

**Misconceptions in Phenomenological Research  
in Educational Administration: An Analysis Based  
on Theses\***

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<b>Abstract</b>	<b>Article Info</b>
<i>The present study intends to determine the ways followed and misconceptions held in the studies of phenomenological research design by analysing the theses in the field of educational administration. By using the database of the Turkish Council of Higher Education Thesis Center, forty master's and ten doctoral</i>	<b>Article History:</b> <i>Received</i> <i>February, 20,</i> <i>2019</i>  <i>Accepted</i> <i>July, 10, 2019</i>

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theses conducted between the years 2010-2017 in the field of education administration were reviewed and analysed methodologically. The results indicated that researchers did not benefit from international literature on phenomenological research, the aims and objectives of the theses were not appropriate for employing phenomenology, the study groups of the theses were structured in an unfavourable way, the interview questions used to collect data were not directed to the essence of experience, appropriate methods for the process of data analysis process were conducted, and the interpretation of the findings included problematic points. These misconceptions held in phenomenological research were mostly due to not dominating the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology. Therefore, the researchers planning to conduct their research under the skin of phenomenology need to read enough about and to gain insights into the phenomenological research design before the beginning of their studies.

**Keywords:**

Phenomenology,  
Educational  
administration,  
Methodological  
evaluation,  
Misconceptions

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**Introduction**

The paradigmatic shifts throughout the last century revealed new approaches to research in social science, and the last decades have seen a growing trend towards qualitative research methods. A number of valuable studies have employed qualitative research to analyse events and contexts, evaluate social processes and observe reality from different perspectives (Neuman, 2014). As a kind of qualitative research, phenomenological studies have also become a frequently used method to reveal the pattern of events and reality with its distinct philosophical background (Creswell, 2013; Frykman ve Gilje, 2003; van Manen, 2007).



Recently, there has been an increasing interest in phenomenological studies among social scientists, which has also been reflected in the production of knowledge in educational sciences. There has been a considerable increase in the number of studies designed with phenomenology. For example, a search in Education Recourses Information Center (ERIC) database results in only 1312 research article about phenomenology until 2009, while the number has come up to 5217 in last ten years (ERIC, 2018). Bakanay and Çakır (2006) relate that increase to the constructivist philosophy adopted in the field of education and argue that constructivist philosophy's definition of education as a phenomenon focusing on the subjective element of reality is influential for the increase in the number of phenomenological studies. Moreover, Randles (2012) states that the phenomenological approach can reveal more accurate results about certain cases than quantitative methods, which leads to a change in the preference of research type in education. From a different viewpoint, Selvi (2009) draws attention to recent critics on education's role in reducing individuals' emotions, behaviours and beliefs into a monotype, and defends that the need for and the use of phenomenology have been increased as it can draw a more comprehensive framework for revealing the processes of interpretation of individuals who perceive different experiences in different ways.

Phenomenology presents a systematic framework for representing and interpreting the subjective experiences of actors in educational processes (Koopman, 2017). It has the potential to develop new perspectives for learning, teaching or management, which have a distinctive and complex structure, by identifying how actors of educational settings understand and interpret the educational processes (Van der Mescht, 2004). Besides, the use of

phenomenological research in education can contribute to the productivity and creativity function of the educational systems through self-realization by emphasizing the uniqueness of individuals (Selvi, 2009).

It does appear that many researchers appreciate the potential of phenomenology for educational research and there is a growing body of literature examining different aspects of education by using phenomenological research methods. Especially the approaches and analyses by scholars such as Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), Giorgi (2009), Marton (1986), Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (1990) lead to the way of using phenomenology in educational research. When those research are considered, it is seen that phenomenology is employed to analyse the feelings and thoughts of students, teachers or managers, how they associate themselves with school and what meanings they assign to school-related processes. Therefore, the phenomenological studies in educational settings try to answer questions such as "What is the essence and nature of the learning experience of a student?" (Van Manen, 1990).

Being a sub-discipline of educational research, the studies in the field of educational administration mainly focus on educational areas such as management, leadership, organization, and evaluation (Oplatka, 2010). Since the primary element in these areas is human, it is possible to say that phenomenological approaches can be useful in researching the different aspects of educational administration. Indeed, the studies of Griffiths (1977), Hobbs (1977) and Greenfield (1978), which are revealing the pioneer discussions on phenomenology in the field of educational administration, are essential starting points in this sense. These discussions focused on the differences between system approaches, which were quite



popular at the time of the publication of those studies, and phenomenology, which was a relatively new concept in the field. It can be concluded from those studies that the abstract structure of the system approach was criticized and the need for a phenomenological perspective was accepted in order to reveal the nature of the educational organizations accurately. It was also mentioned that phenomenology could be used as a method to develop educational administrators by entering their inner world. In another perspective, it was accepted that the system approach and phenomenology were complementary. However, it was stated that phenomenology could not be used in all organizational situations and could not be influential in such stages as examining decision-making frameworks. These arguments show that phenomenology has been handled as an important philosophical foundation and research method for the field from the very beginning. Moreover, Greenfield's (1974, p. 3) call for 'employing phenomenological perspective in research on organizational problems' has been widely accepted in the upcoming years and there have been many studies conducted by phenomenological design (e.g., Blase, 1987; Chater, 1998; Gibson, 2014; Lum, 1997; Makoe, 2008; Van der Mescht, 2004; Waite, 2010). As in the context of these studies, many research topics in the field of educational administration such as the meanings attributed to school-related processes, the nature of the management and school, and the experiences about school, learning and administration can be analysed through phenomenological approaches.

Phenomenological research generates new perspectives on management and leadership by exploring certain experiences in the field of educational administration (Van der Mescht, 2004). It is also valuable in terms of understanding the nature of educational organizations and describing and interpreting the experiences of the

actors involved in the process of learning-teaching. Despite the agreement on the value of phenomenology, the debate continues about how to use phenomenology as a research method and the issue of implementing correct strategies of phenomenological research has been a controversial and much-disputed subject within the field of educational science (Finlay, 2009). It is possible to say that these debates are also reflected in educational administration research. In some studies, which have adopted phenomenological approaches, the appropriateness of the research design and the ways followed in the research to the assumptions of phenomenology is controversial. Therefore, there is a need to question whether research problems can be solved by using phenomenological approaches and existing research in educational administration is congruent with the philosophies underlying the phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). Drawing upon that questioning, the present study intends to analyse the theses employed phenomenological research design and produced in the field of educational administration in Turkey in behalf of the ways followed and to determine the misconceptions when conducting the phenomenological research. This study, therefore, set out to examine the use of phenomenological research design, and thereafter, to develop a guideline for researchers by relying on 'not to do' points. In light of these aims, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

In the theses produced in the field of educational administration and employed phenomenological research design;

- (i) Which sources were used and referenced to justify employing a phenomenological research design?
- (ii) Are the stated aims and objectives appropriate for conducting phenomenological research?



- (iii) Which sampling methods were used when creating the study groups?
- (iv) Which data collection and analysis methods were conducted? And were they appropriate for phenomenological research?
- (v) How were the findings interpreted? Were findings interpreted appropriately for phenomenological research?

Research should be conducted in a framework that is coherent with the underlying assumptions of the research design chosen (Creswell, 2013). In this respect, it is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of phenomenological research design in the field of educational administration. The results should make an instructive and directive contribution by revealing “not to do” points based on empirical findings, and thus guiding students and scholars of educational administration while doing research in phenomenological design. Moreover, in the part of the conceptual framework, inexperienced researchers planning to conduct phenomenological research will meet primary sources forming the base of phenomenology. As a limitation, this study is unable to encompass the entire research articles, master and doctoral theses conducted in phenomenological research design in educational administration due to practical constraints. However, we believe that our study group serves as just a starting point and exemplifies the current situation, and the findings reveal inclusionary insights for the phenomenological research in educational administration.

The first section of this paper begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research and looks at the philosophical foundations of phenomenology. It will then go on to explaining phenomenology as a research design. The second section is

concerned with the methodology used for the study. The fourth section presents the findings of the research, focusing on the key themes that answer the research questions of the study. In the end, the findings are discussed and the paper is concluded with some suggestions for the next research.

