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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Postgraduate Education and Academic Profession: A Focus Group Study with Postgraduate Geography Students

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Abstract

This study investigated what postgraduate-level geography students thought about postgraduate education and the academic profession. The study was conducted at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University in the fall semester of the 2021–2022 academic year. The study adopted a qualitative case study design. The study group consisted of seven participants. Data were collected through focus group interviews using an interview questionnaire developed by the researcher. The data were analyzed using content analysis. Participants' views of postgraduate education were grouped under three main themes: choose to pursue postgraduate education (sub-themes: personal reasons, academic reasons, and social reasons), challenges (sub-themes: challenges regarding admission to the program, personal challenges, financial challenges, academic challenges, and challenges regarding academics), and expectations (sub-themes: expectations regarding admission to the program, academic expectations, financial expectations, and expectations from academics). Participants' views of the academic profession were grouped under three main themes: advantages (sub-themes: personal advantages and social advantages), disadvantages (sub-themes: personal disadvantages and academic disadvantages), and academics' characteristics (sub-themes: characteristics an academic should and should not have). Participants expect academia to consider their objectives and expectations, set objective criteria for admission, focus on gender equality, provide high-quality counseling services, offer courses based on certain standards and methods, and support them financially and spiritually. Participants also think that academics/advisors should have certain personal and academic characteristics, improve themselves constantly, and communicate with them based on collaboration. One conclusion could be that it would be useful for practitioners and rule-makers to take these demands of students into account.

Keywords: Academic profession, focus group, geography, postgraduate education

Introduction

The geography departments in Türkiye also offer graduate (master's and PhD) programs. Students are required to meet certain criteria to be admitted to geography graduate programs. Some challenges are easy to overcome, while others may require preparation and hard work. Since every student has a variety of reasons for pursuing graduate degrees in geography, this study investigated these reasons.

The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) defines postgraduate education in Türkiye. According to Article 4 of the Postgraduate Education and Training Regulation, there are two types of master's programs: thesis and non-thesis. According to Article 15, PhD programs are higher education programs. According to Article 24, D.Arts programs are PhD equivalent higher education programs (CoHE, 2016). Postgraduate education is the final stage of education, and postgraduate education encompasses master's, PhD, and D.Arts (doctor of arts) programs. All graduates are candidates for postgraduate programs. Those who meet certain criteria can find suitable universities and programs and start their education. According to the CoHE (2021) statistics, as of the 2020–2021 academic year, there are 343,569 master's and 106,148 PhD students in Türkiye.

Postgraduate education consists of stages that must be completed to become an academic. Being an academic is a profession, and academics are defined as the staff who conduct education, training, and research activities at universities. Sunar (2020) conducted a study on professional prestige in Türkiye and found that being an academic (professor) was considered to be a prestigious profession in social life. The first condition for becoming an academic is to receive a graduate education.

Researchers have documented the reasons why Turkish students pursue graduate education (Alabaş et al., 2012; Aydemir & Çam 2015; Aktan, 2020; Koşar et al., 2020). A variety of reasons can be listed among the reasons why students pursue a graduate degree. For example, some students are interested in academic or professional careers, while others would like to raise their status in life. Additionally, many undergraduate students have no clue as to what they want to do after graduating from college. They seek new communities because they are excluded from the system with which they are familiar. Students with such thoughts may pursue a master's even though they had never intended to have an academic career before. Furthermore, finding a job in a relevant field may not be possible for all students. Therefore, students can turn to postgraduate education to find jobs and have alternative academic options despite the views that undergraduates should not

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view postgraduate education as an escape route. On the other hand, some students consider pursuing academic careers even before they graduate from college. Those students study hard to have high grade point averages (GPAs), build a good rapport with academics, and improve themselves to fulfill graduate school admission requirements.

To date, several qualitative studies on postgraduate education in Türkiye have investigated teachers (Aktan, 2020; Alabaş et al., 2012; Baldan & Güven, 2018; Baş, 2013; Kılınç et al., 2020; Maviş-Sevim & Akın, 2021; Ulusoy & Güçlü, 2020), graduate students (Aydemir & Çam, 2015; Serin & Ergin-Kocatürk, 2019; Türköz et al., 2021), academics (Bayar & Duran, 2019), and both students and academics (Dilci, 2019). Regarding the attitudes of students, previous studies show that students expect postgraduate education to help them acquire professional knowledge and develop professional skills (Aktan, 2020; Baş, 2013; Maviş Sevim & Akın, 2021; Serin & Ergin-Kocatürk, 2019). Also, although students have positive attitudes toward postgraduate education (Aktan, 2020; Baş, 2013; Çelenk & Bayar, 2019;), postgraduate education poses some challenges (Aktan, 2020; Alabaş et al., 2012; Dilci, 2019; Kılınç et al., 2020; Maviş Sevim & Akın, 2021). For example, students do not think the entrance exam serves its purpose and they consider courses and academics underqualified (Dilci, 2019). They experience fatigue and feelings of incompetence, and they state that they have to sacrifice a lot (Kılınç et al., 2020) and spend too much time on postgraduate education (Kılınç et al., 2020; Aktan, 2020). They also complain that there is no career system that supports postgraduate education (Aktan, 2020; Maviş Sevim & Akın, 2021). They have difficulty putting theory into practice (Maviş Sevim & Akın, 2021). They face problems arising from supervisors/academics (Alabaş et al., 2012; Ertem & Gokalp, 2022).

