Difficulties Faced by Postgraduate Students of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Thesis Writing in Turkey[1]

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Abstract

There are a growing number of students who continue postgraduate degrees in English Language Teaching (ELT) in state and private universities in Turkey. It is taken for granted that thesis writing is a significant aspect of postgraduate education and postgraduate students are experiencing some difficulties with the thesis writing process. In this process, supervision is a complex process and sometimes supervision is the element that makes things easier for postgraduate students or exacerbates the process. Therefore, supervisor–supervisee relationship is a topic that has been explored much abroad lately but relatively few are written about the Turkish case. Considering this research gap, this article investigates postgraduates' views on master's and PhD thesis supervision and difficulties they faced in thesis writing in ELT. The participants from different private and state universities received a link to an online survey engine. The aim was to understand how thesis writing in ELT and supervision are experienced in Turkey. In this study, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. The data collected in the study were analyzed by content analysis technique and frequency counting. The findings are important as they show that there are serious linguistic challenges inherent in thesis writing that are complicating the process but also supervisory process that needs delicate attention. The paper suggests that supervisors and universities should consider the positive and negative aspects of their attitudes and behaviors throughout this process. Some measures can be taken to enhance the quality of supervision at universities in Turkey.

İnönü University
Journal of the Faculty of Education

Suggested Citation

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[1] Part of this paper was presented as an oral presentation at 10th International ELT Research Conference in Antalya on April 25-27, 2018.

Türkiye'de İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Alanında Lisansüstü Yapan Öğrencilerin Tez Yazarken Karşılaştıkları Zorluklar

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Öz

Türkiye'de gerek devlet gerek vakıf üniversitesi olsun İngiliz Dili Eğitimi alanında lisansüstü tez yazan öğrenci sayısı giderek artmaktadır. Tez yazmak, lisansüstü eğitimin çok önemli bir parçasıdır ve lisansüstü öğrencileri, tez yazarken çeşitli zorluklarla karşılaşmaktadır. Tez danışmanlığı, danışman-öğrenci ilişkisi yurt dışında çok sıklıkla irdelenen bir konudur, nispeten ülkemizde bu konuda çalışma azlığı dikkat çekmektedir. Bu eksikliği de göz önüne alarak, bu çalışmayla farklı üniversitelerden mezun olmuş lisansüstü mezunu öğrencilerin görüşlerine başvurmak amaçlanmıştır. İnternet yoluyla bir anket gönderilerek lisansüstü mezunlarının görüşleri alınmıştır. Amaç tez danışmanlığının öğrencinin üzerinde yarattığı olumlu ve olumsuz yanları saptamak ve tez yazma sürecini nasıl iyileştirebiliriz sorusuna yanıt aramaktır. Araştırmada nitel ve nicel araştırma yöntemlerinden yararlanılmıştır. Bu çalışmayla, lisansüstü eğitimde tez danışmanlığı konusu irdelenmiş olacak ve gerekli iyileştirmelerle lisansüstü eğitimin daha sağlıklı, etkili ve verimli geçmesi yolunda küçük bir adım atılmasına olanak sağlanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: lisansüstü programları, tez yazma, danışmanlık, tez danışmanı, İngiliz dili eğitimi.

Önerilen Atıf

INTRODUCTION

Turkey aims to increase the number of researchers and instructors in Turkey to meet the needs of newly established universities as the need for academicians is increasing day by day. Therefore, state and private universities establish new postgraduate programmes. In Turkey, the number of MA (Master of Arts) and PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) programmes in English Language Teaching is also steadily increasing. Despite an urgent need for postgraduates, completion rates can sometimes be low or the completion times may take longer than expected. It is a fact that some students never complete their studies while some others complete it after coping with many shortcomings in the research and supervisory process. It involves many challenges inherent in the process. In Elgar and Klein's (2004, p. 326) words, there are "several factors that contribute to completion difficulties, such as supervision, scope of the thesis topic, sustainability of student stipends, and structure and support in the thesis-writing process". Despite the rapid increase in the number of postgraduate programmes in ELT, research on thesis writing and supervision remains limited in Turkey. The aim of this study is to focus on thesis supervision from the perspective of postgraduate students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Postgraduate degrees require many years of study and research. The timeframe for completing a master's degree in Turkey is minimum two academic years or maximum three academic years (Council of Higher Education (CoHE), 2016, Article 7), which also involves the completion of a research-oriented thesis and the timeframe for completing a PhD degree in Turkey is minimum four years or maximum six years, which involves the completion of a doctoral dissertation (CoHE, 2016, Article 17). It is taken for granted that the most challenging part of postgraduate studies is thesis writing. de Kleijn et al. (2012) claim that;

