

## Feelings and Problems of being a Turkish ELT Graduate Student: A Qualitative Study on Graduate Student Perceptions

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### *Abstract*

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The present study investigated graduate students' feelings and problems in the Turkish English Language Teaching setting. The purposeful sampling method was chosen in order to have a deeper understanding of their perceptions related to being a graduate student. Attending Master's and Doctorate Programs in English Language Teaching at different state universities, four MA and four Ph.D. students took part in the study. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. A Phenomenological Qualitative Approach was adopted for the study, and the Inductive Analysis Method was employed for the data analysis. The outcomes of the study yielded that Graduate Students experienced both negative and positive feelings such as "professional satisfaction", "self-confidence", "excitement", "indecisiveness", "pressure", "lack of satisfaction", and "confusion" during the different periods of their studies. Moreover, "commuting", "limited time", and "lack of knowledge on research methods" were stated among problems they encountered throughout their graduate education process. In order to better understand the professional development processes of English Language Teaching graduate students and to improve the quality of graduate education, it is crucial to discover students' feelings and problems through their lenses by analysing the possible causes indicated by them. Furthermore, this will shed light on detecting and overcoming the problems other graduate students may encounter in another English Language Teaching context.

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*Keywords:* Graduate education (GE), Graduate students (GS), English language teaching (ELT), Feelings, Problems, Suggestions.

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Ethics Declaration:

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of Anadolu University. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The authors confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.



# Türkiye’de İngilizce Öğretmenliği Lisansüstü Öğrencisi Olmanın Duygu ve Sorunları: Lisansüstü Öğrencilerinin Algıları Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma

## Öz

Bu çalışmada, Türkiye’de İngilizce Öğretmenliği alanındaki lisansüstü öğrencilerinin duyguları ve bu öğrencilerin yaşadıkları problemler incelenmiştir. Lisansüstü öğrenci olma hakkındaki görüşlerini daha detaylı anlayabilmek için amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi tercih edilmiştir. Araştırmaya, Türkiye’deki farklı devlet üniversitelerinin İngilizce Öğretmenliği lisansüstü programlarından dört yüksek lisans ve dört doktora öğrencisi katılmıştır. Araştırma verileri yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme yöntemi ile toplanmıştır. Araştırmada Fenomenolojik yöntem kullanılmıştır. Veri analizleri Tümevarımsal Analiz Yöntemi ile yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, lisansüstü öğrencilerin “mesleki tatmin”, “özgüven”, “heyecan”, “kararsızlık”, “baskı altında olma”, “tatmin olmama” ve “zihin karışıklığı” duygularını lisansüstü çalışmalarının farklı dönemlerinde yaşadıkları ortaya çıkmıştır. Yine bu sürecin çeşitli basamaklarında öğrencilerin karşılaştıkları problemlerin “bir şehirden diğerine gidip gelme”, “kısıtlı zaman” ve “araştırma yöntemleri ile ilgili bilgi eksikliği” olduğu belirtilmiştir. İngilizce Öğretmenliği lisansüstü öğrencilerinin mesleki gelişim süreçlerini daha iyi anlamak ve lisansüstü eğitimin kalitesini artırmak için, belirttikleri olası nedenleri analiz ederek öğrencilerin duygularını ve problemlerini kendi bakış açılarından incelemek önemlidir. Aynı zamanda bu, farklı bir İngilizce Öğretmenliği programındaki lisansüstü öğrencilerinin de problemlerinin saptanması ve çözümüne de ışık tutacaktır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Lisansüstü Eğitim, Lisansüstü Öğrenciler, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi, Duygular, Sorunlar, Öneriler.

## Introduction

As a significant step for raising scientists, academicians, and senior executives (Sevinç, 2001), graduate education (GE, henceforth) bears an essential responsibility for researching the various issues of a country and training a high-quality workforce that it needs (Karakütük, 2002). The quality of this process is quite crucial in order to pursue an effective and productive academic career (Özmentaş & Özmentaş, 2005). Studies on GE indicate that the needs, expectations, and views shape graduate students’ (GSs, henceforth) success as it has various positive and negative effects such as motivation (e.g., Saracaloğlu, 2008), self-efficacy (e.g., Gökçek et al., 2014), anxiety (e.g., Onwuegbuzie & Wilson, 2003), and isolation (e.g., Ercisen & Bolliger, 2011).

Studies on GE have primarily focused on various problems of GSs throughout this process (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Çoruk, et al., 2016; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013; Sayan & Aksu, 2005) and tried to offer solutions for these problems (Karaman & Bakırcı, 2010). Furthermore, the attitudes of GSs (Erkılıç, 2009; Ünal & İltar, 2010) and the effectiveness of GE curriculums (Kırmızı, 2011; Küçüköğlü, 2015) have also been under research for some time. However, a scarcity of research on feelings of GSs emerged during the process of their graduate studies stands out among the literature on GE. Furthermore, in the Turkish context, the number of English Language Teaching (ELT henceforth) Departments offering BA degrees is increasing and as a result the need for highly-trained professionals in the field is emerging as well. Thus, an in-depth investigation of the affective issues, problems, perceptions, and feelings of graduate ELT students need to be conducted in order to point out the existing circumstances to enhance the quality of GE. It is significant to carry out a comprehensive study in order to reveal the problematic issues and feelings at each stage (pre-, while and end) of GE that need to be acknowledged, solved and improved for ELT GSs. By doing this, it will also give a thorough framework of GSs’ feelings for the other GSs studying in ELT programs as well as the academicians. Another significance will be the contribution of the current study to the literature on GE students’ professional development processes. Therefore, by understanding the feelings, problems, and how these students handle these problems, it will be easier to understand and modify the problematic issues for other students in the program. In this respect, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the feelings of GSs studying at ELT Departments in Turkey?
2. What are the problems encountered by ELT GSs?
3. How do they deal with these problems?

### **Motives to Become a Graduate Student**

Graduate studies have many barriers that students have to deal with in order to be able to complete their studies successfully (Merç, 2016). The psychological issues are of vital importance that should be considered carefully in this period. There are various reasons leading individuals to become a graduate student. One of these reasons is their socioeconomic background. Ethington and Smart (1986) expressed the role of socioeconomic background for entering a graduate institution. Supporting this result, Song et al. (2008) emphasized the family background and concluded that the likelihood of participants' pursuing an advanced degree increases depending on their parents' higher level of education. As one another element, the candidates having rural backgrounds reported pursuing an advanced degree at lower levels as compared to the others (Song et al., 2008). Furthermore, undergraduate experiences were also detected as an important element in attending a graduate school (Ethington & Smart, 1986).

Studies conducted in Turkey have mostly revealed that GSs want to pursue an academic career in order to be more proficient in their field of study (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013; Incikabi et al., 2013; Ören et al., 2012; Savaş & Topak, 2005) and they believe that they will become a successful scientist (Aslan, 2010; Incikabi et al., 2013). Furthermore, Savaş and Topak (2005) state that benefiting from student rights and gaining an advantage over others when being employed are other factors directing them to graduate studies. Other motives have been found as developing oneself in conducting research, having scientific knowledge and efficacy, being a well-equipped individual, working at a university, being an academician, contributing to the field, learning how to research scientifically, making a difference in professional life, being up to date to the innovations in the field, familiarizing with the university culture, contributing to the community, and being productive and prestigious (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013).

