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MASTER'S STUDENTS' DECISIONS ON PURSUING A DOCTORAL DEGREE: INFLUENCING FACTORS

Summary: This research aimed to reveal the decisions of master's students about whether to pursue their doctoral degree or not and the factors affecting these decisions. The participants of this research, in which the basic qualitative research design was used, consisted of 28 students (19 female and 9 male) in different parts of the educational sciences departments. To gather the data from the participants, a semi-structured interview form, which was prepared by the researchers, was used. The participants' answers were analyzed via the content analysis method and categorized under the main themes of personal, professional, and academic factors. The research findings are explained in light of the details given in the theoretical framework section, namely postgraduate education, reasons to pursue postgraduate education, and reasons for not completing postgraduate education. The findings demonstrated that the majority of the participants were willing to pursue a doctoral degree. According to the results, it was seen that the participants' master's degree experiences affected their decision to be willing or unwilling to pursue their education and enroll in doctoral studies. However, the participants also stated that they didn't have much knowledge about doctoral degree during their master's degree and could only get information with their own efforts. This finding showed that master's degree students needed to be informed more about doctoral degree at the master's degree level.

Keywords: Doctoral Degree, Master's Degree, Reasons to Have Postgraduate Education

Introduction

The changing world has affected the education system and the perspective of individuals toward education. Individuals are no longer content with the education they receive, but they strive to improve themselves with the desire to learn continuously. Educational institutions, especially universities, which are one of the most important institutions in society, have great importance in meeting this demand and in the development of the country (Ozdemir & Gurbuz, 2020). In this context, postgraduate education, which is the highest level of education where both the academics that the university needs and the manpower needed by society and researchers are trained, gains importance (Angell, Heffernan, & Megicks, 2008; Bulbul, 2003; Gunay, 2018; Jung & Lee, 2019). Although the number of people who have postgraduate education is increasing day by day (Coruk, Cagatay, & Ozturk, 2016), it is seen from the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TUIK, 2021) data that individuals who have completed their master's education do not continue their doctorate education at the same rate. According to the data from TUIK regarding the distribution of the population according to the level of completed education, in Turkey in 2020, the ratio of the number of individuals who completed their master's education to the total population is 2.2%, while the ratio of the number of individuals who completed their doctoral education to the total population is 0.4%. It is seen that only 1 out of every 5 students who complete their master's education also completes doctoral education. However, most of the master's students indicate that one of the most important goals they aim to achieve by attending graduate school is to make an academic career and become academicians (Deniz, 2020; Ilter, 2020; Kahraman & Tok, 2016; Kosar, Er, & Kilinc, 2020). Even though some decisions are taken at the policy

level regarding the orientation of teachers to graduate education in Türkiye, there are still some problems in practice, and the number of teachers who continue graduate education is not at the desired level. As a matter of fact, according to 2018 data from TUIK, there are 91,268 teachers with master's degrees, while there are only 1,525 teachers with doctorate degrees (Mavis Sevim & Akin, 2021). This data shows that the number of teachers who continue their doctoral education is quite low. However, the importance of a doctoral degree lies in the fact that it is a prerequisite for entering academia. In actuality, those who complete this program can become academics (Secer, 2021). In addition, in terms of generating new knowledge, doctoral education—which corresponds to an academic application center—is crucial (Pyhalto et al., 2012) because people who pursue a doctoral degree are drawn to innovative studies. By doing this, they are supposed to produce the basic necessities for academic development. After completing this program, people accept their position as scientists in the scientific community (Karaman & Bakirci, 2010; Erdem, 2012). In light of this, a doctoral degree could be interpreted as the final and most crucial phase of scientific education (Boote & Beile, 2005; Erdem, 2012; Karaman & Bakirci, 2010; Keskinkilic & Erturk, 2009). However, as TUIK's data demonstrate, very few people are pursuing a doctoral degree, despite the many advantages of doing so. This reality caused this research to focus on the teachers who continue their master's degree. Considering all these situations, it is very important to determine the problems experienced by individuals in both master's and doctoral education, their thoughts on these educations, and to examine the effect of their master's education on their decision to pursue doctoral education. For these reasons, this research aims to determine the decisions of master's students about whether to continue their doctoral education or not and the factors that affect these decisions. In light of this purpose, the research seeks answers to the following questions:

For the students who graduated from the undergraduate program and are pursuing a master's degree education,

1. What are their decisions on whether to continue a doctoral degree after a master's degree?
2. What are the factors that are effective in making these decisions?
3. What are the reasons for pursuing a master's degree?
4. How do they evaluate their master's degree education?
5. What is their level of knowledge about doctoral degree and getting information about doctorate degree in master's degree?
6. In what ways does a master's degree affect their decision to pursue or not to pursue a doctoral degree?

