

Zihinsel Modeller İnşa Etmek: Kavramsal Öğrenmede Matematiksel İletişim ve Söylemler

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Öz

Matematik gibi algılanması güç bir alan için iletişim temelli öğrenme ortamlarının önemi büyüktür. Öğrenme ortamlarında öğretmenlerin öğrencilerinin anlık tepkilerinden matematiksel anlayışlarına dair fikir sahibi olmaları zordur. Öğrencilerin matematiksel fikirlerinin ortaya çıkarılması, karşılıklı diyaloglar, tartışmalar ve iletişimin önemli bir parçası olan söylemlerle mümkün olmaktadır. Diğer yandan, matematik öğretimi kavramsal ve işlemsel öğrenme olmak üzere iki farklı öğrenme türüne dayanmaktadır. Bireylerin matematiksel kavramları ve kavramlar arasındaki ilişkileri zihinlerinde yapılandırmalarını sağlayan ve anlamlı öğrenmenin anahtarı olan öğrenme türü kavramsal öğrenmedir. Matematiksel iletişim temelli bir öğrenme ortamının ayrılmaz bileşenleri olan öğrencilerin diyaloglarının ve etkileşimli alışverişlerinin geliştirilmesinin, onların kavramsal öğrenmelerini derinden geliştirdiğine inanılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, eğitimde iletişim ve söylemlerin merkezi rolünün altını çizmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu bağlamda araştırma, kavramsal öğrenmeyi beslemek ve gerçekleştirmek için iletişim merkezli öğrenme ortamlarının kullandığı derin etkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, matematiksel iletişim odaklı öğrenme ortamlarının, kavramsal anlayışın derinden gerçekleştirilmesi için nasıl katalizör görevi gördüğüne dair ilgili literatür ışığında kapsamlı bir değerlendirmeyi içermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kavramsal öğrenme, Söylemler, Matematiksel iletişim

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Constructing Mental Models: Mathematical Communication and Discourses in Conceptual Understanding

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Abstract

In the realm of challenging subjects like mathematics, communication-driven learning environments assume paramount significance. Within these environments, gauging students' grasp of mathematical concepts solely through immediate responses can prove to be a daunting task for educators. The unveiling of students' intricate mathematical insights necessitates a platform of reciprocal dialogues, thought-provoking discussions, and engaging discourses. Mathematics pedagogy revolves around two distinct forms of learning: conceptual and procedural. The former, conceptual learning, empowers learners to construct intricate mathematical frameworks within their mental landscapes, interlinking various concepts harmoniously. It is within this context that the cultivation of students' dialogues and interactive exchanges, integral components of a mathematically communicative learning environment, is believed to profoundly enhance their grasp of conceptual dimensions. This study endeavors to underscore the pivotal role of communication and discourses in education. It delves into the profound influence wielded by communication-centric learning settings in nurturing and actualizing conceptual learning. The investigation draws insights from pertinent literature, culminating in a comprehensive exploration of how mathematical communication-oriented learning environments serve as catalysts for the profound realization of conceptual understanding.

Keywords

Conceptual Learning, Discourses, Mathematical communication

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Introduction

In contemporary information-driven societies, advancements in science and technology have heightened the demands on education. Modern individuals are expected to possess advanced cognitive abilities, including adept problem-solving, critical analysis, and creative ideation. Additionally, qualities like innovation and collaborative prowess are essential for navigating daily life and fostering professional growth. Within this landscape, mathematics emerges as a paramount discipline. Hyde and Jain (2020) underscore that mathematics, and by extension, mathematics education, significantly fosters the development of vital skills. These encompass conceptual comprehension, strategic acumen, logical reasoning, analytical thinking, productivity, and fluency. Thus, the centrality of mathematics and its education becomes indisputably clear, warranting a position of paramount importance.

Mathematics stands as the cornerstone for shaping cognitive frameworks that empower individuals to unravel the complexities, patterns, and interrelationships of the world, catalyzing progress in science and technology (Aufa et al., 2016). Its crucial role extends across disciplines such as astronomy, economics, computer science, physics, and statistics, intricately woven into daily life (Andamon & Tan, 2018). Hence, the urgent call for nurturing mathematical literacy becomes evident. However, certain studies underscore a shortfall in essential mathematical skills and literacy among students (Kushwaha, 2014; Yeh et al., 2019), a challenge influenced by a blend of personal and environmental factors (Savaş et al., 2010). The abstract nature of mathematics compounds the difficulty of grasping its concepts and connections (Andamon & Tan, 2018), often accompanied by feelings of tension and anxiety. Addressing this entails a multifaceted approach, nurturing both knowledge and skills while fostering positive attitudes, interests, and motivations. This holistic strategy holds the promise of bridging gaps and cultivating confidence in the realm of mathematics.

Bandura (1969) asserted that socio-cultural development springs from social interactions, shaping knowledge, skills, and tendencies. Cesar (1998) emphasized the crucial role of social interactions in comprehension, skill acquisition, and socio-cognitive growth. In learning settings, students leverage social interactions to articulate thoughts, guiding their learning journey. Tu and McIsaac (2002) recognize social interaction as a key element of an individual's social presence in learning. Scholarly discourse echoes the enhancing impact of student interactions on understanding (Harianja et al., 2020; Lomibao et al., 2016). Similarly, numerous studies explore social interactions in mathematical pedagogy (Apriliyanto et al., 2018; Boaler, 2000; Cesar, 1998). Exploring social interactions in mathematics education brings forth the concept of mathematical communication, highlighting its central significance.