> ...students, mostly for the first time in their education, perform a piece of research independently and therefore have to learn how to actually do research, and, on the other hand, students have to show that they are capable of doing research independently (p.926).

As Sadeghi and Khajepasha (2015, p.357) pinpoint "thesis writing is perhaps the most daunting part of graduate education". This is often the point students continue or quit their postgraduate degrees. This may result from problems related to research process and supervisory practice (Frischer and Larsson, 2000). While writing their theses, postgraduate students need supervision from their advisors. Supervision is usually considered as a complex process. Faculty members are appointed as supervisors based on different criteria at different universities. In some universities, students do not choose their supervisors, rather the department determines them while in some universities, students choose their supervisors based on their expertise and knowledge about the topic. Zhao et al. (2007) mention that;

> Although the systems and structures of postgraduate education differ across national contexts, the underlying notion of an apprentice model, in which an individual student is in large measure dependent on a single faculty member, is fairly universal (p.264).

Most students dream for a good supervisor-supervisee relationship but as Zhao et al. (2007, p. 263) argue "most relationships, of course, fall between these extremes: good in some ways, fair or poor in others". Kam (1997, p. 81) states that "the quality of post-graduate research degree supervision depends as much on the supervisor's ability to meet the needs of a student as on the student's expectation of her or his own responsibilities in relation to those of the supervisor". "Learning alliance was a term that was used by Halse and Malfroy (2010, p. 83) to define the relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee. It comes to mean working towards a common goal that is the completion of a postgraduate programme. Halse and Malfroy (2010) identified key factors that make learning alliance successful:

> as mutual respect between student and supervisor, flexibility in accommodating each other's personal and professional circumstances, a firm commitment to collaborate on the attainment of a doctorate, clear communication, and explicit strategies for progressing towards their common goal (pp. 83-84).

A good supervisor-supervisee relationship "will not only benefit the student but will also reflect positively on the future reputation of the supervisor through the quality of work" (Lange and Baillie, 2008, p. 31). Lee

(2008), based on his findings, argues that supervisor's approach is also dependent on the supervisor's previous experience as a student. For instance, a supervisor follows "master/apprentice approach to supervision" that s/he had experienced once as a student (Manathunga and Goozée, 2007, p. 310). There are different supervision approaches as the way there are different supervisors. As Deuchar (2008, p. 491) argues "while on the surface it may appear that the relationship is a simple dyadic one, many subconscious feelings and desires may complicate the relationship and create unexpected reactions". It is significant to elaborate what supervision is. Grant (2003) emphasizes that;

> ...supervision differs from other forms of teaching and learning in higher education in its peculiarly intense and negotiated character, as well as in its requirements for a blend of pedagogical and personal relationship skills. These differences arise because supervision is not only concerned with the production of a good thesis, but also with the transformation of the student into an independent researcher (p. 175).

Likewise, Pearson and Brew (2002, p. 139) state the main goal of supervisory activity as to "facilitate the student becoming an independent professional researcher and scholar in their field, capable of adapting to various research arenas". Feedback in postgraduate supervision is distinct in its nature and as Wang and Li (2011, p. 102) put it "it allows the supervisor to communicate ideas, engage the student in intellectual dialogues, and provide coaching, modelling and scaffolding. It helps students to learn about the research process and improve their written work". However, supervisors sometimes focus too much on the completion of the thesis and ignore the development of academic competencies of postgraduate students as researchers.

