



PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS DURING THEIR POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION IN TURKEY

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to reveal the problems encountered by teachers during their postgraduate education in Turkey. The participants involved 43 teachers who completed their master or doctoral education in different cities and universities in Turkey and who worked at schools affiliated to Ministry of National Education (MONE). The participants were chosen on a volunteer basis. A semi-structured interview form was developed in order to reveal the problems encountered by teachers during their postgraduate education. Content analysis was conducted on the data and themes were interpreted using tables. As a result of the study, it was observed that teachers encountered problems sourcing from university/institute, their school, and their close environment. The teachers began their postgraduate education with high expectations and assumed that postgraduate education was a process in which academic knowledge would be gained, discussed, and developed. However, considering their problems during the postgraduate education, it was observed that their expectations were not fulfilled.

Keywords: doctorate, postgraduate education, teacher, master

1. Introduction

Postgraduate education is an educational process applied by those who have completed their undergraduate education in order to be an academician or to improve themselves in the field. In the early years of the Republic, students used to go abroad for master and doctoral education. Within the scope of the law no 4936 of 1946 on universities, universities were given academic autonomy. Institutionalization of universities and

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development of higher education brought along master and doctoral studies. Within this framework, doctoral and master theses were published in 1959 and 1962, respectively. With the Law no 2547 of 1981 on Higher Education, all higher education institutions were gathered under one roof. Thus, postgraduate education became more systematic. Today in Turkey, postgraduate education activities are carried out by institutes such as social sciences, natural and applied sciences, and educational sciences under higher education institutions.

According to Law no 2547 on Higher Education, higher education institutions conduct examinations to select university graduates who wish to study for a master's or doctorate degree, or specialization in a field of medicine, according to principles determined by the Inter-university Board. The institutions of higher education prepare the necessary plans and take the necessary measures in order to meet demands concerning postgraduate study. Within this framework, postgraduate education involves 2-year master and 4-year doctoral education. Doctoral degree is the final step of postgraduate education. Students who defend their doctoral thesis successfully receive the doctor (dr.) title.

Entrance to postgraduate education requires sufficient score obtained from Academic Personnel and Postgraduate Education Entrance Exam (APPEEE) or an equivalent exam, diploma grade, and sufficient score obtained from a foreign language exam. Foreign language score is not obligatory for a master's degree but it should be at least 55 or higher for doctoral education. The conditions except for foreign language exam score vary depending on universities/institutes.

Teachers working at schools affiliated to Ministry of National Education (MONE) have already graduated from the varying departments of faculties of education. Besides, those who did not graduate from faculties of education were able to get the right to teach by obtaining the certificate after successfully completing the pedagogical formation courses. Since 1999, they have been appointed based on their scores obtained from Public Personnel Selection Examination, which was called as "Selection Examination for People to be Public Personnel" earlier.

Teachers need postgraduate education to monitor the developing technology and novelties in education while training the future generations because they have the chance to be more beneficial for their students and environment as a result of this education (Nayir, 2007). On the other hand, some teachers undergo postgraduate education so that they can get the advantage for administrative positions at schools. No matter what the reason is, teachers using the right of education, which is a constitutional right, encounter various problems during their postgraduate education.

1.1 Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study was to reveal the problems encountered by teachers during their postgraduate education in Turkey.

2. Method

Two of the qualitative methods, phenomenology and document analysis were used in this study. Phenomenology focuses on phenomena, which the individual is aware of but does not have in depth and detailed understanding of it and makes these kinds of studies possible (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016; Creswell, 2013). In the document analysis, data are collected by examining current records and documents. Written material involving the information about the phenomenon is analyzed (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016; Merriam, 1998). Within this scope, the qualitative data were presented using some examples of participants' opinions

2.1. Participants

Teachers (T) who completed their postgraduate education in Turkish universities and worked at schools affiliated to Ministry of National Education (MONE) participated in this study. A total of 43 volunteer teachers replied the questions.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured interview form was used as the data collection tool in the study. During the preparation of interview questions, the relevant literature was reviewed and three academics from different universities were asked to evaluate the items in order to strengthen the internal validity. Four random teachers were administered the interview form and drawbacks of the form was tried to be determined in order to increase the reliability of the study. Finally, opinions of field experts were taken, and the final version of the semi-structured interview form was ready. Within this framework, teachers were asked:

1. What was your point in postgraduate education?
2. What problems did you encounter during postgraduate education?

Based on the teachers' responses to the question "*what problems did you encounter during postgraduate education?*", "*Problems Sourcing from University/Institute*", "*Problems Sourcing from Their School*", and "*Problems Sourcing from Their Close Environment (Family, Friends, Colleagues, etc.)*" emerged as main themes. These main themes were asked to teachers again and subthemes emerged as a result. The interviews were recorded after their consent was granted. These records were then transcribed.

