Towards a New Understanding of University through Metaphors[*]

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Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin üniversite kavramını tanımlamak için kullandıkları mecaz ifadeleri saptamak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Veri toplamak amacıyla katılımcılardan "Üniversite ... gibidir çünkü ..." cümlesini tamamlamaları istenmiştir. Verilerin analizinde hem nitel hem de nicel yöntemler kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın bulgularına göre, 837 katılımcı 13 kavramsal tema altında üniversite kavramına ilişkin toplam 335 adet geçerli metafor üretmiştir. Belirlenen kavramsal kategoriler ile cinsiyet, fakülte ve yaş değişkenleri arasından anlamlı ilişki saptanmamıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarının yükseköğretim yöneticilerine, politika yapıcılara ve akademisyenlere üniversite kavramının öğrenciler tarafından nasıl algılandığını saptamada önemli veri sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Üniversite kavramı, metaforlar, üniversite öğrencisi*

Introduction

University has been a large contributing factor in formation of culture and civilization for centuries. It is assumed that the reason why there were no universities in ancient times is that ancient cities were already rich in culture (Iyi, 2002). However, the number of universities all around the world has been dramatically increasing especially in the last 15 years. In the present era, the self-perceptions of universities have already narrowed the concept of *university* in which a more limited understanding of science and information is adhered to. Today, the only worthwhile endeavor of the university is to produce, teach, spread and ultimately sell knowledge. Technological developments, globalization and demand for education everywhere by any age group created a collaborationist education market. The increasing competitiveness of almost every marketplace caused by the high-speed advances in technology and by the new concepts created by globalization has triggered important changes in institutions and organizations. Universities have also been profoundly affected by these changes. Research suggests that missions of universities have been changing with movements such as humanitarianism, globalization, internationalization, Europeanization and so on (Bakioğlu & Dalgıç, 2008; Brock-Utne, 2002; Duderstadt, 1997; Evans, 2002; Jarvis, 2006; Mohabedbhai, 2008; Olufemi, 2007; Scott, 2003; Verri, 2003; Yoder, 2006). Higher education institutions have been trying to be a competitive force in every field in order to stand out among others, to have a place in international platform and to realize the demands of the society in the globalization process (Bakioğlu & Dalgıç, 2008). While those changes are being seen, the missions of universities and the university concept in the minds of university students have been transforming as well.

Several scholars emphasize the importance of knowing and defining the world through metaphors. Metaphor studies conducted on defining the concept of university are very few in number. By far conducted studies mostly focus on revealing the metaphorical images of various concepts like teacher, school, learner (Baker, 1991; Balcı, 2001; Inbar, 1996; Mahlios & Maxson, 1998; Saban, 2008, 2009, 2010), teaching and learning (Chen, 2003; Saban, Kocbeker & Saban, 2007), and administrator (Bredeson, 1985; Cerit, 2008) in elementary and secondary education levels. Şimşek (1997) investigated how metaphors as symbolic constructs could be used in the analysis of change in higher education institutions. Using interview method the researcher collected the metaphors faculty members generated to describe university before and after the implementation of the new change plan. It was revealed at the end of the study that as the strategic choices

guiding the behavior of the organization differ, the metaphors used by faculty members to describe university change in tune.

Cerit (2006) scrutinized the perceptions of students, teachers and administrators on the concept of school using metaphors. At the end of the study metaphors used by students, teachers and administrators to describe school were scaled from completely agreed ones (5) to completely disagreed ones (1). According to the findings of the study, school as a place of knowledge and enlightenment, school as a place of change and development, school as a family, and school as a nice and fine place were found out to be the metaphors accepted by all the participants completely. Similarly, in his investigation of metaphors primary school students, teachers and teacher candidates formulated to describe the concept of *school*, Saban (2008) identified 10 conceptual categories. The study was conducted on primary school students, teachers and candidate teachers (*n* = 1709). The determined conceptual categories are; school as a place of love and solidarity, a place of knowledge and enlightenment, a place of enculturation and shaping, a place of growth and maturation, a place of nice and beautiful place, a means or tool for development, hope and guarantor of the future, a workplace, a place of discipline, control and guide. The frequency of those conceptual categories showed differences among participants' position (student, teacher and teacher candidate) and students' class levels. By using metaphors Bredeson (1985) analyzed the job image of principalship from the point of school principals. Three metaphorical images were determined as maintenance, survival and vision. The maintenance metaphor defines the role of principal as a caretaker who keeps the school doors open; survival metaphor defines the role of principal as an implementer of day-to-day activities in school; and the vision metaphor reflects the visionary characteristic of principal as thinking and deciding on certain educational issues in the future.

