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Research Article

Factors Affecting the Identification of Research Problems in Educational Administration Studies*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to reveal the factors that affect the identification of research problems in educational administration studies. The study was designed using the case study method. Criterion sampling was used to determine the work group; the criterion used to select the participants was that of having a study in the field of educational administration. Within this scope, the sample was composed of 29 people from various Turkish universities who have conducted studies in the field of educational administration. Content analysis was used to analyze the data collected via a semi-structured interview form. As a result of the content analysis, educational administration researchers' statements about the factors deemed effective in identifying research problems have been grouped under five main themes. These themes are as follows: (i) "criteria for identifying research problems," including the sub-themes of the nature of the problem, personal criteria, the literature and academic relationships; (ii) "resources for identifying research problems," including publications, the literature, academic shareholders, other disciplines, written/visual media and personal criteria sub-themes; (iii) "criteria for limiting the extent of research problems," including methodological criteria, personal criteria, the nature of the problem, the literature and academic stakeholders; (iv) "criteria for assessing research problems," including the nature of the problem, the literature, academic criteria and personal criteria; and (v) "theory-practice balance in research problems," including personal criteria, the nature of the problem, methodological criteria and the literature.

Keywords

Educational administration • Knowledge production • Research problems • Case study

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In recent years, social, economic, political and technical fields worldwide have experienced significant changes and transformations. Educational activities are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and this process involves both direct and indirect interactions. Both the increased time spent on the training-education process and the increased funds allocated to education by organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF, and the European Union increase the importance of educational sciences—particularly the importance of the field of educational administration—on a daily basis.

For educational administration, which passed through several stages before reaching the scientific position that it occupies today, the process of becoming a science paralleled developments in social sciences. During this process, studies performed in the educational administration field have evolved from a positivist perspective to critical, interpretive and postmodern perspectives (Oplatka, 2007, 2009; Spring, 1994). The theoretical base of educational administration was built in the 1950s using the principles and theory of management sciences in the United States. The current that accelerated the field of educational administration in its early years was the theory movement, which preceded the positivist paradigm. The theory movement insisted both that potentially effective approaches in the field of educational administration could be built on scientific knowledge (Willower & Forsyth, 1999) and that studies performed in the field of educational administration should be assessed according to their contribution to implementation. After the 1970s, the direction of the field of educational administration began to change. At that time, interpretive, critical, cognitive, symbolic and cultural theories described as beyond positivism, all of which objected to the theory movement's mechanical style, its claim and its ideal of being an objective science beyond social reality, became more popular (Willower & Forsyth, 1999). During this period, it was widely accepted that educational administration studies should focus on the topics that are assumed to have a serious impact on understanding human behavior, such as language, culture, and social context (Bush, 1999; Greenfield, 1994; Hoy, 1996; Ogawa, Goldring, & Conley, 2000). Recently, studies conducted in the field of educational administration have primarily tested existing theories instead of initiating deep theoretical and methodological discussions. Although the field encompasses various theoretical assents and applications, scientific knowledge produced within the positivist paradigm (including effectiveness, school improvement and development, accountability, leadership, job satisfaction, and loyalty) is dominant and remains popular. The overall historical background of the field shows the dominance of the positivist, traditional approach (Şimşek, 1997; Turan & Şişman, 2013).

In Turkey, the field of educational administration avoids originality by following and repeating Western studies and discussions; it is built on the "theory movement" and the concepts and theories that are its extensions (Turan & Şişman, 2013). Positivist

and post-positivist theories still survive in the field; meanwhile, the tradition of positivist research and knowledge production is the primary approach that is used in the field of educational administration (Aydın, Erdağ, & Sarıer, 2010).

Educational Administration Studies and Knowledge Production

In modern societies, the areas in which knowledge is produced have their own problems, solutions, rules, activities and meanings, all of which are unique to them. Developing solutions to problems addressed at the scientific level, interpreting problems and solutions, testing existing theories and configuring new theories are realized through scientific studies. Educational administration owes its scientific development as a theory and application area to the studies performed in this field.

Although some fundamental trends and approaches have changed the context of educational administration studies over the last thirty years (Balcı, 2011; Elliott, 1996; Glatter, 1997), studies show improvement from the factors that affect educational administrators' behaviors to the impacts of those administrators' behaviors on other variables (Balcı, 1990; Balcı & Apaydın, 2009; Brewer, 1993; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). The positivist paradigm influenced the field of educational administration for a long time. Although critics have initiated a trend toward diminishing positivism's effects on the methods and techniques used in educational administration studies, educational administration studies primarily attempted to provide explanations based on reality and causality. In the national and international literature, educational administration studies are usually described as lacking creativity and originality—as being repetitive, simple studies (Balcı, 2008; Bush, 2007; Oplatka, 2009). Researchers, practitioners and policy makers in the educational administration field believe that educational administration studies are inadequate, and they believe that that these studies do not affect the field, nor do they focus on the field's essential problems or help improve knowledge and its application (Ogawa et al., 2000).

The subject of knowledge production is also of fundamental interest to scientists in the field of educational administration (Bridges, 1982; Ogawa et al., 2000). In the early 1990s, a study conducted a detailed review of the knowledge base in educational administration (Donmoyer, Imber, & Scheurich, 1995). The knowledge base of educational administration—and consequently, knowledge production itself—is differentiated according to cultural, structural and economic developments (Hallinger, Walker, & Bajunid, 2005; Lee & Hallinger, 2012). Despite these differentiations, the current trend in the field of educational administration is the one-dimensional transfer of Western knowledge, not the production of knowledge that considers the contexts of different countries (Turan & Şişman, 2013). Educational administration adapts the approaches that are emerging in different disciplines. Consequently, its boundaries disappear and it loses its originality, which are additional problems encountered in

the area of knowledge production. It is also important to focus on the disconnection of theory and practice. The lack of communication between knowledge producers and practitioners is seen as one reason for this disconnection (Balcı, 2008; Schmuck, 1968). Another problem arises when school administrators' scientific knowledge does not affect their administrative behaviors. The field of educational administration that is primarily focused on humans often neglects the management, learning and teaching process—in other words the practice dimension. To overcome this failure, the knowledge production and practice dimensions should be made to complement each other. Because educational administration is a social field, it is clear that the knowledge that it produces cannot be independent of production conditions; in Turkey, however, the knowledge produced in the field of educational administration is removed from its cultural context and originality. In this sense, the most meaningful work that can be done in the field of educational administration would be to eliminate the gap between theory and practice, to support creative and innovative studies and to increase the number of studies that address Turkey's reality (Örücü & Şimşek, 2011). For this reason, it is assumed that research problems have a decisive and formative effect on the quality and content of studies on the problems that exist in the field. Therefore, it is very important to reveal the factors that affect the identification of research problems.

