

## Mentor-Mentee Relationship and Ethics

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### Abstract

This study aimed to examine the attitudes and behaviors of mentors in the mentor-mentee relationship in terms of adherence to ethical standards, based on the views of mentees. The study group consisted of six doctoral students from the Graduate School of Educational Sciences and the Graduate School of Social Sciences. Participants were selected using a criterion sampling method, and interviews were conducted with those who met the criteria. A semi-structured interview form was used in the data collection process, and thematic analysis method was adopted for data analysis. The findings of the research indicate that the behavior of mentors towards their mentees was ethically significant. The participants' views showed that it was important for mentees to be autonomous in their relationship with their mentors, to receive guidance, for mentors to allocate time, to share in their work, and to act fairly. In addition, the confidentiality of the interviews played a critical role in the mentor-mentee relationship. The findings acknowledged that the mentor-mentee relationship was critically important for career development, and the mentor was considered a significant figure. It is mentioned that the mentor's failure to fulfill their responsibilities and adhere to ethical principles can be overlooked due to the mentee's preference to complete the process. The results suggest that considering ethical principles in the mentor-mentee relationship can contribute to solving current issues and preventing larger problems.

**Keywords:** Mentor and mentee relation, ethics, doctorate education.

### Mentor-Menti İlişkisi ve Etik Öz

Bu çalışma, mentor-menti ilişkisinde mentorun tutum ve davranışlarının etik standartlara uygunluğunu, mentilerin görüşlerine dayanarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma grubu, Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü ve Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü'nde öğrenim gören altı doktora öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılar, belirlenirken ölçüt örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmış ve ölçütleri sağlayan katılımcılarla görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veri toplama sürecinde yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmış, veri analizinde ise tematik analiz yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları, mentorlerin mentilere karşı sergilediği davranışların etik açıdan önemli olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Katılımcıların görüşlerinden elde edilen sonuçlara göre, mentilerin mentorleriyle ilişkilerinde özerk olmaları, rehberlik yardımı alabilmeleri, mentorların zaman ayırmaları, çalışmalarında paylaşımda bulunmaları ve adil davranmaları önemlidir. Ayrıca, görüşmelerin gizliliğinin de mentor-mente ilişkisinde kritik bir rol oynadığı vurgulanmıştır. Katılımcıların görüşlerinden çıkarılan sonuçlara göre, mentor-menti ilişkisinin kariyer gelişimi için kritik bir öneme sahip olduğu ve mentorun önemli bir figür olduğu kabul edilmiştir. Mentinin, süreci tamamlamayı tercih etmesi nedeniyle, mentorun sorumluluklarını yerine getirmemesinin ve etik ilkelere uymamasının görmezden gelinileceği belirtilmektedir. Araştırma sonuçları, mentor-menti ilişkisinde etik ilkelerin göz önünde bulundurulmasının mevcut sorunların çözümüne ve daha büyük problemlerin önlenmesine katkı sağlayabileceğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Mentor-menti ilişkisi, etik, doktora eğitimi.

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## INTRODUCTION

Mentoring, as an ancient practice from the early times of human history, has its origin in the Odysseus Epic in Greek mythology. King of Ithaca, Odysseus, entrusted his son Telemachus to Mentor when he was off to the Trojan war. Mentor was given a responsibility to educate his son and to raise him as the future King of Ithaca. Over the years, Mentor turned out to be a private teacher and a trusted counsellor of Telemachus (Anderson & Shannon, 2014; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Merriam, 1983). Also, in Homer's epic poem, the Mentor is often interpreted in terms of guidance and conceptualized as mentoring. Mentoring is defined as guiding and supporting a less experienced person through a more experienced person in order to develop his/her competencies. While the more experienced person is called mentor, the less experienced person is called "mentee" or "protégé" (Carruthers, 2004; Creamer et al., 2001; Gaskill, 1991; Haines, 2003; Kram, 1983; Taylor, 1992; Weil, 2001). In Türkiye, the word "mentee" is used as "mente" by Özdemir (2012) for the person who receive guidance and support (Bakioğlu, 2015). Although it was named differently by various scholars, it is essential to thoroughly understand the concept of mentorship due to the positive outcomes of mentorship practices.

A number of conclusions can be drawn for mentoring in The Odyssey. First, being a mentor is a voluntary action since Mentor willingly fulfilled his responsibilities to Telemachus. Second, through Mentor's effort, the hidden potential of Telemachus was revealed, which indicates that mentoring is a nurturing process facilitating the mentee's development. Third, the mentor's wisdom is acknowledged and embraced by the mentee, which reveals the insightful process of mentoring. Fourth, Telemachus took the Mentor's advice into consideration and Mentor kept all the interaction with Telemachus confidential, which reveals the supportiveness and protectiveness of mentoring (Anderson & Shannon, 2014).

In modern times, the terms mentor and mentoring was first used in the North American business and social movements in the 1960s (Ferrerres, 2019). There were two articles focusing on mentoring in business published in the Harvard Business Review in the late 1970s. In the following decades, mentoring became known in the field of education. Specifically, it was initiated with millionaire Eugene Lang's speech to high school students, which was the foundation of the I Have a Dream event (IHAD). In this speech, he guaranteed college education to students if they graduated from high school. (IHAD included a mentoring component as well as college education) IHAD aimed to decrease high and junior high school students' dropout rates and encourage postsecondary school matriculation (Bashi, 1991).

