

Case of Obtaining Permission for Data Collection in Turkey Within the Context of Academic Freedom and Ethics

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Abstract

The main purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the lived experiences of academicians working in the field of educational administration in Turkey with regard to obtaining permission for scientific research in educational institutions and examine it within the context of academic freedom and ethics. A case-study approach was used to collect the data. The study was conducted with the participation of 41 academicians working in universities in different regions. The data were collected with e-mail interviewing and analyzed with content analysis. The results revealed that the academicians experience serious problems regarding obtaining permission and their requests for research permission are not granted for various reasons and sometimes without justification. Based on the results, it can be suggested that the participants' suggestions should be paid attention and more objective criteria should be taken into consideration.

Introduction

It is a widely accepted presumption that academic freedom (AF) which is a multidimensional concept should be at the very heart of academic life in universities (Balyer, 2011; Levinson 2007). AF includes such aspects as autonomy, freedom of expression and research and these aspects constitute the necessary conditions to develop new ideas and disseminate the new knowledge (Drees & van Koningsveld 2008; Rostan, 2010). Considering the policies and practices regarding AF all around the world, it can be clearly seen that these aspects are not adopted sufficiently in higher education and they are often violated in under-developed and developing countries (Altbach, 2000). In this regard it can be argued that developing and disseminating new ideas are not allowed with the non-emancipatory practices in higher education and the freedom of research is one of the fields that these non-emancipatory practices are experienced. Nevertheless, it is difficult to speak of scientific knowledge production without research and a significant part of scientific knowledge produced in the field of social sciences is achieved through research conducted by scientists/academicians working in universities. In these researches, the process of data collection can improve the quality of the study as long as it is conducted appropriately in an objective and ethical measure in a non-blocking environment. However, such factors as time constraints, the importance of the research, and the concerns regarding being criticized due to the results or methods of a study pose challenges in the data collection process (Creswell, 2009).

In fact, challenges regarding data collection emerge while conducting researches in the field of educational sciences and educational administration in Turkey (Beycioğlu & Dönmez, 2006; Beycioğlu, Özer & Kondakçı, 2018). In Turkey, academicians working in the field of educational administration appear to have been facing serious problems in obtaining permission for research in educational institutions in the last few years; with the result that much research has not been

able to go ahead especially with regard to the collection of data. Thus it is possible to refer to a bureaucratic intervention with the method or the essence of the work, content of the research (Berdahl, 1990) and it is against both AF and ethics.

Within this context, we aimed to reflect the lived experiences and opinions of academicians working in the field of educational administration in Turkey with regard to obtaining permission for scientific research in educational institutions and examine it within the context of AF and ethics. In order to achieve this aim, we designed a qualitative study and took the opinions of academicians working in different universities with the e-mail interviewing. As a result, we reached the conclusion that the academicians in the field of educational administration in Turkey do not have so much freedom to choose topics, concepts, methods and sources in their researches and they are unable to research the topics they deem important.

Academic Freedom and Ethics

AF is to develop scientific research by being independent from the restrictions of any authority and to recognize only the self-determination and self-decision (Drees & van Koningsveld 2008, p. 16). In this regard, AF includes such aspects as autonomy, freedom of expression, freedom from constraints in research and teaching (Doğan, 2015; Doğan, 2017). AF is included in the broader concept of freedom of expression because it is considered that there can be no distinction between personal opinions on an issue and opinions developed as an expert on that issue. Therefore, AF necessitates the right of academicians to disseminate their views in both academic and non-academic contexts (Minerva, 2016). Academics should have the freedom to pursue truth without fear of negative sanctions, restrictions, or constraints from religious or political authorities” (Berdahl, 1990, p. 171; Rostan, 2010, p. S72). Within this context, the universities should be independent from external authority and thus autonomous. In fact, university autonomy is the institutional counterpart of AF (Ren & Li, 2013). According to Thorens (2006, p. 104) university autonomy is the degree of independence that the university must enjoy if it is to best achieve its mission as an institution, something that also depends on national traditions and relations of relative conflict or trust between the university and government and society. In an autonomous university, the academics have the right to participate in the governance of university and its decision and policy-making process (Balyer, 2011). Also, they should have the right to organise their work, determine their research and teaching goals and priorities, set standards and rules to assess and steer academic activity (Rostan, 2010, p. S72). Thus, it is possible to argue that the freedom to choose research topics and approaches is at the heart of the AF related problems (Russell, 1993). In research organizations which are truly autonomous, the decision making regarding what kind of research is to be conducted as well as the control of the research process primarily belongs to the researchers who should have a high degree of strategic autonomy (Cruz-Castro & Sanz-Menéndez, 2018). AF is the “key legitimating concept” of the university (Menand, 1996, p. 4) and encourages the academics to adopt openness, flexibility and accountability in both their academic works and society (Tight, 1988). Thus it can be argued that it has the utmost importance for the optimization of university activities (Owusu-Ansah, 2015, p. 173). In this sense, AF, which is quite comprehensive including the teaching and learning activities of academics to research and publishing the results it reaches, is crucial in every stage of the academicians’ fields of study.

