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THE METAPHORICAL PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH PREPARATORY PROGRAM STUDENTS ON ENGLISH LEARNING PROCESS

İNGİLİZCE HAZIRLIK SINIFI ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRENME SÜRECİNE İLİŞKİN METAFORİK ALGILARI

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Abstract

Metaphors have been handy tools to elicit the beliefs of individuals towards a subject that provides a means to explore individuals' deeper thoughts on a particular topic. This study aims to investigate university students' perceptions towards their English learning process through metaphors. The participants are 114 students studying English in school of foreign languages in a public university. Employing a semi-structured form, the participants were asked to complete the sentence: "The English learning process is (like) because" to collect data in this qualitative study. 13 thematic categories were produced after the analysis: endeavor, continuity, obscurity, novelty, fun, obligation, choice, period of life, difficulty, activity, hopelessness, happiness, and opportunity. The results of the study indicate that the participants have logical and realistic thoughts on learning English process, regarding it as an ongoing journey towards becoming successful individuals. The findings of this study are expected to bring deeper insights into learners' expectations and perspectives on language learning that offer guidance for curriculum and material designers in producing effective educational materials.

Öz

Metaforlar, bireylerin belirli bir konu hakkında daha derin düşüncelerini keşfetmenin bir yolunu sağlayan, bireylerin bir konuya yönelik inançlarını ortaya çıkarmak için kullanışlı araçlar olmuştur. Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin İngilizce öğrenme süreçlerine yönelik algılarını metaforlar aracılığıyla araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Katılımcılar bir devlet üniversitesinin yabancı diller yüksekokulunda İngilizce öğrenimi gören 114 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılardan bu nitel araştırmada veri toplamak için yarı yapılandırılmış bir anket kullanılarak "İngilizce öğrenme süreci (gibi) çünkü..." cümlesini tamamlamaları istendi. Analiz sonucunda 13 tematik kategori oluşturulmuştur: çaba, süreklilik, belirsizlik, yenilik, eğlence, zorunluluk, seçim, yaşam dönemi, zorluk, etkinlik, umutsuzluk, mutluluk ve fırsat. Araştırmanın sonuçları katılımcıların İngilizce öğrenme sürecini başarılı bireyler olmaya yönelik devam eden bir yolculuk olarak gördüklerini ve bu konuda mantıklı ve gerçekçi düşüncelere sahip olduklarını göstermektedir. Bu çalışmanın bulgularının, müfredat ve materyal tasarımcılarına etkili eğitim materyalleri üretme konusunda rehberlik sunarak öğrencilerin dil öğrenimine ilişkin beklentileri ve bakış açıları hakkında daha derin bilgiler sağlaması beklenmektedir.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning and teaching English plays a big role because it has international validity, it is the language of commerce, science, and education. (Aydın & Zengin, 2008; Brown, 1973; Demirel, 2015; Takahashi, 2018). Since the same situation is valid in Turkey, learning English has taken place as a long-term process in people's lives. This situation has also attracted the attention of researchers and when the literature is examined, it is observed that various studies have been carried out on foreign language learning processes. Studies focusing on the problems of foreign language learners focus on characteristic and demographic features such as sex (Tunçel, 2014; Şener, 2015; Mehdiyev, Uğurlu & Usta, 2017), intelligence (Karatay & Kartallıoğlu, 2016), learning skills (Tunçel, 2014), learning methods, willingness to learn (Nazari & Allahyar, 2012), personal interest, interaction, being introverted or extroverted, self-confidence and anxiety (Brown, 1973), and transfer from the mother tongue as well as examining the topics related to teaching strategies such as vocabulary, grammar, intonation, stress, and pronunciation (Demirel, 2000; Polat, 2015).

As Pehlivan, Akçay & Neyişci (2020) stated in their studies, the determination is an important point in learning a foreign language and it requires a stable study until being successful. As a result of this stable work, the perceptions of foreign language learners during the language learning period and their thoughts about language learning gain importance. Since these thoughts can show personal differences, it is important to conduct different studies examining student perceptions. Among the studies examining student perceptions, metaphor studies have gained importance in terms of education and applied linguistics (Cameron & Low, 1999). Being very easy to answer, depending on creativity, and allowing the study group to freely convey their true thoughts are the aspects that distinguish metaphorical studies from other studies. For this reason, these types of studies provide researchers and teachers that teach foreign languages with transparent ideas and results about learners' ideas for learning English.