Having a mentor has many benefits such as enhancing creativity, keeping up with career progression, increasing knowledge and skills, advancing known and unknown skills, developing a personal morality, building friendships (Moberg & Velasquez, 2004). In addition, mentors' places absolute faith in the mentees and encourage them to express feelings and thoughts freely, as well as supporting high expectations. These benefits increase self-esteem, self-concept, and self-confidence (Kalbfleisch, 1997; Kim & Zabelina, 2011). In this respect, the mentor-mentee relationship has the potential to improve the career and psychosocial aspects of mentees (Auster, 1984; Johnson & Nelson, 1999; Kram, 1983). More specifically, the development of a sense of competence, confidence and effectiveness in a young manager is also supported through role modeling, acceptance, reassurance, counseling and psychosocial functions based on friendship (Kram, 1983; Roberts, 2000).

Social support theory argues that mentors should provide emotional support such as listening, trust or concern, appraisal support such as affirmation and feedback, informative support such as advice, suggestions and information, and instrumental support such as labor or money. Mentor is also expected to prevent or decrease the stress of mentee through emotional support (Davis, 2010; Eby et al., 2013). Despite the fact that social support does not eliminate stressors in people's lives, it reduces anxiety levels and supports them to be more optimistic, to control themselves, and to try alternative ways to overcome problems (Çetin, 2018; Karaköse et al., 2016; Yirci, 2017).

Rowley (1999) defines mentoring as a critical and effective adult learning strategy that requires a conscious effort. In another definition, mentoring is considered as a symbiotic relationship between a mentor and mentee helping each other to meet their mutual career goals (Haines, 2003). The relationship between mentor and mentee is unofficial. At the beginning, both of them are expected to be voluntary and after a while inequality arises between mentor and mentee because of experience, knowledge, and status differences (Kalbfleisch, 1997).

Some researchers consider mentors as friends (Ambrosetti, 2014; Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005; Özkalp & Kirel, 2018). However, friendship generally refers to a symmetrical and mutual relationship. However, due to inequality, the relationship between a mentor and a mentee does not include the symmetry of relationships between friends (Schlosser & Foley, 2008; Weil, 2001). Therefore, at the beginning of the mentoring process, the mentor

and mentee need to discuss the outline of mentoring in order to share mutual understanding and vision (McKimm et al., 2003).

In general, the mentor and mentee relationship is characterized through extraordinary mutual commitment and personal interest (National Academies Press [NAP], 1992). Ideally, this relationship should be regarded as the kind of partnership where mentor and mentee work together. When working with young people, the mentor is aware of his/her responsibilities and interacts appropriately with the mentee in accordance with the highest ethical standards (Kitchener, 1986; Vujovich, 1999). Although this relationship generally benefits both sides and scientific profession, some ethical problems may occur (Resnik, 2005) since scientists often do not agree on behavioral standards governing science, how to interpret these standards, and how to employ them (Whitbeck, 1995).

The terms mentor and mentoring have become credible in recent years, when concerns about scientific misconduct arose (Weil, 2001). Mentoring also has potential risks (Auster, 1984). For example, a mentor may use the power of mentoring for his/her own egocentric purposes rather than meeting the needs of a mentee. In addition, mentoring relationships may limit the potential of both parties. Mentors may disrupt the development of the mentees by discouraging the autonomous work. Also, mentee may prefer to depend on the mentor's skills rather than developing his/her self-supervision skills (Haines, 2003). Despite the significance of ethical considerations in the mentoring process, only a few studies have concentrated on this issue (Schlosser & Foley, 2008).

Ethical codes may be used to identify ethical problems and solve them in an ethically sustainable way (Karaköse & Kocabaş, 2009; Löfström & Pyhältö, 2017; Vandekerckhove & Tsahuridu, 2010; Wiley, 2000). In general, ethical skills are connected to the principles that provide individuals with a distinct sense of significance and direction in their lives, as well as a commitment to honoring the rights of others to live and work with honesty (Pask & Joy, 2007). Ethical principles provide the ethical justification at the first stage. Within a professional organization, these principles are commonly transformed into a collection of ethical guidelines that professionals commit to adhering to while carrying out their work within the organization. Ethical codes are considered as a set of organizational laws since they are formal and obligatory and are enforced by a supervisory authority (Kitchener, 1985, Kitchener, 1986). Therefore, ethical principles and theories should be taken into account in order to make rational and ethically defensive decisions in mentor-mentee relationships (Kitchener, 1985).

Although the main concerns in mentoring ethics are similar, there is an interdisciplinary perspective on ethics (McDonald & Hite, 2005). For instance, while Auster (1984) sociologically discussed gender in mentor-mentee relationship, Spencer and colleagues discussed the mentoring relationship from a psychotherapy perspective (Rhodes et al., 2009; Spencer & Rhodes, 2005).

According to Allan (2010) various professional organizations around the world (American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct, 2002; Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and Guidelines of the British Psychological Society, 1993; Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, 2000; European Federation of Psychological Associations [EFPA] Meta - Code of Ethics, 2005; Code of Ethics: For Psychologists working in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2002; Ethical Code of Professional Conduct of the South African Psychologist Board, 2002; Draft Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists (Ad Hoc Joint Committee), 2005) have a consensus about ethical principles:

- Respect for dignity and rights of people,
- Justice,
- Autonomy,
- Nonmaleficence,
- Beneficence,
- Veracity,
- Fidelity, and
- Responsibility.