Research Problems

When someone is asked why he/she conducts a study, there are many possible answers, including "my boss asked for it," "an assignment given in class," "I was curious," and "my roommate thought that it may be a good idea," which is an indicator that the number of reasons for conducting a study is almost as large as the number of studies (Neuman, 2007). Although the reasons for conducting a study vary according to the subject, researcher and purpose, in general, research is a process of collecting and analyzing data about problems (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Tharenou, Donohue, & Cooper, 2007). The first and most important step of the process that has been mentioned here and defined as scientific research is that of clearly expressing the problem that leads to the research and stating it as a "*research problem.*"

Research problems focus on the content of the research; they are the researcher's expression of his/her questions (Tharenou et al., 2007). Kerlinger (1979) stated that research problems provide the most significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge and research. The definition of a concept that uses specific observations is extremely important in the research process. It is necessary to transform a generic, abstract research target into a research problem that can be answered more specifically and concretely. Thus, the researcher continues his/her search until he/she arrives are a research problem that can be answered with more specific and concrete answers and

attempts to divide the generic purpose and targets of the research into more specific research targets and components (Cohen et al., 2011). This process, which may seem simple, is the most difficult aspect of scientific research (Creswell, 2011; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996; Singh, 2007). Another difficulty arises because it is necessary both to choose a research approach that is relevant to the research problem and to evaluate that approach in terms of fitting the researcher's worldview, personality and abilities. During the determination and application of the approach, the most critical step is the identification of the research problem so that appropriate decisions can be made when choosing the best approach (Merriam, 2013).

Research problems affect the entire process of a study, from determining the theoretical framework to presenting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Therefore, there are many issues to consider when identifying research problems (Zuber-Skerritt & Knight, 1986). According to Punch (2005), research may become complicated over time, causing the researcher to lose his/her way. In this regard, it is very important to have a research problem that is clearly and explicitly stated at the beginning of the research, to keep the research moving in the right direction. Several factors affect the identification of the research problem, including the following: presenting the current state as it is, explaining cause-and-effect relations, measuring the relationships among variables, comparing the results with other studies, and checking the conformity with the standards (Hsu, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

A well-expressed research problem is a question that has the following properties: the ability to show the data required to answer the question, the ability to guide the research and a design that is answered by the research (Hsu, 2005; Punch, 2005). Educational administration studies follow an interdisciplinary approach that is related to many areas (Aypay et al., 2010; Gorard, 2005; Karadağ, 2009a; Oplatka, 2007). Educational administration has close relations with many scientific disciplines (including sociology, psychology, economics, management, and history), which makes it more difficult for educational administration researchers not only to identify research topics and research questions but also to select a research approach. When identifying or selecting research topics, researchers should ground their efforts on ontological issues related to the essence of educational experiments; they should not only move from practice to theory but also prefer to develop original theories if required (Turan & Şişman, 2013). Another aspect that should be considered by educational administration researchers when designing their studies is the need to pay attention to their field's development within national borders. Research should not focus on importing local concepts, but instead should examine local education policies, their effects on education, school and leadership, and their functions in implementation (Oplatka, 2009). Studies have revealed that research problems in the field of educational administration were both unclear and unconnected to the research

approaches and methods used, causing negative effects on later stages of the research (Karadağ, 2009a). Therefore, it is very important for researchers in the field of educational administration to consider these issues while identifying research problems because they have an effect on research overall. This study aims to reveal the factors that affect the identification of research problems in educational administration studies.

Methodology

Qualitative methods and techniques were used in the design of this study. Qualitative research is an investigation process that begins with a research hypothesis, a worldview, and the probable use of a theoretical paradigm (Creswell, 2011), using unique methods to understand and explain a problem. In this study, which aims to reveal the factors that affect the identification of research problems by educational administration researchers, the case study model was used. A case study can be described as in-depth examination, detailed description and analysis of a case (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The case is a system with both definite boundaries and related components. Therefore, case study is also defined as an in-depth description and examination of a system (Creswell, 2011; Merriam, 2013). One of the researcher's primary goals is to identify specific, unique aspects of the case (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011). The case analyzed in this study is that of problem identification (and the mechanisms of such identification) in educational administration studies. The case, which is considered as a limited system in its entirety, involves the specific methods used by educational administration researchers during the problem-identification phases of their research.

Work Group

The study participants have been determined via criterion sampling, which is a purposive sampling method. Criterion sampling consists of reviewing and working on cases that fit predefined criteria. The reason to prefer criterion sampling is that it both selects the cases that will provide maximum information for solving the problem and ensures that particular case studies are covered in the research (Patton, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Neuman, 2007). Because the primary purpose of this study is the problem identification process, which is the very first step of knowledge production in any academic discipline, the main criterion to be used for determining the participants was that they must perform research in the field of educational administration. That said, the study includes participants at various stages in their academic careers. Considering the limitations of the research, easy accessibility was also taken into account when assembling work group. Consequently, 29 educational administration researchers from various Turkish universities comprised the sample. Information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Information about the Sample

Option	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Gender	Male	Female				-
n	19	10				29
%	65.5	34.5				100
Title	Prof.	Associate Prof.	Assistant Prof.	Doctorate Student	Post Graduate Student	
n	3	3	4	16	3	29
%	10.3	10.3	13.8	55.2	10.3	100

Data Collection

The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. To prepare the interview questions, the relevant literature has been reviewed and a draft semi-structured questionnaire consisting of 18 questions has been created. Next, two experts who have studied in the field of educational administration and give lectures at the post-graduate level were consulted, and the questions were revised according to their suggestions. To test whether the items were comprehensible, pilot interviews were performed with two randomly selected educational administration researchers. The questionnaire was finalized after incorporating the revisions made as a result of those interviews. The final questionnaire consisted of 13 open-ended questions. While developing the questions, the researchers considered some aspects of the study. The primary aspects that are reflected in the questionnaire include the following: points of attention for identifying research problems, limitation criteria of research problems, tools and resources used to identify problems, difficulties in identifying problems and how to establish a balance between theory and practice.

