



Being a master's degree student as a teacher: A phenomenological study in the light of metaphors

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Abstract

This is a phenomenological study aiming to depict the lived experiences of active teachers who are pursuing a master's degree in the field of education. The researchers are also in-service teachers who are currently engaged in the journey of an advanced degree in their professional developments, therefore, they felt the urge to explore what motivates and challenges teachers in their pursuit of an academic degree. Following a qualitative research pattern, this study utilizes a guided process of interview to obtain the gist of lived experiences from the perspective of a group of school teachers. The sampling is purposive and consists of fourteen participants to whom the researchers have an easy access. The participants are among the teachers who enrolled in master's programs related to educational field in Sakarya University, Hendek Campus. In order to depict the perceptions of the teachers, the participants are offered a semi- structured protocol of one question: "Pursuing a masters' degree while teaching actively is like.....because....."

Despite the guided process where only one question is pre-determined, the researchers, with the help of probing questions that emerged from discussion, were able to capture common themes and metaphors by analysing the data systematically. The analysis produced 18 valid metaphors and these metaphors were capsulated under three different themes.

Keywords: Metaphors, in-service teachers, master's degree

Introduction

In today's world, teaching is complex and challenging than it ever used to be. The social and economic concerns about the future, red flags related to planet protection, many add-ons with technology as well as the unease with the rapid spread of social media among students make it crucial for a teacher to keep up with the changes. It has already been accepted by the believers of lifelong learning that, a master's degree provides teachers with up to date knowledge, offers improvement in teaching skills and qualifications, enhances classroom effectiveness as well as contributing to their professional development. According to Vural and Başaran (2021), when 21st century skills are taken into consideration, teachers with these qualifications can easily find their place up to the forefront that is why any attempt to innovate their professional journeys contributes deeply to their overall progresses.

Completing a post graduate programme in order to stay up to date, enables teachers to cope with. "The aim of Phd programs which are one of the graduate programs is to provide the students with the ability of carrying out independent research, commenting on the scientific events with a broad and deep point of view by investigating and the ability of determining the necessary steps to reach new synthesis" (Titrek et al., 2015).

The teacher is one of the essential building blocks of the education system, beyond the recognition that the role of the teacher in the education world is excellent (Settaşı & Vural, 2023). In this context, reasons of teachers for pursuing a master's degree vary. Professional specialization and development, improved pedagogy, advancement in career, far-reaching opportunities, respect and credibility are among these reasons. Moreover, as Arar et al. (2015) mentioned master's degrees serve the foundation of an 'elite' identity among teachers. Postgraduate studies in education enable school teachers to advance their career, improving income and other economic rewards. That

is why the number of teachers with a master's degree shows an upwards trend. The total number of the teachers with master's degree serving for the Ministry of Education in Turkey is 118.735 by December 2021 (MEB, 2021).

Method

This is a qualitative research typifying a phenomenological study. As suggested by Becker (1998) conducting a research is a back and forth movement as it urges the researcher to look in the world, contemplate about what has and has not been seen, and revisiting previous looks.

It is common to conduct a qualitative research by framing it with a particular type such as ethnographic research, grounded theory, phenomenological study, narrative analysis, or basic interpretive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This research takes a phenomenological path and is designed to offer a depictive picture about the lived experiences of in-service teachers pursuing a post-graduate degree in the field of education.

Upon clearing their minds on which design to follow, the researchers made use of a guided interview process. Under the light of an expert opinion, they formulated a protocol of one question: *"Pursuing a masters' degree while teaching actively is like.....because....."*

When the risk of falling repetition emerged, the researchers made use of probing questions.

As suggested by Qu & Dumay (2011). Probing questions can be metaphorized like "mining for nuggets.

18 valid metaphors were produced under the light of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis procedure and these metaphors were categorized under three separate themes. In terms of metaphors mental experience can be interpreted (Lakoff and Johnson, 2008). The teacher identities are coded as T1,T2,T3for the presentation of the findings(T=teacher,1=first).

