

## AN INVESTIGATION OF METAPHORS USED BY PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TO DESCRIBE SUPERVISORS\*

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### Abstract

This study is a qualitative exploration of the perceptions of primary school teachers of their supervisors using metaphors. Data in this study was obtained from interviews with 106 classroom teachers who had been supervised at least once. They worked at schools in İstanbul during the 2015-2016 academic year in the following districts: Esenler, Küçükçekmece, Başakşehir, Kartal, and Bağcılar. Interviews were coded and analyzed using the content analysis technique. The metaphors teachers used to describe supervisors could be grouped into the following categories: profession, sports, family, fear, food, animals, guidance, and objects. Results show that primary school teachers have mostly negative perceptions of supervisors, which agrees with other studies. To address this, we recommend improving communication between teachers and supervisors.

**Keywords:** Metaphors, supervisors, primary school teachers, education, Turkey

\*This paper's abstract which was called "An Investigation Of Metaphorical Perceptions Of Primary School Teachers Regarding Supervisors" was presented orally at the ADVED 2016- 2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ADVANCES IN EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES held in İstanbul on 10-12 October 2016.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

People who are trained in alignment with societies' purposes are the most fundamental resource for their survival and development. Failure of schools, a productive part of the education system, to develop all of the skills an individual needs to be a member of society is a loss to the family, nation, and even humanity (Venn, 1969 cited in Taymaz, 2011a). The primary goal of schools is to educate students, who are their stakeholders, in the best way and raise good citizens for society (Bakioğlu, 2016). It is by way of supervision that we can determine whether educational activities comply with the principles and rules defined by organizational goals

(Özmen & Batmaz, 2006). Supervision is a process in which competent people supervise and observe whether activities conducted in the public and private sectors follow the law (Taymaz 2002). Supervision began when the public sector was first organized and its management and evaluation mechanisms were put into practice (Öz, 2003). Supervision is a sophisticated and complex process. It is a duty and responsibility of the entire staff of an organization. The perception of education is a system that varies in type and has complex forms. Evaluation holds a special place in this system. As in all organizations, evaluations can be effective. They are crucial for developing educational and learning activities, moving them toward targeted standards, and evaluating whether the services provided have reached their goals (Oğuz, Yılmaz & Taştan, 2007).

Good management is a key factor in schools moving their students forward. One of the indispensable parts of good management is supervision. In the modern sense, supervision refers to the assessment, comparison, and evaluation of the efficiency, effectiveness, and economy of results in light of goals and standards, which are defined by probability and relativity (Keskinliç, 2011). Supervision in the Turkish national education system is carried out by the supervisory units of the Ministry of National Education. Supervisors have been supervising and evaluating for many years within this system (Töremen & Hozatlı, 2006). Provincial educational supervisors and assistant supervisors are employed in educational supervision units established by provincial education departments. Provincial educational supervisors and assistant supervisors carry out guidance, on-the-job training, evaluation, review, investigation, and inquiry services. They work at formal and extensive educational institutions of every level and type (Korkmaz & Öner, 2013). Supervisors must be administrators, leaders, guides, educators, and researchers (Taymaz, 2011b). One of the important aspects of the supervision is to obtain accurate information about a teacher's performance. Well-trained supervisors know how to collect information accurately. Effective data-collection techniques mean more than observing and recording what is visible. Supervisors play an important role in ensuring a correct understanding and interpretation of the purpose of the school system. Supervisors must avoid imposing personal standards, judgments, and interpretations on teachers. They must be a necessary resource through which teachers understand and interpret their purpose on their own (Aydın, 2014). The primary expectation of supervisors is to help and guide teachers in educational and learning activities to achieve greater effectiveness (Döş, 2005).

Metaphorical thinking involves using a familiar comparison as a conceptual tool to elucidate the characteristics of a more complex phenomenon (Oxford et al., 1998). Lakoff and Johnson (2005) emphasize that a significant part of our conceptual system is structured by metaphorical relations. They also suggested that the essence of metaphor was understanding and experiencing one kind of a thing (such as phenomenon, concept, and object) in terms of another. Metaphor is a way of thinking and seeing that makes it easier to learn new information because it is related to known information (Morgan, 1998). Metaphor is one of the tools used to identify human perceptions (Arnett, 1999). Metaphor, as a term, means explaining complex terms by "applying," in other words by "transferring," in the Greek. Several dictionaries describe it similarly, such as comparing two things or using basic similarities (Dur, 2006). Metaphors help us understand how meanings are perceived (Cerit, 2008; Rızvanoğlu, 2007). There are lots of papers about metaphors in education which were studied with students or teachers (Goldstein, 2005; Cook-Sather, 2003; Oxford et al., 1998; Felzman, 2014; Glose and Scherr, 2015; Çetin, 2016; İbret and Aydınöz, 2011; Saban, Koçbeker and Saban, 2006; Alger, 2009). Metaphors have been used in professional thinking, professional identity development as well as pedagogic tools, reflection tools, evaluation tools, research tools, program theories, cognitive models, and discovery tools in education and teacher education, as well as tools for change in education (Saban, Koçbeker and Saban, 2006). Various concepts in education have been analyzed using metaphors (Cerit, 2008, Evcim, 2008; Saban, 2009; Tamimi, 2005) including supervision and supervisor concepts. According to a study conducted by Töremen and Döş (2009), teachers' descriptions of supervisors was mostly using metaphors with negative connotations such as hunter, poplar, and frame, suggesting that they considered supervisors to be going their own way, proud, and looking for mistakes. They very rarely used metaphors with positive connotations such as rain or doctor. Kocabaş & Özdemir's (2010) study focused on the themes of power and fear and suggested that teachers have a negative attitude toward supervision and supervisors.