### **Philosophical Foundations of Phenomenology**

Phenomenology, which was developed with the studies of Edmund Husserl and expanded its scope by Martin Heidegger, is considered as a philosophical movement reflected on the fields of psychology, sociology and education (Bakanay and Çakır, 2016). The essence of phenomenological studies is a complete and precise definition and understanding of human experience (Creswell, 2013). Van Manen (2011) notes that phenomenology stems from a highly complex tradition guiding philosophical movements such as existentialism, post-structuralism, and feminism, and it is also a method of humanities used to determine how people make sense of a specific phenomenon. Spiegelberg (as cited in Baird, 1999) explains the primary purpose of phenomenology as to directly examine and define a phenomenon as experienced in consciousness.

From the viewpoint of Van Manen (1990), phenomenological research is a kind of attempt to continuously question the world we are experiencing and to understand it with different dimensions. The following explanations of him about the characteristics of phenomenology are noteworthy for understanding the philosophical foundations: (i) Phenomenology seeks to understand what an individual's daily experiences are and how people interpret them. (ii) Phenomenological studies allow researchers to have a direct connection with life and a logical understanding of it rather than





developing theories by which researchers can control and explain more variables about the world. (iii) Phenomenological studies are not interested in the present but the past, since they focus on the lived experiences; in other words, it is the aim to reach factors transforming a phenomenon to a “thing” by getting to the heart of it.

### **Two Main Approaches in Phenomenology: Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology and Heidegger’s Hermeneutical Phenomenology**

Phenomenological studies are generally accepted as derived from two philosophical traditions. Based on Husserl’s philosophy, the first is the transcendental phenomenology which aims to describe a phenomenon rather than explaining it. The second is Heideggerian hermeneutical phenomenology that focuses on how individuals make sense of a phenomenon. Although they have common sides, these two approaches differ in some ways in interpreting the philosophy of phenomenology and implementing the research.

The main point of Husserl’s phenomenology is to approach the phenomenon as it appeared through consciousness, in other words, the real source of reality is consciousness. Both minds and objects are formed by experience, which occurs as a situation eliminating mind-body dualism (Lavery, 2003). One of the most critical factors in Husserl’s phenomenology is the concept which he calls as ‘lived experience’. According to Husserl, it is not easy to reach the lived experience of the individuals, because these experiences consist of situations that are ignored or taken-for-granted by the individual at first. What we need to do here is to return these ignored or taken-for-granted experiences and re-analyse them. Husserl’s main objective is to reach basic ‘structures’ of consciousness based on these experiences. In this context, Husserl’s phenomenology always focuses

on the meaning of human experience and accepts the lived experience as reality (Koch, 1995).

An important element of Husserl's phenomenology is intentionality. According to Husserl, intentionality is directing the mind toward objects (Eyim, 2006; Koch, 1995). More clearly, intentionality is 'the directedness of consciousness toward the world to understand it,' and Husserl stated that everything could be explained by using directedness (Smith and McIntyre, 1982, as cited in Bakanay and Çakır, 2016, p. 166). The concept of essence or the essence of the phenomena is another key factor in Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl maintained that phenomenology should consider description as an essential point, and that description would return things to themselves, or in other words, to "essence" which constituted the consciousness and sense of lived experience (Koch, 1995). Another critical point for Husserl is bracketing or phenomenological reduction. The process of bracketing can be explained as the elimination of preconceived knowledge, sensation, evaluation and perception of the researcher about the phenomenon that will be examined (Koch, 1995). In the same vein, as noted by Bakanay and Çakır (2016), there is an essential condition in transcendental phenomenology as presenting the experience from the level of consciousness and perception of the individual who experienced it, and thus the researcher should abandon intentionality of his/her consciousness and focus on the consciousness of that individual.

Bringing a different perspective to phenomenology with the hermeneutic approach, Heidegger built his ideas on theology. Accordingly, hermeneutical phenomenology tries to explain and interpret how the individual makes sense of the experiences taking



place in his/her world (Laverty, 2003). The principal understanding of transcendental phenomenology that 'the experience is lived and shaped only by the individual' evolves into the idea that some experiences can be culturally transmitted in hermeneutic phenomenology (Bakanay and Çakır, 2016).

Although phenomenology is considered as a journey to search for meaning based on experiences of the individuals (Creswell, 2013), it is necessary to underline that there are some distinctions between transcendental and hermeneutical phenomenology. In this respect, Giorgi's (2009) statement that one of the most significant distinction between transcendental and hermeneutical phenomenology is related to bracketing and phenomenological reduction is noteworthy. While examining a phenomenon in hermeneutical phenomenology, it is not possible to put aside preconceived feelings, thoughts, or sensations of the researcher and present the experience only from the level of consciousness and perception of the individual who experienced it. In other words, the difference between these two phenomenological approaches concentrates on consciousness and language. Accordingly, against the understanding in transcendental phenomenology as everything has a consciousness, and thus, the phenomenon should be analysed as it appeared through consciousness (Bakanay and Çakır, 2016), hermeneutic phenomenology highlights the language and its context:

*.... where men first meet with Being is not consciousness, but language. Language always exists before the subject. Subject develops within the area of language. The mutual relation between Being and human is realized through language. Language, rather than being a means of conveying the right information, includes 'truth' that the reality 'demystifies' and present itself to our thought. The place where the Being and human are connected is language. Heidegger expresses this idea in 'Letter on Humanism' as 'Being comes to*

*language: Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells.'*  
(Heidegger, 2002, p.37, as cited in Aydoğdu, 2018, p. 1335).

Focusing on the differences between transcendental and hermeneutical approaches, Koch (1995) lists these differences as follows: (1) Hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on the questions about how individuals interpret the phenomena. Therefore, Heidegger opposes to epistemological assumptions of Husserl's phenomenology and refer to transformation consciousness to existence. (2) Heidegger stands up to the idea that meaning can be accepted as a representation of an independent reality and theory can be produced from the perspective of an outside observer. (3) The meaning cannot be isolated from its cultural and historical context in hermeneutical phenomenology tradition. In other words, the meaning is not neutral, and it takes shape according to the purpose and perspective of the interpreter. Therefore, an individual activates his/her interest and expectations while reaching the meaning. In this respect, bracketing makes it impossible to reach the meaning that is thought to appear in pure consciousness. Describing and interpreting cannot be seen as different processes, and thus cannot be separated from each other.

### **Phenomenology as a Research Design**

In recent years, phenomenological studies have increasingly been conducted in educational research along with the replacement of positivist thoughts by post-positivist paradigm and the rise of individual-centered approaches. Based on Husserl's transcendental phenomenology or Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, some scholars considered phenomenology as a part of the research methodology and contributed to the process of phenomenology's



becoming one of the important designs for qualitative studies. At this point, Polkingmore and Moustakas came into prominence for transforming transcendental phenomenology to a research design, while Van Manen has made important contributions to hermeneutic phenomenology in this respect (Bakanay and Çakır, 2016). Besides, there is a need to note that Giorgi (2009) has also made significant contributions to organizing the transcendental phenomenology as a research design.

The main aim of phenomenological studies is to examine human experiences (Creswell, 2013). In other words, the research topic in phenomenological studies is human experience and researchers seeks to reveal the meanings individuals attribute to their lived experiences (Denscombe, 2007). The need for describing or interpreting a phenomenon experienced by the individual forms the core of phenomenological research (Bakanay and Çakır, 2016). The question 'Under what circumstances, what was experienced, and what kind of meaning was reached?' explains the orientation of phenomenological studies' objective (Ersoy, 2016, p. 57). In terms of sampling methods, phenomenological studies are carried out with fewer participants when compared to other research designs, and they mostly employ purposeful sampling methods such as criterion, snowball, homogeneous or maximum variation sampling (Ersoy, 2016). However, some other scholars state that it is more suitable to use criterion sampling method in phenomenological studies as they require studying on more homogeneous groups (Creswell, 2013).

One of the most distinctive features of phenomenological studies in qualitative research paradigm lays on the way raw data is analysed. Indeed, one can also talk about the difference in analysing the data between transcendental and hermeneutical phenomenology.

