

A Metaphorical Approach: How are the Concepts of Principal, Inspector and Curriculum Perceived?

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Abstract

The proper and thorough functioning of the education process is based on the cooperation of the elements in education. Among the elements that should cooperate and act in harmony are teachers, school administrators and experts in educational management and supervision. Further, a curriculum is needed for the education process to proceed in a planned manner. This study aims to explore the metaphorical perceptions of teachers concerning the concepts of principal, inspector and curriculum. A qualitative research design was adopted in this study. The study group was formed through convenience and purposive sampling methods, and the study was conducted with 25 primary school teachers working in Northern Cyprus. A two-stage form was used to identify the metaphorical perceptions of the teachers. The collected data were analysed through content analysis method. They considered principals as the leader and manager of the school they worked in while stressing moderate or rigid attitudes of certain principals. Associations related to the concept of inspector were mostly about guidance; however, they also mentioned the negative characteristics of the inspectors they encountered regarding human relations. Finally, the concept of curriculum was perceived as a guiding adviser and as having a difficult, complex and restrictive structure. In the light of the results, it is recommended that principals be supported as regards human relations, managing relationships and communication, benefiting from guidance services in this regard. In the light of the results, it is recommended that principals and inspectors be supported as regards human relations, managing relationships and communication, benefiting from guidance services in this regard. Teachers are primary practitioners of the curriculum, and attempting to implement a challenging curriculum will reduce the efficiency and quality of education.

Keywords: Metaphor, Perception, Principal, Inspector, Curriculum.

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Introduction

Thoughts about objects, events, concepts and situations can be conveyed in various ways. One of these ways is the use of metaphors. Metaphors are defined as the meanings that humans create by filtering the real-world events in their minds (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008). Accepted also as a kind of analogy and explanation, metaphors are the expression of unknown things through the things we know (Perry & Cooper, 2001).

The process that emerges with the use of metaphors is called metaphoric thinking. This process comprises three stages. The first stage encompasses any abstract phenomenon, concept, event or situation that is intended to be explained or interpreted. In the second stage, concrete linguistic expressions are used to explain this phenomenon. The final stage includes the equivalence established between these two phenomena (Sezer, 2003).

Metaphors can help us express our ideas more easily on issues we are afraid to talk about or subjects that are difficult to talk about (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Metaphors are also a modelling mechanism for individuals to understand and make sense of their own world (Arslan & Bayrakçı, 2006). Furthermore, metaphor is a language event that occurs as a result of transferring the name of one to the other by establishing an analogy between two things with distant or close interest (Aksan, 1999). In addition, metaphors are important because they are a way of perceiving, seeing and understanding the world (Girmen, 2007).

Several topics, facts or concepts are difficult to talk about in educational management. As researchers, we think that we can take the opinions of the participants about issues that can be difficult to explain by using metaphors and we can reveal problem situations with an in-depth analysis. In this study, the focus was on the concepts of principal, inspector and curriculum, which are all included in the field of educational management and supervision.

In the field of educational management and supervision, the concepts of principal, inspector and curriculum are important, as they are interrelated concepts that complement each other. Whereas the principal deals with the educational system at the micro level, the inspector deals with it at the macro level (Bursalıoğlu, 1994). While the inspector conducts audits within the current education system, the principal maintains educational management in schools, which are the most important part of this system. On top of the issues that are subject to inspection and evaluation are the teaching programmes, also known as curriculum.

This study aims to explore the metaphorical perceptions of teachers as regards the concepts of principal, inspector and curriculum.

The Significance of the Study

Education is the most fundamental process in the development and improvement of societies. The higher the quality and efficiency of this process, the more investment is made towards the development of the people and society. The proper and thorough functioning of the education process is based on the cooperation of the elements in education. Among the elements that should cooperate and act in harmony are teachers, school administrators and experts in educational management and supervision. Further, a curriculum is required for the education process to proceed in a planned manner. The proper functioning of the process is important at all levels of education. It is a well-known fact that the first years of life form the basis for the following years. The importance of the first years cannot be denied in education, as in every field. Children with basic social skills through preschool education are able to prepare for primary education and acquire basic academic skills during their primary school years. In these years, many factors such as the teacher's approach towards the child and his or her teaching skills, the decisions of the school administrators on education, the curriculum to cover, the structuring of the curriculum and the proper functioning of the control mechanisms can affect the education process and the child, directly or indirectly. In this context, it is important to understand how teachers perceive the concepts related to educational management and supervision to evaluate and determine the process and the negative situations experienced within the process.