Findings

"Pursuing a master's degree while teaching actively is likebecause....."

This question produced 18 metaphors. Despite the guided process where only one question is pre-determined, the researchers, with the help of probing questions that emerged from discussion, were able to capture common themes. 18 metaphors mentioned above were capsulated as three separate themes. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framed the work of theme generation.

Themes Generated

The researchers came up with three major themes accentuating different perspectives of different participants.

1. MULTITASKING

This theme capsulates the metaphors of participants who emphasize productivity, time management and maximizing efficiency in their everyday lives. Quite surprisingly the ones who produced metaphors related to multitasking realm were deeply inspired by their childhood cartoon characters or fictional role models on television. For each theme the researcher chose three metaphors due to the concerns about time I will be able to present three metaphors for each theme

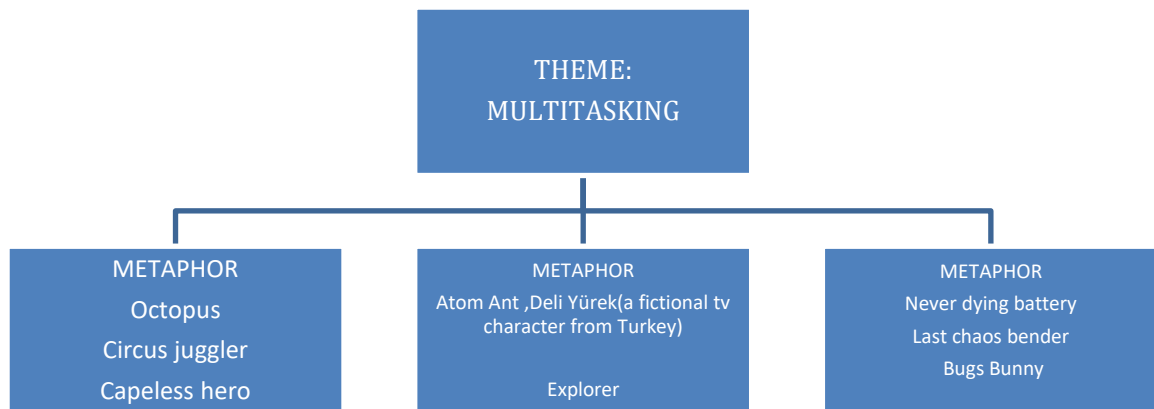


Table 1: Metaphors related to multitasking

1. T 1 : *“Atom Karınca vardı, hatırlar mısınız? Çizgi film. Uçardı, ağırlık kaldırırdı, birden küçülürdü, büyürdü, işte öyle hissediyorum. Elimden her iş geliyor“ Zaten öyle ufak tefeğim ama gücüm kuvvetim yerindeymiş onu gördüm.*

Remember there was cartoon character called Atom Ant. He used fly , lift weights, shrink and change sizes. That is what I feel. I am Jack of all trades now. (Referring to her petite size) I am already small but I am mighty, I realize this.

2. T 4: *“Yüksek lisans yaparken, öğretmenlik yapmak şey gibi, sirklerde jonglörük yapmak. Herşey havada, belirsiz ev, eş, çocuk, öğrenciler, teslim tarihleri, ödevler sunumlar becerebilersen idare et”*

Being in a Master’s degree programme while teaching actively is like being a juggler in a circus. Everything is up in the air. Home, kids, husband, students, deadlines, homeworks, presentations. Manage if you can.

3. T 13 : *(Referring to changing class hours and rooms in a very short notice and unplanned extra tasks from professors while overload by the school work as a teacher) “Ben bir yandan okul bir yandan yüksek lisans derken son kaos bükücü oldum diyorum. Ders saati mi değişmiş hallederiz, sınıf mı yok buluruz, yeni öden mi yüklenmiş yaparız “*

Well, let me say I turned out to be the last chaos bender with my school on one hand and master studies on the other. A change on the fixed timetable? We’ll handle it, No classroom available? We will find one. New homework downloaded on the system? We’ll work it out.

