

# Chapter 10

## Developing a Rubric to Evaluate the Dissertations Conducted in the Fields of Educational and Social Sciences

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to develop a rubric to evaluate the dissertations implemented in the fields of educational and social sciences. In the development of this rubric, the acquisition requirements concerning knowledge, skills, and competence at the doctorate level in the European and Turkish qualifications frameworks, the legal framework of Turkish higher education, and the perceptions of 12 experts in the fields of educational and social sciences concerning the common competences of the dissertations were considered. The rubric can contribute to the evaluation of dissertations completed in the field of educational and social sciences concerning these dimensions and provide PhD students, researchers, and academics with a guide to evaluate their academic studies based on an empirical instrument.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-6086-3.ch010

## **INTRODUCTION**

A Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) dissertation is the final and highest educational outcome in higher education. Hall (1991) indicated that the academic significance of a discipline depends on the quality of doctorate studies, in which Ph.D. dissertations are seen as important tools for a discipline to improve academically. Briefly, Ph.D. dissertation demonstrates its author's technical, analytical, and writing skills (Lovitts, 2005). The doctorate level is the highest qualification level in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF), which refers to level 8 and usually requires four years of study, mostly as a period of research. Ph.D. holders are expected to confirm their advanced knowledge, skills, and competencies in their dissertations according to their qualification level description (EQF, 2015; TQF, 2016). Besides, national authorities can take additional measurements to improve the quality of the doctorate programs and Ph.D. dissertations. For example, the Turkish Graduate Education Regulation (TGER) in 2016 emphasizes that the Ph.D. holders in Türkiye are required to meet one of the conditions, namely bringing innovation to science, developing a new scientific method or implementing a known method to another field (TGER, 2016). In this regard, they are expected to contribute to the literature or the application through their dissertations. They are important scientific studies with findings, implications, and suggestions attracting various researchers, policymakers, and academics.

Several questions appear in the evaluation of a dissertation: what determines a basic dissertation with minimum requirements? Who decides what characteristics it should have? These are the critical questions, which should be considered in the evaluation of Ph.D. dissertations. In particular, although countries have different higher education systems and regulations, most universities have issued some general or specific guidelines on quality and standards for Ph.D. dissertations evaluations regardless of the locations. For instance, properties like originality, sound methods, significant contribution to knowledge, and publishable results are common worldwide criteria (Kyvik & Thune, 2015).

While the TGER establishes a standard framework for evaluating Ph.D. dissertations in Türkiye, each university in Türkiye has its own regulations for Ph.D. dissertations processes, regardless of the academic field. The dissertation jury consists of five members: three faculty members, including the student's dissertation supervisor, and at least two representatives from other higher education institutions. Moreover, evaluation processes might differ according to the students' and supervisors' characteristics, experiences, and relations. Hence, it is not possible to say that they have particular criteria to evaluate dissertations in Türkiye. For that reason, this study tries to fill this gap in the literature by developing a rubric through which jury members, academics, researchers and doctoral students can evaluate the dissertations conducted in the fields of educational and social sciences. Furthermore, the dimensions in the rubric can provide them with a profound and comprehensive idea about the quality of the Ph.D. dissertations.

Developing a rubric to evaluate Ph.D. dissertations conducted in the fields of educational and social sciences based on the doctorate qualifications, based on knowledge, skills, and competencies descriptors can contribute to the literature. Regarding this, qualification descriptors of the EQF and TQF were used, providing a comprehensive overview of the quality of doctorate programs and Ph.D. dissertations in European countries and Türkiye for the possible acquiring learning outcomes during their studies. In this regard, universities in both Türkiye and European countries might use the newly developed rubric by this study as a reference source to evaluate the quality of Ph.D. dissertations.

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