Based on the lived experience of the individual, it is aimed to reach to the essence of the phenomenon perceived by consciousness in transcendental phenomenology (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Therefore, one needs to get an unbiased perspective and to bracket his/her knowledge and feelings about the examined phenomenon, while performing analysis in phenomenological research. On the other hand, transcendental phenomenology requires to interpret the experience rather than describing and reaching its essence (Moustakas, 1994). According to Giorgi (2007; 2009), who has made significant contributions for structuring Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as a research design, the first step in the phenomenological data analysis starts with analyser's bracketing of all his/her perceptions, expectations and views about the phenomenon examined. Then the process is continued by reading the transcribed statements of the participants one after another and determining the points where the semantic differentiation took place, which is called as phenomenological reduction. The next step is the imaginative variation which refers to reaching the meaningful units through the statements that participants produce to convey their experiences, and thus, to deduce the themes revealing the structure of the phenomenon. Called as the synthesis of meanings and essences, the last step includes synthesising meaning units obtained from the interviews with the participants, reaching basic themes and determining the original and unchanged essence of the phenomenon examined. On the other hand, transcendental phenomenology attaches importance to the historical and cultural context in which data appears, which requires a more complicated process for data analysis (Ersoy, 2016). As an example of this complicated process, we can talk about Gadamer's concept of 'fusion of horizons'. (Gadamer, 1989). Gadamer emphasises the interaction between the transcribed



text and the reader by using the concept of fusion of horizons. More precisely, there are actually two horizons, one of which includes the reader's own feelings, thoughts and experiences about the phenomenon, and the other covers the real meaning of the text itself. In terms of hermeneutical phenomenology, "to understand" refers to the fusion of these two horizons, in other words, to the integration of the meaning reader attributed to text and the real meaning of the text itself. Following direct quotation from Gadamer (1989) can be instructive to understand that concept:

*"In our analysis of the hermeneutical process we saw that to acquire a horizon of interpretation requires a fusion of horizons. This is now confirmed by the verbal aspect of interpretation. The text is made to speak through interpretation. But no text and no book speaks if it does not speak a language that reaches the other person. Thus interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak. There cannot, therefore, be any single interpretation that is correct "in itself," precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself. The historical life of a tradition depends on being constantly assimilated and interpreted. An interpretation that was correct in itself would be a foolish ideal that mistook the nature of tradition. Every interpretation has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs."*

Laverty (2003) states that a unique process for data analysis has been followed in hermeneutical phenomenology and that the researcher and the participant structure the data together in a hermeneutical cycle. Based on imagination, hermeneutical cycle, language and writing, the researcher and the participant try to reveal lived experiences. In other words, participants try to present and interpret their experiences together with the researcher (Koch, 1995), just like a doctor and a patient interact with each other during a consultation process and experience fusion of horizons by leaving the

previous understandings, prejudices or conceptualizations (Clark, 2008). As Husserl claims, it is not possible to describe the phenomena as they are, because describing a phenomenon means it is already interpreted. Therefore, it can be stated that it is not right to suggest a form of data analysis for hermeneutical phenomenological studies, as the interaction participant and researcher is highly emphasized.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This research is conducted using the methods and techniques adopted in qualitative research. A case-study approach was chosen to examine the methodological misconceptions in theses employed a phenomenological research design in the field of educational administration. Case studies include analysing a case or a system in the context of a conceptual framework (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002) and addressing the research problem by getting detailed information about it (Merriam, 2002). Case studies are divided into four sub-models: holistic single-case, embedded single-case, holistic multiple-case, embedded multiple-case (Yin, 2014). The present study employed the embedded multiple-case design in which multiple cases are divided into various sub-units to analyse. Each thesis was considered as a different case, and each sub-unit of these theses was analysed comparatively with others.

### **Data Sources**

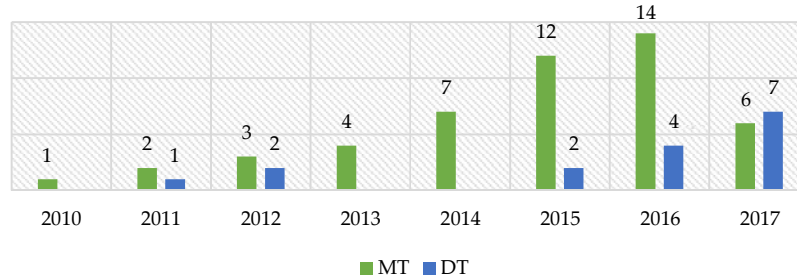
The data sources used in the study consist of 40 masters' and 10 doctoral theses. The reason in choosing the theses as the data source was that they were more accessible and convenient when time and cost constraints were considered. Moreover, as the theses were



evaluated and approved by a committee, they could also reflect the perspective of academics in the field of educational administration. Distribution by years of the theses used as the data source is in Graphic 1. Please note that master's theses have been presented as MT, and doctoral theses as DT.

Graphic 1.

*Distribution of phenomenological research by years*



As seen in Graph 1, there was only one thesis designed with phenomenology in 2010, but this number reached to 18 in 2016. In 2017, there was a decrease in the number of master's theses while the increase continued for doctoral theses. Therefore, it can be concluded that the theses produced in Educational Administration in Turkey increasingly prefer phenomenology as a research design.

### Data Collection Process

When determining the theses to be included in the study, the database of the Turkish Council of Higher Education Thesis Center was utilised as the targeted study group would include the theses conducted in Turkey. The reasons for targeting only the theses conducted in Turkey were: (i) the context of the research necessitated that and (ii) there were practical manners to be taken into

consideration such as time and cost as it would be impossible to include all of the studies which employed phenomenology as the research design. Theses have been reached by entering the specified keywords into the search engine of the database. As their language is Turkish, the keywords included eight different Turkish synonyms of 'phenomenology and phenomenological research' [fenomenoloji, fenomenolojik araştırma, fenomenolojik desen, olgu bilim, olgubilim, görüngü bilim, görüngübilim, görüngüsel yaklaşım] which were found to be used in the literature. Our nomination of the keywords depends on the previous research in Turkish language so that every synonym could be involved in search results. After determining the keywords, we narrowed down the search results to the Division and Discipline of "Educational Administration" and "Educational Administration, Supervision, Planning, and Economics" by using detailed search tab. Note that there were a total of 391 theses in the scope of educational administration in the database, and we have used the keywords as a starting point and sort out the theses which defended that their research design was phenomenology. Forty-nine master's and sixteen doctoral theses employed 'phenomenology' as research design appeared in the narrowed search results by 31st December of 2017. Nine master's and six doctoral theses have been excluded as they are under embargo at the request of their author. Thereafter, the purpose and objectives of the theses, stated reasons for employing phenomenology, the study group, the data collection process, the questions asked for data collection, the data analysis and how the findings were presented were entered into the forms created for each of the remaining fifty theses.



## Data Analysis

The master's and doctoral theses produced in the field of educational administration were analysed by using the method of document analysis, and a methodological evaluation was performed. Document analysis is a kind of qualitative research process used for evaluating printed or electronic material systematically, eliciting the meanings in these materials and developing empirical findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The methodological evaluation includes comparing various studies with each other and evaluating them according to different perspectives (Neuman, 2014). While performing document analysis and methodological evaluation, we analyse data following a case-study design that requires describing, giving examples, revealing themes and patterns and reaching comparative results (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2016). The misconceptions held in the theses were determined by comparing them with the related literature on how to build a phenomenological research.

The purposes and objectives of the theses, the ways followed to form study groups, the process of data collection and analysis, how the findings presented and interpreted were analysed according to principles of transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology. We began with structuring categorical classifications and frequency of occurrence by performing content analysis, as Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) suggests, to determine which sources were referred to justify employing phenomenology, which sampling methods were used to form the study groups, which methods preferred to collect and analyse the data and how the findings were presented. In the next step, we examined the purposes of the theses, the ways followed while conducting the study, presentation and interpretation of the findings according to the appropriateness to the phenomenological

design. After categorizing the misconceptions held in the theses, examples for the categories were presented with direct quotations.