In a study conducted by Silman and Şimşek (2006) metaphors were investigated in order to determine the views of elementary school teachers in Turkey and the USA about their school and centralized educational institutions. Results of the study showed that while primary school teachers working in Turkey were inclined to produce metaphors that show the qualities of centralized education system, teachers working at American schools produced metaphors mostly related to participative and cooperative qualities of the school structure.

University has certain roles and missions to accomplish. While some of those roles and missions are officially accepted, there are some other roles of university that can change from person to person depending on their

needs and expectations (Bakioğlu & Dalgıç, 2008; Lin, 2010). Although explaining the concept of university has been a discussion among scholars for centuries, studies trying to explain the concept of university through metaphors have not been widespread nationally or internationally. The idea behind conducting this research is the lack of metaphor studies centered on students' defining the concept of university. Understanding the mental images that serve to illustrate university in the minds of students is useful to any institutions as well as academicians trying to reach this demographic. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of university students regarding the concept of university through the use of metaphors. In order to realize the objectives of this study, metaphors used by university students have been investigated to define university. These metaphors were categorized under conceptual themes as well as investigating the significance between the conceptual themes, and variables like gender, faculty and age. The results of this study may be illuminating for higher education administrators and policy makers who may be interested in revealing the present and changing image of university from the students' points of view. The study may also provide valuable information for academicians inspiring with ideas that can lead them to implement new pedagogical approaches directed toward their target audiences; other university personnel like student deanship or career centre by providing them information to create the most effective discourses for their recruitment and strategic plans. As the metaphors students generated for university reflect how they perceive their university and university life, this can function as a valuable data for questioning the roles of university for higher education administration in determining the policy, mission and vision of the university.

Method

This descriptive study was conducted to determine the metaphorical representations of university students about the concept of *university*. Metaphor is defined as a word or phrase that is used in place of another to suggest a likeness (TDK, 2011). Metaphors have become to be widely used in research especially in educational sciences in order to visualize abstract concepts (Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, & Kron, 2003; Cerit, 2008; Inbar, 1996; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Saban, 2006, 2009; Saban, Kocbeker, & Saban, 2007; Silman & Şimsek, 2006; Singh, 2010; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2010).

Participants

Participants for this study included 921 volunteer freshman university students in various faculties of a foundation[a] university in Istanbul. They were all the students of ENG 1003 Academic Writing course, excluding those who were absent or not available for some reason at the time the study was being carried out. ENG1003 Communications Skills & Academic Writing course is a compulsory course for first year students. Faculty of Engineering constituted the largest group (n = 277, 33%) followed by Faculty of Economics & Administrative Sciences (n = 176, 21%), Faculty of Arts and Sciences (n = 108, 13%), Faculty of Architecture & Design (n = 106, 13%), Faculty of Communication (n = 101, 11%), and Faculty of Law (n = 71, 9%).

All together 409 males (49%) and 428 females (51%) participated in the study. The distribution of gender across the five departments were 185 males (67%) and 92 females (33%) in the Faculty of Engineering, 99 males (56%) and 77 females (44%) in the Faculty of Economics & Administrative Sciences, 27 males (26%) and 79 females (74%) in the Faculty of Architecture & Design, 21 male (20%) and 85 (80%) females in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, 42 males (42%) and 59 females (58%) in the Faculty of Communication, 35 males (49%), 36 females (51%) in the Faculty of Law. Finally, the participants' ages ranged from 18 to 29 (M = 20.29 years, SD = 1.26).

Among 921 study forms, after the deletion of empty (n = 38), incomplete or meaningless forms (n = 47), 837 valid data forms were obtained.

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[a]According to 2547 Higher Education Law, Article 5, foundation universities are founded by foundations that use its profits only for educational purposes for the development of the university and other institutions owned by the university. They are dependent on the higher education principles and legislations of the country except for administrative and financial matters.