The mathematical communication process, rooted in individuals' grasp of mathematical concepts and their expression of mathematical thoughts, is denoted as the mathematical communication process (Uygur Kabael & Ata Baran, 2016). Importantly, students' mathematical progress is frequently evaluated based on their proficiency in mathematical communication (Farokhah et al., 2017). Extensive research explores various dimensions of mathematical communication skills (Ansori et al., 2019; Ata Baran & Kabael, 2023; Baxter et al., 2005; Brendefur & Frykholm, 2000; Cai, 2017; Cobb et al., 1997; Kabael & Ata Baran, 2017; Kaya & Aydın, 2016; Lisnani, 2018; Lomibao et al., 2016; Maspe et al., 2021; Mosckhovich, 2007; Mujiasih et al., 2021; Nathan & Knuth, 2003; Ryve, 2006; Sari & Yuberta, 2022; Septiana et al., 2018; Stein, 2007; Susilawati et al., 2018; Tong et al., 2021; Walshaw & Anthony, 2008; Yulian, 2018; Zeybek & Açı, 2018). These studies uniformly underscore the pivotal role of mathematical communication in effective mathematics education, aligning with educational goals. Recent research emphasizes the positive impact of peer interactions on reducing students' mathematical anxiety and enhancing their performance and academic achievement (Apriliyanto et al., 2018; Garba et al., 2019; Kaymak et al., 2020; Thurston et al., 2020). As Cobb et al. (1997) noted, the classroom's social context substantiates its contribution to students' mathematical understanding. Boaler's (2000) study further amplifies the importance of social interactions in mathematics lessons. Boaler's interviews with 76 students highlight the paramount role of peer communication in learners' eyes, often surpassing seeking guidance from instructors. These findings underscore the potent effect of active student participation and peer interaction in nurturing a profound grasp of mathematics.

This study delves into the crucial connection between meaningful mathematical knowledge and conceptual understanding. Conceptual learning forms the bedrock of mathematics, entailing logical construction and interrelation exploration of mathematical concepts. Notably, a direct link between conceptual learning and mathematical communication emerges, bearing significant implications for math education. Existing research extensively probes various facets of conceptual learning (Baki et al., 2009; Bergsten et al., 2017; Fernández-Millán & Molina, 2017; Forrester & Chinnappan, 2010; Gürbüz & Gülburnu, 2013; İşleyen & Işık, 2003; Jazuli et al., 2017; Kanz, 2020; Konyalioğlu et al., 2011; Malatjje & Machaba, 2019; Mohd Yatim et al., 2022; Nahdi & Jatisunda, 2020; Rillero, 2016; Soyulu & Aydın, 2006). However, the intriguing nexus between mathematical communication and conceptual learning remains unexplored. This study aims to fill this gap, investigating how mathematical communication bolsters students' conceptual learning in effective math education. It emphasizes the significance of conceptual learning, underscores the role of mathematical communication in

student growth, and advocates communication-centric learning environments. The upcoming sections will delve into mathematical communication and conceptual learning, culminating in an exploration of their interplay and impact.

1. Exploring Mathematical Communication Proficiency and its Significance

Communication skills serve as the bridge through which individuals cultivate self-awareness, navigate their environment, and establish meaningful connections within their social sphere (Yüksel, 2012). Language forms the cornerstone of interpersonal communication. The unique, universal language and terminology inherent in mathematics (MoNE, 2013) underscore the paramount role of communication in mathematics education. Of crucial importance for students is the capacity to articulate their mathematical reasoning, comprehend peers' mathematical insights, and thereby construct a genuine conceptual grasp of mathematics (Martin, 2001). Conversational exchanges that explore diverse perspectives on mathematical ideas foster cognitive clarity and interrelations (Martin, 2001). Paridjo and Waluya (2017) emphasize how such discussions not only unveil mathematical insights but also contribute to the development of an individual's mathematical mindset. Enter mathematical communication skills, which empower individuals to interpret mathematical scenarios, devise effective problem-solving strategies, and convey mathematical concepts coherently to others (Zengin, 2017). This significance particularly resonates in enhancing students' comprehension of mathematical concepts (Baxter et al., 2001). Mathematical communication acts as a conduit for students to transpose their ideas into their surroundings, engaging in activities that amplify their mathematical prowess and knowledge. Summarizing students' endeavors when conveying mathematical ideas to peers or educators, Sammons (2018) outlines these interactions, depicted in Figure 1. **Figure 1**

Activities Performed by Students While Conveying Their Mathematical Ideas

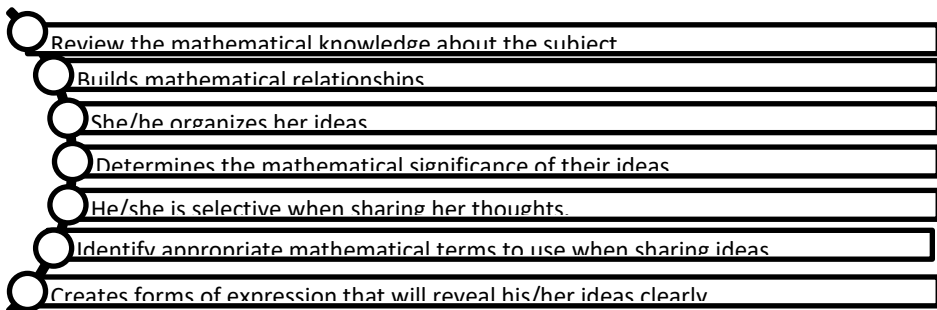
- 
- Review the mathematical knowledge about the subject
 - Builds mathematical relationships
 - She/he organizes her ideas
 - Determines the mathematical significance of their ideas
 - He/she is selective when sharing her thoughts.
 - Identify appropriate mathematical terms to use when sharing ideas
 - Creates forms of expression that will reveal his/her ideas clearly