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Research**

Discussions on the concepts of validity and reliability are continuing in qualitative research paradigm, and the issue is handled in different ways by various scholars and authors (Maxwell, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Kirk & Miller, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest using credibility, transferability, dependability or confirmability rather than concepts of positivist paradigm such as validity and reliability. We have acted in accordance with that suggestion in the present study. In this sense, prolonged engagement, persistent observation and peer debriefing have been used to ensure the credibility of the study, which gives confidence in the accuracy of the findings. Prolonged engagement requires the researchers staying in the field for a sufficient amount of time and reaching all necessary data. In this study, all available theses designed with a phenomenological approach in the educational administration field in Turkey were examined. Moreover, the researchers have a great research experience in the context in which the study was conducted, and therefore, they are familiar with the way the scholars and students follow while doing a research in this context. Persistent observation states that there may be many things in the research field related to the subject being investigated, but it is important to go directly to the data that will contribute to finding answers for research problem. For this purpose, while working on the data sources of the research, we consistently focused on the patterns that can be related to the methodology of them. For example, the theses might be comprised of many different parts; however we have persistently focused on the problem statements, objectives,



methodology and findings as they were the main clues informing about the design of a research. For peer debriefing, we asked a colleague who was competent in qualitative research to check if there was any logical and methodological error in the way the findings of the present study were discovered. She has examined the processes of data collection and data analysis, and made inferences about how the findings were reached, and compared those inferences with the present study together with the researchers. Transferability, on the other hand, is related to whether the findings of the research can be transferred into similar contexts. Thick descriptions, which refer to describing the context and the data of the study in a detailed way, becomes essential for transferability. Therefore, we gave information about the data sources of the present study and explained in detail how the data were collected and analysed in previous parts (See the parts data sources, data collection process and data analysis). To provide dependability and confirmability, inquiry audit was performed. For this reason, after the report of the study had been completed, an external researcher examined the whole process of the research. Differently from the work done in peer debriefing, another scholar who had competence and experience in educational research has read the final report and analysed the whole process, not only data collection and analysis. In this way, he could confirmed the way followed in the present research. Moreover, the study was presented to the participants of a conference, and their feedback was considered while constructing the final report. Indeed, the raw data will be kept in the digital environment for possible confirmations in the future.

### **The Position of the Researchers**

Doing a research that can serve as a kind of guideline especially for a methodological purpose may require an 'interrogation' of the

researchers' position about the subject. Therefore, we feel obliged to explain the researchers' academic background and experience in conducting phenomenological research so that the reader can judge how the researchers are qualified to conduct this research. Firstly, all of the authors are studying in the field of educational administration and have a sound grasp of the context in which the study conducted. All of them have participated in many conferences on educational administration, and three of them have taken part in academic journals as a member of the editorial board or a referee, and therefore they had opportunity to analyse a great number of studies with phenomenological design, which shows their familiarity with how phenomenology is absorbed in the field of educational administration especially in Turkish context. Secondly, four of the authors, who especially took the responsibility of the data analysing and interpreting process of the present research, have studies on 'research methodologies in education' including a book on phenomenological research. Therefore, we can assure that all of the authors have enough experience to conduct and evaluate a qualitative research including phenomenological design.

### **Findings**

The findings are presented accordingly to the objectives of the research. The examples and direct quotations from the theses were offered to enrich the explanations, where possible. As the original language of the theses was Turkish, the direct quotations have been translated into English by the researchers of the present study. Please note that the names of the authors and the original titles of the theses were reserved, and each example referred by a code like T1-MT-2000,



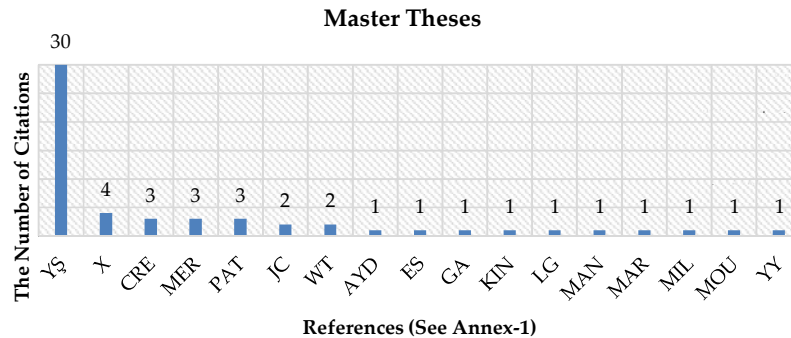
which shows the number (T1), the kind ('MT' for master's theses and 'DT' for doctoral theses) and the year (2000) of the study.

**Findings on the sources used to justify the employment of phenomenology**

The first of the questions aimed to determine the references used for justifying the employment of phenomenology as the research design. Herein, the main intention was to show on which basis the authors and their supervisors build their theses. In this way, we have planned to reveal whether there is a repetition and duplication or diversity. Therefore, the theses were first analysed in terms of the references authors cited to explain the reason in stating their research design as phenomenology. Please note that each reference was created with a certain abbreviation and the expansions of these abbreviations were given in ANNEX-1. Master's and doctoral theses were evaluated respectively through the graphs as follows:

Graph 2.

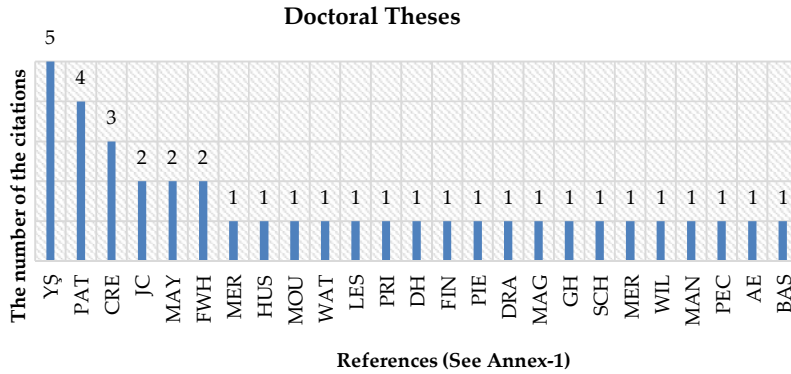
*The sources for phenomenological research design in MTs*



Graph 2 shows that the primary source used for conducting the phenomenological research is Yıldırım and Şimşek’s (2016) book in Turkish. The phenomenological approach was tried to be justified without referring to any sources in four of the theses. Additionally, Creswell (2013), Patton (2015), Merriam (2009), Johnson and Christensen (2012) and Wade and Tavris (1990) were cited in a limited number of the theses. There were also some other sources cited once each.

Graph 3.

*The sources for phenomenological research design in DTs*



According to Graph 3, the book of Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016) was used intensively for the justification of phenomenological design in doctoral theses as in the master’s theses. The studies of Patton (2015) and Creswell (2013) were also referred. It is possible to say that the references used in doctoral theses have more variety than master’s theses.

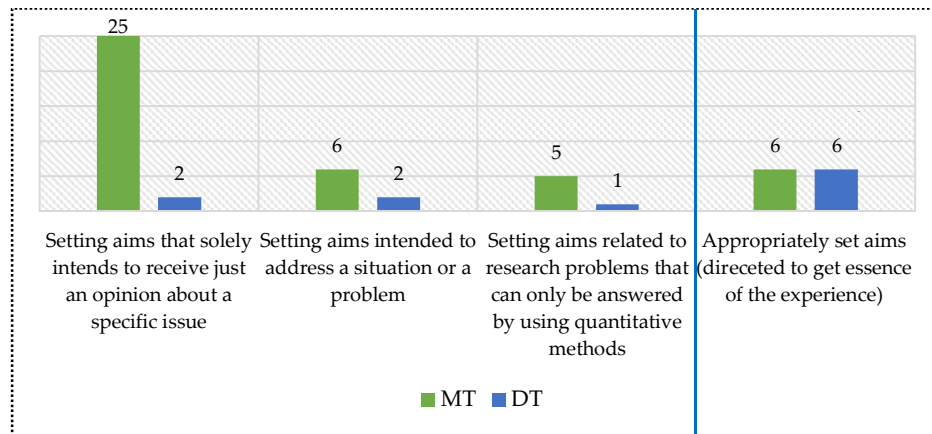


### Findings on the stated aims and objectives of the theses

The aims and objectives of the theses were examined in order to determine if they were appropriate for phenomenological research. Please note that the criterion for appropriation here relates to whether the aims and objectives set out in the theses are intended to draw meaning from an experience. Graph 4 shows which misconceptions have occurred.

Graph 4.