Method

Model

This study is a qualitative study structured according to the phenomenological pattern. Studies conducted with phenomenological pattern determine the participants' experiences and interpretations related to a given phenomenon. The important aspect of such studies is to reveal the viewpoints and perspectives people involved in the study on a given phenomenon. In phenomenological studies, the researcher attempts to form the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspective of participants (Richards & Morse, 2007). The researcher makes interpretations regarding the participants' experiences and elucidates the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2008).

Study Group

The study group was formed using the convenience-sampling method, which is a non-random sampling method, and the study was conducted with 25 primary school teachers working in Northern Cyprus, of which 15 were females and 10 were males. Two of the participants had 1–5 years of work experience, one had 6–10 years, three had 11–15 years, nine had 16–20 years and ten had 21 years or more. While five of the teachers underwent an inspection in the previous year, 20 did not. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the teachers in the study

Gender		Age Range					
		21–30	31–40	41–50	51–60		
Female	15	2	7	6	-		
Male	10	1	2	5	2		
Gender		Educational Background					
		Undergraduate Degree	Master's Degree	PhD Degree	Academy		
Female	15	10	1	-	4		
Male	10	7	3	-	-		
Gender		Term of employment in the present school					
		0–2 years	3–5 years	6–8 years	9–11 years	12–14 years	15 years or above
Female	15	3	2	1	2	5	
Male	10	1	2	-	-	3	4

Data Collection Tool and Data Collection

The data collection tool of this study was a form developed by the researchers, which was similar to the tools used commonly in metaphorical studies. A two-stage form for each concept was used to determine the participants' metaphorical perceptions about the concepts of principal, inspector and curriculum. The form that was distributed to the teachers included expressions such as 'A principal is like ... because ...'; 'An inspector is like ... because ...' and 'A curriculum is like ... because ...'. The teachers were required to fill in the blanks. The data collection took 5 minutes on average for each teacher.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed through content analysis. The analysis was made in three stages. In the first stage, we transferred the participants' responses to an electronic environment and then sorted the data. We checked whether the participants had created metaphors related to the concepts provided to them and whether they had filled in the segment that started with 'because'. If a participant did not respond to one or both, his or her responses were not taken into consideration. The responses of eight teachers who had not met this criteria were excluded from the analysis.

After data sorting, we listed the metaphors and identified the salient metaphors. Next, we grouped the metaphors with similar characteristics under relevant categories. Some of the teachers in the study created multiple metaphors. We evaluated all the metaphors regardless of the quantity.

In the final stage of the analysis, we measured reliability and validity. In this context, we also referred to expert opinion. The expert reviewed the analysis independently from the researchers and made an evaluation. The formula by Miles and Huberman

($r_{M\&H} = \frac{\text{Number of Agreements}}{\text{Number of Agreements} + \text{Number of Disagreements}}$) was used to measure reliability. The analysis

($r_{M\&H} = \frac{58}{58+9}$) revealed that the interrater reliability rate was 86%, indicating that this study is reliable

(Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, the methods involved in the data collection and analysis have been clearly expressed in this study through coding, which inserted direct quotations at certain parts, and the objectivity has been maintained throughout the study.

Results

This section presents the metaphors created by the teachers related to the concepts of principal, inspector and curriculum. The metaphors created by teachers related to the concept of principal are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The metaphors of the primary school teachers about the concept of principal

Metaphor	f	%	Metaphor	f	%	Metaphor	f	%
Leader	6	22.2	Boss	2	7.4	Shepherd	1	3.7
Mother	3	11.1	Train locomotive	1	3.7	Scented plant	1	3.7
Elder sister	3	11.1	Dictator	1	3.7	Ambitious	1	3.7
Sibling	2	7.4	Conductor	1	3.7	Hardworking	1	3.7
Administrator	2	7.4	Friend and fellow	1	3.7	Manager	1	3.7
Total							27	100

The primary school teachers created 27 metaphors about the concept of principal, which are as follows: leader (n=6), administrator (n=2), conductor (n=1), friend and fellow (n=1), shepherd (n=1), train locomotive (n=1), dictator (n=1), mother (n=3), elder sister (n=3), sibling (n=2), boss (n=2), scented plant (n=1), ambitious (n=1), hardworking (n=1) and manager (n=1). The most salient metaphor was that of leader (n=6).

