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A Systematic Review of Graduate Thesis Studies on Coaching

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ABSTRACT

Research Article

The coaching concept has been used in different fields since its emergence in the 1550s. Today, it continues to be used in many areas such as sports, health, business, and education. Although the coaching approach has a long history in practice, its use as a concept and research is not very old. Academic studies in different fields contribute to the subject of coaching, and the field gains depth through new studies. In this study, postgraduate thesis studies on coaching conducted from 1999, when the first postgraduate study in coaching was born, to 2020 were examined by document analysis method. The findings showed that although the graduate thesis studies on coaching date to 1999, it has been carried out for 14 years without interruption since 2007. It was also found that the majority of the studies on coaching were carried out as part of master's theses. Besides, the study revealed that coaching was investigated in 23 different subjects, mainly in education followed by training and business. The other result indicated that postgraduate thesis studies on coaching were conducted in 46 universities. Anadolu University took first place, followed by Marmara University and third Gazi University.

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Introduction

The Turkish Language Institution (TDK) defined the word “coach” as “instructor,” based on the meaning of the word “trainer,” which is of English origin and is related to the field of sports (Özdemir, Yiğit Seyfi, and Cenat, 2016). In the Cambridge dictionary, the word “coach” stands for “a person whose job is to teach people to improve in a sport, skill or school lesson” (dictionary.cambridge.org). Coaching focuses on improving a person’s skills who receive the coaching service (Ives, 2008). Durkaya Özer (2016) describes the coaching concept as; companionship, a vital way used in raising motivation and raising awareness, the way to act comprehending the importance of the current situation and the future, and the route followed to reach the goals by revealing the strengths and the existing potential, and the application area where is acted upon according to the demand of the client. Esen and Kılıçkını (2019) define coaching as the process of creating awareness on the way to reach the desired life by encouraging the emergence of the potential of the client and supporting and encouraging them to take responsibility with this awareness.

Evered and Selman (1989) described the coaching concept as a well-known method to improve performance. Due to being used in many fields, the concept of coaching causes conceptual confusion. Even if there have been standardizations in coaching, especially in the last twenty years, people still cannot fully understand what coaching is (Yurdakul, 2010). There are also conceptual misconceptions on this subject. Many people have a coaching label, from leaders to consultants (Arisoy, 2017). Contrary to these conceptual misconceptions, coaching is not mentoring, counseling, leadership, or therapy. Mentoring is known as one of the most confusing concepts. In mentoring, the person receiving the service can have meetings when needed, is evaluated from the general point of view, and could be more experienced than the mentor. However, coaching practices take a certain period, include meetings as part of a structured program, and involve certain topics along with the person who takes coaching service. The coach is not required to have experience but professional coaching equipment. In mentoring, when considering the experience, being educated is not an obligation (Durkaya Özer, 2016). Compared to the mentors (Esen & Kılıçkını, 2019), coaches do not guide the client. They only ask questions and enable the person to set their own goals and find their way. Mentoring practices can help establish a pathway for coaching (Nash, 2008), but they do not necessarily correspond to coaching.

This coaching method has become used in education, health, management, sports, and many other fields. The scope of coaching is also related to the emergence of the word in another area. Another meaning of the word “coach” in dictionaries is “bus designed for long-distance travel” (dictionary.cambridge.org).

The word “coach” in English means the name given to the means of transportation used to transport valuables from one place to another in the 16th century for the first time (Özdemir et al., 2016; Barnıç, 2018; Çabuk, 2011; Ocak, 2020). When thinking about this usage of "coach" in the 16th century, it is seen that today's meaning of the word coaching has a close meaning. In other words, in today’s meaning, a coach aims to carry the individual from one place to another for various reasons. This process includes very valuable elements.

Although giving an approximate date is possible in terms of usage of coaching in the language, it is impossible to provide a date when its use in practice is considered. According to Sezer and Şahin (2015), the term coaching has been known since human history began. That old or well-equipped individuals convey to younger ones how to hunt and cook with cave paintings and that experienced individuals in the society teach others how to be more effective and valuable are considered the beginning of coaching practices. From this point of view, coaching can be said to have been practiced both consciously and unconsciously since the existence of humanity.

