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A STUDY ON THE PROBLEMS OF GRADUATE EDUCATION IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION•

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Abstract

Research mission, the most fundamental element of the mission of higher education institutions, is considered as a touchstone for education and community service missions. The significance attributed to the research mission also constitutes the main theme of the discussions of universities on restructuring. In this study, it is aimed to determine the level of awareness of students, who have received graduate education, on the aims, expectations and problems they face and higher education values. According to the results of in-depth interviews with 21 graduate students in 14 different state and foundation universities in this study conducted in phenomenological research design of qualitative research methods, the main objectives of the participants in the graduate education are determined in the main themes of career and economic contribution, interest in science and research and gaining personal development and experience. The problems that the participants experienced during their graduate education were outlined in three main themes: system-induced, human-induced and external problems. The second main finding in the study was determined that the level of awareness of the participants about the changing higher education process was not high. Regarding the new concepts and trends of higher education, it was observed that the participants commented mostly on the concepts of competitive-innovative university and academic freedom. Findings about the problems of graduate education in the study were evaluated comparatively with previous studies the findings about the changing values of higher education are discussed within the framework of the theoretical debates in the literature and agenda due to the lack of such a study in the literature.

Keywords: Change in Higher Education, Graduate Education, Problems of Graduate Education.

1. Introduction

Even though university '*universitas*' has different missions in every period of the history (Timur, 2000), it directs/is directed to other missions outside of education/research (teaching/learning) in terms of the mission/meaning that the modern age has imposed on itself. This direction has already been defined in the mission statements. While many of these definitions represent a common objective, the definition of this sharp transformation in the mission-oriented (structured) and ever-changing (Guri-Rosenblit, Sebkova, & Teichler, 2007) universities' missions is made by the notion of the information age in the form of focusing on achieving quality and increasing the capacity to contribute to knowledge (Rosso, 2011).

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While knowledge and science were related to the history of universities becoming schools '*scholarium'*, higher education institutions had to face with the components of post-modern age for quality and further developments. This exigence has made it necessary for universities to evolve into a university model directed by the market (Currie, 1998) for national economies that want to maintain a competitive advantage in globalized economies or to gain a competitive advantage.

This transformation is defined by Wissema (2009) in three generations/two thresholds in a similar way with the parallelism of Toffler's (1980) classification for human history in the form of feudal era (after the agricultural revolution), the age of industrialization (after the industrial revolution) and the information age (prosumer/supra-industrial society/collective imagination age). While in the first generation of universities representing the eighteenth and the pre-nineteenth century, the thought '*idea'* was religion-centered, the second-generation university was developed by being influenced by the processes of industrialization and nation-state structuring, except for the fraction of the 17th and 18th century. For the third generation of universities, a definition is made, without doubt, as a science *'knowledge'* era university understanding, which includes a result that Nathaniel Cantor (1898-1957) ironically criticized interpreting '*information'* instead of '*intelligence'* against academicians' outcome (cited by Wissema, 2009).

The second generation of university understanding started with the Imperial University in France after the period of enlightenment, Humboldt University in Germany and Manchester University in England. To the basis of this understanding, French positivism, German idealism and British empiricism philosophies seem to have been placed (Timur, 2000).

The main characteristics of the second-generation universities can be expressed as to conduct basic scientific research, to carry out a single-disciplinary education and research, to be managed in closed system, to serve the students of the region, to apply standard education programs, to give a national language, publicly funded and state-monopolized *'elitist'* higher education service. The third generations of universities, on the other hand, redefine their roles in classical research, education, and being sensitive to social problems. More reference is made to the role of universities as a *'high-quality'* labor training and innovation center (Wissema, 2009). Although the third generation of university concept is in fact the generalizing of new university definitions such as "entrepreneurial, innovative and research-oriented university", it is also a precursor of many types of concepts derived from social disciplines for the identification of university-state-industry/market relations shaped by economic, political and social transformations in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In the 19th century, it is noteworthy that countries such as the USA and Japan, who saw the understanding of *Humboldt* University for the national development in Prussia, adopted and changed this model for their own national development, not far from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. New university understanding, created by the USA after the *'Land Grant Acts'* of the land donation laws of the United States, intending to go beyond national development and include industrial development, is a post-modern (neo-liberal) interpretation for its fictions/requirements of the major mission (research) ascribed to modern (post-enlightenment and liberal) higher education period by German university understanding (Altbach, 2011). In fact, this stratification will be the cradle of new formations in university-industry-based university models, and Humboldtian research emphasis will be described as the first revolution and the American model as the second revolution (Kiper, 2010)

The three main characteristics of the *'research-driven'* American model that carry the German model forward (Altbatch, 2011) have critical features that continue to be implemented throughout the 20th century, but include controversial points in countries that want to adopt the American model. While in the first of these features, it is emphasized that the most meritorious value is *'community service'* as being the complementary of *'research'* missions added to *'education'* mission, the basic mission of universities; in the second, it is in question that specialization is shaped through discipline-based and later interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary organization. Finally in the third, it is suggested that management function, or preferably called governance, is implemented in '*managerial*' form by professional managers (board of trustees etc. organizations) rather than by "collegiality" model, after partly/completely reliving of academicians. The first feature describes the relationship between universities, the state and the market (industry) from the basic research to the economic growth (basic research-applied research-development-production *'commercial product'*), (Kiper, 2010). The reason for the second and third characteristics is expressed with democratic/participatory and academic freedom (Altbach, 2001; Altbach, 2011).

