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WHAT DO POSTGRADUATES KNOW ABOUT KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN TURKEY?

Ömür Yaşar Saatçıoğlu (a)*, Esra Baran (a), İlke Sezin Ayaz (a, b), Abdullah Açık (a)
*Corresponding author

(a) Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir, 35160, Turkey, yasar.saatci@deu.edu.tr
(b) Bursa Technical University, Bursa, 16330, Turkey

Abstract

Knowledge management is a multidisciplinary approach for all processes related to the production, distribution, evaluation and effective use of knowledge in the direction of the organizations' objectives. The concept of knowledge management is important in terms of countries and organizations in order to catch information age. One of the most important actors in the development of the concept of knowledge management are universities as centers of academic studies. From this point of view, this study aims to provide a general evaluation and categorization of postgraduate theses on knowledge management in Turkey. In order to reach the aim of the research, the years, levels, languages, supervisors, universities, institutes, departments, subjects, methods and application sectors of the postgraduate theses were examined by content analysis. According to the findings of the research, the majority of the theses were carried out in the department of business administration and in the field of social sciences. As a research method it was found that, commonly quantitative methods were used in the theses and the survey method was applied mostly. Majority of the theses applied their research in the educational field. As a conclusion it was observed that the scope of the postgraduate researches related to knowledge management are widening to different research areas but not deepening.

Keywords: Knowledge management, postgraduate thesis, National Theses Center, content analysis.

1. Introduction

The organizations in the twenty first century have faced with having to cope with overflow of data, information and knowledge, within an increasing complex and diverse global environment that have never encountered. Many studies suggested that knowledge is an important resource that organizations should use to generate and sustain the business value (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Therefore, in recent years knowledge management (KM) has received increased attention from academics and practitioners (Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006).

Knowledge management contains a variety of applications that are used in organizations to identify, represent, distribute and enable embracement of insights and experiences. These insights and experiences contain knowledge, either embodied in individuals or embedded in organizational processes or practice (Tsai & Yang, 2010). Holsapple and Wu (2008) have indicated that KM is a field in its own right. Also, it provides an integrative context for explaining interactions between individuals, teams, organizations, systems and their enclosing environment across disciplines as accounting, marketing, human resources, strategic management, operations management and information systems.

Since its establishment in 1991, KM includes the subjects in the fields of business administration, information systems, management, and library and information sciences (Alavi & Leidner, 1999). But more recently, other fields such as information and media, computer science, public health, and public policy have started to contribute KM researches. With the rapid growth of knowledge economy, knowledge management has gradually developed into an independent academic field. Thereby a large number of researchers have begun to examine knowledge management (Ma & Yu, 2010).

As a developing country, it is very important for Turkey to understand the importance of knowledge management and realize that knowledge management is not a temporary trend. It is important that organizations should have a clear and understandable vision of knowledge management. It is also known that knowledge management practices contribute positively to the performance of both organizations and individuals. Zaim (2010) stated that the movement of knowledge management in Turkey is in its "infancy period", but the future is more optimistic. In addition, the same study revealed that the companies in Turkey have significant deficiencies in their knowledge management practices.

The interest in knowledge management in Turkey has gained importance especially in recent years and several studies related to the topic have been published (Barutçugil, 2002; Akgün & Keskin, 2003; Çapar, 2003; Aktan & Vural, 2005; Celep & Çetin, 2005; Güçlü & Sotirofski, 2006; Sağsan, 2007; Çakar, Yildiz, & Dur, 2010; Zaim, 2010). However, the number of studies on knowledge management in Turkey is limited. Knowledge management field should be continuously investigated to recognize the new research gaps. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the current research trends, with this study, it is aimed to determine the current research trends and interests in postgraduate theses related to knowledge management and also it is expected that this study will contribute future researches by presenting a general framework of existing studies.

2. Literature Review

Research in the field of knowledge management has received increased attention within the last decade. Guo and Sheffield (2008) analyzed a total of 160 KM articles that are published in ten top-tier information systems and management journals. The period covers the years between 2000 and 2004. Analysis of all articles by research method shows that sample survey occurs most frequently, followed by field study, theory building, and literature review. Ma and Yu (2010) implemented citation and co-citation analysis to explore the research paradigms of knowledge management studies between 1998 and 2007. They also subdivided this period to 1998-2002 and 2003-2007. According to the results essential of knowledge management, knowledge-based theory on organization and innovation, and organizational learning subjects are the three factors extracted from period 1. Three factors of second period are strategy of knowledge management, organizational learning, and knowledge-based theory on innovation and organization. The research conducted by Tsai and Yang (2010) has accessed the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) on Web of Science created by ISL. The result they reached is summarizing those 1393 paper indexes which title are "Knowledge management" from 1989 to 2009. The top three ranking of research domains they found are management (459 record counts, 32.95%), following by the information science and library science (366 record counts, 26.271%), computer science and information systems (270 record counts, 19.38%).