Allan (2010) also identifies ethical codes as justice, autonomy, according dignity, nonmaleficence, pursuit of excellence, beneficence, care and compassion, veracity, fidelity and accepting accountability. Although professional ethical principles are categorized separately for different majors, there are common principles including honesty, reliability, professional commitment, and respect (Özbek, 2003). The ethical principles for educators were first identified by National Education Association [NEA] in the USA in 1929 (Özbek, 2003). Student commitment principles put forward by the NEA are listed below:

Commitment to Students: Educators know the importance of teaching profession. Therefore, they tend to facilitate the spirit of research, gaining and understanding knowledge, and revealing ideas about important goals. In order to fulfill their responsibilities, educators:

1. Do not restrict students' attempt to gain knowledge
2. Do not unnecessarily deny that students have different views
3. Do not suppress or distort subject matter related to students' enhancements
4. Do protect children from environments that prevent learning and that harm their health or safety
5. Do not put students in situations in which they get embarrassed or disparaged
6. Due to their race, color, religion, sex, nationality, marital status, political and religious beliefs, family, social and cultural background or sexual preferences
  - a. Do not discourage students to participate in any program
  - b. Do not deny benefits to any students
  - c. Do not grant any advantage/help to any students
7. Do not benefit from the professional relationships with students to gain benefit for their own good
8. Do not disclose any information about their students unless there is a necessity (i.e., professional purpose or required by law) (NEA, 2018).

Mentors cannot rely only on good intentions to develop productive and safe relationships with their mentees. Indeed, failure to pay attention to ethical issues may result in undesirable or even harmful decisions. By being mindful of these issues from the outset of their relationship, mentors can create strategies and resources to effectively address ethical concerns (Kitchener, 1986). In this regard, mentors ought to be motivated to contemplate how their conduct in diverse scenarios and real-life situations can impact their association with their mentees, as well as the welfare of the individuals they are responsible for protecting. In order to achieve this, mentors should be willing to tolerate uncertainty as they decide the best action plans. Due to the complex nature of mentoring relationships and the effects of various socio-demographic variables on these relations, mentoring requires a rational, thoughtful, informed, and self-reflective approach (Rhodes et al., 2009).

In addition to an increase in awareness regarding ethical issues, mentees need thinking strategies to analyze and interpret a problem. A mentee should understand the association among ethical intuitions, ethical rules, and ethical principles and law. Mentees can act in line with disclosed ethical codes to understand the fundamental contradictions in ethical problems and to decide between conflicting ethical claims (Kitchener, 1986).

Researchers emphasize that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to mentoring is ineffective for individuals with diverse needs and backgrounds (Benishek et al., 2004; Lowman, 2013). Also, this unrealistic utopia only leads to an atmosphere of denial and oppression (Schlosser & Foley, 2008).

On the other hand, the mentoring relationship may not always be successful or function appropriately. There is hardly any literature assessing which problems are autonomous and idiosyncratic. However, traditional methods in education and mentoring are under stress. Some studies have raised concerns about how the increasing number of mentors and mentees in various contexts and studies can impact the quality of the relationship between a mentor and a mentee. As research labs expand and the number of mentors and mentees increases, the quality of the educational environment and the mentor-mentee relationship are at risk (NAP, 1992).

It should be recognized that the mentor-mentee relationship, similar to any personal relationship, is delicate. Challenges in the relationship can lead to issues for both parties and may result in an ineffective mentoring experience (Scandura, 1998). A mentee may overlook a mentor's negative behavior or ethical violations in order to protect his/her academic progress. If the relationship deteriorates further, the mentee may ultimately leave their academic pursuits behind.

Djerassi (1999) reported the case of Jason Altom, a student who suicided due to his mentor's abuse. In his suicide note, he wrote that

"I am a PhD student in the field of chemistry at Harvard University. The university only assigns one supervisor for academic major and career selection. A supervisor just like a judge. If there was a council of supervisors, we wouldn't be stuck like this. We can't be flexible."

This note and the other indicators showed that students had difficulty due to intensity of course schedules and were pushed to be alone, and were not able to find an authority for support (Sabah Newspaper, 1998).

There has been criticism that there are no established principles to govern research conducted by research institutions and their members, and that scientists and institutions lack a mechanism to guarantee the integrity of the research process (NAP, 1992). The benefits of effective mentoring are reported in the literature. With increased movement within an organization, mentors must step in to address gaps in continuity.

Mentoring is a process that leads to a positive learning experience and results in more socialized, more stable, and more productive employees. Nevertheless, on occasion, mentoring relationships may not proceed as intended. Many studies focused only on the positive assets of mentoring. On the other hand, the difficulties in interactions between mentor and mentee and the ethical issues should not be disregarded (Scandura, 1998). As it was in the past, mentoring remains a crucial component of graduate education today. For an effective mentoring, ethical principles should be integrated to the mentor-mentee relationship (Ellis, 1992).

There are a number of studies on the ethical issues in the mentor-mentee relationships. They focused on issues such as race and ethnic origins, socio-economic status, limits of relationship, ability levels, sexual preferences, religious beliefs (Benishek et al., 2004; Kalbfleisch, 1997; Ragins, 1997; Schlosser & Foley, 2008; Yirci et al., 2016), age, communication, anger, jealousy (Chong, 2009; Johnson & Nelson, 1999; Kalbfleisch, 1997), sexual intercourse (Chong, 2009), sexual harassment, competency, integrity in professional relationships, and denial of access to services (Johnson & Nelson, 1999).