It is clear that there are differences in the ways supervisors understand their roles. Gatfield and Alpert (2002, p. 267) identify four different types of supervisory styles as "laissez faire, pastoral, directorial and contractual". If a supervisor adopts a laissez faire style, s/he shows low support and "non-directive and not committed to high levels of personal interaction" (Gatfield and Alpert, 2002, p. 267). If a supervisor adopts a pastoral style, s/he shows personal care but believes that the candidate can do the tasks by themselves. In directorial style, "supervisor has a close and regular interactive relationship with the candidate, but avoids non-task issues" (Gatfield and Alpert, 2002, p. 268). In contractual style, supervisor shows high support in terms of tasks and personal issues. This style is "the most demanding one in terms of supervisor's time" (Gatfield and Alpert, 2002, p. 268). It should be pinpointed that these are not rigid, clear-cut categorizations. A supervisor can show shifts from one style to another throughout supervisory practices. Rather than rigid categorizations, as de Kleijn et al. (2012, p. 927) claim "a supervision relationship is intimate in nature, and thus can be best judged by the participants themselves." No matter what kind of approach a supervisor has, in Määttä's words (2015, p. 187), a supervisor shouldn't leave or abandon his/her student in trouble "not even when experiencing that the value of the supervision has not been appreciated at all".

There are some studies in the reviewed literature researched mostly in the context of American, European and Australian universities exploring factors affecting students' satisfaction with the supervision process and different supervisory styles' outcomes on students' performances (Zhao et al., 2007; Lunsford, 2012; Deuchar, 2008). Some of them have focused on the role played by power in supervision (Manathunga, 2007). There are also some studies that focus on non-native students' difficulties resulting from cross-cultural differences in thesis writing or international students' supervisory experience (Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014; Wang and Li, 2011). In addition to these studies, educational research focused on the delicate balance between too much control and neglect in supervision (Delamont et al., 1998). Based on the interviews he had done with supervisors from different fields, Lee (2008) identified five main approaches to supervision. As Lee (2008) puts it, these approaches are as follows:

> functional – where the issue is one of project management; enculturation – where the student is encouraged to become a member of the disciplinary community; critical thinking – where the student is encouraged to question and analyse their work; emancipation – where the student is encouraged to question and develop themselves; and developing a quality relationship – where the student is enthused, inspired and cared for (p. 267).

Some studies are concerned with the expectations of students and supervisors (Woolhouse, 2002). There are also some studies that analyze the depths of good supervision as a "complex and unstable" process (Grant, 2003, p. 176).

On the other hand, in Turkey, the literature concerning postgraduate theses and dissertations tends to have a strong emphasis on the structural and content analysis of postgraduate theses (Coskun et al., 2013). Eskici and Cayak (2017) had a qualitative study on the methods of master theses conducted at the Department of Educational Sciences at Trakya University. In addition, there are also some studies that focus on the postgraduate student's opinions about functions of postgraduate education and reasons why they pursue postgraduate education (Aydemir and Cam, 2015) and case studies that investigate challenges in doctoral education and coping strategies (Ozmen and Guc, 2013). In Turkish context, rather than thesis supervisory practice, 'supervision' is taken as observing classes to help teachers develop professionally and improve the class environment and the teacher's teaching strategies. In this sense, Baykal (1990) analyzed educational supervision in the domain of EFL teaching from the perspectives of administrators at four English preparatory schools in Turkey. Memduhoglu et al. (2007) presented the purposes, structure and functions of educational supervision in the Turkish educational system focusing on the supervision of institutions and teachers by elementary school supervisors. There are also some studies that take supervision within the context of thesis writing. Bakioglu and Gurdal (2001) investigated the role perceptions of the supervisors and research students. They found out that students complain about lack of written feedback given by supervisors to the completed parts of the thesis. Another important finding is that writing the whole thesis is generally left to the very end so students cannot complete their theses within the time limits so they generally ask their institution to expand their completion time. Berkant and Baysal (2017, p.148) aimed to "determine teachers' perspectives regarding the implementation of postgraduate education to their professional performance". There is also a study that investigates the problems that the individuals studying postgraduate education at Institute of Education Sciences face (Yetkiner and Ince, 2016). There is a PhD thesis completed in Turkey by Karadag (2014) that investigated doctorate process which is being conducted at Educational Sciences Institutes in Turkey. There is also a study that aimed to "scale the order of precedence of the features that are expected to be in thesis supervisors by asking opinions of postgraduate students with the help of paired comparison method" (Dogan and Bikmaz, 2015, p. 3731). As for their findings, they showed what students want the most from their supervisors is their abiding by the plan made together with the student. Furthermore, among the desired features expected from supervisors are;