Supervision in education is regarded as a necessary activity for achieving quality in education. Activities of supervisors must be carried out in a way that contributes to the improvement and development of educational activities. Hence the way teachers perceive the recommendations of supervisors impacts the results of these recommendations. In this sense, it is important to identify how teachers perceive the recommendations of supervisors. Metaphors can help clarify difficult topics (Tamimi, 2005) so teachers' perceptions of supervisors can be better identified if metaphors are used. The present study's goal is to identify classroom teachers' perceptions of supervisors using metaphors.

## **2. METHODS**

The study collected qualitative data. The 106 participants were selected from primary school teachers who volunteered. They worked at schools in Istanbul during the 2015-2016 academic year in the following districts: Esenler, Küçükçekmece, Başakşehir, Kartal, and Bağcılar. They had been supervised at least once. The participants were 66 female and 40 male; 85 were 21–40 years old and 21 were over 40 years old. Two had completed two-year programs with higher schools of education, 94 had completed four-year program and earned college degrees, and 10 had master's degrees. There were 33 participants with 1–5 years' experience, 34 with 6–10 years' experience, 25 with 11–15 years' experience, and 14 with more than 16 years' experience.

The data was collected in 15-minute interviews. The phrase of "Inspectors are like ..... because ....." was provided to the participants and they were requested to complete the blanks. The data was analyzed using the content analysis method. The views expressed by the teachers during the interviews were read and coded accordingly, and thereafter, themes were created according to shared codes.

### **2.1. Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability are used to ensure the persuasiveness of the study results. "Reporting the collected data in detail and explaining how the researcher achieved the results are among the important criteria of validity in a qualitative study" (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005:257). The process of the data analysis and especially how to reach 8 themes/sub-themes to ensure validity in this study can be explained as follows: A sample theme/sub-theme was compiled for each of 48 codes acquired in the study and which was assumed to represent it in the best way. These codes and themes and sub-themes were included in the section of findings.

In order to ensure the reliability of the study, the expert opinion was applied to confirm whether the codes provided under 8 themes/sub-themes achieved in the study represent the mentioned theme. In accordance with this purpose, two lists were handed to the lecturer in the professor staff working as the related domain expert at the faculty of education at a different university. 48 codes are included in the first list. 8 themes/sub-themes are included in the second list. It was requested from the expert to match the codes in the first list with 8 themes/sub-themes in the second list by using both lists. Then, the match-ups created by the expert were compared with the categories of the researchers. The reliability of the study was calculated using ( $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{consensus}}{\text{consensus} + \text{dissensus}} \times 100$ ) by identifying the number of "consensus" and "dissensus" in comparisons (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 64). Reliability is provided at the desired level when the consistency between the evaluations of the expert and the researcher is 90% or above in the qualitative studies. Reliability was provided at the rate of 96% in the reliability study conducted particularly for this research. The expert whose opinion was asked within the scope of the reliability study correlated only two metaphors with a different category from the researcher's one. Under these circumstances, reliability was calculated as  $\text{Reliability} = \frac{48}{48 + 2} \times 100 = 96\%$ . The study of Saban (2008) was taken as an example while calculating the validity and the reliability of the study.

## **3. RESULTS**

The metaphors expressed by the primary schools teachers for supervisors in this study are grouped by 48 codes organized into eight themes (Table 1): profession, sports, family, fear, food, animals, guidance, and objects.

### **3.1. Profession**

The teachers came up 13 metaphors in this theme. They made comparisons to teacher, general director, detective, public servant, judge, boss, policeman, guard, prosecutor, critic, actor, foreman, and expert. Teachers compared supervisors to a teacher contributing to their development, for example, one teacher said, "Supervisors are like teachers. They train both their assistants and teachers in the profession."