The presentation of research results in the form of commercial products for the community and especially for the benefit of the 'market' is considered to be the second revolution because of its characteristic that it carries the first revolution into the production/production power (entrepreneurship) by moving the

first revolution in the way of the research intertwining with education to contribute to the economy. This means instead of traditional/basic research-oriented and disciplinary '*mode1*' academic research; it is the transformation into problem-oriented interdisciplinary (multi-disciplinary) '*mode2*' projects that are financed from the market and/or the public (Ylijoki, 2003).

In the emerging model, technology transfer is expected to be performed with research outputs (Salmi, 2009), the problem that where, by whom and why the research is going to be conducted is solved via "world-class research universities" model considered essential for academic excellence (Altbach, 2011). For the matter of how, a three-period analysis is conducted about the management *('governance'* with postmodern expression). This analysis, cited from Clark (1983), is presented as an opportunity for developing countries that intend to establish '*world-class universities*' (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2011). The efforts of the research universities to be global are also important for local (regional) and national development since they will have a local and national dimension (Marginson, 2011).

In the process of higher education change and in effort to be a *'top university'*, it can be said there exists a three-dimensional structure that emerged completely in a different way and is in effort to bring new features in those maintaining with the old university understanding by changing them. In Clark (1983), there is a strict state control in the first model, which he mentions as '*Continental Europe model',* while in the second model, referred as the '*British model',* a less strict (weak) state control appears. The second model of management, which is also defined as the model of colleagues, show similarities to the elite university models of the past as a free and less transparent form of management based on a more free but smaller planning in which academics take part (cited in Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2011). In recent years, however, with redirection of massification, accountability, privatization and marketization/competitive (even as Edward de Bono defines '*sur/petitive*') positioning realities, the model of colleagues transforms into executive/managerial model (Altbach, 2007). However, '*the American model'*, which is referred as the third model, sets forth a fundamental autonomy instead of state control and it is stated that this institutional autonomy concept is a guarantee for academic freedom (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2011).

The process based on the similarity/differentiation of the Continental/American model (second/third generation) in the higher education system confirms the theoretic approach that the organizations are going to act with an 'antagonist' kinesis also constituting a basis for differentiation in time as well as affinity with an orientation to organization that emerged in the field and is considered superior. This also verifies that prominent orientations within these differences will also lead to an affinity as sampling/emulation (Üsdiken, Divarcı Çakmaklı, & Topaler, 2017). This discussion, which includes the fact that all three generations of universities are positioned against each other or interlocked after all (Gürüz, 2016) can even be expressed that it is acceptable there should be a change in the direction of the American university model (Gür, 2016).

Governance, institutionalization/corporate culture, leadership, strategic management, environmental (external) evaluation/stakeholder analysis, value, mission and vision, financial management/planning, prioritization, and target measurement, which are all the key words of American university model-oriented change and already in the third model (Hayward & Ncayiyana, 2011) also take place in Slaughter and Leslie (1997) as well as their evaluation in scope of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Moreover, this evaluation brings the discussions to a different level by explaining that the developments in the commercialization of entrepreneurial university foundations and the scientific research results become known with the phenomenon of *'academic capitalism'*.

While emulated American university model is criticized by Gadamer (1988) by the reasons that transformation built as *'who/what for or to whom/why'* in the higher education made students sources by overthrowing '*Universitas Scholarum*', disconnecting sciences as disciplinarians by abolishing '*Universitas Literarum'* and creating a kind of alienation based on tight specialization caused by pragmatism; a new type of researcher and academicians, on the basis of France, via Bourdieu's definition of '*Homo Academicus*' (1984) are evaluated as unqualified (cited in Nalbantoğlu, 2011). In addition, the commercialization of the research results by *'patent'* and derivative names is considered doubtful because of the potential dangers in the future of science (Hardt & Negri, 2004). Besides, the triple helix structure, which represents the relationship between the state/industry and the university, the *'symbiotic'*, and perhaps the *'integral part'*, contributes to local and national innovation policies, the competitiveness and growth of the companies is discussed with concerns of inadequacy in local and national innovation policies by its advocates (Yusuf, 2007).

As a result, inadequate emphasis on entrepreneurship in third generation universities has brought entrepreneurial university understanding. But this was not enough and the fourth generation university model was developed. For the university's educational-research mission, the academic mobility, the

diversity in education curricula, innovation and measurement parameters (performance understanding) become more emphasized; for the mission of community service (the third mission), the transfer of technology, national/international collaborations, flexible structuring and support to the local/regional economy (Lukovics & Zuti, 2015) are made clear.

In spite of all these criticisms of the research universities, discovery of *'ad hoc'* presenting state/global companies a challenge to overcome on a neo-liberal competition platform, the question by whom the research is going to be conducted and the qualification of the researcher as well as skill based/qualified education automatically makes the matter *'ipso facto'*. This importance is explained in terms of favorable governance, abundance of (financial) resources, and concentration of talent (Salmi, 2009) in explanations of the *'core competences'* of world-class research universities. Accordingly, the quality of the research staff as well as the quality of the researchers and students comes to the fore. This prioritization, in turn, leads countries to achieve world-class universities and compete with the economies of the advanced economies, and in particular to research universities to attribute *'excellence'* to "graduate students" (Salmi, 2009), thus leading to inevitably draw the matter of "qualification of graduate education" to the center of the debates.