### **Feelings of GSs**

#### ***Anxiety***

Anxiety can be defined as not being able to deal with a threat to emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical health, where this threat can be perceived as real or imaginary (Seaward, 2002). Research has shown that there has been a 16% increase in GS anxiety levels since the 1950s (Twenge, 2000). As a result of increased anxiety among GSs, low self-esteem levels, unhealthy behaviours like consuming junk food, abandoning exercising have been observed (Hudd et al., 2000). The causes of these behaviours have been found to be as experiencing role conflict in their academic and personal lives, having time management problems, and dealing with financial pressure (Hudd et al., 2000). If these GSs cannot find any solutions for the problems stated above, then they experience physical and mental exhaustion, guilt for their choices and priorities, depression, and burnout (Offstein, et al., 2004).

The most frequently experienced anxiety type among GSs is statistics anxiety (Onwuegbuzie & Wilson, 2003). Due to the negative effect of their anxiety, GSs have been found to postpone taking such courses until the end of their graduate program (Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Furthermore, the performances of GSs have been found to be affected negatively because of their statistics anxiety (Onwuegbuzie, et al., 2000). Attitude studies also found out that these students show a negative attitude towards statistics (Mills, 2004).

In the Turkish context, GSs have defined their research anxiety as not conducting research until it is necessary, feeling uneasy during research, having low self-esteem in determining the research topic, and feeling tediousness when being obliged to do research (Bökeoğlu & Yılmaz,

2005, Merç, 2016). According to the outcomes of Köksal and Razi (2011), the most demanding and challenging side of conducting research is to write a discussion part. Furthermore, negative correlations have also been found out between Turkish GSs' anxiety levels and research self-efficacy levels (Tekin, 2007), and between research anxiety and critical thinking abilities (Bökeoğlu & Yılmaz, 2005).

### ***Academic Motivation***

Academic motivation has the necessary energy to produce academic work (Bozanoğlu, 2004). Pursuing GE depends on both internal and external motivating factors. Internal factors, having two branches –social and science related-, are related to individuals' wishes or circumstances. Social-related issues include providing social development, improvement in the profession, being aware of the current topics, individual satisfaction, having a social position, and making life more entertaining and enjoyable. Science-related factors can be listed as academic development, wishing to become an academician, and working for the improvement of science. Connected to the outside elements, external factors consist of the impact of family, colleagues, peers, and academic environment (Incikabi et al., 2013).

Isolation may stem from different reasons such as being older or younger than other GSs, having a full-time job, residing far away from the graduate school, and having young children (Ericson & Bolliger, 2011; Thomas et al., 2007). Students in their undergraduate schools can engage with various activities offered by their universities to minimize their feeling of isolation. However, GSs seem to be uninterested in those activities, which may cause the feeling of repeating the same things, and result in isolation (Kohun & Ali, 2005). The feeling of isolation may even lead to attrition among doctoral students (Hawlery, 2003; Lewis et al., 2004).

The reasons for feeling isolated can show differences in the years that GSs go through. As Ali and Kohun (2006) stated, the first years of graduate studies may confuse GSs about the program and the requirements, which may lead to a feeling of left behind. Graduate programs leave their students alone in dealing with such feelings, and students who are unprepared for that psychological isolation may result in dropping out of graduate school (Ali & Kohun, 2006). During their second year, especially doctoral students are challenged by several factors, such as taking a comprehensive qualifier exam and finding a research topic for their dissertations. Since these students take this exam alone and have unique dissertation topics, the process may make them feel isolated from their peers, which may also lead to the feelings of left behind and overwhelmed (Ali & Kohun, 2006). Furthermore, time constraints during the dissertation writing process may isolate GSs from their social lives and puts the student under pressure (Hockey, 1994). Also, this type of individual work prevents students from getting help from their peers who are working on similar topics because of a lack of communication and leads to isolation as well (Hawlery, 2003).

### ***Academic Self-Efficacy***

Academic self-efficacy can be described as individuals' perceptions related to their own competencies required to attain their academic aims (Bandura, 1997) and one's opinions that s/he can accomplish a specific academic task (Schunk, 1991). According to Gökçek et al. (2013), students' perceptions play a crucial role in their graduate studies. The rise in students' perceptions related to their academic studies leads them to achieve in a more natural way (Gökçek et al., 2013). Academic self-efficacy is detected to have a direct connection with performance and expectations in academic settings and also indirect one with stress, satisfaction, and dedication to carry out the studies (Chemers et al., 2001).

Affiliation, critical thinking skills, involvement, professional skills, knowledge, and absences have been found to play an effective role in self-efficacy levels of GSs (Byer, 2002). Furthermore, some studies have found out a relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety in an academic environment. Solberg and Viliarreal (1997) conducted a study in a Latino college setting, and the

outcomes of the study indicated a significant negative relationship was found between students' academic self-efficacy and anxiety. Similarly, research conducted in US and Turkish contexts found out a negative correlation between self-efficacy and anxiety (Merç, 2016; Torres & Solberg, 2001)

### **Problems of GSs**

MA and PhD students can encounter problems at different levels of graduate studies (course phase and dissertation phase) and many researchers focused these problems in the literature as problems related to their advisors (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Çoruk et al., 2016; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013), work and managerial sources (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Çoruk et al., 2016; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013; Sayan & Aksu, 2005;), family and finance (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013), courses, program, and research (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Aslan, 2010; Çoruk et al., 2016; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013), and professors (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013; Sayan & Aksu, 2005).

According to Arabacı and Akıllı (2013), GSs may indicate that they have problems with their advisors due to miscommunication, insufficient guidance and help, conflict in ideas, having different research interests from the advisor, and advisor's rejection to the dissertation topic. In another study, Çoruk et al. (2016) listed some problems occurred related to advisors which were enrolment problems to a course on account of not announcing the scores on time, lack of guidance related to course choices, communication problems such as failing to reach to advisors, and problems depending on lack of communication between students and lecturer. Additionally, Gömleksiz and Yıldırım (2013) found out some other problems emerging from miscommunication, time constraints, and insufficient help of the advisors.

One of the problems that GSs mostly encounter is to take permission for their courses from their work (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013). Similarly, Çoruk et al. (2016) have also pointed out inappropriate course days and hours, difficulties in attending to those courses, and limited time for completing the course period as problems for the working students in the same category. Some of the GSs complain of their heavy workload, and they express that they cannot study properly for their graduate lessons due to these reasons (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013). Sayan and Aksu (2005) focused on another group of GSs who were not academic staff and reported their problems related to their requirements of the workplaces as taking permission from their working institutions, having courses and other duties in their working places, and determining the place of appointment. Moreover, the outcomes of this study revealed that some of their administrators and colleagues' attitudes and behaviours towards their academic studies were negative (Sayan & Aksu, 2005).

Çoruk et al. (2016) emphasized the issue of planning the course schedule and arranging many courses on the same day for the sake of preventing the attendance problem. Therefore, students struggle with a busy course day that may lead to exhaustion. GSs may also have difficulties in carrying out research (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013), understanding methods and techniques (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Aslan, 2010), using statistics (Aslan, 2010), dealing with quantitative and qualitative data analysis (Aslan, 2010), getting prepared for the exams (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013), evaluating the process (Aslan, 2010; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013), reviewing the literature (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013), considering research ethics, preparing a project, finding a topic for their thesis (Aslan, 2010), and combining theory and practice, utilizing various procedures and techniques for research (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013; Sezgin et al. 2011).

The lecturer related problems can be listed as having different expectations from the course lecturers, reflection of their personal problems to the students, and misdirection for the requirements of the courses (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013). In the study of Sayan and Aksu (2005), it was reported that lecturers had negative attitudes towards the GSs who were not academic staff.