Research also presents a variety of motivations for students to pursue postgraduate-level studies. Some students pursue master's and PhD degrees to complete a higher education level to improve themselves, while others get graduate degrees to pursue academic careers. Research also shows that the desire to pursue an academic career and become an academic is one of the most common reasons for pursuing graduate education (Aydemir & Çam, 2015; Baş, 2013; Çelenk & Bayar, 2019; Seçer, 2021; Türköz et al., 2021).

Other studies on the academic profession in Türkiye address undergraduates (Demirbilek, 2021; Polat et al., 2013; Yalçın & Demirekin, 2013), education administrators and teachers (Kuzu, 2020), PhD students (Limon & Durnalı, 2018), and academics (Apaydın et al., 2015; Ulaşkın, 2019; Başarır & Sarı, 2015). Some other studies have focused on metaphors regarding the academic profession and academics (Polat et al., 2013; Limon & Durnalı, 2018; Kuzu, 2020; Demirbilek, 2021). However, research investigating postgraduate students' views of the academic profession is scarce.

Within the scope of this study, international literature evaluates the views of geography master's and PhD students together. The international studies address students' experiences with different geography programs (Solem et al., 2011), their career aspirations and faculty perspectives (Monk et al., 2012), career goals and motivation (Solem et al., 2013), and career aspirations and expectations (Dufty-Jones, 2018). The decision of why students pursue academic careers in geography depends on the economic conditions and job opportunities (Monk et al., 2012; Solem et al., 2011; Solem et al., 2013). Students also experience anxiety because of uncertainty surrounding their future careers (Dufty-Jones, 2018). There has been an increase in the number of students enrolling in postgraduate geography education programs in the United States. Moreover, getting a master's degree is like getting a bachelor's degree now (Foote et al., 2012). These results show that Türkiye has the same problems as the rest of the world. In other words, there will be an increase in the number of students enrolling

in postgraduate geography education programs in Türkiye. Therefore, there will be more students seeking employment in academia or the private sectors.

We know little about what postgraduate geography students in Türkiye think about postgraduate education and the academic profession because there is not much research on this topic. Therefore, this study investigated what postgraduate geography students in Türkiye thought about postgraduate education and the academic profession. To this end, two research questions were determined for this study, which are as follows:

Research question 1: What do geography graduate students think about postgraduate education?

Research question 2: What do geography graduate students think about being an academic?

The findings of this research will contribute in several ways to the literature and to our understanding of postgraduate education and being academic while also providing authorities with a basis for improving the current programs.

Methods

Research Design

Qualitative studies aim to determine how people interpret experiences and situations (Merriam, 2018). According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011), most researchers who conduct qualitative studies adopt case studies. Likewise, this study was designed as a case study, which is a qualitative research design. According to Yin (2017), focus group interviews can be used to collect data in case studies.

Study Group

The study group consisted of seven students pursuing master's in the Geography Program of the Postgraduate Education Institute of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University during the academic year 2021–2022. The size of the study group in qualitative research is not standardized (Öztürk, 2014). Büyüköztürk et al. (2015) recommend that researchers recruit key individuals to collect large-scale and more profound data. There are also differing opinions regarding the size of the study group in focus group interviews. According to Çokluk et al. (2011), 4–10 people should be recruited for focus group interviews. Therefore, the study group consisted of seven geography master's students who took different entrance exams to be admitted to the program. Table 1 details all participants' sociodemographic characteristics.

Table 1.
Sociodemographic Characteristics

Code	Gender	Age	Admission Year	Employment Status
P1	Man	25	2020	Employed
P2	Man	53	2020	Retired
P3	Woman	29	2021	Unemployed
P4	Woman	22	2021	Unemployed
P5	Woman	23	2021	Unemployed
P6	Woman	24	2021	Unemployed
P7	Man	24	2021	Employed

Data Collection Tool

First, a draft form was developed based on a literature review conducted by the researcher. The draft form consisted of five open-ended questions on postgraduate education and seven on the academic profession. Two academics, who were experts in geography, checked the draft form for intelligibility and relevance. Two questions on the academic profession were removed based on their feedback. Subsequently,

a pilot study was conducted with a master's student. Questions that yielded similar responses were grouped under one question. Therefore, the final form consisted of three questions on postgraduate education and three on the academic profession. Table 2 presents the interview questions.

