Problems Experienced in Postgraduate Education and Solutions: A Qualitative Study on Graduate Students’ Views

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the problems that postgraduate students experienced during their postgraduate education and to detect their solutions for these problems. A total of ten students who earned Master’s degree in various departments of Karabuk University Institute of Social Sciences participated in this qualitative study designed as a phenomenological study. Criterion, maximum variation and convenient sampling methods were used together to select the participants of the study. The data of the study were gathered through a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers as in line with both the related literature and the purposes of the present study. The data of the study were analyzed through content and descriptive analyses. Results revealed that postgraduate students evaluated post graduate education mostly as a preparation process for the academia and that they encountered problems related to the advisors more frequently, and that these problems decreased their motivation and that the most important solution for them for the problems encountered through postgraduate education was the advisors’ being more sensitive. Results from the current study were discussed in line with the related literature and some suggestions were presented.

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Introduction

One of the most important duties of the universities is to raise skilled workforce needed by countries. In this context, postgraduate and doctoral programs opened within the universities are quite important. Postgraduate education includes the master’s degree, PhD, specialty in medicine and qualification in art. According to Official Gazette of Turkish Republic (1981):

“higher education programs are defined as such: master’s degree is based on an undergraduate training and aims to demonstrate the results of education-training and research; PhD includes at least six-semiannual program based on undergraduate or at least four-semiannual program based on the expertise gained in a laboratory branch by the graduates from master’s degree or pharmacy or faculty of science according to the rudiments regulated by Ministry of Health and Social Aid and aims to demonstrate the results of an original research; specialty in medicine aims to provide special ability and authority to medical doctors in specific areas according to the rudiments regulated by Ministry of

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Health and Social Aid; qualification in art includes at least six-semiannual program based on undergraduate or at least four-semiannual program based on master’s degree and aims to demonstrate an original artwork or aims a superior application and creativity in music and performing arts…”

Providing the skilled workforce that has ability to solve the problems of a country and that is needed by public and private sectors, raising qualified scientists, researchers and academic members and conducting scientific researches to contribute the development of a country are involved in main objectives of postgraduate education (Karakütük, 1999). Similarly, Varış (1984) considers postgraduate education as a process in which scientists ensure the production of information and technology needed for the development of a country. In the higher education strategy report published by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) (2007), it is emphasized that postgraduate education is involved in the factors required to raise the workforce needed for technological development and innovation.

It is seen that there has been a significant increase in the demand for postgraduate education in recent years. For example, the number of graduates from PhD programs was 673 in 1983 and this figure increased up to 4506 in 2012 and the number of graduates from master’s program was 1099 in the same year and it increased up to 25,813 (Çetinsaya, 2014). It is seen that increasing demand in postgraduate education plays along with general increase in demand for higher education as well (Günay and Günay, 2011). In addition, it is expected that the demands of undergraduate for postgraduate education would increasingly continue in terms of next projections conducted for higher education in parallel with the increase in the number of both public and foundation universities and the need of academic member and researchers is arising in parallel with this increase. Besides, non-thesis master’s degree programs opened depending on the philosophy of lifelong learning are evaluated as an important factor in the increase in this regard (Kavak, 2011a).

Although the quantitative increase in postgraduate education in Turkish higher education system is regarded as an important and required factor at the point of raising skilled workforce, there are still some discussions concerning the problems encountered in postgraduate education and in this regard some solution offers are produced in the relevant literature. For example, Ağıralioğlu (2013) argues that number of the academic members who teach well and make advises for thesis in postgraduate education is limited and course contents are not prepared in keeping with scientific data, and departments providing postgraduate education are opened randomly regardless of academic member and research capacities. Other writers indicate that excessive number of courses and thesis students per academic member (Buluç, 2012), low level of interaction between academic members and students in postgraduate education, insufficient scholarships for graduate students (Çakmak, 2012) and insufficient supports from Ministry of National Education (MoNE) for teachers and school managers who want to have postgraduate education (Bülbül, 2011) are involved among the important factors affecting the quality of postgraduate education. İbiş (2014), who discusses the issue of fundamental problems of postgraduate education from a macro perspective indicates that limited sources were allocated to graduate education from national income, relationship couldn’t be established sufficiently between postgraduate education and industry and internationalization couldn’t be ensured sufficiently in postgraduate education. With a similar approach, Özcan (2007) indicates that investments were not made sufficiently in postgraduate education especially for social sciences in Turkey and that the essential part of universities couldn’t eliminate the necessary substructure problems in order to conduct postgraduate education in an effective manner. When examining international literature in this regard, it is seen that almost similar problems were discussed in postgraduate education. For example, Duan and Shan (2013) analyze problems encountered in postgraduate education under the title of academic, institutional and personal problems and consider the low quality of supervisors and students as academic problems, various substructure problems encountered in the institutions giving postgraduate education as institutional problems and financial inabilities and the low motivation of students as personal problems. In this context, it becomes important to reveal the efficiency of postgraduate education programs, of which purpose is to raise skilled workforce needed by a country, develop the capacity of research and development and raise academic members and also experts needed by public and private sectors, through scientific studies and offer solutions for the concerned problems (Sezgin, 2002).