In the previous studies, a broad picture has been drawn related to GSs as a whole. In the studies discussed so far, GSs' perceptions have been investigated, especially in department-based. The purposes of these studies have been to reveal students' feelings, problems, and ways of handling these problems within the scope of specific departments. Although the studies have mainly focused on specific areas (Çimen, 2015; Dogan & Abd-El-Khalick, 2008; Özcan, 2014), to the knowledge of the researchers of the present study, a scarcity of research has been found focusing on GSs' in ELT Department. The perceptions and ideas of the GSs should be investigated in order to shed light on the issues and guide for the other members dedicating themselves in this way. The manuscripts should be prepared in the form of "Introduction", "Method", "Findings (Findings and Discussion)" and "Conclusion (Conclusion and Discussion)". In the introduction part of the manuscripts, information should be given about the purpose and importance of the study, a theoretical framework should be established and a literature review should be made. Research problems for qualitative research, research questions or hypotheses for quantitative research must be given.

### **Method**

The current study was designed as qualitative research. The qualitative study aims to be able to comprehend the central phenomenon in detail (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the purpose was to have a comprehensive understanding of the feelings and problems of ELT GSs. Furthermore, this study adopts a Phenomenological Approach used for the individual or a group of people to investigate, define, explain, and interpret the rich details in the meaning, structure, and essence of the experiences about a case (Grbich, 2013; Patton, 2002). Thus, the researchers of this study aimed to define, explain, and interpret the feelings and problems of ELT GSs studying in GE programs of different state universities in Turkey.

### **Participants and Research Site**

Participants were chosen among students pursuing their graduate studies in ELT at different state universities in central and south Anatolia in Turkey. In determining participants, purposeful sampling method, a term for qualitative sampling, was used. Purposeful sampling aims to specifically select sites or individuals in order to have a deeper understanding of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Due to its nature of presenting the complexity of the world by demonstrating various perspectives of human beings, it is crucial to construct that complexity in the selection of participants. For this reason, using maximal variation sampling, the participants were chosen among GSs who were at different phases of their graduate programs. The maximal variation sampling strategy is generally used for cases and individuals having specific distinctive characteristics to be studied comprehensively (Creswell, 2012). Participants' age, gender, profession, and the phase they are at in their graduate studies are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
*Participants' gender, age, profession, and phase*

	Gender	Age	Profession	Phase
P1	female	23	Research Assistant	At the beginning of the MA course phase
P2	female	25	English Teacher & Principal at a state secondary school	In the phase of taking Master's courses
P3	female	26	Research Assistant	In the phase of writing Master's thesis
P4	female	27	English Language Instructor	Just finished writing Master's thesis/going to defend her thesis
P5	female	27	Research Assistant	In the phase of taking Ph.D. courses
P6	female	38	English Language Instructor	At the end of Ph.D. courses
P7	female	26	Research Assistant	In the phase of preparing for the comprehensive qualifier exam
P8	female	32	Research Assistant	In the phase of writing a Ph.D. dissertation

In total, eight GSs studying at MA and Ph.D. programs in English language teaching were included in this study. In order to provide maximal variation, one student was chosen from each phase of the graduate program. Among all these participants, P2, P4, and P6 were commuters and were coming from outside the city to complete their degrees. P4 and P6 spent approximately four hours, and P2 spent nearly 16 hours each week on the road.

The research assistants were supposed to fulfil some departmental duties apart from dealing with their own studies. These duties assisted some BA degree courses, invigilating midterm, and final exams, having some administrative duties (e.g., being the Erasmus exchange program coordinator). P2, as a principal in a state secondary school, had a relatively less loaded course program. However, she had managerial duties and responsibilities. P4 worked as an English instructor at a private university. She taught English approximately five hours each week at the School of Foreign Languages, offering preparatory courses.

Additionally, she worked at the testing office of the same department, which took most of her time and effort. P6 was an English instructor, and she worked in a state university at the School of Foreign Languages. Her weekly schedule includes approximately 15 hours, and she had the duty of an in-service teacher training coordinator. All participants were single except for P6. While P4 stayed with her family, the others led a single life. P6 was married, and she had an eight-year-old boy. During her weekly travels for Ph.D. courses, she stayed at the house of her mother living in the same city with the university, from which P6 took her Ph.D. courses.

A wide range of courses is offered to these students from their graduate programs, including methodology, research, and linguistics. The students are required to attend all the lessons and fulfill the other requirements in order to pass these courses. Among those requirements, the students are supposed to make presentations, write research articles, read the weekly assigned articles and chapters, take a midterm, final exams, and so on. In order to graduate from ELT MA and Ph.D. programs, students have to take all the necessary credits and courses in addition to writing a thesis.

#### **Data Collection Tool and Procedure**

In order to collect data, semi-structured interview questions were prepared by the researchers. Semi-structured interviews include a set of pre-prepared questions in an open-ended format to elicit elaborated answers to the issues raised (Dörnyei, 2007). As Dörnyei further states, this type of interview aims to guide and direct the interviewee, but leave some space for elaboration on some interesting issues. In this way, the researcher gains an in-depth overview of the interviewee's story. Therefore, eight questions were constructed, and checked by two experts on qualitative research in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the data collection tool. Furthermore, the interview questions were also piloted with two GSs from both MA and Ph.D. ELT

programs. Necessary changes were made in wording in order to enhance the comprehensibility of the questions.

At the beginning of the interview, the researchers asked the first two questions, “How long have you been a graduate student” and “what is your daily life like a graduate student” to create an initial rapport with their interviewees. Later on, four questions aiming to understand the feelings of the participants were posed: “why did you decide to have an academic career”, “has being a graduate student been what you expected and what did you expect before entering the program”, “how do you feel as a graduate student”, and “what kind of experiences make you feel like that”. Lastly, two questions were directed to elicit the problems that GSs may encounter or had already encountered and possible solutions they would offer: “what potential problems might GSs experience during this process” and “have you experienced any of these problems and how did you deal with it”. As a final closing question, researchers asked the participants the following question: “is there anything else you would like to add?”.

One-on-one interviews took place for each participant. This type of data collection process requires the researcher to ask previously planned questions to each participant at a time (Creswell, 2012). Before the interviews, the consent of the participants was taken, and they were informed that their responses and identities would be kept confidential. The questions were directed to the participants in a quiet environment whenever the interviewees were available. The researchers recorded the answers. All the interviews were conducted in interviewees’ native language (Turkish) in order to eliminate any language barriers and help participants reveal their thoughts freely. The quotations taken from the scripts were translated into English by the researcher and checked by another expert from the field.

### **Data Analysis**

Data gathered from interviews were analysed qualitatively. In the analysis of qualitative data, the Inductive Analysis Method was adopted. Inductive analysis is generally defined as revealing patterns, themes, and categories in a data set. In other words, inductive analysis is expressed as the analysis from the data (Patton, 2002). If there is a structure sought in accordance to answer the research questions of the data, deductive analysis is preferred (Yurdakul, 2016). Hence, the researchers of this study aimed to seek feelings and problems of ELT GSs in line with the categories of the previous research on GE.

The researchers transcribed the recorded answers of the interviewees. The transcriptions were analysed by two researchers in the field separately by coding the data under the categories of feelings and problems. Later on, the codes determined by these researchers were analysed together by discussing each and every utterance of each participant leading to that code in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. As the next step, the codes were grouped under sub-themes, and a total of 23 sub-themes were determined under two main themes: feelings and problems of ELT GSs. In the method section, it should be explained in detail how the work was done and ethical rules were followed. In this section, it is suggested to include research model, participants, data collection tools, data analysis, validity and reliability subtitles. Qualitative research should also include the role of researcher.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The data collected through interviews with eight participants have been grouped under two main themes: feelings and problems. Each theme is presented under a sub-title. Even though each case represents one stage, the participants did talk about their previous stages and their feelings. Therefore, the themes and sub-themes were exemplified and explained by taking more than one participant into account.