Emphasis is placed on research and publication in all aspects of academic endeavor. The main purpose of research is to expand the existing information set. However, information obtained through research becomes meaningful when it is shared with scientists or society through articles

published in journals, dissertations and books. Researchers must adhere to ethics in obtaining and disseminating their own research findings. It requires to conduct the practice in a reliable appropriate methodology which is based on ethical principles. When designing scientific research, the results obtained from previous studies are taken into consideration. It can be a demanding task to act independently from the body of knowledge that has been constructed in the relevant field of science. This situation necessitates knowledge of previous studies, which can ensure the continuity of scientific research (Keskin, 2017; Uçak & Birinci, 2008) and therefore, the adherence to specific rules. When these are not adhered to each phase of a scientific study, decisions and actions taken, intentionally or unintentionally can raise both doubts about the reliability of the research and also some ethical issues. In general, ethical problems are experienced as a result of non-compliance with previously determined actions caused by relations with others and other interfering actions in the implementation stage. These issues may occur even though an individual has already set his/her goal by stating “I will do this,” in his/her relationship with another individual (Kuçuradi, 2006). Minimizing harm in a scientific study, respecting autonomy, protecting privacy, offering reciprocity and treating people equitably are widely accepted ethical principles (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). In this regard, the research to be conducted in schools potentially involves many ethical issues and similar significant ethical issues can be experienced in educational administration research.

Academic Freedom in Turkey

According to Thompson (2005), there are three aspects of autonomy: Academic and scientific autonomy, administrative autonomy and financial autonomy. In this regard he argues that Turkey is far below the degree of autonomy that international universities have in terms of academic and scientific autonomy. In Turkey, universities cannot use the scientific autonomy determined by the constitution because of the limitations of the legislations and there is some kind of a controlled autonomy (Güner, 2017). Nevertheless, Ortaş (2008) emphasizes that the autonomy and productivity of universities in Turkey, quality education and lack of research and their causes are not adequately investigated. Discussions on this issue focus on the daily functioning of universities rather than scientific research, knowledge production and defense of academic autonomy. The autonomy of universities in Turkey is regarded as a solidarity to protect the professional interests (Timur, 2005). However, it is rationally expected that a university prioritizing science and social benefit, should expect its academics to take responsibility for their students, society and nature, and strive to fulfill these responsibilities. Within this context, Timur (2005) asserts that the value to be considered in the course of historical development of higher education in Turkey should be the academicians’ freedom of thought and research. AF is associated with research autonomy. Interpreting new ideas, findings for research and developing hypothesis and theory require AF (Neuman, 2010). Nevertheless, it is revealed that in both the legal and practical contexts of Turkey, the freedom of academics is restricted in many fields. Within this context, it is suggested that there is not adequate AF in universities (Balyer, 2011) and governments in Turkey have not only provided insufficient support to science and research but also continuously placed obstacles in the path of AF (Seggie & Gökbel, 2014).

Academicians make such choices as deciding on a research, conducting a research and research processes. Schools can be an excellent source of participants for scientific research. Hence, this is why many education scientists desire to undertake their scientific studies in schools (Alibali & Nathan, 2010). However, in Turkey, there exists a tendency to control the content of the studies on educational administration or embed it into a certain pattern. Decision makers try to justify this

practice on the grounds of “ethical concerns” and “protection of personal rights.” As a basis, circular of the Ministry of National Education is argued. In this circular (MoNE, 2017), the limits related to the studies to be conducted in educational institutions are specified. It is stipulated that in order to be able to collect data in the institutions affiliated to MoNE, a special permission is required for the postgraduate dissertations and studies conducted by universities. Accordingly, when a study in an educational institution in any city is planned, the researcher must obtain permission from the permission commission established in the relevant provincial directorate of national education (DoNE). Thus, it can be stated that the process of obtaining permission from the national education commission for the studies to be conducted in the field of educational administration can often function as a formalization tool or a barrier. Within this context, the case of obtaining permission for research in educational institutions in Turkey can be given as an example of the restrictions that the academicians have been exposed to.

As for the researches regarding AF in Turkey, it was revealed in various studies that the academicians are not satisfied with AF in Turkey and the AF in Turkey is irregular, variable and inadequate (Acar, 2012; Balyer, 2011; Dinler, 2013; Özipek, 2001; Summak, 2008). Nevertheless, discussions on AF in Turkey have been mostly considered as part of political conflict rather than in and of itself (Seggie & Gökbel, 2014). Thus, it can be argued that the issue of freedom to choose research subjects, methods and data collection tools and the freedom in the process of obtaining data to conduct researches have been ignored. In this context, it seems there is a need for researches which identify the problems, legal and practical barriers and can offer solutions.