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Table 1

Participants' Distribution According to Gender and Faculty

Faculty Name	Male n	Male $\%$	Fem. n	Fem. $\%$	Total
Faculty of Engineering	185	67	92	33	277
Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	99	56	77	44	176
Faculty of Architecture and Design	27	26	79	74	106
Faculty of Arts and Sciences	21	20	85	80	106
Faculty of Communication	42	42	59	58	101
Faculty of Law	35	49	36	51	71
Total	409	49	428	51	837

Data Collection

Data were collected in 2010-2011 academic year spring term. Data were collected in ENG1003 Communications Skills & Academic Writing course. A data collection form in Turkish and English was distributed to the participants ($n = 921$) with the prompt *"University is like …because …"* to indicate their conceptualizations of university. The rationale behind providing the data collection form both in Turkish and English was to ensure that students have a chance to express their ideas in a language they feel themselves comfortable. Participants were asked to complete the sentence by focusing on a single metaphorical image. Also three demographic questions (gender, faculty, age) were included at the top of the page for comparison purposes.

The relationship between the type of metaphor and its source was tried to be pointed out with the word *like.* By completing the sentence that starts with *because,* the meaning attributed to the metaphor and the rationale behind it was tried to be pointed out.

Data Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were used in the study. The metaphors students generated were analyzed using the following five steps: (1) coding and elimination, (2) sample metaphor compilation and categorization, (3) validity and reliability, (4) analyzing data quantitatively, (5) constructive analysis technique.

Coding and Elimination Step: In the first step, all the metaphorical images supplied by the participants were simply coded (such as life, family, space etc.). Then the metaphors were analyzed again to characterize their elements: a) topic, b) the vehicle, c) the ground. The topic is subject of the metaphor, university. The vehicle refers the term to which the topic is compared. Ground can be defined as the nature of relationship between the topic and the vehicle. By analyzing the metaphors according to those elements, forms, in which a metaphorical image was not clearly articulated, a rationale was not provided or peculiar explanations were written, were eliminated. For example, some participants wrote more than one metaphor for university. Some provided statements of their views about university without giving a metaphor (e.g. "If you do not study hard, you get lost during university years"). Some could not provide any rationale for their metaphorical reasoning (e.g. "University is like reading a book"). Some metaphors were peculiar and they could not be placed under a clearly recognizable conceptual theme (e.g. "University is like a bar of chocolate, because I like chocolate a lot"). Because of all these reasons 78 forms were eliminated at the end of this step.

Sample Metaphor Compilation and Categorization Step: In this step, the coded 837 metaphors were organized in alphabetical order and the raw data were scrutinized again to choose a sample expression that can represent each metaphor best. The metaphors participants generated were varying in degree of explanation. While some were explained by one sentence, some others were explained in detail with 3-4 sentences. Therefore in cases when the metaphorical expression was too long, the most important features of the explanation were used and the rest of the explanations were meant to be represented with three dots (…). Employing this method, a list of 60 exemplar metaphors was determined.

The purpose of determining exemplar metaphors was to abstract the conceptual themes/categories from exemplar metaphors. In the following step the predominant characteristics of the metaphors that would determine which conceptual category the participants' metaphors best represented were looked into. As a result 13 main categories were identified.

Assuring Validity and Reliability: In order to assure reliability of the data, inter-coder reliability analysis was employed in the study. Inter-coder reliability refers to consistency among different coders. As abstraction of 13 generative categories and the classification of 60 exemplar metaphors into the 13 categories were the critical step of the analysis process one of the researchers of the study who did not take part in data analysis step was asked to sort 60 exemplar metaphorical images into the 13 conceptual

themes. To realize this purpose, the researcher was provided with a list of the 60 exemplar metaphors in alphabetical order and a list of 13 conceptual themes with their main characteristics. The researcher was asked to read each exemplar metaphor and place it into one of the conceptual themes, without leaving any of them out. To estimate the inter-coder reliability rate, Miles and Huberman's (1994) inter-coder reliability formula (Reliability = Agreement / Agreement + Disagreement X 100) was employed. Initial inter-coder reliability was calculated to be 89%. After having a discussion between the three researchers, a complete consensus was reached and a 94% final reliability was reached.