Application

Following the completion of the questionnaire, face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants. The interviews, which lasted for approximately 45 minutes, were audio recorded. During the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and further clarifications were made when needed. In the data-analysis stage, the interviews were transcribed. The content-analysis method was used for analyzing the data obtained in the study. The purpose of content analysis is to determine the concepts and relationships that explain the data obtained by the research. For this purpose, similar data are grouped under particular concepts and themes and then organized in a manner that the reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005, p. 227). An inductive approach was preferred for content analysis. The data were coded using the concepts derived from the interviews, and the themes were created. The steps of the content analysis followed by the study are as follows (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005): (*a*) data coding, (*b*) identification of the themes, (*c*) arrangements of the codes and themes, and (*d*) description and interpretation of the findings.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the internal validity of the study, the following measures were taken: (*i*) while developing the questionnaire, a conceptual framework was formed by reviewing the relevant literature and transcribing the respondents' statements after the interview; (*ii*) initial themes were created by considering the questions asked to the respondents and their opinions overall; (*iii*) the internal validity of the themes and sub-themes derived from the content analysis were evaluated by considering heterogeneity criteria. The steps followed to ensure the external validity of the study—namely, design, participants, data collection, data analysis and interpretation—were described in detail in the methodology section of this study. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2005, p. 257) state that reporting study data in detail and explaining how the researcher obtained his/her results are important criteria for establishing validity. In the studies that use descriptive analysis, another important factor of validity involves directly quoting the participants and explaining the results using those quotations (Ratcliff, 1995, p. 20). For this reason, to establish the validity of this study, the data-analysis process was described in detail, direct quotations were given from participants' own statements and necessary explanations were provided. Another important factor of validity is the researcher's consistency (Ratcliff, 1995, p. 20). Thus, the literature was reviewed and it has been found that similar studies have obtained similar results. To ensure the internal reliability of the study, the following measures were taken: (*i*) the findings of the analysis were given directly and without any comment; and (*ii*) the themes were identified according to the conceptual framework. To ensure the external reliability of the study, the following measures were taken: (*i*) the work done during the process was reported in detail; and (*ii*) raw data and analysis were retained so that the results could be confirmed in the future.

Despite the measures taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, it should be noted that the research has limitations. Although data on the mechanisms used by educational administration researchers in the process of problem identification have been obtained, generalizing the study's findings to the overall academic field of educational administration does not fit the paradigm of the preferred qualitative research approach. Conversely, despite this study's focus on problem identification mechanisms, the data include information about the research problems emphasized in the field. Moreover, the participants' opinions were not compared with the problems that they have used in their research.

Findings

This study determined the factors that affect researchers' identification of research problems. This part of the report consists of the findings obtained from the analysis of the interviews. The findings are presented according to the data representation approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a result of the study, the following five themes were

formed as the factors that affect researchers' identification of research problems: (*i*) "criteria for identifying research problems"; (*ii*) "resources for identifying research problems"; (*iii*) "criteria for limiting the extent of research problems"; (*iv*)"criteria for assessing research problems"; and (*v*) "theory-practice balance in research problems."

Criteria for Identifying Research Problem

The sub-themes and codes mentioned by educational administration researchers that form the "criteria for identifying research problems" theme are displayed in Table 2. The criteria for identifying research problems are grouped under the following four sub-themes: (*i*) nature of the problem, (*ii*) personal criteria, (*iii*) the literature and (*iv*) academic relationships. "Nature of the problem" is the most-mentioned theme, whereas "academic relationships" is the least-mentioned theme.

Table 2
Sub-themes and Codes Included under 'Criteria for Identifying Research Problems'

1- Criteria of Identifying Research Problem			
Nature of the Problem	Personal criteria	Literature	Academic Relationships
▪ Originality [13] ▪ Researchability [11] ▪ Topicality [8] ▪ Being an issue [2] ▪ Accessibility [2] ▪ Local and Universal significance [2] ▪ Being explainable [1] ▪ Relation with the field [1] ▪ Being scientific [1] ▪ Being inter-disciplinary [1] ▪ Intellectual depth [1] ▪ Authenticity [1] ▪ Adequacy to mixed method [1] ▪ Adequacy to quantitative method [1] ▪ Wealth of reference [1] ▪ Questionability [1] ▪ Social media depiction [1] ▪ Ease of data collection [1] ▪ Publishability [1]	▪ Creating interest [15] ▪ Curiosity [10] ▪ Time [5] ▪ Cost [2] ▪ Reading [2] ▪ New research method [2] ▪ Intellectual depth [1] ▪ Tagging [1] ▪ Authenticity [1] ▪ Access to relevant resources [1] ▪ Publishability [1]	▪ Practitioners problems [9] ▪ Contribution to the field [8] ▪ Originality [7] ▪ Academic literature [4] ▪ Theory-practice debate [3] ▪ Topicality [2] ▪ Theoretical shortcoming [2] ▪ Common effect [1]	▪ Instructors [3] ▪ Meeting with practitioners [2] ▪ Academic surrounding [1]

The findings about the sub-themes and codes of the "Criteria for Identifying Research Problems" theme can be summarized as follows:

Nature of the problem. This sub-theme was formed of 21 codes. Researchers stated that some of the characteristics of the problems that form the basis of their research were affecting the formation of their research problems. In this respect, it has been found that researchers were affected by the topicality and originality of the problem, its researchability and its contribution to the field. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Originality [13], (*ii*) Researchability [11] and (*iii*) Topicality [8]. Some quotations from the participants' answers are set forth below:

Another issue is the topicality of the research topic. For instance, in recent years, issues such as school capacity, leadership capacity, school as a learning community, and accountability have been the subjects of intensive debate. At the same time, there are topics that are closely followed by the public, such as the discussion of private teaching institutions. In this context, the topicality of the research problem is another significant dimension.

First of all, the research problem should draw my attention. It should be in my field of interest. I should have a background, a basis for studying the topic; otherwise, it won't appeal to me. I don't conduct a study just having done something. In addition, it should be rich: in terms of the literature, I should not encounter difficulty. I also consider originality, but the studies in educational administration are at the point of a kind of blockage now, I don't know what to say… Job satisfaction, commitments, leadership, these are not the issues that I can call original; thus, I cannot consider originality much. I have to ignore it. Perhaps we make a small contribution to a previously conducted study. Maybe we cannot even make that contribution, we just repeat everything.

I believe that the problem should be researchable. If you attempt to investigate a concept that is too theoretical or too abstract, you cannot put it into practice. You just investigate it, and you cannot implement it. You have to limit the problem. I think that working with a very large sample will force both you and the subject.

Personal criteria. This sub-theme was composed of 11 codes. The participants underlined their interests and their own areas of expertise and mentioned personal strategies such as interest, curiosity, time and cost as their criteria for identifying research problems. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Creating interest [15], (*ii*) Curiosity [10] and (*iii*) Time [5]. Some quotations from the participants' answers are set forth below:

In fact, there are many factors. First, the problem should arouse curiosity. It should catch my attention; after it catches my attention, I have to check if the issue can be researched or not. First, I am focusing on a topic about which I am curious. When I say curiosity, it should catch my attention, for example, I wonder about leadership on the issues related to administration. I want to continue working on those issues. After curiosity, the next factor is if I am capable of qualitative or quantitative research, of performing some analysis. Then, I try to follow issues that are topical. I try to follow congresses, books and periodicals in order to work on the topics included on the agenda. I also consider time, of course. For example, if I am supposed to conduct a quantitative study, I can check the existence of a particular scale. If it doesn't exist, I can change the topic because I prefer to conduct quantitative studies. Also, if the scale is available, can you translate it? If I have a time restriction, I prefer research with fast data collection.