The mentoring relationship depends on relations, and it has some potential risks. In the book series *The Dark Side of Close Relationships*, Cupach and Spitzberg (2011) categorized those risks into behavioral risks (e.g., violence, threats, and stalking) and emotional risks (e.g., anger, pain, and depression). These risks include violence (bullying), conflicts (disagreement), jealousy, anger (anger), threats, harming, rejection, stalking, cheating, fraud, depression, betrayal, teasing, loneliness, desolation, separation, termination, bullying, negative emotions, sexual harassment, inability, sexual aggression, argument, enemies, shyness, anger, and disturbing.

The aim of the study was to investigate ethical conflicts and violations within the mentor-mentee relationship, which holds a significant place in the literature but has not been fully explored in Türkiye. It is expected that this research will help formulate ethical codes that are uniquely tailored to the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship. To achieve this objective, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are your opinions regarding your advisor's treatment of your individual rights?
2. How do you perceive the support that your advisor offers during the counseling process for your academic development?
3. How do you feel about the level of respect shown by your advisor towards your work?

## METHOD

### Research Model

This study employed the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research designs. Phenomenology, which originates from the Greek word "phenomena" meaning appearances, is a method of exploring the way in which individuals experience, perceive, and interpret objects, events, and experiences (Holt & Sandberg, 2013). Phenomenological research attempts to investigate people's lived experiences in order to understand what they are going through (Christensen et al., 2015; Creswell, 2017; Ersoy, 2017). Phenomenological research typically relies on in-depth interviews that involve open-ended questions as the primary method of data collection. Additionally, participants are often asked to provide written accounts of their experiences (Christensen et al., 2015). Therefore, phenomenological design was preferred in order to examine doctorate students' relations with their supervisors during their doctoral education.

### Participants

The participants of the study consisted of PhD students in Graduate School of Educational Sciences and Graduate School of Social Studies at a university. Participating students were selected using criterion sampling technique, a purposeful sampling selection method. This technique allows researchers to examine and to understand a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). In the present study, three criteria were identified: (1) having a master's degree from either Graduate School of Educational Sciences or Graduate School of Social Studies; (2) conducting doctorate education, and (3) already completed first two semesters. The rationale behind these criteria was to identify doctorate students who already had a longer and dependent mentor-mentee relationship with their supervisor in terms of social and academic life. Taking these criteria into account, interviews with participants willing to join the study on a voluntary basis began, and the data collection process continued



until the data set reached saturation. The data collection was concluded when the analysis of participant opinions and the generated codes started to repeat, which is an indication of the fact that the data set had reached saturation. A total of 6 individuals were included in the study. Based on these criteria, six participants were selected. Table 1 provides demographic information about the participants. In order to protect their privacy, the participants were anonymized.

Table 1. Demographic information about the participants

Participants	Gender	The stage of Doctorate Education	Location for interview
Kenan	Male	Dissertation Writing	Office of a research assistant
Kürşat	Male	Dissertation Writing	Office of a research assistant
Derya	Female	Dissertation Writing	Office of a research assistant
Ercan	Male	Dissertation Writing	Office of a research assistant
Erkan	Male	Dissertation Writing	Office of a research assistant
Fatma	Female	Preparing for comprehensive examination	Teachers' room at a school

### Data Collection Tools

In order to collect data, a semi-structured interview technique was used. The tool consisted of open-ended questions and was designed by the researchers. A semi-structured interview form includes flexible questions allowing researchers to collect specific data from each participant, and a significant portion of the interview process involves asking questions or discussing issues that need to be clarified (Merriam, 2015). During the phenomenological interview process, communication and interaction between the researcher and the participant is key, and both parties play an active role in the process (Ersoy, 2017). In phenomenological research, the views of participants are obtained through open-ended questions that are designed by the researcher, without being constrained by the researcher's own perspective or the findings of previous studies (Creswell, 2017). To ensure that participants' perspectives were not restricted, to uncover divergent viewpoints, and to allow for additional inquiries if needed, a semi-structured interview format was utilized in this study.

The researchers designed the interview questions based on the ethical principles introduced by the National Education Association [NEA] in 1929. The questions were reviewed by two experts in the field. Two PhD students were interviewed as part of a pilot study, but the data collected from these interviews were not included in the analysis process. The final version of interview form was designed based on the expert opinion and pilot study. Sample questions used in the study include "How do you feel about your supervisor's attitude and behavior toward your personal rights?", "What is your perception of the support your supervisor offers in terms of your academic development during the consultation process?", and "How do you feel about the recognition your supervisor gives to your efforts in your academic work?". In order to obtain more detailed data on the research topic, the researchers developed probe questions to follow up on participants' responses during the interviews (Creswell, 2017; Merriam, 2015). The followings are examples of probe questions: "How do you feel about the confidentiality of the information you share with your supervisor? What is your supervisor's perspective on communicating with other faculty members in the department and seeking assistance from them? How do you feel about the input that your supervisor provides regarding the subject you are working on? "What is your opinion on the feedback that your supervisor gives you about your work?", "How objective do you think your supervisor is when it comes to this issue?", and "Do you feel that your supervisor is taking advantage of your efforts?". Permission from the participants was obtained to record the interview process. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed into written format. Participants were then given the opportunity to review the written transcripts to confirm that they accurately reflected what they had meant to convey during the interviews.