Analyzing Data Quantitatively: In the last step, all the study data were entered into the SPSS program to calculate the frequencies (f) and percentages (%) of the metaphorical images in each conceptual category. As the data of the study show a nominal or classificatory nature, a nonparametric statistical technique (chi-square) was employed to compare the 13 conceptual themes across the students' gender, faculty and age.

Results

In this part, firstly 13 conceptual categories that have been abstracted from the metaphors and the characteristics of those categories are introduced and described. Then analyses regarding the effects of participants' gender, faculty and age on metaphor preference are presented.

Table 2

Conceptual Categories

Conceptual Categories	f	%	Conceptual Categories	f	%
University as			*University as*		
a place of preparation for life and starting life	156	18.6	a difficult/boring/ negative place	36	4.3
a means	119	14.2	a place of struggle	35	4.2
a place of personal development and maturation	109	13.0	a place of diversity	35	4.2
a place of information flow and learning	81	9.7	freedom	33	3.9
a social learning and sharing place	68	8.1	a must	32	3.8
a family institution	58	6.9	a school	24	2.9
a nice/fun place	51	6.1	Total	837	100.0

Analysis of the findings indicates that students' university perceptions show considerable variety. Altogether students produced 335 well-articulated metaphors for university. Most frequent metaphors used by participants were school of life ($f = 35$), source of information ($f = 28$), development place ($f = 23$), family ($f = 23$), life ($f = 21$), home ($f = 21$), beginning ($f = 18$), personal development ($f = 15$), educative place ($f = 12$), place of getting a job ($f = 11$), guide ($f = 11$), independent thinking area ($f = 10$), freedom ($f = 10$), life ($f = 9$), place of socialization ($f = 9$), second home ($f = 9$), life ($f = 9$), stairs ($f = 9$), door (f = 8), plan of the future ($f = 8$), world ($f = 7$), place of education and socialization ($f = 7$), school ($f = 6$), compulsory ($f = 6$), guide ($f = 6$), high school ($f = 5$), home of education ($f = 5$), beginning of life ($f = 5$), business life ($f = 5$), world ($f=5$), vehicle ($f = 5$), preparation for life ($f = 5$), school of life ($f = 5$), city ($f = 5$).

From identified well-articulated 335 metaphors, 13 conceptual themes were developed: (1) University as a place of preparation for life, (2) University as a means, (3) University as a place of personal development and maturation, (4) University as a place of information flow and learning, (5) University as a social learning and sharing place, (6) University as a family institution, (7) University as a nice/fun place, (8) University as a difficult/boring/negative place, (9) University as a place of struggle, (10) University as a place of diversity, (11) University as freedom, (12) University as a must, (13) University as a school. The presence of significant associations between conceptual categories that were driven from the metaphors students generated and demographics like gender, faculty and age was tested with x^2.

Main Conceptual Categories

University as a Place of Preparation for Life and Starting Life: This category is represented by 156 participants in total (18.6%) and 49 metaphors (14.6%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: school of life ($f = 35$), life ($f = 21$), beginning ($f = 18$), door ($f = 8$), home of education ($f = 5$), beginning of life ($f = 5$), business life ($f = 5$), turning point ($f = 4$), preparation for work life ($f = 4$), future ($f = 3$), stairs ($f = 3$), rehearsal ($f = 3$), different world ($f = 2$), passage to the real life ($f = 2$), teacher ($f = 2$), window ($f = 2$), and last step ($f = 2$).

"University is like a rehearsal of life, because we learn how to move higher with competition and how to solve problems here."

"University is like a window, because when you are inside, you dream about the beauties you will reach when you get out of it."

"University is like stairs, because it prepares the person for life in steps."

"University is like a school of life, because the education you get in university and contacts with people direct your future life."

University as a Means: This category is represented by 119 participants in total (14.2%) and 61 metaphors (18.2%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: place of getting a job (f=11), guide (f=11), plan of the future (*f* = 8), stairs (*f* = 9) , vehicle (*f* = 5), preparation for life (*f* = 5), bridge (*f* = 4), exam (*f* = 4), sun (*f* = 3), door (*f* = 3), step (*f* = 2), key (*f* = 2), making your dreams real (*f* = 2), treasure (*f* = 2), course (*f* = 2), and body (*f* = 2).

"University is like a key, because university diploma works as a key and opens doors for you."

