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Trends in writing education: An analysis of postgraduate theses written in Turkey

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Abstract

In this study, 168 postgraduate theses in the field of writing education in Turkey were evaluated in different perspectives. Detected theses have been coded by the triple coding method in terms of types, years, universities, target groups and subjects. According to the results of research, 62.5% of theses were concluded between 2006 and 2010. 81% of theses are master and 19% of it is doctoral theses. Theses mostly intended to determine writing skills of primary and secondary students. In most theses, student's texts are evaluated as superficial or with formal qualifications. Theses in this area are centered on specific universities.

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Keywords: Writing education; post-graduate theses; Turkey.

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the basic language skills together with listening, speaking and reading. Impact of technology is increasing every passing day in our lives today and in relation to that written communication is gaining importance. Written communication has become one of the indicators demonstrating the level of development of societies. In this regard, the development of students' writing skills is extremely important for every society.

Writing arises from the needs of the people to express their thoughts and feelings in accordance with variety of purposes. The purpose of the author affects wording in a text. For this reason, types of writing such as scientific books, articles, bulletin and theses in which the objectivity is predominant have emerged besides types of writing such as novel, story, poem which are connected with subject expression (Day, 2000).

Scientific texts have their own unique form of expression. Scientific text has an impersonal, objective language, uses third party expression, passive-structured times, complex concepts and various notes and reference systems (Hartley, 2008). It differs from other text types with its simple, understandable and objective expression.

Scientific discourse aims to create a real communication between the reader and the text while introduces information and ideas. Therefore, the authors' transforming all the data to sentences and paragraphs is not important. The important thing is audiences' having right perception about the information in the mind of the author (Gopen & Swan, 1990). It makes it necessary for the author to communicate with reader by using understandable language.

Postgraduate theses are studies which are conducted on two levels as master and doctoral in order to obtain in-depth knowledge and they contribute to the solution of the problem by using different methods. The main goals of

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postgraduate theses are; the author's learning scientific research methods, using the language of science successfully, to gain self-efficacy of subject related basic terminology, exposing a substantive research. Besides all these, it is expected in graduate theses to bring innovation in science, to create new methods or to apply a known method to new fields.

According to Hartley (2008) to write a thesis is similar to write a scientific paper but it is more difficult. By comparison, theses are longer than the articles. The students, who have paper writing experience before writing a thesis, are more successful than those without experience. In this respect, postgraduate students who write theses must be trained by making them write articles. Giving scientific writing education in a process makes students gain awareness of basic writing skills and provides gradual increases in their achievements (Bailey, 2004).

Academic studies on mother tongue education in Turkey began in 1990s and after the 2000s gather pace. First postgraduate training program in the field of Turkish Language education was initiated at Gazi University, in 1989 (Güzel, 2003). It is observed that especially after the restructuring of the Faculties of Education in 1997, studies in this area accelerated (Coşkun, 2003).

Today, science develops into new branches and a fast production of knowledge is happening in every field. While working deeply on a subject, ignoring the other topics around that subject creates a significant weakness. In order to prevent this weakness, databases cover the abstracts of scientific works, and with the help of keywords, it becomes possible to see the works related to an area together. Also meta-analysis studies prepared from time to time allow evaluating the scientific accumulations created in a field together.

In Turkey, some bibliographic studies have been made, related to the scientific research in the field of mother tongue education (Demircan, 1982; Demircan & Ersözden, 1990; Şenol, 2001; Coşkun, 2003; Özbay, 2008; Coşkun, Özçakmak & Balcı, 2011). Demircan's (1982) study which is the first bibliographic study in this area was limited to the teaching Turkish language as a foreign language. The study prepared by Demircan ve Ersözden (1990) is more extensive but limited to only books and articles. Şenol (2001) performed a resource scanning on articles related to reading and writing education.