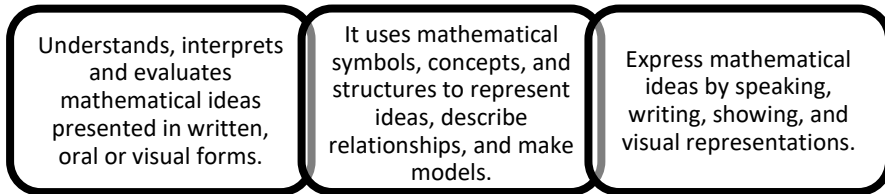
Figure 1 depicts the intricate facets of the mathematical communication process, wherein students deploy a myriad of advanced skills. This process distinctly fortifies the growth of mathematical knowledge and competencies. Within mathematics classrooms, mathematical communication emerges as a cornerstone (Ansori et al., 2019). Baroody (1993) attributes the significance of mathematical communication in learning mathematics to two pivotal reasons. Firstly, mathematics possesses a distinct language, enabling universal communication. Secondly, mathematical communication is intrinsically social within the context of learning mathematics. Amidst broader objectives of mathematics teaching, a paramount aim is nurturing students' social competence, empowering them to effectively convey their mathematical ideas and reasoning to others (Pourdavood et al., 2005). Importantly, mathematical communication skills profoundly facilitate this achievement. This avenue empowers students to engage in discussions, reflection, refinement, and rectification of their ideas (Martin, 2001). Lindquist and Elliott (1996) deem communication pivotal to students' learning and problem-solving endeavors. Thus, the concept of mathematical communication holds a pivotal stance within mathematics education, meriting comprehensive exploration. A rich tapestry of studies underscores the importance and cultivation of mathematical communication skills (Afrianti & Qohar, 2020; Baxter et al., 2005; Brendefur & Frykholm, 2000; Brenner, 1998; Kabael & Ata Baran, 2017; Lee, 2015; Lisnani, 2018; Pujiastuti et al., 2021; Setiyani et al., 2020; Susilawati et al., 2018; Uyen et al., 2021; Yulian, 2018). Furthermore, investigations into the reciprocal influences between mathematical communication skills and variables like students' genders (Ansori et al., 2019), affective traits (Ata Baran & Kabael, 2021; Roble et al., 2018; Septiana et al., 2018; Tahir, 2021), higher-order thinking abilities (Cai et al., 1996), and academic achievements (Baxter et al., 2005; Lomibao et al., 2016) are evident. Studies examining diverse pedagogical approaches impacting mathematical communication skills (Kusumah et al., 2020; Sumaji et al., 2020; Triana et al., 2019), alongside evaluations of how mathematical communication skills influence misconceptions and mathematical literacy (Pugalee, 2001), further enrich the discourse.

When the results obtained in these studies are evaluated in general, it is seen that mathematical communication skills reduce students' anxiety about mathematics and accordingly increase their success levels, while strong mathematical communication established in the classroom significantly affects students' thinking skills, problem-solving, and reasoning skills. All these research results show that mathematical communication skills can be considered as an important variable that reveals the mathematical potential of individuals. There are some clues or indicators that show that an individual has

mathematical communication skills. NCTM (1989) lists the indicators of mathematical communication skills as in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Indicators of Mathematical Communication Skills



These indicators reveal that mathematical communication takes place in various dimensions. Ng (2016) also stated that mathematical communication is provided with the help of written and spoken words and algebraic symbols, and it is transformed into a visual form with gestures. Cai et al. (1996) stated that students should be encouraged to benefit from various representations for effective mathematical communication. Thompson and Chappell (2007), on the other hand, stated that for students to make sense of mathematical concepts, symbols, and words, they should perform mathematical communication in four dimensions: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This situation reveals the importance of knowing the language of mathematics well and using it correctly for healthy mathematical communication.

2. The Role of Mathematical Language in Facilitating Effective Communication

Mathematical communication is rooted in conveying mathematical thoughts through speech or writing and comprehending others' ideas. This highlights language and social interaction's pivotal role. Language serves as a universal symbolic system for communication (Akkuş, 2015). Işıkddoğan Uğurlu and Kayhan (2018) define language as a tool for expressing knowledge, emotions, thoughts, learning, cultural heritage, and inquiry. Vygotsky (2012) emphasizes language's role in cognitive development. Mathematics has its language, terminology, and expression (Aydın & Yeşilyurt, 2007). Usiskin (2012) emphasizes mathematical language for meaningful math engagement. Paridjo and Waluya (2017) highlight students' improved math comprehension through language skills. Verbal language empowers students to communicate, expand concepts, and understand others' ideas (Ansori et al., 2019). Written language clarifies mathematical rationale. Language is the foundation of mathematical communication, with utmost significance.

In mathematics teaching, the use of language in interpersonal interactions comes to the fore. Bruner (1974) stated that mathematical communication plays a central role in the development of cognitive structures, and language can be considered a tool not only for representing experiences but also for transforming ideas. Students need to become fluent in mathematical language so that they can perform mathematical communication effectively. This fluency requires knowing the mathematical language with all its elements shown in Figure 3 (Kersaint, 2015).