*The misconceptions about the stated aims in theses*



Graph 4 implies that the aims and objectives, especially in master's theses, were not appropriate for conducting phenomenological research. The same situation applies to half of the doctoral theses. The most common misconception was 'setting aims that solely intend to receive just an opinion of the participants about a specific issue'. Below is a direct quotation taken from a thesis to exemplify that misconception:

*It is aimed to reveal the perceptions of headmasters and supervisors about the training process of primary school pre-service teachers and to suggest a*

*solution to the problems of the training process of teacher candidates. In this context, the main aim and problem of the research is “evaluating the process of primary school pre-service teachers’ training.” It is purposed to qualitatively analyse the training process of primary school pre-service teachers by headmasters and primary school inspectors.*

[Objectives]:

1. *What is the opinion of primary school headmasters about the process of primary school pre-service teachers’ training?*
2. *What is the opinion of primary education supervisors about the process of primary school pre-service teachers’ training?*

T1-MT-2010

When the above example is considered, one can see that the thesis was prepared to determine the opinions of the participants on “teacher candidate’s training”. It was stated in the methodology that phenomenological research design was employed, however, the study aimed to get opinions of the participants rather than revealing the patterns of experiences about teacher candidate’s training. In order for this study to be conducted as a phenomenology, the researcher should have aimed to reveal the meanings imposed by the teachers to the training they had. For example, it would be more appropriate to build this study on ‘being a teacher candidate’ and to have an aim like ‘investigating how teacher candidates interpret their experiences in the process of teacher candidate training’. The objectives would be exploring (1) ‘how teacher candidates experience the process of teacher candidate training’ and (2) ‘how teacher candidates interpret the process of teacher candidate training’.

Another misconception was setting aims intended to address a situation or a problem. In some of the theses, it was found out that the main aim was to evaluate the current situation of a particular



issue or to reveal the problems related to this situation. An example of this misconception is below:

*In this study, it was aimed to determine the views of the preschool teachers working in the state primary school in Ağrı city center, 2014-2015 academic year related to the managerial problems that they encounter.*

[Objectives]:

1. *What are the problems that preschool teachers encounter in personnel services?*
2. *What are the problems that preschool teachers encounter in general management services?*
3. *What are the problems that preschool teachers encounter in curriculum services?*
4. *What are the problems that preschool teachers encounter in student services?*
5. *What are the problems that preschool teachers encounter in budget services?*
6. *What are the problems that preschool teachers encounter in supervision services?*

T19-MT-2015

It can be understood from the direct quotation that the thesis was intended to determine the managerial problems. Depending on this general aim, the objectives included identifying the problems in different sub-areas. The researcher did not focus on how teachers who have managerial problems interpreted the essence of these problems, but instead on finding out what the problems were. The main aim of the research should have related to a more experience-based problem like 'examining preschool teachers' experiences related to managerial problems'.

The next misconception is setting aims related to research problems that can be answered by using quantitative methods. It is unfavourable to employ phenomenology and even qualitative

research practice to solve the research problem in that kind of theses. The following example can clearly illustrate that misconception:

*This study aims to investigate the effect of inspection on classroom teachers' motivation in the class and to make suggestions about inspection and motivation.*

[Objectives]:

1. Does inspection affect classroom teachers' motivation in class?
2. How inspection affect classroom teachers' motivation in class?
3. What is the effect of the pre-observation period of inspection process on classroom teachers' motivation in class?
4. What is the effect of the observation period of inspection process on classroom teachers' motivation in class?
5. What is the effect of the post-observation period of inspection process on classroom teachers' motivation in class?
6. What is the effect of the inspection process on classroom teachers' performance in terms of planning, practicing and measurement and evaluation?
7. What is the effect of the inspection process on classroom teachers' performance in terms of classroom management?
8. What is the effect of lesson observation of inspection process on classroom teachers' motivation in class?

T37-MT-2017

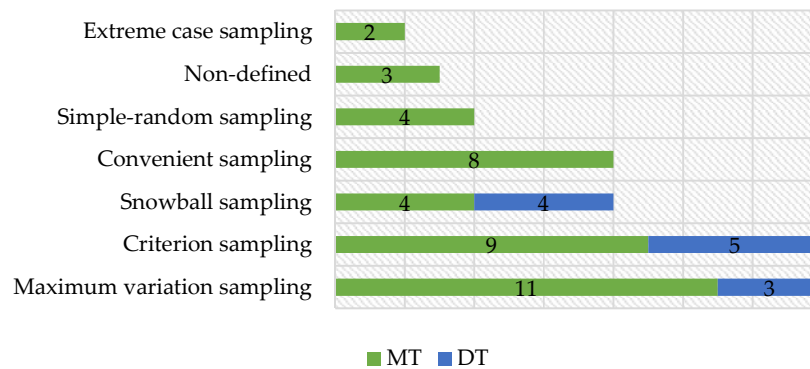
Some theses set aims to analyse the relationship between two variables (motivation and inspection in that case) and their effect on each other as in the example above. 'Effect' and 'relationship' are concepts implying a cause and effect situation. However, qualitative research designs including phenomenology are not interested in causes or effects; rather, they attempt to have a deep understanding of a phenomenon. Therefore, it would be more convenient to resolve those research problems by employing quantitative methods.

### Findings on the Study Groups of the Theses

One of the problems of the present study is about the preferred sampling methods while forming the study group in the theses. Firstly, the sampling methods of the theses have been analyzed according to their frequency. Secondly, the misconceptions about forming the study group have been explained.

Graph 5.

*The sampling methods of the theses*



Graph 5 shows the sampling methods preferred in the master theses and dissertations. While the master theses mostly used maximum variation sampling (f=11), dissertations preferred criterion sampling method (f=5). In addition, the snowball sampling method was used four times in both groups. In the master theses, convenient (f = 8), simple random (f = 4), and extreme case (f = 2) sampling methods were also used, however, there was no information about how sampling was done in some of them (f = 4). In the following table, there are misconceptions about forming the study groups.

Table 1.  
*Misconceptions about forming the study group*

Misconceptions	f
Including the participants who have not experienced the phenomena	23
Despite the use of maximum variation sampling, not explaining the characteristics of the participants in detail	9
Employing the convenient sampling method	8
Employing quantitative techniques	4
Not mentioning about the criteria for criterion sampling	3

Table 1 presents an overview of the misconceptions about forming the study group. The most significant misconception was the inclusion of participants who have not experienced the phenomena. For example, in a thesis (T33-MT-2016) which examined ‘the teacher’s opinions related to servant leadership qualities of primary school principals’, the study group included teachers who had never experienced leadership. Another misconception was in the usage of maximum variation sampling. Most of the theses and dissertations did not explain the characteristics of the participants in detail, which made it difficult for the readers to understand the context of the research. As the convenience sampling method disallows interviewing with the individuals who had experienced the phenomena, employing it in a phenomenological study should be accepted as a misconception. Finally, some theses did not mention about the criteria used for criterion sampling.

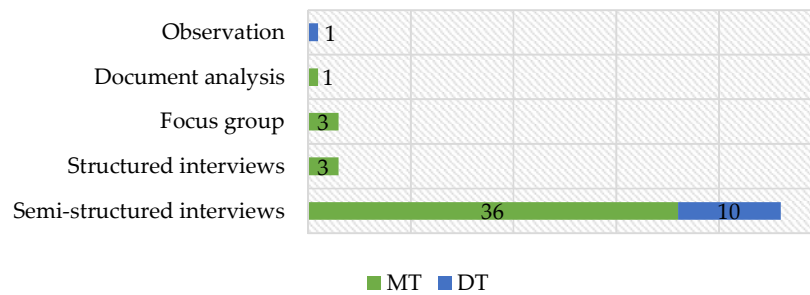
### **Findings on the Process of Data Collection and Analysis of the Theses**

The next objective of the present study was to determine which methods were followed and which misconceptions were held in the collection and analysis of the data. As shown in Graph 6, the majority

of the theses preferred semi-structured interviews as a data collection method (f=46). Focus group interviews (f=3), structured interviews (f=3), document analysis (f=1) and observation (f=1) were other methods.

Graph 6.

*Data collection methods performed in the theses*



The determined misconceptions about the data collection are set out in Table 2. Where possible, examples were given for the misconceptions, and a code number (C) such as E1, E2, E3 etc. was assigned to follow them in the text.

