Supervision and the PhD Process:
Perspectives of Research Assistants[1]

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this phenomenological study was to examine the supervisor-supervisee relationship in the PhD process based on Turkish PhD students' views. Eight PhD students who work as research assistants in educational sciences participated in the study. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the participants, and analyzed by means of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. As a result of the analyses, three main themes, "My PhD", "My Supervisor" and "My Expectations", were revealed. The findings showed that the participants perceived doing a PhD as a means for actualizing themselves and their dreams. The PhD students described their supervisors as guiding, supportive and instructive. They spoke of the personal and professional characteristics that their supervisors should have and how these characteristics affect them. They expected the PhD education to be student-centered and more practice-based. They argued that their relationship with supervisors should have a balance, and it should not go beyond the professional dimension. Moreover, they underlined the necessity that their supervisors' intervention to the process should be limited to guidance.

Key Words: Supervision, PhD Education, Phenomenology, Metaphor

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INTRODUCTION

> *My previous supervisor had too many administrative duties. We broke off in that process. We couldn't see each other when I needed him the most. He didn't state his expectations and requests clearly. I couldn't estimate what he wanted and where he aimed to reach. I was like a slipping car. I was consuming energy all the time, but couldn't progress any further.*
>
> *(Pınar, PhD student)*

The importance of interaction between supervisor and supervisee in the PhD research process can be seen in Pınar's (pseudonym applied) views on her supervisor above. Through knowledge and experience, a supervisor determines the quality of PhD education as a guide to the student, and the student should benefit from this to the maximum level. PhD education is a complex, challenging, dynamic, innovative and formative process. It should have a vision leading to professional development, and create a research culture (Ersoy, 2015). In the realization of this vision, factors such as the supervisor's qualifications, their views on the research, student and supervision, and their supervisory style come to the fore.

Supervision has been included in doctoral education with research degrees becoming formal in the curricula of universities from the late 19th to early 20th century, but supervision and supervisory roles have come through various changes until today (Lee & Green, 2009). While it was initially considered a process in which a master trained an apprentice, it went through a number of changes as areas of expertise increased and governments developed new educational policies. These changes were the flexibility of the hierarchy in the supervisor-supervisee relationship, the increase in the exchange of ideas, and supporting students' research ideas (Malfroy, 2005). As for supervisory roles, the concepts of mentorship, coaching, orientation and guidance come to the fore. These concepts are intertwined and are used interchangeably. Although they different in supervisory practices, in the literature they are included as strategies that can be used together.

Mentorship is a separate practice on its own, but it is also a strategy within supervision (Campbell, 2000, 2001; Manathunga, 2007). The origin of the word 'mentor' goes back to Homer's Odyssey. Before initiating a campaign, Odysseus consigns his son, Telemachus, to his friend, Mentor. The Greek God, Athena, dressed as Mentor guides and trains Telemachus. The word 'mentor' then spread out with "Telemachus' Adventures" (1966), a novel by Fenelon who taught Louis' grandson, in which Mentor becomes Telemachus' emotional and intellectual role model. Henceforth, the concept of mentor started to be used to refer to the relationship that a person experienced in a certain area establishes with an inexperienced person in order to develop them personally and professionally (Mueller, 2004). Mentorship not only involves academic support, but also psychological, personal, and social support. Manathunga (2007) states that mentorship is accepted as an effective way of supervision in the literature.

Coaching, which is included within mentorship, is the method of improving an individual or team performance through orientations and training in order to teach them a

certain skill or to reach a particular goal. Coaching usually involves the existence of an external expert or a coach specific to a job (Mental Health Coordinating Council [MHCC], 2008). Coaching emerged as a training model for athletes, but it was then adapted to areas such as clinical supervision and staff training in education. Coaching is important in improving education and instruction, experiencing new approaches, problem-solving, and building relationships among colleagues. Coaching can take place between an expert and a novice, or peers who are in a mutual interaction, as well as among practitioners who come together for a task (Gallacher, 1997).

In its broadest sense, supervision is defined as the orientation and guidance provided to individuals who work in an organization to achieve organizational goals (Daresh, 1989, as cited in Gallacher, 1997). It can thus be described as a broad concept that includes the use of different strategies or methods in the accomplishment of these goals. However, there are various types of supervision in different disciplines such as education, social services, psychological counselling and psychotherapy (Gallacher, 1997). In the PhD research process, the term "research supervision" is used at the institutional level because PhD students' development is monitored, directed and guided. Research supervision has a vital importance in doctoral education because the success and quality of this process depends on effective supervision (Alam, Alam, & Rasul, 2013; Ismail, Abiddin, & Hassan, 2011).