"University is like a vehicle, because my being in the place that I want in the future depends on my graduation from university."

"University is like stairs, because you can reach to the door and see outside as long as you climb the stairs."

"University is like the sun, because our university years, the best years of our life, prepares us for the future."

"University is like a treasure, because people can develop themselves in theory and practice."

"University is like an exam, because if you pass over the average you lead a life above average."

University as a Place for Personal Development and Maturation: This category is represented by 109 participants in total (13%) and 52 metaphors (15.5%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: development place (*f* = 23), personal development (*f* = 15), life (*f* = 9), home of education (*f* = 4), finding yourself (*f* = 4), first step (*f* = 3), world (*f* = 2), school of life (*f* = 2), an institution that changes person's view of life (*f* = 2), door (*f* = 2), and novelty (*f* = 2).

"University is like a personal development course, because everything we learn to make a difference on our personality."

"University is like a place of self discovery, because there I discover myself and what I am capable of doing".

"University is like a development center, because it gives you opportunities to develop yourself in any areas."

"University is like a school of life, because it is the first place in life we make decisions alone and stay alone."

"University is like home of education, because we have the chance to get many kinds of cultural and global education."

University as a Place for Information Flow and Learning: This category is represented by 81 participants in total (9.7%) and 8 metaphors (2.4%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: source of information ($f = 28$), educative place ($f = 12$), guide ($f = 6$), school of life ($f = 5$), place of development ($f = 4$), and place of constant production ($f = 4$).

"University is like a search engine, because by using it we can get any information we want."

"University is like home of information, because people go there to develop themselves."

"University is like a big city, everyday it teaches students new things."

"University is like a live library, students can reach any kind of information, have a chance to ask questions directly to teachers, and develop themselves."

"University is like a hospital, it cures ignorance."

"University is like a book, because it is the most logical way of getting experience and knowledge."

"University is like a tap, because there is constant flow of knowledge and intellectuality."

"University is like an old tree, because it is glorious, grand and full with information."

University as a Social Learning and Sharing Place: This category is represented by 68 participants in total (8.1%) and 43 metaphors (12.8%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: place of socialization ($f = 9$), place of education and socialization ($f = 7$), world ($f = 5$), life ($f = 3$), combination of culture ($f = 3$), school of life ($f = 2$), sharing place ($f = 2$), and country ($f = 2$).

"University is like the world, because there are people from all nationalities and we can learn about different cultures during those years."

"University is like an activity center, because while getting information about your job, you can develop yourself with social activities."

"University is like life, because it makes you get a lot of experiences. We also get experience in life."

"University is like life, because we come across different events and meet people from different countries and cities."

"University is like a culture combination, because people with different characteristics and from different nationalities come together and learn different things from each other."

"University is like an education and socialization place, because you can meet foreign students and develop your English, you can make international friends."

University as a Family Institution: This category is represented by 58 participants in total (6.9%) and 7 metaphors (2.0%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: family (f = 23), home (f = 21), second home (f = 9), life (f = 2), and secure place (f = 1).

"University is like home, because I spend much more time there than I spend time at home".

"University is like home, because I feel like I am home."

"University is like a family; you discover your own world with people there, create your own family and have a chance to choose them."

"University is like a family, because it tries to give you everything it has like your family."

"University is like the second home, because it is like a place of emotional refuge."

University as a Nice/Fun Place: This category is represented by 51 participants in total (6.1%) and 40 metaphors (11.9%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: life (f = 4), place of fun (f = 3), festival (f = 2), heaven (f = 2), place of escape (f = 2), holiday (f = 2), holiday resort (f = 2), and ocean (f = 2).

"University is like the reality of life, because students experience fun, difficulty, stress, happiness, namely every situation here."

"University is like an ocean, because it is like an ocean, sometimes peaceful and fun and sometimes wavy and difficult."

"University is like a place of having good time, because I can meet new people and turn my hobby into a job."

"University is like a club, because I both have fun and learn at the same time. I like being a student."

"University is like an absorbing novel, because as we are reading a novel, we want to turn back when we come to the end, it is the same for university."

University as a Difficult/Boring/Negative Place: This category is represented by 36 participants in total (4.3%) and 30 metaphors (9%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: private course (f = 3),

prison (f = 2), nightmare (f = 2), space (f = 2), difficulty (f = 2), dead poets' society(f = 1), bird cage (f = 1), and traffic jam (f = 1).

