period of ALES
- 1 (phd. student), written exam problem
- 1 (master student), non-objectiveness of interview
- 15 (8-phd. student, 7-master student), no problem

Necessary conditions should be provided before starting postgraduate education. Thus, individuals must learn necessary conditions before starting postgraduate education. On the other hand, universities and institutes should take responsibility

for the problems such as injustice of admission examinations. Postgraduate education programs should be opened under the leadership of fair lecturers so that fair admission conditions can be provided.

Eighth question was aimed at determining where the participants finished their postgraduate education and what the effects of this situation on their education were.

13 (7- phd. student, 6-master student) of the participants who finished their postgraduate education in home city stated their views as below:

- 11 (7-phd. student, 4-master student), I have no problem
- 1 (master student), I have the problem of getting permission from the institution I work at
- 1 (master student), I don't have time problem

7 (3- phd. student, 4-master student) of the participants who finished their postgraduate education in other cities stated their views as below:

- 1 (master student), to become distanced from academic area
- 5 (3-phd. student, 2-master student), the problem of distance and time

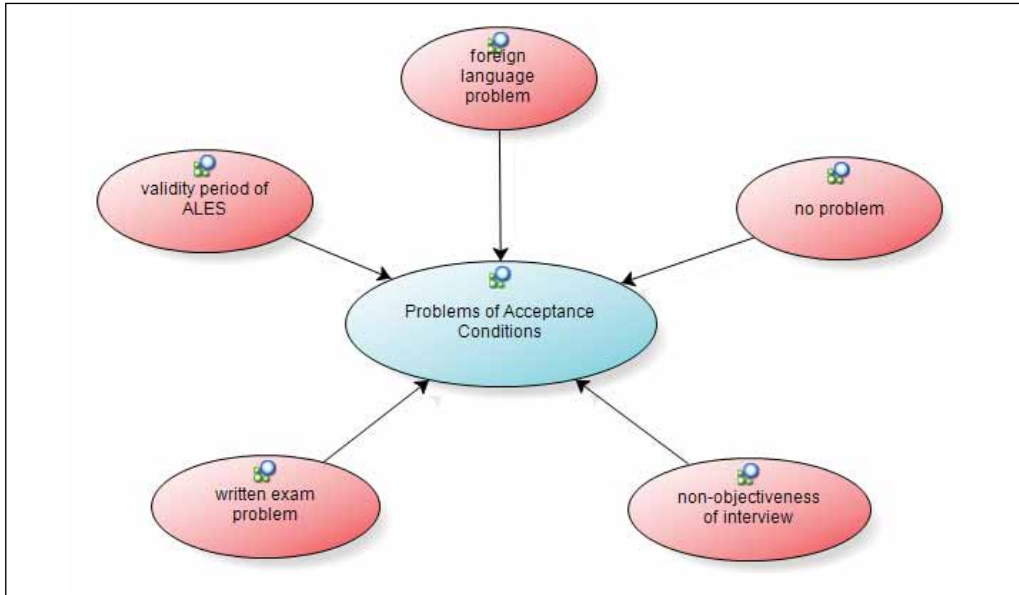


Figure 7: Views of the participants about the problems the encountered at the beginning of postgraduate education.

