Metaphoric Perceptions of Primary School 4th Grade Students on the Concept of Friendship

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ABSTRACT	Research Article
This research aims to determine the metaphorical perceptions of primary school 4th-grade students about friendship. The study group of the study, which was carried out within the scope of the phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research designs, consisted of 144 4th grade primary school students studying in a public primary school in Istanbul Esenler in the 2021-2022 academic year. The data of the research were obtained through the semi-structured interview form (*Friendship is like ……… Because ………..*), which was prepared by the researchers and was finalized in line with the necessary expert opinions. The data obtained within the scope of the research were analyzed by content analysis. According to the findings obtained in the study, it was determined that primary school students perceived friendship in terms of values, skills, and emotional states. In addition, while defining friendship, the students mostly used values such as honesty and sincerity.	
Key Words: Friendship, primary school students, metaphorical perception	

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Introduction

Friendship is a type of social relationship that takes place between people and is an integral part of life. This social relationship is encountered in almost every area of our daily life. Because humans are social beings and constantly interact with other people, these interactions can lead to mutual friendship relations (Aytaç & Tan, 2020). When the definitions of friendship are examined, these social interactions can be better understood. Friendship is a set of relationships in which both sides accept the relationship and treat each other equally, and voluntary, reciprocal, egalitarian relationships are formed with love and commitment (TDK, 2021; Yun-Lee, 2008), where individuals like to spend time with each other and love each other, (Bukowski et al., 1996) and a supportive and mutual bond established between at least two people (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989). These definitions show that friendship is based on bonds, interactions, and emotional states. Introduction

It is important for the solidarity and progress of societies that friendship is one of the most important social relations of social life, in which individuals maintain each other's rights and develop them based on trust (Yörükoğlu, 2018). Because friendships serve to some gains in the lives of individuals (Asher & Coie, 1990). Friendships benefit children by gaining the feeling of trust provided by belonging to a group, creating a sense of belonging, and by reducing stress (Geisthardt, et al., 2002; Gleason, 2004; Overton & Rausch, 2002). Friendship relationships can protect children from negative interactions and stress (Criss, et al., 2002: Hodges, et al., 1997), provide psychological well-being (Hojjat & Moyer, 2017), meet the emotional needs of individuals (Hendrickson, et al., 2011) and give children the opportunity to empathize and use their social skills (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Ladd, 1990). In addition, friendships develop a sense of trust and loyalty in individuals (Zajac & Hartup, 1997). On the contrary, children who cannot establish healthy friendships may experience multiple negative consequences such as substance use, anxiety, delinquent behavior, depression and violence (Bierman, 2004; Kupersmidt, et al., 1990). In this respect, it can be said that friendships fulfill important functions in children's lives (Rose & Asher, 2004).

Friendships are very important for the healthy development of primary school students. Studies have shown that children without friends may experience emotional and mental problems later in life (Ferrer-Chancy & Fugate, 2007). Children's school life is colored according to the presence or absence of friendship relations. During this period, children who do not have friends are more inclined to complain about the feeling of loneliness (Trawick-Swith, 2013). When children reach school age, families and teachers give less importance to friendship and social relationships, as academic progress is prioritized (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016). However, according to Woods (1990), the reason why school is the happiest days of our lives is that children form friendship bonds rather than the pleasures and rewards of academic learning.

Although friendships are found in all life situations, they play an important role in children's social environment, social competence and social adaptation (Heiman, 2000). Friendship, which is established and maintained with both their own sex and the opposite sex, plays an important role in the child's gaining a sexual identity (Yörükoğlu, 2018). The ability to form a social bond of friends also depends on the closeness of other children (Hall, 1994). Clark and Ayers (1988) stated that children generally establish close friendships with their peers.

