INVESTIGATING PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP STYLES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Ayşe ZAMBAK[1] & Emine ÖZDEMİR[2]

Abstract

This study aims to investigate how preschool teachers perceive the leadership styles of the school principals they work with, as they have a significant impact on student performance and school atmosphere. Therefore, a mixed-method research paradigm was utilized with a purposive random sampling method of 114 pre-school teachers at public schools. School Principals' Leadership Style Scale together with the demographic information part and a metaphor elicitation form, were applied to collect the necessary data. Because a convergent parallel design was utilized to weigh the processes equally, quantitative and qualitative data were evaluated independently, and the results were interpreted separately. The results revealed that, according to pre-school teachers' perceptions, the principals they work with show their laissez-faire leadership style more. Unlike quantitative findings, data from the metaphor elicitation form indicate that the category with the most metaphors for a school principal is a figure of authority. Although the descriptive findings of teachers' impressions show that most school principals have a laissez-faire leadership style, metaphors portray school principals as persons who have power at school, supervise their team, have varied tasks, and are motivators and innovators. To sum up, it can be put forward that effective leadership is a crucial necessity of successful organizations, and principals need to take an active part in the preparation process to go a step further in their careers and lead their organizations more effectively.

Keywords: Pre-school teachers, school principals, leadership style, perceptions.

Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Okul Müdürlerinin Liderlik Stillerine İlişkin Algilarinin İncelenmesi

Öz

Bu çalışma, öğrenci performansı ve okul atmosferi üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olduklarından dolayı okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin birlikte çalıştıkları okul müdürlerinin liderlik tarzlarını nasıl algıladıklarını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu sebeple, devlet okullarındaki 114 okul öncesi öğretmeninden amaçlı rastgele örnekleme yöntemiyle karma yöntem araştırma paradigması kullanılmıştır. Gerekli verileri toplamak için Okul Müdürlerinin Liderlik Tarz Ölçeği, demografik bilgi bölümü ve metafor çıkarım formu ile birlikte uygulanmıştır. Süreçleri eşit olarak tartmak için yakınsayan paralel bir tasarım kullanıldığından, nicel ve nitel veriler bağımsız olarak değerlendirilmiş ve sonuçlar ayrı ayrı yorumlanmıştır. Sonuçlar, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin algılarına göre birlikte çalıştıkları müdürlerin serbest bırakıcı liderlik tarzını daha fazla gösterdiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Metafor belirleme formundan elde edilen veriler ise, nicel bulgulardan farklı olarak, okul müdürleri için onları bir otorite figürü olarak kabul eden kategorinin en fazla metafora sahip olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Öğretmen izlenimlerinin tanımlayıcı bulguları çoğu okul müdürünün serbest bırakıcı liderlik tarzına sahip olduğunu gösterse de, metaforlar okul müdürlerini okulda gücü olan, ekibini denetleyen, çeşitli görevleri olan, motive edici ve yenilikçi kişiler olarak tasvir etmektedir. Özetle, etkili liderliğin başarılı organizasyonlar için çok önemli bir gereklilik olduğu ve müdürlerin kariyerlerinde bir adım daha ileri gitmek ve organizasyonlarını daha etkin bir şekilde yönetmek için hazırlık sürecinde aktif rol almaları gerektiği ifade edilebilir.

Keywords: Okul öncesi öğretmenleri, okul müdürleri, liderlik tarzı, algılar

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Introduction

It is commonly acknowledged that educational administration is critical to achieving the intended effect in a school setting. With this crucial notion, it becomes evident that the quality of management is a decisive element if schools are to provide the greatest possible results. Bush (2008) points out that the 'development of a highly-skilled workforce is a requirement, which leads to well-trained and committed teachers with the support of 'highly effective principals' (p.1). It demonstrates the need for a collaborative educational environment fostered by effective leadership traits.

To comprehend the impact of management on the school, one initially needs to grasp the several meanings that it encompasses. According to Bolam (1999), educational management is an 'executive function for carrying out agreed policy" (p.194). On the other hand, Glatter (1979) suggests that studies related to management are linked to the 'internal operation of educational institutions, and with their relationships with their environment, that is, the communities in which they are set, and with the governing bodies to which they are formally responsible" (p.16). There is a significant connection between internal and external factors that influence school principals' potential to lead their institutions. Defining organizational goals throughout this process necessitates collaborative engagement in the educational environment, which reminds us that shared agreement and devoted work is required. These objectives offer a sense of purpose and cohesion. As a result, one of the compelling aspects of a school is the quality of the interaction between the staff and the school management.