### Data Analysis

An inductive thematic analysis method was used in data analysis. An important feature of qualitative research is that it has an inductive process (Merriam, *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*, 2015). Thematic analysis involves examining a series of steps focused on identifying recurring themes or ideas in a text data set. The process of organizing data into themes is a fundamental aspect of many qualitative research methods. For example, while content analysis allows researchers to calculate the frequency of the codes to conduct statistical analysis, thematic analysis does not include statistical analysis (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that involves analyzing and organizing data into themes, with the goal of reducing and summarizing the data to capture important concepts within the dataset. This process typically involves dividing the data, classifying it, summarizing it, and restructuring it to identify key themes or patterns in the information (Ayres, 2008). Through thematic analysis, researchers determine the themes based on the narratives (Clark & Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ersoy, 2017; Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). The

thematic analysis includes the following steps for researchers: (1) becoming familiar with the data (2) creating the first codes, (3) exploring themes, (4) reviewing the themes, (5) defining and naming the themes, and (6) writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, these steps were followed. In the fifth stage, the themes were defined and named. In the study, two main themes were created, namely "Autonomy" and "Academic Activity".

### Validity And Reliability

Validity and reliability are important considerations for researchers at every stage of the research process, from developing the initial framework to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, as well as presenting the final findings (Merriam, 2015). To ensure the validity, participant confirmation was obtained after transcription of the interviews. Participant confirmation is a research practice in which researchers present the identified themes or narratives to the participants and request confirmation of the accuracy of the themes or stories (Creswell, 2017; Merriam, 2015) One of the ways to obtain descriptive validity is to use more than one coder to collect and interpret data (Christensen et al., 2015).

## FINDINGS

In this study, the interviews were conducted to examine the mentor-mentee relationship in term of ethics. The findings revealed two themes: autonomy and academic activity. Each theme included sub-categories describing the mentor-mentee relationship in detail (see Figure 1).

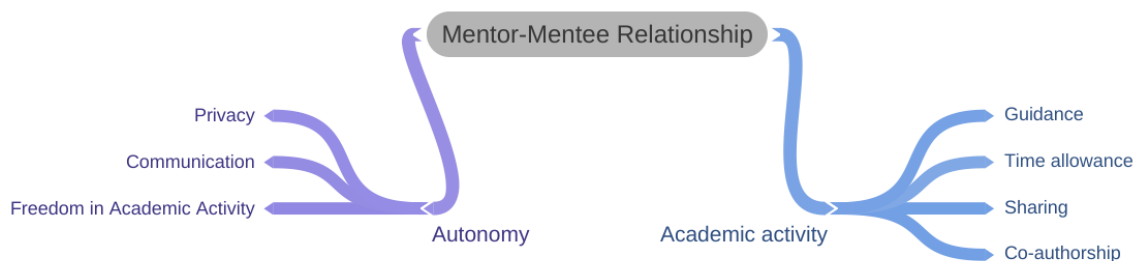


Figure 1. *Concept map of the findings*

### AUTONOMY

The autonomy theme comprised three sub-categories: privacy, communication, and freedom for academic activity. Each of the themes is described with direct quotations from the interviews to support them.

#### Privacy

The participants reported that their academic and personal sharing was confidential in their relations with their mentors, and they felt comfortable about them. For example, Kürşat said that:

"I feel confident about privacy all the time. I mean I was able to talk and discuss with my supervisor. We mainly talked about my academic activities. I know that my supervisor always reassured on privacy and built trust."

Ercan also expressed similar thoughts:

"My mentor is a person I love and respect very much. I have not had any problems with privacy. I mean certainly what happened between us remained between us. I did not hear anything from other people around us about what we talked or discussed. Not my personal issues, not my academic work. I did not hear from anyone else about anything I spoke to with my mentor. I had no problem with this."

#### Communication

The findings showed that there were two opposite views in terms of mentors' thoughts about mentee's relationship with the other faculty members. Fatma reported that:

"I can freely talk to the other faculty members in the department and get their advices. However, when it is about conducting a study, I feel that I have to get permission from my supervisor. Except that, my supervisor always supported me to attend other courses and share/discuss my thoughts with the other faculty members."

On the other hand, Kürşat said that:

“I was asked to maintain a professional distance from the other faculty members in the department. I think that this was not only my mentor's request, but such a culture was formed in the department. My supervisor decided which courses I would take, and I got to know the other faculty members through those courses. However, academic work with the others was always limited.”

Based on the findings, it was concluded that while some mentees did not have professional communication autonomy, the others had such autonomy.

### **Freedom for Academic Activity**

In terms of freedom for academic activity, Erkan stated that “Although we did not have any problem to communicate with the other faculty members, I cannot say that our mentors are OK about our academic sharing and collaborations with the others.” After his statement, a probe question was asked to reveal his opinions about his mentor's this attitude. He replied that “a change would increase the quality of our academic activities.” Another probe question was asked to obtain his solution to such a problem. He answered this question by saying that “we all need to believe in that science develops more if we collaborate. In other words, if we work together and if we understand that there is no harm in collaboration, this change may happen.”

A similar statement was made by Kürşat. He stated that:

“There was always a limitation in working with other faculty members. We, of course, communicated with them in the courses that our supervisor chose for us to take. However, this communication was about the course content. I believe that there should be a limitation in academic activities. This was an unwritten rule in the department. We observed that all faculty members complied with this rule. So, we do not conduct any academic work with the others, I mean during our doctorate education.”