Graduate education has become a significant subject not only for higher education institutions and systems but also for socio-economic structuring of countries as an education step (Sevinç, 2001) with the aim of raising human resources (Köksalan, İlter & Görmez, 2010) in high level/equipment in terms of acquiring knowledge based on specialization in any field of science.

In the higher education mission related to the importance of graduate education, the issues that can be explained with the movement in the relationship with the community service mission could be detailed as the necessities of the technology and information age, the importance of the researchers in the development of the country, the fact that universities become the dominant power for the state economies in the age of change, the change in demand/access and supply balance to higher education, and in parallel to this, the need to increase the need for faculty members (in a sense, qualified manpower to do research) (Dönmez, Aydoğdu, Sever, & Aypay, 2012).

The qualification discussions on graduate education to which excellence is attributed are often discussed in the literature within the scope of "problems" (Aslan, 2007; Denicolo, 2004; Güven & Tunç, 2007; Jackson & Michelson, 2015; Jones, 2013; Karakütük, Aydın, Abalı & Yıldırım, 2008; Özmen & Güç, 2013; Platow, 2012; Sayan & Aksu, 2005; Tonbul, 2017; Wellington, 2010; Yetkiner & İnce, 2016). In this sense, the problems of graduate education in general can be classified as teaching/learning processes (academic qualification); entrance system under graduate education design, course scope, method and tools, examination systems, individual/systematic cost/funding problems; sectoral relationship dimension of courses and research; writing and conducting research (publishing); career and job opportunities on graduate education; supervisor-PhD student relations and failure to meeting graduate education expectations (Günay, 2018; Karaman & Bakırcı, 2010; Marsh, Rowe, & Martin, 2002). In order to solve the problems, on the other hand, it is noteworthy that new trends and structures such as competition, entrepreneurship, internationalization and quality assurance are made in parallel with the change/development process of the higher education system (Altbach, 2004; Park, 2005; Walker, Chris, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2009).

In this context, the aim of this study is to determine problems experienced by the graduate students and the level of awareness of the changing higher education values. To this end, the following questions were sought:

- What are the opinions of the graduate students about the aims of education, expectations and problems?
- What is the level of awareness of graduate students about the concepts that arise and/or change in the process of transformation of higher education?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study was carried out in the *qualitative research method* in order to investigate awareness of graduate students' education and the changing concepts of higher education. The study was carried out in the *phenomenology* research design, which is based on that each phenomenon (perceived event) is dealt with in the natural environment (Altunışık, Coşkun, Bayraktaroğlu, & Yıldırım, 2007) to reveal and interpret (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008) individual perceptions and perspectives related to a particular/exclusive fact or

situation (Creswell, 1998). Exclusive fact or situations in this study are the problems of gradauate students and awareness of them on the changing concepts of higher education.

2.2. Participants

In this study, *purposeful sampling approach*, which is an effective method for reaching comprehensive information and revealing the situations in detail (Patton, 2002; Mason, 2002), was adopted; therefore, graduate students/alumni studying at different universities and departments were determined as participants. Besides, based on the assumption that there may be higher levels of consciousness and awareness on graduate education and higher education subjects and to develop more external contributions to the determination of academic issues and problems; participants who "continue their education at least in the master thesis stage" and "those who are in a professional business outside higher education institutions although their higher education still go on" took part in the study. This approach can be expressed with the aim of increasing the authenticity of purposive and controlled samples in qualitative researches (Yeşil, 2010) instead of being representative. Participants were numbered as P1, P2, P3, …, if they were from state universities S1, S2, S3…, and if they were from foundation universities then F1, F2, F3… for their privacy. Department information of participants was used directly with permissions.

13 of the participants are studying at the master's thesis stage, 1 at the PhD course stage and 2 at the PhD thesis stage, and finally 5 are graduated from master degree students.

The level of graduate education, university types (state/foundation) and working status of the participants are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Participant profile

Participant	Graduate Education Status	University	Department	Working Status
P1	PhD Thesis	S1	International Relations	Unemployed
P2	PhD Thesis	S2	Turkish Language and Literature	Public
P3	PhD Course	S3	Mechanical Engineering	Public
P4	Master Thesis	S4	Mechanical Engineering	Private Sector
P5	Master Thesis	S5	Mechanical Engineering	Unemployed
P6	Master Thesis	S6	Mechanical Engineering	Unemployed
P7	Master Thesis	S7	History	Public
P8	Master Thesis	S7	Mathematics	Unemployed
P9	Master Thesis	S7	Statistics	Unemployed
P10	Master Graduate	S7	Aquaculture Technologies	Private Sector
P11	Master Thesis	S7	History	Unemployed
P12	Master Thesis	S7	Social Studies Education	Unemployed
P13	Master Thesis	S8	Business	Unemployed
P14	Master Thesis	S8	Economics	Unemployed
P15	Master Thesis	S8	Business	Unemployed
P16	Master Graduate	S9	History	Public*
P17	Master Thesis	F1	Interior Architecture	Unemployed
P18	Master Thesis	F2	International Trade	Private Sector
P19	Master Graduate	F3	Business	Public
P20	PhD Thesis	S10	Tourism Management	Private Sector
P21	Master Graduate	S11	Business	Private Sector

**Works contracted and part-time in public.*

As also can be seen in Table 1, 3 of participants studied at foundation universities and 18 of them studied at state universities. The distribution of the participants is in 14 different universities, 13 different departments and 10 different provinces.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

The data of the study was obtained by using the technique of *semi-structured (standardized) interview form* due to the convenience of the researchers to conduct the interviews based on a pre-prepared interview protocol that provides more systematic and comparable information (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The questions in the interview form were delivered to the participants via *face-to-face, computer-aided personal and e-mail-based in-depth interviews*. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants who were studying/living in Konya and Ankara (n=7) while other participants (n=14) were interviewed through computer-aided personal or e-mail based platforms.