The words "leader" and "leadership" are the Anglo-Saxon word "lead," whose etymological root is expressed as "path" or "way." The verb "leaden" is used to mean "to travel." For this reason, the leader means the person who advances first at the beginning of the group and guides the group's members with whom he acts (Kets de Vries, 2007, p. 20). Turkish Language Association, on the other hand, expressed the meaning of the word "leader" as "chief or someone in charge of the highest level of management of an organization" and the word leadership as "leader's duty or leadership" (TDK, 2017). Leadership is honest, open, reassuring, and respectful management to increase the employees' motivation for the organization's success and to manage the organization in the best way (Kıngır and Şahin, 2005). Besides, Ataman (2009) describes the leadership as the act of one person leading and affecting others' behaviors in order to accomplish predefined individual, group, and organizational goals (p.543).Leaders have the power to influence with their different characteristics and can create a vision and mission within the scope of goals. Managers are put in that position by others and strive to achieve their goals, plan, implement and supervise work. Some managers do not have leadership characteristics, and some leaders do not have managerial characteristics. However, a manager needs leadership characteristics (Sabuncuoğlu and Tüz, 2001). As can be seen, while management is concerned with the regulation of mixed environmental conditions resulting in a disciplined and stable situation, leadership, on the other hand, is about ensuring the realization of change by bringing new perspectives to regulation.

Leadership is a critical management role that enables an organization's resources to increase efficiency and goal attainment. Influential leaders clarify the organization's objective, encourage colleagues, and assist them in achieving it. Today, adapting to the changing age has become the most critical necessity of management organizations, and this necessity has changed the functioning, structure, and roles expected from the manager of all management organizations. Accordingly, in today's management approaches, the concept of a leader rather than a manager has come to the fore (Chirichello, 1999). School principals need to have leadership behaviours and characteristics for an educational organization to succeed. For this reason, it is necessary to know what leadership behaviours are for the success of management organizations (Deliveli, 2010).

Investigating Pre-School Teachers' Perceptions About the Leadership Styles of School Principals
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Within the scope of the Project for Increasing Quality and Access in Early Childhood Education, implemented with the technical support of UNICEF, co-financed by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey, it is aimed to expand and diversify early childhood education services, as well as to increase the access of all children, especially disadvantaged children, to early childhood education services and the quality of education provided. The project's target groups consist of children aged 0-6 and their parents/carers, as well as pre-school teachers, school principals, and other ECE service providers in the most disadvantaged communities with limited or no access to early childhood education (ECE) services. Improving the infrastructure of kindergartens, increasing the quality of teachers, and preparing their content are some of the objectives aimed to be realized during this project. It can be understood that successful educational leadership is essential for initiating, executing, and effectively concluding such wide-ranging projects. Considering the scope and outputs of the project, a collaborative project execution within a working system that complements each other is required. This situation is mainly related to the leadership perceptions of pre-school teachers about the school principals they work with.

Considering these all, it becomes clear that school principals are supposed to abandon their traditional mindset and adopt a more current leadership position that encompasses a variety of talents. School leadership is becoming an educational leader and a profession with its values. The conversion of these concepts into precise criteria will allow educational leaders to assess themselves and offer insight on how to train school principals for effective school administration. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the perceptions of pre-school teachers on school principals' leadership styles via a survey and metaphor elicitation form. The research questions include the following:

1. What are the leadership styles of school principals according to pre-school teachers' perceptions?
2. What metaphors do pre-school teachers use to describe the concept of 'school principal'?
   2.a. How are these metaphors classified conceptually in terms of common features?
3. Is there a relationship between pre-school teachers' perceptions of school principals' leadership styles and their metaphors?

Metaphor

There are many ways people can express their opinions about any concept. Researchers use different methods to reveal participants' thoughts or perceptions about an event, object, or concept. Metaphors are structures used to use other concepts to describe a concept, strengthen the narrative, enrich the language, and transform thoughts into linguistic actions effectively. Levine (2005, p.172) stated that metaphor comes from Latin and Greek roots. The word metaphor is a compound name consisting of the words *Meta*: beyond, extreme, and *pherein*: to carry, to load, and it means "to take from one place to another."