Dwivedi, Venkitachalam, Sharif, Al-Karaghouli and Weerakkody (2011) employed a combination of bibliometric analysis, historical analysis and meta-analysis as a means of categorizing accumulated knowledge on KM research to define the landscape of trends in knowledge management. They analyzed 1043 articles appearing across 385 different peer-reviewed journals. The period covers the years between 1974 and 2008. According to their results, KM Systems related topics followed by KM Environment Issues were the most widely published areas, positivist and empirical approaches were the most widely employed approaches and lastly multi-method approach was the most dominant research method applied by KM authors with in the period they studied. Wallace, Van Fleet and Downs (2011) identified twenty source journals, the full text of all articles published for three-year period 2006 through 2008 were analyzed. 3037 articles were identified and 630 of these articles were judged to be about knowledge management topics. The texts of 630 knowledge management articles were analyzed to determine the answer of what research methodologies are used in the knowledge management literature. It was found that 27% of the articles used case study, 17% of the articles used survey and 15% of the articles used literature review. Then framework and interview methods followed these methodology types.

Lee and Chen (2012) tried to explore the development of the KM discipline. They have tried to map the structure of the KM field to visualize the current research trends. They analyzed KM researches published from 1995 to 2010 with a total number of 10974 papers. To obtain dynamic review of the evolution of KM research trends, they subdivided the publications into three time periods: 1995-2000, 2001-2005 and 2006-2010. They also applied factor analysis to subjects and twenty top-ranked factors are selected as the representative sub-areas of KM. According to the results ontology, concept map, computer-supported cooperative work and knowledge creation subjects are the top four subjects for the period 1. Contextual reasoning, knowledge integration, firm resources and software engineering subjects are top four

subjects for the period 2. Organizational intelligence, software engineering, knowledge management model and multi-agent subjects are the top four subjects for the period 3.

Qiu and Lv (2014) presented a bibliometric analysis of scientific output of the knowledge management (KM) research trends from 1993 to 2012 in Web of Science (WOS). All the 12,925 publications of KM research for the past two decades were analyzed. They discovered five research sights on KM research that are as follows respectively: management science, computer science, information science, business, and engineering. Kokol, Žlahtič, Žlahtič, Zorman and Podgorelec (2015) analyzed research trends in knowledge management studies. They chose Scopus database to make their research. The search keyword string used was "knowledge management" AND "organization". Search was performed in information source titles, abstracts, and keywords. All types of information sources written in English in the period 1977–2014 were included in the corpus. The research in knowledge management in organizations is mostly focused on respectively computer science, business, management, accounting, engineering, decision sciences and social science and also a bit surprisingly with health related research subjects.

Another study that was implemented by Akhavan, Ebrahim, Fetrati and Pezeshkan (2016) tried to identify active research areas in knowledge management. They collected their data from the ''Web of Science Core Collection''. They based their final search on this inclusive set of keywords which resulted in in a sample of 3198 articles which provides an overview of the knowledge management literature from 1980 through 2014. According to their results research subject trends in knowledge management literature are business & economics, information science & library science, computer science, operations research & management science, engineering, psychology. They have witnessed the dominance of business and economics subject in recent years.

3. Methodology

Content analysis; is a technique used to characterize and categorize content, information, or symbols found in written documents and documents, interview dossiers, or other records in a systematic way. Furthermore, this technique allows further analysis to be made of the obtained data (Altınışık, Coşkun, Bayraktaroğlu, & Yıldırım, 2007; Neuman, 2013). During the implementation phase, a set of verbal materials (eg, books, newspapers, articles, journals, etc.) must be identified and a system for recording specific aspects of the content should be established. After the analysis of systematically recorded data, they findings are usually presented by using graphics, tables or charts (Neuman, 2013, p. 49).

