



## Primary and Secondary Postgraduate Students' Ways of Selecting Courses and Encountered Problems

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### SYNOPSIS

### INTRODUCTION

Duty of preparing scientists which is among basic missions of universities starts with accepting individuals to the post-graduate education after they graduated from an undergraduate programme. In general, basic aims of post-graduate education are to educate qualified human power; such as, scientists and lecturers, to produce works which lead to developments in technical field, and to do research devoted to finding or proposing solutions to basic problems (Sevinç, 2001).

Selecting postgraduate students for Doctorate or Master Programmes requires certain criteria. It is accepted that these criteria effect the quality of the process of educating scientists (Çıkrıkçı-Demirtaşlı, 2002). The quality of this process depends on students' approaches and their academic experiences in each stage of the process as well as their selection. Postgraduate programmes can be considered as a process consisting of three sub-stages: beginning, research and writing (URL-1). Beginning stage, in this classification, can be described as a preparatory phase for students to prepare themselves for the research stage which includes the process of executing the study and drawing conclusions from the study, and writing stage, on the other hand, is the phase of writing the report of the study. These stages should be considered as parallel processes rather than follow-ups. However, it is widely accepted that the beginning stage is the cornerstone of the whole process.

One thing for doing this as it deserves is to select and take certain courses that would make contributions to the preparation for research area. However, little has been done to guide young researchers on how they select or would select courses that are more useful

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for their future works. Thus, it is believed that this study would make a contribution to the reader, directors of Master and Doctorate programme, post-graduate students and others, to reflect on their acts.

## **THEORITICAL BACKGROUND**

This study aims to reveal post-graduate students' individual assumptions related to 'course selection'. In this vein, Antropological Theory, which is one of basic theories in didactic and was put forward by Y.Chevallard in 1980s, is theoretical framework of this study. Antropological Theory, in general, is used during the processes such as deciding on the research problem, giving meaning to the data and findings from a study and conclusion drawing (Kurnaz, 2007; Sağlam-Arslan, 2008; Kurnaz & Sağlam-Arslan, 2009).

Among basic components of Antropological Theory, three basic elements are considered: object, person and institution (Chevallard, 1992). In this theory, the person is described as each person involved in the investigation process and the object is described as something among things which are there for person. Institution, on the other hand, is a system that teaches ideas and information to person with its own methods. In theory, fundamental approach is personal relationships and institutional relationships.

In this study, the intent is to understand personal relationships taking post-graduate students' views into consideration since personal relationships are constructed under effects of more than one institutional relationship and these institutional relationships are hard to examine in this particular study. Bearing in mind the reality that all attributes of personal relationship can not be explained with a single study, personal relationships are explained, limiting the study with 'course selection criteria' and all factors affecting this process.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate postgraduate students' approaches during selecting their courses, problems encountered and suggestions for solutions to encountered problems from the participating postgraduate students' point of view.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, case study strategy, in which a researcher investigates a single phenomenon within its *real context*, restrained by *time and activity*, and collects *detailed information* by using *multiple methods* of evidence or data collection in a sustained *period of time* (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998), was used. The study was carried out in the 2007-2008 academic year, with 33 primary and secondary postgraduate students who were studying at Karadeniz Technical University, Institute of Science (IS). Data gathering process in this current study consists of two phase; a questionnaire, including open-ended questions, was applied to 33 postgraduates in the first phase, and after analysing the questionnaire eight of them were interviewed in the second phase.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Findings of the study revealed that;

- ~ The participating students' personal relations originate in the framework of four fundamental themes; acceptances, foresights, expectations and factors.
- ~ The participating postgraduates define the courses as their needs and first step of their academic career.

- ~ The participating postgraduates' basic foresight is that there are certain courses each postgraduate student has to take.
- ~ The participants' most crucial expectations in the framework of individual definitions are that the courses they take should make contribution to preparation of thesis or their professional development, and for especially postgraduates who are working, time of the course must fit in their work schedule and must be easy to pass.
- ~ In the process of forming the personal relations the participants value their peers' experiences, the lecturers' approaches and their supervisors' suggestions.
- ~ In the phase of selection of courses the participants have two types of problem arising from personal and external sources. Lack of enough information and peers' influence as personal problems and time fit as external problem are the most noticeable ones.
- ~ Lack of variety of courses in English in IS negatively effects the participants' personal relations.

It is expected that the findings of this study will shed light on criteria on how prospective postgraduates need to select courses. This study also makes a contribution to the understanding of the close relationship between the courses and research phase. It is also believed that this study will be a ground for further studies in the area.

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