Coaching, which is used as a service today, was developed in New York in the 1960s by Winthrop Adkins M.D. and Sidney Rosenberg M.D., and it was used for anti-poverty group programs (Oruç, 2019). By the end of the 20th century, practice-based coaching decreased, and in the 1990s, with the economic crisis, companies began to use coaching services for individual practices (Sezer and Şahin, 2015). On those dates, the most comprehensive organization in the coaching field was founded. The International Coach Federation (ICF) is the largest coaching organization launched in the United States in 1995 and defines and supports professional coaching and inspects competencies (Siminovitch,2019). Although ICF is one of the most known institutions about coaching today, it is seen that there were other movements related to coaching before and after it. EMCC (European Mentoring and Coaching Council) was established in the European Union Countries in 1992, AC (Association For Coaching) was founded in England in 2000, and in 2012, the ICF above, AC, and EMCC came together and established GCMA (Global Coaching Mentoring Alliance) (Özdemir et al., 2016). According to Ocak (2020), a non-profit organization was established in London in 2001 under the title of “The International Coaching Community (ICC),” which organizes training in the coaching profession.

The word coach was recognized in Turkey by the TV series "The White Shadow," broadcasted in the 1980s (Barnic, 2018). The concept of coaching began to be recognized in Turkey with the coach of a basketball team in this television series produced by the USA. From this point of view, it can be said that coaching was first recognized in the field of sports in our country. However, it was recognized as a profession between the years 1995-2000. A small number of coaches started to announce the coaching service in 2000 (Oruç, 2019). The first area where coaching started to be used in our country was administration. With the emergence of concepts of total quality, leadership, and teamwork in administration, the value given to coaching practice has increased (Karabacak, 2010). In addition, with the increasing social awareness regarding the coaching profession and contributing to the development of its members, ICF Turkey was established in 2005. However, its official identity was given to it as the “International Professional Coaching Association” in 2009 (Özdemir et al., 2016; January 2020). Additionally, The Coaching Platform Association was established in 2010. VQA (Vocational Qualifications Authority), which was established in 2006, was renewed in 2011 according to EU standards (Özdemir et al., 2016). In the professional sense, the concept of “coaching” was officially recognized by the vocational qualification authority (VQA) in 2013 (myk.gov.tr; cited by Toker and Kılıç, 2019).

One of the most challenging situations in life is when people analyze themselves from a foreigner's eyes. Therefore, individuals find it difficult to explore their strengths and weaknesses. At this point, the professional process of “coaching” gets involved and allows individuals to analyze themselves (Barnic, 2018). Coaching can briefly be defined as “to be a mirror to a person” (Vardarlier, 2017). The first step of change is getting to know oneself well and adapting their life accordingly. Even reaching this first step facilitates an individual's life and makes a big difference for them to live a more qualified life (İdiguk,2015). The person who will help the individual to achieve this change is the coach who helps the client by analyzing them from a foreigner's eye. According to Çabuk (2011), the coach should help the client who receives coaching service to reach their goal with the questions s/he will ask. There are five basic characteristics that the target should have in this process. These characteristics coded as “SMART” in English are as follows:

1. Specific: The goal should be more specific and relevant to the topic, not general.
2. Measurable: Goal definitions should be made tangible and obvious, not “approximate” statements.
3. Achievable: An accessible target should be determined according to the current situation of the person receiving the coaching service.

4. Relevant: The goal should be related to the vision.
5. Time-bound: When setting goals, it is necessary to plan for a specific time.

Although these basic characteristics are the characteristics of the goal, they also reflect the basic characteristics of the coaching process. Similarly, Siminovitch (2019) has listed the responsibilities of a coach in 4 items. Accordingly, the responsibilities of a coach are discovering, revealing, and adapting to the client's success, supporting the client's self-discovery process, revealing the solutions and strategies created by the client, and keeping the client responsible and accountable for the process. These responsibilities attributed to the coaching person have explained the application area of the coaching concept.

