

The reasons behind English Language instructors' quitting their MA studies

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to gain insight into the English language teachers who quitted their MA studies through one research question that asked the reasons that led the teachers to quit their MA. Three English language instructors participated in this purely qualitative study. I collected the data through semi-structured interviews and graphic elicitation tasks. The results showed that there were a few reasons for their decision to quit, the most important one being the lack of motivation. Implications were discussed in the paper.

Keywords

Graduate schools,
Instructors'
graduate studies,
Challenges of
doing MA,
Instructors'
quitting of MA

Introduction

Students' attrition is an issue which has drawn the attention of some researchers over the last ten years due to its impact on the professional development of teachers. However, most of the research has been about undergraduate or doctoral students, which shows master's students have been neglected for some reason (Cohen, 2012). As Cohen (2012) puts forth, the reasons might vary. First of all, master's students might not be considered as important as doctoral or undergraduate students. Moreover, these students might be claimed not to be so stressful as the doctoral students since they do not have to write a dissertation. They are also thought to be more motivated than undergraduate students since they start their study according to their will.

Due to the reasons above, this study aims to explore the reasons behind MA students' attrition with a main focus on English language instructors working at state universities. The rationale for this focus is that teachers or instructors are generally eager to improve themselves, to be knowledgeable about the methods and techniques to teach better and they are already in the field, which means they are different from engineers who work outside an educational environment and do their graduate studies (Alabaş, Kamer, & Polat, 2012; Başer, Narlı & Günhan, 2005). This eagerness and feeling a kind of "relatedness" (Houston, 2014, p. 27) has motivated me to focus on English language instructors in particular. There must be more than stress which lead them to quit. Actually, there are some studies concerned with teachers who are doing or did their MA studies (Alabaş, Kamer, & Polat, 2012; Başer, Narlı & Günhan, 2005) However, these generally focus on the reasons why they want to continue their education and what kinds of problems or challenges they encounter. Moreover, most of them are quantitative studies which try to generalise the findings. This study aimed to explore the reasons which led three English language instructors to quit in the thesis-writing stage of their graduate studies in a qualitative manner.

Research questions

I aimed to explore the reasons behind English language instructors' quitting their MA studies. My main purpose was to gain insight into their both professional and private lives when they took the decision to quit with the following research question:

- What are the reasons behind language instructors' quitting their graduate studies?

Theoretical background

Research has shown that the decision to leave or to persist studying is highly related to the motivation of the individual. Theories on motivation are generally about human nature and why they act in a certain way in certain circumstances. In these theories there is a continuum from "mechanistic" to "organismic" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 3). In the organismic view, the individual is active and he/she has the inner motivation to accomplish his/her aim. On the other hand, in mechanistic theory the individual is seen passive and he/she is only influenced by "psychological drives and environmental stimuli" (p. 3). The Self-Determination Theory which was proposed by

Deci and Ryan (1985) stems from the organismic view of motivation. They defined it as "... the capacity to choose and to have those choices rather than reinforcement contingencies, drives or any other forces or pressures, be the determinants of one's actions" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 38). This theory is based on the idea that if the individual is willing to do something, he/she will be able to accomplish it.

Self-determination of an individual might be supported or hindered by the environment, which is relevant to my topic of interest, the language instructors who decided to quit their MA studies. Was it because they were not intrinsically motivated to persist? Or were the people around them not supportive enough to help them be self-determined?

Literature review

Student attrition has been the focus of various researchers up to date. Tinto (1975) defines student attrition as:

... a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems... continually modify his goals and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to various forms of dropout. (p. 94)

It is clear from the above discussion that reasons which lead students to leave their educational study might vary. Although there were studies both on undergraduate (Chen, 2011; Ghanboosi, 2013; Martinez, Borjas, Herrera, & Valencia, 2015) and graduate students (Gittings, 2010; Hortulanus, Machielse, Meeuwesen, 2006; Houston, 2014; Most, 2009; West, Gokalp, Pena, E & Fischer, 2011), only Cohen (2012) had a clear aim of studying MA students; and Başer, Narlı and Günhan (2005) and Alabaş Kamer, and Polat (2012) asked for the ideas of the teachers who did or were doing their MAs.

According to these studies, several overlapping points were found out. The most common factor in deciding to persist or quit for the graduate students was the relationship between the students and the faculty or the advisor. Studies done by Başer, Narlı and Günhan (2005), Ehrenberg and Jakubson (2007), West et. al. (2011),

Alabaş Kamer and Polat (2012), Gittings (2010), Houston (2014) and Devos, Boudrenghien, Van der Linden, Azzi, Frenay, Galand, & Klein (2015) found a positive relationship between these variables, which showed that if the students had good interactions with their supervisor, and received support from both their supervisors and the faculty staff, they tended to be more motivated to continue. In other words, they preferred the advisors' "open-door policy" (Houston, 2014, p. 153). On the contrary, Cohen (2012)'s study revealed no correlation. The students in his study were not affected by their relationships either positively or negatively.

Another issue which was found to be influential in graduate students' attrition or persistence was their involvement in professional activities like attending academic conferences (Başer, Narlı & Günhan , 2005; Cohen, 2012; Gittings, 2010; Houston, 2014). Participating such events seemed to be a motivating factor for the students. What is more, having the opportunity to get funds for those activities or some other extra-curricular events was found to facilitate the students' motivations (Houston, 2014)

One more common finding of the studies in the literature was the interactions between the peers (Cohen, 2012; Devos et.al, 2015; Houston, 2014; West et. al., 2011). Whether the relationships between and among the peers was supportive or not was a significant determinant of the students' decision to continue. What I found interesting here is that although the interactions between the students and the supervisors were not effective in Cohen's (2012) study, the relationship between peers was quite significant, which revealed the fact that graduate students really needed each other's assistance.