Table 2.

*Interview Questions***Participants' Views on Postgraduate Education**

1. Why and for what purpose have you chosen to pursue postgraduate education?
2. What challenges have you encountered during your postgraduate education? What challenges did you encounter before and after your postgraduate education?
3. What are your expectations of postgraduate education? How do you think postgraduate education should be conducted?

Participants' Views on the Academic Profession

1. What do you think are the advantages of being an academic?
2. What do you think are the disadvantages of being an academic?
3. How do you think an academic should be? What are the characteristics you would like to see in an academic?

Group Interview Process

Participants' views on postgraduate education and the academic profession were investigated through focus group interviews. The interviews were held in a seminar room by a researcher (Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Geography) and a reporter. All participants were seated in a U-shape to promote interaction. The focus group interviews were held over two days and comprised two sessions. The first session was conducted to elicit participants' views on postgraduate education, while the second was conducted to elicit their views on the academic profession. Before data collection, all participants were briefed about the research purpose and procedure. They were also informed that they needed to express their views as freely as possible. Then, participants were asked to introduce themselves. The researcher and the reporter adopted a non-biased and non-directive attitude to encourage participants to express themselves and engage them in conversations and discussions. The reporter recorded the interviews in written and audio formats. Each interview lasted about 90 minutes.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the research purpose and the focus group interview method. Informed consent from all participants was obtained. The study was approved by the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University (Approval No: 05.18, Date: 18.03.2022).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis. According to Büyüköztürk et al. (2015), content analysis is a popular method for summarizing texts into smaller content categories based on codes.

In the analysis procedure, first, the data were coded. Second, sub-themes and themes were developed based on the codes. Third, findings were compiled and interpreted based on the subthemes and themes. The data were analyzed by both the researcher and a rater experienced in content analysis. Both the researcher and the rater analyzed the interview notes and recordings. They listened to the interviews again and transcribed them verbatim. Then, irrelevant answers from the transcript were removed. The researchers read the transcript line by line repeatedly. In the second stage, the data were coded based on common points and keywords. In the third stage, the data were classified according to the codes, and subthemes were developed to explain the codes. In the last stage, the subthemes were combined under the themes based on the interview questions.

Both the researcher and the rater developed codes and then compared them to evaluate their reliability. For this, Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 64) formula [$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{total number of agreements} + \text{disagreement}} \times 100$] was taken as a reference. In the calculation made using this formula, the compatibility between the two encoders was determined to be approximately 76%. The researcher assigned a code to each participant (P1, P2, P3, etc.) and used direct quotes to provide an accurate and coherent representation of all participants' views.

Results

The findings were grouped under two headings (postgraduate education and the academic profession) and presented based on the themes, subthemes, and quotes.

A. Research Question 1: Postgraduate Education

One question during the interviews was about the reasons why students wanted to pursue postgraduate education. The following are some quotes from interviews representing participants' views:

"Since my first year in college, I've wanted to conduct scientific research and be known for my scientific endeavors..." (P4)

"I've always considered pursuing an academic career since my undergraduate years, and so I've always followed the process closely... I want to be free when I work." (P7)

"My goal is to improve myself, specialize in my field of study, and pursue an academic career." (P3)

"Doing science and leading the community." (P5)

"It [postgraduate education] was one of my goals during my undergraduate years. So, I made sure that my GPA was high enough. I want to be successful in my field of study. I want to have more alternatives than teaching." (P6)

The reasons why participants chose to pursue postgraduate education were categorized under three subthemes (Table 3), which are personal reasons, academic reasons, and social reasons. Table 3 illustrates these themes and the relevant codes from the interviews.

Table 3.

Why Participants Choose to Pursue Postgraduate Education

Theme	Subtheme	Code (Frequency)
Why participants choose to pursue postgraduate education	Personal reasons	Loving geography (7)
		Self-improvement (4)
		Having job opportunities other than teaching (2)
		Anxiety for the future (2)
		Concern for the Public Personnel Selection Examination (2)
		Freedom to work (2)
		Self-knowledge (1)
		Exploring the world (1)
		Meeting new people (1)
		Getting to know academics (1)
		Stress caused by family expectations (1)
		Pursuing an academic career (6)
		Researching and publishing (2)
		Discovering new things (1)
		Doing science (1)
		Specializing in a particular field of geography (1)
		Gaining a scientific reputation (1)
Academic reasons	Academic reasons	Being successful in the field of geography (1)
		Contributing to the literature (1)
		Innovative university environment (1)
		Writing (1)
		Reading (1)
		Doing PhD (1)
		Contributing to society (2)
Social reasons	Social reasons	Leading the community (1)