Figure 3

Elements of Mathematical Language

Sentences	{	Expressions that each have a different meaning (negative, rational,...) Special terms (hypotenuse, trapezoid,...) Terms with multiple meanings (base, median, ...)
Symbols	{	Expressions for reading and interpreting mathematical notations (axb , a^b ,...)
Meanings	{	Making sense of mathematical language Recognizing words used with different meanings in different situations. For example, the base of a number with an exponent and the base of a solid

In Figure 3, it's evident that mathematical language encompasses unique concepts and symbols, with their derived meanings constituting a crucial language component. The significance of language in mathematical communication lies in the internalization of these meanings by individuals. Such internalization transpires through in-class interactions. Notably, classroom interactions encompass two distinct linguistic dimensions: primitive language and mathematical language. Mercer and Sams (2006) outlined two interaction modes linking colloquial language to mathematics education. The first mode involves teacher-guided student interaction, fostering knowledge and understanding development under the teacher's direction. The second mode pertains to peer group interaction, where communication tends to surpass teacher-led instances. In peer interactions, students engage in freer expression of mathematical ideas and contribute more effectively to mathematical discussions.

In recent times, scholars have increasingly focused on the pivotal role of language and social communication in mathematics education (Barwell et al., 2005; Sfard & Kieran, 2001). Given that language forms the bedrock of interpersonal communication, mastering the language of mathematics is paramount for effective mathematical communication. Nonetheless, precise

language use alone doesn't guarantee effectiveness, as students often employ common expressions from teachers or textbooks without a comprehensive understanding (Kosko & Wilkins, 2010), hindering meaningful communication. Indeed, students frequently resort to these expressions even when their comprehension is limited, posing a communication challenge. Effective mathematical communication hinges on how teachers and students articulate their mathematical ideas, and crucially, how others interpret this exchange. This bidirectional interaction underscores the notion of "mathematical discourse," emphasizing the indispensability of reciprocal comprehension.

3. Mathematical Discourse: A Crucial Element in Fostering Mathematics Understanding

Altun (2008) suggests that when imparting mathematical concepts, particularly to young learners, it's prudent to minimize mathematical jargon and opt for more relatable language. This calls for teachers to employ everyday language that resonates with students, rather than relying solely on scientific definitions and symbols. Bali Çalıkoğlu (2002) emphasizes that nurturing students' mathematical comprehension involves fostering reciprocal discussions within classroom dialogues, a departure from conventional teaching methods. These dialogues, alongside teachers' use of everyday language to elucidate mathematical concepts, typically manifest as discourses.

Discourses form an integral facet of language. While language serves as the vehicle for expressing thoughts, discourses lend logical cohesion, persuasiveness, and meaning to speech. In essence, discourses are linguistic tools that engender semantic unity and facilitate the attainment of logical conclusions (Çelik & Ekşi, 2013). Sfard (2008) characterizes discourse as a form of communication individuals engage in, either with themselves or others, synchronously or otherwise, through verbal or symbolic language. Discourses are designed to enhance student comprehension through open-ended queries, fostering active contributions to the learning journey. In the realm of mathematics, which possesses its universal language, discourses assume heightened prominence within learning environments, thereby giving rise to the concept of mathematical discourse. Wells (2003) defines mathematical discourse as both spoken and written language used by mathematics students and mathematicians to communicate mathematically.

Sfard (2012) stated that thinking can be defined as a communication activity that an individual carries out with himself and that this situation allows the individual to produce his own story for learning mathematics. In this context, he claimed that mathematical thinking, or mathematics in short, can be thought of as a discourse. Indeed, in the thinking process, the individual synthesizes the ideas he observes from the people he sees as role models or from his peers and

creates logical verbal expressions in his mind. These verbal expressions form the basis of the individual's way of speaking and expressing in mathematical communications, that is, mathematical discourses.

Paridjo and Waluya (2017) stated that students can improve their understanding of mathematics by using the language of mathematics correctly while writing their mathematical thoughts, expressing their ideas through symbols, shapes, and verbal expressions, and having mathematical discussions. Discourses allow students to develop a common understanding of mathematical ideas and teachers to evaluate their students' mathematical thoughts (Walshaw & Anthony, 2008).

Soter et al. (2008) highlight that discourses play a pivotal role in identifying students' partial comprehension and misconceptions. Mathematics, inherently abstract, is founded on intricate concept interconnections. Students' challenges often stem from struggling to mentally visualize abstract notions or comprehend inter-concept relationships. The profound links between mathematical concepts amplify the significance of misconceptions in the learning journey. Addressing the needs of mathematically challenged students and fostering their self-assurance requires an initial grasp of their misconceptions. For instance, in the context of defining a square, when a student says the discourse "a quadrilateral with four sides of equal length," it becomes apparent that they might struggle to discern the nuanced differences between a square and a rhombus. Consequently, the role of discourse becomes particularly significant in unveiling and addressing such misconceptions held by the student. So, mathematical discourses are believed to hold substantial potential in enhancing the mathematics learning process, notably aiding in the identification and rectification of students' misconceptions.

Discourses play a crucial role in enhancing students' mathematical knowledge access and fostering their mathematical reasoning. Lomibao et al. (2016) emphasize that conventional math teaching often prioritizes task execution and standardized procedures. Unfortunately, procedure execution can be misleading, misrepresenting true comprehension. This misconception leads to challenges in math education. Sfard (2008) advocates discourse integration in math instruction and assessment to rectify this. Evaluating students' discourse during problem-solving reveals genuine understanding. For instance, the correct procedural application may not signify mastery, as it could result from chance. This misconception intensifies in multiple-choice exams. Opting for discourse-based evaluations, showcasing comprehension, grasp, misunderstandings, and misconceptions, offers more meaningful insights, particularly in our educational context.

