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The Metaphorical Perceptions of High School Students Who Receive Psychological Counselling Services on the Concept of "Psychological Counsellor"

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to clarify high school students' conceptual metaphors about school counsellor. To collect data about the beliefs of students for counselling. In addition to find the conceptual themes about the beliefs of students among their experience. The study was carried out with 213 students attending high schools in Marmara Region of Turkey. Participants were 127 girls and 86 boys. To reveal the participating students' perceptions regarding the school counsellor, they were asked to complete the sentence "School Counsellors... (metaphor)... are like because...(why did you choose this metaphor)... The findings defined that 78 metaphors were collected in seven themes These are; sharer, developer, guide, helper, making comfortable and problem solver. The findings of this study suggest that psychological counsellors play an important role in the mental health field in schools.

Keywords

School Counsellor, Counselling, Metaphor, Metaphor Analysis

In modern societies, schools have a role in shaping the nature of adolescents (Steinberg, 2013) one of the most important elements of schools is the psychological counselling and guidance services. The concept of help that is in the centre of this unit and the most demanded one is the service of psychological counselling (Poyraz, 2007; Yüksel-Şahin, 2008). Psychological counselling involves relationship in which the needs of an individual are focused on in terms of development, adaptation, problem-solving and healthy decision-making (Egan,

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2011; Gibson & Mitchell, 2003; Gladding, 2013; Tan & Baloğlu, 2011). In this sense, the process of psychological counselling and the experiences that are lived are important.

Various techniques are utilized while carrying out the psychological counselling process. The words used by the counsees for being understood better, their non-verbal behaviours and metaphors they use to describe a situation provide significant clues about counsees. The verbal expressions and metaphors chosen by counsees constitute an important psychological counsellor strategy that makes it easier for counsees to open up (Ivey & Ivey, 1999). In this context, metaphors may be considered to be the representation of concepts that are made sense of through experience.

A metaphor is defined as a form of verbal narratives and cognitive structures that allow agreement between unique meanings and the person's cognitive system in different contexts (Angus & Rennie, 1989). Metaphors are used for determining the similarities between old information and new information, making relevant connections and materializing new information (Senemoğlu, 2007). In other words, these are considered to be a form of comprehending and understanding of the world by people (Morgan, 1998)

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stated that the conceptual system of a person is based on metaphors. When the syntax of language and words falls short in expressing the inner feelings and thoughts of individuals, these feelings and thoughts are expressed to the outer world through metaphors (Kararımak & Güloğlu, 2012; Zuniga, 1992). Metaphors carry the meaning from its current point to a higher point. Thus, new meanings are created in cognitive structures. In metaphors, there is an image that is hidden behind words waiting to be discovered (Aragno, 2009). According to Modell (2009), metaphors mediate transformation of meaning in addition to transferring meaning between different dimensions.

Studies on how psychological counsellors who work at schools are perceived mostly focused on the views of administrators, teachers and students (Altun and Camadan, 2013; Aluede and Egbochuku 2007; Ametea and Clark, 2005; Ginter, Scealise, and Presse, 1990; Meşeci, Özcan, and Bozdemir, 2007; Özabacı, 2011; Özabacı, Sakarya, and Doğan, 2008; Poyraz, 2007; Ünal and Ünal, 2010; Yüksel-Şahin, 2008). In these studies, it was reported that psychological counsellors have a significant function in the field of mental health; they have a role that strengthens the individual and a function that makes education and training environments easier to be involved in. However, such studies discuss perceptions towards psychological counsellors in a general sense. Nevertheless, psychological counselling services are in the centre of guidance services at schools. In this sense, the perceptions of students who receive psychological counselling services from the guidance service at their school on the concept of "psychological counsellor" are important. This is because, in this process, the improving power of the therapeutic relationship is revealed, and its meaning is restructured. How psychological counsellors who serve such an important function at schools are perceived by students and the student's extent of opening up are highly important in terms of volunteerism. The literature review revealed very few studies on how psychological counsellors are perceived through metaphors and what the meanings under these perceptions are. This study aims to reveal the perceptions of high school students who receive psychological counselling services on the concept of "psychological counsellor" via metaphors.

Starting with this general objective, answers were sought for the following questions:

What are the metaphors of high school students who receive psychological counselling services on the concept of "psychological counsellor"?