Many researchers defined metaphors in a variety of ways. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the essence of metaphors is understanding and experiencing one type of object in terms of another. Hornby (2000) also describes metaphor as 'a word or phrase used in an imaginative way to describe somebody or something else to two things have the same qualities and make the description more powerful' (p.803). Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed that "metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish - a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language." (p.3). Lakoff (1993) considers metaphor as a cognitive tool and adds that "the locus of the metaphor is not in language, but in the way, we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another" (p.1). Therefore, metaphors may enable mapping in the brain to organize our views and experiences about a given topic.

According to Oberlechner and Mayer- Schönberger (2002), metaphors assist individuals in grasping complicated and abstract things by bringing them to life. "Metaphor analysis is a method that systematically investigates elicited or spontaneous metaphors in language to find underlying conceptualizations," according to De Guerrero and Villamil (2001, p.1). Although a metaphor analysis does not disclose all views, it is immensely beneficial to understand better teachers' beliefs, behaviours, and actions as fundamental components of human cognitive functioning. (Kalra and Bajeva, 2012).

Metaphors are mental tools that allow people to communicate a message to an audience in a symbolic form. Metaphor analysis has been used in various educational studies as a research technique. These investigations all studied pre-and in-service teachers' opinions regarding classroom practices, educational administration, teacher-student classroom interaction, and the growth of teacher ideas about teaching and learning (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2008). The goal is to create links between an idea or notion and its physical manifestation. Individuals have the opportunity to convey their feelings, thoughts, and even experiences in a more visual way to help comprehension. The key benefits of employing metaphor analysis as a data-gathering method are that participants may both expose their perceptions and perform self-reflection using metaphorical language. At the same time, it raises participants' knowledge of what it takes to be a school principal. Furthermore, because metaphors disclose social and cultural conventions, the content analysis may obtain insight into specific situations and create comparisons between different metaphor productions.

Metaphors and School Principals' Leadership Styles

An examination of the literature reveals that metaphors and metaphorical analysis have been engaged in educational practice and research for many years. According to Balcı (1999), metaphor has been utilized as a potential tool in education to depict the current status of educational activities. Similarly, metaphors can characterize educational leadership and investigate how this language tool is employed in a leadership situation.

Mullen, Greenlee and Bruner (2005) applied the metaphor to investigate the link between theory and practice in educational leadership programs. Metaphors, according to scholars, serve as an organizing framework for strengthening comprehension and thoughtful investigation into difficult subjects. Linn, Sherman and Gill (2007) conducted another study to look at how future educational leaders use metaphors to make sense of principalship. Principal interns were instructed to utilize metaphorical language to portray the principalship at the end of a university principal training program. Four separate themes emerged from the metaphors: '(a) protection and nurturing, (b) skill, adventure, or problem-solving, (c) challenge, risk, and threat, and (d) chance and luck' (p.161). Their answers reveal their views and assumptions, forming their knowledge and impacting leadership behaviour. In his research, Murphy (2002) aimed to go beyond the traditional definitions for educational leadership by making an in-depth examination of the foundations of educational leadership and making new generally accepted definitions according to changing conditions. According to the research, traditional methods of defining educational leadership have not been effective enough in restructuring school leadership. The researcher introduced a structure to reshape the definition of educational leadership and redefined school leadership using the metaphors of "moral servant,' "educator," and "community builder" (p. 176).

Fennel (1996), on the other hand, worked with four female school principals in her study titled 'An exploration of principals' metaphors for leaders and power' as she aimed to define metaphors that describe school principalship and reflect her thoughts on leadership and power. Over three years, data were obtained from observations and interviews with principals whose school boards had designated as excellent leaders and interviews with teachers at their schools during the first year of the research.

Examining the metaphors revealed three themes: the relational dimensions of leadership and power, the ethic of responsibility for coworkers, and the sense of nurturing for co-workers. According to the statistics, each principal is working to empower, enable, and encourage members of the school communities to express themselves openly. The metaphors used to represent leadership styles showed the concept of power with authority and the complex nature of leadership.

Finally, Kaya and Koca (2020) analyzed 15 qualitative metaphor studies on school principals from 2012 to 2018. Consequently, it was discovered that school administrators' human attributes were valued more than their technical and intellectual abilities. Positive human traits are developed more frequently than negative human traits. Production-training activities, orientation, and power are shown to be the most often generated sub-themes connected to technical competencies. The source of information and transmitter are the most often created category in conceptual competencies.