Table 2.  
*Misconceptions about the data collection*

Misconceptions	Example	C
Formulating interview questions that are not mainly directed to patterns of experience (308/508)	What are your opinions about the effectiveness of training for trainee teachers?	E1
Asking the questions to the individuals who cannot or won't experience the phenomenon. (65/508)	What do you think about your students' choice of basic high schools?	E2
Asking questions to reveal the conceptual knowledge (42/508)	What are the sources of income of schools according to the regulations? What are the solutions to the financial problems of the schools?/How should an effective source management be?/ What are the alternative ways to increase the financial sources of schools?	E3 E4
Using the objectives as interview questions (10/508)	What is the number of children of refugee families?	E5
Asking questions for quantitative information (33/508)	What kind of studies are you doing to develop and implement academic studies in your academic unit?	E6
Asking questions involving an assumption (23/508)	What are the elements of non-verbal communication used by the school principals against teachers?	E7
Doing interviews for the points that can only be analysed by observation (f=4)		
Not formulating enough questions to cover the problem being investigated (2)	No example is available.	N/A

Table 2 sets out an overview for misconceptions about the data collection in theses. We have analysed a total of 508 interview questions included in the master's and doctoral theses one by one. It was found out that 308 of 508 interview questions analysed were not directed to reveal the patterns of an experience. As shown in E1, the question was prepared to get a view on effectiveness of training, rather than describing or interpreting the meaning. Sixty-five interview questions were aimed at individuals who have not experienced the phenomenon investigated. When E2 is analysed as

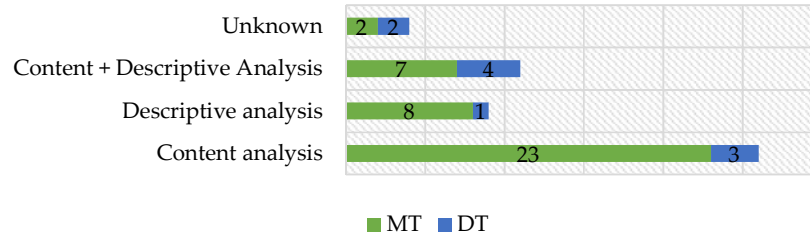




an example, it is seen that the question were asked not to the students who had experienced the process of basic high school choice, but to the teachers who can only be an external observer of the process. Another misconception was asking questions to reveal conceptual knowledge of the participant. For example, E3 is a kind of question to evaluate the conceptual knowledge of school principals about the sources of income. In some theses, objectives of the research were arranged as interview questions. The questions in E4 indicated the objectives of the research and were used as interview questions. The questions that can only be answered by quantitative methods such as E5 were not aimed at revealing the meaning of the phenomenon. In some questions, it is seen that the researcher directs the participant with a certain assumption. When E6 is examined, the statement 'What kind of studies are you doing ...' seems to be based on the assumption that the participant have already done some studies. However, the possibility of the participant's not having done such a study was ignored. Another misconception was doing interview for the points that can only be analysed by observation, which was seen in four theses and exemplified in E7. Finally, in two of the theses, it was found to be another conception that comprehensive questions were not prepared in a way to address the phenomenon in all its dimensions. In these theses, only three questions were directed to participants to deeply understand the phenomenon. However, these questions did not cover the whole aspects of it.

Graph 7.

*Data analysis methods performed in theses*



Graph 7 illustrates the data analysis method employed in the theses. Accordingly, most of the master's theses performed content analysis to analyse the data. On the other hand, doctoral theses mostly employed content analysis and descriptive analysis together. In addition, some theses did not explain the method of analysing the data and the process of analysis. Those theses marked as 'others' in the graph. The misconceptions about the data analysis are summarised in Table 3 below:



Table 3.  
*The misconceptions about the data analysis*

Misconceptions	Example	C
Not explaining the process of the data analysis (f=29)	<i>The data collected by using semi-structured interview protocol were analysed by employing content analysis which was one of the qualitative data analysis methods. The main purpose of the content analysis is to reach the concepts and relations that can explain the collected data.</i>	E8
Reducing the descriptive analysis to only direct quotations of the participants. (f=7)	<i>Descriptive analysis technique was used to reflect the views of the participants.</i>	E9
Confusing descriptive analysis with descriptive research of quantitative paradigm (f=2)	<i>Descriptive analysis was performed for some of the interview questions.</i> [Interview questions]: <i>How old are you?</i> <i>What is your seniority in profession and management?</i> <i>What kind of school are you working in?</i>	E10
Not mentioning about the coding process (f=44)	<i>No example is available</i>	N/A

As shown in Table 3, an important misconception in data analysis is not to explain the process of data analysis in detail. As in E8, most of the theses and the dissertations stated that the data analysis were performed by using content analysis. However, there was no explanation for the stages in which raw data went through for analysis. Another misconception is to refer to descriptive analysis as only presenting the direct quotations expressed by participants. For example, descriptive analysis was stated as an analysis method to reflect the views of the participants. However, as explained in the discussion part of the present study, the descriptive analysis does not include only presenting direct quotations. Moreover, there was a misconception about using concepts of descriptive analysis and quantitative descriptive research. In two of the theses, the questions for obtaining quantitative information about the demographics of the

participants was answered by employing descriptive analysis, which is exemplified in E10. Finally, most of the theses have not mentioned about the coding process in the data analysis. Since it is impossible to exemplify a non-existing situation, it will be explanatory to give a direct quotation from a thesis which explains the coding process in detail. When the following example is examined, it is possible to see what steps and what kind of coding methods the researcher chose during the coding process:

*'In the process of analysing the data, the transcribed interviews have been read again and again, and so the data were conceptually categorized. The themes have been reached by establishing a relationship between the codes. While the answers for the questions of the interview protocols and the data obtained from the literature was being analysed, superficial coding were performed. The codes obtained from superficial encodings were combined under a common concept. After that, employing axis coding, the basic codes were determined by revising existing codes. Finally, the themes have been revised and the main themes of the study have been reached by selective coding.'*

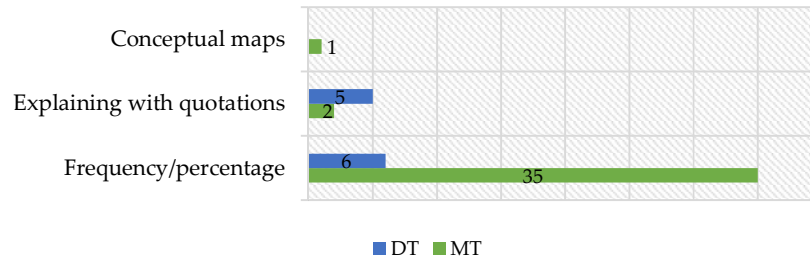
T27-MT-2016

### **Findings on the Presentation and Interpretation of the Findings of the Theses**

Analysing the presentation and the interpretation of the findings in the master theses and dissertations designed as phenomenology is another objective of the present study. For this purpose, how the findings were presented and the misconceptions that were revealed during the interpretation were examined.

Graph 8.

*The way of the presentation of the findings*



Graph 8 shows that the findings were presented as frequency/percentage of themes in most of the theses (f=41). In addition, some theses preferred to explain the themes by providing direct quotations (f=7). A master thesis presented emerging themes by using cognitive maps. The misconception on presenting the findings are summarised in the Table 4 below:

Table 4.

*The misconception about presenting and interpreting the findings*

Misconceptions	
Not discussing the findings according to conceptual framework	2
Not explaining the findings according to the context	5
Including only the supporting literature while interpreting the findings	4
Repeating the findings again and again in the discussion part	9

As can be seen from Table 4, not discussing the findings according to the conceptual framework on which the study was constructed is an important misconception. Indeed, the context, in which the study was performed, was disregarded while interpreting the findings. For example, different statements of the participants in

the specified study group were not compared, and the situations that might arise due to the differences of the participants were not interpreted. In addition, when writing a discussion on findings, the authors have cited only the research that supports their findings. However, there was no mention of the literature that could provide a different perspective for the research. Finally, the findings were repeated in the discussion part and they used in the same sense with the 'conclusion'. Together these results provide important insights into misconception on presenting the findings.