When examining the relevant literature, it is clear that certain empirical studies were conducted for the problems encountered in postgraduate education. For example, findings of İpek Akbulut, Şahin and Çepni (2013) reveal that the effect of the supervisors plays an important role in determining thesis subject and thesis
committee during the PhD period but participants could not get enough efficiency from the six-month report representations. Research findings from Karaküttük, Aydınc, Abalı and Yulduz (2008) demonstrate that the number of academic members is limited in institutions and physical substructure elements such like budget, sources, laboratories and libraries required for postgraduate education are not enough. Research findings from Gürgan Öztürk and Dinç (2016) demonstrate that music teachers encounter some problems like getting permission from the institution where they work, the high number of students, the high load of course, financial problems and transportation difficulties. It is emphasized in different studies that graduate students encounter certain problems such like ALES (academic personnel and postgraduate education entrance exam), problems to participate in scientific meetings, problems concerning thesis supervisor, equipment problems, foreign language problems, financial problems, thesis and seminar problems, poor library services (Sevinç, 2001), limited level of supervisor support (Çoruk, Çağatay and Özdemir, 2016; Özmén and Aydın Güç, 2013; Sezgin, Kılınç and Kavgacı, 2012) and having problem with getting permission from the workplace (Yetkiner and İnce, 2016).

The Current Study

A series of problems encountered during postgraduate education were discussed in conceptual and empirical studies in the literature related to the postgraduate education. Some research findings were produced concerning what these problems were and how they could be solved. As mentioned above, it is required to produce more research findings on this subject because of the presence of these factors affecting the quality of process despite the increase in attention and demand for postgraduate education. Yet, raising skilled workforce needed by a country is closely associated with raising qualified researchers, experts and academic members needed in different fields and the quality of postgraduate education. In this context, as stated by İbiş (2014), it is required to consider postgraduate education in a realistic sense and analyze in different aspects which it is a critical step of education in order that Turkey could develop and reach the level of developed countries. Furthermore, it was stated in a series of study that it is required to produce more research findings for the demonstration of problems encountered in postgraduate education and solutions for these problems (Karaküttük, 1999; Karaküttük et al., 2008; Sevinç, 2001). Kavak (2011a) states that it is required to consider and evaluate the increase in postgraduate education with the quality. This statement creates an important reason for conducting studies to increase the quality of postgraduate education process by the means of determining the problems experienced in postgraduate education and offering solutions in this regard. Finally, another important reason for the current study stems from that problems experienced in postgraduate education process and solutions to be offered in this regard possess potentially a contextual qualification. As such, the current study designed in qualitative research method and phenomenological design focuses on postgraduate students’ experiences and aims to demonstrate problems experienced in the relevant context and offer solutions in this regard. Therefore, findings obtained from this study can constitute an important source of data for the actors playing an active role in the process of regulating, managing or conducting these postgraduate education programs in the departments within the body of Institute of Social Sciences of Karabuk University. Moreover, despite the fact that research method and design performed within the current study are not suitable for the generalization of the research findings, the findings obtained may be expected to constitute a reference source for further studies to be realized in this regard. In this context, the following questions have been tried to answer in the study:

1. What is postgraduate students’ overall evaluation for the process of postgraduate education?
2. What kind of problems did postgraduate students’ experience during the process of postgraduate education?
3. How and in what aspects did problems experienced during postgraduate education affect the relevant process?
4. What are postgraduate students’ suggestions to solve these problems?

Method

Research Model

In this qualitative study, phenomenological research design was employed as it focused on determining the overall evaluation of the postgraduate students’ for the process of postgraduate education, the problems faced during the postgraduate education, how did these problems affect this process and what postgraduate
students’ solutions were to solve these problems based on their experiences. Merriam (2009) points out that phenomenological research design is more suitable for the researchers who try to study the underlying meaning(s) of human experiences. Patton (2014) asserts that the focal point of phenomenological research is to study how humans experience the phenomenon and how they make sense of their experiences. Therefore, this study investigated the postgraduate students’ experiences and how they made sense of it to reach the essence of postgraduate education experience.