Content analysis method was used in this study by using secondary data sources. The data set of the research was accessed from the National Thesis Center on the web site of the Higher Education Council until October 13,2017. The word 'knowledge management' was used as the keyword in English and Turkish. A total of 137 open accessed postgraduate theses were included in the research, assuming that the National Thesis Center covers all of the postgraduate theses on knowledge in universities in Turkey and that all the theses are all recorded electronically and accurately. The obtained data were categorized by entering Excel to analyze the content.

4. Findings of the Study

As Table 1 showed that, among the 137 studies examined in this study 101 were masters and 36 were doctoral studies. The highest number of theses completed in the year of 2006 and also the theses on knowledge management reached their peak through the period from 2006 to 2010. Besides, table illustrated that most frequently used language is Turkish in the theses.

Table 01. Language and Levels of Theses According to Years

Year	Language		Level of Thesis		Total
	Turkish	**English**	**Master**	**PhD**	
1999	2	-	2	-	**2**
2002	1	-	-	1	**1**
2003	3	-	2	1	**3**
2004	5	1	4	2	**6**
2005	7	2	8	1	**9**
2006	17	1	16	2	**18**
2007	10	1	6	5	**11**
2008	10	2	10	2	**12**
2009	13	1	11	3	**14**
2010	11	-	9	2	**11**
2011	3	2	3	2	**5**
2012	7	2	5	4	**9**
2013	9	-	4	5	**9**
2014	5	3	7	1	**8**
2015	11	-	8	3	**11**
2016	5	-	4	1	**5**
2017	3	-	2	1	**3**
TOTAL	**122**	**15**	**101**	**36**	**137**

According to Table 2, most popular supervisor group was "Professor Doctors" with 35,8 %. This group was closely followed by "Associate Professor Doctors" with 34,3%.

Table 02. Distribution of Theses According to Supervisor

Supervisor	Master	PhD	Number of Thesis	%
Prof. Dr.	34	15	49	35,8%
Assoc. Prof. Dr.	21	11	32	23,4%
Asst. Prof. Dr.	40	7	47	34,3%
Dr.	1	-	1	0,7%
Prof. Dr. & Prof. Dr.	1	-	1	0,7%
Prof. Dr. & Assoc. Prof. Dr.	-	2	2	1,5%
Prof. Dr. & Asst. Prof. Dr.	1	-	1	0,7%
Prof. Dr. & Dr.	1	-	1	0,7%
Assoc. Prof. Dr. & Assoc. Prof. Dr.	1	-	1	0,7%
Assoc. Prof. Dr. & Asst. Prof. Dr.	-	1	1	0,7%
Asst. Prof. Dr.& Asst. Prof. Dr.	1	-	1	0,7%

Table 3 shows the leading universities where the knowledge management studies conducted in Turkey. According to the Table 3, the majority of the theses conducted in Marmara University (13,1%), which was followed by Beykent University, Dokuz Eylül University, Middle East Technical University and Selçuk University with a percentage of 4,4%.

Table 03. Distribution of Theses According to University

University	Number of Thesis	%
Marmara University	18	13,1%
Beykent University	6	4,4%
Dokuz Eylül University	6	4,4%
Middle East Technical University	6	4,4%
Selçuk University	6	4,4%
Afyon Kocatepe University	5	3,6%
Ankara University	5	3,6%
Dumlupınar University	5	3,6%
Ege University	5	3,6%
Gazi University	5	3,6%
İstanbul University	5	3,6%
İstanbul Technical University	5	3,6%
Anadolu University	4	2,9%
Hacettepe University	4	2,9%
Sakarya University	4	2,9%
Yeditepe University	4	2,9%
Abant İzzet Baysal University	3	2,2%
Bahçeşehir University	3	2,2%
Others (Less than 3)	38	27,7%

Considering the distribution of theses according to institutes, it is quite clear from Table 4 that, the social science was the institute that the most of the knowledge management theses (73%) completed in. This institute was followed by natural and applied sciences institute (15,3%). Taken together, these two institutes constituted 88,3% of all institutions where theses distributed.

Table 04. Distribution of Theses According to Institute

Institute	Master	%	PhD	%	Total	%
Social Sciences	73	53,3%	27	19,7%	100	73,0%
Natural and Applied Sciences	16	11,7%	5	3,6%	21	15,3%
Educational Sciences	4	2,9%	1	0,7%	5	3,6%
Turkic Studies	4	2,9%	-	-	4	2,9%
Informatics Institute	2	1,5%	1	0,7%	3	2,2%
Banking and Insurance	1	0,7%	1	0,7%	2	1,5%
Health Sciences	-	-	1	0,7%	1	0,7%
Strategic Research	1	0,7%	-	-	1	0,7%

Table 5 presented that, majority of the theses conducted in business, business administration, business engineering departments (38,7 %) which was followed by educational sciences (14,6%). These

two departments composed together more than half of all departments where theses distributed. Other common departments are information and document management, communication sciences and tourism management.