Supervision is critical to a successful PhD education (Ismail et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that it is of significance to define supervisory roles and search for quality accordingly. Mouton (2001) lists supervisory roles as guiding, advising, ensuring scientific quality and providing moral support (as cited in Lessing & Schulze, 2002). These roles are shown in Figure 1.
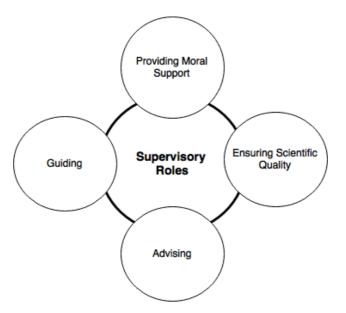

Figure 1. *Supervisory roles*

According to Figure 1, supervisors should guide students throughout the research process. With their knowledge and experience, they should be able to direct and advise students should they become confused or get into difficulty. Students may encounter various challenges that can negatively affect their motivation during the process. In such cases,

supervisors should be able to also support students emotionally, and help them out in the solution of problems. Moreover, supervisors should be able to convey their expertise in scientific research to their students.

Fraser and Mathews (1999) lists supervisory roles in the PhD research process as "expertise in the research field", "supporting students", and "ensuring the balance between creativity and criticism". *Expertise in the research field* covers characteristics such as wisdom, expertise, teaching quality, effectiveness, and guidance. *Supporting students* includes characteristics such as willingness, allotting time to them, helpfulness, and being conscientious. Here, supervisors should makes students feel that they have the intellectual background to manage the process successfully and to give them added confidence. Considering that students can come to a dead-end and may experience feelings of incompetence, they should be presented with a clear perspective related to the process. Additionally, they should be helped to regain the necessary motivation in cases where they do not make the sufficient level of effort or experience burnout. In *ensuring the balance between creativity and criticism*, supervisors should be firstly instructive and give advice to students, and in later stages, move towards constructive criticisms. When Fraser and Mathews' (1999) supervisory roles are examined, it can be seen that the supervisor-student relationship is a social-subjective process, and the effect of supervisors' academic and personal qualifications is extensive on the process. Supervisory roles can be said to differ based on areas of expertise and approaches to supervising.

In the literature, approaches to supervising are categorized as traditional, group and mixed. In the traditional approach, the relationship is between a supervisor and a student, but in group supervision, it is between a supervisor and multiple students. On the other hand, in the mixed approach, the two previous approaches are adopted, but at the same time, information technologies are employed (McCallin & Nayar, 2012). In *traditional supervision*, there is a master-apprentice relationship. Supervisors and students come together at certain times. Here, students are expected to become independent researchers by observing their supervisors (Yeatman, 1995). This approach is suitable for students who are capable, have a high level of self-direction, and can be independent researchers with minimal training input (Manathunga & Goozée, 2007). It is also criticized due to reasons such as isolating students from those other than their supervisor, and restricting the exchange of intellectual knowledge (Neumann, 2005). *Group supervision* aims to move the informal relationship that students have with other students in the PhD process into a formal dimension. Here, many events such as group discussions, writing groups, seminars and workshops are organized which ensure academic development (McCallin & Nayar, 2012). Students interact with each other in group supervision. They have the perception and responsibility of being part of a group or community. Groups enable teamwork, the exchange of ideas, and individuals' supporting each other which leads to their development. In this way, the isolation problem, which is a limitation of the traditional approach, is restricted (Wisker, Robinson, & Shacham, 2007). As for the *mixed approach*, it is an approach in which traditional and group supervision approaches are synthesized, and information technologies employed. Academic activities such as group discussions and seminars can be carried out remotely. In this regard, the mixed approach can be said to have an important place in terms of opening the door for international doctoral education. The approach that Beer and Mason (2009) adopted in which they used blended learning can be shown as an example of the mixed approach that grounds on constructivist learning in the supervisory process. The role of supervisors here is to guide students to basic

sources of information that they will access. Meetings can be held face-to-face, or through the internet. In the later stage, supervisors assess what students have acquired within the process.

In traditional supervision, students are assumed to be independent researchers, and are trained based on this assumption. In this approach, supervisors are in the "expert" position that provides critical contribution to PhD students' works (Parker, 2009). The tradition that is strong but not mentioned here is the desire that students turn themselves into independent researchers with minimal pedagogical education from their supervisors. Moreover, they are "always and already" independent researchers (Johnson, Lee, & Green, 2000) and have perfect creative-critical thinking and writing skills. They are expected to acquire these necessary skills by observing and imitating their supervisors (Manathunga & Goozée, 2007). In this approach, it is not clear how PhD students develop their research competencies. Manathunga's (2005) study showed that most students do not want to admit to their supervisors that they lack knowledge about how to review literature, start writing, or carry out other research tasks. It was stated that this situation is not only due to students not admitting when they need help, but also due to reservations that they could be described as "incompetent" by their supervisors. A statements from a PhD student from Manathunga's (2005) focus group interviews included the following:

> *My supervisor assumed that I knew what to do in my research..., the administrative procedures in the faculty where I was new..., how a study should be conducted..., and how a paper should be written. There was no "apprenticeship" or "coaching".*

The quotation implies that some students try to cope with problems experienced during the PhD process on their own. In Manathunga's study (2005), the students listed problems such as supervisor-student roles and responsibilities that are not realistic and well-defined, insufficient supervision, inconsistencies and lack of trust in the relationship, conflicts with the supervisor, and the supervisor's indifference to the research topic. Also, some students stated that they were provided guidance only for controlling, and their supervisors avoided spending time with them. As in all social relationships, there are also factors that have a significant effect on the supervisor-supervisee relationship. In their study, Bibi-Nawaz, Stronach, Grant, and Frankham (2015) highlighted that social factors such as gender, age, religion and cultural differences could influence the supervisor-supervisee relationship, and these factors should also be considered. This relationship can be affected by gender roles from different cultures, fear of others from different faiths being ignored, an individual's hesitation to express their views, and misunderstandings borne from not considering cultural differences.