When the relevant literature is examined, some studies deal with various aspects of mathematical discourses, evaluate the mathematical discourses

used by the example situations, and examine the mathematical discourses of teachers (Bondurant, 2020; Cobb et al., 1997; Kabeel & Ata Baran, 2017; Makgakga, 2023; Mosckhovich, 2007; Nathan & Knuth, 2003; Pape et al., 2003; Pourdavood et al., 2005; Pourdavood & Wachira, 2015; Ryve, 2006; Stein, 2007; Toscano et al., 2019; Walshaw & Anthony, 2008; Yimam & Kelkey, 2022). Especially in recent studies, it is striking that teachers' mathematical discourses are focused on. In addition, it is seen that there is a consensus in the context of constructivist learning theory and socio-cultural theories that mathematical discourses positively affect students' conceptual development (Sfard, 2008; Walshaw & Anthony, 2008). In addition, it is thought that mathematical discourses have serious contributions to the communication process.

According to Cobb et al. (1997), teacher-centered dialogues in learning environments are usually one-dimensional, mostly providing real information and rarely rich. When students are involved in these dialogues with their inquiries, teachers tend to give more detailed explanations and decorate their explanations with different examples and representations. This shows that student discourse is an important factor that affects teachers' discourses and thus enriches the communication process. Nakamura (2008) also supported this situation and stated that students should be active participants in mathematical discourses to be able to perform mathematical communication effectively.

Lomibao et al. (2016) underline that students' engagement in mathematical discourses enhances their verbal communication skills. Accordingly, educators should cultivate learning environments conducive to such discourses. Classroom interactions, as discussed earlier and illuminated by Mercer and Sams (2006), prominently feature mathematical discourses. Through interactions led by expert teachers, students are influenced by their discourse and can internalize field-specific mathematical discourses. This dynamic enriches mathematical communication in classrooms, significantly enhancing students' mathematical learning. Moreover, within peer interactions, discourses rooted in everyday life tend to prevail over strict mathematical language. These everyday discourses foster comprehension of mathematics' conceptual structure and bolster emotional aspects by imbuing student-driven mathematical discussions with greater significance.

One of the most important obstacles in the development of the mathematical communication process is students' misconceptions and mislearning. Misconceptions that cause conflicts and disagreements while students are discussing their mathematical ideas with other individuals can seriously damage a healthy mathematical communication process. It is thought that discourses positively affect both the development of the mathematical

communication process and the mathematics learning process, with their contribution to identifying misconceptions.

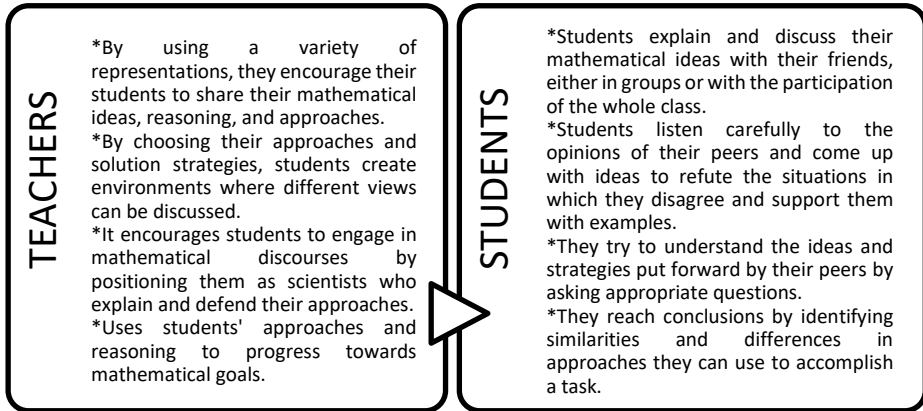
The use of discourses in learning environments is also effective in creating classroom environments suitable for contemporary learning approaches. Kersaint (2015) summarized the communicative processes that take place in a classroom environment rich in mathematical discourse as follows.

- To help students develop a better understanding, both students and teachers acknowledge and discuss their mistakes and the reasons behind them.
- Students question each other using mathematical knowledge to determine the accuracy of their solutions.
- Students arrive at and justify conclusions based on their mathematical knowledge, without seeing teachers as the absolute authority.
- Students are encouraged to use a variety of approaches, such as oral presentations, written explanations, physical, graphical, pictorial, and symbolic representations, to convey their knowledge and solution strategies.

Learning environments rich in discourse provide opportunities for communication processes in line with contemporary approaches such as constructivist learning, which is based on the student's active effort to construct knowledge in his mind. Kersaint (2015) also summarizes the roles of teacher and student in learning environments rich in mathematical discourse as in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Teacher and Student Roles in Mathematical Discourse-Based Rich Learning Environments



As can be seen from the teacher and student roles in Figure 4, mathematical discourses make a significant contribution to the formation of mathematical knowledge by maximizing communication in learning environments. In general, when we consider mathematical communication with language and discourse, many clues appear that it plays an important role in the development of students' mental processes and the perception of the conceptual structure of mathematics. To reveal this situation more clearly, let us consider in detail conceptual learning in mathematics teaching.