### Feelings of ELT GSs

As a result of the data analysis, a total of 17 sub-themes have emerged at four different stages of graduate studies of the participants and grouped under the first main theme: 'feelings'. The distribution of the sub-themes, according to the first main theme, is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

*The distribution of sub-themes according to the main theme 1: feelings*

Sub-themes according to the main theme 1: feelings
<i>At the beginning of the GE, students feel...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anxious</li> <li>• confused</li> <li>• disappointed</li> <li>• dissatisfied</li> </ul>
<i>During the courses, students feel...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• satisfied</li> <li>• motivated</li> <li>• self-confident</li> <li>• under pressure</li> </ul>
<i>While writing their theses, students feel...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• excited</li> <li>• indecisive</li> <li>• demotivated</li> <li>• isolated</li> <li>• under pressure</li> </ul>
<i>After writing their theses, students feel...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unconfident</li> <li>• anxious</li> <li>• dissatisfied</li> <li>• relieved</li> </ul>

At the beginning of the GE, the participants mostly felt anxious, confused, disappointed, and dissatisfied. P1 and P3 mostly articulated these negative feelings. According to P3, she felt anxious about her perceived low self-efficacy at the beginning of the courses. She stated her feeling as:

"I mean, I always had this question in my mind whether I can do it or not. As anxiety, I was seriously anxious about whether I can do it. However, later on, as I moved into the courses, and yes, as I worked on something, I thought I could do this...I was always suspicious about whether I can achieve it. But, after the courses, I gained confidence in myself." (P3)

It has been known that increased anxiety among GSs is related to low self-esteem levels (Hudd et al., 2000). P3 indicated that her anxiety was a result of her not believing in her success in the courses. According to Gökçek et al. (2014), self-efficacy is a crucial element in pursuing graduate studies and leads to success. If students feel that they are not competent in meeting the requirements of their courses, as P3 did, then it is not surprising that they experience a decay in their self-efficacy, dedication to carry out these courses and satisfaction, and an increase in anxiety levels (Chemers et al., 2001). The participant had low self-efficacy levels believing that she had a lack of skills, knowledge, or other absences, which are some of the factors affecting self-efficacy (Byer, 2002). The feelings of anxiety and confusion was uttered by GSs pursuing their MA studies, which shows that as students move on in their GE processes they somehow figure out dealing with these feelings. Thus, it can be said that GSs can better manage this process in time.

In terms of dissatisfaction, P1 indicated that she was not very satisfied when she first encountered the courses. She was expecting a bit more sophisticated and theoretical knowledge compared to the courses she had taken in BA. She was expecting to deepen her scientific

knowledge and enhance this knowledge with current innovations in the field, which are factors affecting people's choices to become an academician in Turkey (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013, İncikabi et al., 2013). For this reason, P1's lack of satisfaction can be explained by her enthusiasm to learn new things in the field. At the first stage of MA, this enthusiasm should be met by the lecturers of MA programs in order to meet the expectations of their GSs.

Contrary to the beginning of GE, the participants indicated both positive and negative feelings while they had graduate courses. P2, who was an English teacher and a school principal at a state secondary school and taking MA courses at the time of the interview, indicated that when she started taking courses, she felt more professionally satisfied and self-confident, which can be counted as positive feelings at this stage. According to P2, she enhanced her knowledge in the field as she took more and more courses on English language teaching, which helped lessons with secondary school children. Likewise, P5, who was at the stage of taking Ph.D. courses, was glad to be a graduate student because academic studies were within her area of interest. P5 explained her satisfaction as:

"When I graduated from the university, I did not work for a while. I was interested in academic studies. I did not want to work neither as a teacher at a state school nor as an instructor at a university. I was interested in academic studies more... Now, I am happy to be here." (P5)

P5's desire to become a member of academic community shows similarity with the outcomes of previous studies conducted on GSs in Turkey for one of the motives to pursue an academic career as being an expert in the field of study (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013; İncikabi et al., 2013; Ören et al., 2012; Savaş & Topak, 2005). In P2's statements, it is seen that her professional satisfaction is heavily related to her eagerness to enhance her knowledge in her field of study. Being well equipped (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013) is also observed to be connected with being academically motivated for learning in P2's situation. As Entwistle (1968) states, there is a positive correlation between these two factors. These results indicate that, Turkish ELT GSs feel motivated and qualified when they see themselves as experts in their fields of study.

Being professionally self-confident was another feeling that P2 uttered in her interview. P2 felt productive and prestigious in front of her students, and she made a difference in her professional life after taking MA courses which were also feelings found in a previous study (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013). Similarly, one of the sources of Ph.D. students' happiness was conducting effective academic studies and publishing them. P7 expressed her satisfaction with this situation, and this is consistent with the outcomes yielded in the research of Gömleksiz and Yıldırım (2013) that candidates would like to improve them for carrying out successful studies. In the present study, P7 was also aware of the financial support of her university that was not the same for all academicians, and she was content with this situation and felt lucky. P5 also expressed her happiness in having academic studies. She explained her pleasure with overlapping of her sense of wonder and love of learning new things with one requirement of carrying out an academic study.

"We constantly see new things related to our own area or statistics. If you like studying always and being a student, it will be appropriate for you. Thus, I am delighted. I always consider searching for new things. When I hear something new, I need to search it from Google, and this is what I do for all the other things in my life. So, it is very good for me." (P5)

These results are in good agreement with the other studies that pointed out having scientific knowledge and being up to date to the innovations in the field (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013), and being aware of the current topics (İncikabi et al., 2013). Therefore, they will not feel fallen behind contemporary researchers and this triggers their motivation to continue their studies. Moreover, P5 also stated to be satisfied with contributing to the academic area despite having difficult times. This outcome concurs with the one concluded in the study of İncikabi, et al. (2013) namely "academic development" and "working for the improvement of science", and also in the study of Gömleksiz and Yıldırım (2013) in terms of "being an academician", "contributing to the field", and

“making a difference in professional life.” This also shows that, no matter how difficult it is for some GSs, they feel happy that they form the building blocks of the field as researchers. Producing, being excepted as researchers and seeing the results of their efforts lead to satisfaction among ELT GSs.

Similarly, one of the participants, P5, expressed her “motivation” as a crucial element for carrying out successful studies. She emphasized the need for constant development. According to her, it is not possible to maintain academic studies without having internal motivation. Similarly, P6 also highlighted the importance of professional development for her case. Her intrinsic motivation can be clearly understood from her internal speech as follows:

“You are doing this because you want it, so I have to study not for completing the courses quickly and becoming an assistant professor but for learning new things.” (P6)

In terms of internal motivation, these results agree with those of Incikabi et al. (2013). Moreover, it can be clearly seen that both P5, who was a research assistant, and P6, who was an instructor living and working in another city, indicated that they were motivated highly for pursuing academic studies. Arising from internal factors, both P5 and P6 reported having a desire to learn new things and developing their abilities. Therefore, even though P1, talked about how she was confused at the very beginning of this process, P2 stated positive feelings and gains after taking some courses. Even though these courses put P2 under pressure, at least she knew what to do in her professional life with the knowledge she gained from those courses. She blamed heavy load of course requirements and limited time to meet those requirements for putting her under pressure. She explained these two sources for this negative feeling as:

“Especially, there is a known fact named homework load that there are times that you write 75 annotated. This can take 50-55 pages, depending on yourself. Reading and analyzing them one-by-one. I think this is an excessive load for a course. As said, you are conducting research. And this happens only in one term. The course lasts one term. The thing you want to do sometimes does not emerge in one term. It sometimes becomes roughly sketched out thing.” (P2)

P2 pointed out here actually how important time-management is and how it is related to anxiety. Similarly, attending Ph.D. courses, P5 pointed out her feeling of being under pressure as the unclear criteria for papers that GSs have to prepare until the end of the course period. The part(s) that professors wanted them to submit for a date or due date for the paper could be uncertain in some courses, which caused stress for her. Feeling under pressure is one of the ways that anxiety emerges in a person. As Hudd et al. (2000) suggest, there is a positive correlation between two factors, and as time-management problems increase, GSs’ anxiety levels increase as well. The course load is more or less the same in all ELT graduate programs. There may be little differences, but students have to keep up with many reading assignments, presentations, papers, and so on. Therefore, by looking at the feelings that emerged after this overload and the quality of the works, the curriculum may be reconsidered and be disburdened for these students.