As explained above, friendship relations serve important tasks in children's lives. The perspective of the concept of friendship is essential in terms of understanding the friendship relations of children. Because children's relationships with their friends, their judgments and behaviors can affect children directly or indirectly (Hartup, 1996). When the domestic and international literature is examined, it is seen that various studies have been carried out on

friendship relations. When these studies are examined, it is seen that they generally focus on social skills, social learning, increasing friendship relations, and the relationship of friendship with various variables. Some of these studies are as follows; (Pratt & George, 2004) searched the effects of children on their peer groups in the transition from primary school to secondary school, (Flashman, 2012) searched the relationship between academic achievement and friendship bond, Balkar (2008) searched the relationship between friendship relations and social-economic status, Çoşkun & Kurnaz (2009) searched self-esteem and peer pressure, Unlendorff (2000) searched the relationship between parental friendship relationships and children's friendship relationships, Özyürek (2017) searched the relationship between recognizing and managing emotions and friendship skills, Ladd (1981) searched social learning approach's social interactions and peer acceptance of 3rd-grade students. Mehaffey & Sandberg (1992) searched the effect of social skills training on primary school children's peer relations and sociometric status, and Kurtoğlu (2019) searched 9th-grade students' perceptions of friendship value. However, a study on how primary school 4th grade students perceive friendship and their metaphors about friendship could not be reached. In this direction, it is aimed to determine the metaphorical perceptions of 4th-grade students attending primary school about friendship.

Method

Model of the Research

In this study, primary school students' perceptions of the concept of friendship were examined, so it was conducted with phenomenology. While phenomenology aims to obtain information on the nature and meaning of our daily experiences, it is a research method used to explain and describe the phenomena or meanings created by individuals (Annells, 2006; Merriam, 2015).

Study Group of the Research

The study group of this study, which was carried out to determine the metaphorical perceptions of primary school students about friendship, was determined by the convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling includes situations that researchers can easily access, as well as providing the researcher with speed, practicality, and time (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this respect, students from an easy-to-reach primary school were selected in this study. The research participants are students studying in a public primary school in Esenler district of Istanbul in the 2021-2022 academic year.

The study group consisted of 144 primary school 4th-grade students in total. Seventy-four of the students are girls, and 70 are boys. The students in the research study group were presented by coding with "P". For example, "*P-1" represents the 1st participant, and ...... "P-15" represents the 15th participant*.

Data Collection Tools and Data Collection

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was used as a data collection tool in the study. The semi-structured interview can be expressed as an interview method (Merriam, 2015; Patton, 2015), in which predetermined questions are asked by the researcher, and it does not allow the researcher to ask different questions at the end during the data collection process.

The relevant literature was examined during the interview form development process, teachers' opinions were consulted, and interview questions were prepared. The prepared interview questions were sent to 6 experts in the field to get expert opinions. As a result of the feedback from the experts, some questions were changed, and a pilot application was made by removing 2 questions. After the application, the researchers checked the clarity of the

questions, and they were finalized. The content validity index of the form was calculated, and the result was determined as .93. The question in the form is as follows; "*Friendship is like………. Because;……….*" In order to better understand this question, "What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you say friend? Can you explain in one word?" "If you could compare the concept of friendship to something, what would it be?" questions were asked.

The time to fill out the forms distributed to the participants is approximately 10 minutes. The researchers carried out data collection personally, and no third party was involved in the data collection process. While collecting the data of the research, social distance, mask, and cleaning rules were followed. All participants wore masks during the interview, and care was taken to ensure that there were at least two meters between the participant and the researcher. Among the 4th-grade primary school students in the study group, there were no (positive) or contacted patients diagnosed with Covid-19.

Analysis of Data

The data obtained through the semi-structured interview form within the scope of the research was carried out in five stages. These stages are briefly described below (Saban, 2009).