Three teachers compared supervisors to bosses. One of them said, "they think they control everything and they are the only ones who know what is right. If they are going to guide and help, then they are right; but that's not the case. They shouldn't expect teachers, who get by despite hardships and little pay, to teach students the fundamentals of life (literacy, four operations, problem solving, domestic violence, terrorism, employment, and means of self-support) and blindly follow the books." Another teacher who also used the boss metaphor said, "They perform their supervision duty, identify improvement areas, and contribute to the improvement of education." One teacher emphasized the preparation work and commented, "everyone tidies up when they come."

Another teacher compared supervisors to foremen and said, "They always tell you what is ideal. They don't teach you. They just criticize."

Teachers comparing supervisors to policemen said that they were not constructive and were just there to blame: "They always look for failures. When they find them, they discipline us."

A teacher who used the director metaphor stated, "All they do is look for failures. They are there to scare you with discipline." Another teacher said, "They visit for one day and try to evaluate before getting to know you better."

Three teachers referred to supervisors as prosecutors who looked for shortfalls and were necessary for order in the schools. Using the judge metaphor, one teacher stressed the supervisors' objective and impartial quality. They also stated that the supervisors ensured justice in the schools. For the expert metaphor, one teacher stated the following: "Because whatever they say is considered correct. However, how many of them have been able to do what it takes to be teacher?"

Another teacher referred to supervisors as people who "think like a typical public employee, because they only focus on what is missing and what must be done. They don't care about what has been done or cannot be done. They don't offer solutions. They just review, observe classes, write their reports, and leave."

One teacher used the detective metaphor to emphasize the quality of looking for mistakes. One teacher used the scholar metaphor because supervisors think they know what is best.

Another teacher said the supervisors had acting skills. Calling them guards, one teacher said: "They wait for the teacher. If the teaching is not done well, they scare the teacher with a stick... Supervisors are like critics because they think their job is only to criticize and talk about negativities."

### **3.2. Sports**

The teachers used two sport metaphors, base jumping and paragliding. Stressing the feeling of excitement, one teacher said, "It means letting oneself go without knowing the outcome."

### **3.3. Family**

Teachers used seven metaphors in this theme: guest, child, prince, mother-in-law, father, landlord, and daughter-in-law.

Teachers compared supervisors' school visits to house visits: "A supervisor visiting a classroom can learn about the primary school teacher and the students by being in that classroom, in the same way that a house guest learns about the host from the condition of the house and the host's attitude toward them." Another teacher said that they did not want supervisors in the classroom, just as a host does not want a guest to visit, and stressed that they could potentially show up any time.

As for the child metaphor, they said that the supervisors acted inconsistently. One teacher said, "They lack consistency in what they say. They appreciate your performance and congratulate you while they insult someone else. They give the same rating for both your performance and the other person's performance in the end. Their thoughts can change in a second." They pointed out a lack of listening skills: "Supervisors are like spoiled children who never listen. No matter how hard you defend yourself, they won't listen to you."

Another teacher extended the comparison to a spoiled prince: "Supervisors are like spoiled princes because they are not content with anything and consider themselves superior to everyone else."

One teacher compared them to mothers-in-law: "They have no intention of stopping when they start talking. They criticize so much that they give you a headache." Another teacher said, "Supervisors are chatty mother-in-laws because they only see negativities, shortfalls, and failures. They never appreciate. They look for the ideal."

One teacher compared supervisors to authoritarian fathers: "Supervisors are like fathers who give no respite. They put pressure on you to do what they want."

One teacher compared supervisors to landlords who are only interested in the outcome, do not accept any excuses, and are not thoughtful.

One teacher said that supervisors loved documents and were not satisfied with any document. "Supervisors are like daughters-in-law because they always want something. Do you have this document, do you have that document? It is impossible to please them."

### **3.4. Fear**

The teachers thought of eight metaphors related to fear: ghosts, ghouls, night terrors, demons, bogey men,

nightmares, and scarecrows. Because even the title of supervisor is terrifying, they are afraid when they hear the name. This illustrated by the following statements:

Supervisors are like ghosts because they don't come or show up, but spread fear.

Supervisors are like ghouls because even hearing their name makes one shiver and stress.

Supervisors are like night terrors. When they come, they don't leave. They take your breath away.

Supervisors are like demons because we hear their names, but never see them. They are scary even if we can't see them.

Supervisors are like bogey men because they think they are created to spread fear.

Supervisors are like a nightmare. They have a long-lasting effect.

Supervisors are like bad dreams because almost all of them are grim-faced, despots, and so scary that, if you saw them in the dark, you would jump out of your skin.

Supervisors are like scarecrows because their only aim is to scare parents, students, school administrators, and teachers. They exist to scare the teacher into doing their job.