Participants

Participants of this study were 10 students in total who earned master’s degree in different departments within the body of Institute of Social Sciences of Karabuk University. As the number of PhD students is quite small in the institution, only master’s degree students were chosen to include in the current study. Criterion, maximum variation and convenient sampling under purposeful sampling methods were used in a complementary systematic way to determine the participants of the study. Accordingly, first a criterion was developed in order to determine the participants of the study. This criterion is to earn master’s degree from a department of Karabuk University, Institute of Social Sciences. Reason for this criterion is that any student who earned master degree would have full knowledge and experience of whole process (for example, course process, thesis writing process) and could provide researchers with healthier and more detailed data in this regard. Then, it has been tried to operate maximum variation sampling mechanism paying attention that the participants determined by this criterion earned master’s degrees from as different departments as possible. In this regard, students graduated from 5 of 14 different departments (Geography, English Language and Literature, Sociology, Turkish Language and Literature and History) of having master programs within the scope of Institute of Social Sciences of Karabuk University participated in the study. To sum up, 10 postgraduate students in total participated in the study, as 2 students from each department, by using convenient sampling method.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview form prepared by the study group based on the relevant literature and expert views was used in order to collect data in this study. Interview form consists of three questions concerning postgraduate process. Accordingly, participants were asked to indicate the problems faced during the postgraduate education, how these problems did affect this process and what postgraduate students’ solutions were to solve these problems based on their experiences. In addition, it is suggested in the literature to prepare complementary questions in order that interview questions are understood better by the participants and interviews are made fit for data collection more thoroughly (Glesne, 2012). As such, complementary questions have been included at the end of each question in order that participants could understand better the relevant question. For example, complementary questions have been prepared as (1) enrollment period and beginning, (2) class period and (3) thesis period for the first question which participants were asked to evaluate postgraduate process as a whole.

A process involving four steps has been followed to prepare the interview form that is used to collect the data in the study. Firstly, researchers reviewed the literature and studies conducted on this subject. Then, a draft interview form was prepared by the study group by taking the purposes of the current study into consideration. At the second step, the draft form was submitted to the views of three academic members who were experts in measurement and evaluation in education, education management and education programs, respectively. Some changes were made on the form according to the views of academic members who examined the form. At the third step, the form was applied to 3 students who graduated from two different departments of Institute of Social Sciences of Karabuk University and who were not involved in the main participant group of the study and their views were asked concerning the form. These three participants indicated above mentioned question in which “participants are asked to make assessments for postgraduate process” is not understood sufficiently and therefore complementary questions were included in the relevant question in the direction of these suggestions. At the fourth and final step, interview form was submitted for view of an academic member working in the department of Turkish Language and Literature and thus the form was finalized.
Data Collection

Study group participating in this study was communicated via electronic mail and telephone. During these pre-interviews, preliminary information was submitted to participants and they were told that interviews would be conducted at the place and date to be determined mutually. Before starting the interviews, participants were informed further on purposes of the study and they were told that the interviews would be conducted by their own will, they could end the interview whenever they wanted and it was aimed to perform a voice recording, in case they gave permission, in order to prevent data loss. All the participants gave permission for voice recording. For this reason, all interviews were recorded. In addition to this, there are some ethical principles to obey in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). As such, participants in the current study were free whether they would participate in the study or not and they were supposed to make a decision in direction of their own will. Furthermore, as mentioned above, permissions were received for voice recording during the interviews, it was stated that names of participants were kept private while reporting the research findings and it was indicated that they would be provided with study findings in case they wanted. Interviews took about 35-40 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data of this study were analyzed via descriptive analysis and content analysis which are the most used data analysis techniques in the social sciences (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2010). Themes and codes were reached through the content analysis performed in this study. Besides, the statements of the participants were quoted directly at proper points in order to support the emerging findings and discuss attractive and different points in the findings. Participants were represented by the abbreviation “P” and numbers in the data analysis and direct quotations.

Validity and Reliability

There are four main criteria to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility is associated with the reflection of the truths by the research in general sense. There are certain methods to apply in order to ensure credibility as a concept referring to internal validity in the study. Prolonged engagement and member checking were used to maintain internal validity in this study. Accordingly, it was tried to collect the most detailed data possible by means of conducting the interviews with participants in detail. It was tried to create an environment where participants would feel themselves relaxed during the interviews and they were asked to focus on only research questions by telling them there was no need to mention any private name during the interview in accordance with the ethical principles. In addition, participants were allowed to feel themselves relaxed during the interview and make evaluations more thoroughly on the process as they had completed the postgraduate process. Member checking was another method used to ensure internal validity in this study. In this context, every interview conducted with the participants and recorded as voice was turned into a text and every participant was provided with the content of interview (some were face to face and some were via electronic mail); they were asked for their views on this content and they were asked to specify if there were any points to add or remove. Two participants made some changes on the interview text and sent it to the study group again.

Transferability is a disputed subject in terms of qualitative research as a concept with regards to generalization of the results emerging in the study. For example, Yıldırım (1999) indicates that “qualitative research has no worry for offering generalizable results and that it is not correct for an individual to transfer the results obtained in a different environment directly to his own case (e.g. class environment) by the individual” (p. 11). Even though it has been generally accepted in the literature that qualitative studies do not make an effort to produce generalizable results, it is understood that transferability specifically in qualitative study is mainly considered as explanation for the whole process of study to readers in detail (Başkale, 2016; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). Thus, steps followed in the study can be used in other similar studies (Başkale, 2016). Detailed descriptions and purposeful sampling methods were used to ensure transferability in the current study. In this regard, each step of the study was described and conveyed to the readers in detail. Besides, criterion, maximum variation and convenient
sampling methods under purposeful sampling methods were performed in a sequence and systematically to select study group and thus it was tried to collect the most detailed data concerning the study problem.