Accordingly, in this study we aimed to reflect the lived experiences and opinions of academicians working in the field of educational administration in Turkey with regard to obtaining permission for scientific research in educational institutions and examine it within the context of AF and ethics. In order to achieve this aim, we targeted the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of the academicians regarding the cases in which permission, partially or wholly, was not granted by the National Education (NE) research permission commission for a postgraduate dissertation study or any other studies?
2. What are the opinions of the academicians regarding the requirement of obtaining permission to conduct scientific research in educational institutions and what should be the criteria in this process?

Methodology

This is a qualitative study examining the opinions of academicians working in the field of educational administration about the case of obtaining permission for scientific research in schools or educational institutions. Qualitative research methods aim to identify people’s beliefs, experiences and attitudes enhancing their involvement in a study (Pathak, Jena & Kalra, 2013, p. 1). In this study which an existing situation was described based on the experiences and observations of the individuals studying in that field, case study design was used. The main feature of case studies is to examine the factors related to the case in detail and with a holistic approach (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2007). Case studies are the designs which attempt to examine a particular phenomenon in its real life context (Yin, 2009). With regard to this, we aimed to carry out an empirical inquiry about the case of obtaining permission for scientific research in schools or educational institutions through a qualitative approach with this study.

Participants

The participants of the study were selected from the academicians working in the field of educational administration, a field which is home to a great deal of empirical studies and requires to obtain information from principals, teachers, students, parents, etc. Also, another reason for the selection of this field was that the educational administration was also the field of study of the researchers themselves; thus the researchers have personally experienced the problems which were the subject of the research. Accordingly, all universities with education faculties which have the department of educational administration were listed. It was revealed that there are 54 universities which have the department of educational administration and supervision and a total of 254 faculty members work in these departments. In this regard, the semi-structured interview forms were submitted to all 254 faculty members having different titles and 41 faculty members working in seven different regions of Turkey responded and contributed to the research. A more detailed information about the characteristics of the participants is given in the following table:

Table 1. Personal characteristics of the participants

| Variable | Regions | Frequency (F) |
|-----------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Regions | Eastern Anatolian | 8 |
| | Aegean | 7 |
| | Black Sea | 5 |
| | Marmara | 5 |
| | Central Anatolian | 11 |
| | The Mediterrian | 3 |
| | Southeast Anatolian | 2 |
| Academic titles | Professor | 4 |
| | Associate professor | 13 |
| | Assistant professor | 11 |
| | Lecturer | 4 |
| | Research Assistant | 9 |
| Total | | 41 |

Data Collection

The gaining of informed (or real) consent is an important ethical consideration in social science research (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998, p. 116). Thus, ethical issues have been given utmost importance at all stages of this study. Accordingly, we firstly had sought for consent before the interviewing process started. Then, in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, we removed all identifying information such as names, e-mail addresses, the names of universities and cities. We just used the academic titles and regions in which the university is. Lastly, in order to debrief we assured the participants that they could make comments and correct our interpretations regarding their statements.

Data of the research were collected with the semi-structured interview forms developed by the researchers and submitted to the participants through e-mail in March in 2019. Semi-structured interview forms are frequently preferred by the researchers due to their such advantages as being flexible, not having a certain standard, enabling the researcher to collect more detailed data and analyzing the data more easily compared to other data collection instruments (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In the development process of the interviewing form, the researchers made a detailed literature review and the questions were prepared with the help of observations and testimonies related to the experiences of the permission process of the researchers working in the field of educational administration. The interview form was examined by two academicians working in a faculty of education in İzmir in the department of Educational Administration and Supervision and according to expert opinions; the form provided the necessary requirements. The final draft of the interview form consisted of a first part that included personal questions and a second part which included following semi-structured, open-ended questions.

We preferred e-mail as the medium for interviewing as we both wanted to expand the diversity of the research sample and it is not possible to access all regions of Turkey and conduct face to face interviewing due to geographical, time and economical constraints (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). Thus in our research, e-mail interviewing has become quite effective in gaining sensitive and personal information about the experiences of participants about the case of obtaining permission for data collection for their researches.

Data Analysis

Analysing data in researches which e-mails were used as medium is quite feasible eliminating the amount of time which would be spent to transcribe the data (Foster 1994) and facilitating the analysis process. Accordingly, in our research data obtained from the participants via e-mail were collected on a computer file under research questions and a data set to be analyzed was formed. Then, the data were subjected to content analysis technique. For the content analysis, the answers given to the research questions were collected under related themes and titles. Then, the researchers identified the codes and the data were organized under these codes. Themes and codes emerging as a result of the analysis were shown in related tables and the expressions that could be used as direct citations were identified and conferred in associated parts in findings. Participants in direct citations were coded with their academic titles and the regions in which the university they work in.