> not limiting student in his/her comments and opinions, encouraging academic studies of the student, giving feedback to the studies of the student on time, easy to be communicated with, having comprehensive knowledge of research methods and techniques, being problem solving in academic studies (Dogan and Bikmaz, 2015, p. 3736).

However, there is still not any study on evaluating postgraduate supervision in thesis writing directly in the field of English language teaching in Turkey. This study aims to address this gap by examining supervisor and student relationship in ELT in Turkey.

METHOD

A questionnaire about thesis writing process in postgraduate education with emphasis on supervisory relationships was self-administered by the researcher by sending survey questions through e-mail to the postgraduates who had graduated MA or PhD programmes in English Language Teaching at any university in Turkey. 41 postgraduates answered the questionnaire between January and March 2018. Before the actual study, a pilot study was conducted. 2 postgraduates took the pilot questionnaire and the actual questionnaire was prepared after some revisions. Out of 41 participants, 80.5 % (n= 33) of them had MA degrees while 19.5% of them (n= 8) had their PhD degree from state universities and private universities. 37 participants had their postgraduate degree from a state university while 4 participants had their postgraduate degrees from a private university. In this study, as the number of graduates from private universities is not equal to the number of graduates from state universities, a comparison cannot be made. 68.3 % of the participants (n=28) didn't have their MA or PhD at the university they had had their bachelor's degree while 31.7 % of them (n=13) continued their postgraduate degree at the university they had their bachelor's degree from. 87.8 % of the participants (n= 36) were females while 12.2 % of them (n= 5) were males. 90.2 % of the participants (n= 37) mentioned that they were working at the same time they were writing their theses. This is important as postgraduate education is different from undergraduate education in this sense. Postgraduate students have more responsibilities in life and other duties apart from thesis writing. Taking into consideration the possibility that differences in supervision might be related to the disciplines, this study is limited to ELT postgraduates. The survey, developed by the researcher, is a questionnaire of 23 items, a combination of closed and open questions. This study used qualitative and statistical quantitative research method with a view to uncovering the opinions of individuals graduated from postgraduate programmes in

ELT in regard to the supervisory practice. For a thematic content analysis, the researcher completed an initial reading of the replies for open questions and then, based on the interpretation of the data, the replies were classified into different categories after determining which categories were dominant. One of the aims is to highlight factors identified by postgraduate students as hindering thesis writing. For closed questions, the percentages were taken manually. This study excludes intrinsic factors and personality characteristics of postgraduate students that help or hinder the process.

RESULTS

The findings from this study provide a valuable insight into the supervisory practice and difficulties postgraduate students face in thesis writing. The participants were asked a range of questions through an online questionnaire. They reported a range of both positive and negative supervisory experiences.

Not all students have had training in academic writing before thesis writing. 65.9 % of the participants (n= 27) mentioned that the institution or the faculty hadn't given them any writing course before the year they started their thesis. On the other hand, 29.3 % of them (n= 12) remarked that they had taken a writing course while 2.4% of the participants (n=1) mentioned that it was not a separate course, but it was incorporated into their lessons. Also, 2.4 % of the participants (n=1) mentioned that the course and thesis writing were at the same time. We can understand from the findings that a high number of students lacked training in academic writing before they started their theses so a separate course would be useful to assist them to improve their academic writing skills.