Under which conceptual categories are metaphors produced towards the concept of psychological counsellor collected?

Method

Participants

The data of this study were collected from the students of four different high schools located in a province in the Marmara Region of Turkey. The study included a total of 213 students including 127 female and 86 male students. 35% of the students were 9th grade, 29% were 10th grade, 24% were 11th grade and 12% were 12th grade students. The psychological counsellors at the four schools were reached, and the data were collected only from participants who received psychological counselling services and agreed to participate in the study.

Instrument

A question form was prepared as the data collection instrument. The first part of the form consisted of questions on the personal information of the participants. The form included questions on whether or not the participants previously received psychological counselling services, their duration of receiving these services and the field to which that was applied. In the last part of the form, the participants were asked to fill in the blanks in the statement “a psychological counsellor is like ... (metaphor) ..., because ... (metaphor) ...”

Data Collection

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) defined a metaphor as “understanding a concept through another.” In this study, it was aimed to reveal the metaphors with which high school students who receive counselling services define psychological counsellors.

Before collecting the data, the relevant permissions were received from the Ministry of National Education and the schools, and the psychological counsellors were informed. In order to reveal the perceptions of the participating students on the concept of “psychological counsellor”, they were asked to complete the statement “a psychological counsellor is like ..., because ...” For this purpose, each student was given a blank paper with this statement on it and asked to state their thought focusing only on one metaphor.

The term “like” in metaphor studies is usually used to more clearly associate the similarity between the topic of the metaphor and the source of the metaphor. This study also included the term “because” for the participants to produce logical reasons for the similarities that were established. Additionally, a personal information form including closed-ended questions that asked about the participants’ gender and class level. In the time given to them, the participants were asked to write down their instant reactions to the phenomenon of “psychological counsellor”. These writings were analysed as the main source of the data for the study. The researcher verbally expressed for the students that their data would be confidential. Additionally, the term metaphor was defined when necessary, and the researcher explained how the blanks in the form should be filled in. In the implementation phase, filling out the form given to the students took approximately 15-20 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data that were obtained in the study were analysed by the method of metaphor analysis, which is a form of content analysis. Metaphor analysis aims to quantitatively explain the reasons and justifications of meanings participants form based on their metaphorical perceptions (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Moser, 2000). There are six steps for processing data with metaphor analysis: 1) Naming, 2) Elimination, 3) Recollection, 4) Theme development, 5) Achievement of validity and reliability and 6) Frequency calculation and interpretation.

In the first step among these six, the metaphors created by the participants regarding psychological counsellors were alphabetically ordered. At this stage, the forms of the

participants who used the same metaphor were gathered, and the forms of two participants who did not produce any metaphors were removed from the dataset.

In the second step, an in-depth examination was made on the metaphors created by the participants and reasons for these metaphors, and 36 forms where metaphors were not used and those including inconsistent and incomplete sentences were removed from the dataset. After the stage of elimination, the remaining forms were alphabetically ordered again. Additionally, the frequencies of statement of the metaphors were calculated at this stage. This way, the frequently repeated metaphors were determined.

After the most frequently used metaphors were determined, it was aimed to determine certain common characteristics among the metaphors created by the participants. At the first stage, 7 themes were created, and initial coding was performed based on which metaphor should be included under which theme. At this stage, a metaphor that had a tendency to be applicable for more than one theme was noticed. The participants explained the metaphor of “family” they produced for the concept of psychological counsellor sometimes in terms of solution of their problems and sometimes in terms of sharing their issues. For this reason, it was decided that the metaphor of family among the data should be included in more than one theme.

At the stage of achievement of validity and reliability, the process of data collection and analysis was expressed in detail. It was aimed to achieve reliability by including direct quotes on the metaphors and statements of the participants. The participants were not interfered with for the purpose of achieving validity, and the statements that were identical were removed from the dataset. Thus, the participants who did not express their ideas in a unique way were determined, and these were prevented from affecting the results. Moreover, views of two experts, one in guidance and psychological counselling and the other in measurement and evaluation, were utilized, and based on the feedback received from the experts, some metaphors were sent to different themes, and some themes were expressed more clearly by changing their names.