Theoretical Framework

Postgraduate education

Postgraduate education is a teaching process in which students realize their career goals, experience scientific activities and research studies, and have a higher level of knowledge and activity with the help of master's and doctoral education, or proficiency in arts and specialty training in medicine based on their undergraduate education (Babayigit, 2019; Bozan, 2012; Citak, 2021; Ilter, 2020; Karaman & Bakirci, 2010). Postgraduate education consists of master's and doctoral education, which individuals who have completed undergraduate education can continue, respectively (Babayigit, 2019). The purpose of postgraduate education can be listed as maintaining the development and continuation of intellectual skills to specialize in a field, developing professional competence and academic values, raising highly qualified manpower for scientists, researchers, and all professions needed by the country, and combining theory and practice in all fields (Bozan, 2012; Ilter, 2020; Ozmen & Guc, 2013; Sevinc, 2001).

Reasons to pursue postgraduate education

People have postgraduate degrees for a variety of reasons. With the help of graduate education, individuals can apply their duties in society more effectively, as well as improve their general and professional knowledge (Coruk et al., 2016). Individuals who continue their postgraduate education

state that the desire to benefit from more education opportunities, the increase in employment opportunities, the desire to pursue an academic career, and their thoughts, such as being able to develop in the professional and scientific field and be more beneficial to their environment, are effective in the continuation of their graduate education (Babayigit, 2019; Erkilic, 2007). People may also pursue graduate education for self-improvement, opportunities to learn more and develop academic abilities, having a thesis, and conducting research (Tanrikulu & Ustun, 2020).

Reasons for not completing postgraduate education

When we check the literature, we can see that people have different reasons for not completing postgraduate education (Ertem & Gokalp, 2016). Having difficulty with adaptation, having familial, financial, or health problems, being currently employed, being dissatisfied with the quality of the education received in postgraduate education, having difficulty attending classes and/or preparing homework, not being able to achieve the expected success in the lessons, a lack of qualified instructors, and having the fear of not being able to find a job at the end of the education are among the reasons why people don't complete their postgraduate education (Barnes & Randall, 2011; Deniz, 2020; Dilci, 2019; Ertem, 2018; Gok, 2015; Hovdhaugen, 2015; Iglesias, Entrialgo, & Muller, 2020; Komsu & Uysal, 2021).

Methodology

Research design

A basic qualitative research design was used in the research. In qualitative research, which does not include statistical analysis and is also called natural, interpretive, and field research, it is essential to evaluate the determined situations as they are and to interpret the research problem with an inductive interdisciplinary approach (Karatas, 2015; Jackson, 2009). The basic qualitative research design incorporates all the features of the qualitative research method and aims to reveal how the individuals participating in the research "make sense of a situation, process, perspective, or world view" (Merriam, 2002, p.6).

Participants

The study group for this research consists of 28 students who continue their master's degree in the fields of educational sciences at the Tokat Gaziosmanpasa University Graduate Education Institute in the 2020-2021 academic years. 9 of the participants in the study are in the age range of 21-25; 13 of them are 26-35; 5 of them are 31-35; and one participant is 41-45. 19 of the participants are female, and 9 are male. While 16 participants are single, 12 of them are married. Six of the participants stated that they did not have any jobs. In addition, 9 of them stated that they had 1-5 years of experience in the teaching profession, 9 of them had 6-10 years of experience, two of them between 11 and 15 years, and one of them between 16 and 20 years, while one of them did not answer this question. Apart from the 6 participants who stated that they did not work in any job, there are 5 English teachers, 4 Turkish teachers, 4 primary school teachers, 4 psychological counselling and guidance teachers, two mathematics teachers, one science teacher, and one biology teacher among the participants. 13 of them stated that they were at the course stage, and 15 of them were at the thesis stage. They get their education in the fields of Curriculum and Instruction (n=4), Turkish Education (n=4), Social Studies Education (n=4), Psychological Counselling and Guidance (n=4), Science education (n=4), Educational Administration and Supervision (n=2) and Mathematics (n=2). To the question asked about how many years after undergraduate education they started their graduate education, 9 of them said they started as soon as they graduated, 8 of them between 1-5 years, 8 of them between 6-10 years, two of them between 11-15 years, and one of them between 16-20 years.