Inquiry audit technique was used to ensure dependability in this study (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). Accordingly, an expert in educational administration field who was not involved in study group and conducted studies on the issues similar to the study subject was asked to examine the study as a whole of which research result emerged and analyze if there is a reasonable relation between problem status of the study, literature review, method and design, the emerging findings and results. As a result of expert analysis, it was concluded that the study showed a consistent structure as a whole. Finally, raw data of the study and themes and codes created through the raw data were shared with the expert who conducted dependability analysis of the study, and the expert was asked to inspect the themes and codes emerged from the raw data to ensure the confirmability. It was seen as a result of the conducted inspection that evaluations of researchers and the expert mesh together.

Findings

As a result of the content analysis and the descriptive analysis conducted from the research data, the findings of the study have been collected under four main themes. These are “postgraduate education in terms of student”, “problems encountered in postgraduate education”, “the results of the problems encountered” and “solutions for the problems encountered”. While analyzing, views stated by the participants on each question were combined using the encodings and the relation between encodings and themes constituted from the encodings were reported using the images. Encodings constituted concerning each theme have been presented by quoting directly in the light of answers from the participants. Encodings (P, 7, P, 10, etc.) belonging to the participants were used in the quotations.

Postgraduate Education in terms of Students

Figure 1 illustrates the views on “postgraduate education in terms of students” expressed by the participants and their expression frequencies.

![Diagram of views on postgraduate education in terms of students](image)

**Figure 1.** The views of the participants on postgraduate education in terms of students, and expression frequencies

As seen in Figure 1, the views of the participants on postgraduate education in terms of students were collected under three main titles. These are “the period when needs are satisfied for academic life”, “the period requiring an advisor’s support” and “the troubled process involving unnecessary courses”.

The period when needs are satisfied for academic life. Most of the participants consider the postgraduate education as the period when academic needs are satisfied and abilities needed for the next level of education are achieved. This case is generally summarized by the statements such in: “In this process, students learn what kind of problems will appear on the way to choose in the future and what should be done on this point, and take the first step to overspecialize. Then, students are supposed to brace themselves for PhD period in an academic sense during the thesis process. At the same time, it guides the thesis process and also students reach to the sufficient level in the field chosen…” (P, 8) and “Postgraduate education is that we conduct studies in a department and subject we choose and become a specialist after our undergraduate education. Reading much in the course period constitutes a preparatory period for thesis period by learning methods of scientific studies and using research techniques…” (P, 10). It is
understood by these statements that participants consider the postgraduate education as a period when needs are satisfied for academic life in general and skills are gained which they are required for the next step.

**The period requiring an advisor’s support.** A group of participants defines the postgraduate education as a period to be achieved by an advisor’s support needed all the time and in all regards. This definition is summarized by the statements of the participants such in: “I didn’t have much difficulty in my thesis period thanks to my advisor but I could have had difficulties in writing my thesis and prolonged it if my advisor were not such an interested person. For this reason, considering it in general, I think postgraduate course and thesis period requires a collaboration between the student and the advisor…” (P, 6) and “Advisor and student relationship has a strategic importance in thesis period in order that a real scientific study appears. However, students essentially direct the process whether it is course or thesis period. If a student is dynamic and inquisitive, then the supervisor would get excited…” (P, 9). These statements demonstrate the belief that participants need advisor support and guidance in postgraduate education and the product to develop is of good quality when these supports and guidance are fulfilled completely and difficulties in this period can be overcome easily, as well.

**The troubled period involving unnecessary lessons.** A number of the participants consider postgraduate education as a troubled period in which it is tried to give them unnecessary lessons. This definition is summarized by the expressions of participants such in: “I think courses apart from the field of students are not useful in the course period…” (P, 5) and “Thesis writing is a difficult period. Before the writing process, it is required to determine the subject and determine the methods such like literature review and reaching the sources well. Difficulties are encountered in reaching sources. There is a need for translated sources. In this period, students are required to benefit from sources in the field and write articles in an academic sense. Articles and lecturing synchronized in this regard are performed. I think it is required to allocate time for language learning in a disciplined way in postgraduate education.” (P, 3). It is understood by these statements that participants are forced to choose courses in the postgraduate education which are useless for their educational phases in the future and these courses are useless in the thesis writing period and demonstrating (creating) a successful product. On the other hand, it is concluded that participants regard this educational period as a troubled one as they have to perform more than one work at the same time in postgraduate education period in order to offer a successful product.

**Problems Encountered in Postgraduate Education**

Figure 2 illustrates the views expressed by the participants on “problems encountered during postgraduate education”.

**Figure 2.** The views of participants on the problems encountered in postgraduate education and their expression frequencies
In Figure 2, it is seen that the views of participants on the problems encountered in postgraduate education are collected under eight main titles. These are “problems with the advisor”, “need for shelter and financial inability”, “problems encountered in source procurement”, “difficulty in determining a thesis subject”, “transportation problem”, “foreign language problem”, “unnecessary procedure in thesis writing period” and “social pressure”.