Having a family, P6 had different roles and responsibilities than the other participants. For instance, one of her social roles was to bring up her little son, and she spent time with him, and her husband and other family members helped her with her responsibilities related to her son. On the other hand, she was a graduate student, and she tried to study as much as possible, and she had success in her Ph.D. studies. Therefore, she reported having feelings of great pleasure with both her family and herself. Thus, P6 was a very good example as a mother, wife, and, at the same time, being a Ph.D. candidate at the age of 40 with the support of her family.

While writing their thesis, the participants reported that they mostly experienced negative feelings such as being indecisive, demotivated, isolated, and under pressure. Recent studies have reported that GSs feel tedious and anxious and have low self-efficacy levels with a decrease in their critical thinking abilities when they have to conduct research (Bökeoğlu & Yılmaz, 2005;

Tekin, 2007; Köksal & Razi, 2011). P3 stated that she was excited when she passed to the thesis writing stage. Along with this excitement, she also expressed being indecisive in finding a research topic for her thesis. The biggest dilemma she was in was whether the research topic she chose was a valid one or not. This question even encompassed her daily life. Most GSs have difficulty in finding a research topic for their thesis (Aslan, 2010). It can be concluded that GSs, especially in MA degrees, do not reach the necessary levels to be able to devise and conduct a research independently. Thus, guiding these GSs is significant to eliminate the above stated negative feelings before they progress to writing their theses.

Another negative feeling that was stated by two cases was feeling under pressure. According to them, they felt under pressure because of two reasons: (1) the deadlines of each stage in the thesis process and (2) being alone at all the stages of this process. Advisors' lack of guidance, communication problems, and their insufficient help can sometimes cause negative feelings for GSs (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Çoruk et al., 2016; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013). In this case, P4 suffered from being under pressure since she was all alone at all stages of the thesis writing process. She stated her feelings as:

“Actually, I thought it would be easier. Previously I thought that the lecturers would be more helpful. However, it did not turn out as I expected. I saw that I have all the responsibility. I mean, you have to decide on everything on your own from all of the literature review to what kind of research you will conduct. I mean, my situation was like that. I never get any help from my advisory at those points. I decided on everything on my own.” (P4)

These show the importance of being supported in the whole process of GE and the participants' utterances indicate that ELT GSs are left alone by their professors especially in their decisions with theses and dissertations, which cause undertaking more responsibilities that one GS can take. The reason for this can be the heavy work load that professors have and as a result limits their time in advising GSs.

Apart from these negative feelings, P3 explained her excitement as being happy and zealous at this stage. Both of these good feelings can be related to completing something during MA. As Gömleksiz and Yıldırım (2013) found out in their study, being an academician is one of the motives that GSs have in pursuing their academic studies. It can be seen in P3's statements that she was quite eager to be an academician, and that made her feel happy in all the stages she accomplished. P3's positive feelings are the ones that all students should experience. Even though she felt indecisive and under pressure like P4, she did not indicate any loneliness during these stages. This may be a distinctive factor in both cases' feelings. As they stated earlier, P3 was a research assistant at the university she pursued her MA, but P4 lived in another city, and she had a distant relationship with her advisor. The distance factor may affect the feelings of these GSs. Therefore, it can be said that being close to their advisors can help students develop more positive feelings during this stage.

Another participant, P8, desired to learn something while taking pleasure while writing her Ph.D. dissertation. Instead of completing it, she would like to develop her knowledge and skills. Her intrinsic motivation played a crucial role in this developmental process. This outcome is similar to the results revealed in the study of Incikabi et al. (2013) at the point of making graduate student's life more entertaining as engaging in academic studies. According to the participants' statements, they were happy with being a member of an academic environment and motivated for improving their knowledge and skills that were also concluded in the other studies (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013; Incikabi et al., 2013; Ören et al., 2012; Savaş & Topak, 2005).

The participants also indicated feelings of isolation and demotivation while they were writing their thesis. P4 highlighted isolation. Even though she tried to make plans and work in a disciplined way, she expressed how hard it was as:

"I cut down on my hobbies, thinking that I have to finish my thesis. Especially reading books, I mean. Instead of relaxing at the weekends, I read for my thesis. The thesis always occupied my mind." (P4)

It is known that GSs have role conflicts in their academic and personal lives (Hudd et al., 2000). Instead of being occupied with daily activities, especially at the weekends, like other people, P4 struggled between the thesis and daily life. She even indicated guilt for her priorities and choices, similar to the findings of other studies (Offstein et al., 2004). Furthermore, the time constraint at the thesis writing process has been found to be another factor isolating students from their social lives by putting them under pressure (Hockey, 1994). Therefore, as P4, being planned and disciplined can be helpful for the students suffering from the same problem.

Sometimes being a bit more involved in daily activities may cause GSs to lose their motivation to continue writing their thesis as P4 has stated in her interview. For her, demotivation was another big problem, and she handled it by finding her own intrinsic motivational factor.

"If you give, you dishearten yourself, and it is hard to be readapted. Also, my biggest support was having a Tübitak scholarship. I worked a little for taking Tübitak [the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey] scholarship and keep up with its deadline. If I had not had Tübitak scholarship, I could have pretexted such as giving a little break, and so on."

As Bozanoğlu (2004) states, in order to produce academic work, it is essential to have the necessary energy. Therefore, GSs should find some deadlines or some other motivational factors to trigger their energy to continue their studies, especially at the thesis stage.

At the end of writing the thesis, GSs felt unconfident, anxious, and dissatisfied, but at the same time relieved. The last case P4, who was at the end of her thesis writing process and was about to present her thesis, stated that even though she was relieved that she finished the writing process, she still had a lack of self-confidence and satisfaction and felt anxious. According to P4, her anxiety was due to the doubt she had on her topic of the thesis. GSs show low self-esteem levels in determining their research topic (Bökeoğlu & Yılmaz, 2005) and when P4's situation is taken into consideration during the thesis writing process, her being indecisive and under pressure due to being alone at that stage seems to cause her to feel anxious at the end. She stated her feelings as:

"I was never sure. I do something, and I need to send it to my advisor, but I always have questions in my mind. It took a long time to get a response from her... As I said, I mostly did not find the feedback I got very satisfying. For this reason, I still feel distressed. I mean, I feel anxious. Is the thing I have done valid? Is the study I have done so far acceptable for everyone?" (P4)

Therefore, the help of the advisor is one of the most critical elements during the thesis writing process. For P4, the feedback was quite remarkable. Since her advisor did not give enough guidance, in the end, she ended up feeling anxious about the validity of her thesis. Additionally, she indicated that she did not feel confident about her thesis, considering the possibility that the jury members would think negatively about her thesis. Feeling the support of the advisor seems quite essential for a graduate student, especially at the presentation stage. If a graduate student has reached the final stage with a hesitance at every phase, it will not be surprising that this student suffers from a lack of self-confidence. In order to be able to defend her study in front of other lecturers, the student needs to be sure about his/her thesis. Telkin's (2007) study has found out that there is a negative correlation between GSs' anxiety levels and research self-efficacy. P4 indicated having low self-efficacy for the research she conducted for her thesis, and this resulted in low self-confidence for her.