On the other hand, Kenan stated that:

“The other faculty members agreed that they conduct academic work with only their own students. Therefore, the other doctorate students have to work only with their supervisors. However, my supervisor supports me to collaborate with the other faculty members. I did not have any problem with that until now.”

Similar to Kenan, Ercan defined this issue as one of the biggest problems in academic life. He reported that he did not have any issue about collaboration and stated that:

“My supervisor never restricted my relationship with other faculty members and my academic activities with them. My previous supervisor [referring to his supervisor in Master's education] had restricted me. My current supervisor set me free in this regard. He never intervenes and we did not have any problem about this freedom.”

The findings showed that the participants preferred to be free in choosing courses and carry out their academic studies with the other faculty members and students. In addition, the participants considered freedom in academic activities as a problematic issue in graduate education.

## **ACADEMIC ACTIVITY**

The academic activity theme included three sub-categories: guidance, time allocation, and co-authorship.

### **Guidance**

Examples are provided below in regard to participants' views about guidance. The quotes revealed that there was a variation in mentors' guidance behaviors.

Kenan stated that:

“I can say that my supervisor is more interested in my thesis than me. We decided my thesis topic together. He wanted me to choose a topic within the scope of his doctoral thesis. I also wanted to work on that topic. When he finds an article related to my thesis, he sends it to me and asks me to read it. He helps me out about statistical analysis methods. I can say that he thinks of my academic progress more than I do.”

On the other hand, Ercan said the following:

“I cannot say he did not contribute; it would be unfair. But he contributed to my academic life less than I expected. At least, he did not complicate my work, which happens a lot in academic life. I mean many students have problems with their supervisors. While sometimes he did not like what I did or what I wrote, he never provided suggestions to make it better. He never gave me an idea about what should I read, how should I write. I know other students who have the same experience. So the problem is disapproving what is done and not providing any clue to improve it; this is the real problem.”

Fatma states that:



“I think I now know the framework of conducting a research. But I have no experience in writing an article and submitting it for publication. He wants me to make such submissions, and I try to do it with a concern because I have no experience. But when I have a question, he definitely helps if he has time.”

### **Time Allocation**

Participants' views about their supervisors' time allocation behaviors are discussed in this section. Ercan stated that “Actually, he spent time on my academic activities, but this time was not productively used in terms of academic contribution. During this time, he just approved or disapproved what I have done or.”

On the other hand, Fatma complained this issue and said that “my supervisor did not allocate time for my academic work. Only when I have questions, he certainly answered them if he had time.”

Derya said that: “My supervisor allocates time for me to show him my work. I get answers to my questions. However, I wish he spends more time for my academic development.”

Kenan also said:

“I am not only one he has been mentoring and there are other doctorate students as well. He teaches many courses this semester and he may get promotion in his job in a short time. Because of his workload, sometimes he asks me to come another time or do it on my own. I mean he does not discard me. When he was busy, he sometimes asked me to come in a more convenient time or asked me to handle it by myself stating that there was no need for him to contribute.”

To sum up, the participants emphasized the importance of time allocation, revealing that the time spent with mentors is critical for mentees in order to present their works to their mentors, to advance their professional competences, and to learn more about academic culture.

### **Sharing**

The participants were asked whether their mentors shared everything they know about the topic they were working on. Some excerpts are presented below.

Ercan said that:

“If there is anything to contribute to the subject I am working on, he will definitely not hide it and share it with me. However, my supervisor was not very interested in the topic I preferred to study. Maybe he did not assume the subjects I worked on. Therefore, as I mentioned before, he did not contribute much to my academic development.”

Kenan shared his experience with the following sentence:

“I do not believe he is hiding any knowledge. He always shares what he knows. But several times he told me that “mentee should know more than his mentor because mentee writes the thesis not mentor. So, mentee needs to work hard, to read more, and to search more. This means mentee should have more knowledge of the literature.”

Derya, on the other hand, stated that “I think my supervisor is not sharing everything with me to keep some knowledge for himself.”

Some participants reported that their mentors help their academic work and share their knowledge and experiences with them. In addition, except for Derya, all participants agreed that their mentors were open to share knowledge.

### **Co-authorship**

Participants were asked about their thoughts on whether they obtain the reward for their labor in scientific studies. Some of the participants' expressions are as follows:

Erkan stated that:

“I believe that the work done in partnership with the mentor and mentee is produced with the effort and performance of the mentee. Of course, it is critical for the mentor to contribute with his knowledge and experience to the work. It is not possible for us to determine the order in which my supervisor and I should be credited as authors. I believe that mentors should prioritize making their mentees the first authors in some publications, as this can serve as a source of motivation for students. However, this can be ignored due to a possibility of promotion in my mentor's position or maybe for other situations. But in general, whatever you call it, maybe academic culture, mentors' personality, or the traditional values, co-authorship is a problematic issue, and this must be overcome.”

Kürşat:

“My mentor always puts my efforts at the center in our works. He is a mentor who makes me stand out, especially by showing the work we do in the academic environment. Like an advertisement. With this, I can see that he is different from the other faculty members in the department. In the department, there is a culture in which always mentor is the first author in joint works and mentee is the second. We never discussed this issue. Rather, we followed this usual order. This is a tradition, but we do not now know whether it is fair or ethical. But I think the person who put more effort on the joint work should be the first author of the manuscript.”