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research in data collection and analysis process, different methods were adopted. For the internal validity of the research, an influential conceptual framework was organized and experts were consulted to give their opinions to form the interview questions. For the external validity of the research, thick descriptions were utilized (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). So as to ensure the external and internal reliability of the research, descriptions about the limits, methodology, the working group, data collection and analysis process were all expressed in detail. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Lastly, the data were analyzed by the two researchers independently and the interpretations were discussed in order to ensure the compromise and conformity.

Findings

Concerning the first research question “What are the experiences of the academicians regarding the cases in which permission, partially or wholly, was not granted by the National Education (NE) research permission commission for a postgraduate dissertation study or any other

studies?,” two themes called “the experiences of academicians about the status of obtaining permission for their research requests” and “the justifications for not granting permission” were identified. Regarding the second research question “What are the opinions of the academicians about the requirement of obtaining permission to conduct scientific research in educational institutions and what should be the criteria in this process?,” two themes called “the opinions of participants about the requirement of obtaining permission for scientific research in educational institutions” and “the opinions of participants about the criteria of giving permission to conduct a research” were identified. The findings will be presented under each themes and codes which emerged as a result of the analysis will be shown in tables. Also, the expressions that could be used as direct citations will be conferred in associated parts.

1. Findings regarding the experiences of academicians about the status of obtaining permission for their research requests.

In this section, the findings regarding the experiences of academicians about the status of obtaining permission from the Directorate of National Education (DoNE) for their research requests are reported. The participants’ experiences within this context are shown in the following table:

Table 2. The Participants’ Experiences Regarding the Status of Obtaining Permission

| The Status of Obtaining Permission | F |
|---|-----------|
| Being able to obtain permission | 12 |
| Being unable to obtain permission | 29 |
| Total | 41 |

As seen in the table above, 12 of the 41 participants stated that the studies they planned to conduct were granted permission by the DoNE research permission commissions. These participants stated that neither they nor the graduate students they supervised faced rejection for their dissertation or other studies. However, 29 participants reported that the permission request to use the relevant scales for the dissertation studies of their graduate students or their own studies were partially or entirely rejected. One participant expressed this situation as follows:

“Research permission requests of our department were rejected at the provincial directorate of national education without justification.” (31-Assoc. Prof., Aegean)

Some of the participants stated that some of the questions in the personal information form and the scale to be used in the dissertation studies of the graduate students they supervised were asked to be changed or edited, and if not done, permission for use of the scale would not be given. One participant stated:

“DoNE research permission commission objected to the dissertations of my two students. The first occurred three years ago. One question in the personal information form of my student’s M.Ed. dissertation study was asked to be removed. The second occurred three months ago. My student was informed that he would be granted permission providing that four questions in the scale were changed and rearranged.” (41-Assoc. Prof., Aegean)

Some participants stated that even the scales previously used in various studies were not given permission and some questions on the scale were asked to be removed or changed. One participant stated:

“DoNE says they would give permission if we removed some of the questions in the Beck Depression Inventory. They cannot provide justification because they are so far from science. An ordinary branch manager says Beck inventory, which has been around for 40 years, is not appropriate. It’s ridiculous, but unfortunately it’s the way it is.” (4-Dr., Central Anatolian)

Some participants stated that they chose the dissertation topics of their Ph.D. and M.Ed. students together, for which they thought it would be easy to obtain permission. Some emphasized that they did not apply for permission because they thought that their request would be rejected.

2. Findings Regarding the Justifications for not Granting Permission

In this section, the opinions of participants about the justifications for rejecting the data collection tools which were not granted permission or were asked to be edited are reported. Related information is shown in the following table:

Table 3. The Justifications for not Granting Permission

| Justification for not Granting Permission | F |
|---|-----------|
| No justification | 9 |
| The issues labeled as discriminative (mother tongue, religion, race, inclusive education) | 5 |
| Investigation of teacher union as a variable | 4 |
| Metaphor studies | 3 |
| Issues related to the school and principal (school climate, teacher mobbing, leadership) | 3 |
| Questions related to local authorities or that are thought to disturb the peace at school | 3 |
| Expressions that are thought to be not suitable for children | 2 |
| Total | 29 |

As seen in the table above, while some of the participants whose research requests were responded negatively stated that their requests were provided justification, some were not provided any justification when they were asked to edit some of their questions. In this sense, one participant argued:

“A letter stating one of the questions in the scale was not appropriate was delivered. There was no justification. When I went to the DoNE to ask for the reason, the branch manager said: ‘We don’t have to write a reason for you.’” (40-Assoc. Prof., Black Sea)

The participants stated that the issues related to inclusive education, mother tongue, religion and race were generally shown as reasons for rejecting their study requests. Some participants stated that their data collection tool included questions about language, religion and race as they were studying discrimination and inclusive education and their study was not granted permission on the grounds that such questions remind the participants of discrimination or participants cannot give objective answers. Two participants described this situation as follows:

“We wanted to conduct a study that would describe how fair the teachers were to their students. In the scale, there were questions defining possible language, religion and race discrimination practiced by teachers against students. Permission was not given on the grounds that those

questions could affect students negatively and students could give biased answers.” (1-Assoc. Prof., Eastern Anatolian)