Method

Research Design

This is a convergent parallel design mixed-methods research. Mixed method research is a type of study in which data from quantitative and qualitative methodologies is combined, correlated, or mixed (Creswell & Clark, 2017).The general purpose of mixed methods research is to broaden and deepen a study's results and, as a result, contribute to the body of knowledge. On the other hand, a convergent parallel design suggests that the researcher conducts both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research simultaneously, weights the procedures equally, analyses the two separately, and interprets the results (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011). Combining both types of data can enhance an evaluation by ensuring that the advantages of the other balance the limits of one form of data.
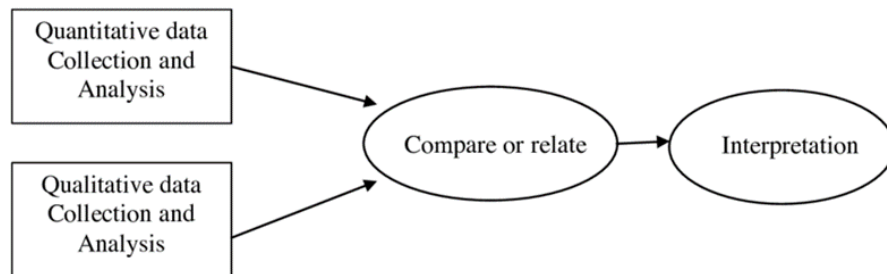

Figure 1. Convergent parallel design (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011)

Participants

The study group consists of 114 pre-school teachers working in public schools in Adana, Turkey, selected by convenience sampling, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods. Convenience sampling is a nonprobability or non-random sampling in which individuals of the target population fulfil specific practical requirements, such as ease of access, geographic closeness, availability at a specific time, or desire to participate, are included in the research (Dörnyei, 2007). Demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics of participants*

Variables		f	%
	Female	98	86%
Gender	Male	16	14%
	Less than 30	18	15,8%
Age	31-40	63	55,3%
	Over 40	33	28,9%
Seniority	1-5 years	8	7%
	6-10 years	24	21,1%
	11-15 years	58	50,9%
	16-20 years	17	14,9%
	More than 20 years	7	6,1%
Education status	BA	101	88,6%
	MA student	3	2,6%
	MA graduate	11	9,6%

As seen in Table 1, 86% (n:98) of the participants are female teachers, and 14% (n:16) are male teachers. This shows that female teachers are outnumbered in this study. More than half of the participants (55,3%, n:63) are between 31-and 40. While 28,9% (n: 33) of the participating teachers are over 40, 15,8% (n: 18) are younger than 30 years old. Furthermore, half of the teachers (50,9%, n: 58) have 11-15 years of work experience. Finally, 101 teachers have a bachelor's degree, while 11 teachers (9.8%) have already completed their MA degrees.

Data Collection Tools

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were utilized to gather the necessary data for the research. These are 'the School Principals' Leadership Style Scale' developed by Akan, Yıldırım, and Yalçın (2014), including the demographic information part and a metaphor elicitation form.

The School Principals' Leadership Style Scale

In the first part of the scale, there is a personal information form stating the purpose of the research and the answers to be used for academic purposes. The information form asked questions about the gender, age, educational status, and professional seniority of the pre-school teachers. In addition, the five-point Likert scale was graded as (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree. The scale consists of three sub-dimensions: transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style, and liberating leadership style. There are a total of 35 items on the scale, including 20 items in the transformational leadership dimension, seven items in the sustainability leadership dimension, and eight items in the laissez-faire leadership dimensionTo find the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the School Principals' Leadership Styles Scale, the Cronbach-Alpha reliability coefficient, Spearman-Brown correlation coefficient and the correlation coefficient determined by the test-retest method were calculated for each factor of the scale. For each subcategory of the scale, the Cronbach-Alpha reliability coefficient varied between 0.82 and 0.96. According to Bozbayındır (2016), a scale is reliable if the Cronbach Alpha score is between 0.80 and 1.00. In this case, it can be said that the reliability coefficients of the scale are within the accepted limits.

The Metaphor Elicitation Form

The metaphors were elicited using a metaphor elicitation form designed by the researchers. The form consisted of two parts. In the first part, participants were asked to answer the prompt "A school manager is (like) a/an………. because................" The second part included questions for

participants to reflect on their metaphor choices and reactions to being a school manager. They mentioned why they want/ don't want to be a school manager and the important areas they would consider in a similar situation. The participants used their mother tongue (Turkish) while generating their metaphors to help them express their ideas more comfortably. Also, it was stated that their participation was entirely voluntary. They weren't supposed to write their names to avoid the identifiability of participants and contribute to privacy, which is an essential issue of ethics in research.