Data collection tool

In this research, data were obtained through the semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. While creating the form, first of all, the relevant literature was examined (Babayigit, 2019; Unal & Ilter, 2010), and the opinions of three academicians were taken to ensure the content validity of the 11-question draft interview form. Afterward, the form was sent to an expert in the Turkish language to control its intelligibility. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the consistency coefficient of the form was also checked. Miles and Huberman's (1994) 'Reliability Level = Agree / Agree + Disagree' formula was used to determine the consistency coefficient. While the number of agreed themes, sub-themes, and codes was 66, 5 of them disagreed, so the reliability coefficient was calculated as $66 / 66 + 5 = 0.92$.

Data analysis process

The data obtained in the research were analysed by content analysis technique using the MaxQda 12 program. Content analysis is carried out by creating coding schemes for the answers to the research questions based on a review of the relevant literature (Harwood & Garry, 2003). Before analysing the data, the recorded interviews were transcribed. After the analysis of the data, the analysis and comments were sent to the two interviewees to get their participant confirmation.

Findings

Participants' decisions on whether to continue their doctoral degree or not and the reasons for these decisions

Participants were first asked whether they would like to continue their doctoral degree after their master's degree. It is seen that the majority of the participants ($n=20$) were willing to continue their doctoral degree. While 5 participants stated that they were not willing to continue, 3 of them stated that they had not decided yet. In the light of the answers received, two main themes were formed: the reasons for being willing or unwilling to continue doctoral education.

Reasons for the willingness to continue doctoral degree

The participants, who stated that they wanted to continue their doctoral degree, were asked the reasons, and the gathered information was categorized into sub-themes and codes as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Reasons for Being Willing to Continue Doctoral Education

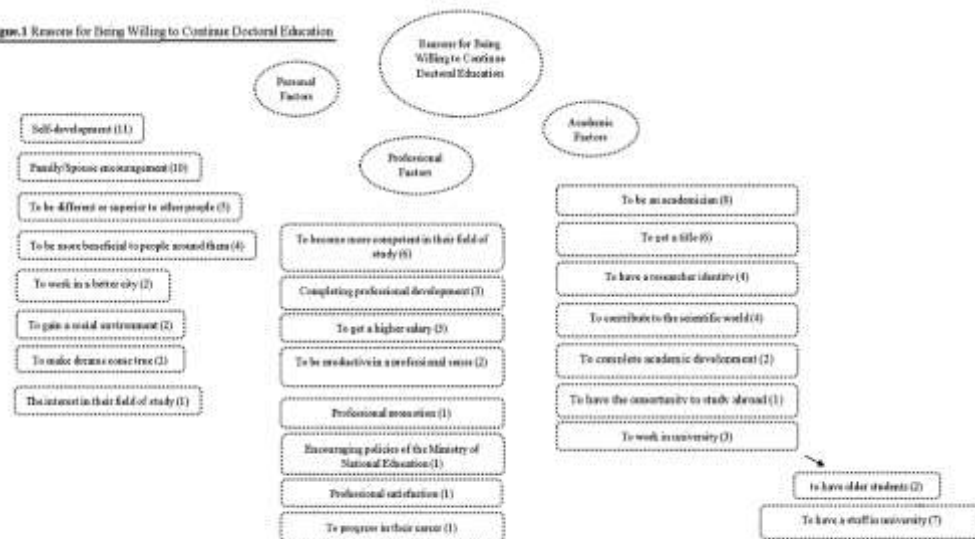


Figure 1: Reasons for the Willingness to Continue Doctoral Degree

As can be understood from Figure 1, the participants were willing to continue their doctoral degree for personal, professional, and academic reasons. It is seen that the most frequently mentioned reason among the personal factors for being willing to continue a doctoral degree is self-development. One of the participants said, "Obviously, I did not aim for an academic career when I started my master's degree. My only goal was to improve myself (P8, M, CS)". Another issue that the participants frequently emphasized was that their families or spouses encouraged them to continue their doctoral degree and became role models. On this subject, one of the participants said, "My husband influenced and motivated me. (P5, F, TS)". Some participants stated that they were willing to continue their doctoral degree because they thought that they would have the opportunity to work in the cities they wanted to live in thanks to this education. For this reason, one of the participants said, "Maybe when I graduate from a doctoral degree, I get extra service points so that it makes it easier to work in my hometown (P22, M, TS)".

Among the professional factors sub-theme, the participants stated that they were willing to continue their doctoral degree to become more competent in their field of study. One of the participants said; "I want to become more competent in terms of education, especially in my field (P9, F, TS)". As can be understood from the statement; "I think teachers need to be more competent. There are in-service seminars, and different kinds of learning materials are open to anyone who wants to attend while working, but I think I should improve myself (professionally) first (P14, F, CS)", completing professional development is another reason.