2. INSPIRATION

This theme capsulates the metaphors of participants who feel encouraged and motivated not only for themselves but also for the others around themselves (like for their students, colleagues or family members). The common key points in their answers were self-discovery, growth and leadership.

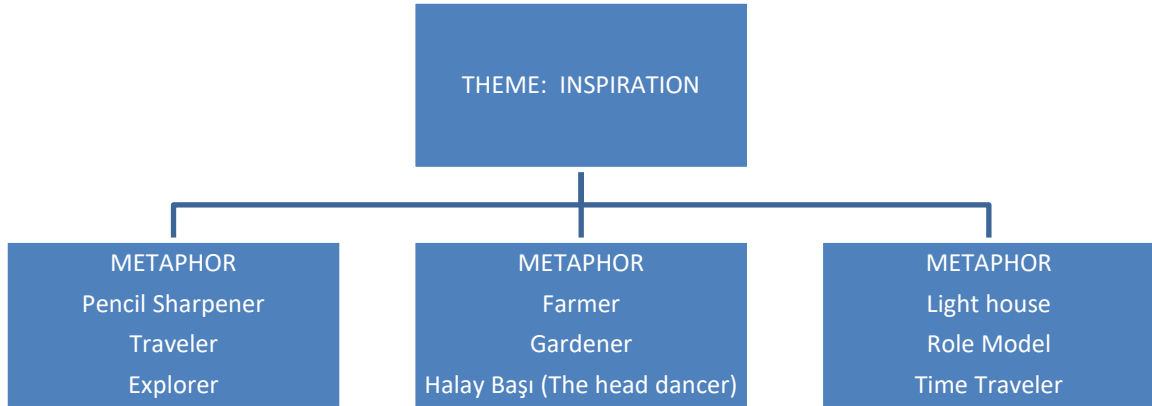


Table 2: Metaphors related to Inspiration

3. T 2 :*“Vallahi yüksekisans bende kalemtraş etkisi yarattı, yazmayan kalem gibiymişim, şimdi sivrildim daha iyi yazar oldum. “*

That master's degree thing worked as a pencil sharpener for me. I was like a dull, blunt pencil. Now I am more precise, I am refined. I write better than I used to. (Writing refers to any kind of academic production and presentation skills here as a twist of Turkish)

4. T 6: *(Referring to her students at school.) “Ödev teslim zamanı geldiğinde benim sınıf anlıyor artık, teneffüslerde bile çalışıyorum, powerpointleri onlara da sunduğum oluyor. Onlara da tohum ekmişim gibi, ilerde biçerler inşallah.”*

When the time for deadlines has arrived, my class gets it because I'm studying at breaktimes. I even perform my power point presentations in front of them. It feels like I have planted seeds in them, I hope they will cultivate these seeds sometime in the future.

5.T 11 :*(Referring to his colleagues at the school he works) “ Okulun deniz feneri gibi hissediyorum. Bana yön soruyorlar , fikir soruyorlar Biz de mi başlasak acaba yüksekisansa diyorlar.”*

I feel like I am the lighthouse of the school I work. Fellow teachers are asking for directions, they ask what I think. They are like “Shall we start too?”

3. PRAGMATISM

This theme capsulates the metaphors of participants who mainly focus on practical consequences and outcomes. They reported that being a master's degree student as a teacher somehow helped them modify their attitudes and positions to fit the context and explore new possibilities other than being a school teacher.