Fatma also stated that “My supervisor was the mentor I wanted to work with. He respects my work. I do not think he will be unfair. ”

Kenan also said that:

“I am aware that there is an issue about the authorship order in academic life. But my supervisor is always fair. I was the first or second author based on my effort in the work. It is not very reasonable to be a first author just because he is an supervisor.”

Some participants stressed the co-authorship issues with their mentors. Erkan stated that he disregarded this problem in order to maintain the mentor-mentee relationship and to provide support for his mentor in terms of possible academic promotion. Similarly, Kürşat considered this issue as a part of department’s culture and, as a result, he preferred not to bring it up. On the other hand, Kenan stated that although this was an issue in the department, his supervisor was fair and reasonable.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the mentor-mentee relationship in terms of ethical issues through mentees’ perspectives. The results revealed that mentees’ autonomy, mentors’ guidance and time allocation, and privacy were critical factors that affect the relationship between the mentor and mentee. The findings were discussed under two categories: autonomy and academic activity.

### **Autonomy**

The principle of autonomy is the basis of various ethical rules frequently found in ethics committees. It includes freedom of thought or choice (Kitchener, 1985). In the mentor-mentee relationship, respect for autonomy has a critical importance (Moberg D. J., 2008). Specifically, Shapira-Lishchinsky (2012) states that as the mentor and the mentee gain more autonomy, mentee’s success will increase (Akgüç, 2004).

In this context, privacy is considered as a part of autonomy (Sayın, 2013). In order to maintain relationship with other people, privacy is a requirement and a critical aspect (Rachels, 1975). Akgüç (2004), defines privacy as one of the ways of developing one’s identity and ensuring self-control, which, in turn, result in self-actualization and autonomy protection. Izgi (2009) asserts that if mentor guarantees full confidentiality in the mentor-mentee relationship, the relationship of trust is more likely to develop. In the mentor-mentee relationship, mentors are expected to encourage the mentee to think aloud, which helps the mentee to develop his thinking skills. Therefore, the mentee should express himself/herself without fear of being reported to a third party (Pask & Joy, 2007). Murray (2001) puts a strong emphasis on trust between the mentor and the mentee. In this study, the participants stated that they trust their mentors in protecting the confidentiality of communication by considering ethical obligations and that they can easily express themselves while sharing their academic or personal issues or questions. This trust-based relationship is important for the development of the mentee.

Some of the participants stated that their communication and freedom of academic activities with the other faculty members were limited by their mentors. ACPA (2018) states that the mentee's freedom of choice and action should not be restricted unless their actions significantly interfere with the well-being of the others or the completion of the institution’s mission. On the other hand, Jones (2007) states that the freedom of research is a part of science application principles and scientists’ responsibilities regarding their virtues. It is important to recognize that respect for autonomy should not impede the mentee's capacity to exercise their own judgment and reasoning (Moberg & Velasquez, 2004). A talented mentor helps the mentee become self-sufficient so that he does not always seek help from others (Lipscomb, 2013). In their study, Çolak et al. (2017) revealed that professional communication autonomy is an important predictor of job satisfaction. The limitation of academic activities (e.g. course selection, study group in the research to be conducted, communication limit with other academicians) is the biggest obstacle in developing mentees’ autonomy in the mentoring relationship and it contradicts the mentoring relationship. There are studies reporting that developmental relationship in which autonomy was

encouraged was not established between mentors and mentees (Arnett, 2002; Beech & Brockbank, 1999; Clarkson & Shaw, 1992). Schlosser and Foley (2008) concluded that there may be limitation problems due to the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship in their study, which is in line with the findings of this study. In a mentoring relationship, it is expected that the mentor will enhance the mentee's autonomy performance and motivate them to cultivate self-regulating behaviors that lead to mastery (Haines, 2003).

### **Academic Activity**

The participants stated that they would like to benefit from the experience and knowledge of their mentors during their doctorate education. It was found that while some participants appreciated their mentors' help in choosing thesis topic, conducting statistical analysis, and writing theses, some reported limited contribution of their mentors. For example, Ercan expressed his opinions as follows:

“My mentor is a person I appreciate very much in terms of human relations. But his academic contribution is limited. You are sending the thesis, or you will be at the thesis monitoring committee, or you will prepare the relevant report or prepare a seminar, I do not think that he is aware of them enough, so maybe my supervisor is the most unaware person about this subject in the jury”.

In their study, Seçkin et al. (2014) found that doctorate students had more expectations from mentoring than master's students. In another study, Milner and Bossers (2004) found that mentors' ability to guide mentees and provide feedback for them was at a moderate level. It was also reported that well-developed communication skills contributed to establishing a constructive relationship between mentors and mentees by increasing self-esteem and confidence (Heirdsfield et al., 2008). However, some studies revealed that mentors neglect and unfulfilled expectations (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Kram, 1983; Murray, 2001). The Higher Education Law (Article 22-2547) clearly defines mentors' duties as to set up office hours to meet with their mentees, to help them in necessary matters, and to guide them (YÖK [Law of Higher Education], 1981). Mentors play an important role in the education of mentees and they should provide mentees experience and knowledge that goes beyond what they can learn in a course or textbook. They model students how to conduct high-quality research, how to teach, how to write research papers, how to get funding, and how to survive in the academic life. Mentoring involves strict supervision and teaching between a scientist and his students. Mentor-mentee relationship offers a way to train new scientists and to transfer scientific standards and traditions to new generations. In addition, mentors often write recommendation letters for mentees, help them prepare their curriculum vitae, and prepare them for job interviews in order to help them work in the field of science (Resnik, 2005; Erdem, 2012).