The metaphors teachers created about the concept of principal were categorised based on their similarity under four headings. The categories and the metaphors under each category are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The categories of the metaphors created by the primary school teachers about the concept of principal

Leading	f	Family members	f	Administration	f	Other	f
Leader	6	Mother	3	Dictator	1	Friend/fellow	1
Conductor	1	Elder sister	3	Shepherd	1	Hardworking	1
Train locomotive	1	Sibling	2	Boss	2	Ambitious	1
				Administrator	2	A scented plant	1
				Manager	1		
Total	8		8		7		4

It was noted that most of the categories created by primary school teachers about the concept of principal were categories under 'Leading' and 'Family Members'. Principals, in addition to their role as administrators, are considered educational leaders of their schools (Jones & Pound, 2008). Therefore, it is natural that the teachers described them as guiding advisers. Moreover, good leaders are expected to be positive role models and lead their team (Moos & Reeves, 1998). In this context,

leaders should be close to the people they work with and establish good relationships. Based on the metaphors created, it can be argued that the principals evaluated within this study were in close relationship with the teachers and were perceived as a member of their families.

“A principal is like a train locomotive because teachers, as freight cars, follow the locomotive.” (T12)

“A principal is like our mother because he/she takes care, asks and helps to the best of his/her abilities.” (T22).

In addition to being perceived as a guiding individual and a family member, the concept of principal was also associated with the concept of administrator. Some of the metaphors created by the participants were grouped under the category of ‘Administrator’. In addition to being an educational leader, the principal is also the administrator of the school. All the responses grouped under this category shed light on the characteristics that principals have as administrators.

“A principal is like a dictator because he or she has no knowledge of democracy.” (T13)

The metaphors outside of the above categories were grouped under the title of ‘Other’. These metaphors were friend and fellow, hardworking, ambitious and a scented plant.

“A principal is like a scented plant because they may change from person to person. For some it might be a sweet scent, for others, it might be unpleasant.” (T23)

The primary school teachers created various metaphors about the concept of inspector. These metaphors were inspecting (n=4), guiding (n=2), adviser (n=4), the mirror of the curriculum (n=1), guide (n=2), I do not know who he or she is (n=1), ghost (n=1), machinist (n=1), a neutral element (n=1), a robot with common software (n=1), teacher (n=1), informative (n=1), epistatic (n=1), there is or there is not (n=2), friend (n=1), invisible (n=1) and moderate (n=1). The most salient metaphors were guiding (n=4) and adviser (n=4). The metaphors created about the concept of inspector are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The metaphors of the primary school teachers about the concept of inspector

Metaphor	f	%	Metaphor	f	%	Metaphor	f	%
Inspecting	4	15.4	Ghost	1	3.8	Epistatic	1	3.8
Adviser	4	15.4	Machinist	1	3.8	The mirror of curriculum	1	3.8
Guide	2	7.7	Neutral element	1	3.8	Friend	1	3.8
Guiding	2	7.7	A robot with common software	1	3.8	Invisible	1	3.8
There is or there is not	2	7.7	Teacher	1	3.8	Moderate	1	3.8
I do not know who he or she is	1	3.8	Informative	1	3.8			

Total						26	100
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The metaphors that the primary school teachers created about the concept of inspector were grouped under four categories which are ‘Leading’, ‘Obscurity’, ‘Inspection’ and ‘Other’.

Table 5. The categories of the metaphors created by the primary school teachers about the concept of inspector

Leading	f	Obscurity	f	Inspection	f	Other	f
Guiding	2	I do not know who he or she is	1	Inspecting	4	Machinist	1
Adviser	4	Ghost	1	The mirror of the curriculum	1	A robot with common software	1
Guide	2	There is or there is not	2	Epistatic	1	Friend	1
Teacher	1	Invisible	1	Neutral element	1	Moderate	1
Informative	1						
Total	10		5		7		4

Inspectors are officials that are responsible for inspecting teachers and providing feedback to relevant individuals. Among the metaphors about the concept of inspector, it was noted that the metaphors about leading were greater in number than the other metaphors. This shows that the teachers perceived inspectors as guides rather than inspecting bodies. In other words, teachers need more guidance rather than being inspected.

“An inspector is like an adviser because they are guides for teachers.” (T5)

The number of metaphors the participants created about obscurity is noteworthy. Only five participants underwent an inspection in the previous year. Those who did not go through an inspection formed the majority group, and it was observed that some teachers expressed this by describing inspectors as people that they ‘could not see’.