At the last stage of frequency calculation, the number of people who used each metaphor and the number of metaphors under each theme were determined. A table was created from the obtained results, and it was aimed to more clearly present the findings obtained from the data.

Findings

Based on the data that were obtained from 177 high school students in this study, 78 metaphors were created. Among these metaphors, only three had 10 or more repetitions, and six had 5 or more repetitions. The most frequently repeated metaphors were found as *friend*, *family* and *companion*. The remaining 69 metaphors were repeated for less than five times. Table 1 shows the distribution of the metaphors under the themes in detail.

Psychological Counsellor as a Sharer

According to the findings obtained in this study, the most frequently represented theme for the metaphors created by the participants was the theme of sharing which contained 11 metaphors. 57 (32.20%) students formed 11 (14.10%) different metaphors by focusing on the sharing aspects of their psychological counsellors. In their order of frequency, the metaphors under this theme were as friend (29), companion (10), family (6), shoulder to cry on (2), confidant (2), close person (2), box (2), diary (1), rakı [a Turkish spirit/drink] (1), home (1) and container (1). The participants who described their psychological counsellors with the metaphors under this theme emphasized that they were able to share all their problems with their counsellors and were sure that the information they shared would stay confidential. Additionally, the participants likened their psychological counsellors to friends, companions and family members, mentioning a one-way interaction. Some examples where the sharing aspects of psychological counsellors were used as metaphors are shown below.

“A psychological counsellor is like a **family**, because **you can share anything you want with them.**”

“A psychological counsellor is like a **diary**, because **you can share everything, open up about your inner world.**”

Psychological Counsellor as an Improver

The improvement theme was represented with 12 (15.33%) different metaphors by 23 (12.99%) participants. The metaphors that were included in this theme were as book (8), mirror (5), family (1), key (1), zoo (1), ocean (1), encyclopaedia (1), master (1), education (1), road (1), lie detector (1) and conscience (1). The most frequently preferred metaphors were book and mirror. While emphasizing the wisdom of the psychological counsellor with the metaphor of a book, they highlighted the objective reflection of what is in their inner world in their psychological counsellor with the metaphor of a mirror.

“A psychological counsellor is like a **mirror**, because **they show us exactly what we do.**”

“A psychological counsellor is like the **ocean**, because **your horizon broadens as you go further.**”

Psychological Counsellor as a Guide

The guide theme was represented with 13 different metaphors by 23 (12.99%) participants. The metaphors that were included in this theme were as sun (5), family (3), guide (3), light (2), candle (2), navigation (2), lighthouse (19), life coach (1), map (1), compass (1), wind (1), music (1) and consultation (1). The participants whose responses were included under this theme had the opinion that their psychological counsellors guided them and showed them the way when they cannot see it by likening them to the sun or a candle. Some examples in this theme were as the following.

“A psychological counsellor is like the **sun**, because **they become my light and show me the way when I am left in the dark.**”

“A psychological counsellor is like a **lighthouse**, because **a psychological counsellor shows the way for students just like a lighthouse shows the way for ships.**”

Psychological Counsellor as a Helper

21 students used 11 different metaphors to describe the helping role of psychological counsellors. These metaphors were as family (6), psychologist (5), helper (2), cane (1), judge (1), kind-hearted hand (1), stick (1), tree (1), bridge (1), fairy (1) and lucky item (1). Here, the participants emphasized the helping characteristics of their counsellors. Some examples in this theme were as the following.

“A psychological counsellor is like a **family**, because **they listen to our problems and help us.**”

“A psychological counsellor is like a **cane**, because **we need assistance in some areas, and they provide this assistance.**”

Psychological Counsellor as a Healer

Some (20) participants saw their psychological counsellors as healers and described them with 11 different metaphors as doctor (8), first aid (2), water (2), medication (1), hospital (1), sedative (1), anti-depressant (1), anaesthesia (1), band aid (1), life (1) and family (1). While they described their psychological counsellors, the participants prioritized the counsellors' aspects of making them better, more relaxed and treating them. Some examples in this theme were as the following.