Time management was also found to be an indicator of success or failure in graduate studies (Başer, Narlı & Günhan , 2005; West et.al, 2011). When the students were not able to balance their academic and private lives, they felt stressed, which led them to social isolation (Hortulanus, Machielse, Meeuwesen, 2006).

In terms of the assignments and the projects, students were found to prefer clear expectations and instructions (Ehrenberg and Jakobson, 2007; Houston, 2014). When they had clearly-established rules and when they were sure of the expectations of their professors, they felt more eager to continue.

Support which was another crucial element for the students was explored by few studies (Alabaş, Kamer and Polat, 2012; Başer, Narlı & Günhan, 2005). Both studies

found out that one of the most important problems which teachers doing their MAs encountered was support from their administrators.

In essence, the literature reveals that there might be different reasons and influences which led to graduate students' attrition or which caused them several problems. Since most of the studies I cited did not have a clear focus on teachers who decided to quit, I aimed to dig more into the factors and reasons which caused English language instructors teaching at universities in Turkey to drop out.

Methodology

Participants

Three English language instructors participated in my study. All of them were graduates of English Language Teaching (ELT) department at a state university in İstanbul. Before recruiting the participants, information about the aim and the procedures of the study was sent to a number of English language instructors and 3 volunteers were chosen. Three pseudonyms were given for confidentiality, Özay, Yaren and Zeynep.

Özay is 32 years old and he has been teaching English to prep class students at a state university in Istanbul. He has been working for the same institution since the beginning of his career. He started his MA study at ELT department as soon as he graduated from university. After he completed his courses in the first semester, he started to work at a prep school at a state university. He decided to quit after he completed all of his courses and just before he began writing his thesis.

Yaren is 33 years old and she has been teaching English to prep class student at a state university in Istanbul. Actually *Özay* and *Yaren* have been working for the same institution. Like *Özay*, *Yaren* has not worked for any other institution. Her MA major was on teaching Turkish to foreigners. She decided to quit after she completed her courses successfully. She had already decided on a topic to study and started to read the related literature.

Zeynep is 33 years old. She has worked for quite a lot of different institutions up to present. She started to teach English to young learners at a state school in Sakarya immediately after she graduated from university. After that she came to Istanbul to

work at a state university-actually the same university as Özay and Yaren. Then she resigned and went to Australia where she worked as a waitress and study at a graduate school at the same time. Now she is teaching English to prep class students at a private university in Istanbul. She quitted her MA twice, once before going to Australia and once in Australia. The first MA major was on translating and interpreting and she decided to quit at thesis writing stage. The other MA was on ELT in Australia and she decided to quit again just before she started to write her thesis.

Instruments

As the first data collection instrument, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the participants. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) claim, with the help of interviews, we have the opportunity to "... explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own." (p.3). The interview questions were prepared by the researcher (Appendix A). At the beginning of each interview, the participants were informed about the aim of the research and consent (See Appendix B for a sample) was taken in order to audio-record the interviews. The questions started with general ones like how long they had been teaching. And then there was a transition to the information about their MA studies. Questions tried to find out what kinds of difficulties they had, what they thought about the advantages and disadvantages of having an MA degree, their feelings after their decision and finally whether they were thinking about continuing or not. I aimed to dig more into the reasons behind their decision through probes without trying not to offend the participant. The interviews took approximately 20 minutes. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and coded for data analysis.

The other instrument is the graphic elicitation task (Appendix C). Bagnoli (2009) states that apart from written or spoken data, "non-linguistic" (p. 547) data were also important in order to learn more about the issue. Therefore, the participants were requested to draw a picture while they were doing their MA and after their decision to quit. They were informed that they could use any kind of drawing and writing. This task was done after the interviews were carried out.

Apart from these, I wrote 9 analytic memos during the course of the study (Appendix D). Saldaña (2013) asserts that writing analytic memos helps a researcher to think

about and reflect on the study. With the help of these reflective writings, I had the opportunity to foresee where I was leading to.

Data coding and analysis

Three interviews were done in order to get insight into the reasons why language instructors decided to quit their MA studies. After I did the interview with the first participant, I listened to it before I did the second interview. I applied the same procedure for each of them. I did not continue with the other interview before listening to the previous one. This was due to understanding whether I was able to probe where necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), whether I should include more questions and whether I should be bracketing (Tuffard & Newman, 2010). In my second interview, I came up with a question which I thought would be beneficial for the research. Therefore, I added that question to my protocol and asked it in the third interview. Since the first interview had already been done, I had to contact with the first interviewee and asked that question to him, as well. After all the interviews were carried out, I started to transcribe them. In the transcriptions, I transcribed everything I heard including “hi, hi,” “aaaa”, “hmmm” and so on. I gave the graphic elicitation tasks just after the interviews in all occasions. After getting the graphic elicitation, I member checked the message that the interviewee wished to convey. According to Carlson (2010), member checking is a significant component of qualitative studies in that it provides information on whether the analyses are correct or not.

The next step was to analyse the data. I chose descriptive and in vivo coding. In Saldaña's (2013) words, “descriptive coding summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun— the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 88). By looking into the data, I tried to find out some topics coming out of the transcriptions. In vivo coding refers to taking what the participant exactly said. It was especially important when the exact words or phrases of the participants were of significant value to the research (Saldaña, 2013). Since I tried to learn about the reasons behind the teachers' attrition and their feelings, I also included in vivo coding.