During the preparation of the interview questions, the literature review was performed and the question sets were obtained from the studies (Aslan, 2007; Bozpolat, 2016; Güven & Tunç, 2007; Jones, 2013; Karakütük et al, 2008; Kim, Benson & Alhaddab, 2018; Özmen & Güç, 2013; Platow, 2012; Sayan & Aksu, 2005; Sevinç, 2001; Tonbul, 2017; Bağrıaçık Yılmaz, Su Tonga & Çakır, 2017; Toprak & Taşğın, 2017;

Wellington, 2010; Yetkiner & İnce, 2016), in which arguments were made theoretically and examined practically.

The relationship between the questions in the quantitative analysis and the questions of the qualitative research is examined and a detailed guide (Berg & Lune, 2015) has been developed in order to give an idea about what should be asked during the interview in the conceptual/problematic area. Within the scope of this guideline, questions are explained with detailed questions in the semi-structured interview form. This detailing was made by giving explanatory information to the participant under the basic/main questions in the in-depth interviews conducted via e-mail.

Some basic steps such as starting with easy and personal questions, starting with questions that are more important for the research topic and focus on a single concept or subject, continuing with more sensitive questions, asking verifier questions, inclining to the conceptual area of the next important questions and asking related questions, and ending the interview by returning to the skipped or unexplained concepts (Berg & Lune, 2015) were followed in the preparation of the questions.

The interview form, which includes the questions formed in this way, was examined together with an expert and two academicians working in the field of qualitative research methodology and higher education studies for *scope validity*. Some minor corrections have been made to the questions about problems related to higher education, but it has been decided to ask questions in a more *structured* form with *sub-conceptual dimensions* rather than a form of *narrative-based* questioning about the change of higher education. After the corrections, a *pre-pilot* study was conducted for the *clarity* of the thesis with the two participants who were in the stage of the master's thesis and PhD course, and after the interviews, it was determined that the participants had to be made a "preliminary explanation" about the concepts related to the change of higher education.

Questions in the interview form can be exemplified as follows:

- *What is the purpose of your graduate education?* (Can you explain in detail reason/reasons leading to graduate education?)
- *What are the matters/problems that you experience in graduate education?* (You can also talk about problems in general, especially in your own experience)
- *Have your expectations from graduate education been met? Have you accomplished your goal? What do you think your learning outcomes (qualifications) are in terms of knowledge, skills and competence?*
- *If you are familiar with the following concept* (*which are listed in Table 5) in the context of changing values of higher education (from the options), (considering your own graduate education), would you like to say a few sentences?*

2.4. Data Collection

The interviews for the study data were carried out in two periods. The first face-to-face interviews were conducted between May-June 2018 and the second meetings were held in September-October 2018, mainly through other interview options. During the face-to-face interviews, meetings were held outside-campus settings and in pre-planned hours in order to make voluntary participants feel more comfortable. Of those, one-to-one interviews lasted an average of 40-50 minutes, while the interviews conducted with a few participants took roughly 80 minutes. Computer-aided interviews were conducted in the evening for 30-40 minutes, taking into consideration the daytime work or occupation status of the participants. In both types of interviews, interviews were tried to be maintained until the completion of the presentation of original and non-recurring contributions (Bakioğlu, 2015) by the participants. Voice records of the participants who consented the recording of voice were converted into text, sent by e-mail and later confirmed to avoid any kind of misunderstanding (Bakioğlu, 2015). For the participants who did not accept voice recording in both interviews, the researcher took "notes". In e-mail-based interviews, participants were also called. The interviews were conducted with only one person at the same time (Altunışık et al., 2007) for the *validity* and *consistency of the data* (considering that the participant may not be comfortable with more than one academician and that taking notes in different ways may cause non-systematic data).

2.5. Data Analysis

In this study, it is aimed to reveal the essence of expressions with *interpretative approach* (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the study, *descriptive analysis* and *content analysis* methods of data analysis were used. In the descriptive analysis, the data obtained were summarized and interpreted according to the predetermined themes while the context of content analysis, tries to reveal themes and dimensions that were not obvious before (Şahin, 2010). In this study, because of the uncertainty of the themes in the answers obtained from the questions about the graduate problems and the necessity of coding, content analysis

method and general concepts, which will be the basis of themes about the change of higher education, were determined beforehand and descriptive analysis method was used.

2.6. Validity and Reliability

For the validity and reliability of the study, the related literature was examined and the following steps were applied (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001):

For internal validation;

The interview form, which was formed after the literature review and pre-pilot interviews, was examined by two different academicians who had qualitative research education and experience for scope validity, conducted researches in the "field of higher education". Two graduate students re-read this form and it was finalized after necessary corrections.