Problems with the advisor. Most of the participants expressed that they had difficulties with advisor during the postgraduate education. This case can be summarized in general by the expressions of participants such in: “Indifference of the advisor affects adversely this period and prolongs the thesis period.” (P, 3) “… The attitudes and behaviors of the advisors affect the perspective of candidate for master degree.” (P, 7) and “… If advisor insists on old scientific subjects and methods, it will be difficult for student who wants to conduct a thesis using new subjects and methods.” (P, 9). It can be referred from the expressions that participants encounter some problems in postgraduate education and they consider the difference of views with their advisors as one of the most important reasons for these problems.

Need for shelter and financial inability. Most of the participants stated that they had some difficulties related to shelter and financial abilities and that these problems affected the postgraduate education period negatively. This case is summarized by the expressions of participants such in: “A student falls behind if s/he is out of the city where s/he studies in. On the other hand, it is a difficult situation for those who are unemployed and have a financial inability.” (P, 2) and “We encounter various problems. There are especially problems with financial possibilities. As course period is compulsory, we get late to start working life. At the same time, employment opportunities are quite limited for the friends living in Karabuk province…” (P, 10). It is clear that they have difficulties in the postgraduate education period and they regard problems with need for shelter in the province where they do master’s degree and lack of budget to allocate for postgraduate education because of financial inequalities.

Problems encountered in source procurement. A part of participants have expressed that they have had problems in source procurement during the postgraduate education period. This problem can be compiled by the expressions of participants such in: “A difficulty in source procurement during thesis writing period is a problem for us.” (P, 3) and “… Duties assigned during course period and limited opportunities of the library where the relevant literature review could be performed can be evaluated as a different problem. It is hard to reach sources through the library which they will set up a substructure for Sociology department concerning the theoretical part requiring a comprehensive research especially in thesis process.” (P, 10). These expressions demonstrated that that participants couldn’t reach sources required to be reached both in course and thesis periods during the postgraduate education and thus the process becomes more difficult and prolongs.

Difficulty in determining a thesis subject. A group of the participants evaluated that determining thesis subject was an important difficulty during the postgraduate education. This evaluation can be seen clearly by the expressions of participants such in: “The biggest problems of postgraduate students is the determination of a subject in thesis selection process. The reason is that all students have an assertive thought of how and what I can perform in literature review or what kind of a marginal study I can use to enter in the literature and how I can make an indelible impression. This idealist thought limits the candidate in subject selection and make him go round in circles in time.” (P, 3) and “… The first problem encountered after completing the course period is being in a quandary to determine the thesis subject. It is another problem that they cannot determine the plan to follow in the next period and thus thesis writing prolongs and becomes more difficult…” (P, 3). It is understood by these expressions that a part of the problems encountered by participants in postgraduate education is composed of instabilities in determining a thesis subject and thus students sink into pessimism.

Transportation problem. A number of participants have emphasized that they have had difficulties in transportation. This can be seen clearly from the expressions of the participants such in: “Individuals might have many difficulties if they don’t study in the city where they live in; likewise, I have had many difficulties in this regard…” (P, 6) and “… I think it is a problem if students do master’s degree in a city where they don’t live in and they are thus on the road at certain intervals…” (P, 11). It is understood by these expressions that one of the problems encountered by participants in postgraduate education is the difficulty in transportation between the city of study and city of residence.

Problems with foreign language. A group of participants have expressed that another problem encountered in postgraduate education is based on the problem with foreign language. Participants have
expressed this situation such in: “Difficulties in literature review for the studies that couldn’t be translated into Turkish are based on the problem with language (inability)...” (P, 3) and ... “Language inability of the postgraduate student hinder them to use of foreign sources...” (P, 9). It is understood by these expressions that participants have difficulties in using foreign sources during postgraduate education and these problems results from their insufficient knowledge of a foreign language.

Unnecessary procedure in thesis writing process. Some participants have indicated they are subjected to unnecessary procedures in postgraduate education, particularly in thesis writing process. Participants have expressed this case such in: “We encounter serious problems due to permissions tried to be received from administrative units in thesis period and the process take a long time...” (P, 5) and ... “Tiring procedures of BAP, TÜBİTAK and the sanctions imposed have negative effects on the motivation of students and advisors...” (P, 9). It is seen by these expressions that participants think that processes to receive permissions for the application and financial support especially in thesis process include unnecessary procedures and take long time.

Social pressure. Finally, some participants have expressed that they are exposed to a social pressure and thus their motivation is affected adversely. Participants have expressed such in: “View of the family and society on postgraduate education has adverse effects on our motivation...” (P, 1) and ... “You get psychologically exhausted because of your expectation from the education, expectation of the society and being on a shaky ground. You might get exhausted because of a lack of consistence between your idealist attitude and your family’s view...” (P, 10). It is seen by these expressions that students are under pressure during the postgraduate education because of the views of both families and social environment on postgraduate education and this pressure has adverse effects on their motivation.

