

THE PROCESS OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION: FROM THE ADVISOR'S PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study is held with the aim of putting forward the self-experiences of faculty members advising doctoral students among graduate students registered at the Educational Sciences Institute about writing doctoral dissertations together with their expectations from the doctoral students in the process of writing dissertations, identifying the problems encountered and providing solutions to these problems. This research was organized as a descriptive study based on a qualitative method. In the research, the criteria sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling methods, is used. In the research, the criteria as giving lectures at Anadolu University, Educational Science Institution, to have been completed at least one Ph.D. thesis of his/her students, and being an advisor of doctoral thesis right now are required. 21 faculty members were determined in accordance with being appropriate to these criteria. Semi-structured interviews were made with volunteers from faculty members. The data were analyzed descriptively. As a result of the data analysis, most of the advisors stated that they had difficulty in defining the topic and problem during the process of defining the research problem and doctoral students had a problem in identifying and writing the results. Most of the advisors stated that they worked together with their advisees to solve problems. Advisors answered the question about which academic competences an academic member should have to consult. In these competences, they stated methodological proficiency and field knowledge proficiency as important. Some advisors recommended following the innovations in their field publishing and having a scientific attitude in the academic competences. Advisors answered the question about which academic competences an academic member should have to consult. In these competences, they stated methodological proficiency and field knowledge proficiency as important. Some advisors recommended following the innovations in their field publishing and having a scientific attitude in the academic competences.

Key Words: Doctoral Dissertation Process, Advising Education, Doctoral Advisor.

INTRODUCTION

As well as being the instructional summit of the graduate education period, Philosophy of Doctorate is a prominent first step in the course of academic studies; hence, Ph.D. programs are considered to be the most fundamental stage of raising scientists and research crew. Pioneering legal amendments concerning doctorate programs in our country are rooted in the instructional/educational guidelines of Istanbul University developed on the basis of the regulation, a.k.a. 1933 University Reform, approved in 1934. As more and more universities started to offer higher education opportunities, graduate education became more and more common in time. Analysis of the types of graduate studies reveals that it had only a single stage form—PhD—lasting 3 to 4 years until the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1982, the American model was adopted, and graduate studies modified to be provided in two stages—MA & PhD—and to be completed with a thesis (Bozan, 2012).

Most comprehensive regulations regarding higher education took place in 1981 with the enactment of Law on Higher Education, #2547. This law assigned the authority of commencing, running, and terminating graduate studies to institutions, and this led to the launch of Institute of Science, Social Sciences, Health Sciences, and Educational Sciences within the body of universities, which was the line drawn between graduate education

and units providing undergraduate training (Sağlam, 2007). Tenures of professors working at institutions belong to faculties, and institutions do not have their own tenure for professors.

According to the latest amendments, there have to be at least 3 professors—two of whom have to hold a PhD degree—for MA programs and at least 5 professors—two of whom have to be full professors—for PhD programs at institutions; furthermore, institutions have been granted the right to start joint programs via cooperation with other institutions (BHE, 2010).

Among the aims determined for doctorate programs, universities underlined that individuals with a PhD degree have to be knowledgeable enough at least to conduct a research. The purpose of graduate studies, as outlined by the 18th article of the Regulation on Graduate Education-Training, is to equip individuals with skills necessary to administer research studies independently, to interpret scientific phenomena in all dimensions, and to conclude new synthesis. Similarly, graduate students who complete their courses successfully, who succeed in comprehensive exams, and whose dissertation proposals are accepted and approved are required to fulfill one of the following conditions entailed by the 39th article of the same regulation; bringing innovation to science in general, devising a new method, or adapting an already existing method for a new situation.

Davis and Parker (1997) state that there are 3 basic goals of a dissertation: to conduct research independently, to contribute to science with the research, and to make the research accessible for everybody through related documentation. Based on these three foundational features, it is possible to conclude that a dissertation is *“the documentation of a research study contributing to science.”*

In our country, dissertations are completed under the supervision of an advisor and two members of dissertation jury appointed by the head of the program. Not only do the hard work by and the qualities of the PhD student, but also the role of the mentor plays a significant part in the successful completion of a dissertation, and both the starring character and primary responsibility are acted and taken by the mentor during this process. Bakioğlu and Gürdal (2001) underpinned that the most complicated and difficult task for professors was to advise dissertations and that being an effective researcher was one of the prerequisites to be an efficient advisor, which emphasizes having adequate research skills for professors.

Following are qualities that a competent advisor should bear as defined by Easteby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002):

1. Being knowledgeable about the field and methods
2. Being an active international researcher, meaning that publishing articles in international periodicals, attending international meetings, and cooperation with other researchers abroad
3. Being able to regularly and realistically organize time
4. Being agile in responding to emergencies, and encouraging PhD students to become independent and self-governing
5. Being able to provide feedback on the works of students within one or two weeks
6. Being accessible

Of all the above qualities, being accessible is considered to be the most definitive criterion during choosing an advisor by Orer, Kocadereli & Demirel (2010), and Wisker (2001). Besides, being friendly, open, supportive, and using criticism positively are also added to the list of necessary qualities by the same researchers.