When all the transcriptions, graphic elicitations and analytic memos were collected, I did “house-cleaning” (p.182) in Bogdan and Biklen’s (1998) terms. In other words, I had a look at all the data and make some arrangements like ordering. Then I started to analyse the data. After the coding was completed, I developed a preliminary codebook for each participant where I wrote the code, its definition, the inclusion/exclusion criteria and an example from the data (Appendix E). Then, I read the codebook a number of times to find the overlapping codes across the participants. After developing the codebook (Appendix F), I tried to categorize the codes in order to reach the themes. Totally three themes emerged from the data. These were advantages of having an MA, lack of motivation and feelings.

Subjectivity

One of the most important things in data analysis in qualitative studies is the issue of subjectivity (Carlson, 2010; Peshkin, 1988). Since it was impossible to be purely objective during the study, I tried, at least, to bracket myself so that my preconceptions would not interfere. While listening to the first interview, I realized that I was trying to push the interviewee to talk about his institution. I, myself, had so many problems with my institution during my MA study like schedules, questionnaires or using some sources that I had a theory that if a language instructor decided to quit his/her MA, the most important reason might be the non-supportive work environment. During the interview, I seemed to be pushing the participant towards that theory. Fortunately, I realized this and included it in my analytic memo before the second interview and I was able to bracket myself (Tuffard & Newman, 2010). In the second and the third interviews, I stopped doing that.

Another thing I did in order to be objective enough was to consult the participants whenever necessary. For example, while I was coding the transcriptions of my third interview, I realized that the participant mentioned she was not happy with her institution. However, I did not probe to learn more details. This was probably due to the over-bracketing. As I did not want to push the participant to talk about the non-supportive environment, I chose not to ask more about that question though actually I should have. Therefore, I e-mailed to her asking what she meant by it.

The final thing to overcome subjectivity was to member check with the participants (Carlson, 2010; Ryan, 2003). After analysing the data and writing the results section, I

sent the related parts to my participants. I did not prefer to send them the transcriptions since it would be impractical for them to read. Before sending them the results section, I explained that if they wanted me to make any necessary changes with regard to false starts, ungrammatical sentences, etc., I would be able to do it. Another thing I mentioned was about my interpretation. I asked them to consider whether I was able to interpret what they meant. The reason behind putting limits on member checking procedure was to give them exact directions of my expectation. I also tried to assure them that they were not expected to produce grammatically correct and complete sentences as this was an interview which should be done in a natural way (Carlson, 2010).

Results

A total of three themes emerged out of the data- the advantages of doing an MA, lack of motivation due to the graduate school, and lack of motivation due to feelings.

Advantages of doing an MA

The participants each mentioned a different advantage of doing an MA. Yaren, for example, said that “I thought it would bring me a new point of view and broaden my horizon because I always look at things from the same point of view. I teach English to Turkish students. I wanted to change my side. I wanted to be on the other side, teach Turkish to foreigners.” Her comments on the advantages show that since she was doing her MA on teaching Turkish to foreigners, she would have the opportunity to have a different point of view.

Zeynep mentioned theoretical contribution of doing an MA on herself. Upon my question concerning if she wanted to start another MA programme, which department she would choose, she said that “ELT, because, I wanted to contribute to my professional life, to my career...” When further asked whether she really believed that it would contribute to her teaching, she stated that “Not as much as we expect or people think it does but at least I can just remember the theoretical knowledge that I learnt in university. You know, it’s like you’re refreshing your background

information. It just feels good. You feel like you know something...” Although she was not sure whether she would be able to apply this theoretical knowledge into practice, she would feel good to refresh her knowledge. Zeynep expressed something further related to this topic “To be honest, it only helps me make just a little bit more money at university because they just add that to your salary.” Since Zeynep was working at a private university, having an MA degree could make more financial contribution to her than the other participants who were teaching at a state university. Similar to Zeynep, Özay believed in the theoretical advantage of doing an MA. He said that “Maybe it can give you a deeper knowledge about the area, but as a classroom practice, I don’t think that it has significant benefits.” After this comment, I asked him to dwell more on the “significant benefits”. He stated that:

Actually, teaching is something innate. Whatever you learn afterwards, if you don’t have the chance to apply it in the classroom, and if you are working at a state school, you don’t have much chance to do it. So it’s just a theory. You learn something. Maybe you keep it in mind. But as you don’t do much thing about it in the classroom ... it’s theoretical.

In essence, all instructors believed there were some advantages of doing MA although they sounded to have some concerns about their practice in the real classroom, which indicate the gap between theory and practice.

Lack of motivation due to the graduate school

Lack of motivation due to the graduate school had two different causes: lack of guidance from the supervisor and satisfaction with the academic environment at the graduate school. The first cause was mentioned by all the participants. For instance, Özay said that “Because he [my thesis advisor] was a professor from French language teaching. Actually he was not very helpful. I was asking him when I can see you. And he answered me ‘I’m here all the time.’ But when I come to visit him, he was absent.” He further asserted that as an MA student, he did not deserve such a behaviour from the professor. Yaren mentioned a very similar thing,

But then in the thesis level, I couldn’t reach the teacher. I needed that supervision. I had never done; I had never written a thesis before. I read lots of samples, thesis samples to get an idea, to decide on my thesis statement but it doesn’t help. You need somebody to show you the way, to lead you. That leading person was missing. I couldn’t even reach him on the phone.

Yaren seemed to be quite enthusiastic about the thesis since she already had some ideas but what was lacking was the person to lead her. Likewise, Zeynep reported her feelings of frustrations due to lack of guidance. She explained that

... I didn't get enough guidance from anyone. I mean I had an advisor but my advisor wasn't really helping. I don't want to blame her it's just the nature of writing a thesis, I guess. You have to find the topic. You have to make the researches but it was such a new area for me, like I didn't know how to make research. I didn't know how to find a topic.