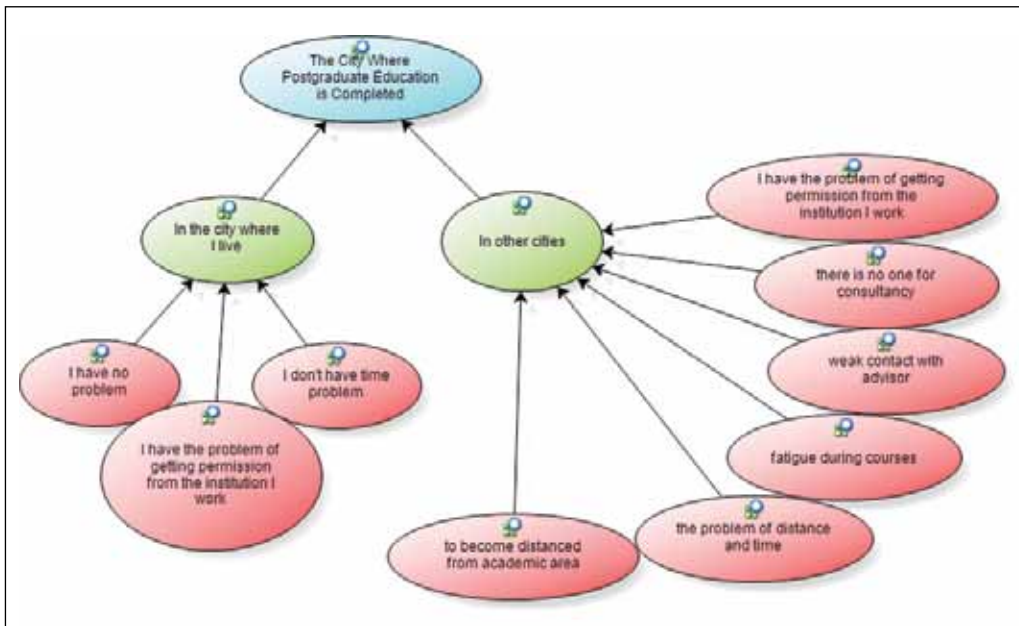


Figure 8: Views of the participants about where they finished their postgraduate education.

- 2 (master student), fatigue during courses
- 2 (phd. student), weak contact with advisor
- 1 (phd. student), there is no one for consultancy
- 1 (phd. student), I have the problem of getting permission from the institution I work at

It is of course impossible for all individuals to take postgraduate education in their home cities. Due to a set of problems, some of them have to get postgraduate education in other cities. No wonder this situation may have negative effects on education processes of individuals.

Ninth question was aimed at determining whether the participants had problems at course stage of their postgraduate education.

The participants stated their problems at course stage as below:

- 1 (phd. student), the courses are unqualified
- 1 (phd. student), lectures regard students as inadequate
- 1 (phd. student), personal inadequacies
- 2 (1- phd. student, 1-master student), prejudices of lecturers in courses
- 1 (phd. student), not being able to take intended courses due to the attitude of head of department
- 2 (phd. student), unfair evaluation
- 1 (phd. student), imposed courses
- 1 (master student), obligation of scientific preparation

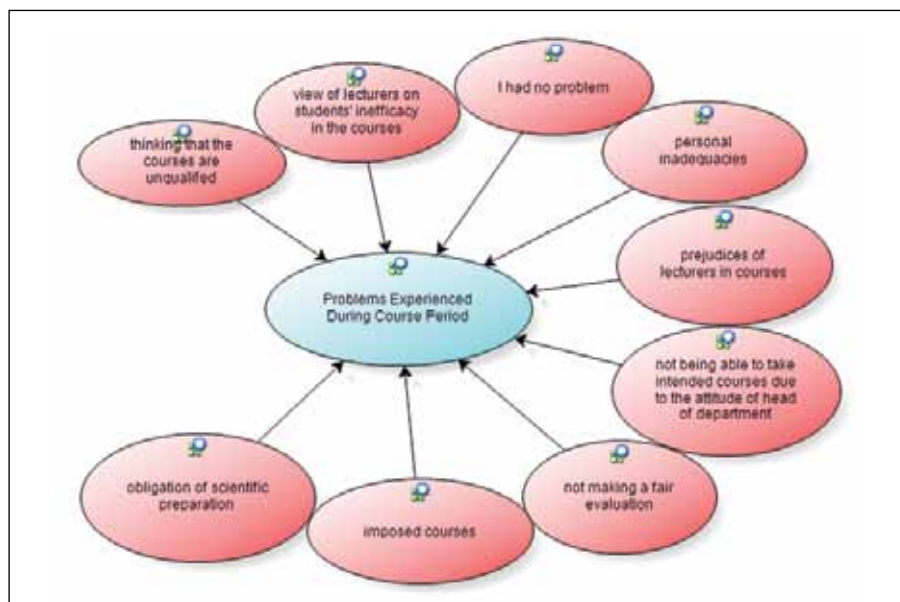


Figure 9: Views of the participants about the problems they encountered at course stage of postgraduate education.