4. Exploring the Significance and Role of Conceptual Learning in the Pedagogy of Mathematics

One of the most important purposes of mathematics teaching is to enable students to learn mathematics by understanding it (Ata Baran & Yenilmez, 2014). Van de Walle (1989) attributes students' learning by understanding mathematics to the realization of three conditions: knowledge of mathematical operations, knowledge of mathematical concepts, and understanding of the relations between concepts and operations.

These conditions reveal two types of learning that mathematicians call conceptual and procedural learning. Conceptual learning, which is one of these learning types, especially allows students to construct and make sense of mathematics in their minds. The term 'concept' signifies a generalized abstract notion distilled from specific instances (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2022). In all scientific fields, foundational concepts drive growth. Mathematics, deeply entrenched in concepts, necessitates understanding individual elements and their relationships. Nurjanah et al. (2021) stress grasping concepts for effective mathematical learning, is echoed by NCTM (2000). This emphasizes conceptual knowledge and learning. Birgin and Gürbüz (2009) define conceptual knowledge as linking, symbolizing, and expressing math concepts diversely, focusing on meaning (Canobi, 2009). Conceptual learning involves establishing logical foundations for concepts and exploring interrelations, as described by

Kilpatrick et al. (2001). Nahdi and Jatisunda (2020) stated that conceptual learning does not only mean knowing the information but also interpreting the information by making it meaningful.

Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, enables us to know and apply situations such as relations, operations, etc. to be used in problem-solving by using the symbols and language of mathematics (Soylu & Aydın, 2006). In short, procedural knowledge includes the practical part of mathematics. Balka et al. (2014) emphasized that mathematics teaching given in schools for many years is based on procedural learning. Especially in countries like Turkey that adopt an exam-based education system, an understanding of mathematics education that is based on procedural learning rather than conceptual learning comes to the fore. On the other hand, Zakaria et al. (2010) stated that knowing mathematics is especially based on knowledge of concepts, in addition to knowing operations and procedures. Mason et al. (2009) supported this view and emphasized the importance of conceptual learning by stating that for a deep understanding of mathematics, it is necessary to make sense of the theoretical structures and relationships on which complex mathematical concepts are based. This situation reveals the necessity of developing students' conceptual learning levels to achieve the goals of mathematics teaching.

A student needs to know how to perform a mathematical operation. But if this student does not know the logical reason for his action, his work is just memorization. For example, a middle school student learns that when adding and subtracting rational numbers, the denominators of numbers must be equalized. Students who learn this information can solve many of the operational questions in this way. Most of these students do not know why they are equating the denominator and unfortunately, the teachers do not explain the logical basis of this operation. Unlike addition and subtraction operations, there is no need to equate the denominator in multiplication and division operations, and equating the denominator causes unnecessary redundancy. Students who forget memorized information make mistakes in applications involving four operations on rational numbers or deal with unnecessary operations. This situation is thought to be the most important reason why mathematical literacy levels do not develop in societies that adopt rote-based education. To overcome this problem, it is seen as a necessity to give importance to conceptual learning in mathematics teaching.

Köğçe et al. (2019) stress the importance of accurate concept comprehension in effective teaching, highlighting conceptual learning's role in understanding interconnections between concepts. Scholars also affirm that conceptual learning lays the groundwork for procedural knowledge (Geary, 1994; Halford, 1993). Gelman and Williams (1998) note that mathematical knowledge originates from conceptual understanding, while procedural

knowledge stems from practice, counteracting rote memorization. Chi et al. (1989) assert that conceptually adept students provide insightful procedure explanations, especially in problem-solving. However, Aydın et al. (2016) warn against outcomes via formulaic approaches, misleading educators. In societies like Turkey, overemphasizing procedure over concept learning compounds educational challenges. Zakaria et al. (2010) emphasize deep conceptual comprehension for math proficiency. Mason et al. (2009) stress conceptual learning's role in understanding complex math, urging enhanced student conceptual learning for educational goals.

A review of relevant literature reveals a plethora of studies investigating diverse aspects of conceptual learning in mathematics education (Abrahamson & Abdu, 2020; Ata Baran & Yenilmez, 2014; Baki et al., 2009; Becerra Labra et al., 2012; Gürbüz & Gülburnu, 2013; Hussein & Csikos, 2023; İşleyen & Işık, 2005; İşleyen & Işık, 2003; Lobato et al., 2012; Mareschal, 2016; Rillero, 2016; Schwarz et al., 2018; Simon, 2013; Simon et al., 2018; Soylu & Aydın, 2006; Tzur, 2011, 2011; Tzur & Simon, 2004; Walid, 2023). In a comprehensive review of the academic landscape, it becomes evident that studies focusing on the development of conceptual learning skills and their impact on academic achievement, as well as affective and cognitive traits, prominently occupy the forefront of educational research. While international studies extensively explore various facets of conceptual learning, limited research is evident in Turkey. Exploring the impact of pedagogical methods and techniques on enhancing conceptual learning within mathematics education is crucial for instructional enhancement. Notably, communication-centered learning environments aligned with constructivist principles emerge as significant. Yet, a substantial gap remains, both domestically and globally, concerning the interplay between conceptual learning and mathematical communication. This study aims to bridge this gap, contributing to a deeper understanding of this pivotal intersection.