### **Discussion**

The present study aimed to determine the misconceptions when conducting the phenomenological research by examining the theses employed phenomenological research design and produced in the field of educational administration. Within the scope of this aim, firstly, the resources used to justify employing phenomenological research design were examined. The findings revealed that using the phenomenological research design was justified by referring to a single resource (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016), especially in master's theses. This source is one of the first books on qualitative research written in Turkish, and thus, it is not surprising that many authors and scholars often refer to it for phenomenological research. However, it can be argued that referring mostly to a single source may lead to a one-way perception and in-depth readings from different sources are necessary to better understand the phenomenological research design. A limited number of references to respected scholars such as Cresswell (2013), Patton (2015), Merriam (2009), Johnson & Christensen (2012) and Wade & Tavris (1990) further highlights this necessity. However, in the doctoral theses



examined within the scope of the present research, it is seen that there was a strong reference to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016), but the studies of Patton (2015) and Creswell (2013) were also referenced. Therefore, it can be stated that the sources used in the doctoral theses varied when compared to the master's theses. Although this finding seems to be consistent with our expectations, only one doctoral thesis referred to Husserl and Heidegger, who have laid the philosophical foundations of phenomenology, which suggests that the researchers and their supervisors conducted their studies without fully understanding the phenomenological design and its philosophical underpinnings. Moreover, even if the phenomenological research is defined in general as the studies to reveal the structure of the experience and consciousness (van Manen, 1997), some factors cause these studies to be placed on different axes. As Laverly (2003) maintains, phenomenological research is generally carried out by counting on Husserl's transcendental phenomenology which focuses on describing, or Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology that engages in interpreting, and the purpose of the research is decisive in that point. Therefore, just stating 'the phenomenological design is employed' is not explanatory enough for phenomenological research. Then, it is possible to suggest that the arguments presented in order to justify the phenomenological design were insufficient and that researchers held misconceptions about the phenomenology even before beginning to study on their problem.

The second question in this study sought to determine whether the aims and objectives of the theses were appropriate for employing a phenomenological research. The findings indicated that the phenomenological research design was not appropriate for the aims and the objectives of most of the master's and half of the doctoral theses. The most significant misconception was setting aims and

objectives that solely intended to receive just an opinion of the participants about a specific issue. The discussion of this finding takes us to the literature on philosophical and methodological foundations of the phenomenological approach, which was explained in the previous parts. The relevant literature suggests some basic criteria for employing a phenomenological research design. For example, Creswell (2013) argues that the most basic criterion for the decision on whether a research can be carried out as phenomenology is to have an aim directed to the in-depth understanding of the human experience that can be generalized to a group of people. Similarly, Denscombe (2007) offers that the experiences of people are the subject of phenomenological research and researchers should aim to determine the common points of the meanings attributed to these experiences. Langdridge (2007) accepts the phenomenology as a research design to set light to the world in which people live and the meaning that this world expresses to them by lying on the experiences. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), one of the respected scholar in the field of phenomenology, phenomenological research is a process of depiction, and reaching the essence of human experience is at the center of it. This combination of literature provides support for the argument that although the framework of the phenomenological research tradition has not been clearly elaborated, the main point of phenomenological research, in general, is to study of human experiences and to elucidate the meanings attributed to certain phenomena by analysing these experiences. However, it was explicit in some theses examined within the scope of the present research that the researchers only struggled to get the opinions of the participants instead of considering their experiences as the starting point, aimed to reach superficial findings about what the problems were encountered in some specific situation rather than to focus on





how the participants made sense of these problems and stuck to aims requiring quantitative research paradigm like analysing the relationship between some variables and explaining the effects of them on each other. We believe that lack of dominance on the philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenology and a series of debate on phenomenological research tradition (e.g. Finlay, 2009; Giorgi, 2009; Langdrige, 2007; Lavery, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) has played an important role in the emergence of all these misconceptions.

Another objective of the study is to determine which sampling methods were used in the studies employing phenomenological design. According to the findings, sampling methods such as extreme case, simple-random, convenient, snowball and maximum variation were preferred. It is important to note that some of the theses examined have never given information about the sampling method. As the phenomenological research focuses on the experience of a group of participants in order to reveal the different dimensions of the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2013), the most critical point about the participants becomes that they must have experienced the phenomenon before (Moustakas, 1994). However, one can conclude from the findings of the present research that whether the participants had experienced the relevant phenomenon was not considered in some theses. Moreover, the sampling methods preferred are also questionable. It is seen that some of the theses used the sampling methods of quantitative research paradigm such as simple-random sampling, and some others employed convenient sampling which prevents close examination of the phenomenon. The simple random sampling method is related to forming the sample of a study by making a list of the sampling units in a given population and assigning them randomly to the sample (Best & Kahn, 2006). On

the other hand, it is adopted to carry out the study by including the nearest participant who is accessible in the convenient sampling (Saldana, 2011). As stated in many parts of the present study, the bottom line in phenomenological research is to reveal or interpret the patterns of the experience. However, randomly selecting the participants or including the nearest person the researcher can reach makes it impossible to fulfill the principle of 'including participants who have experienced the phenomenon examined'. Therefore, it has been suggested that phenomenological studies are conducted with relatively few participants and criterion, snowball, homogenous and maximum variation sampling methods are preferred for the inclusion of these participants in the study (Ersoy, 2016). Similarly, (Creswell, 2013) defends that as creating homogenous and experienced-based study groups is an important step for phenomenological research, the criterion sampling would be more appropriate to employ. However, determining and defining the criteria for inclusion of the participants becomes an essential part for creating a homogenous and experience-based study group (Patton, 2015). Patton's claim differs from the findings presented here, as they showed that most of the theses employing criterion sampling had not mentioned about their criteria for inclusion of the participants in the study group, which implies another misconception. Moreover, the present study showed that the identifying characteristics of the participants were not explained in detail and that findings were not discussed according to the variations. However, the most important issue in maximum variation sampling is 'to reflect the variation of the participant who may be different sides of the problem examined' (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 108) and thus, it aims to examine the problem according to the different aspects and to identify the points shared in the views of the participants different from each other (Patton, 2015). From this point



of view, the way of employing the maximum variation sampling in the theses is also a matter of misconception. There might be differences among the participants, who have different characteristics and present the different sides of the phenomenon, in adopting a perspective for the problem as well as in comprehending, interpreting or sense-making of it. Then if maximum variation sampling basically aims to examine the phenomenon with its all dimensions and from the different perspectives of the participants interpreting it, findings of the examined theses would be expected to represent these differences.

The process of data collection and analysis in the theses employing phenomenological research design has also been examined in the present research. The results indicated that semi-structured interview forms were used as data collection tool in most of the theses. Other data collection tools such as observation, document analysis, focus group interviews and structured interview protocol were also accommodated. While Creswell (2013) suggests interviews as the primary data collection tool in phenomenological research, it is also possible to use observations and documents to get more detailed information. Therefore, the findings of the present research about data collection tools corroborate the literature. However, Bakanay and Çakır (2016) claim that there are a series of studies conducted inappropriately to the phenomenology in terms of data collection process in the literature, and the main reason for this case is insufficient knowledge of the researchers' basic philosophy of phenomenological research design. Consistent with this claim, this research found that there were some remarkable misconceptions in the theses analysed. For example, in their interviews, researchers asked the questions that were not related to the patterns of the experience and directed these questions to those who did not or

would not live the experience. However, as stated earlier, whether it is organized as transcendental or hermeneutical, the 'heart' of the phenomenological research consists of individual's experience about a phenomenon and the meaning attributed to it by her/him (Bakanay & Çakır, 2016; Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, the data collection process of the theses must have been designed under the skin of reaching the experience. The other misconceptions such as asking questions that aims to reveal the conceptual knowledge or quantitative information and involves an assumption or prejudice and doing interviews for the points that can be only analysed by observation are also signals implying that researchers did not dominate philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the phenomenological research. Researchers should have considered the fact about the phenomenological research that the aim was not to reach infinite and precise information, to generalize the findings to a particular population or to achieve a generalizable concept or principle (Bakanay & Çakır, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