Another question was asked to determine whether the participants had chosen their thesis advisors or not. 61 % of them (n=25) said that they had chosen their advisors while 39% of them (n=16) said they didn't. The participants were asked how they chose their thesis topic. 14 participants said that they chose their topic with their advisor, 16 participants said they chose it by themselves, 6 participants said that they chose it from the reviewed literature. 2 participants said they found their thesis topic accidentally or randomly. 2 participants said they chose it with both their thesis advisor and self-study. 1 participant said the institution gave the topic to him/her.

Another question was asked to understand whether students wished their advisor were someone else. It is seen that 53.7% of the participants (n=22) didn't wish while 34.1% of the participants (n=14) had a wish like that and 12.2% of the participants (n=5) avoided giving a definite answer and gave a remark as "maybe". A further question was asked about the way they had selected their thesis topics. 68.3% of the participants (n=28) said that their topic was among the research interest of their advisor while 31.7% of the participants (n=13) said that it wasn't.

As Wang and Li (2011, p.101) argue "students benefit from engaging in intellectual exchanges with their supervisors in order to receive guidance on their research progress and thesis writing". Wang and Li (2011, p. 102) further note that "it is through the feedback process that the supervisor helps the student go through the research journey towards becoming an independent researcher and a competent scholarly writer". The participants were asked whether their advisors went through their chapters regularly. 70.7% of the participants (n=29) said that their advisors went through their chapters regularly while 29.3% (n=12) said that they didn't. Although the number of participants who said their advisors went through their chapters regularly was high, in the following question that was asked to understand whether they gave meaningful feedback, the number of participants who gave a positive response dropped. 58.5 % (n=24) think their advisor gave meaningful feedback while 17.1 % (n=7) didn't agree so. 17.1 % (n=7) hesitated from giving a positive and negative answer to that question and answered as "maybe". 2.4% (n=1) of the participants think that their advisor didn't give meaningful feedback at all. One participant said that the workload of giving feedback was shared among the faculty members equally. One participant wanted to emphasize that s/he changed the supervisor because of that reason.

For the question that was asked to understand whether the participants were happy with their supervisors, 63.4% of the participants (n=26) mentioned that they were happy with their supervisors while 24.4 % of the participants (n=10) mentioned that they weren't. 12.2% of the participants (n=5) refrained from giving a direct answer and replied by saying "maybe".

The participants were asked to remark how their relationship with their supervisor was. 25 participants gave positive remarks such as "fine, encouraging, excellent, friendly" and so on while 9 participants gave negative

ones. 3 participants remarked their relationship as moderate and 4 participants refrained from giving any answers to that question. In the following table, one can see some of the given responses:

Table 1
Postgraduate students' relationship with their supervisor

Positive remarks	Negative remarks
Fine/positive/encouraging/all the time perfect/frequent and fruitful/like a mother to me/spoke and discussed on a daily basis/ very effective and constructive/very good/excellent/great/good and fun/friendly and sincere/one of the luckiest ones/useful and friendly/informative and supportive/consulted her regularly/quite good/very frequent and fruitful/appreciated my progress	Not OK, very limited, refused to see me or answer my e-mails or phone calls, had to change my advisor due to that, irresponsible, weak, didn't give any feedback, didn't like anything at all

It can be observed that the participants' negative remarks related to supervisor-supervisee interaction focused mostly on feedback and timing. 9 graduate students described their interaction as limited and some participants claimed that their supervisor refused to answer their e-mails or phone calls and didn't give any feedback at all. This is in line with a previous study done by Dogan and Bikmaz (2015);

> it can be said that students' paying most attention to supervisors' being organized, giving feedbacks to students on time and easy to be communicated with show that students expect from their supervisors to make use of time efficiently. The underlying reason for this case can be students' taking responsibilities apart from education during post graduate education process and thus their need for using time efficiently (p. 3736).

As Abiddin et al. (2009) have provided evidence from the reviewed literature, supervisors and students should clarify their responsibilities and expectations at the very beginning of this process. Otherwise, a lack of clarity will cause great problems.