The word metaphor is defined as "a word or phrase used to describe somebody/something else in a way that is different from its normal use, to show that the two things have the same quality and to make the description more powerful" (Oxford Learners' Dictionary, online). Lakoff (1993, p.202) defined metaphor "as a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept." As Kövecses (2002) and Cerit (2008) state, metaphor is the analogy of a concept, a situation, an object, an activity, and an activity to another concept or situation by stating its reason. Cameron & Maslen (2010) draw attention to metaphors and state that when people's use of metaphors is investigated, people's emotions, attitudes, and conceptualizations can be better understood as individuals and as participants in social life. Turan, Yıldırım & Tıkman (2016)

put forward that metaphors are the symbols we use to explain perceptions. Hosseini & Pourmandnia (2013) state that there is no surer way to have deeper ideas about language learners than by researching their beliefs by stating that language learners' attitudes and beliefs should be included in an increasing research group. As stated in these studies, it can be observed that more and more studies are drawing attention to studies that investigate metaphors to learn about learners' beliefs, inner thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions about language learning and the language itself.

One of the pioneering studies regarding metaphors was done by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and they assert that to understand one kind of thing through another, metaphors are used, and they add that metaphors are mindsets that shape individuals' thoughts regarding the world, and they make it possible to express vague concepts in a more concrete way in daily life. Learners' level of motivation, attitudes towards the language, and their metaphors regarding the language they learn are integral factors while learning a language (Gömleksiz, 2013). Metaphors are crucial parts of everyday and specialized language and most importantly, a core mechanism of how humans conceptualize the world (Hoang, 2014). Additionally, metaphors can be used as an efficient method to reveal learners' perceptions of foreign languages and their images in their minds (Limon, 2015). For all these reasons, investigating learners' beliefs and attitudes towards language learning plays an important role in language learning and teaching.

When the literature is scanned, there are few studies investigating the metaphorical perceptions of students about learning English, especially in higher education institutions where English is taught as the language of instruction (Ishiki, 2011; Baş & Bal Gezegin, 2015; Fang, 2015; Erdem, 2018; Mudra & Aini, 2020; Pehlivan, Akcay & Neyisci, 2020).

As we can see from some of the following studies, researchers have handled metaphorical perceptions of language learners and teachers in different ways. However, these studies are very limited as they handle different concepts such as an adult learner's conceptualizations towards the language teacher and language class (Parvaresh, 2008); university students' perceptions towards a language teacher (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008); foreign language learners' perceptions of coursebooks (Kesen, 2010); university students' perceptions towards English instructor (Ahkemoğlu, 2011; Ahkemoğlu & Kesen, 2016); mental images of students while stating feelings in English (Çap & Acat, 2012); pre-service teachers' perceptions towards foreign language (Gömleksiz, 2013); high school students' perceptions towards English and English class (Ocak & Gürel, 2014; Limon, 2015; Bekdaş, 2017); prospective teachers' perceptions of a language teacher teaching English to young learners (Tercan, 2015); secondary school students' perceptions towards English teacher (Ugur, Rabia & Baysal, 2017); university students' perceptions towards

speaking English (Dincer, 2017; Öztürk, 2021); an EFL learner's school transition experience (Uştuk, 2021).

Studies that explore the perceptions of students by metaphors towards English, learning English, and/or the process of English language learning are very limited. Some researchers preferred to carry out studies on university students' perceptions of English and learning English (Ishiki, 2011; Farjami, 2012; Fang, 2015; Erdem, 2018), while some studies were carried out on the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards language learning process (Baş & Gezeğin, 2015; Mudra & Aini, 2020) and teacher candidates' pre- and post-course beliefs about language and teaching (Şimşek, 2014). Ishak (2019) studied teachers' and students' perceptions towards ESP teaching and learning process. Shaw & Andrei (2019) conducted a study on preservice teachers' metaphors for learning and teaching English as a second language. An example study on this topic is Pehlivan, Akçay & Neyişçi's (2020) study which was carried out to investigate preparatory program students' metaphorical perceptions towards English and learning English. When it comes to studies that focus on preparatory program students' perceptions, it could be understood that the literature needs more studies on this topic.