Results of the Problems Encountered

Figure 3 illustrates the views of the participants on “the results based on the problems encountered during postgraduate education” and their expression frequencies. It is seen on the Figure 3 that views of participants on the results based on the problems encountered in postgraduate education are collected under two main titles. These are “loss of motivation” and “loss of time”.

![Figure 3](image_url)

Figure 3. The Views of the participants on the results based on the problems encountered during postgraduate education and their expression frequencies.

Loss of motivation. Most of the participants have emphasized that problems encountered in postgraduate education have adverse effects on their motivation. Participants have expressed this situation such in: “Problems encountered in the period affect and prolong the thesis writing process. Students might have moral problems as well as financial inabilities. Concerns caused by the financial and moral problems bring along adaptation problems and academic development of the student is affected adversely...” (P, 3), “Problems encountered during postgraduate education have adverse effects on attention and perception of the student...” (P, 8) and “Problems encountered in postgraduate level might have adverse effects on motivation of the student.” (P, 9). It is seen by these

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* BAP is an abbreviation used for Scientific Research Projects. Karabük University where this study was conducted included a Scientific Research Projects Department that is founded to evaluate, accept and support proposals for scientific research projects and conduct other necessary procedures related to these projects.

† TÜBİTAK: The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey
expressions that problems encountered by the participants in postgraduate education affect adversely their motivation and it might be a reason for many other problems.

**Loss of time.** Some of the participants have indicated that problems encountered in postgraduate education result in extension of time allocated to postgraduate education. Participants have expressed this case such in: “Postgraduate education isn’t completed by the students on time because of this kind of problems…” (P, 13) and “It prolongs the relevant process in general. The reason is that it takes at least 2-3 months to perform a literature review and determine a subject in mind. Thesis writing period of the candidate experiencing a loss of motivation during this period will continue naturally in an adverse sense…” (P, 7). It is demonstrated by these expressions that problems encountered by the participants in postgraduate education cause students to go beyond the duration allocated for postgraduate education and to lose time naturally.

**Solution for the Problems Encountered**

Figure 4 illustrates the views of the participants on “solution for the problems encountered” and their expression frequencies.

![Solutions for the Problems Encountered Diagram](image)

**Figure 4.** The views of the participants on solution for the problems encountered and their expression frequencies

As can be seen from Figure 4 that views of the participants concerning solutions for the problems encountered are collected under three main titles. These are “Advisor should be concerned”, “Source opportunities should be procured” and “No unnecessary procedures”.

**Advisor should be concerned.** Most of the participants have expressed that advisors should be more concerned to find possible solutions for the problems encountered in postgraduate education and they can overcome the difficulties. This case is summarized generally by the expressions of the participants such in: “An advisor should give more duties to students, directs the student to study and train the student in academic manner… Student should be guided properly in determining thesis subject…” (P, 4) and … “It is important to reach and get in touch with the advisor more easily during postgraduate education in terms of solving the problems and make the process faster. It will contribute to study atmosphere if the advisor is open minded and considers the student as an individual who has been making progress in being a scientist instead of a student …” (P, 7). It is demonstrated by the expressions that participants believe that it is an important step that participants attract the required attention from their advisors concerning a solution for the problems encountered in postgraduate education.

**Source opportunities should be procured.** A group of participants have expressed that solution for the problems encountered in postgraduate education is associated with whether an opportunity is supplied to reach enough source. This case can be seen by the expressions of participants such in: “Students can be provided with a more comprehensive opportunity of study by reproducing the sources included in the library…” (P, 12) and “It is required to improve scientific sources and data in postgraduate education…” (P, 10). It is understood by these expressions that participants would not have difficulties in solving the problems encountered in both increasing source opportunities included in the library and supplying the financial support.

**No unnecessary procedures.** Some of the participants have expressed that it is required to eliminate unnecessary procedures to solve the problems encountered in postgraduate problems and the period will
become easier in this way. This case becomes clear by the expressions of participants such in: “It is required to take necessary precautions in order to make administrative process faster. Institute of Social Sciences should evaluate itself. Administrative personnel who don’t know how they should give the simplest form should pattern themselves after the universities conducting this work in a better manner…” (P, 5) and “Support entities such like BAP, TÜBİTAK should be applied within the procedures that are short and not tiring (including being able to go abroad)…” (P, 9). These expressions demonstrate that participants think it is required to eliminate the unnecessary procedures for solution of the problems encountered in postgraduate education.

Discussion and Results

This study focused on determining the problems encountered in postgraduate education and solution offers for these problems according to the views of students. The views of the participants were collected under four themes entitled “postgraduate education in terms of students, problems encountered in postgraduate education, results based on the problems encountered and solutions for the problems encountered.” Therefore, findings indicate that postgraduate education is regarded by the students as a period in which the deficiencies are satisfied mainly for the academic life, advisor and shelter are the leading main problems in postgraduate education, the problems encountered have adverse effects on students’ motivation and an advisor is important to solve these problems and it is also important to supply more comprehensive source opportunities and eliminate the unnecessary procedures.