Participant confirmation was received after the interviews were transcribed.

For external validation;

Purposive sampling approach was preferred in order to ensure diversity and generalizability. Data collection process was deeply focused.

Direct quotations were made from the statements of the participants.

Data collection (sample), data analysis and other processes of the study and their interpretations based on literature are described in detail.

For internal reliability;

Questions were clearly expressed to the participants.

In the process of data coding, classification, analysis and interpretation of the data, opinions of two academicians were also taken into consideration in terms of consensus. Thus, the rate of acceptance of the study by others was intended to be increased.

For external reliability;

Interview records, notes and all other written records are stored for possible additional interviews and comparison with other studies.

In the interpretation of the data, similar/different views and alternative explanations in the literature are taken into consideration.

3. Findings

3.1. Higher Education Problems (Purposes, Expectations and Difficulties)

Expressions of participants about their aims in the graduate education were gathered as *three themes* and *seven codes* and the distributions of the participants within these codes are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of participants according to the purpose of graduate education

Theme	Code	Participants (n)
Career and economic contribution	Having an academic career	14
	Contribution to current career/business life	6
	Economic assurance/contribution	4
Interest in science and research	To gain an academic/scientific perspective/specialization	11
	Special interest / Self-realization	2
Other purposes	Personal development and experience	6
	Escape from professional business life	2

As also can be seen in Table 2, the most stated purpose of the participants in their graduate education is to *have an academic career, gain academic/scientific perspective and gain personal development and experience.*

Some of the participants expressed their higher education objectives being having an academic career as follows:

"Because noticed no harm in making scientific studies, also because I wanted to be in an academic career, I aimed to study a (post)graduate degree" (P8)

"In my senior year, my lecturers told me that they thought of me as a successful student and I had to move it forward. I have been doing graduate studies in order to enter academic life with the guidance of my instructors." (P9)

A participant who critically evaluates the purpose of making an academic career has stated:

"To be honest, I started to be an educator/academician who came from the field (sector) instead of the non-proficient field professors of the field." (P20)

Another participant, who is interested in science and research and who made graduate studies with the aim of making an academic career in this sense, stated this aim by addressing the problems in professional business life (in the meaning of escaping from Professional business life) as follows:

"First of all, I wanted to have my academic career to access the information I was wondering by doing scientific research, to compile and interpret this information, to examine the events and facts from a scientific point of view and to follow the new technologies closely. In addition, another reason that pushes me to pursue an academic career is unfortunately is the value given to engineers in our country. I do not want to be one of the engineers assigned to state institutions in funny numbers over the years with a nonsense exam. In the private sector, we are considered as an engineer but we are at the same level with the worker in terms of salary." (P3)

Finally, another participant who expressed his/her reason for graduate education by emphasizing the theme of personal development and gaining experience, said:

"In order to take myself one step further and to have proficiency in the profession, I got a master's degree." (P17)

According to Table 2, while the majority of the participants who are looking for an academic career aim to gain an academic/scientific point of view, some of them do not have this aim, whereas two participants (P10 and P19) who do not have an academic career aim seem to be interested in science and research. One participant, graduated from master degree, stated this situation as:

"I started working in the banking sector in 1999. After working for 3 years, I left and did not work for 7 years because the working hours were so high and I could not spare the time for my children as much as I wanted. In 2010, I started to work as a civil servant. Obviously, I am trying to evaluate every possible opportunity to compensate the past time. My objective now is to get a PhD after handling the foreign language." (P19)

When the participants were asked to evaluate their expectations in terms of their fulfillment of the above stated objectives, as can be seen in Table 3, the majority of the participants (n=16) were positive, 4 participants were negative and 1 participant responded both positively and negatively. According to participant expressions, expectation status is classified under *three themes* and *six codes*.

Table 3: Distribution of participants according to expectations from graduate education

Theme	Code	Participants (n)
Academic outcome	Theoretical/practical outcome and specialization	8
	Research/academic publishing and project	6
Professional and cultural acquisition	Increase/Renewal of professional knowledge	4
	Cultural and social development	2
Lack of gain	Negative processes and challenges	5
	Fall into repetition of bachelor's degree	2

According to Table 3, the most significant gain of the participants as a result of their graduate education is the the *specialization* in the academic sense and obtaining *theoretical/practical outcome* and also *research and academic publishing* under the theme of *academic outcome*. Four of the participants, almost half of those (n=10) are in professional business life, used positive expressions to improve or renew their professional knowledge.

One of the participants expressed the gaining process of the research skills and academic publication related to the academic outcome as:

"So far, my studies have been published in academic journals and books. I believe that the education I received has many contributions in the fact that I have language and field competency to make periodical projects for various institutions." (P1)

Another participant who emphasized the points of specialization and enhancement in relation to the academic outcome said:

"However, this training gives you a more equipped, willing, knowledgeable, researching and suggestive structure. I realized my purpose here in an academic sense, but if I can be active (realize) in a university I hope soon, I will have fulfilled all my goals in my life." (P11)

A participant in the sense of professional contribution stated that *"My expectations were met. I made use of the information I gained during my graduate studies in business management, marketing, sales management and many other subjects in making decisions and determining our strategies in my daily life."* (P18)