The participants were asked whether they got any outside help while writing their thesis. 58.5% (n=24) of the participants said they did not while 41.5% of the participants (n=17) said they did. Another question was asked to understand whether they wanted to quit their thesis. 75.6 % of the participants (n=31) said they didn't while 17.1% of the participants (n=7) said they did. 7.3% of the participants (n=3) replied that they sometimes wanted to quit their thesis. The ones who said they wanted to quit their thesis were asked to come up with an explanation. 3 participants said that their supervisor was the reason. Some of the given answers were as the followings; difficulty in gathering data, limited time and working too much, the unfairness of the system, the administrative process, exhaustion and being lost at some point and not knowing what to do.

The participants were asked what kind of problems they encountered while writing their thesis. The given responses can be categorized into three themes; advisor related problems (n=16), thesis process related problems (including writing a literature review, collecting data and analyzing data) (n=14) and time related and personal problems (n=11).

It was found that some postgraduates had advisor related problems. For instance, Participant 8 gave the following response:

> "My advisor did not know statistical analysis very much, which made me so frustrating during thesis writing process. He was unable to guide me".

In a similar vein, Participant 18 illustrated the following point:

> "I couldn't receive enough feedback. I was quite uncertain when I went through the chapters and certain analysis steps".

The following extract by Participant 20 indicated a similar problem:

"My main problem was related to timing of the feedback I received from my advisor. It took so much time to get feedback and this delayed the finish date of the study. I could have finished it at least 1 year before the actual date".

In the following extract, Participant 25 highlighted a problem about his/her advisor's lack of expertise in the field of ELT:

"My tutor was not a tutor in ELT. She was someone from German Language Department. That's why she was not competent enough to give me advice related to language issues".

Similarly, another postgraduate mentioned about an advisor related problem:

"My first advisor changed due to health problems, and my second advisor was in another university in another city. That was the main problem. Also my second advisor asked for so many changes and corrections, which was actually good, but was a pain back then" (Participant 31).

Another theme was about thesis process such as writing a literature review, collecting data and analyzing data. The participants' opinions related to this category are as the followings.

"I was not that knowledgeable about statistics at the time of my thesis writing" (Participant 34).

"While collecting data, it was hard to find volunteers" (Participant 24).

The last theme was time related and personal problems. Here are some of the given responses:

"Because I was working at the same time, it was hard to focus" (Participant 17).

"My only problem was with time. We were attending courses at the same time. We were at school all day and we had little time to do everything about courses and thesis at night" (Participant 29)

In another question, the most difficult thing about thesis writing was asked. In the reviewed literature, the academic difficulties are notable such as:

lack of time, negative emotion (isolation, discouragement, and fearfulness), intellectual block (both writing and reading), and resource constraints (lack of office space, access to participants, relevant books or software) (Mcalpine, 2013, p. 261).

The participants in this study gave largely similar responses. The following table illustrates the given responses. 8 participants stated that data analysis was the most difficult thing in thesis writing as research can be a new experience for many postgraduate students. For 7 participants, writing literature review brought some problems. In Berg's (2009, p. 388) terms, "the basic intention of a literature review is to give a comprehensive review of previous works", but also "challenge previously accepted ideas or findings". In this sense, writing a literature review is not an easy component. 6 participants had great difficulty in data collection. For 6 participants, having discipline was the most difficult thing to complete their theses. 5 participants mentioned that time management was the most difficult aspect of thesis writing. They needed to devote a significant amount of time to their studies. 4 participants underpinned supervisor-supervisee relationship as the most difficult thing.