The identification of the research problem is one of the parts that I have difficulty with: how to limit it, how to look at it; what has been already done. You have to read all of the studies; it takes time. Additionally, there are notes that I have recorded of congresses, of sessions in which I have participated. If a different method has been used and I have to investigate this method, I choose problem situations where I can use this method. Or there may be a problem that I am really curious about, from time to time I go to schools, I was becoming more involved with the schools: especially at the dissertation stage, I could go to the school.

Literature. This sub-theme was composed of 8 codes. Most of the participants have mentioned that they primarily use the literature as the criterion for identifying research problems. Accordingly, they insisted on criteria such as the originality of the research, its contribution to the field and fulfilling theoretical gaps. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Practitioners' problems [9], (*ii*) Contributions to the field [8] and (*iii*) Originality [7]. Some quotations from the participants' answers are listed below:

In the end, I consider the topic's status in the literature or my potential contribution to the field by researching it. This kind of question comes to your mind after identifying a topic, a concept. Sometimes you choose a topic, but when you check you see that an identical study has already been conducted. It is not right to start if you are aware of it. Then, you have to check its status in the literature.

When identifying a research problem, I am in favor of being application-oriented. Our studies are generally far removed from practice: for example, we prefer working with teacher candidates because it is easy to reach the sample; in a way, we have influence on the students. We can convince them more easily, but we do not go to the practitioners. When I say to go to the practitioners, many studies about teachers and school administrators have been conducted, but how problem-focused were they? To give an example, do we really need leadership performance by school administrators? Alternatively, considering our school configuration, is it possible for school administrators to develop different types of leadership structures? For instance, school administrators were suddenly changed with 6528. Now, how can analyze the leadership features of these administrators?

Academic relationships. This sub-theme was composed of 3 codes. Participants have emphasized researchers' opinions and the academic environment as the important criteria for preparing research problems. The top two codes in this category are as follows: (*1*) Instructors [3], and (*2*) Meeting with practitioners [2]. Some quotations from the participants are listed below:

In fact, the studies conducted in the field may be a criterion for me. A subject that I found interesting may seem absurd to an educational administrator. In addition,

the instructors who trained us during our education, with whom we are working, may be a criterion. The reason is that when you want to conduct a study, if you ask their opinions, you can get some direction such as this subject is adequate, whereas that one is not. In this sense, for me the most important factor or the criteria for identifying research problems may be the studies conducted in the field, and second most important is the instructors with who I am working.

I can say that the interviews that I have conducted with my acquaintances who are teachers or school administrators, along with my academic surroundings, were also effective in helping identify research problems.

Resources for Identifying Research Problems

The sub-themes and codes mentioned by educational administration researchers that comprise the "resources for identifying research problem" theme are displayed in Table 3. The resources for identifying research problems are grouped under the following six sub-themes: (*i*) publications, (*ii*) the literature, (*iii*) academic stakeholders, (*iv*) other disciplines, (*v*) written/visual media and (*vi*) personal criteria. "Publications" is the most-mentioned theme, whereas "written/visual media" and "personal" are the least-mentioned themes.

Table 3
Sub-themes and Codes Included under 'Resources for Identifying Research Problems'

2- Resources for Identifying Research Problem		
Publications	*Literature*	*Academic Stakeholders*
▪ Books [21] ▪ Scientific journals [18] ▪ National-International thesis [6] ▪ Written resources [1]	▪ Databases [14] ▪ Literature review [2] ▪ Scientific resources [1] ▪ Topical issues [1] ▪ Reliable statistics [1] ▪ Debates on social theory [1] ▪ Inapplicable theoretical formations [1] ▪ Written resources [1] ▪ Indices [1]	▪ Instructors [6] ▪ National-International congress [4] ▪ Colleagues [2] ▪ Conversations [2] ▪ Courses [1] ▪ Shareholder perception [1] ▪ Inspectors [1] ▪ Teachers [1] ▪ Principals [1] ▪ Sub-principals [1]
Other Disciplines	*Written/Visual Media*	*Personal Criteria*
▪ Current events [4] ▪ Sociology [1] ▪ Political science [1] ▪ Cinema [1] ▪ Literature [1] ▪ Philosophy [1] ▪ Anthropology [1] ▪ Government programs [1] ▪ International reports [1] ▪ Problems of the schools [1]	▪ Internet [7] ▪ Media [3] ▪ Film-video [2] ▪ Television [1] ▪ News [1] ▪ Social Media [1]	▪ Readings [3] ▪ Observations [1] ▪ Professional problems [1] ▪ New research methods [1]

PS: The number in square brackets represents frequencies.

Our findings about the sub-themes and codes of the "Resources for Identifying Research Problems" theme can be summarized as follows:

Publications. This sub-theme was composed of 4 codes. Researchers stated that they primarily use scientific journals and books to identify research problems. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Books [21], (*ii*) Scientific journals [18] and (*iii*) National-International theses [6]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

It may be books and papers. Databases are also a resource to obtain the topics of recent papers. In addition, some international theses may provide guidance. I am not very reliance on national theses. I am also trying to access reliable foreign resources. Talking with teachers may be a source for us as well.

I check what has already been done on the topic by reviewing the theses and papers written during the last 5 years. I enter keywords on the topic and conduct a search for selected years. Also, there are magazines to which I subscribe. You can follow these periodicals from the Internet. I try to follow innovative journals as well, such as Education Administration Quarterly and the Journal of Education Administration. I review recently submitted theses from YOK.

Literature. This sub-theme was composed of 9 codes. Researchers stated that they mostly use databases and literature to identifying research problems. The top two codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Databases [14] and (*ii*) Literature reviews [2]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

The method that I use the most for identifying research problems is searching databases. With the increased opportunities that universities have in this regard, we can access important databases and investigate the studies conducted on a particular topic. Different research problems can be constructed with this method, which enables us to survey the field. Considering that each study is in fact the beginning of another study, I believe that an effective literature review is one of the most important factors in the process of identifying a research problem.

Certainly literature ... It is crucial to determine if a problem can be holistically and dimensionally supported by the literature. The richness of the databases is crucial; we look at the indices and journals.

Academic shareholders. This sub-theme was composed of 10 codes. The researchers stated that they mostly use their teachers and colleagues, along with what is shared in class, to identify research problems. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Instructors [6], (*ii*) National-International congresses [4] and (*iii*) Colleagues [2]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

One of the factors affecting the identification of research problems is the congresses that are organized at the national and international levels. These kinds of meetings allow us to meet the important academicians in the discipline and discuss current issues. In this regard, I can confidently say that congresses are an important source to use in the process of identifying research problems.

Strictly speaking, the studies conducted in the field may be a criterion for me. A subject that I find to be interesting may seem absurd to an educational administrator. In addition, the instructors who trained us during our education, with whom we are working, may be a criterion. Because when you want to conduct a study, if you ask their opinion, you can get some instructions such as this subject is adequate, whereas that one is not.