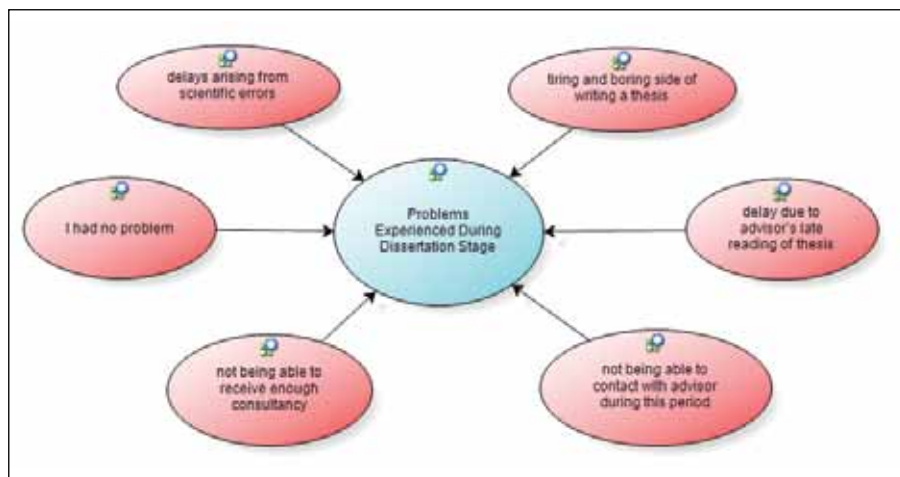


Figure 10: Views of the participants about the problems they encountered at thesis stage of postgraduate education.

- 11 (3-phd. student, 8-master student), no problem

That students encounter a set of problems during course stage is no wonder quite normal. However, what matters is to prevent such problems' hindering postgraduate education process. Thus, both individuals who get postgraduate education and the lecturers who contribute to them should take responsibilities accordingly.

Tenth question was aimed at determining whether the participants had problems at thesis stage of their postgraduate education

The participants stated their problems at thesis stage as below:

- 1 (master student), tiring and boring side of writing a thesis
- 2 (phd. student), delay due to advisor's late reading of thesis
- 2 (phd. student), not being able to contact with advisor during this period

- 6 (5-phd. student, 1-master student), not being able to receive enough consultancy
- 2 (1-phd. student, 1-master student), delays arising from scientific errors
- 9 (2-phd. student, 7-master student), no problem

Thesis stage, which is on of the most important stages of postgraduate education may become tiring due to some problems. Individuals should consider this stage as a positive process for their personal and occupational development rather than an obligatory duty.

Tenth question was aimed at determining whether the participants had any other problems.

The participants stated other problems in postgraduate education process as below:

- 1 (phd. student), Prejudices against my competence for postgraduate education as I am an OYP research assistant

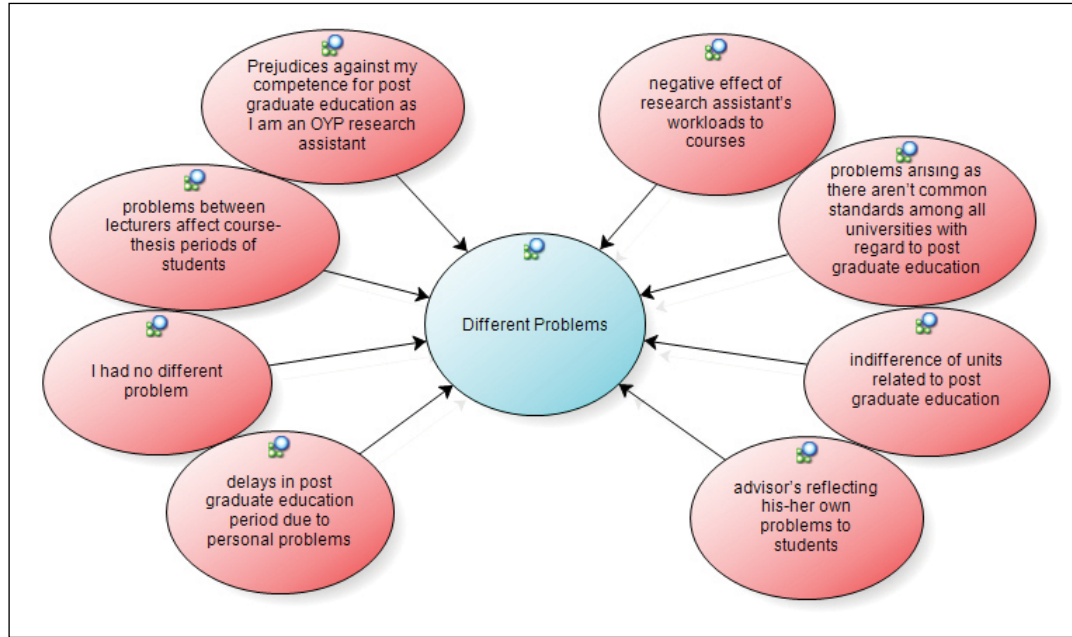


Figure 11: Views of the participants about other problems they encountered in postgraduate education process.