- *Coding of data;* In the coding and sorting phase, all data were analyzed by continuous comparative analysis method. Statements containing similar concepts were collected in the same place and data that were not suitable for the nature of the study were excluded from the study.
- *Finding the categories;* After the obtained data were analyzed with continuous comparative analysis, the determined metaphors were divided into categories, supported by the literature.
- *Organizing the categories in which the codes are represented;* At the stage of organizing the categories, first of all, the relevant literature was scanned and the meanings of friendship were tried to be created. At this point, the data obtained were presented to expert opinions and categories were created.
- *Gathering and explaining metaphors that are similar to each other in terms of categories under the same headings*; The metaphors obtained from the students were grouped under three categories. These categories are named as value, skill, and emotion. The data related to these results were supported in the context of the opinions of some of the students and presented in the findings section.
- *Identification and interpretation of findings;* After examining the expert opinions and the related literature, the metaphors related to friendship and the categories of these metaphors were determined. The metaphors produced by the students about friendship are divided into categories as value, skill and emotion dimensions.

Validity and Reliability

Data source and researcher triangulation (Stake, 2010) was used to verify the data obtained from the participants. Data source triangulation aims to compare the perspectives of all participants' experiences. Thanks to researcher triangulation, all researchers studied the data closely. Expert opinion was sought for the semi-structured interview form used in the study. The transferability of the study findings for different situations was checked.

Different (independent) researchers also checked data categories to identify and verify the conceptual categories primarily created in the study (Creswell, et al., 2003). Thus, cross-checking of the compatibility between the coders was made and care was taken to ensure coordination among the researchers. The findings were handled within the framework of rich and detailed descriptions and supported with examples. At this point, the themes obtained

were evaluated and discussed within the framework of the literature. Information about the determination of the focus of the study, the environment in which the research was carried out, and the participants were given. In addition, ethical committee approval was obtained before the study was conducted.

Findings

In this section, the metaphors produced by the 4th grade primary school students participating in the research about friendship are presented below, supported by quotations from frequency values, categories, and student expressions.

Metaphors Related to Friendship by Primary School 4th Grade Students
Findings regarding the perceptions of primary school 4th grade students about friendship are given in the table below with their numerical values. The metaphors of primary school 4th grade students regarding the concept of friendship are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Metaphors Used by Students in the Scope of the Study*

Order	Metaphors	f	Order	Metaphors	f	Order	Metaphors	f
1	Honesty	9	21	Longing	2	41	Speaking	1
2	Sincerity	8	22	Being Supportive	2	42	Seeing Himself	1
3	Trust	7	23	Forgiveness	2	43	Good Communication	1
4	Camaraderie	7	24	Communicating	2	44	Not Taking Sides	1
5	Being Together	6	25	Being Open	2	45	Problem-Solving	1
6	Sharing	6	26	Being Kind	2	46	Bonding	1
7	Being Helpful	6	27	Keeping The Word	2	47	Being Polite	1
8	Love	5	28	Fidelity	1	48	Not Being Rude	1
9	Happiness	5	29	Respect	1	49	Not Mocking	1
10	Being By Your Side	5	30	Tolerance	1	50	Nice Behavior	1
11	Mercy	5	31	Being A Good Person	1	51	Freedom	1
12	Devotion	4	32	Being Truthful	1	52	Not Disdaining	1
13	Being Fair	4	33	Being Relevant	1	53	Pleasure	1
14	Being Cheerful	4	34	Serenity	1	54	Enthusiasm	1
15	Being Considerate	3	35	Not Being Selfish	1	55	Compession	1
16	Brotherhood	3	36	Not To Lie	1	56	Empathizing	1
17	Success	3	37	Being Smiling	1	57	Being Social	1
18	The Game	3	38	Beauty	1	58	Cooperation	1
19	Confidence	3	39	Not Being Alone	1	59	Joking	1

| 20 | Joy | 2 | 40 | Excitement | 1 | **Total Produced Metaphors: 144** |

When Table 1 is examined, a total of 59 metaphors were produced from 144 views on friendship. It is seen that the most produced metaphor is honesty (9). When the metaphors used by the students regarding friendship are examined, it is seen that they generally perceive friendship positively. When these results were examined, it was determined that the students attributed different meanings to friendship. These meanings were gathered under similar categories by taking expert opinions. Data regarding these categories are presented in Table-2 below.