“A psychological counsellor is like a **doctor**, because **they treat the soul.**”

“A psychological counsellor is like a **medication**, because **they heal all problems.**”

Psychological Counsellor as a Comforter

The comforter theme included 6 different metaphors coming from 12 students. These metaphors were as flower (5), angel (2), family (2), rose (1), spring (1) and sea (1). The participants whose responses were included under this theme saw their psychological counsellors as a comforting factor, and they stated that they reached peace because of their presence. Some examples in this theme were as the following.

“A psychological counsellor is like a **flower**, because **they cheer us up, provide us with peace, happiness and comfort.**”

“A psychological counsellor is like an **angel**, because **they make one relax and do everything that they can whatever our issue may be.**”

Psychological Counsellor as a Problem Solver

The problem-solver theme included 3 different metaphors stated by 9 participants. Most of the students likened their psychological counsellors to a family (7) and stated that their counsellors solved the problems they experienced. The other two students used the metaphors of an aunt (1) and a public hero (1). These students focused on the solution part of the process they experienced with their psychological counsellors. Some examples in this theme were as the following.

“A psychological counsellor is like a **public hero**, because **they solve all problems.**”

“A psychological counsellor is like a **family**, because **you can find a solution by sharing all secrets with them.**”

Table 1

Thematic Categorization of 78 Metaphors regarding Psychological Counsellors

Theme	Number of Students	Student Percentage	Metaphor	Number of Metaphors	Metaphor Percentage
Sharer	57	%32.20	Friend (29), Fellow (10), Family (6), Fellow Sufferer (2), Confidant (2), Close-Up (2), Box (2), Daily (1), Raki (1), House (1), Storage Container (1)	11	%14.10
Developer	23	%12.99	Book (8), Mirror (5), Family (1), Key (1), Zoo (1), Ocean (1), Encyclopaedia (1), Mind Teacher (1), Education (1), Way (1), Lying Machine (1), Conscience (1)	12	%15.38
Guidance	23	%12.99	Sun (5), Family (3), Guiding (2), Light (2), Candle (2), Navigation (2), Lighthouse (1), Life Coach (1), Map (1), Compass (1), Wind (1), Music (1), Reasoning (1)	13	%16.66
Helper	21	%11.86	Family (6), Psychologist (5), Help (2), Walking Stick (1), Judge (1), Compassionate Arm (1), Bat (1), Tree (1), Bridge (1), Fairy (1), Lucky Things (1)	11	%14.10
Curative	20	%12.29	Doctor (8), First Aid (2), Water (2), Medicine (1), Hospital (1), Sedative	11	%14.10

			(1), Antidepressant (1), Anaesthesia (1), Plaster (1), Life (1), Family (1)		
Making Comfortable	12	%6.78	Flower (5), Family (2), Angel (2), Rose (1), Spring (1), Sea (1)	6	%7.69
Problem Solver	9	%5.08	Family (7), Aunt (1), Folk Hero (1)	3	%3.84
Other	12	%6.78	Human Spirit (2), Meat-Nails (1), Human (1), Door Handle (1), Tape To The Head (1), Water In The Desert (1), Infinity (1), Help Service (1), Parents (1), Family (1), Mother (1)	11	%14.10

Discussion

This study investigated the metaphors of high school students who received psychological counselling services on the concept of “psychological counsellor” and their metaphorical perceptions. According to the findings that were obtained in the study, the 78 metaphors created by 177 high school students on the concept of “psychological counsellor” were collected under seven themes. These were the sharer, improver, guide, helper, healer, comforter and problem-solver themes.

The participants who perceived a psychological counsellor as a “sharer” emphasized that it is important to feel understood, and the confidentiality of what they shared was a factor for them. Özabacı (2011) conducted a study with secondary school students and reported that the participants perceived their psychological counsellor as “a warm and the sincerest person”. The study by Altun and Camadan (2013) with psychological counsellors working in the field found that psychological counsellors were seen as an “unconditionally accepting person”. The main factors that lead to perceptions of psychological counsellors as “sharers” may include protection of “privacy” which is the main principle of psychological counselling (Gladding, 2013; Hackney & Cormier, 2008; Karaca & İkiz, 2010; Kuzgun, 2014; Tan & Baloğlu, 2011; Yeşilyaprak, 2016) and supporting students in opening up by sharing and active participation. The participants who perceived their psychological counsellors as “improvers” stated that their counsellors were effective in their increased awareness in this process and broadened horizon. Likewise, Ünal and Ünal (2010) determined that high school students perceived their psychological counsellors as “people who provide knowledge”. Özabacı (2011) reported that secondary school students perceived their psychological counsellor as “one who improves and teaches”. A reason for this perception of psychological counsellors as “improvers” may be the objective of the individual “to change”, which is a focus of the psychological counselling process (Corey, 2008; Gibson & Mitchell, 2003; Gladding, 2013; Hackney & Cormier, 2008; Kuzgun, 2014; Murdock, 2013; Yeşilyaprak, 2016). Additionally, noticing missed opportunities and unused potential may influence this process (Egan, 2011).