Having completed all the stages except for the presentation of the thesis, P4's overall assessment of her experience yielded that she was not satisfied at the end of this process due to her expectations for the kind of knowledge she gained. She was an English instructor at a private

university in the school of foreign languages, and she taught English as a foreign language. This requires her to enhance her teaching abilities in her field, as well. For this reason, she stated that she had expected to gain more practical knowledge. However, the MA program provided her with more theoretical knowledge, which made her somewhat satisfied with the program. Studies have shown that GSs mostly have problems in combining theory and practice (Sezgin et al., 2011; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013). In P4's situation, she may have the necessary knowledge to combine theory and practice, but could have problems and lack of knowledge in how to do so.

### Problems of ELT GSs

A total of seven sub-themes have emerged for the second main theme: problems as a result of the data analysis process. The distribution of sub-themes, according to the second main theme, is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

*The distribution of sub-themes according to the main theme 2: problems*

Sub-themes according to the main theme 2: problems
<i>At the beginning of the GE, students face problems related to...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of knowledge literature search</li> </ul>
<i>During the courses, students face problems related to...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• commuting</li> <li>• limited time</li> </ul>
<i>While writing their theses, students face problems related to...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of knowledge on...               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ research methods</li> <li>○ literature search</li> <li>○ statistics</li> </ul> </li> <li>• lack of support from advisors</li> </ul>

At this first stage of the GE process, P1 stated that she had a problem in not knowing how to find and evaluate academic articles related to her research topic. Researchers have investigated the difficulties that GSs can come across and found out that carrying out research, reviewing the literature, and utilizing various techniques and procedures for research are some of the problems that they can encounter during their studies (Aslan, 2010; Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013; Sezgin et al., 2011). Especially for the ones who have just started their MA career, the above issues can be quite complicated and needed to be instructed by the lecturers before assigning them to the students. P1 was lucky enough to find answers to her questions since she was a research assistant and worked with her professors. She also asked her friends' help and look for information from the internet. Being surrounded by other academicians and lecturers is a beneficial thing for the starters. However, other GSs may not be as lucky as her. Before going deeper into the course stage, it is necessary to solve these kinds of problems so that fulfilling the other requirements will not be so difficult for GSs.

The participants stated that, during the courses, they faced problems concerning commuting and having limited time. P2 experienced these problems as her graduate school was very distant from the city she lived and she had limited time for excessive course requirements. P6 had a more challenging duty because she got married with one child who was only three years old. As similar to P2, she lived in another city and went there every week. She emphasized that becoming a Ph.D. student was one of her biggest dreams. However, it could be understood from her statements that it was not easy to have many responsibilities at the same time. According to Hudd et al. (2000), role conflict might be a problem due to having both academic and social responsibilities. P6 suggested that having a good time-management strategy could be a good solution for this problem. On the contrary, Offstein et al. (2004) mentioned even physical and mental illness as a result of not having a good balance between these responsibilities. Moreover, P6 believed that she was fortunate due to having the support of her family.

P2 was a director in a secondary school, and she was also teaching English at the same school. She had to spend weekly 16 hours on the road to take MA courses. Generally, for a Turkish graduate student, it is a big problem to take permission for their MA courses from their work (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013), but for P2, this was not the issue. She stated her problem as:

“... If you are living far away from the city in which the university you are taking you MA courses... travelling- I had many friends working at schools of Ministry of Education- is very problematic... The lecturers do not really care about the students' situation. For example, if the courses can be done on Fridays or Mondays, it will be easier for the ones who travel. However, I travel here in the middle of the week, on Wednesdays. I go directly to my school when I return from MA courses. This makes me a bit dizzy.” (P2)

The inappropriate course days and difficulties in attending the courses have already been highlighted in the Turkish context (Çoruk et al., 2016). This problem even doubled by another one, as Arabacı and Akıllı's (2013) study revealed that the heavy workload of students prevents them from studying their courses and fulfilling the course requirements accurately. Connected with this issue, P2 expressed having problems with time as well. She indicated that:

“I come home and do my homework after school. I have a schedule. I have to stick to my schedule. Every week there is an intensive reading, article, field research and so on. Generally, for each course, they want a research paper. They want us to write an article. Moreover, this is not an easy process. It cannot be done with a short term study. It requires a long term study.” (P2)

P2 found two solutions to this problem. As she stated, she had a schedule and studied regularly. She also indicated that graduate students at her university could ask for extra time for their final assignments. So, having extra time can be another solution for the ones who have similar problems like P2. Sometimes heavy workload can be a reason for GSs, and they cannot study properly (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013). Therefore, GSs should have good time-management skills in order to be successful at this stage which is also illustrated with the statement of P5 as follows:

“It is difficult to be a GSs and a research assistant at the same time because my job responsibilities dominated my daily life. I engage in my job responsibilities, mostly within the working hours. However, I try to study when I have free time. I search for articles and generally collect them within the working hours, and I read them at home in the evenings or at weekends. Although I have time to search at school, I read them and write my articles mostly at home.” (P5)

As another problem, P5 complained of changes at different stages of a Ph.D. For instance, she reported not being happy with unclear points expected for papers such as the parts to be submitted or due date for the assignments. She thought that unclear points made her anxious and desired a clear and detailed schedule as a solution to this problem. Accordingly, Arabacı and Akıllı (2013) emphasized a similar issue that P3 stated as a misdirection of course requirements. Moreover, P7 pointed out another problem that she did not experience any problem with her advisor; however, she observed that some GSs had communication problems with their advisors. As stated by P7, Arabacı, and Akıllı (2013), Çoruk et al. (2016), and Gömleksiz and Yıldırım (2013) also indicated a communication problem between the GSs and their advisors. P7 reported to have chances to observe different GSs, and according to her, some GSs could easily be offended professors' comments for their papers. She saw the source of this problem was a misunderstanding of these students. As for these situations, P7 advised to be honest and share their ideas with their advisors in a suitable manner.

This last stage seems to be the most problematic one among all others. The problems were retrieved from both P3, P4, and P8's interviews. Finding a research topic was a significant problem reported by both P7 and P8. According to P8, GSs had this difficulty due to not being autonomous in their studies. She indicated that the ability to control their decisions in various stages of

academic studies was important. Especially for solving this problem, students needed to read a lot and try to find their own way of finding a topic for an article or dissertation. She also reported that being autonomous was not only crucial in finding a research topic but also other stages, such as preparing for the qualifier exam. P8 had a different point of view in finding a solution to the same problem. She complained about the restricted time and having many responsibilities in both their job and Ph.D. courses. During the preparation and writing processes, she expected the guidance of professors more. Considering various parts of the writing process, she pointed out a pessimistic scenario that students may feel lost in a part of a study without the help of the professors. Thus, P8 believed that GSs needed to be guided by the professors regularly.