As the review of the above-alluded studies revealed, more research is needed for studies that consider metaphorical perceptions of university students towards English and learning English. Considering all these, it is aimed in this study to shed light on how students who learn English perceive the English learning process through metaphors and contribute to the literature. Therefore, this study aims to highlight the perceptions of preparatory school students' beliefs about the English learning process. The research questions are as follows:

- What metaphors do the students of the School of Foreign Languages generate to examine their perceptions of the English learning process?
- Under which categories do these metaphors gather based on their rationales?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Design

This study is a qualitative study that was carried out in phenomenological design. As Miles & Huberman (1994) state, qualitative studies enable us to obtain rich and integrated content and they provide us with the potential to reveal complex cases. To obtain an in-depth and detailed understanding, a phenomenological pattern was used in this study. As Creswell (2013) says, the common meaning of individual experiences regarding a phenomenon or a concept can be de-

finned by phenomenological research. Before this study was conducted, an ethics committee consent form was taken by the related university.

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University in Turkey. The participants were 114 preparatory students studying English during the 2021-2022 academic year. The participants consisted of 40 males and 74 females. The participants started learning English from secondary school and their English level ranged from A2 to C1 (CEFR).

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured form was used to obtain data. The first part of the form was designed to collect participants' demographic information about sex. The participants were given an example sentence by the researcher to familiarize the type of sentence they were supposed to write. The second part of the form aimed to obtain the participants' metaphors about the procedure of learning English. Participants' consent was obtained before the surveys were given to them. The model sentence was "English learning process is (like).... because". With the help of this prompt, the metaphors the participants produced were meant to be unearthed so that their beliefs would be explicit. One class hour (40 minutes) was given to the participants to complete the form.

All parts of the form were in Turkish, the mother tongue of the participants. The participants were orally informed about using English or Turkish while giving the answers to make them feel more comfortable. The reason behind this option was that such a restriction could have prevented the free flow of participants' perceptions, ideas, images, and feelings. Alternatively, they might not have felt comfortable with the adequacy of their English level to convey their feelings more appropriately.

As Creswell (2007) and Yıldırım & Şimşek (2011) state, detailed reporting of collected data and the researcher's description of how he/she obtained the results constitute validity in qualitative research. Thus, the next paragraph will explain how the researcher obtained data.

The analysis of the metaphors in this study included four steps: naming/labelling, sorting (clarification and elimination), categorization, and analyzing data. Before the analysis, Turkish sentences were translated into English by the researcher. In the first naming/labelling stage, all the metaphors and their entailments provided by the participants were identified, and they

were first given a number, and “M” for male participants and “F” for female participants were written. The names of the metaphors were coded such as love, swimming, and discovery. When metaphors were not identified, they were remarked “no metaphor”. In the sorting stage, common elements and similarities among various metaphors were identified. During the sorting stage, ten forms were filtered out as either they were not meaningful, there were no metaphors and rationales, or they were blank. In the categorization stage, expressions and phrases that explained the metaphor best were taken to create a conceptual category. The metaphors were analyzed according to the justification of the participants, and a title for each metaphor was produced to put the metaphors into certain conceptual categories. A sample categorization of participants’ metaphors and their justifications are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample categorization of participants’ metaphors and their justifications

Metaphor	Justification	Conceptual category			
		Researcher	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3
swimming	because there is no end to what you are going to learn and without working hard you cannot achieve anything.	Endeavor	Endeavor	Burden	Endeavor
swimming	because it gives you pleasure when you are used to it	Fun	Fun	Fun	Joy
swimming in the sea	because the sea gets deeper, and English gets more difficult as you learn	Difficulty	Difficulty	Endeavor	Difficulty
reading a book	because every time you learn something new and develop yourself	Novelty	Novelty	Progress	Novelty
chess	because it makes your mind work	Activity	Novelty	Activity	Activity