The participants who perceived their psychological counsellors as “guides” emphasized their counsellors’ roles of helping them notice their options and leading them towards the right choice. Other studies in the literature reported agreeing results (Altun & Camadan, 2013; Özabacı, 2011). The reason for this perception may be realization of existing options by students in the process of psychological counselling and their acquisition of skills of turning towards the optimal choice (Corey, 2008; Gibson & Mitchell, 2003; Gladding, 2013; Hackney & Cormier, 2008; Kuzgun, 2014).

The participants who perceived psychological counsellors as “helpers” stated that their counsellors were people who provide support for them when they need it. The findings reported in the literature were in agreement with the finding here (Özabacı, 2011; Ünal & Ünal, 2010). It is a positive thing for students that they perceive psychological counsellors as “helpers”, and they are sure that counsellors will always stand by them. This perception is highly important as

a factor that would make it easier for students to receive support in further times and prevent potential problems. These perceptions of students will contribute greatly for protective and preventive functions (Karaca & İkiz, 2010; Kuzgun, 2014; Tan & Baloğlu, 2011; Yeşilyaprak, 2016).

The participants who perceived psychological counsellors as “healers” prioritized their aspects of making their situation better and treating them. Özabacı (2011) conducted a study with secondary school students and found that the participants perceived a psychological counsellor as a “counsellor who provides recovery”. The reason for this may be the constructive change provided by strengthened personality of students regarding solutions for the areas of problems they have. Psychological counselling is based on a therapeutic relationship with an expert counsellor and aims change in the counselee (Gibson & Mitchell, 2003; Gladding, 2013; Tan & Baloğlu, 2011).

The participants who perceived psychological counsellors as “comforters” saw their counsellors as relaxing and stated that they reached peace in their presence. Altun and Camadan (2013), in their study carried out with psychological counsellor, emphasized the “comforting” role of psychological counsellors. This perception may be caused by experiencing catharsis as a result of intense emotional relaxation that is experienced in the process of psychological counselling.

The participants who perceived psychological counsellors as “problem-solvers” focused on counsellors’ aspects related to reaching solutions to their problems. Previous studies reported similar results (Altun & Camadan, 2013; Özabacı, 2011; Ünal & Ünal, 2010). This perception may be related to the focus of the psychological counselling process on problem-solving and healthy decision-making (Gibson & Mitchell, 2003; Tan & Baloğlu, 2011). According to studies in the literature (Gündoğan & Onur, 2006; Ginter et al., 1990; Vail, 2005), the expectations of school administrations and teachers from psychological counsellors are towards solution of problems experienced by students in personal, social and educational areas. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that psychological counsellors are not people who solve the problem of the individual in their name, but they have a role in improving their problem-solving skills (Gladding, 2013; Hackney & Cormier, 2008; Karaca & İkiz, 2010; Kuzgun, 2014; Yeşilyaprak, 2016).

In this study, the role of therapeutic conditions and skills in the perceptions of the high school students who received psychological counselling services on their psychological counsellors was striking. In addition, another interesting result was that the metaphor of “family” was included under all themes. The perceptions of the participants on the metaphor of “family” for all themes may be related to parent attitudes. In the light of the findings of the study, some recommendations may be provided. In terms of recognition of the psychological counselling and guidance services of schools among other students, students who have already received psychological counselling services may be utilized by sharing their views on these services. Similarly, clarifying the roles, duties and responsibilities of psychological counsellors at school regarding what psychological counselling is and is not may contribute to students’ reception of such services in terms of both volunteerism and awareness. In this case, such services will act as a buffer in preventing phenomena that lead to pathologies or crisis situations.

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