Another question asked during the interviews was about the challenges postgraduate education posed for students. What follows are some quotes representing participants' views:

"Foreign languages are the greatest challenge." (P7)

"Objective criteria are insufficient; not many care about justice." (P2)

"I think that my greatest problem is my anxiety about the future... It's tough to manage this process with anxiety for the future...My only fear is my anxiety about the future." (P1)

"Even in my undergraduate years, I knew that postgraduate education would have its challenges, like, you have to know foreign languages, and you have to take the Academic Personnel and Postgraduate Education Entrance Exam so and so..." (P3)

"The greatest problem is low self-confidence. Seeing yourself inadequate and making a big deal out of nothing. I also have to learn foreign languages, which is another challenge." (P5)

"Everything is easier if you know the right people." (P6)

Participants' views of the challenges of postgraduate education were classified under five subthemes as challenges regarding admission to the program, personal challenges, financial challenges, academic challenges, and challenges regarding academics. These subthemes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Challenges of Postgraduate Education

Theme	Subtheme	Code (Frequency)
The challenges of postgraduate education	Challenges regarding admission to the program	Insufficient knowledge of foreign languages (7)
		Injustice (3)
		Insufficient objective criteria (2)
		Academic personnel and postgraduate education entrance exam (2)
		Gender inequality (2)
	Personal challenges	Nepotism based on political views (1)
		Limited quota (1)
		Seeing oneself inadequate (3)
		Anxiety about the future (2)
		Being a woman (2)
	Financial challenges	Lack of experience (1)
		Stress caused by family expectations (1)
		A sweet challenge (1)
		Lack of a job with a steady income (4)
		Limited financial opportunities (2)
	Academic challenges	Anxiety about being financially insecure (2)
		Difficulty determining the area of specialization (human geography, physical geography, regional geography, etc.) (5)
		Making a big deal out of the process (2)
		Difficulty writing a thesis (1)
	Challenges regarding academics	Local-minded academics who favor their countrymen (2)
		Academics with gaps in their knowledge of their field of expertise (1)
		Not knowing academics in person (1)
		Differences among academics (1)
		Academics who do not make enough time for their students (1)

A third question in the interviews sought answers about what students expected of postgraduate education. What follows are some quotes representing participants' views:

"It should be harder to get into postgraduate education programs. I mean, people who can really do it should be admitted." (P5)

"I think that postgraduate should be of higher quality. At this point, I believe that academics should provide students with settings where they can express their thoughts and opinions freely." (P1)

"I think that non-thesis postgraduate education programs should be closed down. Most private universities only think about money and offer low-quality master's programs. The state should bring some sort of regulation to that." (P2)

"There should be objective criteria and conditions for admission to postgraduate education" (P4)

Participants' expectations of postgraduate education were grouped under four subthemes (Table 5). These subthemes are expectations regarding admission to the program, academic expectations, financial expectations, and expectations from academics as detailed in Table 5.

Table 5.
Participants' Expectations of Postgraduate Education

Theme	Subtheme	Code (Frequency)
Participants' expectations of postgraduate education	Expectations regarding admission to the program	Admission to postgraduate education should be neither too hard nor too easy (5)
		Admission to postgraduate education should be harder (2)
Academic expectations	Academic expectations	Students who really want to pursue postgraduate education should be admitted (1)
		There should be new objective criteria for admission (1)
		There should be a system that takes gender equality into account (1)
		Bright and productive students should be admitted (1)
		Universities should offer high-level and high-quality education (2)
		There should be physical and human geography laboratories (1)
		Classes should adhere to certain standards (1)
		Low-quality non-thesis postgraduate education programs should be closed down (1)
		There should be settings where students can express themselves freely (1)
		Academics should use active learning methods (1)
Financial expectations	Financial expectations	Classes should focus on specialization (1)
		Students should be involved in scientific endeavors (1)
		It should be easy to access data sources (1)
		There should be international collaboration (1)
		Students should be provided with financial opportunities (1)
		Students should be supported financially so that they can attend scientific activities (1)
		Students who pursue postgraduate education should be allowed to work outside the university (1)
		Academics should guide students (1)
		Academics should be more attentive (1)
		There should be standards for academics (1)
Expectations from academics	Expectations from academics	Academics should help students improve themselves (1)

B. Research Question 2: The Academic Profession

In the interviews, the participants were also asked to share their views on the advantages of being an academic. The quotations below exemplify those views:

"In this profession, I can work freely, communicate with Turkish or foreign colleagues, and improve myself." (P7)

"I think it's a prestigious profession because your ideas are accepted and adopted by society." (P4)

"Being an academic means that you can read stuff and do scientific research not as a hobby but as a profession. Plus, you feel good because you can always keep up with your education, and it has a high status in the eyes of the public. I think that people listen to you more and respect your opinions when they see an academic title before your name." (P1)

"It's a prestigious profession; it's nice to be an expert and be known for your scientific research." (P3)

Participants' views of the advantages of being an academic were collected under two subthemes: personal advantages and social advantages (Table 6).