As shown in Table 1, the metaphor swimming was used in the categories of FUN, DIFFICULTY and ENDEAVOR based on the justification that was produced by the participant. To illustrate the first sentence, the full version is as follows: “Learning English is like swimming because there is no end to what you are going to learn and without working hard you cannot achieve anything.” The metaphor swimming in this sentence was put into the category of ENDEAVOR because the participant regards it as something that requires hard work. On the other hand, the metaphor swimming in the following sentence was put into the category of FUN as the participant sees it as something fun: “Learning English is like swimming because it gives you pleasure when you are used to it.” The metaphor swimming was also matched with the category of DIFFICULTY based on the reason produced by another participant, which was: “It is like swimming in the sea because the sea gets deeper, and English gets more difficult as you learn.” As for the metaphors reading a book and chess, based on the expressions that represented the metaphors best, they were put in the category of NOVELTY and ACTIVITY.

Before analyzing data, the researcher also consulted three expert opinions to ensure the reliability of the study. The experts were asked to determine whether the metaphors obtained represented the categories. The researcher evaluated all the results and consensus, and dissent values were calculated. The number of agreements and disagreements was calculated according to the formula by Miles & Huberman (1994) which was given as $\text{validity} = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{total number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}}$. In this respect, the percentage of agreement from the reliability calculation was 0.85. This meant that according to Miles & Huberman (1994), this study was reliable as the percentage was more than 70. To provide confirmability, a field expert confirmed the accuracy of the results. Finally, the frequencies and percentages of the data were calculated by the researcher.

Before elaborating on the results of the study, it will be noteworthy to state that because this study was conducted on a limited time, only 114 participants could be reached. Additionally, the participants could only produce one metaphor because of the nature of the prompt they were given in the survey.

3. FINDINGS

A total of 114 metaphors were produced by 114 participants in this study. These metaphors were examined in this study to unearth their perceptions about the English learning process. Thirteen thematic categories were created from the answers based on their rationales. The results of the data related to the perceptions of preparatory school students about the English learning process are presented in this study.

Table 2. Participants' demographic information

	Male	Female	Total
Sex	40	74	114

As understood from Table 2, female students participated more (n=74) in the study.

Table 3. *The distribution of conceptual categories and metaphors about the English learning process*

Categories	Metaphors	f	%
1.Endeavor	Road, driving a car, swimming, climbing a mountain, growing plants, swimming, baby's growth, exam, marathon, entering a degree program in a university, journey, driving, learning how to drive, worker, growing trees, merchandizing, learning Maths, growing kids	18	15.80
2.Continuity	Learning to speak (2), baby's growth, learning Maths, marathon, continuity, playing an instrument, parrot, cumulative, bee's making hive, university exam, going the opposite way in the escalator, growing trees, year, sports (2)	16	14.0
3.Novelty	Adventure (2), reading books, starting something new, starting life again, sculpting a stone, journey (2), sea, discovery, road, discovering yourself, a baby's learning to speak, sports, science	15	13.20
4.Activity	Puzzle (3), chess, game, driving, climbing a mountain, knitting, bodybuilding, TV series, sudoku, exercising, embroidery	13	11.40
5.Period of Life	Life (4), adventure, growing up (4), a baby's getting accustomed to life, a baby's perceiving the environment	11	9.70
6.Opportunity	Family, key, starting a new life, star, meeting new people, rebirth, thinking differently, step	8	7.10
7.Difficulty	Being addicted, suffering, a baby's learning to speak, difficulty, torture, swimming, starting school again	7	6.10
8. Obscurity	A new language, discovery, path, sleeping, journey, adventure	6	5.30
9.Choice	Occupation, eating food, bitter coffee, trying to be wealthy, reaching the end of the sea, a baby's growth	6	5.30
10.Hopelessness	Sea, building a house, reaching the clouds, imagination, economy	5	4.40
11.Fun	Fun, game, swimming	3	2.60
12.Obligation	Construction, starting to walk, growing a flower	3	2.60
13.Happiness	Having an animal/plant, love, receiving different birthday gifts	3	2.60
Total		114	

Table 3 presents 114 metaphors out of 13 categories. While forming categories, rationales were considered, which made the same answers be placed in different categories. For instance, the metaphor road can be seen in the categories of ENDEAVOR and NOVELTY. Likewise, the metaphor journey was given as an example of the categories of NOVELTY and OBSCURITY.