These examples show that none of the participants were able to get the help they needed from their supervisors at the graduate school. Probably due to this, all of them decided to quit at the thesis stage.

Another thing that led the teachers to lose motivation was their satisfaction with the academic environment at the graduate school. Especially Özyay and Yaren mentioned their dissatisfaction with the academic environment. For example, Özyay said that:

We were doing some readings but I don't think that the work was so academic. Because while writing the assignments, we weren't following some rules. Is it APA? There was something like this. We weren't following it, we were just writing. And I don't think that the professors were suggesting enough resources.

He went on to say that if these problems had not existed, he would have felt more professional and maybe he would not have quitted the program. Another example related to the issue came from Yaren. She said that "To exemplify, I was expecting the teachers to hand out kinds of articles or at least assign us to find articles, to read them and to discuss on them. Instead we discussed on ideas in general and it always sounded like they were never prepared for their lesson." She also talked about the approach of the professors, "Things were too unplanned. Teachers were loosy and not enthusiastic as we were. That made me lose my concentration and lose enthusiasm." Moreover, she reported that sometimes the professors even asked the students what to cover in the class, which was an indication of their being unprepared for the class. She claimed that the professors were so busy that they did not have any spare time to guide their students.

The comments made by Özay and Yaren indicates that the non-academic environment where the professors did not provide students with enough resources; assignments were too childish and where the professors were unplanned caused them to lose their enthusiasm.

Apart from the lack of guidance and non-academic environment, the participants individually mentioned some other things, as well. For example, Özay was not happy with the medium of instruction at the graduate school. He said that:

... I got bored. I didn't feel like doing it. Maybe I had no motivation. Maybe I couldn't see any further benefits and maybe the courses were not very satisfying because in my MA there were some other students from French language teaching, German language teaching and teaching Turkish as a foreign language and were taking almost the same courses and of course the language was Turkish. Of course we had English courses, too but if we have 4 courses in a term, only there is one English.

He actually related his attrition from the graduate school to this language problem, as well. In the interview, he also mentioned the difficulty he had with the terminology in Turkish.

Yaren talked about the physical conditions and the attitude of the faculty staff towards the students. She was not content with the classrooms or the building in general due to their oldness and dirtiness. She reported that "So the conditions weren't the best one to have lessons. Sometimes we even didn't have the class to cover the lesson. We had to visit the instructor's room." Moreover, she complained about the attitudes of the faculty staff. She said that they were not very respectful to the students and they had to spend too much time on procedures.

Lack of motivation due to feelings

I found out that feelings of the participants were also influential in their motivation. They seemed to feel under pressure while doing their MA. Özay defined this pressure in this way, "... it was difficult for me in life. Maybe it was like, how can I explain, it was like a stone on my feet. I have to deal with it." He actually started to see MA like a burden in his life because he said that his brain was always busy, "...I have to finish this. I have to write this. It was always on my mind." He drew similar feelings in the graphic elicitation task, as well. He drew himself with questions in his mind feeling worried, anxious and sleepless. He was so overwhelmed that he said "I felt like a

bird” after he decided to quit. He also drew this idea in the graphic elicitation task. He drew himself between two thought bubbles. In the big bubble he wrote “LIFE IS GOOD, FUN! That’s better. MORE TIME FOR LIFE. NO STRESS!” On the other hand, he wrote “Is this really the right decision?” in the small bubble. When I asked him whether he drew the sizes of the bubbles intentionally, he said “Yes”. He also told me that he wrote some sentences in capital letters on purpose in order to show that they were more important.

Zeynep also reported that she had experienced feelings of pressure. She said that “...It’s [doing MA] just stressful during the lessons and thesis.” In a further comment, she claimed that “I couldn’t plan the stages. I couldn’t plan my studies so it was so complicated. It was so frustrating. Seriously, it was so frustrating that it made me quit.” In the graphic elicitation task, she wrote some words related to her feelings. She seemed to have feelings of doubt and struggle in the middle of the MA just before her decision to quit. When she decided to quit, she felt guilty and disappointed contrary to Özay’s feelings of relaxation.

As for Yaren, although she did not mention any feelings of pressure during the interview. Her graphic elicitation showed that she had a busy mind while doing her MA. She seemed to have so many thoughts, plans and so on. With regard to her feelings after her decision to give up, she said that she was quite angry with the supervisor and she was unhappy to let the people down. In her words, “They [people in her life] were disappointed because they are not used to hearing me failing stories. This is a failure for them. It’s disappointing for them to say for my mother, for example, to say her daughter couldn’t complete her thesis.” Therefore, these feelings seemed to have had an impact on the teachers’ decision to quit since they might have felt psychologically overwhelmed by the things that they had to do

Finally, the problems Zeynep was experiencing in her private life and the institution also led her to a state of lack of motivation. As for her private life, she said that with her first MA program, she was having problems with her boyfriend. She said she was not generally happy with her life. The institution she was working for was also one of those problems according to her. They did not support her with the schedules because

she had to have a prep year as she was doing her MA in a different major than her BA. These problems frustrated her and in the end she gave up.

Discussion

In this study, I aimed to find out the reasons why three English language instructors decided to quit their MA studies. I found three general categories through the analysis of the data. These were: advantages of doing MA, lack of motivation due to the graduate school, and lack of motivation due to feelings.