Other disciplines. This sub-theme was composed of 10 codes. Researchers stated that they mostly use disciplines other than educational administration. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Current events [4], (*ii*) Sociology [1], Political science [1] and Philosophy [1]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

First of all, national and international theses, electronic databases, and provocative books that are not relevant to the educational administration field!!! Sociology, philosophy, political science, anthropology, literature, cinema, publications that offer all kind of references and are assumed to add intellectual and epistemological ontological depth, along with the latest academic journals that have international reviewers, which unfortunately have few these aspects.

Everything. Even films are included, novels, books… all of them. When something comes to your mind, you conduct a literature review anyway. In addition, there are general trends, for example, during the implementation of 8-year education, everybody worked on that issue. Thirty percent of the congress was about it. In the case of 4+4+4, everybody conducted a study. When the kindergarten age decreases, everybody conducts a study about it. The same thing happens when there is a change of curriculum, etc. General trends change. Global trends affect Turkey. These kinds of things are present.

Written/Visual media. This sub-theme was composed of 6 codes. Researchers cited written/visual media as a resource for identifying research problems. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) The Internet [7], (*ii*) Media [3] and (*iii*) Film and video [2]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

I am trying to follow all the education articles written in recent years. I follow most popular issues, changes. I also am interested by the writings of our teachers, shared on social media.

The news may impress me or capture my attention. The situations occurred or experienced in the school and the application of the Ministry of Education are among the news that interests me. There is news reflecting the positive or negative consequences of a particular application. Because of this news, some questions arise in my mind. In fact, this is one of the influencing factors when I initiate a study or identify a research problem.

Personal criteria. This sub-theme was composed of 4 codes. Researchers stated their personal strategies, such as readings and observations, as resources for identifying research problems. The top three codes in this category include the following: (*i*) Readings [3], (*ii*) Observations [1] and (*iii*) Professional problems [1]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

The impression that I get from the readings is quite effective in the problem-identification process. Thus, I don't have a method specific to that process.

If I am interested in a topic, I choose it as the field of study. Next, I make readings from the resources that I can find on the Web. I probe deeper and deeper if the topic is discussed in social media forums. It gives me an advantage to see the perspective of people who are not looking at the science side.

Because I work at a school, I begin the process of problem identification using the problems that I experience in my professional life.

Criteria for Limiting the Extent of Research Problems

The sub-themes and codes that comprise the "criteria of limiting the extent of research problems" theme are displayed in Table 4. The criteria of limiting the

Table 4
Sub-themes and Codes Included under 'Criteria of Limiting the Extent of Research Problems'

3- Criteria of Limiting the Extent of Research Problem'			
Methodological Criteria	*Personal Criteria*	*Nature of the Problem*	*Literature*
▪ Workgroup [8] ▪ Variables [5] ▪ Measurement tools [3] ▪ Data [2] ▪ Data collection [2] ▪ Analyze unit [1] ▪ Research questions [1] ▪ Research process [1] ▪ Research techniques [1] ▪ Adequacy to ethnographic research [1] ▪ Paradigm [1] ▪ Method [1]	▪ Resources and facilities [8] ▪ Time [6] ▪ Competency of the researchers [4] ▪ Interest [2] ▪ Purpose [1] ▪ Reading [1] ▪ Paradigm [1]	▪ Accessibility [7] ▪ Researchability [5] ▪ Purposes of the research [5] ▪ Originality [2] ▪ Being related to a particular problem [1] ▪ Workability [1] ▪ Scope [1] ▪ Qualification [1] ▪ Accuracy [1] ▪ Size of the problem [1] ▪ Cultural adequacy [1] ▪ Measurability [1]	▪ Previous studies [6] ▪ Theory [2] ▪ Relations with the systems [1]
Academic Stakeholders			
▪ Instructors [3] ▪ Colleagues [1]			

extent of research problems are grouped under the following five sub-themes: (*i*) methodological criteria, (*ii*) personal criteria, (*iii*) the nature of the problem, (*iv*) the literature, and (*v*) academic stakeholders. "Methodological criteria" is the most-mentioned theme, whereas "academic stakeholders" is the least-mentioned theme.

The findings about the sub-themes and codes of the "Criteria of Limiting the Extent of Research Problems" theme can be summarized as follows:

Methodological criteria. This sub-theme was composed of 12 codes. The researchers stated that they limit their research questions by considering the workgroup, the features of the measurement tools and data formation. The top three codes in this category are the following: (*i*) Workgroup [8], (*ii*) Variables [2] and (*iii*) Measurement tools [3]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

Is it doable? It should be checked first because investigating something that you cannot apply is meaningless. In a concrete sense… Is it achievable? How can I measure it, quantitatively or qualitatively? Of course, there are variables. We also know that it is not possible to solve all the problems of the world with a single study. Therefore, we have to check the main variables. I mean, all of these issues are revealed when you review the literature.

First, I am careful to not be too large. As the field expands, you begin to drown. Let's say that you will conduct a study on teacher candidates. To me, it sounds pointless to include every department; you should know the specific features of each discipline. Let's say that you will work on identity: the identity of a government schoolteacher will not be similar to the identity of a private schoolteacher. Because there are many factors influencing the variables, I am trying to limit those factors. In a school, there are many variables that affect trust, but we cannot include all of them. Therefore, I try to cover and focus on the essential variables.

Personal criteria. This sub-theme was composed of 7 codes. The researchers emphasized resources and facilities and mentioned some personal strategies (such as competency and time) as their criteria for limiting the extent of their research problems. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Resources and facilities [8], (*ii*) Time [6] and (*iii*) The researcher's competency [3]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

The main issue is the resources and opportunities that I have. The final resources and facilities that I can obtain create my limits. What is important is how much my resources and facilities can shed light on the problem. How much I can clarify the problem through my efforts? Is it possible to explain the complexity of the problem using the method that I will adopt? Is it out of my depth? Which dimension of the problem should be investigated? The theoretical discourse and previous frameworks also affect the limitations.

It can be said that the expertise of the researcher both in the field and about the research subject is a significant limitation on the extent of the research problem.

Nature of the problem. This sub-theme was composed of 7 codes. Under this sub-theme, the researchers stated various features of the problem that form both the basis of the research and the researchability of the research problem. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Accessibility [7], (*ii*) Researchability [5] and (*iii*) The purposes of the research [5]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

While limiting the extent of the research problem, I consider the accessibility of the sample upon which I will conduct the research and the usability of the measurement tools that I will use on the selected sample.

While limiting the extent of the research problem, I first try to reduce the problem to a researchable level. I am careful not to select very generic topics and I clarify the subject as much as possible when considering the data-collection stage. What I mean is that I take the later stages of the research into account.

I think people always want to do too much at the beginning of the road. This is how I feel, at least. I depart with great expectations but what counts is whether the project is feasible. Our predecessors have said that the best thesis is a completed thesis. They add that you cannot save the world with that thesis. Therefore, the most important factor to consider while making limitations is feasibility. You have to set the limit appropriately; you should not go too far. Sometimes, you want to research a subject but you are concerned about data collection. Thinking that you cannot reach relevant people limits you. Thus, I feel that feasibility is one of the most important aspects.