Data Analysis

In this study, the School Principals' Leadership Style Scale, which has a five-graded Likert scale, was utilized to gather quantitative data. After the quantitative data were collected, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SSPS) 23.0 was used to summarize and analyze the data through descriptive statistics meaningfully and usefully. The researcher computed and illustrated a comparison of means to analyze quantitative data through the tables formed in SPSS 23.0. For the analysis of the data from metaphor elicitation form, the obtained data were evaluated and interpreted using the content analysis method, allowing concepts and themes that were not visible using the descriptive approach to be seen. (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). Likewise, the researcher concentrates on coding and classifying the data in content analysis, making this approach rich (Stemler, 2000). Because the convergent-parallel approach is a concurrent strategy that entails collecting qualitative and quantitative data on the same phenomenon at the same time, each data set is analyzed separately but at the same time. For this reason, in this study, both datasets were evaluated simultaneously and investigated whether there was a relationship between them.

Findings

The data from the scale applied to learn the pre-school teachers' perceptions of school principal leadership styles are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of preschool teachers' perceptions regarding school principals' leadership styles*

Sub-categories	N	%	x̄	Maximum Value	Minimum Value	ss
Transformational Leadership	114	61,85	61,85	100/80	20/39	5,51
Transactional leadership	114	63,51	22,23	35/28	7/13	2,40
Laissez-faire leadership	114	64,82	25,93	40/32	8/14	2,70
TOTAL	**114**	**62,82**	**110,02**	**175/138**	**35/74**	**9,42**

As shown in Table 2, when the leadership scores of school principals are examined according to the perceptions of pre-school teachers, school principals show the most "laissez-faire leadership" style (x̄=25,93). In the second place, it was stated that while they had the 'transactional leadership' (x̄=22,23), they showed the least "transformational leadership" style (x̄=61,85). The teachers noted that the school administrators showed the "laissez-faire leadership" style at the "agree" level, the "transactional leadership" style at the "undecided" level, and the "transformational leadership" style at the "disagree" level. Teachers generally agree that school administrators show the releasing leadership style, but they do not agree with the transformational leadership style.

For qualitative data, metaphors produced by pre-school teachers regarding the concept of school principal were examined in different conceptual categories, and metaphors included in each category were shown in tables. In addition, the reasons for choosing metaphors are expressed by quoting the participants' sentences.

Table 3. *Pre-school teachers' metaphors about the concept of the school principal*

Categories	Metaphors	f	%
Figure of authority	Brain (3), boss, hammer, heart, leader (6), king in the chess, father, fountain, captain, heart and brain of the school, conductor, orbit, cell nucleus, dictator	22	19,3
Guide	Lighthouse, Sun, compass, candlelight, book, light bulb, North star, locomotive, railroad, sunshine, coach, leader, wheel, a parent in a crowded family	14	12,3
Source of balance	Seesaw, scales (3), juggler, mother, salt of the food, smooth operator, rainbow, cornerstone, balance board, the foundation of the house, colourful painting, the lion king	14	12,3
Source of responsibility	Stone of patience, driving a car, father (2), a shirt of Nessus (2), team captain, head of the family, president, captain, householder, soldier, pilot	13	11,4
Source of motivation and innovation	Team captain, an entrepreneurial structure, skyscraper, psychologist, torch, leader (2), tree, seed, computer, climate, key	12	10,5
Labourer	Bee (2), clock, porter, octopus (2), gardener, ant, truck, operating system	10	8,8
Protector	Tree root, mother, the roof of the house, umbrella, father, park ranger, shield, seawall, photo frame	9	7,9
Mediator	Peacemaker, intersection, forest, orbit, politician, conductor, choir conductor, climate	8	7
Source of justice	Judge, neutral flag, rainbow, lawyer	4	3,5
TOTAL		**114**	**100%**

The participants' metaphors for the concept of "school principal" were classified and presented in nine conceptual categories. Table 3 shows the conceptual categories created from the metaphors used by the participants regarding the concept of "school principal" and the frequency (f) and percentages (%) of mentioning these categories. Then, the metaphors that make up each category were presented in tables, and the characteristics of the categories were supported by quoting from the participants. Although the word leader appears under different categories due to the reasons expressed by the participants, it is the most preferred metaphor in this study. Thus, in the perceptions of pre-school teachers, which is the main theme of our research, it is revealed that school principals are mostly accepted as leaders in their institutions. On the other hand, the concept of the school principal is associated by the teachers with the brain, father, mother, scales, bee, octopus, climate, and captain more than once.