When I consider the findings as a whole, I can say that lack of motivation which occurred due to several problems was the main reason for them to quit. For instance, the participants reported to have lost their motivation and enthusiasm due to insufficient guidance from their supervisor. This was also one of the main reasons that some other researchers had found (Alabaş, Kamer & Polat, 2012; Başer, Narlı & Günhan, 2005; Devos et.al., 2015; Ehrenberg & Jacobson, 2007; Gittings, 2010; Houston, 2014; West et.al., 2011). The common conclusion of those studies was that good interactions with the supervisor led to more motivation to continue, whereas Cohen (2012) did not find any correlation between the two.

The participants also talked about the academic environment of the graduate school. Two of them, Özay and Yaren, were dissatisfied with the academic environment, which, they mentioned, led to their loss of enthusiasm. Though it was not exactly the same, some other studies found a relationship between the motivation and the academic satisfaction (Başer, Narlı & Günhan, 2005; Cohen, 2012; Gittings, 2010; Houston, 2014). In these studies, what was meant by “academic environment” was the involvement in professional activities like academic conferences. In my study it referred to assignments, sources, syllabus and so on. Especially Yaren and Zeynep mentioned not having clear instructions on how to start or what to do while writing their thesis. This was found out to be significant for the motivation to go on by Ehrenberg and Jacobson (2007), and Houston (2014).

One further reason for the lack of motivation was related to the feelings of the participants. They reported to experience feelings of pressure. One of them even described doing MA as carrying a stone on his feet. Hortulanus, Machielse and Meeuwesen (2006) revealed similar results that their participants felt stressed and isolated from the social life.

Another reason which caused lack of motivation was the gap between theory and practice. Although the participants said that doing MA contributed to their theoretical information about the field through the activation of information from their undergraduate courses, they did not believe that they would be able to apply this in the class. The theoretical contribution was also found out by Alabaş and Kamer (2012), and Başer, Narlı and Günhan (2005). However, in the study of Başer, Narlı and Günhan (2005) most of the teachers supported the idea that they would be able to use the information practically in the class, which was contrary to the teachers' idea in the present study.

Moreover, Zeynep reported that she experienced some problems with the institution that she was working at that time. The problems were mainly due to the schedules. This had already been revealed by Alabaş, Kamer and Polat (2012), and Başer, Narlı and Günhan (2005). Interestingly, these studies were all carried out in a Turkish context, which might be an indication of an unsupportive administrative environment for teachers' graduate studies. The main reason for this may be that teachers' right to be enrolled in graduate schools were not guaranteed by law. Zeynep also said that she had problems in her private life, which was in line with the study of Hortulanus, Machielse and Meeuwesen (2006) Although Zeynep did not prefer to give details about the problems with her boyfriend, she probably could not balance her academic and private life.

Conclusion and implications

This study looked at the reasons behind English language teachers' attrition from their MA studies. The main reason was found to be the lack of motivation which was affected by a number of things like guidance from the supervisor, the gap between theory and practice, feelings of pressure, the problems with the private life or the institution, physical conditions of the graduate school, the attitudes of the faculty staff and so on. This conclusion asserts that the participants in my study were highly affected by the things outside of themselves, which might be an indication of the need of outside support for success. Therefore, the Self-Determination Theory does not work on its own.

The conclusions I drew from the study might be beneficial for the graduate schools and the institutions. As for the graduate schools, the first thing to be done is to make the professors aware that graduate students need guidance especially while writing their thesis. Another thing might be to design the syllabus in a way that prepares the students for the thesis. By this, the students' complaints related to the non-academic environment might be overcome, as well. Finally, institutions should be made aware of the problems of the teachers doing their MA and a supportive environment should be created.

Notes on the contributors

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Appendix A

The Research Question

What are the reasons behind language instructors' quitting their graduate studies?

The Research Protocol

Welcome! The aim of the study is to learn more about teachers or instructors who have quit their graduate studies. The interview will last about 30-45 minutes. I want to remind you that you have the right to withdraw from the study whenever you want. I will record and then transcribe the interview; but your name will be confidential and never appear in the paper. If there are any unclear points, let me know so that I can explain them. If you are ready, may I start the audio-recording?

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. When did you start your MA? Was it before or after you started teaching?
3. What were your feelings when you first started? What were your expectations?
4. How much time did you spend on your MA?
5. How many hours were you teaching then?
6. What was the most important thing that you missed when you were doing your MA?
7. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of having an MA degree for a teacher or instructor?
8. What led you to quit?
9. How did you feel when you decided to quit? Can you give examples to explain?
10. How many hours do you teach now?
11. What are your future plans?

Thank you very much for your participation. Do you have any questions for me? May I consult you if I have any further questions?

After writing the paper, I will show the related parts to you to have your consent on the things that you have said.

Appendix B

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by *****from ***** University . I understand that the project is designed to gather information about academic work of faculty on campus. I will be one of approximately 3 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.
2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by researchers from Century University. The interview will last approximately 20-30 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this