What matters most, apart from receiving a decent education during PhD, studies is the relation between the advisor and the advisee. As for the findings of research on the relation between advisors and advisees, some state that it should be in the form of an advisor system, the advisor guiding the advisee about a diverse variety of topics (Crookston, 1972; Monsour and Corman, 1991; Paglis, et.al, 2006; Wrench and Punyanunt, 2004) whereas some others think the relation with the advisee should not be that close, should be limited with the main responsibility of the advisor to furnish the advisee with related knowledge and skills to improve academically and professionally (Crookston, 1972; Monsour and Corman, 1991; Paglis, et.al., 2006; Wrench and Punyanunt, 2004).

Guiding and supporting are two most vital features of an advisor as far as the advisees are considered (Cronan-Hillix, et.al, 1986). In addition, being honest, open, emphatic, affectionate, sincere, and sharing (Cronan-Hillix et.al, 1986) are also among the expectations of advisees from their advisors together with contribution to their professional development (Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, and Hill, 2003). Such advisor attributes and behaviors are invaluable in terms of easing participation in graduate academic world (Austin, 2002; Myers, 1998; Myers and Martin, 2008), completing the PhD process on time and not quitting the program (Golde, 2005; Hepper and Hepper, 2003; Mauch and Birch, 1993), growing positive perceptions regarding the academic world (Kelly and Schweitzer, 1999), conducting research (publications) (Paglis et.al, 2006), devising a strategy for career planning, and getting to know their colleagues (Dixon-Reeves, 2003). In short, what advisees hope to find in their advisors can be summarized as being accessible, sparing enough time for them, helping how to write and edit a dissertation, and adding onto their academic and professional development (Golde, 2000; Nettles and Millett, 2006; Schlosser et.al. 2003).

Related research indicates that the quality of the relation between the advisee and the advisor directly affects the PhD process. Especially, the period during which dissertations are documented is the most fragile since the interaction between the two parties climax within this period. In this sense, it would be logical to conclude that positive interaction during this phase works for the student (Hartnett, 1976), influences the relation the advisee has with the department affirmatively, helps the participation of the advisee into the academic world (Gerholm, 1990), and facilitates correct timing of the completion of dissertations (Lovitts, 2001). Conversely, a weak and unqualified relation generally causes a majority of PhD students to drop out of the program (Lovitts, 2001; Golde, 2005).

Expectation is the core component of the interaction between the advisor and the advisee. Relevant studies point out that the imbalance between the expectations that an advisor has from the advisee and vice versa often leads to troubles (Ayas and Kala, 2007; Burgaz and Şentürk, 2007). Open and sincere sharing of expectations between the parties is regarded as a significant step in order to overcome related problems. Not only do the expectations of the advisee from the advisor, but also those advisors have from the advisee matter. Knox et.al (2006) believe that personality traits and professional competence of the advisee also has an effective part in the relation between the advisor and the advisee. Accordingly, what the advisors expect from the advisee are being motivated about the dissertation, locked on the target, hard working, career-oriented, clever, responsible, trustable, and having a sense of humor. Some of the negative attributes of the advisee, as stated and noted by the advisors, are being restless, over self-confident, headstrong, lazy, selfish, and insecure, which would make cooperation more difficult than it already is.

Closeness of the relation between the advisee and the advisor should also be balanced. Expectations other than academic ones, such as exercising and playing music together, should never prevail and cloud academic performance. Neither should let the ultimate reason that has brought them together slip out of their minds, which is designing and conducting a scientific research. Especially the advisors helping more than one advisee should keep a record of their meetings (one copy for the advisee) so that decisions made on mutual agreement will not be forgotten, and any serious conflict regarding those decisions will not arise. Some relation models that cause considerable malfunctions on relations are self-exhaustive advisor; overstepping advisee; not following given feedbacks; exploitative advisee; and advisees lacking self motivation skills (Orer, Kocadereli and Demirel, 2010).

In some departments/programs, it is the advisor who determines his/her advisees whereas the advisees get to choose their advisors in some others. Phillips and Pugh (1994) think that choosing the advisor is one of the prominent stages of PhD studies. Zhao, Golde & McCormick (2007) state that the criteria to select advisors mostly define the satisfaction level in advisor-advisee interaction. Regardless of all, a healthy and positive interaction between an advisor and an advisee delivers efficiency over the entire process and freedom from academic strings onto the advisee to become a self-governing researcher while adverse interaction generally winds up with the advisee discontinuing the program. (Lovitts, 2001; Golde, 2005).

According to Kluver's study (1997), graduate students think that meetings with the advisor on a regular basis may be considered as definitive criterion for the completion of dissertations on time. Consulting with either the advisee or the advisor regularly once a week or two weeks eases advisee's progress. These sessions can help the advisor to monitor the advisee without much effort and to respond to emerging problems quickly and effectively. What plays the crucial role in this process is an advisor sticking to his/her appointments (cited in: Spillett and Moisiejewicz, 2004).