Another participant, who did not initially have any academic expectations, in terms of cultural and social development expressed the thoughts as *"When I started my graduate study, I had no real or big expectations, I just wanted to adjourn my military service and I did it. If I had really wanted to do this training, not in a comfortable way, I could have had some knowledge, skills and competencies in some subjects but I think that I developed myself in reading books and magazines."* (P14)

A participant who gave a negative opinion about the achievements of graduate education emphasized that her/his current knowledge was not developed and said:

"I do not think that the graduate courses I have received provide an extra benefit from the courses I took during my undergraduate education although I deliberately chose the courses of the department." (P4)

According to the answers given to the problems of the participants about their graduate education, three themes, eleven codes, and their distribution by participants are shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Distribution of participants according to the status of graduate education problems

Theme	Code	Participants (n)
Problems with the system	Entry system to programs	10
	Dissertation stage process	7
	Access to physical facilities at the university	7
	Foreign language problem	6
	Course process	5
	Operation of the Institute	5
	Relation between supervisor and student	5
Problems of human origin	Qualitative/Quantitative status of faculty members	4
	Self / instructor reluctance	3
Other (External) issues	Social and economic conditions	9
	Other issues	2

As it can be seen in Table 4, the problems mentioned by the participants related to the graduate education are mostly *entry system, access to physical facilities* and *economic condition.*

About half of the participants who expressed their feelings about graduate education entrance system, for example P1 and P21 emphasized on the "introversion" problem during graduate student recruitment:

"I had applied to other universities in Ankara, but I could not get acceptance from other universities except the university I had graduated from bachelor and master degree. For this reason, I think that some universities, despite their good reputations, have some problems regarding the admission requirements they apply to entrance exams. Therefore, when I decided to start my PhD studies, I did not apply to other universities in Ankara." (P1)

"…Generally, as all schools want to work with their own students, it is twice as difficult to get selected for us, who graduated from the Faculty of Open Education..." (P21)

Regarding the reference issue in graduate student entrance examinations, another participant stated:

"One of the problems that I witnessed a lot in the exams for graduate education is the fact that some students get ahead of successful students under the name of "reference" without any effort." (P3)

The statements of the same participant regarding the inefficiency of the courses and the inadequate library and laboratory facilities offered by the university are as follows:

"The problem is, while the courses in the graduate education should rather be related to area of specialization, this is ignored and courses are slurred over with an essay translation or simple assignment. Additionally, even though I received my graduate education in a technical university, I could not use the lab facilities, and I could only use the library in certain hours as well as limited number of book loans." (P3)

Participants also expressed some difficulties in terms of the costs of graduate studies. For example, a participant has a solution such as getting a scholarship from his own point of view:

"One of the biggest problems that I experienced in graduate education and that any graduate student may encounter is the economic hardship. Although our supervisors only sometimes remember and mention we are master degree graduated individuals, but sometimes forget this and behave as if we are still undergraduate students, puts us, students, behind the eight ball. While our professors expect students to work almost all day, they should keep in mind that now that we are graduated, it is not easy for us to want money from our family as if we are still studying undergraduate. They should solve this problem with a scholarship or a project." (P6)

Apart from the above three main problems stated by the participants, the most common problem that they face was the inability to determine the thesis topic freely during the thesis writing process. A participant's statements on this issue also include criticism of advisory support:

"I told my thesis supervisor that I, myself, can determine the subject of my thesis and would like to study on that and I have just learned this period that he switched himself with another supervisor because of that…" (P12)

In terms of the foreign language inability of the graduate students and the inability to be in the academic environment sufficiently, a participant's self-criticism of the system was as follows:

"Foreign language exams based on entrance to graduate education are insufficient to measure foreign language skills. Even if I get a high score, I cannot benefit from the works written in foreign languages. Professional foreign language skills should be taken into consideration when taking students to graduate education. In general, the foreign language score is seen as an obstacle to be passed for the transition to graduate education. After being a student, the foreign language score of the student is not beneficial for reaching out different sources in his/her field." (P2)

"Participation in scientific activities is not much approved by supervisors, and conducting a scientific work is not welcomed without the knowledge of the supervisor. In most cases, this situation is considered as the student's attempt to be in way over student's heads by the faculty member." (P2)

Another major problem of graduate students, operation of the institution is expressed as:

"The institute wants us to write a petition for even the smallest work, but I believe it should be more solution-oriented rather than such procedures." (P9)

Finally, some students criticize academicians' quality and quantity competencies, a participant commented:

"In general terms, faculty members have educated themselves well, but some professors do not know how to pass their knowledge to the others, or they do not teach students how to explore and direct students." (P13)

As an example of the difficulties that the participants exhibited as an external reason for the fieldwork problems in their thesis practice, two participants explained the following:

"While I was writing my thesis, I found it difficult to fill in my surveys in the industry. Most people didn't want to do the survey, but I tried my best to persuade them to do it, and this was the most challenging topic." (P15)

"The process of the thesis was very difficult for me and it took too long. My supervisor was very selfless and educative, but the survey I prepared for my thesis caused difficulty for me. The people are escaping when I ask if I can do a survey, and the firms refrain from providing environment and information to do enough research." (P17)

3.2. Concepts of Higher Education in the Process of Change

Participants were asked to explain briefly the basic/new/controversial concepts in Table 5 by also considering their graduate education processes in order to determine the perception and awareness levels of some concepts of higher education. The concepts they have chosen and commented on are coded and shown in Table 5:

Table 5: Distribution of participants by higher education concepts

Theme (Concepts of Higher Education)	Code	Participants (n)
Competitive university	High quality in education	4
	Qualified academic staff and publishing	4
	High recognition and image	4
	Attracting succesfull students	2
	Success in social/sportive activity	1
	Institutionalization	1
Innovative university	Comply with the technology and change	3
	Having a new perspective	1
	Creative thinking	1
	New patent and licence number	1
Entrepreneurship university	New knowledge discovery	1
World-Class university	Worldwide known	2
	Rate of foreign student and academic staff	1
Research university	Having high research funds	1
Third generation university	Being integrated to new economic system	1

4.0 University	Being entrepreneurial and productive	1
	Information systems	1
	Online university	1
Center of Excellence	Improving R&D Centers	1
Ranking of the universities	Ranking of qualitive academic studies	1
Cooperation among universities	Researching multidisiplinary	1
Internationalization	Students and staff from various countries	1
Mobility	Student or staff mobility for learning	3
	Meeting new cultures	1
Diversity		-
Flexibility		-
Accountability		-
Transparency		-
Student centeredness		-
Multidisciplinary		-
Ethical violation/plagiarism	Proper use of citations	1
	Merit based education	1
Quality assurance/accreditation		-
Institutional autonomy	Rejecting political repression	1
	Scientific/academic competence	1
Academic freedom	Free thought	3
	Free researching and publishing	1
European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process)		-

As can be seen in Table 5, the concepts that all of the participants do not explain are diversity, flexibility, accountability, transparency, student-centeredness, multidisciplinary, quality assurance and formerly named as Bologna Process. The concepts that participants interpret mostly are competitive and innovative university concepts. Others are the concepts of academic freedom and mobility.

For example, a participant stated the fact of attracting succesfull students in terms of the competitive university as following:

> "*In order to become more institutional, effective in academic publications, successful in sports etc., universities aim to raise themselves to the highest levels in competition environments by attempting promotional activities for attracting succesfull students.*" (P8)

P12 made a statement in the context of innovative university as "*Universities should be able to adapt and get used to every innovation, and be in favor of innovation and changes.*" P7 defined academic freedom in free thinking/researching aspect with the following sentence: *"We can say that academic freedom is that academicians can freely publish their studies and share their opinions freely about everything."* Finally, another participant discussed about institutional autonomy and academic freedom in a critical approach and stated that:

> *"I understand that the university is based entirely on scientific competence without being under the pressure of political power and acts in this direction. I believe that within the present movement, universities in Turkey are not able to gain such an identity".* (P2)

4. Discussion & Conclusion

The primary result of this study, which aims to determine graduate students' problems and level of awareness about changing higher education process, was concluded that there exist some serious problems of participants about graduate education and that their level of awareness about changing higher education process is low. It can be counted as another result that participants aim graduate education mostly to make academic career and/or gain experience and thus to gain acquisitions in academic sense from the education they receive.

As well as *having an academic career, gaining academic/scientific perspective, personal development and experience acquisition,* which are the main aims of receiving graduate education that is also stated in the study, *contributing to available career, increasing economic assurances, special interest* are also in compatible with local and foreign literature indicated below. The aim of having an academic career, for example, is emphasized quite often in determination of career making in PhD in a faculty by Rudd and Nerad (2015).

It is pointed out that the reasons for students' graduate aims were particularly to major in science and specialize in special interest, and to become an academician and gain a scientific perspective in this study as well as in a study conducted by Yetkiner and İnce (2016). On the other hand, in a study by Sayan and Aksu (2005), the findings obtained in terms of self-improvement, becoming an academician, being a professional, being interested in science and deepening in the field are considered consistent with the findings of this study.

Steward, Williamson, and King Jr (2008) on the reasons for graduate studies, have reported the effects of cognitive values, social contribution and economic issues explained in different expressions in parallel with the findings of this study. Özmenteş and Özmenteş (2005) determined the expectations from graduate education in their studies as academic career, specialization-development, obtaining a scientific view and eliminating the deficiencies. As a result, it can be expressed that academical, professional and economical expectations are essential for students to take a master's or PhD degree.

The problems of the participants described in the study related to the graduate education can be summarized as: unjust examinations in particular, the introversion of the student recruitments (as a result of injustice), the theoretical density in the content of the courses and the humdrum teaching methods, the inability to be free in the selection of the thesis subject (supervisor imposition), library (resource) and laboratory insufficiency, procedures in institutes and inability to reach employees and foreign language problem.

These results are also found in other studies in the literature. To put it another way; the problems in graduate entrance exam were determined as written exams and objective interviews (Yetkiner & İnce, 2016), universities' being unjust by preferring students who are their own graduated students (Sayan & Aksu, 2005); introversion problem took part in internal feeding (Günay, 2018).

Problems such as the theoretical density and the use of classical methods delivered by the participants about the functioning of the courses are seen as one of the important findings in the study conducted by Tonbul (2017) such as not being able to reach the depth of the field, not gaining critical point of view, not being encouraged to reach the current findings and lecturers' not contributing enough to the classes. However, a graduate education is expected to advance the student further in scientific and even social context.

The complaints of the participants about the attitude of the employees related to the institute were stated in research findings of Bakioğlu and Gürdal (2001) as the employees of the institute do not give assisting information that are needed. What is expected of the institutes is to solve the problems in a more practical way and reduce the bureaucracy.

