

**ORIGINAL PAPER**

**A Qualitative Study about Nursing Doctoral Education in Turkey**

**Hafize Özdemir, PhD**

Assistant Professor, Giresun University, Health Science Faculty Department of Nursing, Piraziz, Giresun Turkey

**Selda Yarali Arslan, PhD**

Assistant Professor, Selçuk University, Health Science Faculty Department of Nursing Konya, Turkey

**Sultan Taşçı, PhD**

Associate Professor, Erciyes University, Health Science Faculty Department of Nursing, Kayseri, Turkey

**Correspondence:** Hafize Özdemir, Assistant Professor, Giresun University, Health Science Faculty Department of Nursing Piraziz/ Giresun Turkey, E-mail: hafize.ozdemir@giresun.edu.tr

**Abstract**

**Background:** Doctoral education is important in nursing for the development of nursing science.

**Objective:** The aim of this study is to determine the problems in nursing doctoral education in Turkey and to contribute to solutions.

**Methodology:** In the study carried out qualitatively, the data was obtained through focus group interview with 8 nursing doctoral students.

**Results:** According to students' expressions; the support of consultant is deficient, curriculum of doctorate doesn't meet students' expectations, evaluation methods aren't suitable for them, they have excessive working loads in their business and neglect their families. Students are mostly supported by their lecturers who are responsible from the subject, fellows and families. The students look for their lecturers to make contribution to lessons ever more, to provide counselling in a more effective way, to choose their consultants, to revoke written examinations, to decrease working loads in their business during doctoral education and to hold a meeting with their lecturers.

**Conclusions:** Nursing educators need to understand problems of doctoral students. Some regulations in educational system can be helpful to overcome problems.

**Key Words:** doctoral education, nursing, problem

**Introduction**

Doctoral education is important in nursing for the development of nursing science. The doctoral education prepares the students develop the science of nursing through researches and theory; contribute to the science of nursing and professional leadership. According to Keogh (1997), the start of doctorate programs is an important process in completing the process of professionalism (Keogh, 1997).

In the last two decades, there was a significant increase in the doctoral programs in the world. During this period, various conferences, workshops and meetings were held for qualitative students, faculty, research and courses. As a result, it was concluded that qualitative academic programs are required to feel sure about the future of the nursing (Anderson, 2000).

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) reports that there are currently 92

doctoral programs in nursing available nationwide, including 86 research-focused (PhD, DNSc, DSN) and 6 clinically-focused programs (DNP, ND). An additional 13 doctoral programs in nursing are currently under development (Bartels).

Currently, it is known that there is an increase in the quantity of doctoral programs in our country while nursing programs continue in numerous countries. In our country, the number of universities having doctoral programs is ten. Although doctoral education in nursing is not a new concept in Turkey (1972), it has to confront various problems. There aren't enough studies in our country to determination and elimination of these problems.

The objective of this study is to determine the problems of doctoral programs of nursing and provide contributions to their solutions.

### **Methodology**

In the study performed in descriptive method, one of the qualitative research programs, in order to determine the opinions of the students of doctoral program for nursing about the program, the data was obtained through focus group interview method. This method was chosen since it enabled us provide the opportunity to obtain information related to the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of the participants in a comfortable environment. The qualitative research is a technique that is preferred in the systematical analysis of the meanings arises from the subjects who are examined or are planned to be examined (Ekiz, 2003). Through the qualitative method, human behavior can be analyzed via a flexible and totalitarian approach and the opinions and experiences of the individuals who are included the study gains a significant importance (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2000).

The study was carried out with the participation of 8 students who were enrolled to nursing doctoral programs of various universities. No other qualification was needed among the students who were accepted to the study except volunteering to participate.

### **The Place of the Study**

The study was conducted in the meeting room of nursing department at a university in June, 2009.

### **The Tools of Collecting Data**

The students were informed that the meeting will be recorded through tape recording and noting down and their voice recorded consents were obtained. The data was collected through a questionnaire consisting the demographic questions prepared by the researchers and the questions of focus group discussion which were semi-configured under the topics of "The problems encountered in doctoral education", "The problems related to the assessment of doctoral education", "The problems related to the working environments", "The sources of support in the problems", and "Opinions and suggestions related to the distant education in doctoral education". In order to provide a comfortable and effective interview, a convenient physical environment and psychological environment of confidence were obtained. The interview of 80 minutes was recorded through tape recording and noting down. Focus group interview was carried out with a team of a moderator, a reporter and an observer.

### **The Assessment of Data**

The analysis of the study was carried out through descriptive analysis. While decoding the records of the interviews, no changes were made in the expressions.