Literature. This sub-theme was composed of 3 codes. The researchers stated that they use the literature—i.e., previous studies and theories—as a criterion for limiting the extent of their research problems. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Previous studies [6], (*ii*) Theories [2] and (*iii*) Relations with the system [1]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

While limiting I look at previous theses and studies about the topic. Where they have probed and how have they directed the topic? I review those studies. I review how they have been limited. I try to find an intermediate path by following in their footsteps and asking my teachers. You can do all of these things, but you also should be satisfied. I don't think that limiting the problem just because someone has said to do it is right. Of course, I have my own rights and wrongs; my ideas. There are parts that I wonder about. This is how I set limits.

Academic shareholders. This sub-theme was composed of 2 codes. The researchers stated that they use academic shareholders as a criterion for limiting the

extent of their research problems. In this regard, participants receive help from their teachers and colleagues to limit the extent of their research problems. The top two codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Instructors [3], and (*ii*) Colleagues [2]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

> *Usually, I consult an expert, but selecting this expert is puzzling. I am not sure if you have to ask more than one person, but I do try to ask more than one person. I am trying to hear their ideas. Is there already such a study, should I include this topic or not? What do I have to lose if I include it? Is it better to cover this topic? I am trying to ask more than one person. In particular, I try to ask my teachers.*

> *We have teachers, colleagues with whom we are working in the field. There are instructions, for example, you can do it or it is better not to do it, along with their ideas and suggestions. In this regard, we can limit the problem a bit.*

Criteria for Assessing Research Problem

The sub-themes and codes that form the "criteria for assessing research problems" theme are displayed in Table 5. The criteria for assessing research problems are grouped under the following four sub-themes: (*i*) the nature of the problem, (*ii*) the literature, (*iii*) academic criteria, and (*iv*) personal criteria. "Nature of the problem" is the most-mentioned theme, whereas "academic criteria" is the least-mentioned theme.

Table 5
Sub-themes and Codes Included under 'Criteria for Assessing Research Problems

4- Criteria of Assessing Research Problem			
Nature of the Problem	*Literature*	*Academic Criteria*	*Personal Criteria*
▪ Problem solving [12] ▪ Originality [10] ▪ Representing a problem [3] ▪ Topicality [3] ▪ Cultural accordance [2] ▪ Applicability [2] ▪ Depth [1] ▪ Drawing attention [1] ▪ Not to serve the market [1] ▪ Free of political results [1] ▪ Working well in practice [1] ▪ Publishability [1] ▪ Methodical originality [1] ▪ Corresponding to something in real life [1]	▪ Originality [7] ▪ Theory [4] ▪ Literature review [3] ▪ Shortcomings in the literature[3] ▪ Fulfilling a need [1] ▪ Similar studies [1] ▪ Being suggested in important studies [1] ▪ Fulfilling a gap of the theory [1] ▪ Contribution to the field[1] ▪ Being studied in foreign countries[1]	▪ Experts' opinion [5] ▪ Colleagues [3] ▪ Instructors [1] ▪ Academic promotion /passing grade[1]	▪ Interest [4] ▪ Competence [3] ▪ Personal belief [1] ▪ Bias [1] ▪ Paradigm [1] ▪ Publishability [1] ▪ Possibilities and conditions [1] ▪ Open horizons [1]

The findings about the sub-themes and codes of "Criteria for Assessing Research Problems" theme are presented below:

Nature of the problem. This sub-theme was composed of 14 codes. Researchers stated that the originality of the research questions and their contribution to resolving a

problem in the field are the most important criteria. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Problem-solving [12], (*ii*) Originality [10] and (*iii*) Representing a problem [3]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

If I feel that a research problem makes a contribution to fill a gap, I evaluate it as valuable. In addition, I feel that it will be a valuable study if I am convinced that the research problem contributes to the solution of an educational problem and has not been totally consumed by the studies already in the literature.

Will it really bring benefits? I am not talking about the academic benefit that it will bring to me. Will it really benefit the audience that suffers from the problems mentioned in the research when they read the study? It will make any contribution to solving the questions in their minds? If they have administrative problems and the study is about educational problems, will it suggest a solution? Will it make a contribution to national education? I will consider the subject's contribution to society. Otherwise, it is bound to be a study forgotten on dusty shelves.

Literature. This sub-theme was composed of 10 codes. The researchers talked about the importance of the originality of their research questions, belonging to a topic in the literature and resulting from important theoretical formations. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Originality [7], (*ii*) Theory [4] and (*iii*) Literature review [3]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

If I believe that there is a problem, this may be sufficient to evaluate a subject as worthy. In addition, being original is an important factor. There may be many studies on a particular issue. However, I look at the existence of the theories that I can use as metaphors; the ability to offer a new perspective encourages me to work on an issue.

For instance, I am trying to get away from the subjects on which too many studies have been conducted, such as loyalty and organizational commitment. You can already see the subjects on which too many studies have been conducted in the journals, articles, congresses. Because I am bored by subjects on which too many studies have been conducted, I try to look for new issues. Being topical, increasing my interest, and having a theoretical basis is important. It is important to position our study within a theoretical frame. In our studies, we provide the definition and the importance of the study, and then we shift to the next part. In fact, it should not be like this, but instead should be positioned in a theoretical frame. Therefore, the theoretical framework is very instructive for us to develop our problem status, our problem. Thus, I try to choose the subjects that have a background, that I can perform, that fit the theories that I am familiar with.

Academic criteria. This sub-theme was composed of 4 codes. The researchers stated that they used the opinions of the experts and their colleagues when assessing

the value of the research questions. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Experts' opinions [5], (*ii*) Colleagues [3] and (*iii*) Instructors [1]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

It is important to consult the people whose opinion I trust and whose expertise in the field I respect. Talking and sharing with my colleagues can also help me.

In fact, usually we do not make the final decision; I am not the decision maker. There may be an issue that I consider; I try to find the literature and read about it; but afterwards, when I attempt to consult people who are at respectable places or who have considerable knowledge, they say that the issue is not important or valuable. In this respect, I have influence to an extent. The persons that I consult also have an impact. In addition, you conduct your studies to publish somewhere, to present somewhere or to make a presentation. In this regard, negative comments by the journal in which you want to publish are also effective, in a sense.

Personal criteria. This sub-theme was composed of 8 codes. The researchers stated that their competence, beliefs, bias, and paradigms significantly affect the value of their research problems. In this regard, the participants highlighted previous studies and theories. The top two codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Interest [4], and (*ii*) Competence [3]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

If my work area and expertise indicate that the problem is worth researching, that is sufficient.

If I believe that a problem exists, that belief may be sufficient to evaluate the issue as worthy of study.