Coaching is an ever-developing profession all over the world today, and it has become a communication method adopted by people in institutions such as leaders, teachers, and counselors (Whitworth et al., 2020). In addition to being a rapidly developing profession, coaching has also become a popular method that strengthens communication between individuals (Tuncel, 2017). This method has affected many fields and has been involved in the coaching process. Coaching has covered many different areas such as education, counseling, personal development, situation analysis, planned change, and behavior development (İşlek & Şarlayan, 2014). Professional fields and institutions that were not involved in the coaching process at first or even rejected it have participated in this transformation over time. Leaders need coaches if they want to effectuate change and build high-performing organizations. Businesses accepted coaching as an unnecessary expense in the past, but now it is seen as an investment. According to William Arruda, organizations with strong coaching cultures have reported their revenue to have been above average compared to their peer group (Williams, 2017). Naturally, other businesses that have witnessed this over time will also want to adapt to this transformation to have a coaching culture. Coaching mediates finding solutions to the new era in various areas of life, provides a high level of facilitation, and is supported by neurobiological findings. Therefore, it is a tool of development, change, and transformation, which is characterized as the profession of both the era and the future (Kaplan, 2019). The application of the concept of coaching, which is not very old in the literature, in many fields and its versatile benefits have increased its use and popularity. The expansion of its field has surely also affected academic studies on this subject.

A thesis is a scientific research process in which ideas are tried to be verified using scientific methods; the reality of the ideas has not yet been proven but does not also contradict the existing information. The hypotheses that have been introduced during the thesis study are tried to be proven with the information obtained, and the conclusions reached. Hundreds of theses in different fields have been conducted and are being conducted in Turkey. Thesis studies are also conducted on coaching in Turkey, which is a new research topic in the world.

It is known that prior studies play an active role in informing and guiding future studies. The review studies could be beneficial to the researchers to be aware of current trends in relevant research topics. Although many thesis studies have been made on coaching at master's and doctorate levels, no scientific research analyzes these studies from various aspects. Besides, there is a lack of research studies using the document analysis method to review the postgraduate thesis studies conducted in the field of coaching in Turkey. Therefore, this study fills a critical gap by reporting significant findings regarding the characteristics of graduate thesis studies conducted on coaching.

This study aims to examine the postgraduate thesis studies in the coaching field in Turkey. For this primary purpose, the answers to the research questions are sought to determine graduate thesis studies' characteristics and research tendencies. These questions are as follows:

1. What is the distribution of postgraduate theses in the coaching field by years?

2. What is the distribution of postgraduate theses in the coaching field by postgraduate education level?
3. What is the distribution of postgraduate theses in the coaching field by subject?
4. What is the distribution of postgraduate theses in the coaching field by universities?

Method

Qualitative research is an approach to discovering and understanding the meanings attributed to a social or human problem by individuals or groups (Creswell, 2017a). The qualitative research method was used in this study. After determining the research method, the study was designed with the most appropriate research technique. This study adopted the document analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods. The document analysis method allows the researcher to collect public documents or private documents as data collection tools (Creswell, 2017b). The documents collected and inspected in this study are the graduate thesis studies (MS and Ph.D.) conducted in Turkey between 1999-2020.

Population and Sample

The study population consists of postgraduate theses conducted in the coaching field between the years 1999-2020. The relevant dates include all the years starting from the first thesis study in the coaching field until the time of this study. The sampling method has not been used in this study. The entire study population has been reached. All postgraduate theses in the coaching field were accessed from the thesis search centre of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). The title and abstract sections of the theses in the database were examined. Thereby, the theses that were not in the coaching field have not been included in the scope of the study.

Data Collection

In the thesis title section of the search database of YÖK, the keyword “coach” was searched. Then, a data repository was created from the theses presented by the thesis search database. Theses that are not related to the coaching field were not included in the repository. A total of 100 postgraduate thesis studies related to the coaching field constitute the data repository.