The fact that the participants were strictly guided by their supervisors in the selection of the thesis topic were criticized by Karaman and Bakırcı (2010) to determine that similar theses were made in the same fields and this would reduce the quality of graduate education.

Katılmış, Çelik and Kop (2013), in their studies, pointed out not being able to reach sources and not having updated course contents among other problems, which correspond to the finding of library insufficiency and not using laboratories effectively in this study. Whereas, the unrestricted use of libraries and laboratories is indispensable for graduate education.

Hardships related to "foreign languange, supervisor, financial issues and databases" that emerged with the studies conducted by Özmen and Güç (2003) and Sevinç (2001), the problems that Toprak and Taşğın (2017) referred as financial burdens in their studies also correspond to the hardships and problems that emerged with this very study. Of these problems, it can be stated that the solution of economic problems is the most complicated. Forwhy, universities want to increase the rate of graduate students in order to concentrate more on research mission. Nevertheless, universities that have recently faced difficulties in the sense of financial resources should urgently come up with a solution to students' complaints about the tuition costs.

In terms of the matter of perceiving the changing structure of higher education, which is the second dimension of the study, the concepts that the participants interpreted mostly were found to be competitive and innovative university concepts. The other most interpreted concepts are academic freedom and

mobility. The concepts that no participants can explain are; the concepts of diversity/flexibility, accountability, transparency, student-centeredness, multidisciplinary, quality assurance and formerly named as the Bologna Process.

Whereas the fact that concepts of changing higher education such as entrepreneurship, inter-university co-operation, internationalization, quality and research universities have become suggestions/solutions to referred graduate problems (Bozan, 2012; Turkey Research Universities Coalition [TAÜG], 2016) and also the fact that index of entrepreneur university as a new trend (Akyazı & Akyazı, 2017; Turkey Scientific and Technological Research Institution [TÜBİTAK], 2013; Ünal & Çatı, 2016) is determined as national higher education policy, participants' unawareness about aforesaid concepts, in this sense not being able to make contributions, actually mean something. Similarly, the themes "student-centeredness and flexibility" (Collis & Moonen, 2011; Gürşen Otacıoğlu, 2007; Kardaş & Yeşilyaprak, 2015; Wright, 2011; Yalçın İncik & Tanrıseven, 2012) was frequently identified as the main line in developing solution offers to graduate problems that participants stated about course content, supervisor relations and resource insufficiency. On the other hand, although the foreign language problem expressed by the participants was criticized as being the language of academic colonialism in English (Altbach, 2011) it was shown to be the indispensable element of mobility and internationalization in higher education (British Council, 2015) and also it is stated that the lock of internationalization can be opened with a great degree of mobility (Özer, 2017).

It can be said that the lack of awareness of the participants about quality assurance in higher education draws attention to an ongoing problematic area on the subject of ownage and internalization of quality in the form of the problematic relationship of quality with accountability (Özer, Gür, & Küçükcan, 2010). Likewise, failures and inaccuracies in efforts to establish, a European Higher Education Area (Günay, 2018), formerly named as the Bologna Process, can be considered as a factor for the unawareness of this concept. Contrary to the essence of the system, the adaptation of the Bologna Process to the national higher education system by the university decision-makers' and practitioners' imitation and translation methods (Günay, 2018), not by students (European Students' Union [ESU], 2015), may be seen as a reason for the participants awareness of this process.

The relative sensitivities of the participants to the concepts of competition, innovation and worldwide at the changing higher education values may stem from the fact that many universities have recently included these concepts in the mission/vision definitions. In fact, the attractiveness (Marginson, 2004) of globalization/global competition concepts for universities is not a new phenomenon. It has a rich place in the literature in terms of initiating a discussion of the basic functions of universities in the period when the reality of globalization is criticized by its vigorous advocates (Kurul Tural, 2004). On the other hand, the different manifestations of the concept became more evident (Doğramacı, 1985; Doğramacı, 1992; Doğramacı, 2007; Gürüz, 2003) in the periods when competition and derivative mottos were presented as prescriptions for our universities in Turkish higher education literature and it was accepted as one of the ideal university principles with the definition of academic competition (Aktan, 2003). While it is ultimately seen that the components of being a world-class university which has the main elements such as competition, quality and internationalization (Altbach, 2011) are determined as the primary criteria with the title of "globalization dynamics" to restructure the higher education of developing countries and our country (Çetinsaya, 2014), it is witnessed that those are also criticized for meaningful reasons (Çakar, 2011; Timur, 2000).

In conclusion, it is obvious that there are problems in graduate education, however, problems in higher education, whose basic function is "science/art production and dissemination, correct perception of social problems and offering solutions to problems and making contributions to the development of high level people" (Ertem, 2018; Karadağ, 2014), should be debated in changing higher education scope. In this context, that makes it inevitable to increase the consciousness and awareness levels of instructors and students. To this end, it may be suggested to include courses on change in higher education in graduate programs in social departments especially.

This study has, of course, certain limitations. The problems in graduate education and the perception of changing higher education are reflected from the framework of twenty-one graduate students. In order to reach detailed results and solutions, more people should be reached with quantitative and qualitative measurement tools. Most importantly, it is quite essential to include the opinions of other internal partners (such as academicians) and external partners in the comments on this issue. That way, discussions can be made richer by giving an "*external perspective*" to the problematic issues.

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