Table 2
The most difficult thing about thesis writing

The most difficult thing about thesis writing	Number
Data analysis	8
Literature review	7
Data collection	6
Discipline	6
Time management	5
Supervisor-supervisee relationship	4
Methodology	3
Institutional procedures	1
The chosen topic	1
Total	41

Students' perceptions are an important indicator of this complex process. In the last question, the participants were asked to use a metaphor to express their feelings about the period that they wrote their thesis. As Lee and Green (2009, p. 620) state, "metaphor has been taken up increasingly in recent years in educational and social research contexts as a 'method' of analysis of research data". Through metaphors, one's perspective can be understood better. 12 participants didn't use a metaphor but only adjectives, so expressions with no metaphor were eliminated. 29 metaphors were analyzed and organized into themes. Although the participants used many different metaphors, there were some overlaps among the metaphors. The metaphors were categorized into four themes, metaphor as a concrete object, metaphor as a part of nature, metaphor as an abstract concept, metaphor as a living thing (a person or an animal). In the following table, the metaphors obtained from the participants can be seen. In Lee and Green's (2009) study, supervisors were asked to describe their understanding of teaching in supervision and one of the supervisors used the image of rock climbing to describe thesis writing process. Similarly, metaphors such as "climbing a mountain", "climbing on ice" are also evident in this study.

Table 3
Metaphors used by the postgraduates to describe their thesis writing process

Metaphor as a concrete object		Metaphor as a part of nature or a related activity in the nature		Metaphor as an abstract concept		Metaphor as a living thing or related to a living thing	
Tunnel	2	Jungle	2	Long awaited love that hurts	1	octopus	1
Prison	1	climbing on ice	1	pain	1	baby	2
Puzzle	1	climbing a mountain	3	hell	2	pregnancy	2
edge of a knife	1	walking a dark road but arriving at a beach in the end	1	mirage	1	a primary school student learning to read a text	1
		long dark days	1	a long journey	1	lonesome cow girl	1
		Nemo keeps swimming	1	burning the candles at both ends	1	juggler	1

Represented with some metaphors like "long waited love that hurts, pain, hell, mirage, climbing on ice, mental prison" show that thesis writing was quite difficult for the participants. Thesis writing was conceptualized as something that gives pain. Despite being less frequent in number, some relatively positive metaphors such as "baby, Nemo keeps swimming" also emerged from the data. Hope is inherent in some of the metaphors like "a tunnel, walking a dark road but arriving at a beach in the end and pregnancy". Metaphors as a concrete object are also preferred by some of the participants (n=5). This is in line with the reviewed literature. For instance, Hooley (2017) experienced thesis as an object and elaborated that:

> When I was a student, the thesis was a coach helping me develop tools to answer important questions. When I was a supervisor, the thesis was a bridge-builder, strengthening my relationships with supervisees. Then, when I was a PhD applicant, the thesis was a door-opener, providing me means to access PhD opportunities (p.380).

The metaphors in this study replicated previous studies' findings. As Lee and Green (2009) explored:

> The landscape of supervision is populated with bridges, chasms, mountains and archways, and traversed by a plenitude of journeys, punctuated by juggling and balancing, marked by rites and rituals, and filled with darkness and light (p. 617).

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The opinions received from the questionnaire underpin that thesis writing is a difficult process. It needs commitment and support in this daunting task. 'Good' supervision plays an important role in the success of postgraduate programmes. Supervision is the element that makes things easier for postgraduate students or exacerbates the process. In light of these findings, the graduates' voices revealed through this study show that changes regarding the supervisory practice seem necessary. Some steps can be taken to improve the postgraduate experience in Turkey. Supervisors need to consider their positive and negative effects on students. This is in line with Bakioglu and Gurdal's (2001) study as they indicated that supervisors should have weekly scheduled meetings with their supervisees and help them enhance their academic skills. The findings showed that students want to have supervisors who are accessible. Bloom et al.'s (2007, p.31) study supports this finding as they also underlined that "graduate students value advisors who are accessible and approachable" on academic and personal issues. As Carter and Kumar (2017) underline, supervision in itself teaches something not only to postgraduate students but also supervisors themselves:

> ...how to work with people who are not automatically on the same wave length – the skill of working across diversity is commonly expressed in doctoral graduate attributes, but is also an attribute that we supervisors need to learn (p. 73).