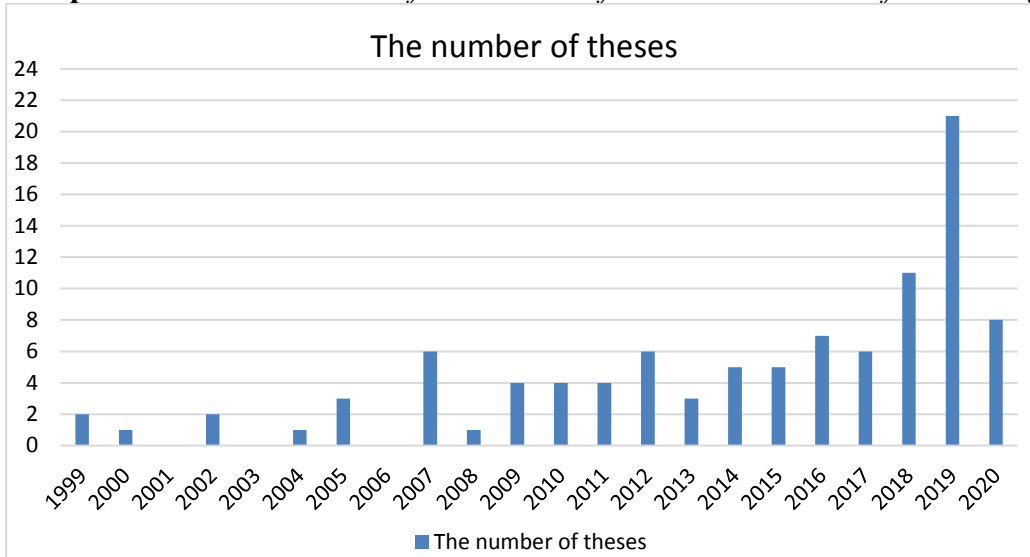
Data Analysis

In the study, postgraduate theses in the coaching field in Turkey were examined under various sub-headings. In this direction, the document analysis technique was used. Document analysis is a detailed scanning of the written materials related to the cases or events examined and it provides a holistic perspective in the light of the information obtained (Creswell, 2002). Interpreting in qualitative research includes the extensive abstraction of data beyond the codes created during the analysis process. The data found in the last stage is conveyed by texts, tables, or figures (Creswell, 2013).

Findings

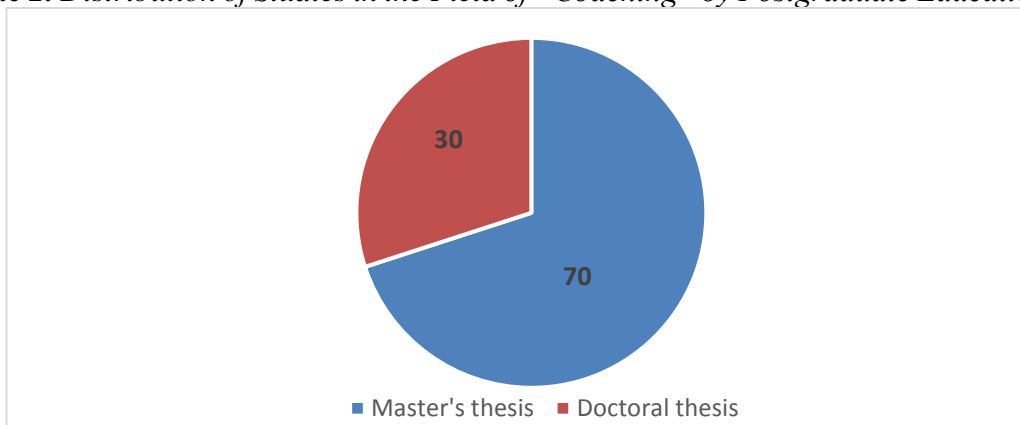
In this section, the findings of the postgraduate theses conducted in the coaching field in Turkey between the years 1999-2020 are included.

Graphic 1. *Data on the Year of Publication of Theses in the Field of “Coaching”*