Considering the academic factors, the majority of the participants stated that the reason for being willing to continue their doctoral degree was to be an academician. One participant expressed her opinion by saying, "I started this journey to be an academician. (P16, F, TS)". Among the factors that affect the participants' desire to continue their doctoral degree are their desires to complete their academic development, contribute to the scientific world, and have the opportunity to study abroad. This statement reflects this view, "If I have a doctoral education, the first thing I will do is take advantage of the research scholarship and examine the opportunities to study abroad. (K1, F, TS)".

Reasons for the unwillingness to continue doctoral degree

The reasons for being unwilling to continue their doctoral degree were asked of the participants, and their answers are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Reasons for being unwilling to continue doctoral education

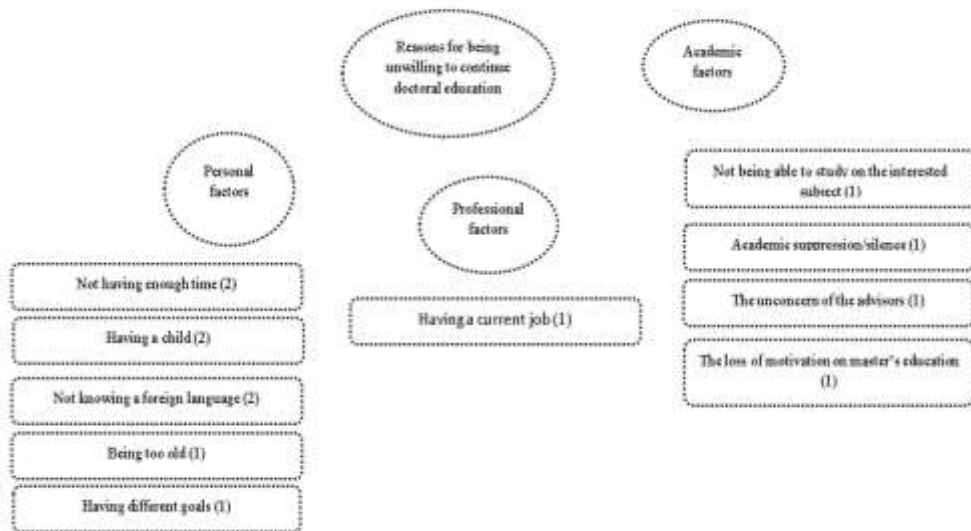


Figure 2: Reasons for Being Unwilling to Continue Doctoral Education

As can be seen in Figure 2, the participants' decisions were formed as sub-themes of personal, professional, and academic reasons based on the main theme of the reasons why the participants were unwilling to continue their doctoral degree.

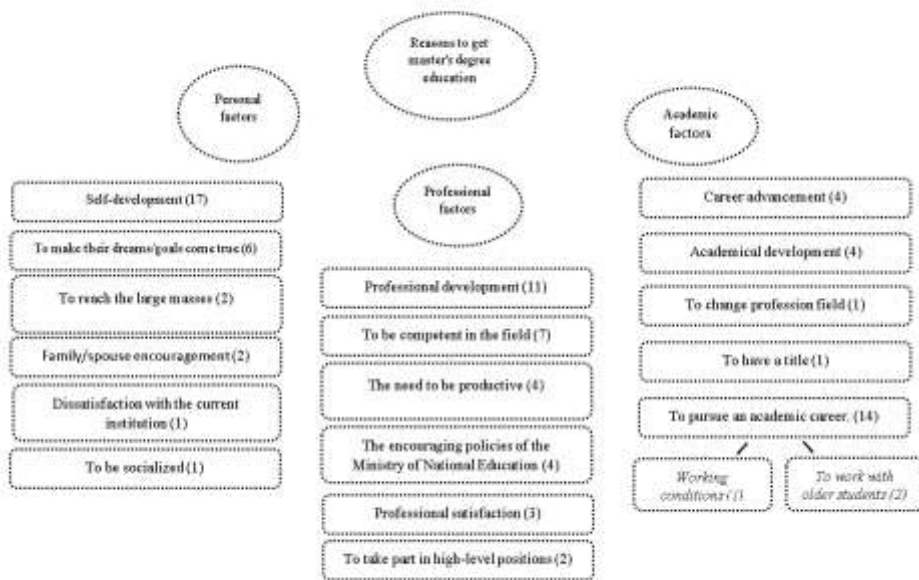
Related to the sub-theme of personal factors, some of the participants stated that they were unwilling to continue their doctoral degree because they thought that they could not have enough time for it. Apart from this, having a child can also be seen as an obstacle to continuing a doctoral degree. This statement reflects these views, "I don't have time either. I have two children; I am also working. I don't want to start this education because I think it will be difficult (P6, F, TS)".