Conceptual Categories of Metaphors Created by Primary School 4th-Grade Students

When the metaphors of primary school students about friendship were examined, it was determined that these metaphors were gathered under; value, skill, and emotion. The distribution of metaphors related to these categories is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Conceptual Categories of Metaphors Created by Students*

	Metaphor Category	Created Metaphors
Metaphorical Perceptions of Friendship	**Value**	Honesty, Sincerity, Trust, Camaraderie, Sharing, Love, Compassion, Devotion, Being Fair, Being Understanding, Brotherhood, Success, Confidentiality, Being Open, Being Kind, Keeping The Words, Loyalty, Respect, Tolerance, Being Good, Being Truthful, Not Being Selfish, Not Lying, Being Smiling, Being Beautiful, Seeing Himself, Getting Along, Not Being Rude, Not Taking Sides, Freedom, Being kind, Not being Rude, Not disdaining
	Skill	Being Together, Helping, Standing With Him, Playing, Supporting, Communicating, Problem Solving, Empathizing, Not Making Fun, Good Behavior, Being Social, Cooperation, Joking
	Emotion	Happiness, Joy, Fun, Longing, Interest, Peace, Excitement, Pleasure, Enthusiasm, Compassion

When Table 2 is examined, the distribution of the metaphors used by primary school students regarding friendship into categories is seen. When the distribution of metaphors is examined, it is seen that students generally make value-based explanations about friendship. In addition, students also explained friendship as a skill and emotion. The expressions used by the students while explaining the concept of friendship were divided into categories in line with expert opinions. Detailed information on these categories is supported by one-to-one quotations from student opinions.

Value

When the students' views were examined, it was determined that they perceived friendship as a value. According to the students, friendship carries meanings as value,

honesty, sincerity, helpfulness, sharing, tolerance, loyalty, etc. . Some of the student opinions supporting these statements are as follows;

P-9 *"Friendship is like honesty. Because if we are not honest, we cannot make friends".*

P-41 *"Friendship is like sharing. Because we share everything with our friends. We are happy when we share something with them. He is our friend".*

P-69 *"Friendship is like trust. Because I don't make friends with people I don't trust. My mother doesn't want me to be friends with those people anyway. She says they will harm me".*

Skill

When the students' views were examined, it was determined that they also perceived friendship as a skill. According to the students, it means skills such as friendship, communication, problem-solving, togetherness, and empathy. Some of the student opinions supporting these statements are as follows;

K-47 *"Friendship is like empathy. Because to empathize is to understand your friend".*

K-33 *"Friendship is like establishing cooperation. Because we play games together and do everything brilliantly".*

Emotion

When the students' opinions were examined, it was determined that they perceived friendship as a situation that creates positive emotions. According to the students, it means positive emotions such as happiness, joy, fun, longing, interest, peace, excitement, pleasure, enthusiasm, compassion, etc. . Some of the student opinions supporting these statements are as follows;

K-19 *"Friendship is like happiness. Because I always feel happy when I am with my friend. I was not with my friend during the ban, I was very unhappy".*

K-3 *"Friendship is like being cheerful. Because my friend and I are always cheerful. When we see each other, we immediately start laughing".*

K-28 *"Friendship is like fun. Because we have a lot of fun with my friend".*

K-8 *"Friendship is like yearning for it. Because when my friend goes away, I miss him so much. I wish he didn't go. I want to be with you too".*

Discussion and Result

In this study, the metaphorical perceptions of primary school 4th-grade students about the concept of friendship were examined. The data obtained through the semi-structured interview form were used to determine these perceptions. According to these data, it was determined that the metaphors created by primary school 4th-grade students about friendship were gathered under the categories of value, skill, and emotion.