Ample amount of research indicates that efficient advisering expands the width of academic intellectuality for the advisees (Smallwood, 2004; Lovitts, 2002; Barnes and Austin, 2009, Robinson, 2008). Effective academic advisering is considered to be one of the determiners of completing or discontinuing the program for the advisees during the entire process (Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 2000; Wong, Selke and Thomas, 1995). For this reason, the relation between an advisor and an advisee can be likened to apprenticeship or to the one between a master and a prospect. However, professors are not supported by any kind of training about advisering skills. Perception of advisership within graduate education is as a phenomenon molded with trial and error and reflecting on one's or others' experience. Contrary to this, advisership skills are not innate but they are rather of behaviorist nature, and learned and improved through education and experience (Orer, Kocadereli and Demirel, 2010).

It is best advising for novice advisers, to review successful dissertations, to share their projects with colleagues, even to co-adviser several dissertations in order to improve themselves and their confidence. Confidence is deeply rooted in experience. A good way is to partake in juries as often as possible to accelerate the feeding process (Orer, Kocadereli and Demirel, 2010).

Academic dignity of the adviser is the foundation of trust for the advisees. Blessed is the adviser who referees in journals, partakes in congresses, and publishes books because s/he promises much to share. Training on advisering skills is an indispensable part of academic move-ahead (Orer, Kocadereli and Demirel, 2010).

As aforementioned, successful advisering and cooperation with the relevant institution vitally matters for the attainment of program goals as much as the specifically developed programs do. Literature review has shed light on several studies conducted on responsibilities and roles of advisers and disputes between them and the advisee. Yet, no research has been detected regarding a full description of the process by advisers who have already been there.

This research is significant because it views the dissertation process from the angle of adviser professors who experienced the same process earlier. Though indirectly, the findings are expected to inform other advisers actively involved in dissertation process, PhD students, and program heads of graduate institutes; hence, to help developing strategies aiming to better graduate education.

Gains during thesis stage, considered as the last phase of the process, should be viewed as the climax for the advisee to be released off academic dependency and to become an independent researcher. A comprehensive description of this process will surely be beneficial for not only advisers and advisees, but also for the administrators. There appears to be no written regulations and guidelines on advisers' academic duties. However, relevant research offers findings underlining that definition of academic duties is of major priority for thesis documentation phase (Robinson, 2008). In this regard, it would be reasonable to state that it is important to describe the advisering and advisee experiences of adviser professors. All aspects considered, this research is expected to contribute to graduate education.

Conducting graduate education since 1998-1999 academic year, Anadolu University Institute of Educational Sciences administers graduate programs in educational sciences and other teacher training programs. Primary purpose of the Institute of Educational Sciences is to contribute to the system in order to make it work more effectively and efficiently by helping raise personnel bearing the qualities required by Turkish Education System (<http://ebe.anadolu.edu.tr>).

This study aims to describe the opinions of advisor professors—presently or formerly conducting dissertations formally at the Institute of Educational Sciences—about their own PhD experience and to picture what their present advisees think about thesis documentation phase. Answers for the following research questions have been sought under the light of discussions:

1. What do the advisors think about their own advisors?
2. What do the advisors think about their own dissertation experience?
3. What do the advisors think about themselves as advisors?
4. What do the advisors think about their advisees' dissertation experience?
5. What do the advisors think about 'advisment training'?

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed descriptively. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the advisors. What secures the reliability of practice for semi-structured interviews is the exactness of the researcher in terms of manners and behaviors towards each and every participant (Gay, Mills and Airasian, 2006; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006).

Participants

In the research, criteria sampling method that is one of the purposive sampling methods, is used to select participants. Participants in the study were selected using a criterion sampling technique. Patton (1990 p. 238) indicates that *"the logic of criterion sampling is to review and study cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance"*. Participants are required to have advised at least one dissertation and to be still advising at least one other dissertation. Based on the data obtained from the Institute of Educational Sciences, 23 professors complying with the selection criteria were contacted. Later, those who were voluntary to participate in the study were chosen. Two of the professors stated that they wouldn't be able to take part in the study due to their busy workload; thus, following is the demographic information on 21 participating professors.

Table I: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Participants	F
Gender	<i>Female</i>	10
	<i>Male</i>	11
Current number of doctoral advisees	<i>1</i>	10
	<i>2</i>	3
	<i>3</i>	1
	<i>4</i>	3
	<i>5</i>	1
	<i>7</i>	1
	<i>10 and plus</i>	2
Discipline	<i>Primary Education</i>	2
	<i>Computer Education and Inst. Tec.</i>	4
	<i>Educational Siciens</i>	5
	<i>Foreing Language Education</i>	3
	<i>Special Education</i>	6
	<i>Fine Arts Education</i>	1
Rank	Professor	9
	Associate Professor	8
	Assistant Professor.	4

As can easily be seen in Table 1, of all the participating advisors/ mentors 11 are male, and 10 are female. The number of dissertations that the participants have advised so far ranges from one to 10 or more. As for the

programs, the highest number of participants belongs to Special Education Program. Regarding the academic titles held by the participants, 9 are full professors, 8 are associate professors, and 4 are assistant professors.