As illustrated in Table 3, the metaphors created by the participants fall into the categories of ENDEAVOR (n=18, 15.80%), CONTINUITY (n=16, 14%), OBSCURITY and CHOICE (n=6, 5.30%), NOVELTY (n=15, 13.20%), FUN, OBLIGATION and HAPPINESS (n=3, 2.60%), PERIOD OF LIFE (n=11, 9.70%), DIFFICULTY (n=7, 6.10%), ACTIVITY (n=13, 11.40%), HOPELESSNESS (n=5, 4.40%) and OPPORTUNITY (n=8, 7.10%). It can be concluded from the metaphors that most of the participants have positive feelings towards the process of learning English as derived from the categories of

NOVELTY, FUN, ACTIVITY, HAPPINESS, and OPPORTUNITY. These categories consist of 42% of all categories. Whereas metaphors with negative meanings were put in the categories of OBSCURITY, OBLIGATION, DIFFICULTY, and HOPELESSNESS which comprise 21% of all categories.

The metaphors that participants produced about the English learning process were analyzed by categories as follows:

3.1. Category 1: Endeavor

The category ENDEAVOR emphasizes participants' hard work and any activities that they do to achieve success in learning English. Some examples of metaphors with rationales are presented below:

"English learning process is like a challenging road because language is something which renews itself and we need to repeat and study constantly".

"It is like growing a plant because although the process is pleasing, it requires attention and care."

"It is like a difficult exam because it requires regular study and practice".

Eighteen metaphors were produced under the category of ENDEAVOR. The metaphors in this category are road, driving a car, swimming, climbing a mountain, growing plants, baby's growth, exam, marathon, entering a degree program in a university, journey, driving, learning how to drive, worker, growing trees, merchandising, learning Math, and growing kids. It can be inferred that the participants in this study are well aware of the fact that without putting enough effort they will not be able to perform an adequate level of performance.

3.2. Category 2: Continuity

The category CONTINUITY describes that participants are aware of the fact that they need to study and practice regularly to excel in a foreign language. To illustrate some examples of metaphors with rationales:

"It is like playing an instrument because if there is no continuity, you will forget it."

"It is like a parrot because it requires constant revision."

"It is like a bee's making a hive because it is something which requires time and continuity."

Sixteen metaphors can be seen under the continuity category. The metaphors identified

within this category are learning to speak (n=2), baby's growth, learning Math, marathon, continuity, playing an instrument, parrot, cumulative, bee's making hive, university exam, going the opposite way in the escalator, growing trees, year, and sports (n=2). Participants seem to realize that advancing in a language requires a disciplined and regular style of study and time.

3.3. Category 3: Novelty

The category NOVELTY handles the situations which participants regard as new and inexperienced. Some examples of this category can be illustrated as follows:

"It is like reading a book because every time you learn something new and develop yourself."

"It is like discovering a new place because each time you learn something new."

"It is like a journey because before you set off you think that everyone's life is like yours but during the journey, you witness different lives and cultures."

We can see 15 metaphors under the category of NOVELTY (i.e., adventure (n=2), reading books, starting something new, starting life again, sculpting a stone, journey (n=2), sea, discovery, road, discovering yourself, a baby's learning to speak, sports, and science). Considering the rationales given to the metaphors, participants have a positive attitude towards the English learning process as they consider it as a new opportunity to develop themselves.

3.4. Category 4: Activity

The category ACTIVITY describes how the participants resemble language learning to a game or regard it as a source of activity. To illustrate some examples of metaphors with rationales:

"It is like a puzzle because it will be completed when you put the correct parts together."

"It is like embroidery because you may find it difficult at the beginning, but you will be good at it later."

"It is like chess because it makes your mind work."

The category activity has 13 metaphors that have a considerably high percentage (11.40 %) compared with most of the categories. These metaphors can be listed as puzzle (n=3), chess, game, driving, climbing a mountain, knitting, bodybuilding, TV series, sudoku, exercising, and embroidery. In this category, we can see that participants link the activities to careful thought and effort based on their rationales.