Reviewed literature shows that some prominent universities abroad have kept supervision educational development compulsory. They don't appoint any student to a lecturer unless s/he takes supervisor development sessions (Manathunga and Goozée, 2007). In Turkey, similar sessions can be provided by universities. A supervisor might have experienced and observed two supervisory practices as a student in his/her MA degree and PhD degree before. Therefore, s/he might have difficulty in interacting with his/her supervisees and enculturating him/her to the academic community. Such development sessions that can be offered by the institutes or the Council of Higher Education will help supervisors to reflect upon themselves and construct a healthier supervisor-supervisee relationship. On the other hand, students can be given the chance to choose their advisors and as Zhao et al. (2007, p. 277) suggest "students could be explicitly informed of important factors to consider when choosing their advisor". Another suggestion is providing academic writing courses at the beginning of postgraduate research process that will be of great help for postgraduate students. Since students struggle with academic writing, courses offered at the beginning of the process would benefit both the students and the supervisors. It will be preparing students who are to undertake a thesis or dissertation. From the reviewed literature, it is evident that:

> Many supervisors report problems with students being unable to synthesise and think conceptually, structure their writing or write at an appropriate level. Supervisors are concerned when students keep coming back to them apparently having learned nothing from a previous set of corrections (Lee and Murray, 2015, p. 559).

Also, students should be equipped with all the tools that are necessary in thesis writing. Research methodology classes should be redesigned in line with students' needs. These classes should fuel and help students do research independently. Supervisors should consider the nature and amount of feedback that students need at their different stages of thesis writing. As Carter and Kumar (2017, p. 73) claim "despite time pressure and perhaps irritation, supervisors need to avoid hastily-given negative feedback that can damage the learning experience of the candidate". Basturkmen et al. (2014, p. 433) underlines the importance of feedback by saying "feedback can be seen as a means of socialising students into the community's discursive practices". Students should also learn to make most of their thesis committee apart from their advisors and they can get additional help from their committee, but the faculty members in the committee should be willing to give outside help to the students. It is hoped that supervisors and universities will benefit from these findings and myriad of opinions to make the postgraduate studies a better place.

This study has some limitations. Although the questionnaire was sent to more than 100 postgraduates, only 41 of them replied back. A further study with a higher number of participants would give a more comprehensive picture through a questionnaire and a further interview with some participants. It is possible that postgraduates who were satisfied with their supervisors were more likely to reply the questionnaire. Postgraduates who were dissatisfied with their supervisors might have refrained from filling out the questionnaire. Time-memory bias can also be a factor in avoiding replies (Williams, 2003). A person may not

be willing to recall bad experiences in his/her life. In addition, future research could also be extended to analyze supervisors' views on thesis supervision and thesis writing in postgraduate programmes in Turkey. This would help us to complete the puzzle.

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APPENDIX

Survey questions

1.   Choose the one you have finished lastly: MA or PhD

2.   Gender

3.   From which university in Turkey did you have your MA/PhD degree? If you don't want to give the name of the university, you can say whether it is a state or private university.

4.   Did you have your MA or PhD at the university you had your bachelor's degree from?

5.   Were you working (as a teacher/instructor, etc.) at the same time while you were writing your thesis?

6.   Did the institution/faculty give you any academic writing course before the year you started your thesis?

7.   How many hours/How much time were you able to allocate to thesis writing? (please give a number in a week or in a month or in a year)

8.   Did you choose your thesis advisor?

9.   How many courses have you taken from your thesis advisor before your thesis?

10.   How did you choose your thesis topic?

11.   Have you ever wished that your thesis advisor were someone else?

12.   Was/Is your topic among the research interests of your advisor?

13.   Were you able to consult your advisor regularly?

14.   Did your advisor give meaningful feedback throughout the process?

15.   Overall, were you happy with your advisor?

16.   How was your interaction with your thesis advisor?

17.   What kind of problems did you encounter while writing your thesis?

18.   Did your advisor go through your chapters regularly?

19.   Did you get any outside help in writing your thesis?

20.   What was the most difficult thing about thesis writing?

21.   Have you ever wanted to quit your thesis?

22.   If your answer is 'yes' to the previous question, what was the biggest reason for that?

23.   If you could use a metaphor to express your feelings about the period that you were writing your thesis, what would you say?

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