“In a study on the problems of schools in areas with high rates of internal migration, the question ‘What is your mother tongue (native language)?’ was not found appropriate. Again, we received negative feedback on some questions in an MA study investigating the interaction of local authorities with educational institutions.” (27-Assoc. Prof., Aegean)

One of the significant reasons for not being able to obtain permission was the investigation of the union as a variable. Some participants stated that they considered union membership status as an important variable in their research and asked the participants whether they were a member of a union or not, and if so, what union it was. However, the DoNE permission commission found the question inconvenient and stated that the survey would not be given permission unless these questions were excluded. One participant described a case he experienced during a graduate dissertation study as follows:

“The question of ‘If you are a union member, what union do you belong to?’ asked in the personal information form was asked to be removed. As a reason, the question was reported to contain political content. We had to remove this question from the questionnaire.” (41-Assoc. Prof., Aegean)

Another difficulty which was encountered in obtaining research permission was seen in metaphor studies related to school and teacher. It was found that such studies were not given permission on the grounds that they would negatively affect students’ perception of school and teacher. One participant stated:

“A metaphor study on teachers was not permitted on the grounds that students could resemble their teachers to animals.” (25-Assoc. Prof., Aegean)

In another study questioning how students perceive the school metaphorically, one participant described his experiences during the request process as:

“One of the dimensions of the scale was ‘School as a place of pressure.’ DoNE officials rejected the request for research permission because this dimension and the relevant questions could affect students’ perception of the school negatively.” (21-Assoc. Prof., Central Anatolian)

Among the other issues which the academicians had difficulties in obtaining permission for their researches were school climate, teacher mobbing and investigation of the leadership qualities of the school principal. For example, one participant described the situation he experienced like this:

“The scale to be used in the research was related to the school climate, and there were statements about the principal-teacher relationship. The scale was not allowed to be used. We have been given verbal remarks such as ‘This would disturb the peace in school.’” (30-Dr., Black Sea)

Another participant of a study examining the leadership status of school principals stated that:

“DoNE did not give permission on the grounds that teachers could not do such an evaluation.” (8-Prof.Dr., Central Anatolian)

Also, it was revealed that some studies were not given permission due to the use of expressions such as “sexual” or “sexual development.” One participant explained the situation as follows:

“The subject of my student’s dissertation was related to the professional ethical behaviors of school principals. My student was informally notified that four of the questions in the scale carried implications of sexual harassment, and these questions had to be removed or the word “emotional” instead of “sexual” had to be used. When my student objected that the original scale could not be

intervened, the permission commission official said: 'Change and use these items as we say...Otherwise, your request will be rejected'....So we decided not to use the scale, and conduct the study with qualitative method." (41-Assoc. Prof., Aegean)

As a result of the rejection of their study requests, the participants took different actions. In this sense, some participants stated that they solved the problems they encountered in obtaining permission for their research by using their personal connections network. Also, some participants stated that obtaining permission to conduct a study in a city at the local level was more difficult than obtaining permission at the regional or country level. For example, a study that aimed to investigate the problems of the guest and host schools in the process of strengthening the schools against earthquakes was not given permission because the relevant DoNE did not regard the research as a scientific. Then, with the same measurement tool, the sample size was expanded, and the researcher applied to the MoNE and finally, the ministry granted the permission.

3. The opinions of participants about the requirement of obtaining permission for scientific research in educational institutions.

Regarding the opinions of participants about whether it is necessary to obtain permission for scientific research in educational institutions or not, it was revealed that some of the participants (F: 11) argued that it is not necessary to obtain permission in scientific studies in order to use the data collection tools in schools as they are already reviewed by the university ethics committees. According to these participants, the researcher should be free; no permission should be obtained for scientific research in schools. One of the participants stated:

"Permission should not be required. Freedom of research may be restricted under the excuse of obtaining permission. Especially, not being able to obtain permission for the disturbing issues is a matter." (35-Dr., Eastern Anatolian)

Participants who think there is no need for permission also thought that it is sufficient to negotiate with the administrator of the institution where the research would be conducted. The participants emphasize that, in the absence of permission, the researchers could reach unbiased results by obtaining more original data in a freer environment and obtaining permission restricts research freedom. One of the participants expressed the situation as follows:

"I think that to inform [the authorities] is not necessary. AF is intervened when research permission is requested. The request for permission might be rejected personally or ideologically. I think there is a problem of trust such as not trusting the academician, believing that he will commit ethical violations." (7-Dr., Black Sea)

It is considered unnecessary to obtain permission for research except experimental studies. One of the participants stated:

"Experimental research in ethics can be subject to permission because the researchers can use the experimental group as a tool for some subjective purposes." (39-Dr., Aegean)