In recent years, supervision has been regarded as a pedagogy. Supervision pedagogy includes training students in skills such as conducting research, writing, data analysis, literature review, presentation, and managing a research project (McCallin & Nayar, 2012). Firth and Martens (2008) state that supervision is a specialized form of teaching. Emilsson and Johnsson (2007) indicate that in Switzerland, more universities have started to organize courses for supervision, and administrations recommend supervisory training to universities with graduate programs. In this respect, there are tendencies towards regarding supervision as a pedagogy, providing students with research training, and educating supervisors (Boud & Lee, 2005; Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007; Johnson et al., 2000; McCallin & Nayar, 2012). One of these tendencies are learning communities that include wider interactions rather than just the supervisor-student interaction. Learning communities allow for horizontal and vertical

learning interactions of those meeting with similar learning objectives. Parker's (2009) idea of scientific writing groups in research training is an example of a learning community. This idea was proposed in order to develop students' scientific writing skills, and includes participating in a scientific writing project as a group. During the process, group members reflect on the project they work on, review each other's work and support each other, and in this way, peer learning is realized. In their study, Emilsson and Johnsson (2007) aimed to teach supervisors how to supervise and adopted process-oriented group supervision. The contents of the program consisted of topics such as communication-theory and practice, supervision-theory and practice, "meta-communication" and communication levels, empathy in communication, and relationships. Supervisors were asked to reflect on their experiences within the process. Issues that each supervisor had a problem with were determined and solutions found. An important finding of the study was that most supervisors, with some exceptions, lacked knowledge regarding the theoretical framework of supervision. At the end of the program, they stated that they gained important knowledge about interpersonal communication, and were satisfied with the project and their outcomes.

Studies have shown that the supervisor-student relationship and the quality of supervision are significant determinants of PhD student achievement and theses quality (Bakioğlu & Gürdal, 2001; Çakıcı, 2006; Guss, 1961; Ismail et al., 2011; Işıksoluğu, 1994; Lessing & Lessing, 2004; Lessing & Schulze, 2002). PhD students want freedom in their studies, expect constructive criticism and quick feedback from their supervisors, and need to be motivated, encouraged and supported by them (Ismail et al., 2011). It can be argued that there is a need for studies that examine the supervisor-student relationship and the PhD research process. The aim of this study is to probe the supervisor-student relationship in the PhD research process based on student perceptions. The following research questions were specified based on this aim:

1. What does a PhD mean for PhD students?

2. How do PhD students define the concept of supervision?

3. What are PhD students' expectations based on their experiences of PhD education?

METHOD

Design

Phenomenology was adopted for this study since the aim was to examine how people make sense of their personal experiences and to focus on the nature of sense-making (Patton, 2002). Phenomenology provides rich ideas on how we can understand and examine experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). According to Moustakas (1994), in phenomenology, one aims to investigate what is experienced about the phenomenon, and what contexts or situations affect this experience of the phenomenon (as cited in Cresswell, 2007). In this study, phenomenological design was preferred because it was aimed to examine how PhD students make sense of the concept of "supervision", how they perceived the PhD process they have experienced, and what their expectations are from the process. Interpretive phenomenology was thought to be more suitable as the research design since the first author was a research assistant undertaking his PhD, and the second author was a supervisor of PhD students. Interpretive phenomenology refers to looking at the meanings embedded in individuals' life experiences, and thus, going beyond merely defining concepts and their characteristics. Different from descriptive phenomenology, it approaches human experiences

from an ontological rather than epistemological perspective. It looks for hidden meanings within phenomena rather than defining the experience (Ersoy, 2016). In this study, the researcher's prior knowledge (i.e. the view that a researcher's experiences and prior knowledge is a valuable guide for the study) in interpretive phenomenology was adopted instead of the researcher's objectivity (i.e. researcher's standing from his/her prior knowledge and experiences) in descriptive phenomenology.

Context and Participants

The participants were PhD students studying at a Turkish state university that has been established for almost 60 years and has had more than 4,000 graduate students. At the university, there are currently nine institutes, of which five provide graduate education, and more than 30 research centers in various areas. The graduate school of education sciences where the participants were studying has 13 PhD programs, 17 Master's programs with theses, and five Master's non-thesis programs in ten areas. Thirty-six professors, 45 associate professors and 31 assistant professors work within the graduate school where 1,226 students continue their education at Master's and PhD levels. The graduate school has a 20-year experience of supervision in educational sciences. For this reason, an established culture of supervision exists in the institution.