Data Collection

In the first phase of the study the interview questions were prepared regarding the aims of the present study. The questions were given to three professionals from the field in order to be checked in terms of context and correctness. Depending upon the opinions of the professionals, some of the interview questions were replaced and the final version of the questions was formed. In order to evaluate the interview questions, one pilot interview was conducted by the researcher. A total of 26 questions were asked under five basic titles to the participants during the interviews. Before the study started advisors had been informed about the purpose and process of the study. During this meeting, all the advisors were also informed about the data collection process. They were told that the data would be collected using a tape recorder. The interviews would be recorded and the data would be transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Besides, the data would only be listened and read by the researcher but nobody else. At the end of this meeting, volunteer advisors were named as the participants of the study and a written consent was signed by the participants and researcher. All interviews were conducted face to face between September and December of 2011. The interviews were conducted on the dates and hours which the participants determined. The interviews lasted between 20 and 100 minutes. Each participant was assigned a code number to protect confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed descriptively. During the descriptive analysis, the collected data are presented according to the questions used in the interviews (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). During the present study, as a requirement of descriptive analysis, each interview was transcribed. Transcriptions of the interviews do not include interjections and exclamations such as “huh-huh, oooo, hmm”. After developing the draft interview coding form, two researchers marked the appropriate item for each question of each participant independently. In order to examine the consistency of the researchers about marking the answers on the interview coding forms, markings were compared and some important changes in the categories were done. After these changes, the last version of the interview coding form was constituted. In order to determine the inter-raters reliability, all the interviews were read and appropriate categories were marked for all the questions of all the participants by the researchers independently. The reliability was between 85% and 100% with an average of 92.5%.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study aims to describe the opinions of advisor—presently or formerly conducting dissertations formally at the Institute of Educational Sciences—about their own PhD experience and to picture what their present advisees think about thesis documentation phase. The findings of the study are organized and presented guidance of the research questions. Findings can be summarized as follows:

The Advisors' Opinions About Their Own Ph.D. Thesis Advisors

Upon being asked what they think about their own dissertation advisors in the past, advising professors (K1, K16, K11, K19, K21, K17) stated that their own advisors were academically competent and experienced. Some of the participants (K1, K5, K20, K11, K15, K8) mentioned several *negative attributes* about their old advisor such as *ambitious, angry, hard to please, not trusting the advisee, asking for what s/he does not possess, not contributing to the dissertation process, indecisive, and inconsistent*.

When the participants were asked to describe the interaction between them and their old advisors, most of them expressed that their interaction was mainly positive. *Accessibility* (K7, K11, K14, K17, K10, K19, K20, K21), was noted as the most prominent feature in terms of interaction, and some others verbalized by the participants are *equal colleague relation* (K5, K14), and *civilized* (K6), and *friendly* (K4) interaction. A considerable amount of participants (K17, K21, K1, K2, K5, K11, K7, K19, K16) stated that they *generally* had *face-to-face interactions* with their advisors in the past. Some of them (K20, K3, K9, K12) noted that they

didn't have the chance to frequently see their advisors due to misfortunes on the advisors such as being out of town, which had a negative influence on the dissertation process.

Both the program and the advisors were emphasized as determining agents when the participants (K1, K3, K4, K5, K6, K10, K11, K12, K15, K16, K21) were asked about choosing their advisors. This was perceived positively and negatively by different participants. However, 6 participants (K7, K9, K14, K17, K18, K20) who stated that they had chosen their own advisors in the past underlined that it had had a positive effect on dissertation process.

The Advisors' Opinions About Their Own Dissertation Experience

Another difficulty said by the participants (K1, K3, K5, K6, K7, K15, K16, K17, K18, K19, K20) regarding the formulation process of research questions/theme was *to determine the research subject and to define research problem*. Furthermore, they (K15, K20) expressed that this was the result of *being left alone and having indifferent advisors*. Most of the participants (K1, K2, K3, K5, K6, K11, K16, K17, K19) told that they had overcome such problems through the *guidance from the advisors* whereas some (K5, K8, K10, K11) stated that they had solved this problem by the help of *the studies they had done for seminar course, their individual efforts, on their own, or through help from peers*. Still, there are some other participants (K15, K6, K7), few though, who verbalized that *they had had no difficulty* with respect to identification of the research problem during their *dissertation process*.