Table 6.
The Advantages of Being an Academic

Theme	Subtheme	Code (Frequency)
The advantages of being an academic	Personal advantages	Prestige (6)
		Self-improvement (3)
		Freedom to work (2)
		Producing (1)
		A non-routine job (1)
		Being an expert (1)
		Proving yourself (1)
		Being a member of a political party (1)
		Being creative (1)
		Working with young people (1)
		Financial opportunities (1)
	Social advantages	Contributing to society (4)
		Leading the community (3)
		Social benefit (2)
		High social status (2)

The participants revealed their thoughts on the disadvantages of being an academic in the interviews as well. What follows are some quotes representing participants' views:

"The academic profession is getting more challenging because there's nepotism and no objective criteria for evaluating scientific research." (P2)

"Being an academic is tough. You have different responsibilities at every step. You're expected to overcome different challenges in every step." (P7)

"I think that being an academic is a tough process because it's not easy to produce. Even if it's easy, I think that what is more important is the validity of scientific research. Being an academic is a fast-paced and bitter-sweet challenge. It's worth it if you're patient enough..." (P5)

"If you're an academic, you may end up with a conflict of status. I mean, there is intense competition and hierarchy; getting a title may be a problem." (P6)

Participants' views of the disadvantages of being an academic were collected under two subthemes: personal disadvantages and academic disadvantages (Table 7).

The data analysis of the interviews presented findings on the characteristics participants would like to see in academics. What follows are quotations detailing those expectations:

"Academics shouldn't be selfish and should have the spirit of workers working in a science factory. They should be in love with

Table 7.
The Disadvantages of Being an Academic

Theme	Subtheme	Code (Frequency)
The disadvantages of being an academic	Personal disadvantages	Mental fatigue (3)
		Physical fatigue (2)
		Physical health problems (vision disorders, weight gain, etc.) (2)
		Limited free time/rest (1)
		Not knowing foreign languages (4)
	Academic disadvantages	Hierarchy (3)
		Anxiety about not being appointed in title change (3)
		The challenge of producing quality academic publications (3)
		Nepotism (2)
		Title conflicts (2)
		Insufficient support for scientific research (2)
		Being a female (married with children) academic (2)
		Intense competition (1)
		The obligation to constantly overcome obstacles (1)
		The decline in academic prestige day by day (1)
		Administrative duties (1)

science. They should always improve themselves and keep up with developments. They should be like torches that illuminate everybody. They should also be students when necessary and should be virtuous." (P7)

"I think that scientists should know a couple of foreign languages (aside from the fact that they should use English perfectly). They should be supportive and shouldn't abuse their positions and knowledge for other purposes. They should be fair." (P4)

"Academics should be curious. They should not be influenced by the misconceptions and impositions of society. They should contribute to the economy and science of the country. They should do research on advanced technology and research and development (R&D). They should be able to teach and communicate effectively." (P6)

The characteristics participants would like to see in academics were grouped under the subthemes of the characteristics academics should have and the characteristics academics should not have. Both subthemes are illustrated in Table 8.

Discussion and Conclusion

Postgraduate Education

Through the findings of the study, participants' views of postgraduate education were collected under three sub-themes: (1) why they choose to pursue postgraduate education, (2) the challenges of postgraduate education, and (3) their expectations of postgraduate education.

The personal reasons why participants chose to pursue postgraduate education can be summarized as follows: First, they wanted to improve themselves. Second, they were interested in professional options other than being appointed public teachers. Third, they had concerns for their futures. Fourth, they were worried about The Public Personnel Selection Examination. Fifth, they wanted the freedom to work. These findings expand the findings of other studies in the literature, as the current research shows that most students have positive attitudes towards postgraduate education (Aktan, 2020; Baş, 2013; Çelenk & Bayar, 2019; Demirdelen Alrawadieh & Yazıt, 2021). Similarly, the findings of the current study seem to be consistent with the existing literature,

Table 8.
The Characteristics Participants Would Like to See in Academics

Theme	Subtheme	Code (Frequency)
Characteristics	The characteristics academics should have	Scientific worldview (observer, rational, objective, etc.) (6) Effective communication skills (5) Sharing their knowledge and experience (4) Having innovative and original ideas (4) Having merit (4) Being just (3) Making time for students (3) Enlightening the community (3) Adhering to ethical principles (3) Multidimensional thinking (3) Being critical (3) Being free-spirited (2) Knowing languages (mastering English) (2) Having a sound grasp of their fields of expertise (2) Doing scientific research on advanced technology and R&D (1) Knowing students and recognizing individual differences (1) Having the spirit of a student (1) Being balanced (1) Being understanding (1) Being humble (1) Enjoying what they do (1) Avoiding repetition (1) Being curious (1) Contributing to the economy of the country (1) Being virtuous (1) Being brave (1)
	The characteristics academics should not have	Not every postgraduate student should be an academic (6) Plagiarism (3) Being closed to development and innovations (3) Misconduct (3) Being shallow-minded (2) Arrogance (2) Lack of understanding (2) Being self-centered (2) Not knowing languages (2) Not sharing experiences (1) Lack of courage (1) Being aloof (1) Abusing position and knowledge (1)

as all our participants were willing and enthusiastic about doing a master's or PhD in geography, which is a promising result.