"University is like a prison, because it has a small area and is composed of only two buildings."

"University is like a nightmare, because students have exams approximately every day.

"University is like a private course, because it has limited space and activities.

"University is like dead poets society, because everything we learn was founded by dead people".

University as a Place of Struggle: This category is represented by 35 participants in total (4.2%) and 23 metaphors (6.9%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: life (f = 9), marathon (f = 3), exam (f = 2), competition (f = 2), arena (f = 1), chaos (f = 1), storm (f = 1), and firm (f = 1).

"University is like life, because it has difficulties, downs and ups."

"University is like a marathon, because it is the first place you come up with the difficulties of life."

"University is like a marathon, because there are many rivals and you are constantly in a competition."

"University is like an exam, because you constantly try to achieve something."

University as a Place of Diversity: This category is represented by 35 participants in total (4.2%) and 16 metaphors (4.8%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: world (f = 7), city (f = 5), novel (f = 4), life (f = 3), common area (f = 3), tree (f = 2), home (f = 2), shopping centre (f = 2), and TV show (f = 1).

"University is like the world, because you can interact with various personalities and face with different situations."

"University is like a forest, because it gives shelter to all kinds of differences, classes and cultures."

"University is like a city, because it is composed of many kinds of human beings."

"University is like a tree, because there are different departments in its every branch."

University as Freedom: This category is represented by 33 participants in total (3.9%) and 14 metaphors (4.2%). The main metaphors produced in

this category are: independent thinking area (*f* = 10), freedom (*f* = 10), independent country (*f* = 2), growing up (*f* = 1), and kite (*f* = 1).

"University is like a place of freedom, because new ideas and developments usually occur and begin in university."

"University is like the capital city of free thinking, because everyone can express their opinions easily and without pressure."

"University is like the statue of liberty, because you can express yourself freely and behave independently."

"University is like freedom, because there is nobody who makes you limit yourself."

University as a Must: This category is represented by 32 participants in total (3.8%) and 21 metaphors (6.3%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: compulsory (*f* = 6), torture (*f* = 4), prison (*f* = 2), work place (*f* = 2), water (*f* = 2), disliked meal (*f* = 1), dentist (*f* = 1), and military service (*f* = 1).

"University is like a prison, because we must go to university for a good future life."

"University is like a workplace, because being a student is like a job."

"University is like water, because it has become compulsory to survive in today's world."

"University is like water, because 3/4 of the world is covered with water."

"University is like a must, because it is vital for the rest of your life."

University as a School: This category is represented by 24 participants in total (2.9%) and 12 metaphors (3.6%). The main metaphors produced in this category are: school (*f* = 6), high school (*f* = 5), continuation of high school (*f* = 3), elementary school (*f* = 2), and opportunity (*f* = 1).

"University is like an elementary school, because there you can grow your identity and shape yourself again."

"University is like the continuation of high school, because while some courses are just like the same as we had in high school, some courses have a content that I have never thought of before."

"University is like a high school, because the courses and subject matters are all the same, the only difference is after the graduation we have a university diploma."

"University is like a school, because it takes attendance."

Effect of Faculty, Gender and Age

There were no difference among categories according to faculty ($x^2 = 64.877, p > .01$), gender ($x^2 = 21.707, p > .01$) and age ($x^2 = 64.239, p > .01$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to discover the perceptions of university students regarding the concept of university through the use of metaphors. Metaphors are limited in their description representativeness as they can reflect only one feature of the phenomenon they describe (Weade & Ernst, 1990). This suggests that a set of metaphors are needed for a comprehensive description of the concept of university. 13 metaphorical themes emerged from this study: university as a place of preparation for life, university as a means, university as a place of personal development and maturation, university as a place of information flow and learning, university as a social learning and sharing place, university as a family institution, university as a nice/fun place, university as a difficult/boring/negative place, university as a place of struggle, university as a place of diversity, university as freedom, university as a must, university as a school.