The participants reported the importance of mentors' time allocation. Some of them agreed that their mentors spend time to check out their scientific work; however, they expressed different opinions in terms of mentors' contribution to those works. For instance, Ercan said that “actually he allocates time for me but this time is not effective in terms of contribution.” On the other hand, although they spent time together to answer Derya's questions, she expected from her mentor to spend more time for her academic work. Based on those views, it is concluded that while some mentors fulfill their duties in the mentoring relationship, some do not fulfill their obligations. Seçkin et al. (2014) revealed that time allocation and guidance are two critical factors having an influence on mentoring. In his study, Lipscomb (2013) found that mentors develop professional competencies of mentees. In a similar study, Straus et al. (2009) emphasized that lack of time is an obstacle to a productive relationship by both mentors and mentees. Murray (2001) revealed that mentees were unwilling to demand time from a busy mentor. Haines (2003) and Eby and Lockwood (2005) considered lack of time and ineffective feedback as a potential trap of the mentoring relationship. In this context, there are studies in the literature reporting positive and negative opinions about time allocation in the mentoring relationships. Bashi (1991) pointed out the guidelines on the standards for the amount of time mentors and mentees should spend together, as well as the key activities that are essential. As Bashi (1991) suggested, mentoring programs should be designed based on these guidelines. The success of a mentoring relationship depends on dedicating sufficient time to discussing matters that are significant to the mentee. Although time constraints, inadequate guidance, and a lack of information sharing can exist, a mentor-mentee relationship can still be formed, but these challenges may result in difficulties for the relationship.

The participants also mentioned co-authorship issue as one of the ethical problems. They stated the determination of authorship order is influenced by academic culture and the potential for the mentor to advance in their career. However, some of the participants revealed that their mentor was fair and did not neglect mentees'

effort in academic work. Actually, based on the participants' opinions, it is clear that they are not aware of how to determine authorship order. Oğuz (1999) explains this order as follows:

“The first author in the manuscript is the one who poses the research question. The most important part of the scientific research is to reveal the problem worth researching. Sometimes, the person who raised the research question is not the one who writes hypothesis. In this case, the person who writes the hypothesis is the second author. The third one the one who identifies how to test the hypothesis, in other words who designs the research method. The other names are placed based on the rate of their contribution to the study. Merely engaging in the typical and routine practices of a professional does not automatically confer the right to be listed as an author.”

In addition, Yılmaz (2012) reported unethical authorship order in published scientific works. One of the most prevalent ethical dilemmas in the world pertains to the violation of authorship rights. The same issue was reported in Turkey by Higher Education Council in 2006. Ruacan (2005) stated that, for whatever purpose, including individuals who are not entitled to authorship among the authors does not align with the principles of scientific ethics and fairness. Malone (1998) considered decision about authorship order as a possible conflict among contributors and suggested that in order to minimize the potential disagreement, authorship issues should be addressed as early as possible in the research process and reviewed as the work progresses.

The influence of mentoring in optimizing career development cannot be ignored. In a mentoring relationship, boundaries should not be excessively lax, as they may lead to misunderstandings, nor too rigid, as they can limit the connection between the mentor and the mentee. Furthermore, if there is confusion or misinterpretation regarding the nature of mentoring, it may hinder the development of an effective mentoring relationship (Benishek et al., 2004).

Such an assessment will likely include a discussion of the diversity elements that exist in the relationship and environment, including but not limited to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and age. Differences must be discovered and considered rather than undervalued and ignored. When mentors acknowledge and respect these differences, it facilitates the mentee's growth, as it enables them to cultivate their professional skills in accordance with a universal value system, rather than solely adopting the mentor's cultural perspective (Benishek et al., 2004).

As one of the most important cornerstones of scientific and academic life, ethics should be studied, considered, and taught (Ruacan, 2005). Overall, the ethical standards that are expected in a mentoring relationship involve respecting autonomy, refraining from causing harm, promoting the welfare of others, and acting with fairness. When making decisions, we should prioritize what we would choose for ourselves, our loved ones, and everyone else in identical circumstances, while also taking ethical principles into account. Moreover, if our decision could potentially cause harm to someone, we must strive to minimize that harm (Kitchener, 1985). As with any relationship, mentor-mentee relationships may encounter negative situations. To avoid irreparable damage to the relationship, preventive measures should be taken, or, if necessary, a different mentor should be considered.

Mentor-mentee relationships are established for various purposes and may encounter ethical violations or dilemmas. Decisions should be applicable in a broad sense and should be aligned with regulations, ethics, and respect. Principles such as competence and merit, which are based on national and universal values, should be prioritized. Furthermore, the establishment of mentor-mentee relationships should be guided not only by formality but also by sensitivity towards individual needs and feelings.

### **Limitations**

As the research was conducted with qualitative research method, it is not possible to generalize the results. Generalizability of findings is limited with the nature of the participants

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### **Statements of Publication Ethics**

This research was approved by the Firat University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee with the decision dated 22.05.2020 and numbered 11/16.

**Researchers' Contribution Rate**

Authors	Literature review	Method	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Results	Conclusion
Author 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Author2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Author 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Conflict of Interest**

This study does not have any conflicts of interest.

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