3.5. Category 5: Period of Life

This category reveals the situations that participants regard as a part of life.

“It is like life itself because when you are in the process itself, it develops itself. Sometimes it is difficult but if you keep going, you will reach success”.

“It is like life itself because whenever you think that you have learned your lessons, it comes with surprises.”

“It is like a baby’s getting used to life because it is both difficult and complex but when you see that you can do it, it pleases you.”

Eleven metaphors were produced under the category of PERIOD OF LIFE. To give an example of these metaphors, they can be listed as life (n=4), adventure, growing up (n=4), a baby’s getting accustomed to life and a baby’s perceiving the environment.

3.6. Category 6: Opportunity

The category OPPORTUNITY tackles any situation that participants regard as an opportunity and chance. Some examples of metaphors related to this category are as follows:

“It is like a star shining for a career because it gives privileges.”

“It is like a family because if you have it, everything will be easy. If you do not, life will be difficult.”

“It is like a key that opens new doors to your future because it is the most required qualification for international communication.”

The category OPPORTUNITY yielded 8 metaphors. To give an example of these metaphors, family, key, starting a new life, star, meeting new people, rebirth, thinking differently and step can be listed. In this category, the participants focus on the opportunities of learning English.

3.7. Category 7: Difficulty

The category DIFFICULTY emphasizes the situations that participants find difficult to reach and hard to accomplish. Some examples of metaphors with rationales are presented below:

“It is like starting school again because you learn everything from the beginning.”

“It is like swimming in the sea because the sea gets deeper, and English gets more difficult as you learn.”

“It is like being composed of difficulty itself because you really get exhausted when you learn something new.”

Seven metaphors can be seen under the DIFFICULTY category. These metaphors can be illustrated as; being addicted, suffering, a baby’s learning to speak, difficulty, torture, swimming, and starting school again.

3.8. Category 8: Obscurity

The category OBSCURITY covers anything that does not have an end and a result. Some examples of this category can be shown as follows:

“It is like an unending path because you can learn but you cannot say that it is finished.”

“It is like sleeping because you can’t know if you learned or not, which means it is obscure.”

“It is like a long journey because it is an adventure which does not have an end, keeps renewing itself and you cannot be sure of what you can learn.”

The category OBSCURITY has 6 metaphors (i.e., a new language, discovery, path, sleeping, journey, adventure) that have a small percentage (5.30%) compared with the rest of the categories. In this category, we can see that few participants think that they do not feel confident about their understanding and performance in learning English.

3.9. Category 9: Choice

This category was created because of the metaphors that show the decisions and choices of the participants. To give examples to this category, the metaphors with rationales below can be presented:

“It is like eating food because sometimes I enjoy eating but sometimes, I eat because I have to.”

“It is like trying to be rich because, with an easy way, you can be rich easily but if you force yourself, you will not. If you regard English solely as a lesson, you cannot learn it. However, if you try to learn it like you learn your native language, you can learn it shortly and easily.”

“It is like reaching the end of the sea because if you carry the right equipment with you, you can be successful. If you do not give yourself the required time and care, you can sink.”

The category CHOICE yielded 6 metaphors: occupation, eating food, bitter coffee, trying to be wealthy, reaching the end of the sea, and a baby’s growth. This category emphasizes that the participants regard learning English as a choice.

3.10. Category 10: Hopelessness

The category HOPELESSNESS covers anything that participants feel hopeless about. Some examples of this category can be shown as follows:

“It is like a dream because it cannot be more than a dream.”

“It is like reaching the clouds because the target is very misleading and distant.”

“It is like constructing a new building because we keep learning new things in English but still something remains absent.”

We can see 5 metaphors under the category of hopelessness. Only 4.40 % of the participants have this perception, which is a small amount. These metaphors are the sea, building a house, reaching the clouds, imagination, and economy.

3.11. Category 11: Fun

The category FUN tackles any situation in which participants feel excitement, entertainment, and joy. Some examples of metaphors related to this category are as follows:

“It is fun because I enjoy it when I learn it.”