Having a job is the professional factor that causes master's students not to be willing to continue their doctoral degree. For that reason, a participant said, "I already have a job. I don't want to start a doctoral degree because I think it would be difficult to have it while working (K6, F, TS)".

In terms of academic factors, it is seen that one of the reasons for being unwilling to continue a doctoral degree is the unconcern of the advisors. A participant stated that the advisor should take care of the students at the master's level and prepare them for the doctoral process and said, "I think that while having a master's degree, the advisors leave the students a little bit alone. In this regard, I think the advisor should confront the student (P23, F, TS)".

Reasons for pursuing a master's degree

The participants were asked about their reasons to pursue a master's degree. The data analysis results related to the answers to this question are given in Figure 3.

Figure.3 Reasons to Get Master's Degree Education**Figure 3:** Reasons for Pursuing a Master's Degree Education

As can be seen in Figure 3, the theme of the reasons to get a master's degree is categorized into three sub-themes: personal, academic, and professional factors.

Considering the sub-theme of personal factors, it is evident that the majority of the participants started their master's degree for self-development and to make their dreams/goals come true. The following statement reveals a participant's view on this subject, "First of all, I started my master's degree to improve myself because I want to get more of the education I get at schools (P10, F, TS)". Some of the participants started their master's degree to be socialized. One of them stated this opinion by saying, "Actually, it is a kind of socialization in order not to become monotonous in life (P21, M, TS)".

Among the professional factors, it is seen that professional development, in both fields of education and educational sciences, is the most frequently emphasized reason for starting a master's degree. One of the participants' following words expresses this opinion: "I applied to renew myself to increase field knowledge and to recall information that I forgot or overlooked (P6, F, TS)". As can be seen from the findings, the aims of meeting the need for professional satisfaction and the desire to take part in high-level positions can also be effective in participants' decisions to start their master's degree. For this reason, one participant said; "In the future, I want to work on the central organization of the Ministry of National Education. So, I want to improve myself in this field (P28, M, CS)".

In terms of academic factors, it is seen that participants are willing to pursue an academic career due to their desire to work with older students and the desire for comfortable working conditions at the university. The following statement can be given as an example: "I think the working conditions at the university are more comfortable (P5, F, TS)". The desire to have a master's degree, which is the first step of academic education, and thus continue with a doctorate degree is among the other academic factors expressed by the participants. "I am having a master's education to continue my doctorate to be able to become an academician in the future (P18, F, CS)" statement shows this desire.

Opinions about master's degree

The participants were asked their opinions about the master's degree, and their answers were grouped under two main themes as positive and negative.

Positive opinions about master's education

The positive answers of participants about master's degree are given in Figure.4.

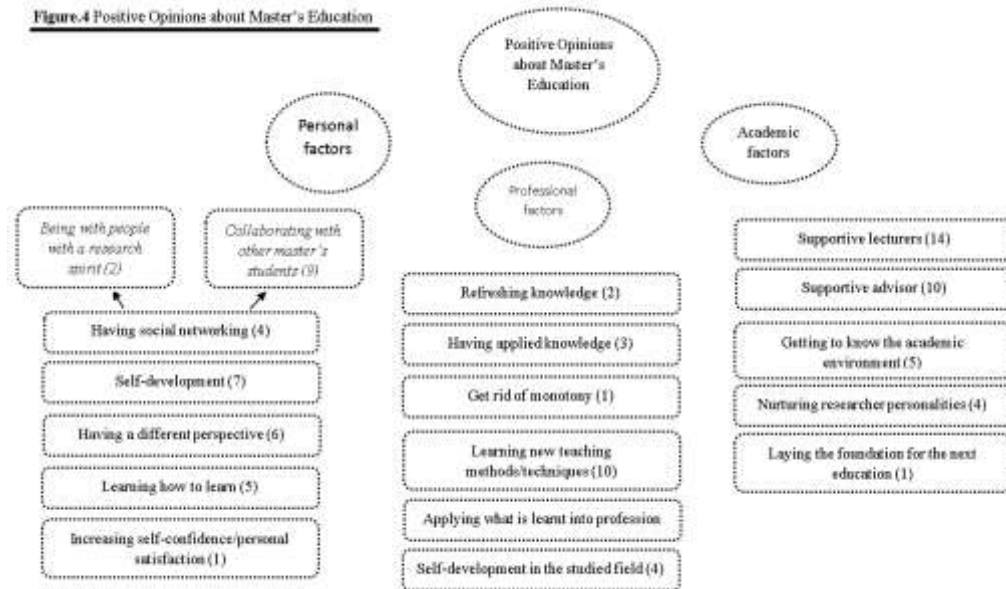


Figure 4: Positive Opinions about Master's Degree

As seen in Figure 4, the positive opinions expressed by the participants about the master's degree were categorized into three sub-themes: personal, academic, and professional factors.