### **The Ethical Aspects of the study**

The written and oral consents of the students about their willingness to join the study were obtained with the approval of academic institutions at their universities.

### **Results**

The eight students in the group receive doctoral education at six different universities. Five of them are at the stage of lessons, one of them is ate the stage of doctoral competence and two of them are at the stage of thesis. Three of the students study at the universities where they live, five of them continues their education in different cities, and 2 of them are married.

The students stated that they encountered various problems during the doctoral programs they attend. The first of the matters the students regard as problems is; the failure of their consultants in sparing time for them, failing in receiving necessary support from

their consultants during the preparation and presentation of seminars. While most of the students expect doctoral education to provide them different points of view; they stated that it wasn't different from master's education, the lessons weren't so productive, the lecturers didn't provide any contributions to seminars and they weren't happy with the education they receive:

...“ *I realized that the doctoral education wasn't different from master's education. I think that consultancy hours were disregarded and no time was allocated. I am affected negatively. There are times I don't see my advisor. I have to ask for help from the other people. We can't get help related to the effective presentation of the seminars*”.(Student 1)

....“*We still receive education; we spend the period of applications of master's degree and doctoral degree with the students and without the participation of our advisors. The people at the hospital and advisors regard us as teachers. The people at the hospital and advisors regard us as the extra workload. We can't practice, our practical training isn't effective, and this moves us away from clinics. There are some lecturers who finish their practical training without seeing a real patient. We prepare a seminar and become lecturers*”. (Student 2)

....“*the lecturers loom large for us. However, I always give the seminars. I want the advisors teach. The lectures can be go halves in. They are in a good place for me, I want to get different things from them*”.(Student 3)

Related to the assessment of doctoral lectures, the students stated that the examination shouldn't be in written form, they lost their self-competences when they fail a course. A student expressed that the evaluations were carried out in homework form and online and he was happy with this method:

....“*I finished my master's degree in a different place. We have two visas and a final exam. There shouldn't be written exams. There should be interval examinations. I had never failed a course, but it happened. We lost our self-competences. This exam doesn't quantify me. There are 11 articles and I remember only 8 of them. I am afraid of competence*”. (Student 4)

... “*we are examined online, the lecturer sends us the questions, we research and send the answers, it is just like a homework. We are pleased with this assessment type*”. (Student 7)

Another problem that the students who are registered to a program outside the city where they work is the conflict with their co-workers and administrations in the schools where they work. The students stated that they had conflicts with their co-workers although they shared the workload in the school where they work because they were sent for doctoral education:

...“*I accept all the given tasks, they gave me coordinatorship and I didn't resist. The administrators support me, but they sometimes fail since were in a tight situation. I prepare all the documents of the department. I don't reflect any problems to my school. Some people don't believe that I ply between. I spend efforts beyond my power. I am trying to hide my tiresome*.”( Student 4)

...“*I go and come through my annual leave. The most important thing I detest is the differences among the individuals. I have arguments with my co-workers. They claim that I studied doctoral education just for myself. There is also an administrative depress*.”( Student 5)

Especially, the married students stated that they had problems in sparing some time to their families and they received social support from their advisors in the department, their team-mates and families:

... “*I am trying to do my homework during the remaining time except the classes. Physically, I am getting tired. I am a mother and I am having difficulty. I think my physical and mental health is running down. I travel for seven hours. I feel tired due to sleeplessness and timelessness. The school administration supports me, but I can't say anything to them since we encounter the lack of personnel*”.( Student 3)

... “ *I am trying to sleep less, thus I separate time for my friends, yet I can't meet my family*”. (Student 6)

...“*my friends from the doctoral program of my term are my biggest supporters*”. (Student 7)

Related to the distant education; the students stated that distant education wasn't convenient for nursing department, the lectures should be carried out with an academician and the style is gained from the lecturers:

*"The lecturers share their experiences during the lessons. Distant education shouldn't exist in the nursing department". (Student 3)*

*... "no matter what happens, I explain my problems to all of my lecturers. I explain the process clearly, they understand me and I feel that it is important to be a member of that department. I take part in the associations and the city feed people..... doctoral education should be more long-termed. Our friend coming from out of the city fell into emptiness. We can't gain a style when separated from the advisor. Everything is clearer with the assistance of the advisor." (Student 8)*

## Discussion

### The problems in doctoral education

The nurse, educators and researchers produce nursing information and provide a basis for evidence-based nursing applications. Doctoral education generally required to be successful in such nursing roles (Pastor, Cimiotti&Stone, 2004). The increase in the researchers and the increase in knowledge and applications of nursing are related to the quality of programs in doctoral education (Bahçecik & Alpar, 2009). The quality of a doctoral program is basically defined as the quality of the students and faculty, the researches of the faculty, the curriculum and the success of the graduates at the desired levels (Anderson, 2000).