“It is like a game and chat because as I learn it while having fun, I do activities and learn lots of things.”

“It is like swimming because if you feel afraid, you cannot learn it but as you get used to it, swimming gives pleasure to you.”

Three metaphors were produced related to the category of fun. These metaphors are fun, game, and swimming. When we consider the whole group, it only consists of 2.60 % of the general group, which is a low percentage.

3.12. Category 12: Obligation

In this category, participants feel obliged to learn, experience and accomplish things. The examples given for this category are presented as follows:

“It is like a construction because it requires an intact foundation.”

“It is like a baby’s first steps because while the baby becomes impatient to run, it has to deal with falling down constantly.”

“It is like growing a flower because if you don’t give water, it will die.”

We can see 3 metaphors under the category of OBLIGATION. These metaphors are construction, starting to walk and growing a flower. Only a small group of participants thought that they must learn English for different reasons.

3.13. Category 13: Happiness

The category HAPPINESS handles situations that give the participants the feeling of being happy. Some examples of this category can be illustrated as follows:

“It is like love because you will be passionate about it as you learn.”

“It is like having an animal/plant because if you feed it, it will grow up, become beautiful and give happiness.”

“It is like receiving different birthday gifts because as you learn something new, you will be happy as if you have received an expensive birthday gift.”

Three metaphors (i.e., having an animal/plant, love, and receiving different birthday gifts) were produced related to the category of happiness. When we consider the whole group, 2.60 % of the participants expressed their happiness.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated preparatory school students’ perceptions towards the English learning process with the help of metaphors. Participants produced 114 metaphors and their metaphors were allocated according to 13 categories. These categories were ENDEAVOR, CONTINUITY, OBSCURITY, CHOICE, NOVELTY, FUN, OBLIGATION, HAPPINESS, PERIOD OF LIFE, DIFFICULTY, ACTIVITY, HOPELESSNESS, and OPPORTUNITY. As Mudra & Aini (2020) say, metaphors have a positive effect on determining successful language learning when they are conceptualized appropriately. Hence, this section aims to compare/contrast the results of this study with other studies in the literature to provide help.

When the literature is reviewed, this study gives different results compared with some studies. Contrary to the results of this study, Baş & Bal Gezegin (2015) found that the participants consider the English learning process as a task which gives the implication that participants do not regard it as a continuous process. However, in this study, the category CONTINUITY is among the categories with the highest percentages. Although the category FUN is among the categories with low percentages in this study, it is among the top three categories according to frequencies

in Öztürk's (2021) study that investigated metaphorical perceptions of undergraduate students towards English speaking.

Some studies have parallel results with the results in this study. Participant groups view English learning as an enjoyable activity in common, while the category fun did not yield a high percentage in Nikitina & Furuoka's (2008) study. These results have parallels with the results in this study. The category FUN also is not among the categories with high percentages in this study. Considering the percentages of the categories, the top category is ENDEAVOR with 15.80%. We can see similar results with some studies. To illustrate, Shaw & Andrei (2019) aimed to discover pre-service teachers' metaphors for learning English, and the most frequent category in their study was challenge. Dincer (2017) found that half of the learners found speaking English arduous. Alternatively, the category effort was the third category according to the percentage in Erdem's (2018) study that investigated university students' perceptions of English through metaphors. Learning English is regarded as something that requires effort with some challenges in all these three studies. Pehlivan, Akçay & Neyişi (2020) yielded similar results with this study. Endeavor was the category with the highest percentage and the participants in that study also considered learning English as something that requires process and effort, while they did not consider it as something that could be associated with hopelessness and obligation. Learning English required constant repetition and time investment aside from hard effort for the participants. All these studies illustrate in common that students that learn a foreign language, undoubtedly, find the process of learning a language difficult while being aware that learning a language requires effort and practice.