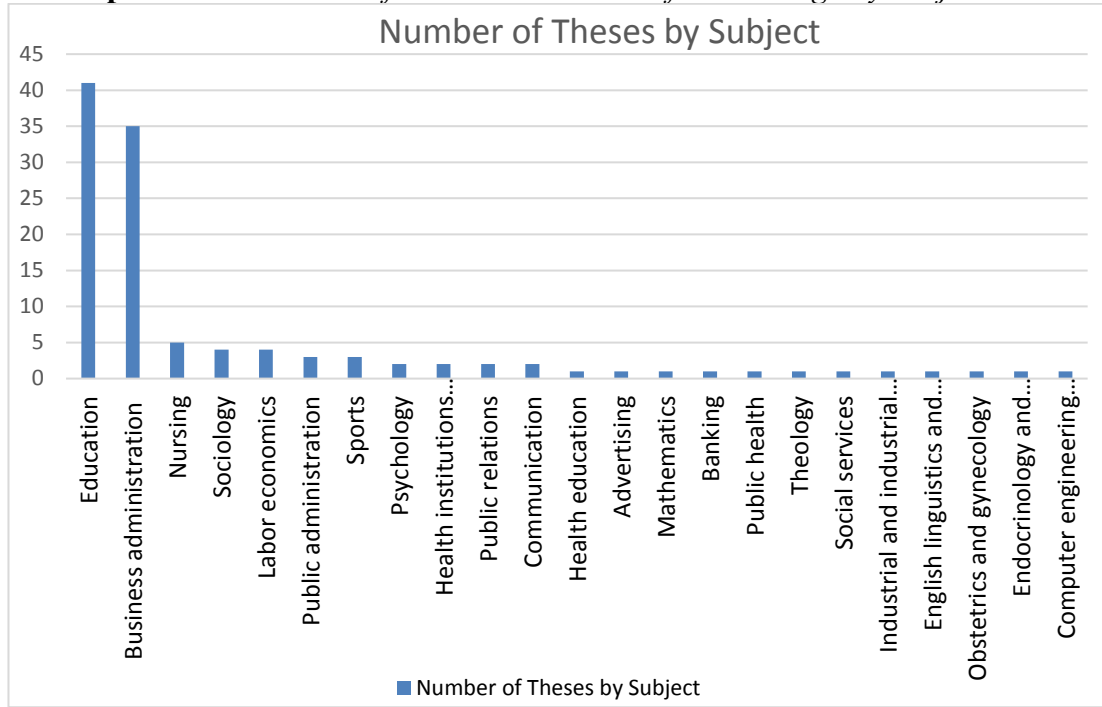
Graphic 1 shows the number of theses conducted between 1999-2020 on “coaching” in Turkey. Between these years, a total of 100 postgraduate studies were conducted in the coaching field. When the graphic is examined, it is seen that the thesis about coaching was first conducted in 1999 in two different studies. While only one thesis was conducted in 2000, it is seen that no thesis studies on this subject were conducted in 2001, 2003 and 2006. The fact that coaching is still a new field in Turkey is thought to be directly proportional to the small number of theses conducted at the beginning and changing the number of thesis studies in the field from year to year. Although the inconsistency in the sequence of postgraduate studies continued until 2007, theses on coaching were conducted each year from 2007 to 2020. From this point of view, it can be said that academic activities in the coaching field have increased in recent years. In particular, the fact that 11 studies were conducted in 2018 and 21 studies in 2019 reveals the rapid rise of coaching studies in the academic field. Although there was a decrease in 2020 compared to 2019, a total of 8 academic studies and theses were conducted and they contributed to the field.

Graphic 2. *Distribution of Studies in the Field of “Coaching” by Postgraduate Education Level*



When the data in Graphic 2 is examined, it is seen that 70% of the postgraduate studies in the coaching field are master’s theses. 30 of the 100 theses studied as doctoral theses. From this point of view, it can be said that the coaching field is mostly studied in master’s theses.

Graphic 3. *Distribution of Theses in the Field of “Coaching” by Subject*



Graphic 3 shows the distribution of postgraduate studies on coaching by subject. When the data is examined, it can be said that the most frequently studied subject is education, and a total of 41 postgraduate studies have been conducted on this subject. Although postgraduate studies on coaching started in 1999, thesis studies on education were first undertaken in 2007. The most studied thesis topic in coaching has been business administration following education. A total of 35 theses on the subject of business administration have been conducted. Considering that the main purpose of coaching is performance improvement and guiding towards the target, the fact that the most studied subject is education and business administration supports the result in the data. In Turkey, thesis studies on coaching have been conducted on nursing, sociology, theology, and mathematics. However, the number of thesis studies in these fields has not been as many as those in the fields of education and business administration. It can be thought that the diversity of the thesis topics is since coaching is a method that can be applied in many different fields. A total of 23 different postgraduate theses on coaching were conducted in 22 years. Based on this result, the thesis studies on coaching are expected to be carried out in different fields in the upcoming period.