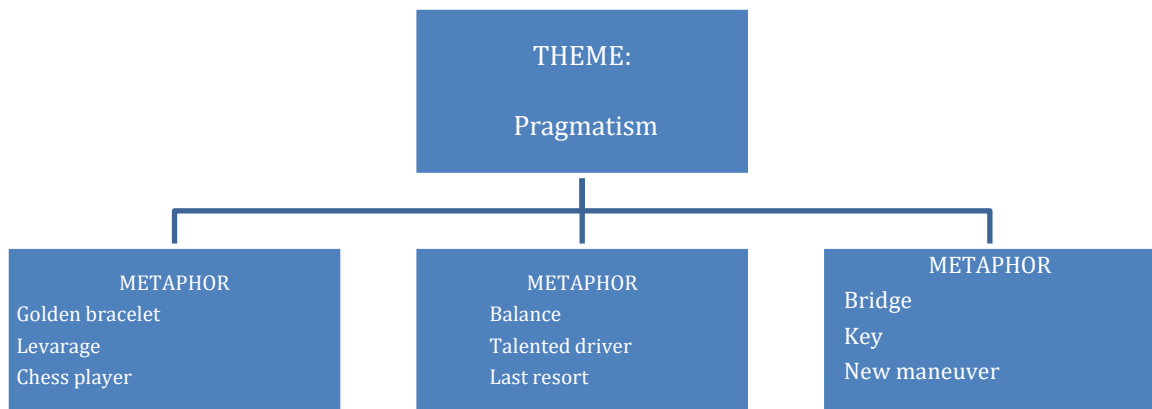


Table 3. Metaphors related to the theme Pragmatism

1. T 9: “*Öğretmenlik altın bileziğimiz, güvencemiz. Yüksek lisans diploması bir altın bilezik daha takmak gibi. Gelecekte ne olur bilemeyiz, illa bir faydası olur.*”

Teaching is our golden bracelet, it is our safe resort. The diploma of master’s degree is like wearing another golden bracelet. We will never know what waits us in the future, it will eventually do some good.

2.T 10: (Referring to potential networks) “*Hem öğretmen hem öğrenci olmak zor ama böyle sırf öğretmen olarak bir yere vardığımız yok, yüksek lisans kaldıraç olur belki ummadık şeyler olur.*”

It is hard to be a teacher and student at the same time, however, as teachers we are not getting anywhere ,the master’s degree would serve as a leverage , some unexpected encounters may happen.

3.T 14: “*Bir şekilde öğretmenlikte tecrübeliyiz, yüksek lisans köprü gibi geliyor bana, bundan sonra bir adım atarsak, bu köprüyü kullanıp hareketimizi kolaylaştırabiliriz.*”

Somehow we are experienced in teaching, a master’s degree is like a bridge to me, if we take a step forward we can use this bridge to facilitate movement.

Results

The themes generated from this study are multitasking, inspiration and pragmatism. Each of this metaphors contributes to the to the different aspects of the human experience of “being a master’s degree student as an in-service teacher “. The concept is decoded under 18 different metaphors.

Some teachers relate their experience to familiar fictional or cartoon characters like Deli Yürek, Bugs Bunny or Atom Ant, whereas some others make cultural references like Halay Başı or Golden Bracelet. It is also notable that teachers associate their experience with farming, gardening, exploring, travelling and juggling in a circus. These variations reveal cultural conceptual thinking of Turkish teachers, highlight how their brains processes their experience and offer a straightforward representation of what is discovered during the research.

Recommendations and Limitations

The researchers hope the findings of their study will illuminate the path taking teachers to farther education as well as the challenges they come across throughout the process. Although realities of teachers are subjective, the insights obtained from the research have the potential to inspire the policy makers of teacher training programmes,

promote the general quality of education and the professional development of teachers in the long run. There are some limitations that the researchers encountered while conducting the study. The first of them is in terms of duration. The study is limited with one semester. With the beginning of the next semester the devastating earthquakes happened and there was not even a single person in Turkey who was not touched by the disasters. The damage was and still is beyond repair. An extended duration could have provided a deeper and complete picture. The researchers fear that the sample group runs the risk of not being able to depict a reliable picture of how teachers perceive the phenomenon on larger scales. Population sampling is not random, it is purposeful. So, researchers worry about the bias of self-selection. The researchers also questions whether the participants' social and emotional skills play a role or dominate the result of the study. If so, they are concerned that it will overshadow the validity and reliability of the result of the study.

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