Different views are stated regarding the ideal number of participants in phenomenological research. Referring to Dukes and Polkinghorne in this regard, Creswell (2013) says that the number of participants may vary between 3-25 individuals. Accordingly, Dukes (1984, as cited in Creswell, 2013) proposes to examine a group of 3-10 individuals, while Polkinghorne (1989, as cited in Creswell, 2013) proposes 5-25 individuals. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016) assert that the number of participants in phenomenological research can be 5-6 individuals. Eight research assistants pursuing a PhD degree in educational sciences participated in the present study. Individuals who were both research assistants and PhD students were selected among those who were at the thesis stage after passing the qualification exam, and thus, were experiencing the supervisor-supervisee relationship more intensely. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. The reason why PhD students were preferred over Master's students in the study was that in comparison, PhD students experience the phenomena of "PhD research process" and "PhD supervision", which are the focus of this study, more intensely and for a longer time. Table 1 presents the individual characteristics of the PhD students who participated in the study and information regarding their PhD processes (i.e. age, teaching experience, area of PhD education, year in the PhD program, experience abroad, publications, perceived supervision approach, university where they received a Master's degree and were doing a PhD, title of the PhD supervisor, and whether or not they changed their supervisor during the PhD process).

Duration that the PhD students (pseudonyms given in Table 1) spent in their PhD education ranged from three to four years. Among the participants, only Mustafa did not have previous experience abroad and publications While Ali, Ayşe, Pınar, and Burcu had been abroad through the Erasmus exchange program for a long time, other participants had been abroad only for oral presentations at seminars/conferences. Ali and Ceren had authored book chapters in their areas. Based on the PhD students' statements, it can be inferred that all of them received traditional supervision. Ali, Ayşey, Burcu, and Ceren were undertaking their PhD at the university where they studied for their Master's degree and was also their place of work, whereas Pınar, Ahmet, Mehmet, and Mustafa were working at different universities,

but assigned to this university in order to complete their PhD studies. Supervisors of Ali, Pınar, Ahmet, Burcu, and Ceren were professors, and those of Ayşe and Mehmet were associate professors. Mustafa was the only student whose supervisor was an assistant professor.

Table 1. *Participants' individual characteristics and PhD processes*

Particip ant	TE	Area	Year in PhD	Experien ce Abroad		Publications			Supervision Approach	University for Master's and PhD Degrees	PhD Supervisor 's Title	Supervis or Change in PhD Process
				C	EP	A	P	B C				
Ali (39)*	+	SE	4	+	+	4	15	2	Traditional	Same	Prof.	No
Ayşe (34)	-	ME	4	+	+	2	5	-	Traditional	Same	Assoc. Prof.	Yes
Pınar (30)	-	PCG	3	+	+	1	10	-	Traditional	Different	Prof.	Yes
Ahmet (34)	+	CEIT	3	+	_	5	20	-	Traditional	Different	Prof.	No
Mehmet (33)	+	CEIT	4	+	_	11	20	-	Traditional	Different	Assoc. Prof.	No
Burcu (32)	+	EE	4	+	+	10	25		Traditional	Same	Prof.	No
Ceren (31)	-	SE	3			1	25	2	Traditional	Same	Prof.	No
Mustafa (37)	-	AT	3	_	_	_	_	_	Traditional	Different	Assist. Prof.	No

TE= Teaching Experience (Ministry of National Education); C= Congress; EP= Exchange Program (Erasmus); A= Article; P= Presentation; BC= Book Chapter.

SE= Special Education; ME= Mathematics Education; PCG= Psychological Counselling and Guidance; CEIT= Computer Education & Instructional Technology; EE= Elementary Education; AT= Art Teaching.

*Numbers in parentheses show participants' age.

Data Gathering and Analysis

The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the participants, and analyzed by means of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA refers to phenomenological examinations that focus on discovering experiences with individuals' own terms, and presents an analytical approach to their attempts of making sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It accepts the researcher's interpretive role on the data, and enables accessing the participant's cognitive inner world through a careful and open methodology (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Interpretive phenomenology was adopted as the research design for this current study. IPA was used in the analysis because it is an approach that is suitable for "using the researcher's prior knowledge" in interpretive phenomenology.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the PhD students. Some of the students were interviewed more than once. In these interviews, the participants were asked the following questions:

1. Can you explain what it means to you to do a PhD?
2. How would you evaluate your own PhD research process in terms of the supervisor-supervisee relationship?
3. What do you think supervision is like? Why?

4. How should the supervisor-supervisee relationship be for you?
5. What is the relationship like between you and your supervisor? Why?

The participants were also asked questions other than these primary questions, and some participants were asked questions unique to their situations in a second interview.

While interpreting the research data, inferences were reached based on all dimensions that constitute the context such as how the participants described the phenomenon, their emphasis, tone of voice and mimics as seen during the interviews, and the participants' individual characteristics. For example, interpretations were made by considering the process which a participant went through, and his story when explaining a contradiction due to his description of a situation as lucky although it was misfortune in his PhD process. In another example, the reasons behind a participant's reaction to being called "assistant" were interpreted in the context of the legal regulations for "assistants" and "research assistants", and the participant's world-view. The fact that the authors of the current study are a PhD supervisor and a research assistant doing his PhD and therefore subjected to similar processes was thought to be an advantage in terms of revealing the meanings behind the participants' statements. Therefore, interpretive phenomenology was adopted in the study, and since it was suitable for "making use of the researcher's prior knowledge" in interpretive phenomenology, interpretive phenomenological analysis was preferred in the analysis.