Table 1. *Distribution of Theses in the Field of “Coaching” by Universities*

| University | f |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Anadolu University | 10 |
| Marmara University | 9 |
| Gazi University | 6 |
| Sakarya University | 5 |
| Çanakkale On sekiz Mart University | 5 |
| Bahçeşehir University | 4 |

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Dokuz Eylül University | 4 |
| İstanbul Aydın University | 4 |
| Ankara University | 3 |
| Middle East Technical University | 3 |
| Pamukkale University | 3 |
| Yeditepe University | 3 |
| Afyon Kocatepe University | 3 |
| Beykent University | 2 |
| Ege University | 2 |
| Hacettepe University | 2 |
| İstanbul University | 2 |
| Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University | 2 |
| Akdeniz University | 1 |
| Altınbaş University | 1 |
| Atatürk University | 1 |
| Atılım University | 1 |
| Balıkesir University | 1 |
| Bartın University | 1 |
| Boğaziçi University | 1 |
| Çukurova University | 1 |
| Dumlupınar University | 1 |
| Fırat University | 1 |
| Gaziantep University | 1 |
| Gebze High Technology Institute | 1 |
| Haliç University | 1 |
| İstanbul Şehir University | 1 |
| İstanbul Technical University | 1 |
| İstanbul Okan University | 1 |
| İzmir Kâtip Çelebi University | 1 |
| Kırşehir Ahi Evran University | 1 |
| Kocaeli University | 1 |

| | |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Maltepe University | 1 |
| Necmettin Erbakan University | 1 |
| Niğde University | 1 |
| Health Sciences University | 1 |
| Selçuk University | 1 |
| Trakya University | 1 |
| Ufuk University | 1 |
| Uludağ University | 1 |
| Yıldız Technical University | 1 |
| Total | 100 |

When looking at the data given in Table 1, it is seen that the thesis study on coaching is mostly conducted at Anadolu University and corresponds to 10% of the total number of theses. After Anadolu University, the university with the highest number of theses on coaching is Marmara University, with nine theses. After the 16 universities that followed them, one thesis study on coaching was conducted at the universities listed in the table. The list includes 46 universities. Thus, it can be said that only 46 universities have thesis studies on coaching in Turkey, and any thesis studies on coaching have not been conducted at universities other than these 46 universities.

Discussion and Result

In this study, the postgraduate education theses on coaching conducted in Turkey between the years 1999-2020 have been analyzed. When the distribution of 100 postgraduate theses in the coaching field is examined within the scope of the study, it is seen that there was an inconsistency between 1999, when the first thesis was conducted, and 2007. During these dates, any thesis study was conducted for three years at intervals, but after 2007, it was observed that the thesis studies were conducted, although they were at different rates. The reason for this is thought that coaching practices were not yet widespread at that time. The concept of coaching was seen as a profession in Turkey between the years 1995-2000. In the service sector, it was introduced in 2000 by a small number of coaches (Oruç, 2019). Therefore, the number of postgraduate thesis studies on coaching is expected to be lower until it gained an official status in 2009 (Özdemir vd., 2016; Ocak, 2020). However, in 2019, most theses were conducted in the coaching field, with 21 theses. The postgraduate thesis studies on coaching have been increased since 2013. The reason could be because Vocational Qualifications Authority (MYK) officially recognized the concept of "coaching" in 2013 (cited from myk.gov.tr, Toker and Kılıç, 2019). In other words, it is thought that the reason for the increase in thesis studies on coaching, especially since 2013, is because the concept has become more official and has the opportunity to take more place in life.

The fact that 70% of the theses examined within the scope of the study are master's theses shows that the rate of doctoral theses in the studies in the data repository is quite a few. It is thought that the reason for this is the fact that the number of doctoral graduates in Turkey is less than the number of master graduates. Günay (2018) stated in his study that the number of people who graduated from the master's education level is more than the number of people

who graduated from the doctoral level in 17 years in Turkey. Therefore, the fact that the number of master's theses is higher than the number of doctoral theses is seen as normal. This is also valid for the theses conducted in the coaching field. The fact that the number of master's theses on coaching is 40% more than the number of doctoral theses is thought to be related to this situation.