By far the most frequently formulated metaphor that described the concept of university was university as a place of preparation for life. Metaphors in this conceptual theme were like beginning, door, future, stairs, and passage to the real world, window and rehearsal to express how university affects future. Studies conducted on other levels of education even indicate similar findings. Saban (2008) pointed that school is seen by students, teachers and prospective teachers as hope and a future guarantor. Moreover, university is a complex social organization that occupies a strategic position in the education ladder of the individual (Nakpodia, 2009). These similarities might reflect the fact that, despite their diversity, in the name of preparing themselves for life students saw university as the last and the most life-like educational experience that they were exposed to.

University has been perceived as a means by 119 participants representing 14,2% of all the conceptual metaphors with metaphors like key, bridge, sun, treasure, door and stairs. Most of the participants stated in the *ground* part of their metaphor sentences that university functions as a tool/means to reach the life they desire in the future by means of acquiring a profession. This explains the value of being a university graduate for these students. This finding could also reflect the fact that they think the university they graduate from will have an influence on their careers in

terms of enhancement of their overall employability. Training individuals for professions has been one of the most obvious functions of university since the Middle Ages (Delaney, 1969; Hamlyn, 1996). However, it's clear that as a result of technological advances and improved productivity, while the present jobs have been being eliminated over time, new jobs are being generated. Therefore, today's university is also expected to prepare students for semi professions and new qualifications beyond traditional jobs (Delaney, 1969). Students are expected to have graduated with a variety of skills and experiences like leadership, entrepreneurship, creativity, and teamwork. Therefore, students also consider university as a place of personal development and maturation with a frequency of 109 and 13%. Besides acquiring the necessary knowledge, qualifications and competences to fulfill their professions after graduation, today's university students aim to nurture some other characteristics of development: self-understanding and self-identity; independence and autonomy; self-decision-making and responsibility; and emphasis on career development (Chiu, 1994). In this regard the function of university as a place of personal development and maturation is assigned more importance by students. Similarly, the university journey is identified by students as a significant stage crucial for their growth and development toward maturity (Lin, 2010). On the other hand, in Cerit's study (2006) school as a place of growing up and maturation metaphor was agreed with more by teachers and administrators than students.

School as a place of information flow and learning has been identified as the fourth mostly used conceptual category with a frequency of 81 and 9.7%. Balcı (2001) also identified in his research that teachers, students, and parents describe school as a place of knowledge and information. The metaphorical theme of school as a family institution constitutes 6,9% of all the themes by 58 students. Similar findings have been determined in different educational institutions at different levels. Cerit (2006), Baker (1991), Inbar (1996), Mahlison and Maxon (1998) also identified in their research in elementary and secondary schools that school was perceived as family not only by students but also by teachers and administrators. The results of this study show that students' perception of school as a family do not change in university. As an educational institution and as a place they spend most of their time, university still occupies an important place in their lives as a family does.

Furthermore, university is attributed some qualities of being an entertainment place. While none of the students defined school as a place of entertainment in Cerit's (2006) study, in our study university was defined

as a place of fun with metaphors like place of fun, festival, heaven, place of escape, holiday or holiday resort. This finding may be the result of the fact that young people today are highly exposed to popular culture and want to encounter knowledge through their interactions with the world (e.g. from popular culture). A major part of their concept of their lives and life styles are formed by television, movies, music, magazines, comics, fashion, computer games, and the Internet. In today's universities, students choose social media to identify themselves because the Internet connection is readily accessible everywhere in campuses, and highly acceptable to them thus acting as a bond between them, providing matters relevant to their lives. Popular culture serves as a valuable tool that helps them to cope with the difficult task of building and maintaining an identity (White, 1985). By subscribing to fun and entertainment coming from this tool in university environments, students claim an identity with their friends who share the same views about who they are or might be, and what the world is and might be. In other words, they see university as a place where they can socialize and mostly have fun.

University as a social learning and sharing place is the fifth mostly expressed metaphorical theme with the percentage of 8.1 by 68 students. Students think that in university they have the chance to come together with people with different interests and backgrounds which in turn contributes their socialization and learning from each other. Extra-curricular activities play a big role in university students' lives (Kaufman & Gabler, 2004; Lin, 2010). Although university's function as a social learning and sharing place is very important for students, it can be more effective in that sense with more extra-curricular activities and facilities provided by university. Students participated in the study also used the metaphorical image of university as a difficult/boring/negative place with metaphors like prison, bird cage or traffic jam referring to the limited extra-curricular activities due to shortage of space. The explanations of the metaphors produced by students show that students want to be in a campus environment with some other facility buildings they can spend their free time, socialize, and develop their competencies in various activities. During university years, students' involvement in extra-curricular activities with peers seems to be the most significant factor facilitating their personal development (Chang, 1999). Lin (2010) conducted a qualitative research in Taiwanese universities to scrutinize students' perceptions of university life. In the study 7 themes emerged (phases of university life, academic performance, career preparation, extracurricular activities, interpersonal relationship, impact of the environment and self-development) which were in line with the findings of this study.