In the study, first, general views of the students on their postgraduate education were examined. Study findings indicate that students regard this period as a period to satisfy the deficiencies mainly for academic life. This finding of the study makes us think that participants evaluate the postgraduate education as the first step of the period started to be an academician and start the postgraduate in order to be an academician. This finding is in line with the findings of Ören, Yılmaz and Gücüli (2012) and Baş (2013). As expressed clearly in Code of Higher Education (1981), master’s degree is the first step of postgraduate education. Participants regard the postgraduate education mainly as a preparation for academic life and it can be evaluated as an important finding in terms of satisfying the need of Turkey for an academic member. Yet, academic members are raised through postgraduate education in Turkey (Karayalçın, 1988) and shortage of academic member is presented as one of the most important problems of of the higher education system in Turkey and it has been seen in recent years that need for qualified academic members come up more in parallel with the increase in the number of university (Çetinsaya, 2014; Kavak, 2011b; Küçükcan and Gür, 2009). When considering Academic Member Trainee Program (ÖYP) application has been terminated by the decision dated 01/09/2015 and numbered 3040 made by CoHE which it was structured in order to supply source of academic members needed by the system (Education and Education, 2015), it is seen clearly that the finding of the current study has a significant importance. In addition, it is seen that some participants have considered the postgraduate education as a troubled period in which an advisor support is essential and unnecessary lessons are involved. Evidence from a line of studies demonstrated that thesis advisor plays an important role in increasing the quality of postgraduate education (Sezgin, Kılınç and Kavgaç, 2012; Ünver, 2003). Concerning to the subject, Sezgin (2002) indicates that quality of postgraduate education is directly contributed when academic members play active roles to raise people. Moreover, the participants consider some courses of master’s degree as unnecessary and it makes us think that these courses do not satisfy their expectations or learning needs. Study findings by Arabacı and Akıllı (2013) and Yetkiner and İnce (2016) support this expression. Therefore it is possible to argue that it is required to review courses and course contents in postgraduate education at certain intervals by receiving the views of students, academic members and other shareholders.

Another finding of the study indicates that problems with the advisor, shelter and financial inabilities are primary for the problems which students encounter in postgraduate education. In addition, participants have considered problems in source procurement, difficulty in finding thesis subject, transportation problems, problem with foreign language, and unnecessary procedures in thesis writing process and social pressure as the other problems they encountered in postgraduate education. It is seen in the literature that there are similar findings to this finding of the study (Çoruk, Çağatay and Özdemir, 2016; Karaküütk, Aydın, Abali and Yıldırım, 2008; Özmen and Aydın Güç, 2013; Sevîn, 2001; Sezgin, Kılınç and Kavgaç, 2012). Another study demonstrates that problems with advisors are expressed by the participants as advisors of postgraduate students do not back up their students and personal relations come into prominence (Kaya, 2014). As mentioned above, consultancy of academic members plays an important role in postgraduate education and
has influence on the quality of process. As mentioned by Güven and Tunç (2007), students may be caused to move away from postgraduate education if academic members don’t fulfill efficiently his responsibility to raise students in postgraduate education. In this context, it can be argued that literature and expectations correspond to the expressions of participants in the current study that problems with advisor is the most important problem encountered in the postgraduate education. In addition, students consider “shelter” as one of the most important problems encountered in postgraduate education and it can be explained regarding to the context in which the study was conducted. Karabuk University is a university founded in 2007 and therefore it faces a line of problems such as physical environment, infrastructure, superstructure, and faculty member. Taking into consideration criticisms in the literature that recently founded universities are founded without the required physical substructure (Çetinsaya, 2014; Küçükan and Gür, 2009), this finding of the study indicates that needs of students for shelter is a problem required to emphasize sensitively regarding to efficiency of postgraduate programs conducted within the body of Karabuk University. Furthermore, it is thought that study finding discussed above can be evaluated with the problems encountered in source procurement, which is another finding of the study, and lack of library services mentioned by the participants at this point. Yet, the relevant finding of the study might have been caused as the library involved in center campus of Karabuk University was put into service in 3rd April of 2017 nearly 10 years after the university had been founded (Karabuk University, Head of Department of Library and Documentation, 2017). In addition, Kılıç, Çepni, Kılcan and Palaz (2016) examined problems of the recently founded universities according to views of academic members, and findings of the study conducted in the context of Karabuk University indicate deficiencies in number and quality of library, laboratory, amphitheater, classroom, social areas of the university in terms of physical opportunities. In this regard, it can be stated that it is important to satisfy the deficiencies concerning the substructure elements in order to make postgraduate education more qualified in Karabuk University.