The academic reasons why participants chose to pursue postgraduate education can be summarized as follows: First, most participants wanted to pursue academic careers, which broadly supports the findings in the literature. Earlier research, for example, has also shown that most students are interested in pursuing academic careers (Aydemir & Çam, 2015; Baş, 2013; Çelenk & Bayar, 2019; Seçer, 2021; Türköz et al., 2021). Additionally, research on teachers has demonstrated that students want to receive postgraduate education to improve themselves personally and professionally, work as academics, gain respect and prestige, and contribute to the profession (Alabaş et al., 2012; Baş, 2013; Çelenk & Bayar, 2019).

Although most studies conducted outside Türkiye focus on PhD students, they give us clues as to why students choose to receive postgraduate education. Geography PhD students are interested in academic careers, while geography master's students are interested

in careers outside academia (Dufty-Jones, 2018; Monk et al., 2012; Solem et al., 2013). Almost half of PhD students consider academic careers. However, most also think about job opportunities in other sectors (Monk et al., 2012) or experience uncertainty and anxiety about their future careers (Dufty-Jones, 2018). Although most PhD students want to work in academia, many are quiet pessimistic about it (Dufty-Jones, 2018). Students doing master's and specializing in physical geography are more likely to seek positions in public institutions (Solem et al., 2013).

In a similar vein, our results also showed that master's students sought postgraduate education to become academics. This is probably because geography graduates have limited job opportunities outside academia. Uncertainties in job opportunities lead students to seek different career options, one of which is academia.

Every year, more and more students pursue postgraduate education in Türkiye. For example, the number of students in higher education increased by 3.79% in the 2020–2021 academic year compared to the previous academic year (CoHE, 2021). Parallel to this finding, students are more interested in postgraduate education than before. Our participants stated that they had been preparing for postgraduate education for personal, academic, and social reasons since their undergraduate years. Most participants expressed a desire to become academics. However, they pursued postgraduate education not only because they wanted to have the freedom to work and more job opportunities. Some participants pursued postgraduate education because they were concerned about their futures, which is consistent with the existing studies. Dağyar et al. (2021) reported that undergraduate students were interested in pursuing postgraduate education because they wanted to be academics and have different job opportunities. Students expect that postgraduate education will help them specialize in their field of study and become respected and influential academics (Aydemir & Çam, 2015). These results indicate that master's students are highly aware of postgraduate education, as they have been considering becoming academics since their undergraduate years.

Most participants knew that postgraduate education would pose challenges even before they started it. Although participants reported different challenges, the greatest challenge regarding program admission was low proficiency in foreign languages. Although it is a greater challenge for PhD students, master's students also reported it as a major problem. The other challenges regarding program admission were injustice, the lack of objective criteria, the Academic Personnel and Postgraduate Education Entrance Exam, and gender inequality. Most participants noted that they had difficulty choosing what field of geography to specialize in. Also, participants remarked that they did not know academics well enough. They complained that academics were local-minded people who favored their countrymen. Ertem & Gokalp (2022) also found that one of the greatest challenges was the poor rapport between postgraduate students and academics. Solem et al. (2011) emphasized that student–supervisor relations were critical for students.

As for personal challenges, participants stated that they felt inadequate and had concerns for their futures. Moreover, they noted that being a woman was also a challenge. Interestingly, two female participants at the beginning of their postgraduate education talked about the challenges of being a woman in academia. In accordance with the present findings, Yıldız (2018) also argued that female academics in Türkiye have a different profile than those in other countries. Many Turkish female academics have to meet work and family requirements and deal with multiple responsibilities and duties (Başarır & Sarı, 2015; Yıldız, 2018). Yalçın and Demirekin (2013) reported that four in five undergraduate students believed that

academia was challenging for married women with children. These challenges stem from traditional patriarchal norms dictating societal roles for women. Therefore, these results show that academia is more challenging for both female academics and women who want to pursue academic careers.