FINDINGS

Based on the findings obtained from the PhD students' interviews, the PhD process and supervision approaches they experienced were gathered under the category "My PhD Journey" with three main themes. The main themes within this category included "My PhD", "My Supervisor", and "My Expectations". The category and main themes reached in the study are represented in Figure 2.
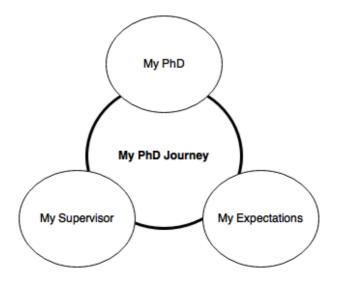

Figure 2. *Students PhD journey*

In the theme "My PhD", the students revealed how they made sense of undertaking a PhD, and the factors that pushed them to this stage. They explained how they made sense of their supervisors as a result of their experiences in the theme "My Supervisor". As for the

theme "My Expectation", it comprises of PhD students' expectations from their PhD education and their supervisors. The scope of these themes are elaborated as follows.

My PhD: My Self-Actualization

In this theme, the PhD students basically emphasized actualizing themselves. As they highlighted achieving their dreams and receiving a title in the personal dimension, they mentioned opening the door to the academic world, becoming an independent researcher and specializing in an area in the academic dimension. The main theme of "My PhD", its subthemes and codes are represented in Figure 3.

Some of the PhD students thought that a PhD would provide them with important opportunities for self-actualization, and that these opportunities were significant factors in their undertaking a PhD. Other factors that were seen as important in doing a PhD were the provision of opportunity to achieve one's dreams, and the title of doctor perceived as the reward for one's effort and work unlike other academic titles. The following are samples from the students' views related to the personal dimension within the theme "My PhD":

> *I decided to do a PhD by thinking it would create an environment where I would be able to do things I couldn't do, achieve what I dreamed of. This is what PhD means to me in general.* (Ahmet)

> *I think the doctoral title is something we obtain through our work, and it is an important title given in civilization....You gain the doctoral title yourself, and it is something given to you by the professionals in your area, not something you have from birth.* (Ali)
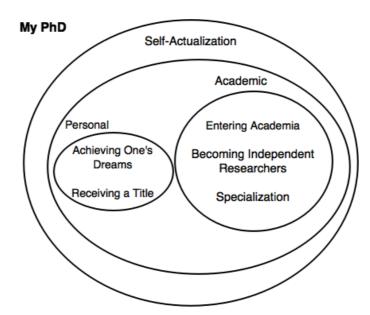

Figure 3. *Theme of "My PhD", its sub-themes and codes*

Some of the students thought that doing a PhD was the prerequisite for becoming an independent researcher, being accepted in the area, and for specialization. Therefore, doing a PhD was seen by some of the students as a means to achieving what they wanted. Besides,

they emphasized that holding a doctoral title was necessary to open the door to academia. Quotations from the students' views in this regard are as follows:

> *I think doing a PhD is a start to being an academic. It is a very important process by which individuals prove themselves as unique researchers and become acceptance in the area.* (Ceren)

> *In fact, doing a PhD means specialization to me. I also did an MA, but one goes for a deeper specialization in a PhD.* (Burcu)

My Supervisor: Guiding, Supportive and Instructive

The PhD students referred to their supervisors as "Guiding", "Supportive", and "Instructive". These expressions constituted the sub-themes of the main theme "My Supervisor". The main theme of "My Supervisor", its sub-themes and codes are represented in Figure 4.

Some of the PhD students thought that supervision in the Master's process advanced in the master-apprentice relationship, but in the PhD process, the work became more specific, and the supervisory role changed to that of advising and guiding. The students who described supervision as guiding pointed out that their supervisors' intervention in the process should limited to guidance and orientation. These students stated that they should have the initiative with regard to their own theses. The following are quotations from students who highlighted the guiding role of their supervisors in the PhD process:

> *This is how supervision is like; when you do something your way, you don't know certain things due to lack of experience. At that point, you get help from someone, and that's your supervisor, you consult him. Just like you go to a real estate consultant when you buy a house. I am the one who buys the house, not him.* (Mustafa)

> *In a car trip, you are the driver, and your supervisor is the co-driver who should be there in case of difficulty and support you in the difficult part of the track, but then steps back when not in difficulty. It's actually like an assistant beside you; it should be you who has the control because it's your thesis after all. Of course, you will have your supervisor's support, but it shouldn't be him who has the steering wheel.* (Pınar)
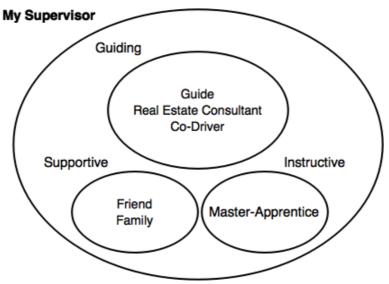