- 2 (phd. student), problems between lecturers affect course-thesis stages
- 1 (master student), delays in postgraduate education process due to personal problems
- 1 (phd. student), negative effects of research assistant's workloads to courses
- 1 (phd. student), problems arising as there aren't common standards among all universities with regard to postgraduate education
- 1 (master student), indifference of units related to post graduate education
- 1 (phd. student), advisor's reflecting personal problems to students
- 13 (5-phd. student, 8-master student), no other problems

CONCLUSION

The postgraduate education field of the participants in this study was seen to be preschool education, assessment and evaluation, curriculum development, special education, computer and instructional technologies education, social sciences education, Turkish education, psychological services in education and fine arts education. The reasons of the participants to prefer these areas were detected as; to be interested in, to specialize in educational sciences, to be an academician, to be employed in Ministry of National Education, to gain a sociological perspective, similarity to undergraduate education, to examine shifts from education to society, to study in a field other than his/her undergraduate field of study, to specialize in his/her undergraduate field of study.

Furthermore, it was detected that all of the participants worked at an institution and their postgraduate education was beneficial for their workplace. The benefits of postgraduate education for workplaces can be summarized as; enabling to

specialize in job, applying learned information in working area, enabling to make researches on behalf of the institution and contributing to the institution by preparing projects on behalf of the institution.

The reasons of the participants to get postgraduate education can be stated as; to make academic study, to improve himself/herself academically, to raise good educators, desire to become a successful academician and teacher, to contribute to science and not want to work in the Ministry of National Education.

The expectations of the participants from postgraduate education and the degree of fulfillment can be summarized as; to make research (fulfilled), to get qualified education (fulfilled), to take lesson from prominent names of the field (fulfilled), to progress by virtue of lecturers (unfulfilled), to make joint projects with lecturers (unfulfilled) and academic publishing (unfulfilled).

It appeared that, at the beginning of the postgraduate education, the participants encountered such problems as; foreign language, validity period of ALES, written exam and non-objectiveness of interview.

It came out that some of the participant encountered the problem of getting permission from the institution; some of the participants who got their postgraduate education in a different city encountered the problems of being distanced from academic area, distance and time and some others encountered such problems as fatigue in lessons and weak contact with advisor

Moreover, it was detected that the participants encountered at course stage such problems as; unqualified lessons, view of lecturers on students' in efficacy in the courses, personal inadequacies, prejudices of lecturers, not being able to take intended courses due to the attitude of head of department,

REFERENCES

not making a fair evaluation and obligation of scientific preparation. On the other hand, they encountered at thesis stage such problems as; delays arising from scientific errors, not being able to receive enough consultancy, delay due to advisor's late reading of thesis and thesis writing process' becoming tiring and boring

According to another result of the research, the participants stated such problems as; prejudices against OYP research assistant about competence of them for postgraduate education, lecturers' reflecting problems between them to course-thesis period, delays in postgraduate education period due to personal problems, advisor's reflecting his-her personal problems to students, indifference of units related to postgraduate education, lack of common standards among universities with regard to postgraduate education and negative effects of research assistant's workloads to courses.

Recommendations regarding the problems encountered by students in postgraduate education are as below:

- Undergraduate students can be enabled to visit postgraduate educational environments so that problems in their mind's about postgraduate education can be solved.
- Offices can be set up for consultancy about postgraduate education for undergraduate and graduate students.
- Both academicians and postgraduate education students can provide consultancy in such offices.
- The condition of foreign language may remain as a condition for postgraduate education, but educational environments can be established by relevant departments and programs for students to academically improve their knowledge of foreign language during postgraduate education.
- "Blind evaluation" can be carried out for fair evaluation of written exams. A certain rate of written exam can be used for candidate selection.
- Interviews can mainly focus on introduction of nominee, self-expression and level of interpretation.
- Environments can be established where lecturer-student and student-student collaborations can be provided.
- Common lessons can be given by lecturers from the same university in order to enhance interaction.
- Common lessons can be given by lecturers from different departments of the same university in order to enhance interaction.
- Common lessons can be given by lecturers from different universities in order to enhance interaction.
- Online distance education option can be provided for postgraduate students coming from a different city.
- The number of environments can be increased where lecturers of the department and postgraduate education students can come together and have exchange of ideas.
- Quality of postgraduate education can be enhanced by detecting common standards between all universities.

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