Almost half of the participating advisors (K2, K4, K8, K9, K10, K12, K14, K15, K18, K21) stated that they had gone through *difficult times writing the literature review for their dissertations*. *Lack of sources in Turkish* (K1, K5, K10, K18, K13, K21) and *difficulty in reaching foreign sources* (K11, K5, K10, K16, K18, K19) were recorded as the most frequent reasons for this problem. Besides, following were also noted as other reasons leading to such problems; *no accessible internet connection* (K11, K20, K19), *lack of technological support* (K2, K7), *late attainment of sources* (K2, K5), *not being able to reach the full texts of studies* (K3, K7), *lack of a guide* (K20), and *being unaware of concepts related with research skills* (K20, K7, K19). Alternative solutions that the participants had found for the aforementioned problems were bringing foreign sources with their own means (K5, K6, K10, K15, K16, K7), making use of other universities' databases, visiting libraries (K10, K16, K7), and embassies (K11), and appealing to the thesis center of Board of Higher Education (K6, K1, K16, K20). One of the participants (K1) said that s/he had used the reference list of other studies while another one (K7); had learned a foreign language in order to overcome such problems. A small number of participants (K4, K12, K8, K21) told that they hadn't experienced difficulty about this since they had had a good command of foreign language (K12, K21), the databases of their universities had been rich (K21), and that they had regarded the process as an exciting one (K6).

A majority of the participants (K1, K2, K4, K7, K8, K9, K10, K12, K14, K15, K16, K19) mentioned that *they hadn't undergone any difficult process during determining the research method*. Three of those (K3, K11, K18) who had problems in this process told that statistics had been the biggest trouble for them. Similarly, two participating advisors (K6, K20) verbalized that they had experienced several hardships stemming from inadequate guidance by their advisors about research methods. Apart from these, other problems emphasized by the participants concerning this phase are; advisors' insist on a popular research method (K3), being incompetent to devise a data collection tool (K11), being indecisive about research design (K3, K12), inadequacy of courses on scientific research methods during classroom phase of the process (K13), not learning the entire research process through practice (K21), difficulty to find field experts for reliability and validity analyses (K11), problems during practice (K11, K3), no-return of some questionnaires (K11, K3), being unable to interpret the data (K17), and not making use of technology during data collection process (K15).

Participants talked about different solutions they had employed for the problems they had had during determining the research method for their own dissertations. Among the participants, 4 (K1, K8, K10, K16) stated that academic competence of and guidance by their advisors had been helpful enough to overcome the problems that had occurred during the dissertation process. On the other hand, 4 (K8, K9, K14, K17, K19) other participants (K7, K11, K18) noted that it had been significantly beneficial to have taken different courses on

research methods during completing their courses. Likewise, 3 participating advisors (K1, K15, K13) stated that they had sought help from others with better skills at statistics. Finally, one (K15) said that books had been useful for him/her while another one (K13) told that it was his/her individual research efforts that had been effective tackling such problems.

Almost half of the participants (K3, K4, K5, K7, K8, K9, K14, K16, K19) mentioned that they had gone through difficulties identifying the findings and documenting them during their dissertation process. Following are several examples to such problems: *Difficulty in determining and expressing the findings* (K1, K2, K10), *and receiving no support from the advisor about this* (K12); *difficulty in finding related examples* (K1), *integrating the findings with those of other studies* (K6), *in reaching findings* (K8), *making use of computer programs effectively* (K11), *developing a model* (K11), and *long-winded process for identification of findings* (K13). Some of the participating advisors told that they had appealed to their advisors or a member of the dissertation supervision team while 3 of them had been assisted by their peers to overcome difficulties in determining the findings.

Participating advisors stated various reasons for difficulties they had experienced during the reporting process of their dissertations. Some of them are *difficulty in academic writing skills* (K1, K6, K10, K21), *lack of advisor support* (K13, K20), *inability to come up with an example* (K1, K21), and *inefficient use of computers* (K11). Generally, the advisors (K1, K10, K16, K17, K21) said that *suggestions by their advisors* had been influential in order to tackle those problems they had experienced during reporting their research. Alternatively, *reviewing previous theses* (K1, K7, K10, K1), *studying books on research methods* (K7), and *getting help from peers* (K12) are among the other solutions stated by the participants. Still, some others (K1, K2, K3, K5, K8) expressed that they hadn't felt any difficulty *since they had taken courses on research methods earlier, they had been good at computers, and they had been provided with the chance to analyze and study the guidelines for reporting theses published by their institutes.*

The Advisors' Opinions About Themselves As Advisors

Upon being asked what they think about themselves as advisors, participants (K1, K3, K4, K6, K7, K9, K10, K11, K12, K13, K16, K19, K20, K21) generally stated that they held *positive advising qualities*. Of these qualities, the subjects emphasized especially *helping and guiding the advisee*. Most of the participating advisors (K4, K5, K9, K10, K12, K15, K20, K21) were determined to describe the relation they have with their advisees *as open and positive with the advisor being the main determiner of the type of the relation*.

A bigger portion of the subjects (K1, K2, K3, K5, K6, K7, K9, K10, K11, K13, K18, K19) stated that *they preferred to hold face-to-face conversations with their advisees*. Some said (K2, K3, K4, K5, K13, K16) that they had *regular sessions* with their advisees whereas some others (K6, K7, K9, K11, K12, K14, K19) noted that *interactions took place when necessary*. Four of the subjects (K1, K4, K5, K14) mentioned that the advisees living in the same city were allowed to visit them *without any appointment*.