For participants, the financial challenges were having no steady income and feeling economically insecure. Most participants reported financial difficulties because they did not have jobs with a regular income. These findings also confirm what has been found by Çelenk and Bayar (2019), who also found that financial problems adversely affected postgraduate education. İlter (2022) also stated that financial difficulties made undergraduate students concerned about graduate education. İlhan et al. (2013) emphasized that the barriers preventing geography graduates from being employed other than in teaching geography positions be removed. Cook et al. (2021) reported that future career despondency was common among Australian postgraduate students with academic career aspirations. It can be stated that students in different countries around the world have similar concerns.

Geography graduates in Türkiye face limited job opportunities that generate low income. This is also the case in many countries. Fortuijn et al. (2020) argue that university administrators, politicians, employers, and society know little about what geography is and what geography graduates do. They are also not convinced that society needs more geographers. Gillen (2015) also found that human geographers were concerned about not being able to find jobs in academia or the private sectors. Furthermore, working students also experience challenges because they cannot devote enough time to their academic endeavors as they cannot take any time off, which results in fatigue (Aktan, 2020; Alabaş et al., 2012; Kılınç et al., 2020; Ulusoy & Güçlü, 2020). We can state that postgraduate education poses different financial challenges for employed and unemployed students.

When examining the expectations of participants from the graduate education process, it was found that most participants believed that postgraduate education was neither too easy nor too hard. Interestingly, two participants thought that postgraduate education should be made harder and that only prolific students with bright ideas should be admitted to postgraduate programs. Some participants recommended that admission to postgraduate programs be based on objective criteria and gender equality. They also suggested that academics use active learning methods in geography labs, provide free learning environments for high-quality education, and collaborate with foreign academics for scientific endeavors. Some participants believed that non-thesis master's programs were low-quality programs that universities offered in order to make money. Some participants expected universities to provide them with job opportunities and fund them for scientific activities (e.g., congresses or symposiums). Participants expected academics to be attentive and student-oriented people who supported self-improvement. In short, participants thought that postgraduate geography education should be improved in many ways.

These results are in accord with recent studies indicating that postgraduate education is imbued with many problems and shortcomings (Bayar & Duran, 2019; Tonbul, 2017; Dilci, 2019). Dilci (2019) suggested further both academics and students to improve postgraduate education. First, universities should create a new system for student selection. Second, all parties should learn foreign languages. Third, academics should improve themselves. Fourth, students should develop the skills necessary to do scientific research. Fifth, students should be funded. Likewise, Bayar and Duran (2019) investigated how academics thought postgraduate education could be improved. The academics made the following recommendations: instructors should be more equipped. Universities should adopt new criteria for the enrollment

process, and generate more financial sources. Tonbul (2017) examined expectations for improving the quality of postgraduate education through the role of institutes. He reported that students expected the institutes to inform them, while academics expected more support from the institutions.

These findings will doubtless be much scrutinized, but one immediately dependable conclusion is that although the problems of geography programs vary across countries, they have some common problems, such as limited budget, university administrators, politicians, and employers (Fortuijn et al., 2020). Balcı (2014) found that geography master's students experienced personal, social, professional, or academic inadequacies both during and after the program. Therefore, it is crucial to find solutions to those problems.

The Academic Profession

Participants' views of the academic profession were grouped under three subthemes: (1) the advantages of being an academic, (2) the disadvantages of being an academic, and (3) the characteristics that academics should have.

Under the advantages of being an academic, personal advantages and social advantages were found. In terms of personal advantages, participants noted that they would like to be academics because it was a prestigious profession. The participants also remarked that being an academic allowed them to improve themselves, gave them the freedom to work, specialize in their fields of study, and promoted creativity. As for social advantages, the participants stated that being an academic could help them contribute to society and lead the community to a better future. The high status of being an academic in society also recurred in the interviews as a social advantage for the participants. However, these findings do not fully support previous findings in the literature. For example, in the study conducted by Ulaşkın (2019), academics complained that they did the same things every day, devoted most of their time to their lectures, and spent only a little time on their scientific endeavors. Still, those academics like being academics since being an academic is a fun and satisfactory profession, allowing them to attend events (congresses and symposiums) where they could meet new people and see new places.

The disadvantages of being an academic were grouped under two subthemes: personal disadvantages and academic disadvantages. Participants believed that being an academic was an arduous process. They found the academic profession mentally and physically exhausting and draining. In accordance with the present findings, previous studies have also shown that people view the academic profession as "a profession that is in every aspect of life" (Tülübaş & Göktürk, 2018). Likewise, Ulaşkın (2019) argues that academics eventually mix personal and professional responsibilities.

As for the disadvantages of being an academic, participants, who were master's students, noted the lack of foreign languages as one potential problem. They also mentioned hierarchy problems and title conflicts. They were concerned about receiving tenure track positions. They had difficulty adapting to the arbitrariness prevalent in academia. They also reported the existence of insufficient funding for scientific research. Although most participants regarded the academic profession as prestigious and socially beneficial, one participant believed it was not as highly respected as before. He also stated that it could be a respectable profession again if certain conditions were met (i.e., social acceptance or usefulness to society). He added that it was only financially satisfactory and had high social status.