The struggle metaphorical theme is represented by an image of arena or storm where students compete with each other for scarce resources; and unexpected difficulties appear each day as it does in real life. The metaphorical theme university as a place of diversity is depicted by an image of world or big city that has many opportunities, many view points, choices and alternatives. School as freedom is another metaphorical theme used by students representing an image of independent country or democracy. This corresponded to the result of the study completed by Lin (2010) indicating *"after completing at least ten years' uniform education in the elementary school educational system, students embraced the air of openness, freedom and diversity of the university".* University provides students a feeling of freedom not only by the degree of freedom of thought they are given during university years but also through their life with other benefits university provides students like obtaining a job, acquiring a life style and actualizing themselves after graduation. The metaphorical themes revealed in this study show parallelism with Saban's (2008) study that was conducted to investigate school metaphor on primary school students, teachers and teacher candidates. All the metaphorical themes except for school as a discipline and control centre overlap in the two studies. School is seen as a place of discipline and control with metaphors like prison, bird cage or hippodrome in Saban's (2008) study. However, for university students it seems that university has an opposite meaning by providing them freedom of possibilities in any area. Although metaphors of prison or bird cage were used in this study by the students to define university, such metaphors form another metaphorical theme: University as a difficult/boring/negative place emphasizing its limited campus facilities and shortage of space. This would give an idea to universities to do the necessary changes in the interior design and construction of new buildings in their campus.

By other students university is described as a must that is enforced by society as compulsory without any significant reason. Students also criticize university as being a duplication of secondary school with no difference between each other. Therefore, metaphor theme of "school" was used to represent metaphors in this theme category.

Four metaphorical themes determined in the study show strong similarities with Cerit's (2006) study in which school metaphors were investigated. Among the conceptual themes identified in his study, four of the themes (school as the place of knowledge and enlightenment, place of change and development, a family institution, a nice and fine place) expressed by students, teachers and administrators with the highest frequencies were also metaphorical themes mostly used by participants of

this study. Although the levels of educational institutions the studies took place are different, the parallelism of the metaphorical themes between our study and Cerit's (2006) study are striking.

In the study although there were differences regarding age, gender and faculty, demographic variables showed no significant differences. Cerit (2006) also identified no significant relationship regarding demographics.

Limitations and Possibilities for Future Research

The findings of this study are thought to be illuminating especially for higher education administrators who may be interested in uncovering the present and changing concept of university from the students' points of view. As the metaphors students generated for university reflect how they perceive their university and university life, this can function as a valuable data for questioning the roles of university for higher education administration in determining the policy, mission and vision of the university. The participants in this study were a select group - students of only one university in Istanbul. A more comprehensive research is needed to get a complete picture of certain metaphorical images of university in the minds of university students. This research could be expanded to more foundation and/or public universities in and out of Istanbul to get the metaphorical images of a more representative group of participants.

Moreover, the participants of this study were only asked to provide metaphors to describe the concept of university by completing the prompt *"University is like … because …."* It would be interesting to ask participants to provide metaphors to describe their ideal university and their experiences at the university. This would allow researchers to determine whether students' expectations were met and whether they were satisfied with their university choice. This kind of comparative data compiled from longitudinal studies would definitely be useful to establish a well-planned student relationship management in universities.

Furthermore, this study relies on only university students. Other studies and more recent research need to be conducted on a wider scale of faculty members, university administrators and even families of students in order to see the diverse university images among different stakeholders.

Finally, whether the literature on metaphors desires to determine students' mental images of university or simply relies on the participants' perception of university, it is clear that any similar study on metaphors in another country and culture would bring benefits to the majority of

researchers in terms of analyzing the data and administrators and faculty members for the sake of understanding students.

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