Some of teachers' opinions were presented in the study in order to support the findings. Within this framework, descriptive analysis technique was used. The data obtained from the interviews are presented without changing them in descriptive analysis (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). The goal of it is to present the data obtained from interviews and observations to the audience in an organized and interpreted way.

3. Findings and Interpretations

In this section, the themes emerged by analyzing the problems encountered by teachers during their postgraduate education were presented using tables. The findings were interpreted. Direct quotations were presented to support the findings.

3.1 Postgraduate Education Levels of Teachers

It was observed that the postgraduate education levels of teachers involved master and doctoral degrees. Some of the teachers who completed their master did not continue to doctoral education. This situation is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Postgraduate Education Levels of Teachers

	n	%
Master	32	74,4
Doctorate	11	25,6
Total	43	100

Of all the teachers participated in the study, 32 (74,4%) completed their master education while 11 (25,6%) completed doctoral education. When the teachers having master degree were asked why they did not continue to doctoral education, 28 teachers (87,5%) indicated that they weren't able to due to foreign language requirement and 4 teachers (12,5%) expressed that they did not want to since the process was too tiring.

Some of these responses were presented below:

T2: *"Although I took foreign language tests repeatedly, I could not get the required score."*

T7: *"The required foreign language score for entrance to doctoral education is 55, but I was never able to get over 50. It caused weariness for me."*

T19: *"I would like to go for doctorate if the foreign language was not a prerequisite. However, I could not."*

T25: *"The master thesis process was tiring and I would have to deal with courses and thesis during the doctorate again; therefore, I took neither academic personnel and postgraduate education entrance exam nor foreign language exam. I thought master was enough."*

T36: *"After starting master, reading, research, and writing processes were too intense. I thought that this situation would be worse in doctorate. Moreover, seeing the academics never-ending efforts to advance to a higher position and their efforts to read and write made me think that it was not a suitable job for me. In the end, I completed my master degree, and doctorate was not necessary."*

3.2. Teachers' Reasons to Start Postgraduate Education

The participants were asked about their reasons to start postgraduate education, and their responses were presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers' Reasons to Start Postgraduate Education

	n	%
Being an academic	36	83,7
Improving themselves in the field	32	74,4
Meeting the requirements of postgraduate education (APPEEE, foreign language, diploma grade, etc.)	21	48,8
Gaining an advantage for being an administrator at schools	33	76,7
Contributing to the field	33	76,7
Earning respect	41	95,3

Participants indicated various reasons to start their postgraduate education such as being an academic (n=36, 83,7%), improving themselves in the field (n=32, 74,4%), meeting the requirements of postgraduate education (n=21, 48,8%), gaining an advantage for being an administrator and schools (n=33, 76,7%), contributing to the field (n=33, 76,7%), and earning respect (n= 41, 95,3%). Some of their responses were provided below:

T3: *"I was a teacher when I applied for master education. I had the intention to be an administrator at National Education. I started my master since I had a sufficient APPEEE score."*

T19: *"During my undergraduate education, the academics were all researchers and writers, which drew my attention. I went to a course for foreign language with the thought that "I could be like them". I studied for APPEEE on my own. The foreign language score I got for my master education also helped me enter doctoral education."*

T25: *"I took APPEEE during my undergraduate education. The score was sufficient for entrance to master education. I applied. They accepted me. That is how I started. Then, I was appointed as a teacher. That provided me an advantage. I continued doctoral education."*

T41: *"I was interested in the field of history as a graduate of Social Studies Education. I applied for master education. I tended towards research more. When I met the APPEEE and foreign language requirements, I was able to start doctoral education."*