5. Nurturing Conceptual Understanding: The Role of Mathematical Communication Environments

Many scholars advocate an educational paradigm focused on comprehension-driven mathematics learning (Pirie & Kieren, 1994; Sierpinski, 1994). Research consistently reveals that traditional education impedes conceptual learning, steering students toward procedural knowledge (Mack, 1995; Moseley, 2005). Addressing this, there is a call for a mathematics education framework that remedies traditional education's limitations and nurtures conceptual development. Nurjanah et al. (2021) propose student-centered methodologies that promote active engagement and distance from rote learning, a criticism of traditional approaches. The Everyday Mathematics program, by the University of Chicago's school mathematics project, advocates

introducing abstract concepts only after establishing a strong foundation in conceptual knowledge. This program emphasizes real-life examples, concrete objects, and visual aids to enhance students' conceptual development through collaborative discourse (Everyday Mathematics, 2022). In this context, modern pedagogies fostering conceptual growth, often centered on communication-based learning environments, assume vital importance.

Kandemir (2004) emphasizes the significance of students' grasp of the underlying pre-concepts that constitute a given concept for robust conceptual understanding. This comprehension hinges on classroom dialogues, idea-sharing, and participatory educational settings. Sari and Darhim (2020) concur, stating that in participatory classrooms, students demonstrate their grasp of mathematical concepts through effective engagement in discussions, problem-solving, and explanations. Examination of pertinent literature unveils research outcomes showcasing that participatory classroom environments indeed enhance students' conceptual comprehension (Çaycı et al., 2007; Kanselaar et al., 2000; Marinopoulos & Stavridou, 2002; Sukmawati et al., 2019). In one such study, Ross and Willson (2012) underscored that participatory classroom contexts, where diverse interpretations of mathematical concepts are shared among educators and learners, foster the establishment of connections between concepts and the acquisition of conceptual knowledge. In sum, these findings collectively underscore the paramount importance of learning environments rooted in research, discussion, collaboration, and inquiry for nurturing students' conceptual development.

Now, let's examine a few examples of situations that can demonstrate that mathematical communication-based learning environments support students' conceptual learning. First, let's take the discussion of a teacher trying to teach his students the concept of angle:

Teacher: *Yes, friends, today we will learn the concept of angle. First, let's talk about the concept of angle. Can anyone define the concept of angle?*

Student A (asks for a voice): *An angle is a number that expresses the size of the aperture formed by the two lines.*

Teacher: *Is an angle a number?*

Student A: *Yes, teacher, for example, 600 is an angle.*

Student B (requests to have a say): *But my teacher, the definition of angle in the sources is expressed as "The union of two rays with the same starting point is called an angle.". In this case, the angle seems to represent a shape rather than a numerical value.*

Teacher: *Well, let's go over the angle definition you made then. What does the union of two rays with the same starting point signify?*

Student C: *Teacher, since the ray is a set of points, the union of the two sets again denotes a set.*

Teacher: *Then can we say that an angle denotes a set of points?*

Student A: *Yes, my teacher, but we always use expressions such as 300, 600, etc. in practice. That's why I thought the angle was a numerical value.*

Teacher: *Yes, you are right, such a misconception can occur. So, what do you think about expressions like 300, and 600?*

Student D: *My teacher, I read in a source that these numerical expressions express the size of the aperture formed by two rays with the same starting point, and they are called the measure of an angle.*

Teacher: *Then, as a result, we will call the shape formed by the union of two rays, namely the set of points, the angle, and the measure of the aperture formed by the rays, the measure of angle.*

Dialogues between the teacher and his students reveal that initially, the students could not make sense of the concept of angle, and then the students reached the truth through a mutual exchange of ideas. For healthy conceptual development, it is thought that for teachers instead of giving the truth to the students' ready-made source of information, the students' access to the right information with their logic filters with this kind of mutual exchange of ideas will provide more permanent learning.

As a second example, consider the concepts of fractions and rational numbers. Let's examine the following dialogue between a teacher who wants to understand the definition of the concept of rational numbers at the secondary school level and his/her students.

Teacher: *Let's define the concept of rational numbers now. Firstly, I want to ask: Do you think fractions and rational numbers are the same things?*

Student A: *Yes, the same thing, I think. When we add the negative fractions, rational numbers appear. (Many students in the classroom support this view)*

Teacher: *How about the negative fraction? Shall we make sense of this situation by remembering the definition of a fraction?*

Student B: *Teacher, the fraction was each of the equal parts of a whole. How can it be a negative fraction since a fraction denotes parts of the whole?*

Student A: *A negative fraction is formed because of a minus sign in front of the fraction, but I cannot say whether it indicates a fraction as it stands.*

Teacher: *I guess it makes no sense to show the parts of the whole with a minus sign. Then, if the concept of fraction expresses the parts of the whole, what do the numbers we write as $1/2$, $2/3$, ... mean?*

Student C: I researched this, they are called fraction numbers, and they show the amount of the fraction in the whole. So, I agree with the idea that fractions cannot be negative.

Teacher: I also agree with this idea. So, let's consider the rational number and fraction relationship again.

Student B: Since fractions represent parts of a whole, we will associate fractions with rational numbers. Since fraction numbers cannot be negative, there will be a subset of rational numbers in this case. So, rational numbers are a more general set.

Student C: Yes, I agree with this. I think rational numbers are a larger set that includes all the fraction numbers and their minuses.

Teacher: Well then, I want to ask a question. Consider the numbers $1/2$ and $2/4$. We know that both numbers are fractions. But are they both rational numbers?

Student D: If we conclude that all fraction numbers are rational numbers, of course, they are rational numbers. But these are equivalent fractions, that is, they represent the same amounts of the whole. Since both show the same amount, wouldn't it be wrong to write both in the same set? Frankly, I'm a bit confused...