When the findings obtained in the research are examined, it can be said that most of the metaphors created by primary school students about friendship are value-oriented metaphors. The values that students use while expressing friendship are honesty, sincerity, trust, camaraderie, sharing, love, compassion, devotion, fairness, understanding, brotherhood, success, confidentiality, being open, being kind, keeping the word, loyalty, respect, tolerance, goodness, being truthful, being unselfish, not lying, being smiling, being beautiful, being self-seeking, getting along, not being rude, not taking sides, freedom, bonding, being polite, not being rude, not disdaining. When the literature is examined, friendship is often expressed as a set of unplanned personal relationships that are voluntary, meet social and emotional needs, include mutual help and love (Demir, et al., 2015). Friends are important individuals in reassuring each other, offering suggestions, sharing important problems in confidence, protecting them, creating a continuous togetherness, and getting used to situations of tension (İnanç, et al., 2007). In addition, friendship provides many benefits such as meeting social-emotional needs, feeding sincerity, love and friendship (Akın & Akın, 2015). In this respect,

it can be said that the value dimension of the friendship obtained in the research coincides with the perspectives on friendship in the literature.

Students also used words expressing skills and emotions while saying friendship. The words that describe skills and emotions used by the students are "Being together, helping, standing with him, playing, supporting, communicating, problem- solving, empathizing, not making fun of, nice behavior, being social, cooperation, joking, happiness, joy, fun, longing, interest, peace, excitement, pleasure, enthusiasm, compassion". As children recognize their emotions and their level of recognizing emotional concepts improves, their friendship skills also increase (Özyürek, 2017). Başaran et al., (2020), in their study, determined that children who have one or more friends are better in terms of psychological well-being than children who have no friends. In this respect, friendship supports children psychologically and creates positive emotions in children. Moreover The basis of friendship skills are social duties such as establishing togetherness, improving social activity skills, resolving conflict situations, forgiving, and cooperation (Salı, 2010). In addition, the ability to maintain friendships has traditionally been considered an important part of an individual's life skills (Hundley & Cohen, 1999). Emotional and social skills that increase children's quality of life and make it easier for them to reach their goals are indispensable skills of social life. These skills include many skills such as apologizing, communicating, greeting, expressing emotions, managing emotions, problem-solving, and peer support (Kapıkıran, et al., 2006; Sørlie, et al., 2008; Westwood, 1993). In addition, Parker & Asher (1993) stated that the quality of friendship of children is a predictor of their emotional well-being. These expressions in the literature support the sub-theme of friendship as well as the value dimension of the skill and emotion bot.

The research has some limitations and assumptions. These assumptions and limitations are presented below.

- The research is limited to primary school students attending the 4th grade of a primary school in Istanbul.
- The research is limited to the answers given by the students to the current questions.
- The research is limited to primary school students studying in the 2021-2022 academic year.
- It was assumed that the primary school 4th grade students participating in the study had the same skills in establishing and maintaining friendships (shyness, introversion, etc.).
- It was assumed that the primary school 4th grade students who participated in the research answered the data collection tool sincerely and sincerely.
- In this study, it was assumed that the cultural and sociological dimensions of friendship were at the same level for each child.

Suggestions

Some suggestions were made in the context of the data obtained within the scope of the research. When the data obtained from the research is examined, the following suggestions can be given.

- Educational programs should be organized taking into account the values, skills and emotional dimensions of friendship.
- Considering the meanings of friendship, children should be supported to establish healthy friendship relationships.

- It has been demonstrated by the findings that friendship creates positive emotional states. In this context, friendship relations can be used in emotional education for children.
- Researchers working on the concept of friendship can determine friendship programs by taking into account their values, skills, and emotional states.
- School guidance services can provide guidance services for children by identifying the meanings children attach to friendship.
- Family training can be given to mothers and fathers on the concepts that children attribute to the concept of friendship.
- Seminars can be organized for parents that friendships evoke positive feelings, reinforce social values, gain social skills and support children.

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