A close examination of the metaphors in this study provided some insight into the deeper thoughts of the participants. If we tackle the categories one by one, the category ENDEAVOR reflects how the participants are ready to study hard to succeed in English while CONTINUITY suggests that participants do not have unreal expectations towards the process of learning English. Feeling lost when learning English can be deduced from the category OBSCURITY. However, when we look at the rationales given for the category NOVELTY, learning English opens the door to new opportunities for the participants in this study. In Farjami's (2012) study, the category of opportunity illustrates the participants' direct endorsement and interest in positively learning a language. This category in this study also implies that participants consider learning English as a tool to their benefit in their lives. They want to use this to make their future lives, including their careers, brighter. The FUN and OBLIGATION categories suggest that some participants associate the process of learning English with fun activities. Moreover, they take the issue of learning English seriously and they feel responsible for their own learning. Emphasizing the importance of making the right choices and having a good plan to learn English, success for participants is

highlighted in the CHOICE category. The category PERIOD OF LIFE implies how participants regard the English learning process within the flow of life and associate it with their own lives. The same category emphasizes how learning English contributes to learners' lives by preparing them for the future in Baş & Bal Gezeğin's (2015) study. The category DIFFICULTY displays how most of the participants emphasize the hard work, endeavor, and patience to learn a language when we consider the entailments of the metaphors. In Erdem's (2018) study, difficulty was the most frequent category, which shows that students regard learning English as difficult, yet they accept it as a necessity which is good for language learning. The category ACTIVITY implies the positive perspectives of some participants towards learning English, but they are also aware of some intellectual requirements. Although they are small in percentage, participants' feeling distant from the idea of being proficient in English is obvious in the category HOPELESSNESS. If we look at the other side of the coin, emotional approaches towards learning English by the participants can be inferred.

Participants in this study clearly have logical and realistic thoughts towards the process of learning English. They are also aware that without putting the necessary effort and having a habit of studying regularly and seeing this process as a new experience, excelling in a language will not be accomplished. The metaphors swimming, learning Math and marathon indicate how participants take the learning process seriously. The metaphors playing an instrument, sports, and growing trees highlight that the participants are all aware of the fact that if they stop studying and practicing in English, they will lose their knowledge of English. This result is aligned with the study of Ishiki (2011), Erdem (2018) and Pehlivan, Akçay & Neyişi (2020). Participants in these studies also view English learning as a non-stop journey, or something they should keep trying until they reach their goal of being successful individuals.

When an overall consideration is made, the use and analysis of metaphors provide us with a variety of impacts on our language learning and teaching. As Evans & Green (2006) explain, second language learners find English metaphorical, and the essence of learners' thoughts and how they conceptualized the world was metaphorical. Therefore, metaphorical studies will be of importance in combining the inner world of the learners' and teachers' methodologies and understanding of how learners regard language learning. Moreover, with the help of metaphors, students are aware of their accomplishments and achievements for the future (Ishiki, 2011). Metaphors are also mental guiding signposts for learners' thinking and conceptualization that will help the learning process be understood so that teachers can generate new learning or correct the previous learning (Farjami, 2012). In light of these findings, studies that handle learners' attitudes, beliefs, and metaphors are needed to delve into the individual learners' backgrounds to understand their preferences for learning a language.

In conclusion, this study has yielded some significant results which show the perceptions of English language learning. It is noteworthy to state that participants focus more on the categories of ENDEAVOR and CONTINUITY, which highlights the importance of studying hard on a regular basis. This can be a milestone for English instructors and prospective teachers to consider before they prepare curriculum, syllabi, and classroom activities for their classrooms. Curriculum and material design studies can benefit from the results of this study. Activities that will make students practice and revise the topics they learn regularly which will make them recall and recycle the information they learn could be prepared. Approaching foreign language teaching more objectively will also be beneficial. As participants in this study stated, the language learning process can make them feel that there is no end to it, and they may be finding themselves in a very completely new environment. Therefore, supporting the students both academically and effectively will be of help.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was participated by students who study English at a preparatory school in a university. In this study, participants were not categorized according to the departments they are going to study after graduating from preparatory school. This type of categorization could be important as not all the departments require English as a medium of instruction so the importance and the meaning the participants give to learning English could be different among participants from different departments. Future studies which consider the departments of the participants will be of value.

Also, to obtain in-depth and detailed data, interviews could be made with some of the participants in the same study group.

ETHICAL DECLARATION

The study was ethically approved by Ankara University Ethics Committee on 06.01.2022 with decision ID 36.

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