“An inspector is like a ghost because I have seen only one in my teaching career.” (T11)

In addition to being perceived as an inspecting body, inspectors were also described through concepts such as friend, machinist and robot. These descriptions were grouped under ‘Other’.

“An inspector is like a machinist because they become involved in case of a breakdown.” (T12)

Primary school teachers created 23 metaphors about the concept of curriculum. These metaphors were the mirror of a teacher (n=1), a good guide (n=1), there is not (n=1), a bottomless well (n=1), dough (n=1), heavy (n=2), the rules that robots should follow (n=1), a garden surrounded by barbed wire (n=1), manager (n=2), challenging (n=1), a powder barrel (n=1), not updated for a long time (n=1), guiding (n=3), guiding light (n=3), road map (n=2) and knowledge of road (n=1). The most salient metaphors were guiding (n=3) and guiding light (n=3).

Table 6. The metaphors of the primary school teachers about the concept of curriculum

Metaphor	f	%	Metaphor	f	%	Metaphor	f	%
Guiding	3	13.0	The rules that robots should follow	1	4.3	Not updated for a long time	1	4.3
Guiding light	3	13.0	A garden surrounded by barbed wire	1	4.3	A good guide	1	4.3
Road map	2	8.7	The mirror of the teacher	1	4.3	There is not	1	4.3
Heavy	2	8.7	Challenging	1	4.3	A bottomless well	1	4.3
Manager	2	8.7	A powder barrel	1	4.3			
Dough	1	4.3	Knowledge of road	1	4.3			
Total							23	100

The metaphors created were grouped under four categories considering their characteristics. These categories were ‘Leading’, ‘Becoming Stereotyped’, ‘Challenge’ and ‘Other’.

Table 7. The categories of the metaphors created by the primary school teachers about the concept of curriculum

Leading	f	Becoming stereotyped	f	Challenge	f	Other	f
The mirror of the teacher	1	The rules that robots should follow	1	Heavy	2	Manager	2
A good guide	1	A garden surrounded by barbed wire	1	Challenging	1	There is not	1
Guiding	3	Dough	1	A bottomless well	1	Not updated for a long time	1
Guiding light	3			A powder barrel	1		
Road map	2						
Knowledge of road	1						
Total	11		3		5		4

The metaphors created in primary schools about the concept of curriculum, which describes the topics teachers will cover throughout an academic year and their order, were mostly in the category of ‘Leading’. The curriculum guides teachers on what to teach and in what order to teach them, and teachers perceive curriculum in this context.

“A curriculum is like a road map because it shows the direction of the train.” (T12)

In addition, since the curricula in schools are not flexible, there were metaphors about being stereotyped.

“A curriculum is like a garden surrounded by barbed wire because you are not allowed to walk outside, but you can walk inside.” (T20)

Lastly, some teachers touched upon the challenges of the curriculum, and others emphasised that it should be updated.

“A curriculum is challenging because it is difficult for us to cover all subjects.”

(T22)

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings showed that participants perceived the concepts included in this study positively; they mostly attributed positive characteristics to these concepts. The concept of principal, which was evaluated positively by 85% of the teachers and negatively by 15%, was associated with metaphors primarily about the concept of administration. In addition to being evaluated as leaders who direct their team and people with whom teachers can talk freely, principals are perceived as individuals who are ambitious, do not treat people equally and dictate people to do things. In other studies on perceptions about principals, the concept of principal was mostly associated with administration (Sözer & Sel, 2020; Tekel & Bayır, 2021); besides, the metaphors about principals included commander, soldier and computer (Akan, Yalçın & Yıldırım, 2014). However, other studies revealed that teacher candidates used the concepts of guiding and advising more for principals (Kösteriloğlu, 2014) and created mostly positive metaphors about principals (Zembat, Tunçeli & Akşin, 2015). Relevant studies in the literature show that while teacher candidates have positive attitudes towards principals, in-service teachers evaluate their principals based on their experiences with them. It can be said that the primary school teachers in the present study mostly had positive relationships with their principals.