### **3.5. Food**

Teachers used two food metaphors: lemons and Noah's pudding. "Supervisors are like lemons because you make a sour face when you hear about them." Noah's pudding has many ingredients, which one teacher compared to supervisors' diverse personalities. "Supervisors are like Noah's pudding. There are thousands of different personalities among them. However, they never blame each other. They cover each other's mistakes. From the outside, you think that they do a perfect job."

### **3.6. Animals**

Teachers used three animal metaphors: lions, blacksnakes, and fireflies. One teacher compared supervisors to lions, who are kings of the jungle and have the most prestigious position in the educational realm. Another teacher stressed the fear with the lion metaphor: "Supervisors are like lions in a cage at the zoo. They just scare you." Comparing supervisors to blacksnakes, one teacher said: "They wrap their coils around and around and squeeze." A comparison to fireflies referred to supervisors' role of illumination.

### **3.7. Guidance**

Teachers used seven guidance metaphors: road signs, guides, counselors, sailboats, compasses, traffic lights, and ships, as seen in the following statements.

Supervisors are like guides because they should guide the way.

Supervisors are like counsels because they should guide the way.

Supervisors are like sailboats because they sail with the wind.

Supervisors are like ships. If you trust them and consult them, they will direct and guide you well in your teaching profession.

### **3.8. Objects**

The teachers made eight comparisons to objects: mirrors, hot stoves, fires, microscopes, belts, strainers, scales, and photographs. Three teachers used a mirror metaphor to point out that supervisors reflect effort and the situation objectively. The hot stove metaphor was used to suggest that one should not irritate supervisors. Similarly, another teacher stated, "If you touched them, you'd get burned. You must always stay on their good side." Referring to a microscope, one teacher stated, "They keep magnifying the smallest failure on and on..." With the belt metaphor, teachers stressed that supervisors should not put pressure on the teachers. "A supervisor is like a belt. If you don't tighten it enough, your pants will fall down; if you tighten it too much, you will get choked. No quality educational activities would be done if it weren't for [supervisors]. On the other hand, if they overdo it, no educational activity would be done at all. They would push you away from the profession." Like strainers, one teacher said supervisors filtered the quality teachers. Like scales, one teacher said that supervisors weighed the work and effort. Like photographs, one teacher said supervisors precisely reflected existing conditions.

**Table 1. Metaphors used to describe supervisors**

Themes	Codes		
Profession	Teacher	Demon	Strainer
Sports	General director	Night terror	Belt
Family	Detective	Ghost	Scale
Fear	Public servant	Bogey man	Microscope
Food	Judge	Scarecrow	Mirror
Animals	Boss	Bad dream	Photograph
Guidance	Policeman	Ghoul	Stove
Objects	Guard	Nightmare	Fire
	Prosecutor	Lemon	Ship
	Critic	Noah's pudding	Guest
	Actor	Firefly	Traffic lights
	Foreman	Lion	Landlord
	Expert	Blacksnake	Prince
	Child	Road signs	Compass
	Father	Guide	Daughter-in-law
	Mother-in-law	Counsel	Sailboat

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, the primary school teachers expressed positive metaphors, though few, to describe their perceptions of the supervisors, such as guidance. This reflects a supervisor's duty to counsel and offer professional help. Contrary to the findings in this study, some studies have revealed that supervisors do not perform guidance and professional help roles satisfactorily (Doğanay 2006; İlğan 2008). In agreement with our study, the study conducted by Menduhoğlu and Mazlum (2014) suggested that teachers had more positive perceptions regarding supervisors' guidance and professional roles at that time than in the past. Comparing these studies, it may be suggested that teachers have positive more perceptions today compared to the past that supervisors perform their guidance and professional help roles.

Results of this metaphor-based study show that primary school teachers have mostly negative perceptions of supervisors. Most studies conducted in Turkey have reported similar conclusions (Boydak, Özan & Şener, 2015; Kocabaş & Özdemir, 2010; Sünbül & İnandı, 2005; Töremen & Döş, 2009). As supervision is an activity for developing education, the relationship between teachers and supervisors must be established soundly. Teachers and supervisors should have positive perceptions of each other. They must work together to enhance education, and for teachers to accept supervisors' recommendations, teachers should have positive perceptions of them. Hence the negative perceptions of supervisors must be given due consideration.

In order to change the mostly negative perceptions of supervisors, teacher-supervisor communication could be improved. This should improve their perceptions of each other, as they will have the opportunity to get to know each other better.

The reason teachers have negative perceptions seem to stem from supervisors' focus their activities and on controlling teachers. In order to prevent this, supervision activities can be designed not to focus on controlling but improving education, as in the modern understanding of supervision.

This study used metaphors to understand primary school teachers' perceptions of supervisors. Future research could use metaphors to investigate the qualities of an ideal supervisor. School administrators and primary school teachers could be asked about their views on how supervision and inspection should be performed.

Supervisors could be asked about their views of current teachers and an ideal teacher.

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