study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

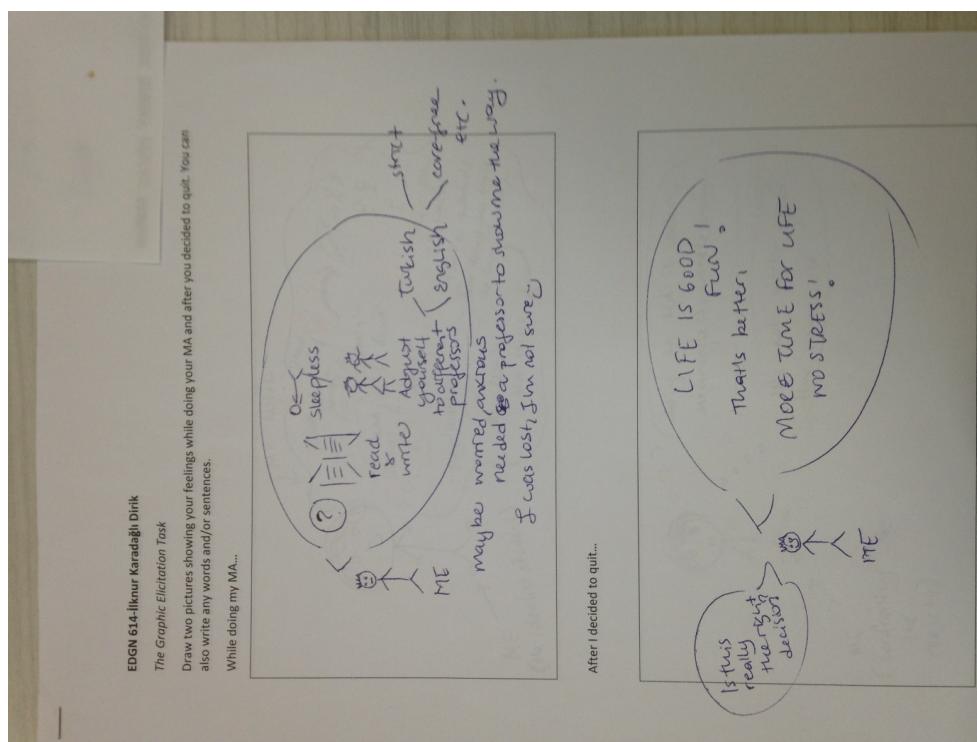
7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

My Signature _____
Date _____

My Printed Name _____
Signature of the Investigator _____

Appendix C

Özay's graphic elicitation



Appendix D

Analytic memos

Analytic Memo of the First Graphic Elicitation Task

My graphic elicitation task requires the participants to draw their feelings before and after they decided to quit their MA studies. I felt a little bit unsure about when to do it. Is it more suitable to do it before or after the interview? If the participant does it after the interview, he/she will have already remembered his/her feelings through the questions in the interview. On the other hand, if he/she does it before the interview, he/she will have already thought about the process before starting to answer the interview questions. In the end, for my first interview, I decided to do it after the interview. My first participants did not seem to be reluctant to do the task, which is rare and very good for my research! He drew the picture accompanied with some speech bubbles. I did not have much difficulty in interpreting it because everything was so obvious and in line with the answers to the interview. In both pictures he drew himself and the people around him. In the first picture-while he was doing his MA- he also drew the pictures of his professors. He seemed to be bored while doing his MA since he had to think about assignments which required him to read and write, and obey the deadlines. One more problem he drew was trying to get used to different professors. However, after he decided to quit, he felt relaxed and was able to find more time for himself. This time the other people he drew were his friends. He wrote in capital letters "... " which shows that this was more important to him than academic studies. I wanted to make sure that he did it on purpose and asked him to clarify and he said "Yes! I did it on purpose!". After all, it was a nice activity for me.

Analytic Memo of the First Interview

My first participant was a person that I know very well. I intentionally wanted to start with him as I thought I would feel more relaxed. However, it was not so! I felt excited and I saw the same feeling in him, as well. It was like we felt a little bit stupid speaking English to each other. We couldn't help laughing at the beginning but a few minutes later we got used to it. When I started to ask my questions, I saw that he gave very short and clear-cut answers. Then I tried to dig into details with probes but I think his style was a little bit talking little. Therefore, it took 18 minutes to ask and answer 10 questions and probes. Meanwhile, I found myself asking some different questions that I did not think about before and I took notes of them so as to ask them to the other participants, as well. After I listened to the interview, I realized that I was trying to push him towards institutional problems. I think I shouldn't do it again.

Analytic Memo of the Second Interview

My second participant was a friend of mine from my previous institution. I felt more relaxed this time, which means knowing someone very well does not guarantee a relaxed atmosphere! The interview looked more structured in the way that it flowed. I did not forget to ask the questions which came out in my first interview. This time I again found some more questions about the academic program of the department that she was a student at. While she was talking about the reasons why she quit her MA, she said that she did not find the department academic enough. I asked how can you define "academic"? After her answer, I decided to ask why she thought it was not academic. I think I should ask this question to my first participant, as well. This is because it might be important to know whether being "academic" is a factor in deciding to continue or whether the participant thinks the environment he was in was "academic enough".

Analytic memo for the second graphic elicitation

Just like in the first interview, I gave the graphic elicitation task after the interview. However, I mentioned it before we started our interview. The interviewee seemed a little bit worried about the task and she said she was not good at drawing but I tried to comfort her saying that I was not interested in how good she drew and if she wanted she could reflect what she felt with words as well. She said O.K. When I gave her the task, she asked whether she could

do it in another room. I thought she would be more comfortable if she did so. And then I let her do wherever she wished. She brought the task to me about 20 minutes later. When I looked at the drawing, everything was quite clear. What was interesting was that it was so similar to the drawing of the first participant! She drew herself with a lot of ideas in her mind while she was doing her MA. After she decided to quit, she was trying to confront the reality of doing MA. She thought it was useless and impractical.

Analytic memo of the third interview

My third interviewee was one of my colleagues from my previous institution and was also my classmate in BA. Therefore, I felt quite comfortable when I met her in her apartment. Actually, she met me warmly with some cookies and tea made by her! So the interview was like a casual speech. Before we started, I asked her whether she would like to have a quick look at the questions. First she said yes. But then she changed her mind and said that being spontaneous was better. When I compared this last interview with the previous ones, I can say that I was a lot more comfortable, which was probably due to being “experienced”. I asked the questions but the interview was more like a casual speech than a question and an answer type of speech. I was sure that I asked all the questions but the order might have been different than in the protocol. I tried to probe as much as I could. But still it took about 17 minutes! I think I should learn to make the participant more!