Teacher: So, the fact that the number $1/2$ is in the set does not mean that all the numbers that are equivalent to this number are also present?

Student A: Then the set of rational numbers must be a set containing the simplest form of all fraction numbers.

Teacher: Well, according to the information we have reached, would it be appropriate if we write a set for the rational number as follows?

$$Q = \{a/b: a, b \in \mathbb{Z}; a \text{ and } b \text{ are relatively prime}\}$$

Student C: Yes, in this case, all the fraction numbers are included in the set, since a and b are integers, negative numbers are also included in the set. Also, since you say that a and b are relatively prime, fraction numbers expressing the same quantities will not be written in the set separately. I think this set is the right teacher...

Student B: Only one thing stuck with me. We talked about the fact that 0 cannot be a divisor in a division. Since the number 0 is also an integer, it can be written instead of b . What will it be like then?

Student D: I agree too, we should add an expression like b shouldn't be zero.

Teacher: Congratulations, you both saw an important point. Then if we write it like this, I guess there will be no problem.

$$Q = \{a/b: a, b \in \mathbb{Z}; b \neq 0, a \text{ and } b \text{ are relatively prime}\}$$

When we examine the dialogue between the teacher and the students, it is seen that the teacher does not give the relationship between concepts as ready and directs the students to the discussion. With this approach, the teacher encourages his students to learn this way, by showing that he is open to a communication-based learning environment. As it was seen at the beginning, there was a dominant opinion among the students that the concepts of fractions and rational numbers meant the same thing. With the mutual exchange of ideas under the guidance of the teacher, the students were able to reach the right information by using the clues they uncovered. In this example, it is important to note how important students' prior knowledge is in determining the relationships between concepts. Knowing the definition of fractions and fraction numbers, the properties of sets, and the role of 0 in the division process played a key role in reaching a new concept.

In a study conducted by Kabael and Baran (2016) with pre-service secondary school mathematics teachers, pre-service teachers were deliberately given incomplete or erroneous discourses, and they were asked to analyze the discourses. One of the discourses given in the study is "There is one of the numerics 0, 2, 4, 6, and 8 at the end of the numbers divisible by 2, right?". This example is very important in terms of revealing the importance of classroom discourses in conceptual learning. Such a statement means that a number cannot be divided by 2 unless one of these digits is present in the one's digit. However, every number is divisible by 2. But, if the division is desired to be without a remainder, any of these numerics must be in the units' digit of the dividing number. For students to make sense of the difference between division and divisibility, teachers need to make correct statements, and this reflects healthy mathematical communication.

A striking example in terms of revealing the effect of communication-based learning environments on conceptual learning is presented in the study by Chapin et al. (2003). In the study, a situation where a primary school teacher gave a series of numbers while teaching odd and even numbers to his students and aimed to determine whether the numbers were odd or even because of class discussions was exemplified. As a result of a student's statement that 24 is an odd number because it is divisible by 3 in the discussions, the teacher tried to bring the students to the right result by exchanging ideas. Here, the importance of class discussions in terms of revealing students who have conceptual misconceptions and guiding them to correct information is emphasized.

Conclusion and Discussion

In the modern era, education has evolved beyond mere knowledge acquisition to the development of skills aligned with current demands. Educators now prioritize fostering critical thinking, collaborative abilities, information retrieval, analysis, and effective problem-solving. Mathematics plays a crucial role in nurturing these skills, with communication abilities being pivotal. Gauging students' mathematical understanding solely from instant reactions in math classes is challenging. Mutual dialogues and discussions offer a means to unveil students' mathematical ideas. Contemporary learning theories underscore active student engagement and self-guided learning, guided by teachers. Communication-based learning environments are an integral facet of today's education, enabling students to thrive in these contexts.

The essence of understanding mathematics, with its abstract and conceptual nature, lies in comprehending mathematical concepts and their interrelationships. Many students mistakenly believe that memorizing definitions and formulas suffices for success, leading to deeper struggles and a sense of helplessness. Contemporary learning approaches reject rote memorization, advocating for student-centered environments driven by mathematical communication. Such approaches aim to enhance students' conceptual grasp through verbal and written interactions. Chapin et al. (2003) emphasize the significance of asking "Why do you think that?" to encourage explanations based on understanding rather than memorization. In these environments, students engage in dialogues, refining their mathematical ideas. Active participation fosters deeper understanding and the development of unique mathematical discourses, which reflect an individual's comprehension and mental growth. These discourses, as noted by Akkuş (2015), signify a distinct pattern, and contribute to a culture of meaningful discussion. Unlike casual exchanges, discourses convey purposeful speeches aimed at influencing others, serving as indicators of one's mathematical understanding and cognitive advancement.

This study delves into the pivotal role of communication and discourses within contemporary learning approaches, aiming to elucidate their contributions to meaningful conceptual learning in mathematics education. The research underscores that mere regurgitation of information, whether heard or memorized, falls short of genuine conceptual learning. Instead, cultivating a robust conceptual framework based on logical foundations is imperative. Mathematical communication and discourses emerge as powerful tools, revealing the presence of this structure within individuals and enhancing the conceptual learning process. The study emphasizes the significance of fostering a discourse culture in mathematics classrooms to enhance lesson

effectiveness, particularly in challenging topics. Furthermore, advocating for communication-driven learning environments and nurturing a culture of mathematical discourse can counter the prevailing perception of mathematics as difficult and counter negative biases even before students embark on their educational journey.

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