Nevertheless, it was also identified that the majority of the participants (F:30) stated that permission should be obtained for research in educational institutions. These participants indicate that various studies are conducted in schools; that these studies may go beyond the scope of science and that unethical methods might be applied. At the same time, they emphasize that it is possible to harm people and interfere with private life; that personal information may be used for commercial purposes and the issues which are likely to become a matter of public record may

damage the reputation of institutions. Also they state that the research process and its results may represent individuals and groups negatively in the public. For example, one participant noted:

“I think it is necessary to get permission because research may also be carried out with malicious intents. For example, it is possible that there may be situations such as explaining personal information to make profit or to blacklist someone, etc.” (41-Doç.Dr., Aegean)

According to another participant who believes that permission should be obtained:

“Especially in the studies conducted with students, researches may be carried out in a way which affects students mentally and physically, or there may be situations such as political orientation etc.” (20-Research Assistant, Marmara)

Some participants think that it is necessary to obtain permission in order not to waste the energy and time of education stakeholders in the studies to be conducted in schools. Besides, there may be political and divisive questions in the data collection tool which would jeopardize the participant. Permission is required to avoid future legal or unethical charges. One participant has stated this as:

“I think it’s necessary to get permission. There may be questions on the scales to measure political, divisive, unethical views that would jeopardize the participant’s career. It is also necessary to obtain permission to respond and not to be subject to any further legal or unethical accusations. Applying a measurement tool without permission should not be considered as a right.” (34-Assoc. Prof., Eastern Anatolian)

Some participants think that due to ethical concerns, permission is required for research in schools. These participants state that:

“How the forms are prepared cannot be controlled as there is not an effective ethics committee process in higher education institutions” (12-Assoc.Prof., Marmara), and *“it is not possible to know whether conducting the study without permission is ethically appropriate or not.”* (13-Lecturer, Black Sea)

In addition to this, these participants think that it is necessary to obtain permission in order to be taken seriously by the school administration. For example, one participant stated:

“I think, getting permission protects both us and the people we interview. In fact, in the absence of an official letter of permission, nobody wants to help you, especially in small cities.” (40-Assoc. Prof., Black Sea)

4. The opinions of participants about the criteria of giving permission to conduct a research.

Considering the opinions of participants about the criteria of giving permission to conduct a research, it was revealed that the participants referred to such issues as who should give the permission and what the criteria should be. The participants’ opinions regarding these issues are shown in the following table:

Table 4. The Opinions of Participants about the Criteria of Giving Permission to Conduct a Research

| Who Should Give? | F |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| DoNE | 10 |
| Ethics committees of universities | 9 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| School principals | 5 |
| Committees independent from university and MoNE | 4 |
| Ministry of Education | 2 |
| Not required permission | 11 |
| Total | 41 |
| What Should be the Criteria? | |
| Being based on the benefit of society | 6 |
| Being scientific, ethical and objective | 6 |
| Being based on voluntary participation | 4 |
| Compliance with the principle of confidentiality | 2 |
| Being suitable in terms of the purpose, method, accessibility, cost, etc. | 2 |
| Contributing to the educational sciences | 1 |
| Total | 21 |

As seen in Table 4, one fourth of the participants (F:10) argued that the permission should be given by DoNE as is still the case. However, they also emphasized some points as following:

“These permissions should not go beyond being a part of an administrative process. The scientific supervision of the data collection tools to be used in the research should be done by the relevant units of the universities.” (25-Assoc. Prof., Aegean)

“Teachers who have a master’s degree should be assigned to DoNE permission commissions. The circular regulating the research permits can be considered decent.” (17-Dr., Eastern Anatolian)

Also some participants (F:9) argued that the permission to conduct research should be given by the ethics committees of the universities. According to these participants:

“Competent people should be appointed to ethics committees. Some criteria should be met such as knowing the scientific research processes well, having knowledge about ethics, professional ethics and research ethics in general and reflecting this in professional life and scientific studies.” (41- Assoc. Prof., Aegean)

The process of obtaining permission *“should be regulated according to objective and universal criteria determined within the framework of AF by fundamentally considering the ‘benefit of society.’”* (10-Dr., Central Anatolian)

In the studies to be conducted on students,

“it should be essential not to harm the physical and mental health of children. It may be sufficient to ensure the voluntary participation of individuals in the studies to be conducted with teachers and administrators.” (19-Assoc. Prof., Aegean)

According to the participants, taking permission from another authority other than the the university ethics committees may be a waste of time for researchers. For the studies such as dissertations, projects, research articles, etc., it should be sufficient to get permission from the departments, faculties or one of the related boards of the university. For such studies, *“DoNE*

should provide a consent letter, not permission, for the convenience of the research. The permission process should not harm its scientific autonomy.” (31- Assoc. Prof. Aegean)

In addition, some of the participants (F:5) argued that it is sufficient to obtain the approval of the school principal for the research. The researcher should decide on a specific time with the director of the unit, and the research should be accordingly. The opinions of some participants regarding this are as follows:

“If there is no ethical violation, and the approval of the ethics committee is taken, the institution should make an evaluation only for the time allocated by the employees and the protection of the private information belonging to the institution.” (8-Prof.Dr., Central Anatolian)

Some participants (F:4) also think that research permission in schools should be given by committee independent from university ethics committees or MoNE. According to these participants, *“MoNE should establish a unit headed by academicians in the cities for research permission and the permission should be obtained from here”* (3-Dr., Kırşehir), or *“the letter to be taken from the university ethics committee should be sufficient”* (1- Assoc.Prof., Eastern Anatolian). Lastly, some participants (F: 2) think that the research permission should be given by a unit to be established in the Ministry. One participant’s opinions regarding this are as following:

“For the research permission, commissions including academics should be established within the ministry, these commissions should examine the purpose and necessity of the research, the instruments to be used, and if necessary, opinions should be obtained from the provincial organization.” (20- Dr., Eastern Anatolian)

Limitations and Discussion

Before proceeding to discussion, it is important to refer to the limitations of this study. Although the qualitative method used in this study provided a profound picture of the views of academicians about the case of obtaining permission for data collection within the context of AF and ethics, its limited sample constitutes an impediment to generalize it to all academicians in Turkey and the whole participants of the research. In this sense, the reader is invited to judge the applicability of the findings and conclusions to other samples. This study merely examines an idea; it does not constitute sufficient inclusiveness to handle the issue with all its dimensions and to produce a solution. It is clear that more comprehensive studies are needed. Also, e- mail interviewing adopted in this study could create some kind of limitation as it lacks some information regarding the context (role of environment, presence of others) and non- verbal communication between the participants and researcher (Murray and Sixsmith, 1998). Accordingly, it is suggested that the research should be conducted again using face-to-face interviewing technique.

In Turkey, the self-governance of universities, a precondition of academic freedom, has always taken precedence over individual rights and freedoms (Seggie & Gökbel, 2014, p. 9). Accordingly, the discussions around administrative and financial autonomy, as defined by Thompson (2005) have always been more prominent than academic and scientific autonomy. However, it must be noted that according to eight institutional autonomy criteria determined by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Turkey was found to be among the countries which had the lowest scores (OECD, 2003). Accordingly, it is possible to argue that Turkey which do not have so much administrative and financial autonomy cannot have academic and scientific autonomy either. In this regard, it is estimated that the academicians may not have the required freedom to choose the research topics, methods, data collection tools, etc.

Considering our findings about the experiences of participants regarding the issue of obtaining permission from DoNE research permission commissions to use their data collection tools in schools, it is clearly seen that the majority of the participants had difficulty in getting permission and their requests were partially or fully rejected. In parallel to our findings, Sikes and Phipps (2010) also represented educational researchers' bad experiences regarding the issue of obtaining permission from ethical review committees of universities and related procedures. As for our research, it was also revealed that most of the research topics which were not given permission included such social and political issues as mother tongue, religion, race, union membership status, sexual development and gender, etc. In this sense, it was identified in various researches that political issues such as the Kurdish problem, Armenian question and political Islam are generally not allowed to study in Turkey by DoNE research permission commissions (Acar, 2012; Dinler, 2013; Seggie and Gökbel, 2014). Similar to Turkey's situation in that regard, it was revealed that different cultural contexts are not welcomed so much (Allen, Anderson, Bristol, Downs, O'Neill, Wats, & Wu, 2009) and the academicians have difficulty in studying sensitive topics related to child and sex, vulnerable children, etc. in some countries in the world (Sikes 2008; Redwood 2008). Also, as a result of not obtaining the required permission, it was determined that the participants preferred to choose topics which they thought it would be easy to obtain permission to avoid rejection. For academicians, this means imposing self-censorship on themselves. It also means, directly or indirectly, to instill the idea of approving auto-censorship on individuals who may become academicians in the future and convey it to the future and thereby gain continuity. In fact, it was also revealed in several studies that self-censorship is a widespread issue in Turkey and the researchers cannot do research outside of the boundaries that have been drawn for them (Aktas, Nilsson and Borell, 2019; Balyer, 2011; Freedom House, 2017; Seggie and Gökbel, 2014; Tural, 2007). Accordingly, regarding the findings of the study, it can be argued that there is a tendency to control the content of the studies intended to be conducted in the field of educational administration with the help of commissions formed within the structure of bureaucratic DoNE organization. There can be various reasons for this inclination. One of the reasons can be explained by the fact that the officials appointed to the permission commissions in the local districts have limited competence in scientific research and narrow perspectives. Also, the political power may be endeavoring to shape the society as it sees fit, or it may have a covert policy to prevent it from going beyond the defined limits. Within this context, it can be argued that DoNE research permission commissions have a tendency to impose power rather than to deal with ethical issues. Similar to what DoNE did in Turkey, it was suggested in various researches that the ethics committees of universities are inclined to act as gatekeepers with an aim to avoid of controversy and risk and they do not consider ethical matters so much (Cannella & Lincoln 2007; Halse & Honey 2007; Sikes 2008). The rationale behind this practice, as Cooper (2003) points out, could be related to the fact that creation of new knowledge through research is often considered painful and inconvenient for those who believe in existing ideologies. However, being able to discuss the issues such as freedom and ethics is both a distinctive feature of a democratic society and the role of the academy. Science can be seen as a tool for discovering the truth behind the phenomena and incidents (Mayor, 2008) and as a power that changes the world, it can also be seen as a tool that acts to influence change in the hands of power holders (King, 2008). It can also be used to justify the existing social system and hierarchies. Scientific research involves questioning without bias and accepting nothing as absolute truth (Academy of Sciences, 2018).