The subject that the participants mentioned most under the sub-theme of personal factors is that master's degree is beneficial for self-development. "As the need to read more articles arose in the master's degree process, I felt the need to improve, organize a path for, and set goals for myself. I can say that I have finished all the articles in the literature, especially in the fields in which I want to work (P7, F, CS)" statements show the opinion of one of the participants in this direction. One of the issues that the participants frequently emphasized was that master's degree gave them a different perspective. One of the participants said, "Especially, our perspective on some issues related to our field has changed. It enabled us to observe the information we obtained with an analytical approach, more critically (P22, M, TS)". The participants also stated that graduate education had a positive effect on them in terms of collaborating with other master's students and being with people with a research spirit. "I got more friends. Our relationship with my friends was very good. In fact, we learned more from sharing lessons than we learned from lecturers (P5, F, TS)" said one of the participants.

In terms of professional factors, a master's degree provides participants with the opportunity to learn new teaching methods and develop themselves in their field. One of the participants said; "The lessons I took from some of my lecturers showed that there can be very enjoyable lessons that I had not been interested in before and that I would not even have thought of. I can say that I have learned methods that I can apply in my lessons (P5, F, TS)". Master's degree has had a positive impact on professional

development, allowing participants to apply what they learned in their profession. One of the participants said, "We have always been involved in the lessons, not only did we get the information, but we also used it. I have always been satisfied with this during my master's degree (P9, F, TS)".

In terms of academic factors, the presence of supportive lecturers or advisors is effective in developing positive attitudes toward a master's degree. For example, one of the participants said, "The support of lecturers and advisors is a very good guide because they are superior to us, both in article and thesis writing. I don't think I could have done it easily without the guidance of my lecturers or the guidance of my advisor (P10, F, TS)". Participants also stated that a master's degree is effective in laying the foundation for the next level of degree, namely a doctoral degree. An example statement for this opinion is as "I think that especially scientific research and the applications we have made in the courses constitute a really good foundation for my next education step (P9, F, TS)".

Negative opinions about master's degree

The negative answers of the participants about their views on master's degree are given in Figure.5.

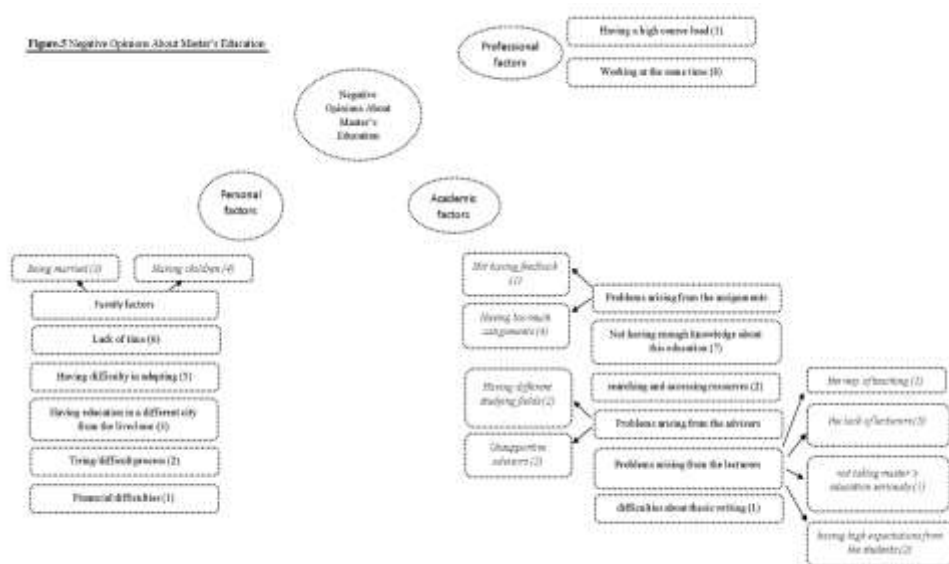


Figure 5: Negative Opinions About Master's Degree

As can be seen in Figure.5, the negative opinions expressed by the participants about master's degree are categorized into three sub-themes as academic, personal, and professional factors.