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the category represented by the metaphor the most is "figure of authority" (19.3%), while the category represented by the least metaphor is "source of justice" (3.5%). Other categories are the protector (7,9%), guide (12,3%), source of balance (12,3%), moderator (7%), labourer (8,8%), source of responsibility (11,4%), and the use of motivation and innovation (10,5%).

School Principal as a Figure of Authority

Out of 114 participants, 22 teachers regarded the school principal as a person of authority to maintain sound administration in a school setting. This category has the highest number of metaphors,

implying that teachers value the leadership position of a school principal. The "leader" metaphor was also repeated six times. The following are the participants' justifications for their choices:

Being a school principal is like a leader because S/he is good at controlling and regulating all details. Also, management requires success.

Being a school principal is like a cell nucleus because a school manager controls and audits the regular operation of all units.

Being a school principal is like the King in chess because s/he is the one who leads the way, not the one who walks ahead.

Being a school principal is like a fountain because everyone loves water that flows in his judgment.

School Principal as a Guide

The metaphors created in the guidance category constitute 12,3% of all metaphors produced. It is seen that the participants who prefer these metaphors perceive school principals as those who direct and guide students, teachers and other school staff and thus enable the school to reach its goals.

Being a school principal is like sunshine because it illuminates and warms us.

Being a school principal is like a compass because it shows us the way where we should go.

Being a school principal is like a lighthouse because it helps students and teachers to find the right path.

Being a school principal is like a locomotive because it leads the personnel with its leadership and mission and directs the development and progress of the staff.

School Principal as a Source Balance

Of all the categories created for school managers seen in Table 3, the metaphors developed under the category 'source of balance' show that school principals are expected to enable some balance in their educational context among various dynamics. The word scales, which refers to the mission of the school principal, is the most frequently preferred metaphor in this group.

Being a school principal is like a juggler because s/he has to keep the balance and finalize everything without offending anyone.

Being a school principal is like a smooth operator because they treat everyone according to their personalities and conditions.

Being a school principal is like a mother because s/he establishes good communication with schoolteachers and, on the other hand, strives to provide better education for students and create a safer environment.

School Principal as a Source of Responsibility

The principal's responsibility is to offer leadership, direction, and coordination. The principal's primary responsibility should be to establish and maintain excellent educational programs within their school and encourage the advancement of teaching and learning inside their school. Hence, metaphors in this category symbolize that the school principal has many responsibilities as the face of the school.

Being a school principal is like a shirt of Nessus because this job requires a lot of responsibilities.

Being a school principal is like a stone of patience because s/he needs to be patient enough to deal with each detail and person.

Being a school person is like a captain because s/he is the person you can trust at the wheel.

Being a school principal is like a father because the school includes roles and responsibilities like a family.

School Principal as a Source of Motivation and Innovation

The work engagement of principals inspires teachers' creativity, which should increase the number of innovations developed in schools. Also, it can be accepted that a principal's leadership style and teachers' motivation are two critical components of a school's performance. For that reason, the metaphors in this category underline the significance of principals' role in inspiration and creativity.

Being a school principal is like a psychologist because a good principal listens to problems and tries to find solutions to increase the motivation of the school staff.

Being a school principal is like a key because it opens a new path with it.

Being a school principal is like a torch because s/he encourages colleagues to explore new ways with it.

Being a school principal is like a seed because seeds of innovation open up very different horizons.

School Principal as a Labourer

The metaphors in this category indicate that school principals have a lot of obligations, and it is stressed that these responsibilities may sometimes make being a school principal a difficult task. When the statements were examined, it was seen that the participants perceived the school principals as beings who are constantly working to meet the needs of the school, students, and teachers and to solve their problems in all situations. 'Bee' and 'Octopus' are the metaphors that are preferred more than once to indicate school principals' diligence.

Being a school principal is like a clock because it works for 24 hours.

Being a school principal is like a porter because s/he works continuously at the weekends and even during summer vacation.

Being a school principal is like an octopus because they need to have power and time to reach everywhere and achieve a lot of work.