Coşkun's (2003), Özbay's (2008) and Coşkun et al.'s (2011) studies are more comprehensive in terms of postgraduate theses. In Coşkun's (2003) study, 434 theses were evaluated in the field of Turkish language education; 347 being master, 87 being doctorate. In Özbay's study (2008), 598 theses information were covered in the field of Turkish language teaching, including books, articles, web pages; 479 being master, 119 being doctorate. Coşkun et al. (2011) evaluated 1568 postgraduate theses in the field of Turkish language education in Turkey by classifying those according subjects.

There is no analytic study evaluating postgraduate theses concerning writing education directly related to Turkey. This study presents an analysis of postgraduate theses concerned with writing education in Turkey.

2. Purpose of the study

The present study aims to evaluate postgraduate studies concerning writing education in Turkey between 1981-2010 by classifying them in terms of type, their years, universities, target groups and subjects.

3. Methods

In the study, a scanning was made at the National Thesis Center with 72 concepts related to writing education. 168 theses found at the end of scanning were coded by the triple coding method. In the scanning process, mainly National Thesis Center database was used. Also, web pages of some universities and previously printed bibliography studies were used for the theses of previous years. Detected theses have been coded in terms of types (postgraduate, doctorate), years of completion and universities. Also, codes were made for theses target groups (pre-school, primary school, etc.) and subjects. In classifying the theses according to their subjects; theses related to multiple subjects were examined separately under each subject.

In order to provide coding reliability; codes by the first researcher have been separately checked by the second and third researchers. Although there were some minor differences between the codes, it was understood that these were made by mistake and after adjustments, a full accord was achieved between coders.

4. Results

In the research, theses related to writing education were evaluated according to their years and types.

Table 1: The distribution of theses in the writing education area in terms of year and type

	Masters		Doctorates		Total	
Years	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
1981-2000	21	77.8	6	22.2	27	16.1
2001-2005	31	86.1	5	13.9	36	21.4
2006-2010	84	80.0	21	20.0	105	62.5
Total	136	81.0	32	19.0	168	100.0

As seen Table 1, there is a significant increase in the number of theses on writing education. Between 1981 and 2000 (20 years), 27 theses were made, and between 2001 and 2005, which is a shorter span, 36 theses were completed. The number of theses between the years 2006 and 2010 is 105. Approximately 2/3 (62.5%) of the theses in writing education in 30 years were completed between 2006 and 2010 (in 5 years). Masters theses are 81% while doctorate theses are 19%. So, there is approximately one doctorate thesis against four postgraduate theses.

In theses on writing education, target groups were evaluated based on their names of theses.

Table 2: The distribution of theses in the writing education area in terms of subjects

Subject	**f**	**%**
Summative assessment of students texts	68	% 40.5
Assessment of students texts in terms of formal qualities [Incoherencies (*f*=8), miswriting and punctuation (*f*=17), grammatical mistakes (*f*=10), legibility (*f*=8)]	43	% 25.6
Assessment of students texts in terms of content (planning, relations between texts units, cohesion and coherence)	11	% 6.5
Teaching methods	38	% 22.6
Vocabulary knowledge	14	% 8.3
Curriculums	9	% 5.4
Teaching materials and school textbooks	8	% 4.8
Writing education for foreigners and bilinguals	7	% 4.2
Assessment and evaluation in teaching writing	5	% 3.0

Theses in writing education 40.5% of the student texts were evaluated generally (holistically). Ratio of the theses of which texts examined in terms of faults of expression, spelling, punctuation, grammar, legibility etc. formal qualities were 25.6%; and the ratio of the theses of which texts examined in terms of content, such as planning, relations between text units, comprehension and consistence were only 6.5%. 22.6% of the theses were on methods of education; 8% were on vocabulary.