In Turkey, officials who assume certain powers in various institutions of the state expect the academicians to show the same attitudes shown by the officers in general. Such an expectation

clashes with the nature of the work the academicians do. Approaching academics as officers contradicts AF and autonomy. While the officer has to be loyal to the state, the scientist must be loyal to the ethical principles governing the scientific research process. Academics cannot be expected to act as officers. Harris (2005) explains the issue as follows: although the hierarchical nature of the university has traditionally been mysterious and supported by elitism, social and cultural hierarchies, and the civil service has a very formal and clear hierarchy. While academics tend to specialize in their work, officers tend to behave more generically between departments and political areas. The university is characterized by institutional autonomy and professional self-regulation. Officers are limited to written codes of conduct which emphasize integrity and impartiality. The concept of AF and autonomy is not shared by the officers as much as traditionally understood and enjoyed in the research community. It is the responsibility of the researchers, not the officers, to administer a research program.

Not granting permission for the subject of a study and collecting data shows the existence of a self-functioning state which limits both the kind of research contradicting the interests of the dominant ideology and the ruling class, and debate over these issues in the academic-social domain. It can be asserted that the structure which does not allow forming an awareness of autonomous university and the mentality undertaking its defense underlie this situation (Ortaş, 2008). It is also supported with some participants' statements regarding "*we solved the problems we encountered in obtaining permission for our research by using our own personal connections network.*" As it is seen in this direct citation, in order to collect data, the researcher must have strong connections with the individuals who hold bureaucratic authority at the local level. Nevertheless, Brew (2015) emphasizes that when researchers depend on the protection of those who have the power to make decisions about them and their future progress, they will pursue a special way of doing things, thereby probably harming AF. Thus, it can be argued that the power determines how the academy functions, trying to define the nature of the research and what is valuable and AF may be limited by power relations. However, AF, which is fairly crucial to the advancement, transfer and application of knowledge, protects the university against the interference of state officials and enables freedom of expression and action, freedom to conduct research and disseminate information without limiting the truth (Ekundayo & Adedokun, 2009).

In this regard, it is possible to suggest that if there were two columns, one for AF, and one for interference with it, in Turkey, the freedom part would fall short while the latter would extend. As the current situation possibly continues, the opportunity to conduct research in the field of educational administration could perish. As Timur (2005) notes, the issue of science and research freedom in Turkey is far beyond the capabilities of the academic staff. So, as Minerva (2016) emphasizes, it is necessary to take the issue of AF much more seriously and begin to consider the threats against it through different perspectives. Moreover, when the academic community learns how to be free, it can also resist the external threats against the academic domain. In this sense, academicians made some suggestions regarding the institutions which must be authorized to give permission and the criteria that must be adhered. Accordingly, it was revealed that most of the participants suggested that DoNE research permission committees, as in the current case, and Ethics committees of universities should grant the permission but permission process should be based on scientific, ethical, objective criteria within the framework of AF and ethics. In fact, it is noteworthy to emphasize that the criteria put forward by the participants are consistent with the principles and criteria which were published by the Academy of Sciences Committee on Ethics in Science of Turkey (2002). Accordingly, it would be relevant to pay attention to the suggestions of

the academicians as people from inside the field of research, thus practice in order to contribute to the freedom of academy in Turkey.

Conclusion and Implications

When the results of the research are examined as a whole, it can be asserted that independent research in the field of educational administration, and thus academic freedom are under threat due to difficulty in obtaining data collection permission, the resort to unethical methods and other factors in Turkey. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to argue that although the institutions which are responsible for granting permission for research differ all around the world, they are sometimes in a tendency to control, limit and even stop the research being done (Sikes and Piper, 2010). In this regard, what must be done all over the world is to pay attention to the demands of the academicians to use their rights to conduct their studies in accordance with scientific research principles and methods without any interference. No matter which institution is responsible for granting permission, what must be followed is a democratic, scientific and ethical path which prioritizes science. Within this context, it is vital that researchers feel free or act autonomously at all stages of the research, from planning to implementation, interpretation of the data collected and its publication. Therefore, as the Academy of Sciences Committee on Ethics in Science of Turkey (2002) states, the issues related to the removal of administrative pressure on the researcher and the provision of good research facilities will need to be further raised by universities and academicians.

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