P8 also indicated another problem related to data collection during writing her dissertation. Due to being a research assistant and not having their own classes and students, she had to collect data from participants that she did not know. She felt stressed because she did not know whether she could handle any unexpected behaviour during data collection. Moreover, time restriction was another source that increased her anxiety at that period. She expected guidance from professors regularly during the process of writing an article. However, she stated that she was alone during the data collection procedure, and she had to find solutions for every single problem at this period. Research conducted on GSs have shown many advisor-related problems that students can encounter during their studies. Lack of guidance, failing to reach advisors, lack of communication (Çoruk et al., 2016), and time constraints (Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013) are found to be some of those highlighted problems. A new problem that can be added to this list was P4's insufficient feedback from her advisor, which was also a problem of the Ph.D. candidate P8:

"Writing articles constantly for the courses, every instructor may not provide any or detailed feedback. It can be more difficult to maintain feedback with the increasing number of students. It could be that you write an article just for the aim of having success in a course and it does not have any other purpose. Yes, the students also have some responsibilities at this point for publishing that paper. GSs should develop themselves to achieve this. In my opinion, students need the guidance of the instructors." (P8)

Furthermore, maybe as a source, the advisors' own workload can be another element in this list. To solve this kind of problem, P4 offered some actions that she did during this stage. She stated that examining another thesis, getting help from friends and experts, and taking all the responsibility at this process would make GSs overcome such a problem.

Little knowledge in research, problems in access to some databases, and lack of statistics knowledge were the issues that P3 stated for her experience during the thesis stage. GSs generally have problems in conducting research (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013) comprehending research methods and techniques (Aslan, 2010; Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013) and analysing quantitative and qualitative data (Aslan, 2010). Furthermore, GSs have been found to develop negative attitudes towards statistics (Mills, 2004). So, P3's problems can be found in the findings of the previous studies. However, the problem in accessing some databases can be emphasized and added to the list of problems that GSs have during this stage. For a solution to these problems, P3 indicated that she asked for lecturers' help, read books on the related topics, and searched the internet.

Although some of the feelings and problems were previously identified with other research in the field, there have been unique findings that all eight cases have stated in this study. Additionally, while many studies have focused on the problems and rarely given genuine solutions of that students have developed, these findings of the current study will shed light to feelings, problems and genuine solutions of GSs for each step, particularly in the field of English as Foreign Language Education MA and Ph.D. Programs.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to have a deeper understanding of the feelings and problems of ELT GSs in MA and Ph.D. programs in Turkey and how they handle their problems. The findings of this quantitative study demonstrated similar results with the previous studies conducted on GSs in Turkey (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Aslan, 2010; Bökeoğlu & Yılmaz, 2005; Çoruk et al., 2016; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013; Ören et al., 2012; Sezgin et al., 2011). However, in addition to the findings of these studies, this study highlighted different feelings, such as excitement, indecisiveness, pressure, lack of satisfaction, confusion, professional satisfaction, and self-confidence. Furthermore, what is also unique of this study is that these feelings have been stratified for each stage of MA and Ph.D. programs, indicating the sources as well. In order to support GSs when they experience these negative feelings, the awareness of their existence is of vital importance, most notably for the lecturers in ELT graduate programs.

Specific problems should also be taken into account in the restructuring of these programs. If some actions are to be taken, the field-specific problems such as problems in access to international databases should be solved, and maybe some extra courses on statistics can be put in the curriculum. Most importantly, the problem of distance has to be discussed in detail since ELT MA programs are rare in Turkey, and very few universities in big cities offer graduate studies in the field. As researchers (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2013; Çoruk et al., 2016; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013) have indicated, GSs are mostly the ones who have professions and families bringing many extra responsibilities for them in their daily lives. Therefore, even though it is challenging to consider the situations of each and every individual, the curriculum and course days can be organized in favor of the ones who are in a more hectic and challenging position. In this way, these students can focus on their graduate studies better, and the results will be more fruitful.

In sum, it is necessary to note here that the identification and solution of these problems are quite crucial for the success of GSs pursuing their academic careers. Considering the fact that MA is the first step in their careers, lecturers and graduate programs should provide as much help as they can. As Bülbül (2003) said, having young and hardworking brains in MA and Ph.D. studies not just contributes to the individuals, but also the development of the country as a whole.

## Implications for the GE departments

Considering the problems and feelings articulated by the ELT GSs in this study, there are some steps that professors and administrators can take. The professors can be aware of GSs feelings and problems that they may experience at the different stages during the process of GE. In order to overcome the problems related to insufficiency of knowledge, which is necessary to be able to complete successfully some steps, professors can determine a road map at the beginning of the courses with clear goals and assessment criteria, and make a plan with their GSs by taking their needs and expectations into consideration. Therefore, feelings such as confusion, indecisiveness, dissatisfaction and demotivation can be eliminated. Furthermore, problems related with time and commuting show that administrators should arrange GE weekly programs understanding the fact that their students have many responsibilities in their lives and have to deal with many things in limited time. Hence, instead of offering courses on various days of a week, the schedule can be arranged in favour of GSs and can be held in one or two successive days. Moreover, departments can arrange meetings for GSs to share their GE-related problems and feelings with their peers and professors to find solutions. In this way, more fruitful products can be achieved in GE process as

GSs will not feel isolated, confused and left alone. Additionally, considering professors' workload and professional and personal responsibilities, administrators can try to balance their requirements so that professors can spare more time for their GSs.

### Implications for the GSs

The results of this study suggest that some GSs should have a good program for balancing their social, occupational and academic lives so that they can spare enough time for their GE studies and research. Furthermore, GSs should prepare themselves mentally to meet the criteria in course contents. That is, they have to have high readiness levels for a GE considering that it is a long journey with many requirements such as time, energy and effort. GSs should also have healthy communication with their advisors and all other instructors so that they can share their problems or any feelings in order to overcome and continue their studies without interruption. Furthermore, these students should be open to new ideas suggested by the instructors and evaluate the ideas maintained by instructors objectively. Since this is an ongoing process, GSs should develop themselves and update their knowledge continually.

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a graduate student?
2. What is your daily life like as a graduate student?
3. Has being a graduate student been what you expected? Why? /Why not? What did you expect before entering the program?
4. How do you feel as a graduate student?
5. What kinds of experiences make you feel like that? Give examples.
6. What potential problems might GSs experience during this process?
7. Have you experienced any of these problems? How did you deal with it?

### Genişletilmiş Özet

Bilim insanları, akademisyenler ve üst düzey yöneticiler yetiştirmenin önemli bir adımı olan lisansüstü eğitim, bir ülkenin çeşitli konularını araştırmak ve ihtiyaç duyduğu yüksek kaliteli işgücünü yetiştirmek için temel bir sorumluluk taşır. Lisansüstü eğitim alanında yapılmış çalışmalar, bu süreç boyunca öncelikli olarak lisansüstü öğrencilerin çeşitli sorunlarına odaklanmış ve bu sorunlara çözümler sunmaya çalışmıştır. Ayrıca lisansüstü öğrencilerin tutumları ve lisansüstü öğretim programlarının etkinliği de bir süredir araştırılmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, alan yazında lisansüstü öğrencilerinin bu süreçler içerisinde çalışmaları sırasında ortaya çıkan duyguları üzerine yapılmış çalışmaların azlığı öne çıkmaktadır. Ayrıca, Türkiye bağlamında, lisans derecesi sunan İngilizce Öğretmenliği bölümlerinin sayısı artmakta ve sonuç olarak bu alandaki yüksek eğitilmiş profesyonellere olan ihtiyaç da ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu nedenle, lisansüstü eğitimin kalitesini arttırmak ve mevcut koşullara işaret etmek için İngiliz dili eğitimi lisansüstü öğrencilerinin sorunlarının, algılarının ve duygularının derinlemesine araştırılması gerekmektedir. Böylece akademisyenlerin yanı sıra İngiliz dili eğitimi lisansüstü programlarında okuyan lisansüstü öğrenciler için kapsamlı bir çerçeve sunulabilecektir. Bir diğer önemli nokta, mevcut çalışma ile lisansüstü öğrencilerin mesleki gelişim süreçlerine ilişkin alan yazına katkı sağlanacaktır. Mevcut çalışma nitel araştırma olarak desenlemiştir ve böylece merkezi olguyu ayrıntılı olarak kavrayabilmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmadaki amaç, İngiliz dili eğitimi lisansüstü öğrencilerinin duyguları ve sorunları hakkında kapsamlı bir anlayışa sahip olmaktır. Ayrıca bu çalışma, bir vaka hakkında bireyin veya bir grup insanın deneyimlerinin anlam, yapı ve özündeki zengin ayrıntıları araştırmak, tanımlamak, açıklamak ve yorumlamak için Fenomenolojik Yaklaşımı benimsemektedir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın araştırmacıları Türkiye'deki farklı devlet üniversitelerinin İngiliz dili eğitimi lisansüstü programlarında okuyan