I should have interest in the subject—I mean, if it is related to my work, personality and problems that I experience in everyday life, that makes my perception more selective. When I see the problem, I think, "I have experienced something similar. Why I don't investigate this issue? Why I don't find a solution to this problem?"

The Theory-Practice Balance in Research Problems

The sub-themes and codes that form the "theory-practice balance in research problems" theme are displayed in Table 6. The criteria for identifying research problems are grouped under the following four sub-themes: (*i*) personal criteria, (*ii*) the nature of the problem, (*iii*) methodological criteria, and (*iv*) the literature. "Personal criteria" is the most-mentioned theme, whereas "the literature" is the least-mentioned theme.

Table 6
Sub-themes and Codes Included under 'Theory-Practice Balance in Research Problem

5- Theory-Practice Balance in Research Problem			
Personal criteria	*Nature of the Problem*	*Methodological Criteria*	*Literature*
▪ Inability to establish [2] ▪ Competence [2] ▪ Deep theoretical review [2] ▪ Following the field [1] ▪ Analyzing [1] ▪ Understanding [1] ▪ Experience [1] ▪ Deep readings [1] ▪ Reviewing different works [1] ▪ Reading [1] ▪ Foresight [1] ▪ Ignoring the theoretical framework [1] ▪ Being aware of the practical difficulties [1]	▪ Corresponding to something in real life [13] ▪ Topicality [1]	▪ From theory to practice [7] ▪ From practice to theory [4] ▪ Organizational cooperation [3] ▪ Direction of the research [2]	▪ Taking part in the literature [2] ▪ Backward literature review [2] ▪ Affecting the field [1] ▪ Similar studies [1] ▪ Type of the theory [1] ▪ Theoretical background [1]

The findings about the sub-themes and codes of "Theory-Practice Balance in Research Problem" theme can be summarized as follows:

Personal criteria. This sub-theme was composed of 13 codes. The researchers emphasized the importance of their competence and keeping up with the field when establishing the balance between theory and practice. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Inability to establish [2], (*ii*) Competence [2] and (*iii*) Deep theoretical review [2]. Some quotations from the answers are set forth below:

I cannot establish the balance that I want at the moment, but I work hard to establish it, and I believe that my next study will be more balanced. I am trying to learn how to embed theory into the literature by reading different studies, by reviewing their methods and techniques. In addition, I work on how to make an application that starts from theory.

While building the subject, the problem of the research in my mind, the praxis of the theory is automatically shaped. The hypothesis, theories, literature and all kinds of categories of information that have not been approved by our non-epistemological community have an area of application, each in need of its own method. What is important is to have relevant foresight…

First, I build a theoretical foundation for the research problem. Then, I perform the application of the study and analyze the collected data based on the theoretical framework. Here, the researcher should have a command of the theories related to the research problem.

Nature of the problem. This sub-theme was composed of 2 codes. The researchers stated that educational administration studies should correspond to practice to establish a balance between theory and practice. The top two codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Corresponding to something in real life [12], and (*ii*) Topicality [1]. Some quotations from the answers are set forth below:

I care about the work at the level of theory. In fact, the studies that we conduct test either a theory or a tool that carries us to a theory. Personally, I want research problems with an application dimension. Therefore, nearly all my studies are empirical.

I try to establish a balance, in other words, for me one criterion is the applicability of the work supported by the theory.

For example, I experienced something recently. In a driving course, they learned that we are working in the educational administration field. They commented, 'You don't know schooling, do you want to be an inspector?' I responded that I would be an academician in the field. I encountered comments such as 'Will you manage us without being aware of our practice?' 'It is easy to talk from there,' etc. As a result, I better understood that we should switch from theory to practice. I mean this how they see us. It is not appropriate to remain insensitive when there is such an expectation in the community.

Methodological criteria. This sub-theme was composed of 4 codes. The researchers emphasized the direction of the research when configuring their research problems. Most of the researchers stated that they organize their research from theory to practice and configure their research questions accordingly. The top three codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) From theory to practice [7], (*ii*) From practice to theory [4] and (*iii*) Organizational cooperation [3]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

I investigate the theoretical basis of the problem and I identify the problem, considering whether the results of the problem will be applied or whether they will contribute to practice.

At this point, the direction of the research from theory to practice or from practice to theory can be seen as a critical factor.

What theory says is always different than practice. Therefore, maybe we should move from practice to theory. For instance, we are discussing school managers' power perceptions. You adapted the classification of French and Raven and took five types of power, but that doesn't work well in practice. School leaders often lack charisma. Alternatively, in our decentralized school formation, the most common type of power is legal power. School principals' power level is not high because the

school does not have a budget. The school principal's power to reward is limited to sending a certificate of recognition from the district governorate. Therefore, there is no need to re-discover America. In our country, he/she is already using his/her legal powers. We know that. In fact, the system forces the principal to act like this. Thus, it is obvious that there is a disconnect between theory and practice. How much we can minimize that disconnect, that is what counts.

Literature. This sub-theme was composed of 7 codes. The researchers emphasized the importance of both their theoretical knowledge and similar studies in establishing a balance between theory and practice. The top two codes in this category are as follows: (*i*) Participating in the literature [2] and (*ii*) A reverse literature review [2]. Some quotations from the participants are set forth below:

It is important for the problem to have a theoretical background and to be mentioned in the literature. Similar studies are important. However, the existence of a problem in practice that is not supported by theory may lead one to question the theory. Theory does not always give direction to practice, I believe that original, brave researchers should conduct studies that question and refute theory. Reporting new information is possible when one questions stereotypical assumptions. Despite believing that one should be competent in the realm of theory, I also believe that the preconceptions of the past should be questioned and interpreted through innovative, out-of-the-box approaches. In fact, as a result of detailed reviews of the theory, it is always possible to see that there are opposing views that do not always fit the theory—and there are always different points of view.

It should be noted that a reverse literature review is the most important factor to establish the theory-practice balance. At this point, the direction of the current research (from theory to practice or from practice to theory) can be seen as a critical factor. The establishment of this balance by researchers—who want to test a theory or who are willing to develop a theory after application—is closely correlated with conducting deep readings about the field and following the field closely.

Discussion

The basis of good research is a good research problem, and it is quite important to ground studies with a good problem statement (Creswell, 2011; Sekaran, 2006). The process of identifying research problems is a complex process in which various interactive processes run together, affected by factors such as timing and luck, with the intervention of different views and the requirement of being consistent with the literature (Smith & Hitt, 2005). In other words, research is built on the identification or formation of the research problem (Bryman, 2012). According to the data obtained in this study, the factors that affect the identification of research problems in educational

administration studies are grouped under the following categories: (*1*) "criteria for identifying research problems," (*2*) "resources for identifying research problems," (*3*) "criteria for limiting the extent of research problems," (*4*) "criteria for assessing research problems" and (*5*) "theory-practice balance in research problems."