It is seen that family factors, such as being married or having children, are the most important factors in negative opinions of the master's degree process for participants. "As we all know, having a master's degree with a child is very difficult (P5, F, TS)" and "Since there are responsibilities related to marriage and children, there are such difficulties for me (P19, F, CS)" are two participants' statements as examples of this opinion. The remarkable point here is that all the participants who expressed family reasons were women. Based on the statements of the participants, it can be said that the difficulties experienced by the participants about time caused them to have negative views about graduate education. "Unfortunately, I don't have free time. This makes me very tired (P18, F, CS)" is one of the expressions that reveal this view.

From the point of view of professional factors, the participants stated that they had difficulties in their graduate education due to both having a high course load and working at the same time, and one of the participants expressed her opinion by saying, "Working at the same time and due to the high course load in the Ministry of National Education, I have difficulties (P7, F, CS)".

Considering the academic factors, the results show that negative opinions about master's degree are caused by problems arising from the assignments, not having feedback on the assignments, and not having enough knowledge about the process during their undergraduate education. These problems caused them to start their master's degree without knowing how the process was or being ready, leading to negative opinions. "I had difficulties in some courses because I did not have enough knowledge from my undergraduate degree. I had difficulty reaching scientific articles, especially in scientific writing (P8, M, CS)" said one of the participants. As it is understood from the statements of the participants, the lecturers also caused students to develop negative attitudes toward a master's degree.

The participants' knowledge level about doctoral degree and whether they get any information about doctoral degree in their master's degree

Participants who were pursuing their master's degree were asked whether they knew the doctoral degree process. Very few of the participants (n=2) stated that they had sufficient knowledge about the doctoral degree process. In addition, 10 of them stated that they did not have any knowledge, while the majority (n=16) stated that they had limited knowledge.

Participants were also asked whether they received any information about doctoral degree from faculty members, friends, or the institute during their master's degree. While the majority of the participants (n=18) stated that they did not receive any information, 7 of them stated that they received information partially, and 3 of them stated that they received information completely.

The role of master's degree in the willingness/unwillingness to continue doctoral degree

The participants were asked whether their master's degree had a role in their willingness or unwillingness to continue their doctoral degree, and in what respect. As a result of the answers of the participants, the information was categorized into sub-themes and codes and given in Figure.6.



Figure 6: The Role of Master's Degree in the Willingness/Unwillingness to Continue Doctoral Degree

As can be seen in Figure.6, the answers given by the participants regarding the role of master's education in their desire to continue or not to continue their doctoral degree were categorized into three sub-themes: positive effect, negative effect, and no effect.

According to some participants, the fact that graduate education is effective in meeting the academic world has a positive effect on their decision about doctoral degree. Regarding this view, one of the participants said, "We studied a subject in the lesson, and as a result, we came up with a product (article). Especially after the publication of this, I can say that I want to enter the academic community even more (P9, F, TS)" and stated that getting to know the academic community increased her desire to be a part of this community. Some participants mentioned that taking the lecturers as role models and the lecturers helping them to do the right things in graduate education had positive effects on their willingness to continue their doctoral education. One participant expressed her opinion by saying, "The way the lecturers behave is very effective in my thoughts about being willing to pursue a doctoral degree. The way and courses they teach, or the evaluation criteria. These facts affected me positively (P4, F, CS)".

The difficulties experienced in graduate education and the problems experienced have a negative effect on the decision of some participants to continue their doctoral degree. This is due to the thought that the studies are not reflected in real life. "Social sciences are not very open to development. It always remains an individual experience. I search for the master's and doctoral theses that have been published before, and I see that they don't have much of a place in society. It is like that people only develop themselves thanks to these theses, and it is done just to have a master's or doctoral degree. (P27, M, TS)" sentences show the view of a participant. Participants' fear of not meeting expectations for their master's degree and lack of qualified education affect their decision to continue their doctoral degree negatively. One of the participants said the following sentences about this issue, "I think master's degree has been unqualified. I want it to be more qualified (P5, F, TS)".

Some participants stated that master's degree did not have any effect on the decision they made about doctoral degree, as one of the participants said, "Master's degree doesn't have too much effect (K6, F, TS)".

Discussion

According to the results of the research, the majority of the participants pursue a master's degree and want to continue their doctoral degree with the desire to improve themselves. Similarly, Demirbolat (2005) and Kahraman and Tok (2016) found that the most influential reason for students to pursue graduate education is to improve themselves and be competent. Some of the participants stated that family/spouse encouragement was among the reasons for both getting a master's degree and being willing to continue doctoral degree, and some others stated that they decided to pursue this education because they took their family members as role models. There are also other studies concluding that people start graduate education as a result of family or spouse encouragement (Deniz, 2020; Suleymanov, 2014). However, it is noteworthy that there are other studies in the literature concluding that family pressure makes postgraduate education difficult (Cepni, Kilinc, & Kilcan, 2018; Qi & Li, 2020; Vural & Basaran, 2021). In addition to this, it is seen that being married/having children is among the negative opinions about master's degree and the reasons for being unwilling to continue doctoral degree. In parallel with this result, Cohen (2012) concluded in his study that unmarried people are more likely to continue and complete their postgraduate education than married ones.