Table 3: The distribution of theses in the writing education area in terms of target groups

Target groups	**f**	**%**
Primary school students	54	32.1
Secondary school students	62	36.9
High school students	12	7.1
University students and adults	9	5.4
Special education for handicapped	12	7.1
Foreign students	7	4.2
Undefined	33	19.6
Total	168	% 100

36.9% of the theses were on the writing skills of secondary school students; 32.1% were on primary school students; 7.1% were on high-school students and again, 7.1% were on students requiring special education. In 33 theses, target group could not be set based on title.

Table 4: The distribution of theses in the writing education area in terms of universities

University	Masters	Doctorate	Total	
			f	%
Gazi University	29	11	40	23.8
Afyon Kocatepe University	23	0	23	13.7
Ankara University	11	9	20	11.9
Marmara University	7	4	11	6.5
Atatürk University	11	0	11	6.5
Other	55	8	63	37.5

Theses on writing education have been made at total of 50 universities. Table 4 shows that the postgraduate theses in the writing education area in Turkey were mostly produced at Gazi University (23.8%); Afyon Kocatepe University (13.7%) and Ankara University (11.9%). The theses made at the five universities (f=105), in which 10 and over theses were made, form the 62.5% of all theses.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

According to the results of the research, a large part of the postgraduate theses in Turkey on writing education have been prepared between 2006 and 2010. This result shows that there is an important increase in thesis number in terms of years, and that this increase will continue. Also, there is one doctorate thesis against four postgraduate theses. Based on this, it can be expected that the ration of doctorate theses may increase in future years.

In this study, in 40.5% of the examined theses, student texts were evaluated holistically. In such studies, where the relations between writing skill and other variables are evaluated, writing problems are examined superficially. Therefore, in such studies, writing related problems are not clarified sufficiently. Among the theses detected in the study, there are theses focusing on specific points in writing. However, most of these theses examine problems related to formal features such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, legibility, etc. The ratio of such theses (25.6%) among all theses is a very high ratio. On the other hand the ratio of theses that evaluate student texts in terms of content, such as paragraph construct, creativity, text planning, text elements etc. is only 6.5%.

According to Özbay's (2000) research, most (54.6%) Turkish language teachers focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar errors while evaluating the essays of students. The ratio of Turkish language teachers that prioritize the content in their evaluation is only 21.2%. The results of this research show that formal evaluations are preferred more than content evaluation even in scientific studies.

The writing activity is a work of production based on the expression of the emotions and ideas in the brain through writing (Harris, 1993; White & Arndt, 1997; Cooper & Patton, 2004). In order to express ideas in an orderly pattern, first, a planning is needed while perceiving the information and uploading them to the brain (Coşkun, 2009; Güneş, 2009). It would be wrong to expect a healthy expression from a person who can't think healthily. The text to be written is formed in the brain, before on paper or screen (Yalçın, 2002). Thus, the qualities related to arranging the content (ideas, relations between text units and consistency) are more important than stylistic qualities (legibility, spelling, punctuation, grammar rules, etc.). In the teaching of writing, the ratio of the theses on stylistic qualities being so much high beside the ratio of the theses on content qualities displays an important problem.

32.1 % of the examined theses are intended to primary school; 36.9 % secondary school and only 6.5 % about high school (lyceum) students' writing skills. The research results show that 62.5% of the theses in the field of writing education are done at five universities. This result can cause theses are on similar subjects.

As a result of this study, the following recommendations can be offered:

a. Number of doctoral theses in the field of writing education should be increased by increasing the quality of scientific research in this field.
b. Studies to evaluate the success of high school and university students in writing should be placed on efforts.
c. In studies in the field of writing education rather than superficial assessment different perspectives that may result in substantial recommendations needed to be created.

d. The studies in the field of writing education must be focused on creativity and the qualifications of the organization of the content instead of formal qualifications.
e. Getting larger number of the universities where theses in the field of writing education is done and increasing the diversity of subjects of the theses must be provided.
f. More detailed studies which analyses the theses in terms of method, measuring instruments and findings should be conducted.

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