Analytic Memo of the third graphic elicitation

When I mentioned the graphic elicitation, the participant said she would be happy to do it. She did it at the end of the interview again. She did not draw but wrote some words related to her feelings. She wrote the words in shape like a ladder from left up end of the paper to the right down. She started with quit positive feelings like “excitement” and “satisfaction”, but to the end she started to have “doubts” and although she tried to “hold on”, she had to “give up”. After that, “disappointment” started, she felt “defeat”ed and she experienced “unhappiness”. Actually, I wanted her to draw two things which reflected the time while she was doing her MA and the time after she decided to quit. However, she could not stop herself and wrote all the things in the place spared for the time while she was doing her MA. Then she said after the word “giving up”, I could take the other words down.

Analytic memo for the first transcription

It was actually very difficult to start doing the transcription because I postponed it a number of times. I didn’t know the exact reason but it was like I was kind of afraid of doing it. While I was writing my MA thesis, I had to transcribe a lot of video recordings of a class, which means I did not have good memories of transcribing. When I started, I was ambitious to finish it at once! Actually I did it but it left me with so much pain on my neck. I transcribed every “hi hi” or “aaaa” or whatever, trying to count the pauses. That’s why it took about 3 hours to transcribe 18 minutes. I could not believe it! I was disappointed when my first interview lasted only 18 minutes, but the transcription showed that it shouldn’t be too long!

Analytic memo for the second transcription

Since I became a little bit more experienced with transcribing, I started to do it immediately after I finished my first. I transcribed everything just like in the first one. The difference was that I started to use a website to help me. In the first one, I was listening from the telephone and transcribing on my laptop. Using the website made things a little bit easier because I didn’t have to change from the word document to the media player. The only problem was that it didn’t capitalize the words automatically. I had to make changes after copying and pasting it into word.

Analytic memo for the third transcription

The last interview was similar to the third one. I was not so stressed this time. I went on using the same website to help me. Again I transcribed everything. I think things became easier with experience. The only problem was that I accidentally erased one-page transcription on

the web tool and I couldn't find it anywhere. It was like a nightmare. It was only 3-5 minutes but minutes were not important as long as it took one page!

Appendix E

Preliminary Codebook

Code	Definition	Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria	Example from the Text
Enthusiasm	To be willing to start MA	Includes the feelings of happiness and excitement/ Excludes the feelings of proud	<i>... with both of them I felt really excited...</i>
Proud	To be proud to be accepted to an MA program	Includes feeling proud of being accepted/Excludes feelings of happiness and excitement	<i>Among 40 candidates, only 4, I guess, were chosen so it was a big success for me.</i>
“Advantages”	Advantages of having an MA degree	Includes the advantages like finding a better job and earning more money/Excludes advantages like prestige or helping you become a better teacher	<i>And I started to think more pragmatically, like, you know, if I have the MA diploma, I could have more advantages when I come back to Turkey.</i>
Problems-psychological	Things which puts her under pressure	Includes things like stress, frustration, burden/ Excludes things like lack of guidance	<i>It's just very stressful.</i>
Problems-lack of guidance	Problems related to lack of guidance from the supervisor	Includes the lack of help from the advisor in terms of finding a topic, doing research, lack of instructions/ Excludes problems about the general academic environment	<i>I mean I had an advisor but my advisor wasn't really helping.</i>
Problems-finding a topic	Problems which Zeynep has finding a topic	Includes the problems which she personally has finding a topic/ Excludes the lack of guidance from the supervisor in finding the topic	<i>I learnt a lot but knowing how to research doesn't, didn't help find my topic.</i>
“guilty”	How she felt when she quitted MA	Includes the feelings of guilt and disappointment	<i>I felt so guilty! I said in the first one, oh my God, I thought I was a good student but now...</i>
Satisfactory	Her feelings about	Includes all the	<i>With the Victoria</i>

academic environment	the department in terms of academic atmosphere	satisfactory sides of the department in terms of academic life like the courses, the experience of the professors, etc.	<i>University in Australia, they definitely, they, the academic atmosphere was professional and satisfying.</i>
Problems with the private life	The problems she had in her private life	Includes the problems she had with her spouse/Excludes the problems she had at work	<i>The first time I quit, I was having real problems with my boyfriend.</i>
Problems with the job	The problems she had in her work environment	Includes only the problems with the place where she worked	<i>And it was also my job</i>
Lack of motivation	Motivational problems she had during the thesis stage	Includes the lack of motivation to write the thesis/Excludes any motivational factors about doing the assignments	<i>If I was motivated enough, I could find time. I mean I'm sure I could find time. It's just because I didn't have the motivation.</i>
MA's contribution to being a teacher	Whether having an MA degree makes a person a better teacher or not	Includes the mismatch between the theory and the practice/ Excludes the satisfaction of the intellectual development of the teacher	<i>I seriously think there is a huge gap between theory and practice.</i>
"Satisfaction"	The fact that MA helps you to improve yourself theoretically	Includes the satisfaction of refreshing your theoretical knowledge/Excludes the question whether MA helps you to become a better teacher	<i>Satisfaction. I didn't do it to help me in the classroom because I know myself. I wasn't a bad teacher. I don't think I am a bad teacher now.</i>