3.3. Teachers' Problems Sourcing from University/Institute during Postgraduate Education

Participants expressed some problems sourcing from the university/institute they enrolled during their postgraduate education. Their responses can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Teachers' Problems Sourcing from University/Institute during Postgraduate Education

	n	%
Indifference of Institute staff	41	95,3
The unavailability of university services for students coming from other cities	35	81,4
Lack of informing by supervisors	36	83,7
Conduction of graduate courses at an undergraduate level	33	76,7
Reluctance of Academics in Lessons	32	74,4
Close-Mindedness of Academics	29	67,4
Academics' lack of attention to participation/absenteeism	36	83,7
Academics' lack of contribution to the thesis writing process	36	83,7

Participants expressed some problems sourcing from the university/institute such as indifference of the institute staff (n=41, 95,3%), the unavailability of university services for students coming from other cities (n=35, 81,4%), lack of informing by supervisors (n=36, 83,7%), conduction of graduate courses at an undergraduate level (n=33, 76,7%), reluctance of academics in lessons (n=32, 74,4%), close-mindedness of academics (n=29, 67,4%), academics lack of attention to participation/absenteeism (n=36, 83,7%), and academics' lack of contribution to the thesis writing process (n=36, 83,7%). Some of their responses were presented below:

T9: *"When I started my master education, like all of my friends, I went to Social Sciences Institute to learn the course schedule. However, they did not give a sufficient answer. They told me to go and find the academic who would give the course. It was such a situation that I could not ask my second question. I experienced the same situation during thesis process. Everyone was sending me to others."*

T17: *"I thought that academics were not as they were in undergraduate education. I thought that they would conduct the courses at a higher level. Moreover, I was afraid because of it. How would I achieve. In the end, history is too comprehensive. However, when we started our courses, one of the academics showed us a list. He asked us to select a topic from the list and present in one month later. I was surprised. During presentations, the academics only listened or intervened sometimes."*

T24: *"I thought that I was a candidate academic since I was carrying on master education. Therefore, I shared my different thoughts during a lesson. However, I got a reaction from the academic. He told me that my viewpoint was not possible and it was different from my thoughts in the literature for forty years. When the same thing happened a few times, I alienated from academy during master education that I started with the goal of doctorate."*

T31: *"We were four students during master education. We were trying to participate each lesson as much as possible. We were trying not to miss any class and to benefit from the academic as much as possible. There were two other students. They were occasionally coming to lesson. When we took the midterm exam, we were eight students. We learned that other two students were coming only for the exams. The same thing happened in the final exam. Those who showed up for the midterm exam for the first time started to come rarely after midterm. By the way, the four of us never missed any class. When the results were explained at the end of the year, we learned that those who occasionally came to class passed the course. This situation made us think that "If only we would do the same".*

T39: *"I was wondering that "Are all institutes like this?" However, when I contacted my friends at other universities, I learned that they were suffering from more or less the same things. Institutes do not pay regard to students. On the other hand, these students will be the academics of future."*

T43: *"I was not able to see my supervisor during thesis writing. When I was available, he was not, and vice versa. The workload of my supervisor was causing this problem. When we were taking his courses, he used go undergraduate courses as soon as he finished our course. Perhaps, he wanted to contribute but his lack of time made me write my thesis on my own."*

3.4. Teachers' Problems Sourcing from their Schools during Postgraduate Education

Teachers expressed some problems sourcing from their schools that they work during postgraduate education. Their responses can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Teachers' Problems Sourcing from their Schools during Postgraduate Education

	n	%
Difficulty in getting the permission from the school they work	41	95,3
Administrators' beliefs that the performance of teachers continuing postgraduate education would drop	36	83,7
Administrators' reluctance to consider the schedule of teachers continuing postgraduate education	33	76,7
Jealousy of administrators and colleagues	36	83,7
Parents' belief that the teacher would hinder the fundamental job, which is teaching	36	83,7

Participants expressed some problems sourcing from the schools they work such as difficulty in getting the permission from the school they work (n=41, 95,3%), administrators' beliefs that the performance of teachers continuing postgraduate education would drop (n=36, 83,7%), administrators' reluctance to consider the schedule of teachers continuing postgraduate education (n=33, 83,7%), jealousy of administrators and colleagues (n=36, 83,7%), and parents' belief that the teacher would hinder the fundamental job, which is teaching (n=36, 83,7%). Some of their responses were presented below:

T5: *"I have trouble in getting the permission from the administrators since I am a classroom teacher. After starting doctorate upon master, I started to have problems with them more. I see that administrators and my colleagues view the postgraduate education as a luxury."*

T18: *"While the weekly schedule was arranged, the administrators did it without considering my postgraduate schedule. I requested them to review it. However, they asked me to arrange my postgraduate schedule based on the school. They told me that when they made a revision for one teacher, other teachers would also ask the same privilege. I talked to the academic. Thanks to him, he was able to change the time of the course by getting the other students' approval. Thus, I was able to join the class."*

T25: *"While some parents found my postgraduate education as positive for students, the majority of them thought that I was hindering the education of my students. Moreover, some of them tried to give me that message indirectly. Some of them talked to vice principal about it."*

T28: *"My master schedule was prepared after my schedule at school I work. I explained the situation to the administration. They told me that the lessons already started and other teachers arranged themselves according, therefore it would be difficult to change it. I insisted. Finally, they rescheduled the program."*

3.5. Teachers' Problems Sourcing from their Close Environment (Family, Friends, Colleagues, etc.) during Postgraduate Education

Teachers mentioned problems sourcing from their close environment (family, friends, colleagues, etc.) during postgraduate education. Their responses can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Teachers' Problems Sourcing from their Close Environment (Family, Friends, Colleagues, etc.) during Postgraduate Education

	n	%
Parents' lack of understanding postgraduate education	39	90,7
Spouses' complaints about being neglected	38	88,4
Inappropriate house environment	38	88,4
Some colleagues' view of postgraduate education as an empty effort	35	81,4

Participants expressed some problems sourcing from their close environment (family, friends, colleagues, etc.) during postgraduate education such as parents' lack of understanding postgraduate education (n=39, 90,7%), spouses' complaints about being neglected (n=38, 88,4%), inappropriate house environment (n=38, 88,4%), and some colleagues' view of postgraduate education as an empty effort (n=35, 81,4%). Some of their responses were provided below:

T11: *"After starting master education, reading and research was intense. Therefore, I was not able to spare enough time for my family. During the thesis process, I needed to study harder. This situation caused my spouse to complain about being neglected and we had trouble."*

T16: *"I never became possible to study at home environment. My spouse, children, noises, and their sentences such as "we already don't see you properly. Studying at home, too?" were bothering me. Thus, I was going to National Library or Gazi University Library to study."*

T24: *"I became a teacher for the sake of my mother and father. They could not understand my will to be a student again as a person who educates students."*

T33: *"What is sad for me is that my friends with whom I work and got undergraduate education did not appreciate my postgraduate will and thought that I was disturbing my comfort."*

4. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

Based on the results, it can be stated that teachers in Turkey face various problems during postgraduate education. These problems generally sources from their university/institute, the schools they work at, and close environment (family, friends, colleagues, etc.). These problems also indicate why they do not get involved in postgraduate education. In their study focusing on the reasons why teachers did not get postgraduate education, Toprak and Tasgin (2017) found that the intensity and weariness of it, their inability to meet the prerequisite criteria, and their inability to arrange their course hours at school were among the reasons that prevented them from postgraduate education. Ozmen and Guc (2013) conducted a study on difficulties experienced during doctoral education and students' coping strategies. Based on their results, they found that teachers working at schools affiliated to Ministry of Nation Education were having trouble in arranging their weekly schedule and difficulties in communicating with supervisors. Moreover, the studies conducted by Baser, Narli, and Gunhan (2005) and Oluk and Colak (2005) revealed similar findings. As can be seen, the results of the current study were consistent with the results of former studies. This

aspect makes the study more important because it shows that teachers' problems during postgraduate education have not been solved yet.

Postgraduate education provides a scientific development and strengthening of a country. With this aspect, it is becoming more important for teachers to conduct postgraduate education. However, the problems are disrupting this process. Therefore, as Doğusan (2003) states the teachers' postgraduate education process should be supported. Ministry of National Education (MONE) should support, monitor, and develop this process. It should provide incentives for teachers to start postgraduate education. Effort should be made on making schedules more flexible, financial support, and increasing the prestige. On the other hand, academics' workload should be decreased so that it would be possible for them to spare more time for postgraduate education. To do that, the number of academics should be increased. Thus, with the increase in teachers' prestige and economic power, the quality of education from primary school to higher education would increase.

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