Table 05. Distribution of Theses According to Department

Department of	Number of Thesis	%
Business / Business Administration/ Business Engineering	53	38,7%
Educational Sciences	20	14,6%
Information and Document Management	8	5,8%
Communication Sciences	6	4,4%
Civil Engineering	6	4,4%
Tourism Management	5	3,6%
Public Relations	4	2,9%
Information Systems	3	2,2%
Industrial Engineering	3	2,2%
Journalism	3	2,2%
Architecture	3	2,2%
Information Technologies	2	1,5%
N/A	2	1,5%
Management and Organization	2	1,5%
Banking	1	0,7%
Physical Education and Sports	1	0,7%
Computer Science	1	0,7%
Science and Technology Policy Studies	1	0,7%
Labor Economics and Industrial Relations	1	0,7%
Maritime Business Administration	1	0,7%
Informatics	1	0,7%
Management of Hospital and Healthcare Institutions	1	0,7%
Public Administration	1	0,7%
Accounting and Finance	1	0,7%
Insurance	1	0,7%
Sport Education	1	0,7%
Strategy Science	1	0,7%
Textile Engineering	1	0,7%
International Relations	1	0,7%
Distance Education	1	0,7%
Structural Engineering	1	0,7%

In terms of research subject involved in the knowledge management dissertations, business (31,4%) and information and document management subjects (27,7%) ranking in the first and second (Table 6). These two research subjects were followed by civil engineering (4,4) banking and science and technology (2,9%).

Table 06. Distribution of Thesis According to Research Subject

Research Subject	Number of Thesis	%
Business	43	31,4%
Information and Document Management	38	27,7%
Education and Training	18	13,1%
Civil Engineering	6	4,4%
Banking	4	2,9%
Science and Technology	4	2,9%
Communication Sciences	4	2,9%
Tourism	3	2,2%
Archive	2	1,5%
Industry and Industrial Engineering	2	1,5%
Journalism	2	1,5%
Public Relations	2	1,5%
Public Administration	2	1,5%
Architecture	2	1,5%
Marine	1	0,7%
Economy	1	0,7%
Health Facilities Administration	1	0,7%
Insurance	1	0,7%
Textile and Textile Engineering	1	0,7%

Table 7 presents the number and percentages of the research methods used in the theses. According to the Table 7, 70,1% of the theses used quantitative research method, 23,4% of the theses used qualitative method and 6,6% of them used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The majority of the quantitative studies included survey method (69,3%). Most of the qualitative studies included case study (8%) followed by literature review (7,3%).

Table 07. Distribution of Theses According to Research Method

Research Method	Master	%	PhD	%	Total	%
Quantitative	69	50,4%	27	19,7%	96	70,1%
Qualitative	27	19,7%	5	3,6%	32	23,4%
Qualitative+ Quantitative	5	3,6%	4	2,9%	9	6,6%
Detailed Research Method	**Master**		**PhD**		**Total**	**%**
Survey	68	49,6%	27	19,7%	95	69,3%
Case Study	8	5,8%	3	2,2%	11	8,0%
Literature Review	10	7,3%	-	-	10	7,3%
Interview	6	4,4%	-	-	6	4,4%
Interview+ Survey	2	1,5%	3	2,2%	5	3,6%
Model Development	2	1,5%	-	-	2	1,5%
Content Analysis	1	0,7%	-	-	1	0,7%
Focus Group	-	-	1	0,7%	1	0,7%
Observation	1	0,7%	-	-	1	0,7%
Case Study + Data Analysis	1	0,7%	-	-	1	0,7%
Case Study + Model Analysis	1	0,7%	-	-	1	0,7%
Case Study + Survey	1	0,7%	-	-	1	0,7%

Case Study+ Delphi	-	-	1	0,7%	1	0,7%
Interview+ Focus Group + Survey + Document Analysis+ Observation	-	-	1	0,7%	1	0,7%

In the knowledge management theses, there were so many different fields of application and sector. As illustrated in Table 8, the most frequently used application field or sector is education (21,9%), followed by construction and public institutions (7,3%). Banking, small and medium enterprises and tourism and hotels are other frequently used application fields and sectors.