Researchers generally follow a four-step process when identifying their research problems. In the first step, the researcher identifies a probable problem based on his/her personal interests. In the second step, he/she performs a purposeful reading of the literature and attempts to obtain perspective on the problem. In the third step, the researcher attempts to form a holistic structure by synthesizing various sources and knowledge sets. Finally, the researcher looks for support by consulting with the field specialists or expert researchers and attempts to obtain feedback from them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). This study concludes that educational administration researchers consider the steps described above; however, the essential dynamics that influence the identification of research problems do not follow a sequence. Instead, they are complex, spontaneous and haphazard. Although the participants indicated that identification of research problems is the most important step in their research, they underlined that this process is not being managed in a serious manner.

The review of the themes obtained from the views of educational administration researchers about the factors affecting the identification of research problems showed that similar sub-themes were created for each theme. Examples of these sub-themes include the nature of the problem, the literature, academic stakeholders, individual characteristics, and methodological criteria. The reason for these similarities among the themes may be the researchers' holistic approach to evaluating the research problem, along with the interrelations between each stage of the research concept. Considering the close relationship between the question-identification stage of a study and its suggestions, the fact that the identified research problems is effective in each stage of the research should be interpreted resulting from the integrity and consistency of educational administration researchers' perspectives on their research.

Our findings revealed the importance of the criteria related to the nature of the problem, the personal criteria, the literature-based criteria and the criteria related to academic relationships. The participants mentioned factors such as topicality, researchability, whether a subject is interesting, originality, and filling a gap as the issues that they consider when identifying the question. In addition, they emphasized the importance of academic shareholders' opinions. In this study, which addresses the identification of research problems, the content of the problem was underlined, and it has been concluded that researchers are impacted not only by the topicality and originality of the problem but also by its contribution to the field (Bahçekapılı, Bahçekapılı, Erümit, Göktaş, & Sözbilir, 2013). However, based on the findings of

this theme, it is difficult to say that research problems are identified through a planned, systematic process. Like the findings of educational administration researchers Örücü and Şimşek (2011), the respondents in this study stated that they encounter difficulties in identifying research problems, particularly because of problems arising out of their academic relations and excess workload.

It has been found that the resources used by educational administration researchers include books, scientific journals, databases, teachers, current events, the Internet and theses. Books, journals and theses are the sources that are the most-often used to identify research problems, which indicates that researchers do not adopt a practical approach that addresses cultural context and takes social realities as its starting point. This trend would not help solve current problems; moreover, it will be insufficient for the purposes of policy development and offering realistic and practical solutions for Turkey's educational system, which are top issues in the educational management field. This situation has also resulted in the similarities of the topics addressed in scientific publications. It has been found that studies conducted in the field of educational administration are repeating themselves (Aypay et al., 2010; Balcı & Apaydın, 2009; Karadağ, 2009b; Turan, Karadağ, Bektaş, & Yalçın, 2014). In other words, educational administration is a field in which Western studies are repeated. According to Turan and Şişman (2013), who emphasize that the majority of the studies conducted in the field of educational sciences and teacher education in Turkey involve adapting and transferring models developed in West, the assumption that underlies this understanding is that "the most valid theories on educational management are the ones developed in the West." The academicians who established the field were primarily educated in the West, and they made good-faith attempts to transfer what they learned there to Turkey (Turan & Şişman , 2013). Balcı (1993) states that theme selections for dissertations follow a uniform pattern and that in Turkey, educational administration researchers tend to repeat previous studies using different universes and samples instead of addressing new and original themes. These statements indicate that because of their use of common resources for identifying and developing research problems, educational administration researchers both avoid practical problems and cannot meet expectations in terms of improving the field and making social contributions to their communities.

With respect to setting limits on research problems, it has been found that workgroups, variables, resources and facilities, time, accessibility, previous studies and instructors are the factors that are deemed important. The researchers determine the value of their research problems by considering the criteria such as solving a problem, originality, having a theoretical basis, experts' opinions, instructors, personal interests and competence. In a study of the factors that researchers consider when selecting research topics (Chow & Harrison, 2002), we see that the problem

is to identify a real-world issue that positively affects either the literature or the accumulation of knowledge (pointing an important gap in theory, creating new results and leading new processes). In another study (Kwiatkowski & Silverman, 1998), the primary criteria for identifying research problems was whether a problem enabled the participants to obtain usable information. Another view featured in this research is whether probable resolutions to research problems should be realistic and whether they should match the researcher's expertise. To conduct a study that has an operational working plan, we must ask questions that can be answered. In addition, it is effective to consider time and resources when identifying a research problem. It is useful for researchers to choose research problems that can be addressed within a reasonable period and that consider the importance of financial resources.

Another important finding relates to the views of educational administration researchers about the need for a balance of theory and practice when identifying a research problem. It has been concluded that theory-practice balance is quite problematic. The participants have indicated that it is difficult, but very important, to establish this balance. They stated that their criteria for theory-practice balance are personal and arise out of the nature of the problem, the methodology and the literature. The studies of educational administration researchers are primarily based on theories asserted in very different countries, thus leading to a mismatch between theory and practice. As Bolay (2014) notes, the most important difference in the perspectives of Western versus Eastern studies arises from their approaches to theory and practice. Similarly, it has been argued that particularly in countries such as Turkey, researchers should develop a perspective that goes from practice to theory instead of from theory to practice; this perspective will provide more effective and productive solutions to social and societal problems.

In addition, considering the research processes, from identification of research problems to the theory-practice balance, participants highlighted the importance of cultural, contextual and local adequacy as useful in practice, resolving problems and fulfilling a gap in the literature. Tsui (2006) has also mentioned the importance of considering local context when selecting a research problem. His study argues that there are two trends in the selection of research problems and topics. The first trend involves selecting topics that will draw the attention of Western researchers. However, in this case, that approach creates a risk of missing the local context. The second trend discussed by Tsui (2006) involves identifying unique situations in local context and selecting the topics through this approach. Fulfilling a gap in the literature is another issue that relates to identifying research problems. A similar case has been observed in a study performed on Asian social psychologists (Leung, 2007). This study insists that Asian researchers focus and publish on research topics that are popular in the West. Sandberg and Alvesson (2011) argue that the most dominant consideration

used to identify research problems is fulfilling gaps. Researchers review the existing literature to identify gaps and identify their research problems accordingly.

When considering the scope of the literature on identifying research problems, all of these findings show that this issue retains its complexity. In addition, each researcher may assign this issue a different meaning. However, with respect to educational administration studies, it can be said that it is important to initiate interpretative and cultural studies in which practice will guide theory and in which qualitative approaches are preferred by considering social and cultural context, not filling a gap in the literature or following the "Science for Science" approach. When the question-identification stage, which is the starting point of the research, is performed according to this approach, it is possible to conduct studies that are based on the reality of the relevant society, that are consistent with that reality and that can contribute to practice.

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