Similar to the concept of principal, it was seen that the metaphors created about the concept of inspector were 77% positive and 23% negative. Although the main responsibility of inspectors was to inspect, very few people mentioned this role of the inspectors, and the metaphors about the concept of inspector were mostly about leading. Since inspectors, who are considered as authorities, possess a high level of knowledge and skills in the areas they inspect, they are expected to utilise these characteristics and identify the deficiencies of the institutions or people they inspect and help these individuals develop themselves in areas where they are inadequate (Oliva & Powels, 2001). Few teachers touched upon the moderate aspect of inspectors. Therefore, it can be said that teachers see inspectors as hard-tempered individuals. On the other hand, many teachers emphasised the absence of inspectors and all agreed that they were not around. In fact, most teachers who participated in this study argued that they were not inspected in the previous year. The perceptions towards the concept of inspector were found to be positive in a study conducted with pre-service teachers (Döş, 2010), but teachers in another study created negative metaphors on these concepts (Töremen & Döş, 2009). Our perceptions are shaped by our experiences. If the experiences of the teachers in the study about the inspectors in the previous year had been different, the findings related to this part of the study would have been different.

Finally, the metaphors created in relation to the concept of curriculum were 52% positive and 48% negative. While the emphasis on the concept of curriculum was that it reminded more of a guiding adviser, it was criticised for its difficulty, complexity and lack of flexibility and for not being up-to-date. In similar studies, the concept of curriculum was associated with concepts such as adviser and road map (Özdemir, 2012), and it was found that negative metaphors were generally created in relation to this concept (Taşdemir & Taşdemir, 2011). In this study, the negative metaphors created in relation to the concept of curriculum focused on the challenges related to the curriculum. At this point, it can be said that the teachers had difficulty in understanding the curriculum, or they had difficulties with its lack of flexibility. When developing curricula, not considering teachers' opinions, their experience and their exclusion from such studies can cause teachers to develop negative thoughts about the curriculum.

While the concepts of principal and inspector in the study are related to human concepts, a curriculum is about a non-living entity. Our perceptions about the concepts related to human beings vary according to the attitudes and behaviours of each person. While our perception towards a moderate inspector who leads us is positive, we can have negative thoughts about a principal who treats teachers differently. Therefore, our recent experiences may affect our perceptions about the concepts that we associate people with. Conversely, our thoughts about a non-living entity like curriculum can be more objective. Thus, this study found that while the concepts related to human beings had a higher rate of positive attitudes, it can be said that the reason behind the difference in opinions about the concept of curriculum was the difference between the concepts.

Recommendations

Generally, the primary school teachers presented positive metaphors regarding the concept of principal. While principals were considered the leader and manager of the school they worked at, some principals were found to have moderate or rigid attitudes. Harmony among school staff is an important element for creating a healthy school climate, which requires healthy communication. It is recommended that principals be supported as regards human relations, managing relationships and communication, benefiting from guidance services in this regard.

The teachers mostly associated the concept of inspector with guidance and perceived inspectors as guiding authorities. Moreover, they mentioned the negative characteristics of inspectors they encountered in terms of human relations. In the field of educational management and supervision, it is recommended that inspectors, who are considered competent authorities in their field of inspection, approach teachers as moderate and guiding educational leaders and guide them on developing themselves in areas where they are inadequate.

Most of the teachers in this study stated that they had not undergone any inspection in the previous year and had not noticed any inspectors around. Inspectors are one of the most important pillars of the control mechanism. The reasons why inspectors cannot visit schools frequently should be investigated, and if there is an inadequacy as to the number of inspectors, it should be resolved. Thus, it will be possible to strengthen inspection mechanisms and enhance inspection. Guidance services may be more necessary especially in the first years of the teaching profession. If inspectors meet more frequently with the stakeholders and contribute to the development of especially principals and teachers' skills by guiding them, it will positively affect the education process. In addition, there can be studies with principals investigating their work conditions, and thus, their problems can be revealed.

The concept that was evaluated most negatively in this study was curriculum. In addition to perceiving curriculum as a guide, the teachers talked about it as being difficult and complex. The main reasons for this negative attitude should be explored and determined in greater depth. Teachers are primary practitioners of the curriculum, and attempting to implement a challenging curriculum will reduce the efficiency and quality of education. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers who are one of the most important stakeholders of education be involved and have a voice in the process of curriculum development. The curriculum should not be limited to the knowledge and opinions of the commission members developing it, but it should be designed through consultation with, and evaluation among, stakeholders from the preparation phase to the implementation phase. Thus, curriculum development, in which teachers can become more active through participatory practices, will prevent teachers from experiencing the same problems or help them reduce such problems and increase the efficiency and quality of education. Another aspect of the curriculum under focus was that the curricula are not up-to-date. Considering the innovations both in our country and across the world, necessary updates should be made, problems in implementation should be addressed, and deficiencies must be eliminated.

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