Figure 4. *Theme of "My Supervisor", its sub-themes and codes*

The students who described supervision as being "instructive" highlighted the master-apprentice relationship. They wanted to take their supervisors as a model, and thus, argued that the master-apprentice relationship was necessary. From this perspective, these students seem to have adopted the tradition approach to supervision. Quotations from their views are as follows:

> *You see an apprentice when you go to the hairdressers, you see how he acts and examines the master. In fact, most people don't notice him, but the apprentice observes how his master cuts the hair, holds the comb, and treats the customers. He learns things about the job he will practice in the future...I used to wonder if such a learning style exists. When I started my PhD and met my supervisor, I realized that it is the way it should be, you observe him and depend on him.* (Ali)

> *Our supervisor-supervisee relationship is like the master-apprentice relationship. I was sitting beside my supervisor and he was writing all paragraphs and sentences in front of me, telling me what was wrong, just like a motor mechanic teaching an apprentice by showing him things.* (Mehmet)

The PhD students who referred to supervision as being "supportive" explained their relationship with their supervisors by labeling them as friend or family. These students stated that they had a more social and informal relationship with their supervisors. Quotations from their views are as follows:

> *My relationship with my supervisor is more like friendship. Well, I grew up in dormitories, our school had a boarding house, it was a good school where you had such good friends with whom you get along even after 20 years, you remember them with respect and love. That's how I feel about the relationship between me and my supervisor.* (Mustafa)

> *Our relationship was sometimes more than supervisor-supervisee, and more like family. I can say that my supervisor supported me morally.* (Ayşe)

To sum up, some of the PhD students had a traditional sense of the student dimension of supervision. They thought that learning occurred by observing and receiving instructions based on a one-to-one relationship. In the supportive dimension of supervision, among the students who preferred the social relationship, there were also those who wanted the master-apprentice relationship. However, some students favored the master-apprentice relationship and thought the social aspect would not be suitable for them. Students who described supervision as guidance stated that supervisors should advise and guide them; but as students, they should control the process themselves.

My Expectations: What Kind of Relationship? What Kind of Supervisor? What Kind of Education?

Under the main theme "My Expectations", three sub-themes were revealed relating to the PhD students' views on how their relationship with their supervisor should be, what kind of a supervisor they wanted to work with, and what kind of education they preferred to receive. These sub-themes included "What Kind of Relationship?", "What Kind of Supervisor?", and "What Kind of Education?" The main theme of "My Expectation", its sub-themes and codes are presented in Figure 5.
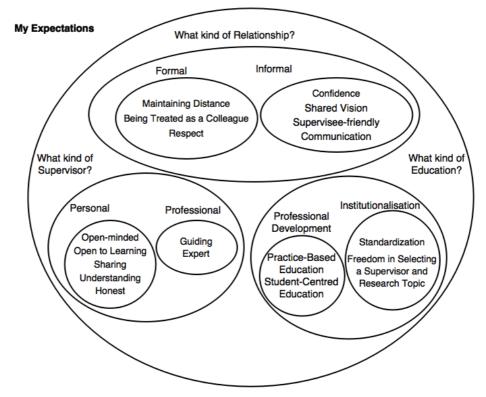
Figure 5. *Theme of "My Expectations", its sub-themes and codes*

In the sub-theme "What Kind of Relationship?", the students explained how the formal and informal relationships should be and what they expected from these relationships in the PhD process. They mentioned maintaining distance in formal relationships, and being treated and respected as colleagues. Some of the students touched upon not having much of an emotional dimension in their relationships with supervisors, and underlined a balance in this respect. These students thought that there could be problems in cases where an emotional balance could not be established, and distance not maintained. It was stated that this relationship should not go beyond the professional dimension. Quotations from the students' views are as follows:

> *I actually think that there shouldn't be personal involvement, but of course individuals need support since it's a long process. In that sense, it's on the borderline. Well, I mean, in terms of actually guiding, and providing moral support. There is a thin line here.* (Ayşe)

> *There are those whose research assistantship is not only about lessons, I know that very well. I think the supervisor-supervisee relationship in Turkey is way too personal and emotional. By emotion, I mean a relationship other than purely about the research should be minimized. In fact, the supervisor and supervisee should only be in contact for research activities.* (Mehmet)

In the sub-theme "What Kind of Relationship?, some of the PhD students criticized the way supervisors approach them. These criticisms were related to issues such as assigning tasks to research assistants that are not their job, which then caused problems between them. These students perceived themselves as colleagues to their supervisors, and emphasized that the assistantship tradition should no longer continue. Quotations from their views are as follows:

A supervisor should approach his supervisee as an academic, not as a PhD supervisor. (Ahmet)

There is this issue of assistantship[4], which relates to a law from before 1980. However, we aren't assistants, but research assistants. A research assistant is nobody's personal assistant. He or she has the same status with everybody under the department chair. Both you and him have to fulfil the tasks assigned by the chair. There may be a hierarchical relationship in a project, but other than that, you can't have such a relationship. (Mustafa)

In the informal dimension of the supervisor-supervisee relationship, some of the PhD students touched upon confidence, shared vision and supervisee-friendly communication. They emphasized the importance of these aspects, and stated that supervisors' adopting a style of communication suitable to supervisees would enhance their effectiveness and achievement. Quotations from their views are as follows:

I think there should be mutual understanding and respect between the supervisor and supervisee; then, everything would be fine. The supervisor should have confidence in the supervisee, and vice versa. (Burcu)

How the supervisor should be depends on the student. It is about expectations. (Mehmet)

The PhD students explained "what kind of supervisor" they wanted to have by highlighting the personal and professional characteristics of their supervisors. They explained their supervisors' personal characteristics as open-minded, open to learning, sharing, understanding, and honest. They attributed importance to their supervisors' sincerely accepting their competence about issues beyond their expertise, and being open to learning and innovations. In addition, they wanted to work with supervisors who shared their knowledge. Some of the students asserted that when the supervisor and supervisee did not have a common perspective, problems could be experienced in finding a research topic. Quotations from these students' views are as follows:

When the supervisee asks something of the supervisor and the supervisor doesn't know anything about it, he should accept it openly. "Well, I don't know about it either, but let's have a look at it"; there should be such a relationship. (Burcu)

In a PhD, if you don't have the same perspective and vision with your supervisor, it is a difficult process. I mean, I have friends who have experienced this; as I said, I was lucky with this, but it happens as we have observed in our environment. (Ceren)

Some of the PhD students thought that their supervisors' professional characteristics included guidance and expertise, and these characteristics were of great importance in having a smooth PhD process. A student's view on this issue is given as:

I gathered all the data for my thesis through an achievement test. However, there were problems with this test. I panicked, I was thinking if I would gather the data again, and I overcame this problem with my supervisor's advice. My supervisor's competence and expertise in qualitative research helped me through that situation. (Mehmet)

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[4] With the 1981 Higher Education Law (No. 2547), 'assistantship' was replaced by 'research assistantship'.

Other students mentioned receiving quick feedback from their supervisors with regard to professional characteristics. They also spoke of supervisor's allotting time to and caring about the supervisee. Some of the students stated the following in this respect:

My previous supervisor had too many administrative duties. We broke off in that process. We couldn't see each other when I needed him the most. He didn't state his expectations and requests clearly. I couldn't estimate what he wanted and where he aimed to reach. I was like a slipping car. I was consuming energy all the time, but couldn't progress any further. (Pınar)

All I expected from my supervisor was to guide me, give me quick feedback. This is very important in the PhD process, because you will get stuck at some point, and how quick you receive feedback and your way is cleared matters a great deal. (Mehmet)

The PhD students also emphasized professional development and institutionalization with regard to "what kind of education" they wanted to receive from the PhD process. A practice-based and student-centered education was preferred in professional development. In the dimension of institutionalization, it was stated that informal relationships were dominant in the process, there should be certain standards in this regard, and the student should be free to select his/her supervisor and research topic. The view of one student who wanted to have a student-centered process is as follows:

For instance, we support student-centered education, that's what we emphasize while designing material, training teachers and when speaking at academic conferences. So why don't we have a student-centered PhD process? (Mehmet)

Regarding institutionalization in the sub-theme "What Kind of Education?", the PhD students thought that the lack of certain standards in the supervisor-supervisee relationship caused a set of problems. They stated that formal processes such as the qualification exam, thesis monitoring committees and thesis defenses proceeded depending on the decisions of the supervisor and other faculty members. They also said that informal relationships within the institution can affect the relationships in these formal processes. Quotations from the students' views are given as:

We have many legal regulations, but at the same time, we have informal relationships....When I first thought about pursuing a PhD while I was teaching at a state school, my colleagues asked me whether I was interested in carrying a professor's briefcase. This was the perception! Well, there were such practices in the past, even today we do have it in some institutions. In this regard, the roles of the supervisor and supervisee should be well-defined so that we don't experience such cases. We should have standards instead of unwritten rules. (Ahmet)

I've never seen a friend who carries his supervisor's briefcase in corridors, but I know many friends of mine who do their supervisors' job. (Mehmet)

Finally, related to institutionalization, the students stated that they wanted to freely select their research topic and supervisor. It can be said that the problem of standardization mentioned above also emerged here. Although there was no legal restriction on the students' selection of a research topic and supervisor and they seemed to have a say in both, they thought that the informal relationships and supervisors' expertise restricted the students' selection. Quotations from these students' views are as follows:

My Master's supervisor limited me to his area of expertise, although I wanted to study in my own area. In such a case I would need to change my supervisor, which just wasn't possible as personal and social relationships were established accordingly. The supervisor has an area and he is competent in that area, and also keeps the student in that area. He doesn't want knowledge producing to a level more than he can control. That's what I considered while selecting my PhD supervisor. He should be someone unafraid to work on something he doesn't know much about. I was able to do that; although we had some difficulties. It's because of tradition, and it can be difficult to overcome traditions. (Mustafa)

Your supervisor has an area of expertise, and you want to go into something else; but your supervisor doesn't want to, and so you may have such problems. These should be overcome somehow, which is only possible by selecting your own supervisor. (Mehmet)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The views of the students on their PhD journey were gathered under three main themes; "My PhD", "My Supervisor", and "My Expectations". Under the theme of "My PhD", the students perceived undertaking a PhD as a means for actualizing themselves and their dreams, whilst for some of the students, it was a necessity on the route to becoming an independent researcher, and for acceptance in the area and specialization. In the theme "My Supervisor", the students saw their supervisors as guiding, supportive and instructive. Lastly, in the theme "My Expectations", the students explained the personal and professional characteristics that supervisors should have, and how these affect themselves as supervisees. The expectations included carrying out the supervisor-supervisee relationships on a certain basis of respect and confidence in the PhD process. Finally, the students expected the PhD education to be student-centered and more practice-based.