Table 08. Distribution of Theses According to Field of Application

Field of Application / Sector	Number of Thesis	%
Education	30	21,9%
Construction	10	7,3%
Public Institutions	10	7,3%
N/A	9	6,6%
Banking	8	5,8%
Small and Medium Size Enterprises	7	5,1%
Tourism and Hotels	7	5,1%
Large Scale Enterprises	5	3,6%
Manufacturing	5	3,6%
Automotive	4	2,9%
Electronic	4	2,9%
IT	4	2,9%
Private Enterprises	4	2,9%
Public + Private Institutions	3	2,2%
Health	3	2,2%
Architecture	2	1,5%
Communication	2	1,5%
Logistics	2	1,5%
Media and Press	2	1,5%
Military and Defense Industry	2	1,5%
Accounting	1	0,7%
R & D Enterprises	1	0,7%
Finance	1	0,7%
Ship Construction	1	0,7%
Service	1	0,7%
International Enterprises	1	0,7%
Knowledge Worker	1	0,7%
Museums	1	0,7%
Non-Governmental Organizations	1	0,7%
Insurance	1	0,7%
Sports Federation	1	0,7%
Technology	1	0,7%
Textile	1	0,7%
Virtual Enterprises	1	0,7%

In the Table 9 the frequencies of keywords, which are repeated more than two times, are presented. In terms of keywords/ indexes involved in the knowledge management dissertations, "knowledge management" (69,3%) and "knowledge" (25,5%) keywords ranking the first and second in the Table 9. These two key words were followed by "knowledge management systems" and "management" (19,7%), "Educational Administration" (9,5%) and "performance" (8,0 %) were other frequently mentioned key words.

Table 09. Keywords Frequencies

Keywords / Indexes	Frequencies	%
Knowledge Management	95	69,3%
Knowledge	35	25,5%
Knowledge Management Systems	27	19,7%
Management	27	19,7%
Educational Administration	13	9,5%
Performance	11	8,0%
Learning Organizations	9	6,6%
Communication	7	5,1%
Leadership	7	5,1%
Managers	7	5,1%
School administrators	7	5,1%
Businesses	7	5,1%
IT	6	4,4%
Culture	6	4,4%
Sufficiency	6	4,4%
Intellectual Capital	5	3,6%
Knowledge Sharing	4	2,9%
Knowledge Production	4	2,9%
Supply Chain Management	4	2,9%
Information System	4	2,9%
Human Resources	4	2,9%
Innovation	4	2,9%
Document Management	3	2,2%
Organizational Knowledge	3	2,2%
Strategic Management	3	2,2%
Strategy	3	2,2%