Although the problems related to postgraduate education exist in every discipline, these problems are seen in the nursing field more deeply due to inefficiency and density of doctoral programs in nursing in our country.

The students complained that their advisors didn't separate enough time for them, they didn't receive any supports from their advisors during the preparation and presentation of seminars.

In our country, there is no control on thesis advisors and there are no legal precautions to protect the students. Mostly, the students avoid transmit their complaints with the fear of "failing to graduate" (Gökmen, 1996). Moreover, many thesis advisors are obliged to

manage numerous thesis at the same time and they fail to separate enough time to their students, thus the students complain about this (Arıcı, 1997).

The students in our study stated that they want to have a class with their advisors more actively and gain a style from them. The students pointed out that doctoral education should be different from the master's degree, its philosophic dimension should be regarded in order to develop their intellectual capacities.

In the literature, it was determined that discussing the clinical problems developed the intellectual competences of the students, they would be able to see how to approach the problem if the discussion exceeds definite limits and they would gain self-confidence in discussing and defending the ideas instead of giving up (Yam, 2005). The desired thin in the doctoral education is; the students display their experiences through exploring the things that are examined and told through exceeding the borders.

In a qualitative study performed with five students who receive doctoral education in England, two students stated that they needed specific lessons for their special working areas, one student declared that they expected a more structuralized and particular education and expected to participate the working groups more actively. The students mentioned that their advisors didn't guide them and it was difficult to work without the guidance of an advisor. Their biggest worry is returning back to their countries before the completion of the doctoral study (Evans, 2007). These findings show that the students of doctoral education abroad have problems similar to those in our country.

While describing the characteristics of a master trainer, the qualifications such as being patient and supportive, raising compliment and positive support, correcting the mistakes of the participants without hurting their self-confidence, listening and observing can be listed (Sullivan, Magarick, Bergthold, Blouse& McIntosh, 1999). The expressions of some doctoral students related to the support of the advisors and examinations make us think that the academicians who coach them fail to carry qualifications that are expected from a master trainer.

### **The problems related to the assessment of doctoral education**

During the assessment of the students in the study group, it is seen that they are tested through classical methods require memorizing the knowledge rather than top level skills. This assessment approach that fell from favor is not found convenient by those students at the developed stage of doctoral education. Instead of this, multiple assessment methods and the evaluation at every stage are suggested. In some doctorate programs, online examination/homework that is applied as one of the evaluation methods in some doctoral programs can be suggested as one of the current assessment techniques.

In the assessment and evaluation approach that is recently accepted, there is focusing on the process besides the result. More than remembering the knowledge, its application, structuralization, and showing the top level abilities of the students are paid attention. It is suggested to determine how the things are learned besides measuring at every stage of education, measuring through a multiple methods instead of measuring via a single method

([http://iogm.meb.gov.tr/files/size\\_ozel/olcme\\_ve\\_degerlendirme.pdf](http://iogm.meb.gov.tr/files/size_ozel/olcme_ve_degerlendirme.pdf)).

### **The problems experienced in working conditions**

In the study which has the topic of "The problems of research assistants who study at another university in the name of their university" that has been in our country, 44 postgraduate and 202 doctoral students with a total of 251 research assistants were interviewed about their problems. Among the problems; the lecturers didn't regard the research assistants appointed from another city unequal to permanent staff of the country, they increased their workload through giving them more charges, the thesis advisors didn't spare enough time for them and those research assistants refrain from expressing their opinions related to the administration. The research assistants stated the the administrators of their own university didn't start any communication with the university where they receive postgraduate education related to their problems with the administrators of the university where they study (Özdem, 2002).

For the institutions whose the doctoral students who experience problems similar to those in the Özdem's study, it can be suggested that the students share their problems with the administrators of the university where they study.

### **The support resources of the problems**

In our country, most of the students have to go to another city having a doctoral program since there are limited doctoral programs for nursing.

Doctoral education is a rather extensive process. The female students who enroll the nursing doctoral programs in our country are mostly and at the same time are wives and mothers. Since they work as nurses or academicians, they have numerous responsibilities. Those responsibilities may be rather compulsory. During this process, it was observed that the students generally receive support from their families, husbands, colleagues, lecturers and their social environments and their responsibilities during the education process were lightened. The existence of social support systems can be one of the most important determinants in the completion of their education.