Some of the PhD students thought that their supervisors' intervention in the process should not go beyond the role of guidance, but limited to orientation. This is because these students thought the PhD work was theirs, and thus, they should hold the initiative. In Grant, Hackney, and Edgar's (2014) study that examined PhD students' views about their supervisors, the participants indicated that their supervisors' role should not go beyond the role of advisor. The PhD students in the current study perceived their supervisors as a supportive peer or family member. Those who saw supervision as support from a family member adopted an emotional-social relationship in the supervisory process. Unlike this view, some of the students thought that emotions did not have a place in the PhD process, and that it should be effectively carried out through formal relationships. They asserted that since relationships with supervisors differed from one individual to another, this relationship should be unique to individuals. Manathunga (2005) pointed out that in the scope of individualized supervision, PhD students' individual needs should be taken into consideration.

The students' expectations from the PhD process focused on three aspects related to the supervisor, relationship, and education. Some of the students thought that their relationship with supervisors should have a certain distance and balance, and it would be more convenient if the supervisor-supervisee relationship did not go beyond the professional dimension. When this balance was not established in the supervisor-supervisee relationship, problems may emerge. Some of the PhD students wanted their supervisors to approach them

as a colleague, some wanted not to be assigned non-academic tasks by their supervisors, and some wanted the "research assistantship" to be observed instead of continuing the former "assistantship" tradition. In Bakioğlu and Yaman (2004), 76% of research assistants who participated in the study thought that the non-academic tasks assigned to them by their faculty members negatively affected their academic career. Therefore, it was found in the present study that the PhD students fulfilled such non-academic tasks simply in order to keep the relationship intact and advance in their academic work.

For some of the PhD students, it was important to have a sincere relationship with their supervisor(s), work with those who share a common vision, and establish a relationship based on confidence and respect. These students highlighted the concepts of sincerity, friendship and confidence in relationships with their supervisors. Similarly, Hockey (1994) underlined the necessity that the supervisor-supervisee relationship should be based on friendship and confidence in the professional context. The students in the current study thought that these factors would lead to success. They sought certain personal and professional characteristics in their PhD supervisors. The personal characteristics that they thought should be possessed by supervisors were being open-minded, open to learning, sharing and understanding. The PhD students working with supervisors who did not have these personal characteristics thought that they were not able to explain their ideas, could not work in the area they wanted, and were restricted to their supervisors' areas of expertise. On the other hand, the students viewed their supervisors academic guiding and expertise as significant in the smooth progress of the PhD process. Moreover, supervisors' providing quick and timely feedback to students' works was perceived as an important characteristic. A supervisor who did not have these characteristics was regarded as one who does not allot time to supervisees, does not provide feedback to them, and lowers their motivation. Problems such as not allotting time to supervisees, not providing feedback and not being able to guide them were reported in similar studies, which shows that existing problems continue to be experienced (Akbulut İpek, Şahin, & Çepni, 2013; Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Ismail et al., 2011; Sevinç, 2001). Some of the PhD students stated their expectations regarding professional development and institutionalization in a quality PhD process. These students expected the PhD process to be structured in a way to put them at the center.

Some of the PhD students expected that there should be standards in their relationships with supervisors and other faculty members with respect to institutionalization. The lack of such standards, and the prominence of subjectivity leads to certain problems. PhD students who work as research assistants are individuals placed at the bottom of the academic hierarchy. The lack of standards in the dimensions mentioned cause informal relationships to be influential in practice. Another related problem is the difficulties that PhD students experience in selecting a supervisor and research topic. Although there is no limitation in theory, the PhD students thought that they were not free in their selection, which caused pressure on them. In their study, Akbulut İpek et al. (2013) concluded that supervisors' views and areas of expertise were highly influential on PhD students' research topics.

Welde and Laursen (2008) reported certain characteristics that an ideal supervisor should have from the perspective of PhD students. The PhD students in Welde and Laursen's (2008) study wanted their supervisors to have characteristics such as being flexible or strict when necessary, supporting independent thinking, encouraging independent work, not allowing students to get confused, struggling for students' development, being sensitive to their mood, creating an environment for meetings and communication, and adopting a style

of providing suitable advice to them. While the findings of their study are consistent with those reported in the current study, they also show that PhD students in different parts of the world experience similar problems.

In this current study, the PhD students' views on the PhD process and supervision were revealed based on their experiences. The participants of the study consisted of research assistants who were PhD students within the graduate school of educational sciences at a Turkish university. For this reason, the study reflects the views and experiences of a limited group. This study has limited generalizability, but could be replicated with more institutions and individuals through quantitative or mixed research approaches. In this regard, a similar study could be carried out to understand supervisors' perspectives on the process.

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