Appendix F

Final Codebook

Code	Definition	Inclusion/Exclusion	Example
Enthusiasm	Feelings the participant(s)	Includes the feelings of being	<i>I was very enthusiastic and I was excited (Yaren)</i>

	experienced when they started MA	enthusiastic/Excludes feelings of being proud and/or excited	
“Proud”	Feelings when the participant(s) learnt that they were chosen from among a lot of candidates	Includes the feelings of being proud/Excludes the feelings of being enthusiastic and/or excited	<i>...because in the first one, I was chosen among 40 other candidates... and only 4 of were chosen so it was a big success for me. So I was really happy. The other one was in Australia, so it was a Australian university. That's why I was excited to be accepted by a foreign university. (Zeynep)</i>
“Excited”	Feelings when the participant(s) started their MA	Includes the feelings of being excited and wish to finish as soon as possible/Excludes the feelings of being enthusiastic and proud	<i>I was very enthusiastic and I was excited (Yaren)</i>
“Lack of guidance from the supervisor”	The help the participants wanted to get from their supervisor but could not.	Includes the lack of guidance from the supervisor/Excludes the lack of guidance from the professors in general	<i>“Because he [my thesis advisor] was a professor from French language teaching. Actually he was not very helpful. I was asking him when I can see you. And he answered me ‘I’m here all the time.’ But when I come to visit him, he was absent.” (Özay)</i>
Non-academic environment	Problems related to academic environment of the graduate school like the assignments, resources, etc.	Includes problems related to assignments, unplanned professors and resources/Excludes the problems related to physical environment	<i>“To exemplify, I was expecting the teachers to hand out kinds of articles or at least assign us to find articles, to read them and to discuss on them. Instead we discussed on ideas in general and it always sounded like they were never prepared for their lesson.” (Yaren)</i>
Feelings of pressure	Negative feelings the participants experienced while they were doing their MA	Includes the feelings of stress or anxiety while doing their MA/Excludes the feelings of pressure coming from their workplace	<i>“... it was difficult for me in life. Maybe it was like, how can I explain, it was like a stone on my feet. I have to deal with it.” (Özay)</i> <i>“I couldn't plan the stages. I couldn't plan my studies so it was so complicated. It was so frustrating. Seriously, it was so frustrating that it made me quit.” (Zeynep)</i>
Theoretical	Theoretical	Includes the	<i>Not as much as we expect or</i>

advantages	advantages of doing an MA	contribution of doing MA in terms of theory/Excludes the types of contributions	<i>people think it does but at least I can just remember the theoretical knowledge that I learnt in university. You know, it's like you're refreshing your background information. It just feels good. You feel like you know something..."</i> (Zeynep)
"Guilty"	Feeling as if the participants did something wrong to quit their MA	Includes the feeling that they should not have decided to quit their MA/Excludes the feelings of guilt towards their family and friends	<i>Oh, terrible. I felt so guilty. I said in the first one oh my god! I thought I was a good student but now. I'm finding out that I'm not that good.</i> (Zeynep)
"Relaxed"	Feeling comfortable after the participants decided to quit	Includes the positive feelings that associated with quitting MA, feeling freer	<i>"I feel relaxed. I felt like a bird."</i> (Özay)
"Angry and disappointed"	Feeling angry with the supervisor due his/her lack of guidance; feelings disappointed to make their beloveds disappointed	Includes feelings of anger towards the supervisor/Excludes the feelings of anger towards themselves/Includes the feelings of disappointment towards their beloveds/Excludes the disappointment towards themselves and their professors	<i>"...Not myself, maybe a little bit myself. Maybe I was questioning why I chose this department or whether I chose the wrong department, whether I should have chosen ELT. Then I was angry with the supervising teacher and the school in general. And I was disappointed."</i> (Yaren)
Private life	Problems that the participant(s) have in their private lives	Includes the problems related to their love relationships and family relationships/Excludes the problems related to their work place	<i>"Oh yes, definitely! Definitely! The first time that I quit, I was having real problems with my boyfriend."</i> (Zeynep)
Work place	Problems that the participant(s) have in their workplace	Includes the problems that the participant(s) in the institution (administration) they were working for/Excludes the	<i>In my MA, I changed my major so I had to have a prep year, but the regulations in my institution said that I could only have two days of for one year. So I couldn't take all my courses in the same year. It</i>

		problems they had in their private lives	<i>took 3 years to complete the course and I lost motivation. (Zeynep)</i>
The medium of instruction	The language in which the medium of instruction was given in the graduate school	Includes the problems related to the language in the graduate school/Excludes the positive sides of the language in the graduate school	<i>"... I got bored. I didn't feel like doing it. Maybe I had no motivation. Maybe I couldn't see any further benefits and maybe the courses were not very satisfying because in my MA there were some other students from French language teaching, German language teaching and teaching Turkish as a foreign language and were taking almost the same courses and of course the language was Turkish. Of course we had English courses, too but if we have 4 courses in a term, only there is one English." (Özay)</i>
School's attitude towards the students	The negative attitude the faculty staff had towards students	Includes the negative attitudes of the staff at the faculty/Excludes the negative attitude of the academic staff towards students	<i>"Their [the faculty staff] attitude toward students was not a good one. First you have to spend too much time even for the simplest things. You know those procedures, students 'procedures even the simplest thing took me lots of time and I didn't that much time to spend on that.'" (Yaren)</i>
Physical conditions	The physical conditions of the graduate school that affected the students' performance	Includes the size, smell, furniture, comfort, etc. of the classrooms at the graduate school/Excludes the physical conditions of the building in general	<i>"So the conditions weren't the best one to have lessons. Sometimes we even didn't have the class to cover the lesson. We had to visit the instructor's room." (Yaren)</i>