### **The opinions related to distant education in doctoral education**

The interviewed students stated that distant learning wouldn't be convenient since it would prevent them to obtain styles from their advisors.

Technology provides working nurses or student nurses the opportunity to learn, share the knowledge and co-operate with all their colleagues in the world. Distant learning method doesn't meet the needs of all the learners; however, it is ideal for those who are motivated, need flexibility, desire to catch professionalism through developing themselves. The internet based education is a learning option that is based on the hypothesis that the students are the parts of learners' groups although they are separated from each other and lecturers (Novotny & Davis, 2005). In a performed study, it was stated that more information is required for distant education; however it could be as useful as the traditional education for the students (Halter, Kleiner & Hess, 2006).

### The Use of Results in the Applications and Suggestions

Related to the solution offer and expectations; the students suggested that the lecturers should provide more contributions to the lesson, they give more effective consultancy services, the students may choose their own advisors, the evaluation should be performed in homework form instead of written exam, a decrease in their work-load during the school period in the school where they work, organization of a similar session with the participation of advisors who teach doctoral subject in order to discuss the problems.

### Limitedness

The limitedness of the study is the limited quantity of the students and failing in gathering due to the different cities they reside.

### Conclusions

According to the study, the most common problems the students who receive doctoral education in nursing have to face are; being unable to receive enough consultancy services, inappropriate measuring methods for doctoral education, having conflicts at work and overload of work. Tackling and solving these problems is necessary and important for a more qualified education.

It is true that starting the doctoral programs is a significant touchstone in nursing, but it should be considered that professionalizing is a process of idealization and even the most developed profession can't reach to the peak point (Bernhard & Walsh, 1995).

### References

Anderson CA. (2000). Current strengths and limitations of doctoral education in nursing: are we prepared for the future? *Journal of Professional Nursing*. 16(4), 191-200.

Arıcı H. (1997). Raising a Scientist in Social Sciences, Post Graduate Education. Tüba Publications. Scientific Meetings Serial No:7, Ankara.

Bahçecik N& Alpar Ş. (2009). Nursing education in Turkey: From past to present. *Nurse Education Today*. 29(7), 698-703.

Bartels JE. Your Careee as a Nurse Educator, NSNA IMPRINT January 2005, 42-44. [http://www.nсна.org/Portals/0/Skins/NSNA/pdf/Imprint\\_Jan05\\_educator.pdf](http://www.nсна.org/Portals/0/Skins/NSNA/pdf/Imprint_Jan05_educator.pdf). access date: 07.01.2011.

Bernhard LA. & M Walsh. (1995) Leadership: the key to the professionalization of nursing. (3rd ed.) Mosby, St. Louis, USA.

Ekiz D. (2003) Introduction to Research Methods in Education: Methodologies of Qualitative, Quantitative and Critical Theory, Anı Publication. Ankara.

Evans C. (2007) The experience of international doctoral education in nursing: An exploratory survey of staff and international nursing students in a British university. *Nurse Education Today* 27, 499-505.

Gökmen İ. (1996) Problems of Doctoral Education and Suggestions, 2. University Council. Presentations, Sarmal Publishing House. 206-208.

Halter MJ. Kleiner C.&Hess RF. (2006) The experience of nursing students in an online doctoral program in nursing: A phenomenological study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 43, 99-105.

Keogh J. (1997) Professionalization of nursing: Development, difficulties and solutions. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 25, 302-308.

Novotny JM. & Davis RH (2005) Distance Education in Nursing, Springer Publishing Company. 2nd ed. 256.

Basic Concepts in Measurement and Evaluation [http://iogm.meb.gov.tr/files/size\\_ozel/olcme\\_ve\\_degerlendirme.pdf](http://iogm.meb.gov.tr/files/size_ozel/olcme_ve_degerlendirme.pdf) access date: 07.01.2011.

Özdem G. (2002) Problems of Guest Research Assistants in University (example of Ankara), Unpublished Master Thesis. Ankara University, Institute of Education Sciences. Ankara.

Pastor DK. Cimiotti JP& Stone PW. (2004) Doctoral preparation in nursing: What are the options? *Applied Nursing Research* 17(4), 137-139.

Sullivan R. Magarick R. Bergthold, G. et al (1999) Education Practice Guideline for Medical Educators Ed. Özvarış, Şevkat Bahar, Trans. Şahin, N. Nalan. Hacettepe Public Health Foundation, Ankara.

Yam Bernard MC. (2005) Professional doctorate and professional nursing practice. *Nurse Education Today* 25, 564-572.

Yıldırım A.& H. Şimşek. (2000) Qualitative Research Techniques in Social Sciences, Seçkin, Ankara.