School Principal as a Protector

In this category, metaphors indicate that school principals have a mission of protection, caring and reassurance. Considering the metaphors produced, it can be said that the participants have positive thoughts about the concept of the school principal. The metaphors produced in this category draw attention to school principals' protective and caring aspects. It can be said that an environment where the participants feel safe and protected will help the realization of better-quality education.

Being a school principal is like a park ranger because you always must take care of it.

Being a school principal is like an umbrella because it protects students from all kinds of evil, just as an umbrella protects us from the rain.

Being a school principal is like a father because he should treat and protect students, teachers, and other staff at school like a father.

School Principal as a Mediator

The metaphors generated under the theme of " school manager as a mediator" reveal that participants consider the school principal as a person who helps their staff resolve the conflicts occurring at the school or finds other ways to overcome these kinds of problems trying to create harmony.

Being a school principal is like a choir conductor because s/he tries to make all people work in harmony and produce a melody as if s/he is leading a choir.

Being a school principal is like a forest because, in a forest, all kinds of plants, trees and geological structures live together harmoniously.

Being a school principal is like an intersection because s/he connects the ways.

School Principal as s Source of Justice

When the expressions containing the metaphors that make up this category are examined, it is seen that the participants who prefer these metaphors perceive the school principals as people who are fair and impartial in the face of events and their decisions.

Being a school principal is like a judge because the basis of management is to treat all individuals equally.

Being a school principal is like a neutral flag because teachers need fair support and motivation.

Being a school principal is like a rainbow because it respects differences and holds each difference together.

The third research question of the study investigated whether there was any relationship between pre-school teachers' perceptions of school principals' leadership styles and their metaphors. When school principals' leadership scores are evaluated to pre-school teachers' opinions, school principals demonstrate the most "laissez-faire leadership" style. Secondly, it was reported that while they exhibited "transactional leadership," they displayed the least "transformational leadership." Teachers usually feel that school administrators show the releasing leadership style, but not the transformative leadership type. Laissez-faire, loosely translated from its French origins, means "let it be" or "let it alone." This implies that leaders allow their staff members to execute tasks in whichever way they see fit, without imposing specific standards or processes. Instead of a single leader making all the decisions for an organization, company, or team, laissez-faire leaders make a limited number of decisions and let their colleagues pick the best workplace solutions.

On the other hand, when the metaphors created by the teachers in the concept of the school principal are grouped, it is seen that the school principals are the people in powerful positions who hold more authority (n: 22, 19,3%). However, school principals also stand out as guiding and responsible people. As it can be understood from here, the perceptions of teachers obtained from the scale and the ideal school principal leadership they have formed in their minds contradict each other.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study investigates the school principal leadership perceptions of teachers working in pre-school education schools. One hundred fourteen pre-school teachers were determined through the purposive random sampling method. The study used a convergent parallel design to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. The data collection tools used were the 'School Principals' Leadership Style Öcale' developed by Akan, Yıldırım, and Yalçın (2014), which included a demographic information section and a metaphor elicitation form.

In our study, which consists of data collected simultaneously, the results of the scale used to collect quantitative data revealed that school principals have the most "laissez-faire leadership" style according to pre-school teachers' perceptions ($\bar{x}$=25,93, 64,2%). According to Eren (2008, p. 524), leadership that allows complete freedom is a leadership style that leaves employees who do not need executive powers much and expects employees to perform their duties and responsibilities on their own with the opportunities provided to them. While leaders give their staff the opportunity and tools they require thriving, they are primarily uninvolved in day-to-day operations.

Although there is not much difference in the descriptive results of pre-school teachers' leadership style perceptions of pre-school teachers in this study, transactional leadership style comes in second place ($\bar{x}$=22,23, 63,51%). In the research conducted by Dalgıç (2015) on primary and secondary school teachers in the Sancaktepe district of Istanbul, it was concluded that school principals adopt more transactional leadership behaviours. Transactional leadership, which includes achieving organizational goals in return for high performance, is a leadership style that motivates followers to meet individual needs. These kinds of leaders are active in the current environment, and they prefer the continuation of existing activities rather than change and transformation. They ensure that everything in the organization runs smoothly as planned. To achieve this, they monitor existing practices and evaluate whether employees are successful or not. They reward good performance according to the result, and while appreciating their success, they also correct the problems and inadequacies (Gedikoğlu, 2015).