On the other hand, some theses accommodated content analysis or/and descriptive analysis in the data analysis process. There were also some others that did not give information about the issue. As a misconception about the process of data analysis, not explaining the process in a detailed way became prominent. However, the way data is analysed may be a touchstone for reaching the accurate findings especially in phenomenological research, and that is why it is not enough just asserting that 'The content/descriptive analysis is performed in this study'. In this discussion, our aim is not to give a lecture about how data is analysed in phenomenological research, but we wish to draw attention to the fact that performing content or descriptive analysis requires dominating the focal point of the



phenomenology. In this context, Bakanay and Çakır's (2016: 172-173) following statements are instructive for researchers intending to conduct a phenomenological research:

*"Does a researcher desire to describe or interpret the phenomenon? Do we accept that the experience is fully individualized and must be lived individually, or that some experiences can be transferred by enculturation? The philosophical position taken in this kind of questions determines whether the prejudices, assumptions and cultural implications will be included in the process of explaining the phenomenon."*

Similarly, Finlay (2009) maintains that all the phenomenological research attempts to describing rather than explaining, but some researchers distinguish between transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutical phenomenology. In this context, she states that while transcendental phenomenology focuses on revealing the underlying structures of the meaning of a phenomenon, hermeneutical phenomenology takes the contextual conditions in which this phenomenon is experienced into account, and thus these two traditions have different reflections on the methodology of data analysis. For example, according to Giorgi (2007; 2009), who have significant contributions to organizing Husserl's ideas as a research design, the data analysis in transcendental phenomenology must go through the phases of bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and reaching a synthesis of the general structure of the experiences. On the other hand, Ersoy (2016) points out that a more complex data analysis process is awaiting the researchers in the studies carried out in line with hermeneutical phenomenology since the characteristics of the context in which the data collected are considered. One of the most referenced scholars for phenomenological research design, Moustakas (1994), starts the data analysis process of phenomenological studies with describing the

phenomenon, then continues with revealing how participants experienced the phenomenon by determining the important statements about the experience. At this phase, the statements are brought into a meaningful unit and reduced the themes. What is experienced (textural description) and how it is lived (structural description) are described at the next stage. At the last stage, the descriptions of what the experience is and how it is lived are gathered together to reach the essence of the phenomenon. Therefore, the data analysis model Moustakas (1994) presents for phenomenological research may be utilized as a common framework for both transcendental and hermeneutical phenomenology. However, as can be understood from these valuable insights of different scholars mentioned above, the data analysis process in phenomenological studies corresponds to a much more complex case than just stating what content or descriptive analysis is as in the theses examined in the scope of the present research. Another point that needs to be discussed for the misconceptions in the process of data analysis in the phenomenological research is related to the descriptive analysis. It was found out in some theses that researchers perceived descriptive analysis as just giving direct quotations of the participants and sometimes confused descriptive analysis of qualitative paradigm with descriptive research of quantitative model. Creswell (2013) argues that direct quotations of the participants may be used to improve the quality of expression or to arouse the interest of readers, especially in the phase of textural description in which the answers for the question of "What is experienced?" are explained. Therefore, there is a need to remind that descriptive analysis of qualitative paradigm engages in 'summarizing and interpreting the collected data according to predetermined themes' (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 224).



Analysing the presentation and interpretation of the findings of the theses and dissertations was the last part of the present study. The methods used to present findings such as drawing conceptual maps, describing with the help of direct quotations and performing frequency analysis are employed extensively in qualitative research, and so in phenomenological designs. The issue to be discussed here is how the findings are interpreted. In this sense, the first conspicuous misconception is that the findings were not interpreted in the light of a conceptual framework. However, one of the most crucial points for qualitative research is to evaluate the findings of the research within a certain theoretical framework, and the research is expected to contribute to an existing theoretical foundation from a different point of view or to force this theoretical foundation to change (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, it is important to interpret the findings in the context of the research so that readers make a better evaluation on the results (Creswell, 2013). However, it was found out that the factors covering the context of the research such as the study group, the time and place of the study and the role of the researcher were not referred in the discussions of the theses. Another misconception in the interpretation of the findings is the inclusion of only the supporting studies for the findings. However, the comparative presentation of the previous research conducted in a different context and revealing different results should strengthen the design of the research by providing a full and objective interpretation for readers. Finally, in some theses, only a summary of the findings was presented under the topic of discussion. The authors have not gone beyond repeating the previously stated findings of the research, and therefore, the meaning expressed by the findings cannot be fully reflected.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The field of educational administration has welcomed more sophisticated methods of investigation and moved to a more knowledge-based arena beginning from 1990s. (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). As a result, quite a few empirical studies have been produced in the field, employing various research designs that include phenomenology (Gumus et al., 2016; Murphy, Vriesenga & Storey, 2007; Oplatka, 2012). The production process seems to be continued in the near future, which increases the significance of gaining competence in research methods. Given the potential contribution of phenomenological studies to the field by producing interesting and surprising results (Van der Mescht, 2004), scholars or postgraduate students should consider and apply phenomenology as a research design properly by remaining faithful to its nature. In this sense, even if the sample of our research is limited to Turkey, we believe that international readers can deduce useful insights while conducting a phenomenological research. To be able to use the results of this research, we recommend international readers enter in a process of intercultural transfer of knowledge by abstracting from experiences of previous researchers whose thesis were examined in our research. They can learn about the misconceptions hold by heir Turkish counterparts and be aware of 'not to the points' while conducting their phenomenological research in international settings.

The results of the present study show that the misconceptions held in phenomenological research are mostly due to not dominating the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology. In other words, it seems that researchers and their supervisors in educational administration did not have the philosophical and conceptual knowledge necessary to carry out a phenomenological research





design. Actually this kind of misconceptions may be more linked with supervisors, as they are responsible for guidance and assistance to students to carry out their research in the most suitable way. Therefore, the supervisors need to read enough about the phenomenological research design and to review the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl and hermeneutical phenomenology of Heidegger as well as relevant works of the scholars such as Giorgi (2007, 2009) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), who brought new perspectives for these two approach, so that they can help the students planning to conduct their research under the skin of phenomenology. The present research has also identified that the misconceptions in the theses were concentrated in the selection of participants, the formation of data collection tool and interview questions, analysis of data and interpretation of the findings. This result indicates that the related studies are methodologically problematic. A key priority should, therefore, be to review the recognized works of the scholars such as Corbin and Strauss (2008), Creswell (2013), Moustakas (1994) for eliminating those misconceptions.

This study included only the theses of educational administration. Therefore, the next research may analyse the articles of the scientific journals as the phenomenology has become an increasingly employed design in the field of educational administration (Çakanay & Çakır, 2006). Moreover, the misconceptions about the other research designs of the qualitative paradigm such as case-study, narrative research, grounded theory or action research can be examined in the scope of the theses and articles produced in the educational administration.

When the misconceptions are considered, the results implicate that the researchers and their supervisors were not able to answer

their research problems by employing phenomenological research design. In many of the theses, it is seen that the researchers have aimed to gather opinions on a particular subject. It will be more appropriate to use the model 'basic interpretative research' based on the studies of Merriam (2002) and Sandelowski (2000) for such research. In this research model, the opinions of the participants about a particular event, the reasons for their choice in a specific subject and the problems they experience in relation to a certain issue can be analysed by employing the methods of the qualitative research paradigm. When we consider the theses examined in this study, it is possible to say that the basic interpretive research model would be more functional and reduce the discussions about the design.

### **Limitations**

The work of the members of an academic field is the first-hand account to see how some particular standards of research are set (Whitley, 1984, as cited in Oplatka, 2010). Therefore, in the present study, we assume that the theses can reflect the facts on how educational administration perceives and employs phenomenological research design, as the authors and supervisors of the theses are the main members of the field. However, that can also serve as a limitation for the study, as we include only theses, but not other published works such as journal articles for the time and cost constraints. Apart from that, although our inferences in the present research are based on the most referenced guidelines in phenomenological research, they eventually reflect our way of interpretation for those guidelines. The qualitative research paradigm takes a stand against the perception that 'there is one specified way of doing research', which would make it questionable to assert that



‘unless you do it in our way, it is wrong’. Therefore, the present study can be valued as revealing one of the correct ways of doing phenomenological research in educational administration.

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**Mikail Yalçın** was a beloved friend and a promising scholar in the field. We lost him in a tragic event in 2017. We still feel the deep sorrow of his loss. He is gone but not forgotten.

*Rest in peace...*