The participants also stated that they pursued their master's degree for professional reasons, and the incentive policies of the Ministry of National Education are effective in achieving this result. The same item is also among the reasons for being willing to continue doctoral degree. As a result of other different studies, it can be observed that individuals working in the Ministry of National Education experience professional stagnation and burnout after a certain period (Erdemoglu Sahin, 2007; Ozcan,

2008). It can be said that the effort to get rid of this monotony is among the reasons that push individuals to pursue postgraduate education. This situation may also have a negative effect on job satisfaction (Karakose & Kocabas, 2006; Basalp, 2001). Many studies on occupational satisfaction indicate that teachers' job satisfaction levels are higher when they complete their postgraduate education (Celik, 2008; Basalp, 2001; Ocal, 2011). Hence, individuals can have a positive attitude toward their education when they achieve their goals.

Parallel to the findings of other studies (Avci & Akdeniz, 2021; Mavis Sevim & Akin, 2021), this study shows that academic reasons are among the reasons individuals start master's education. Improving themselves academically is the most frequently stated academic reason by the participants. Similar to many other studies in the literature (Alabas, Kamer, & Polat, 2012; Cepni et al., 2018; Emmioglu, McAlpine, & Amundsen, 2017; Ertem & Gokalp, 2019; Hockey, 1994; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Kurtoglu Erden & Seferoglu, 2021; Qi & Li, 2020; Wright, 2003), the findings of this study also showed that lecturers and advisors have an important role on individuals' thoughts about both master's and doctoral degree, positively or negatively. Participants experienced varying levels of support from lecturers and advisors during their master's and doctoral degree, but some felt academic suppression due to their advisors' indifference and faculty members' behavior. This negatively affected their decisions to continue their doctoral degree.

When the participants were asked about their views on master's degree, they stated that master's degree supported them in terms of learning new teaching methods/techniques to use in their professional lives. In the literature, it is seen that there are different studies that have reached similar results (Er & Unal, 2017; Sarikaya, 2018). However, similar to the results of many studies conducted in the literature (Avci & Akdeniz, 2021; Cepni, et al., 2018; Kurtoglu Erden & Seferoglu, 2021), some other participants in this study also expressed their problems with having too many assignments and not having feedback on the assignments during their master's degree. Contrary to this finding, Vural and Basaran (2021) found that individuals developed themselves in terms of literature review and writing thesis-articles thanks to their master's degree.

Participants discussed the problem of not knowing a foreign language as well. This issue, which seems to pose a problem for students, especially being unwilling to continue their doctoral degree, is both seen as a problem (Cepni et al., 2018; Kapucu & Bulut, 2019; Sarikaya, 2018; Vural & Basaran, 2021) and an advantage (Er & Unal, 2017; Savas & Topak, 2005) in previous studies. Because, according to some studies, the requirement of knowing a foreign language prevents students from continuing their doctoral degree, while according to others, individuals have the opportunity to develop themselves by learning a foreign language thanks to postgraduate education.

Conclusion

Aiming to reveal master's students' decisions on whether to continue doctoral degree or not and the factors affecting these decisions, this study showed that people start master's degree for similar reasons as the factors affecting their decisions on continuing doctoral degree. Their thoughts about master's degree have some related items as well.

The findings of the study showed that the majority of people have postgraduate education to develop themselves individually, professionally, and/or academically. Extracurricular activities such as seminars and social or scientific meetings can positively affect their desire to continue doctoral education. Families, advisors, instructors, and assignments in master's degree can have a positive or negative impact on students' decisions about pursuing a doctoral degree. In light of these findings, it can be suggested that the assignments should be chosen from real-life situations, and advisors and instructors should be more involved in their students' assignments and other issues. It can also be interpreted from the findings that people who achieve their goals in master's degree are more likely to continue their doctoral degree, so it is recommended that they be supported to reach their goals.

Based on the results of this study, in general terms, it can be concluded that the thoughts of individuals about their master's degree affect their reasons to be willing/unwilling to continue their doctoral degree because the experiences of individuals during their master's degree are effective in their decisions about pursuing a doctoral degree.

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