Again a majority of the participants (K3, K4, K12, K13, K15, K17, K18, K21) underlined that *it was the advisee to choose the advisor*. However, a few of them (K2, K7, K11, K14, K6, K21) noted that *it was the head of the program, themselves, random assignment, or mutual agreement that set who would advisor whom*.

Participating professors (K1, K7, K8, K14, K16, K17, K18, K21), expressed that *they had been positively influenced, as an advisor, by the behaviors of their own advisors in the past*. Yet, some (K1, K2, K8, K11, K13, K15) underpinned that *they were able to turn the negative attributes of their own advisors in the past into positive results for their own current advisees*.

What professors stated about *the factors influencing the dissertation process* can be divided into two as *advisor-based and advisee-based*. Accordingly, some professors (K2, K8, K10, K14) mentioned that *advisee's not being a member of the university and their heavy workload were leading reasons* with respect to advisee-based factors: Two participants (K13, K14) emphasized that *the personality and academic characteristics of the advisee* affected the mentoring process. Among the advisor-based factors, *business of academic studies or*

classes/courses and high number of advisees were noted by the participants (K4, K5, K7, K8, K9, K10, K11, K12, K13, K14, K15, K17, K18, K19) as *advisor-based factors negatively impacting the dissertation process*.

The Advisors' Opinions About Their Advisees' Dissertation Experience

Almost all of the participants (K1, K3, K4, K5, K6, K7, K8, K10, K12, K13, K14, K16, K17, K18, K21) said that *problems with their advisees usually emerged during determining research subject and defining the research problem*. Some of the subjects (K3, K4, K6, K10) pointed *hard-to-achieve targets of the advisees as the main reason of this problem*. *Directing the advisees to similar previous studies and other sources in the field and sharing their own resources* are two strategies that participating advisors (K1, K3, K4, K5, K6, K8, K9, K10, K11, K12, K13, K14, K15, K17, K18) use to eliminate such problems.

A majority of the subjects (K1, K5, K7, K11, K12, K15, K19, K20, K21) stated that most of their advisees did not experience any problems during reviewing the literature. *Knowing a foreign language* (K1, K12), *being good at technology use* (K1, K12, K15, K21), and *the richness and variety of the sources and databases in the university libraries* (K5, K12, K15, K21) were given as primary factors eradicating related difficulties. Nevertheless, there are some other subjects who said their advisees had troubles during literature review. Among these *difficulties are searching the articles on the Internet rather than the printed ones* (K6, K21), *neglecting the most recent studies* (K1), *insufficient search skills* (K2, K10), *not knowing how to make use of the key words* (K8, K12, K20), and *translating foreign studies instead of searching the ones completed in Turkey* (K20). Advisors (K7, K8, K10, K12, K20, K2) noted that they *tried to guide their advisees through comprehensive explanation of the process for them*.

The subjects told that their advisees had difficulties about different aspects during determining the research method of their dissertations. *Incompetent knowledge about research methods* was emphasized as the most frequent reason leading to such problems by the participants (K1, K4, K7, K20). Very few mentoring professors (K12, K15, K21) said that *their advisees didn't experience many difficulties during determining the research method of their dissertations*. A possible solution of this one, as expressed by the subjects (K4, K1, K7, K12, K20), might be *increasing the variety of research method courses that the advisees take*.

A vast amount of the participants (K1, K3, K4, K6, K9, K12, K15, K19) recorded that *their advisees had troubles during determining and reporting the findings*. According to the participants (K3, K4, K9, K12, K17, K21), a primary reason of this problem is *low quality command of knowledge about statistics and data interpretation*. *Co-working with the advisees, providing several model theses to be reviewed by the advisees, and seeking help from the other members of the program* are the main strategies employed by almost half of the advisors (K1, K2, K3, K12, K13, K15, K18, K17) to tackle such difficulties. Only 3 mentoring professors (K3, K11, K20) stated that these problems could be overcome by training the advisee *on statistics at the beginning of dissertation process*, and by *describing and writing a well-organized method chapter*.

Participating advisors (K1, K5, K7, K12, K17, K20, K21) told that *problems stemming from the incomprehensibility of the statements and typographical errors in writing* were generally observed during reporting the dissertation. Other related problems are those originating from the lack of academic writing skills such as *being unable to correlate the findings with the literature and the problem of the research, inadequate use of citations, repeating the findings in conclusion and discussion chapters, and not reflecting a holistic point of view* (K10, K1, K3, K20, K7). Furthermore, 3 of the subjects (K1, K5, K10) mentioned that their advisees suffered from problems *due to not paying close attention to the guidelines on writing theses published by the institution that their program was affiliated with*. Most of the participants (K1, K3, K5, K10, K13, K20, K21) stated that *they co-worked with their advisees and suggested possible solutions* in order to deal with these problems just like they did during determining the findings. Besides, *seeking help from a language expert* (K5), *appealing to the members of the jury for their advice* (K15), *studying several books on research methods* (K10), and *improving computer skills* (K2, K19) are also employed by the participants to come up with a solution for such problems. Only one advisor (K20) suggested *integrating a course on academic writing skills in PhD programs*.