İngilizce öğretmenlerinin duygu ve sorunlarını tanımlamayı, açıklamayı ve yorumlamayı amaçlamıştır. Katılımcılar, Türkiye'de Orta ve Güney Anadolu'da bulunan farklı devlet üniversitelerinde İngiliz dili eğitimi alanında yüksek lisans ve doktora eğitimine devam eden öğrenciler arasından seçilmiştir. Katılımcıların belirlenmesinde amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Toplamda, sekiz lisansüstü öğrencisi bu çalışmaya dâhil edilmiştir. Maksimum çeşitliliği sağlamak için, lisansüstü programlarının her aşamasından bir öğrenci seçilmiştir. Veri toplamak için araştırmacılar tarafından yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları hazırlanmıştır. Veri toplama aracının güvenilirliğini artırmak için nitel araştırma konusunda iki uzman tarafından sekiz soru oluşturulmuş ve kontrol edilmiştir. Ayrıca, mülakat soruları, hem yüksek lisans hem de doktora iki lisansüstü öğrencisi ile pilot uygulama olarak yapılmıştır. Görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler nitel olarak analiz edilmiş ve verilerin analizinde tümevarımsal analiz yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Sekiz katılımcı ile yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda toplanan veriler iki ana tema altında gruplanmıştır: duygular ve sorunlar. Lisansüstü eğitimlerinin başlangıcında öğrenciler endişeli, şaşkın, hüsrana uğramış, hoşnutsuz gibi duygular hissetmişlerdir. Ders dönemleri sırasında öğrenciler, memnun, motive, kendine güvenen, baskı altında ve tezlerini yazarken uyarılmış, motive olmuş, yalıtılmış ve baskı altında hissettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Son olarak, tezlerini yazdıktan sonra kendine güvenmeyen, endişeli, hoşnutsuz ama rahatlamış hissettiklerini söylemişlerdir. Veri analizi sonucu ortaya çıkan problemlere bakıldığında ise öğrenciler, lisansüstü eğitimin başında gerekli alan yazın araştırması için bilgi eksikliği, dersler esnasında yol ve zaman, tez yazma aşamasında ise araştırma yöntemleri, alan yazın taraması ve istatistik açısından problemler yaşadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca tez yazım aşamasında danışmanlarından gerekli desteği göremediklerini de eklemişlerdir. Bu nicel çalışmanın bulguları, Türkiye'deki lisansüstü öğrenciler üzerinde yapılan önceki çalışmalarla benzer sonuçlar ortaya koymuştur. Ancak bu çalışmaların bulgularına ek olarak, bu çalışma heyecan, kararsızlık, baskı, tatminsizlik, kafa karışıklığı, mesleki doyum ve özgüven gibi farklı duyguları vurgulamıştır. Dahası, bu çalışmanın da benzersiz olan yanı, bu duyguların yüksek lisans ve doktora derecelerinin her bir aşaması için katmanlaştırılmış olmasıdır. Özetle, sorunların ve duyguların tanımlanması ve çözümünün akademik kariyerlerini sürdüren lisansüstü öğrencilerin başarısı için oldukça önemli olduğunu belirtmek gerekir. İngiliz dili eğitimi lisansüstü öğrencileri tarafından dile getirilen sorunlar ve duygular göz önüne alındığında, profesörlerin ve yöneticilerin atabileceği bazı adımlar vardır. Profesörler, öğrencilerinin lisansüstü sürecinin farklı aşamalarında yaşayabilecekleri duygu ve sorunlarının farkında olabilmelidirler. Bazı aşamaları başarılı bir şekilde tamamlayabilmek için gerekli olan bilgi yetersizliği ile ilgili sorunların üstesinden gelmek için hocalar derslerin başında net hedefleri ve değerlendirme ölçütleri olan bir yol haritası belirleyebilir ve öğrencileri ile ihtiyaç ve beklentilerini dikkate alarak plan yapabilirler. Böylelikle kafa karışıklığı, kararsızlık, tatminsizlik ve motivasyon kaybı gibi duygular ortadan kaldırılabilir. Dahası, zaman ve işe gidip gelmeyle ilgili sorunlar, yöneticilerin, öğrencilerinin hayatlarında pek çok sorumluluğu olduğunu ve birçok şeyle sınırlı bir süre içinde uğraşmak zorunda olduklarını anlayarak lisansüstü eğitimin haftalık programlarını bunları göz önünde bulundurarak düzenlemeleri gerektiğini göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, haftanın çeşitli günlerinde kurslar sunmak yerine, programlar lisansüstü öğrencilerin lehine düzenlenebilir ve bir veya iki ardışık günde yapılabilir. Ayrıca bölümler, lisansüstü öğrenciler için lisansüstü eğitim ile ilgili sorunlarını ve duygularını meslektaşları ve profesörleri ile paylaşmak ve çözüm bulmaları üzere toplantılar düzenleyebilir. Bu şekilde, lisansüstü öğrenciler izole edilmiş, kafası karışmış ve yalnız bırakılmayacağından, lisansüstü eğitim sürecinde daha verimli ürünler elde edilebilir. Ek olarak, profesörlerin iş yükünü ve mesleki ve kişisel sorumluluklarını göz önünde bulundurarak, yöneticiler, profesörlerin öğrencilerine daha fazla zaman ayırabilmeleri için gereksinimlerini dengelemeye çalışabilirler. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, bazı lisansüstü öğrencilerin sosyal, mesleki ve akademik yaşamlarını dengelemek için iyi bir programa sahip olmaları gerektiğini, böylece lisansüstü eğitim çalışmalarına ve araştırmalarına yeterince zaman ayırabilmelerini önermektedir. Ayrıca, lisansüstü öğrenciler ders içeriklerindeki ölçütleri karşılamak için kendilerini zihinsel olarak hazırlamalıdır. Yani, zaman, enerji ve çaba gibi birçok gereksinimi olan uzun bir yolculuk olduğunu düşünürsek, bir lisansüstü eğitim için yüksek hazırlık seviyelerine sahip olmaları gerekir. Lisansüstü öğrenciler ayrıca danışmanları ve diğer tüm eğitimler ile

sağlıklı bir iletişim içinde olmalıdır, böylece problemlerini veya herhangi bir duygusunu paylaşarak öğrenimlerine ara vermeden devam edebilirler. Ayrıca bu öğrenciler, öğretim elemanlarının önerdiği yeni fikirlere açık olmalı ve öğretim elemanlarının sürdürdükleri fikirleri objektif olarak değerlendirmelidir. Bu devam eden bir süreç olduğundan, lisansüstü öğrenciler kendilerini geliştirmeli ve bilgilerini sürekli olarak güncellemelidir.