Lastly, the teachers in this study stated that the principals showed the least transformational leadership style, although by a minimal margin. ($\bar{x}$=61,65, 61,51%). Transformational leadership is a leadership approach that aims for radical change and transformation in corporate structure and functioning. Considering that the first necessary behaviour of transformational leaders is to ensure the communication of the employees with the vision, one can better understand the primary mission of transformation. This result may also be perceived as the fact that the efforts of the principals are not enough to keep up with the new changes in their schools with the rapid changes that have occurred in the world in recent years, or this effort is not perceived by the teachers correctly. In addition, according to the research conducted by Aslan (2013), in which he wanted to find the leadership styles of the school principals according to the perceptions of the primary school teachers in the İdil district of Şırnak province, it was revealed that school principals mostly adopted the transformational leadership style. Aslan (2013) attributed this result to the region's characteristics and the young age of the principals. She stated that young principals are aware of new and contemporary leadership styles and try to implement them in their schools. Therefore, the results of the research conducted by Şahin (2003), Özyiğit (2012), Bardakçı (2017), Abu Tineh, Khasawneh, and Omary (2009) are also contradictory to the results of the current research.

Contrary to quantitative results, data obtained from the metaphor elicitation form suggest that the category, which is represented with the highest number of metaphors, is 'school principal as a figure of authority. The metaphors developed under this category are brain (3), boss, hammer, heart, leader (6), king in chess, father, fountain, captain, heart and brain of the school, conductor, orbit, cell nucleus, and dictator. These metaphors indicate that participants of this study consider the school principal as a person who ensures that all duties in the school are fulfilled with the power s/he holds.In his MA thesis, Yalçın (2011) discovered that school principals were viewed as a "source of power," a "management focus," and a "school director as a router," using metaphors like a leader, ship captain, maestro, cell nucleus, brain, governor, king, and authority, which aligns with the findings of this study. While Singh (2010) discovered the metaphor "traffic cop" in her research, Browne-Ferrigno's (2003) study established the metaphor of leader. As a result, school principals are frequently seen as authority and power bearers in numerous researches.

Other categories that emerge in this study unravel the school principals as a guide, source of balance, responsibility, motivation and innovation, labourer, protector, mediator and source of justice. The findings of Yalçın (2011) are consistent with the metaphors developed in the present study. In his study, under the category of " doing a difficult and tiring job", the school principal is perceived as a porter, patient stone, worker and a collection officer. Akyol and Kapçak (2017) developed a category with the same title including some metaphors like a gardener, the earth and Messi indicating similar findings with the present study.

Although it is emphasized that school management is a difficult and exhausting task and that school principals are the people who do hard work, other studies are reaching positive metaphors proving that school managers are hardworking people. In addition to them, school management is emphasized as a problem solver in Linn et al. (2007) study, which shows parallelism with the findings of this study.

Because a convergent parallel design was used to weigh the processes equally, both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed individually, and the findings were interpreted separately. The results show that the data obtained from both data collection tools do not match each other. Although school principals mostly have a laissez-faire leadership style according to the descriptive results of teachers' perceptions, metaphors, on the contrary, highlight school principals as people who have authority at school, guide their team, have various responsibilities and are leaders of motivation and innovation. As metaphors are mental tools that assist people to communicate a message to an audience in a symbolic way, it is striking to see the disparity between the subconscious conceptions of the participating teachers and the school principals they currently work with. These findings show that school leaders are expected to define and promote some goals that are connected to stated values such as equal chances, fairness, justice, stakeholder involvement, dedication, understanding, or collaboration, which stresses common moral ideals among the staff. Similarly, Avcı (2015) agrees that school principals' leadership skills directly impact organizational trust, dedication, citizenship in school culture and environment, and educational excellence. In other words, school principals need to possess the required personality traits and professional credentials to manage a school successfully. Although it is the responsibility of teachers to improve themselves constantly, the role of management is vital in the successful implementation of this understanding in a school. Hence, school principals can organize activities such as in-service training courses, seminars and conferences in and outside the school related to the professional development of teachers and their motivation in this direction.

In conclusion, when the link between educational leadership and school improvement is considered, it can be seen that 'effective leadership is a key to both continuous improvement and major system transformation' (NCLS, 2001, p.5). It cannot be overstated that school principals play a critical role in guaranteeing the performance of their schools by prioritizing the creation of a democratic, innovative, and cooperative school climate and emphasizing the necessity of their employees' active engagement in the process. Thus, school principals are supposed to be aware of the unique conditions in which they find themselves and work on a careful adaptation of various types of leadership in close partnership with their colleagues.

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Ethical Approval

The data in this study were collected and analyzed following all publication ethics rules.

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