Another finding of the study is associated with the problems encountered by postgraduate students. Accordingly, participants have indicated that problems encountered in postgraduate education affect adversely their motivation and cause a loss of time. It is seen that findings reached in the literature are similar to this finding (Barutçu and Onaylı, 2016; Özmen and Aydin Güz, 2013). Postgraduate education has a critical importance regarding to raise skilled workforce in a country (Karaküütük, 1999; Sezgin, 2002). Furthermore, two main factors that distinguish postgraduate education from other levels of education are a high level of cost and difficulties in reaching the objectives (Ibiş, 2004). From this point of view, problems encountered in postgraduate education might result in a decrease of motivation, extension of graduation process and waste of resources. When considering the resource allocated to postgraduate education is limited in Turkey (Ibiş, 2014; Özcan, 2007), postgraduate education is supposed to become non-functional which it aims to raise a source of experts and researchers needed by a country in every field. On the other hand, with reference to determination that one of the urgent needs of Turkish higher education system is qualified academic member (Çetinsaya, 2014; CoHE, 2007; Küçükan and Gür, 2009), it can be stated that the extension of thesis completion time because of problems encountered in postgraduate education might have adverse effects on the system as a whole.

The final result of the study is associated with suggestions of participants to solve the problems encountered in postgraduate education. Participants consider that problems encountered in postgraduate education might be eliminated effectively when advisors show more interest, source opportunities increase and unnecessary procedures are eliminated. It is seen that there is a relation between problems experienced mostly with the advisors in the relevant process and the concerned advisor that is the most emphasized factor in the suggestions of participants on solutions for the problems encountered in postgraduate education. When examining the literature, however, it is seen there are a series of study findings which demonstrate problems based on the advisors are the primary problems encountered in postgraduate education (Çoruk, Çağatay and Özdemir, 2016; Kaya, 2014; Özmen and Aydin Güz, 2013; Sezgin, Kılıç and Kavgacı, 2012 ). When considering advisor is an important factor for efficiency in postgraduate education and advisor who plays a successful role to raise students has a positive effect on quality of the process (Sezgin, 2002), it can be argued that the relevant study finding corresponds to the expectations. Thus, advisor is supposed to support and direct properly students from determination of thesis subject to determination of study method and from analyses to reporting (Sezgin, Kılıç and Kavgacı, 2012), otherwise motivation of the students might decrease (Barutçu and Onaylı, 2016) and students might not possess any strategy for solution (Özmen and Aydin Güz, 2013). In this context,
it can be concluded from the study finding that advisor who has full knowledge of field, develops himself continuously in professional sense and give an effective assistance for thesis students in the period is a critical factor in order that postgraduate education reaches its objective. On the other hand, participants think supplying a sufficient resource and eliminating the unnecessary procedures will be effective in solution for the problems encountered in postgraduate education. As mentioned above, substructure factors such like library, laboratory, classrooms and transportation have effects on postgraduate education period. It is clear that an equipped library where students can study and reach various databases is pretty important in postgraduate education. Besides, it can be considered that students have made such a suggestion as they consider source procurement and lack of library services as the problems encountered in postgraduate education. Finally, participants have emphasized that it is required to eliminate unnecessary procedures especially based on the institute in order to solve problems encountered in postgraduate education. In the studies of Karakütük and others (2008) examining the views of the postgraduate institute managers of the universities in Ankara concerning problems with postgraduate education, it has been demonstrated that institute managers think of legal regulations related to postgraduate education are insufficient. In this regard, it can be expressed that it is important that institutes in which postgraduate education programs are conducted revise legal regulations to make the process easier and remove the unnecessary procedures.

In this study conducted in qualitative research method and phenomenological design, problems encountered by students who do master’s degree and their solutions for these problems were examined. The Study results demonstrate that postgraduate students consider postgraduate education period mainly as a preparatory period for the academic life. In other words, most of the students starting to do master’s degree aims to be academic member. When considering that ÖYP has been removed and need of Turkish education system for qualified academic member has been gradually increasing through the recently founded universities, this finding of the study may be considered as important in terms of eliminating the need of qualified academic members. In this regard, it may be suggested to encourage students to be academic members in the postgraduate programs opened and schedule content, time, course and academic member dimensions of the programs in this regard. The study results also demonstrate that the most important problems encountered in postgraduate education are related to advisors and the literature supports this result. In this respect, universities should take precautions to develop the educational abilities of academic members consulting in postgraduate education, open academic units within the body of institutes which give assistance to the students and academic member in the preparation process of thesis and provide sustainability for these units. In addition, postgraduate programs should not be opened before learning and research environments such like library, laboratory and classroom are not provided precisely which they are pretty important in postgraduate education; it should be ensured that these research-learning facilities sustain their functionalities after these programs have been opened. Besides, institutes should act as a facilitator in the process and care about information and document management processes in order to avoid certain conditions in which thesis prolongs and motivation of the students decrease. The results of the current study are not suitable for generalization because of the method and the design of the study. For this reason, similar studies can be conducted in order to examine similar conditions, which took place in different, time, places and contexts, in different aspects. In addition to this, in subsequent studies based on this subject, problems encountered in postgraduate education and solution offers can be examined from a multiple perspective based on the views of students, academic members and academic managers. Furthermore, the fact that this study focused only the problems and solution offers of master’s degree students as the number of PhD students is quite limited in Karabuk University Institute of Social Sciences is regarded an important limitation and therefore further studies can be conducted through the participation of PhD students or both postgraduate and doctorate students.

References


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