This finding is consistent with that of Ulaşkın (2019), who asked academics about the challenges of the academic profession and reported that the challenges varied across academic titles. For example,

academics with high titles (e.g., professors) complained about conflicts with management and other academics, while those with low titles (e.g., assistant professors) were concerned about having tenure and complained that they felt mentally exhausted due to spending most of their time on research. The same study also revealed that academics stated that their profession took a turn for the worse, which resulted in low-quality academics and scientific studies.

The characteristics of academics were grouped under two sub-themes: The characteristics academics should have and should not have. Participants stated that academics should have a scientific worldview, communication skills, original ideas, and ethical principles. They noted that academics should share their knowledge and experiences. They added that academics should be versatile, meritorious, capable, objective, critical, innovative, productive, and free-spirited people with a sound grasp of their fields of study. Participants remarked that academics should not commit plagiarism. They stated that academics should not be shallow, inconsiderate, arrogant, self-centered, and lacking courage, who are against innovations and sharing knowledge and experiences. Although each participant described their own image of an ideal academic, most participants underlined common points. This view is supported by the fact that some participants were against the idea that all postgraduate students be academics. It is pleasing that master's students hold this view as it can be more powerful when they move on to PhD programs. These findings corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work. For example, Grant et al. (2014) stressed the importance of being a good supervisor in becoming a modern academic. Studies on academics in Türkiye emphasize certain aspects of the academic profession.

According to Ulaşkın (2019), an ideal academic should be a visionary and influential educator who produces and shares knowledge and knows the society for which he/she serves. Akar (2019) grouped the characteristics of an ideal academic under six subthemes: merit, mental competence, personality traits, work habits and attitude, value system, and interpersonal relations and harmony. Özer et al. (2021) reported that master's students took academics as role models for being determined people who improved themselves and guided others.

Demirbilek (2021) asked fourth-year college students to develop metaphors regarding academics. He grouped their metaphors under three subthemes: guide, researchers, and negative characteristics. Under the theme of "negative characteristics," students viewed academics as inconsistent, selfish, incriminating, and programmed people. Similarly, Polat et al. (2013) conducted a study with undergraduate students of primary teacher education programs, and the participants developed 43 positive and 18 negative metaphors for academics. The researchers grouped the metaphors under six themes: information source, critic, information producer, researcher, guide, and other. Kuzu (2020) investigated education administrators' and teachers' metaphors for academics. The education administrators mostly used the metaphors of "light" and "sun," while the teachers mostly used the metaphors of "light" and "researcher." Limon and Durnalı (2018) also examined the perceptions of PhD students about doctoral education and being an academic. They found that PhD students generated the metaphors of "sun," "tunnel," "life," and "ladder" for doctoral education, and "guide," "friend," "compass," and "torch" for academics. All these research results indicate that participants think of academics as people with both positive and negative characteristics.

To sum up, geography master's students pursued postgraduate education for personal, academic, and social reasons. However, they encountered personal, financial, and academic challenges, as well as challenges related to academics. They also experienced challenges

regarding admission to programs. Participants had academic and financial expectations. They also expected some changes in the admission to programs and the profiles of academics. For participants, the academic profession has both personal and social advantages, as well as personal and academic disadvantages. Participants also believed that academics should be ideal individuals regarding personal characteristics and academic merits.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations would be possible. First, universities need to consider students' goals and expectations when revising geography master's programs. Additionally, developing objective criteria in line with gender equality could be suggested. Acknowledging students' personal and academic goals and expectations as well as providing students with more counseling could also be listed among significant recommendations. Before postgraduate education, undergraduate curricula should include courses and activities for career planning to help students consider realistic and achievable career options. Universities should improve their technical and physical learning environments. Academics should use active learning methods in their lessons in line with certain standards. Academics should encourage students to learn foreign languages. Universities should provide financial support and encourage students to attend national and international scientific events and activities. Academics/advisors should be aware of their own personal and academic characteristics. They should constantly improve themselves and establish cooperative communication with their students.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

One major limitation with qualitative studies is the lack of generalizable results, as these studies use analysis methods (i.e., descriptive or content analysis) to give in-depth insights into a situation. Similarly, as a qualitative research, the most important limitation of the present study is that it did not reveal generalizable results. To overcome this limitation, future studies may recruit different groups or samples and conduct repeated research. It can also be recommended that researchers conduct longitudinal studies while also conducting different studies following processes and changes. Finally, researchers can recruit master's students, PhD students, and academics in the same sample to conduct new and advanced studies as well, which could help overcome the potential limitations of the current study.

Ethics Committee Approval: The study was approved by the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University (Approval No: 05.18, Date: 18.03.2022).

Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from participants who participated in this study.

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