Categorization of Keywords in Knowledge Management Theses are shown in Figure 1.
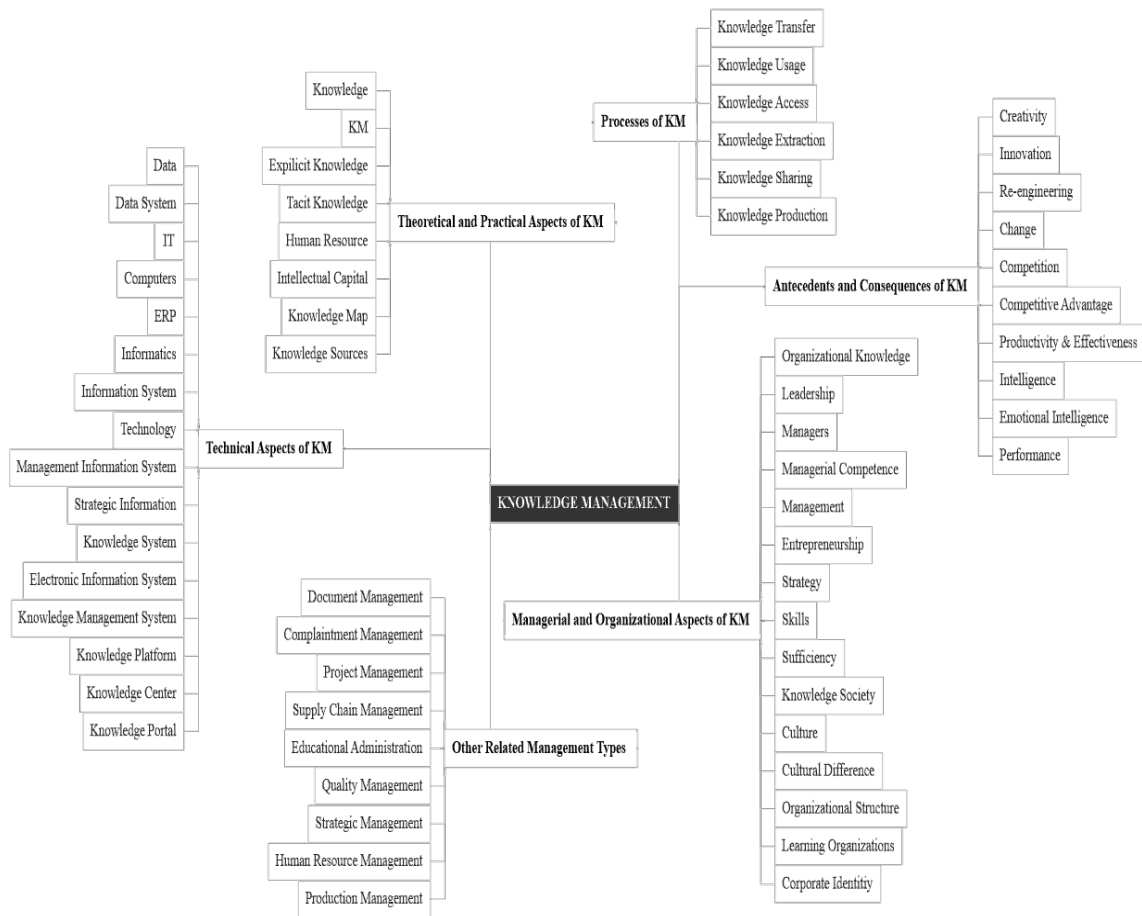
Figure 01. Categorization of Keywords in Knowledge Management Theses. **Source:** Adapted from Sedighi and Jalalimanesh (2017).

5. Conclusion and Discussions

According to the findings, it was found out that the theses on the knowledge management in Turkey were mostly written in Turkish and in Marmara University. Most of the theses had been completed between the years of 2006 and 2010. Most of the theses were completed at the Institute of Social Sciences and Natural and Applied Sciences in the departments of Business, Business Administration, Business Engineering, Educational Sciences, Information and Document Management. When the application areas of theses are investigated it was observed that most of the theses were conducted in 'education', 'construction' 'public institutions', 'banking' 'SMEs' and 'tourism' sectors respectively.

In terms of research methods, similar with the study of Guo and Sheffield (2008) the survey was the dominant method used in the investigated theses. In another study conducted by Wallace et al. (2011), case study, survey, literature review, and interview were most frequently used methods in respectively. This study's findings have similarities with the study of Wallace et al. (2011), only the ranking of the survey and case study were interchanged.

As Ma and Yu (2010) emphasized that knowledge management, organizational learning, and innovation are the important factors in the knowledge management studies, the similar concepts were

encountered in the keywords of the investigated theses. In addition, the keywords of 'management' and 'information system' were mentioned by Yang (Tsai & Yang, 2010) as key research domains.

Kokol et al. (2015) stated that the KM researches were mostly focused on, business, management, accounting, engineering, social science and health related research subjects. And also, Qiu and Lv (2014) discovered management science, information science, business, and engineering research insights. By the examination of the theses in terms of institute, department, research topic and research methods, it was seen that this study's results intercepted partially with the results of the Kokol et al.'s and Qui and Lv's studies. Finally, in terms of research subjects the findings showed that "business" subject is clearly dominant as found in the results of Akhavan et al (2016)'s study.

The biggest limitation of the research is the existence of non-opened access theses in the National Thesis Center. It is not possible to reach some information because the entries in the summary sections of non-accessible theses were not enough and detailed. Therefore, total 55 non-opened access theses were not included in this research. Another limitation of the study is related to conceptual confusion. Frequently "knowledge" word is used as "information" in Turkish or vice versa. So, the theses related to information system and management were not included in this study.

When the recent status of the theses was analyzed, it can be seen that postgraduates' attention to the knowledge management subject has increased and knowledge management theses have been carried out in many sectors even though the number of theses were very limited. To summarize, it was seen that the scope of the studies related to knowledge management is widening to number of different research areas but not deepening. Knowledge management is a significantly crucial concept for all sectors. For further studies, it is suggested that theses can be dealt with in a more depth manner for being useful for the managerial and sectoral implications.

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