As a result of the research, it was determined that the most studied subject in 100 postgraduate thesis studies was education. Recently, there has been an increased emphasis on coaching practices in education across many countries, including the UK, USA, and Australia. The approach that coaching practices are beneficial in supporting students, teachers, and administrators has been adopted (Nieuwerburgh, 2012). While coaching practices are performed in different fields in our country, it can be said that coaching in education has gained more importance in recent years. One of the factors affecting this situation is the fact that the Ministry of National Education issued a circular in the 2011-2012 academic year, which requested that teachers working at middle schools and secondary schools (high schools) should perform coaching (Çam Tosun and Bayram, 2017). In the previous period, student coaching was conducted by psychologists, and this important task was attributed to teachers with this circular letter. In this case, it is inevitable to be tended towards an education-based approach in coaching practices. The development in coaching practices has led to a need to conduct more studies in this field. As a result, witnessing the increasing number of graduate thesis studies on coaching in the educational area has become inevitable. When the postgraduate theses studies that were conducted in the field of education are examined, it is seen that these studies focus on the subjects such as school administrators' coaching level, teachers' coaching skill level, and the effect of coaching practices on student success. Thus, as a result, the number of studies in education has started to escalate as of 2011. While 41 of the 100 studies in the coaching field are in the field of education and training, the second most studied subject is business administration, with 35 thesis studies. The coaching practices in Turkey started in the management field. Specifically, as the concepts such as total quality in management, leadership, and group work gain attention, the importance given to coaching practices has increased (Karabacak, 2010). The studying of 21 subjects other than these two subjects is only five theses. The attribution of coaching duties to teachers and administrators, and the fact that coaching practices are more common and crucial in these areas, have allowed these two areas to be studied primarily in theses.

It has been determined that a postgraduate thesis study in the coaching field was conducted in 46 different universities in Turkey between the years 1999 and 2020. The university where most studies were conducted in this field was Anadolu University. When the studies that were conducted at Anadolu University in the field of coaching are examined, it is seen that 5 out of 10 theses were carried out under the consultancy of Elif Tekin İftar. Most of the studies on coaching performed at Anadolu University could be due to the research areas of thesis consultants because it is believed that the thesis advisors play a crucial role in the development of theses (İşıksoluğu, 1994). Previous research studies show that thesis advisors tend to encourage their graduate students to do studies related to their research areas and, therefore, have an important influence on determining the thesis research topic (İpek Akbulut vd., 2013). Therefore, thesis advisors interested in coaching may have affected the distribution of graduate thesis studies conducted at Universities in Turkey.

Apart from Anadolu University, various studies have been conducted in different universities related to the coaching field. It is seen that one postgraduate thesis study has been conducted in each 28 of 46 universities where the theses were conducted in the coaching field. This situation could be related to the low tendencies of the faculty members towards the subject. As a result, it can be concluded that the interest in the field of coaching is not common in academic thesis studies in Turkey. However, when we look at the practices and studies in the

world and Turkey, it can be stated that change is expected in this situation. It is foreseen that the increasing prevalence of coaching will also be reflected in academic studies. According to Tiryaki (2015), coaching skills will be set as a standard expected from managers in the next ten years. As skills such as time and budget management are a natural expectation, coaching skills such as team management will become such a basic expectation.

Suggestions

In conclusion, this study aimed to examine the postgraduate education theses conducted between the years 1999-2020. Based on the results of the study, the following suggestions can be offered:

- It appears that master's students have more interest in coaching than doctoral students. Coaching is an essential component in education, deserving to be inspected and analyzed extensively. Therefore, this study suggests that more research studies should be conducted on coaching in different contexts.
- While many of theses conducted are on education and business administration, the number of theses on other subjects is very few. Conducting a thesis on the coaching field in different topics will ensure that the coaching field is supported by academic data.
- Thesis studies in the coaching field comprise 46 universities in total. If the relevant field studies are conducted in different universities, the scope of the research will expand, and this will bring new perspectives to the literature.

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