The Advisors' Opinions About 'Advisement Training'

As the advisors were asked their opinions about which academic competences an advisor should have to mentor. *Academic competence* was the most frequent response given by the participating advisors (K1, K2, K3, K5, K7, K8, K10, K11, K12, K13, K16, K19, K20, K21) concerning *the qualities that a professor should have in order to be an advisor*. Moreover, the subjects (K1, K2, K3, K4, K5, K6, K7, K9, K10, K11, K12, K13, K20, K21) also stated that *being competent about research methods, field knowledge, and a foreign language* were significant among the academic qualities. Several advisors (K1, K5, K9, K17, K18, K20) counted *the ability to catch up with the innovations in the field and to publish, and to hold and apply scientific attitudes* within necessary academic qualities.

A majority of the participants (K1, K2, K3, K4, K5, K6, K8, K9, K12, K13, K15, K16, K20, K21) included *being an effective communicator*, along with academic qualities, as an important factor for advising/mentoring. Almost half of the advisors (K1, K6, K10, K13, K15, K17, K20, K21). emphasized being good at time management.

Upon being asked what the content of advisement training should be, a large number of participants (K1, K3, K5, K9, K11, K12, K13, K16, K18, K19, K20, K21). prioritized that *the content should be relevant for professional development* in connection with the first question. Half of the mentoring professors (K4, K5, K6, K7, K9, K10, K11, K16, K18, K20, K1) expressed that there should be a course on *communicative skills* within advisor training. Very few of them drew attention on the necessity of courses such as *technological support services* (K2, K21), *ethics* (K1, K21), *thesis writing rules* (K1, K5), *legal processes* (K21, K1), *language skills* (K12), and *adult psychology* (K10) for an advisor-training program. Although the significance of time management has been brought forward, only one participant (K7) suggested that skill courses on *time management* should be included in the content of the program.

Answers given by the participants for the question *'What do you think about advisor training, and how should it be provided'* point that the mentoring professors (K1, K6, K9, K10, K16, K11, K19, K21) want a *face-to-face and an effective online communication*. Several others (K7, K13, K18, K19, K21) mentioned that advisor training should take place *only in face-to-face settings* while one advisor (K3) preferred *online settings over face-to-face interaction*.

For the question *"What stage of academic career do you think is a good time to have advisor training?"* they almost unanimously (K1, K4, K5, K6, K7, K9, K10, K11, K18, K21) expressed that *right after completing PhD was a good time to be trained on mentoring*. 8 of the participating advisors (K1, K2, K6, K11, K12, K13, K19, K21) noted that *there was no need for a specific point in time to take such a training, and that this type of training should be provided through in-service training programs any time the professors need it*.

A majority of the advisors (K1, K3, K5, K7, K9, K10, K11, K12, K16, K18, K19, K21). recorded that it would be dramatically beneficial to offer advisor training for professors. A few subjects (K1, K3, K5, K7, K10, K12, K16) expressed that such training should be taken on a voluntary basis whereas only one subject told that there was no need for such training on mentoring.

DISCUSSION

Ample amount of studies have revealed that advisors bear a really significant role especially during the thesis preparation phase of dissertation period (Austin, 2002; Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 2001). As for the relation between the advisors and the advisees, many advisees think that the core source of effect on their decision to continue or discontinue the PhD program is the interaction they have with their advisors (O'Bara, 1993; Lovitts, 2001). This has been determined based on the findings concerning the advisees. Yet, there is a limited number of studies investigating advisors' standpoint in this issue (Lovitts, 2001). Therefore, this study examined the PhD process from the angle shared by the advisors.

Analysis of advisors' opinions regarding the positive attributes of their own advisors in the past has indicated that the advisor profile described by the subjects as being experienced, understanding, easy to communicate, accessible, knowledgeable, civilized, and friendly actually overlaps with the roles of advisors as outlined by Barnes and Austin (2009).

Participating professors generally complain that it was hard to meet with their advisors due to mentor-based reasons such as the mentor being out of town and that this had a negative impact on their dissertation process. Wisker (2001) especially underlines the significance of reaching the advisor when necessary, and states that being accessible is one of the leading factors over choosing an advisor.

Subjects' experience as an advisor and an advisee shows that it is *the advisor or the program* that has the definitive effect on the selection and the assignment of the advisors. These findings are consistent with those of Akbulut, Şahin, and Çepni (2013). According to the results of their study, more qualified dissertations can only be the outcomes of feeling free to choose your advisor. Several other research studies also point to the fact that the advisees should be allowed to make their own choices about their advisors. Polat, Alabaş, and Kamer, (2009) conclude that the advisee should not be left out during decision-making process about the selection and appointment of the advisors. How professors embrace this situation varies from negative to positive. 6 participating advisors *who were lucky to get to choose their own advisors in the past* believe that it had a positive influence on their dissertation process. Similarly, findings identified by Zhao, Golde, and McCormick (2007) indicate that PhD students who select their own advisors feel more satisfied with the dissertation process as well. Furthermore, Lovitts (2002) discusses that choosing one's advisor on one's own sheds positive influence on both the nature and quality of the interaction between them.

Results have shown that participating advisors *underpin the difficulty in determining the research topic and identifying the research problem* for both their dissertation experience and for the current dissertations they work on. These findings are parallel with those of Akbulut, Şahin, Çepni (2013) in which interviews with participants who were PhD students and who had completed their PhDs were held. Solutions offered by the advising professors during the study include advice to the advisees to expand their readings specifically in their own field, which is again consistent with those of Akbulut, Şahin, Çepni (2003), Likewise, Polat, Alabaş, and Kamer (2009) found that problems during the selection of research topic were the most frequent for advisees as well. Ayas and Kala (2007) stated that advisors complained about their disappointments concerning their expectations from the advisee, and this caused many difficulties in choosing the research topic, administering the research, and reporting it were mainly advisee-origin. Moreover, problems regarding the selection of research topic have also been underlined in Kalem and Akman's study (2007).

According to the data of the research by Robinson (2008), advisors mostly thought of themselves as 95% competent in communicating. This finding is consistent with the responses (*mostly positive mentoring qualities*) provided by the participants of the present study to the question "*What do you think about yourself as an advisor?*" However, there seems to be a serious discrepancy in terms of the percentage (90.9%) that Robinson (2008) found concerning the academic competence of the participants. In Robinson's study (2008), rate of academic competence was the second after communication whereas in the present study three participants stated to be competent only about research methods, and one about the field. As for another study of which findings happen to be similar to the present ones, Burgaz and Şentürk (2007) aimed to determine the opinions of both the advisors and the advisees about communication behaviors of each other. As a result, advisors were identified to feel more positive about their own communicative behaviors than the advisees did for them. In Knox, Lewis, Pruitt, and Hill (2006), advisors expressed that negative personal and professional attributes on part of the advisees would damage the communication between them. In this study, mentoring professors also think that it is the behaviors of the advisees that determine how the interaction between them will develop in time.

In this research, advisors accept that some of them meet with their advisees *regularly* and some do it *only when necessary*. Kluver (1997) found that regular meetings had a major impact on the completion of thesis process as far as the graduate students were concerned (cited in: Spillett and Moisiejewicz, 2004).

Participants feel that they have been positively influenced by the behaviors of their own advisors in the past. Moreover, some take it one step further and say that they have turned the negative attributes they witnessed in their own advisor's behaviors into positive ones for their advisees. These findings, based on the opinions of mentoring professors, can be taken as a reflection of cognitive apprenticeship model within the literature.

Several subjects admit that some *problems affecting the process negatively stem from some mentor-based factors such as heavy workload, business of academic studies, and high numbers of hours spent in the classroom or with the advisees*. Similar problems have also been reported by some other studies (Çakar, 1997; Sevinç, 2001). Ayas and Kala (2007), and Myers and Dyer (2003) found that the biggest problem for graduate students was the fact that advisors did not spare enough time for each advisee. In Gündoğdu, Küçükoğlu and Kaya (2007), participants noted that they had difficulties "because their advisors were not able to guide them as required due to busy working schedules."

A vast number of subjects think that "their advisees go through hard times during the identification and documentation of findings". One of the primary sources of this problem has been determined as *being incompetent about statistics and data interpretation*. This might be considered as a confirmation of Keskinlik and Ertürk's study (2009), in which they found that graduate students did not feel competent but felt the need for further training in statistics,

Almost half of the participants *co-work with their advisees* in order to overcome the problems related with determining and documenting the findings while some others *provide sample research studies and ask their advisees to follow them or seek help from other members of the program*. The ultimate aim of PhD programs is to raise individuals who are capable of designing studies on their interests without help from any other third party and independently. Advisors are expected to help and guide their advisees in order to tackle this difficulty (Wisker, 2001). Findings of this research indicate that working together with the advisees is the most helpful.

Participants generally believe that the core feature of an advisor is the capabilities s/he has regarding his/her own field of study. Moreover, they think that knowledge on research methods, field, and a foreign language matter the most as for being a competent advisor. Yet, several other mentoring professors hold the idea that following field-related innovations, publishing, and exhibiting scientific behaviors should also be considered within academic competence. A majority of the participants also feel that being an effective communicator is also one of the key qualities that an advisor should have along with academic competence. In addition, almost half the participants think that time management skills also do matter for an effective advising. All these findings are completely consistent with qualities of efficient advisors determined in the literature so far (Easteby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002; Orer, Kocadereli and Demirel 2010).

These suggestions were developed from the results of the research:

- Doctoral students' opinions can be received about evaluating of doctorate programs in addition to academicians' opinions.
- According to the participants; a lot of various problems were faced in dissertation writing process. In order to reduce the faced problems; the lessons for research in doctoral education process can be varied and these lessons can be more practical.
- It is indicated that advisory process is influenced negatively because of academicians' extra lessons and works and administrative tasks. This situation can be considered in advisory assignment.
- The advisors can be given doctoral advisory education which will be organized variously intended for developing academicians' academic advisory skills.

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