RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teachers' Perceptions of Occupational Health and Safety: A Metaphor Analysis

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Abstract: This study reveals teachers' perceptions of occupational health and safety through metaphors. The study group includes nursery, primary, secondary and high schools teachers working in the central district of Batman province in the 2023-2024 academic year. The study employed a qualitative approach to identify and explain metaphors regarding occupational health and safety. The researchers used diversity sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, to reach the participants. To collect data, a semi-structured from was created which included the following expression *"Occupational health and safety is like.............because............"*. Content and descriptive analysis methods were used to analyse the data. The findings suggested that teachers described occupational health and safety through 68 different metaphors all of which represented positive perceptions. These metaphors were categorized under nine themes based on the justifications for the metaphors and their similarity. The themes were *protectiveness, preventativeness, need, essentiality, supportiveness, continuity, systematizer, resilience*, and *universality.* The most metaphors were created under the theme of protectiveness which was followed by preventativeness. Based on these findings, suggestions are presented to review and evaluate teachers' views on occupational health and safety.

Key Words: *teacher, occupational health and safety, metaphor*

INTRODUCTION

With the industrialization and development of technology, hazards and risks increased due to reasons such as increased use of machinery, production of more physical and chemical substances, as well as physiological, ergonomic, psychological, social and socioeconomic factors, and the emergence of work accidents and occupational diseases increased the importance of occupational health and safety (Gündüz et al., 2023). Occupational health and safety is a discipline that offers a systematic and scientific approach to prevent health problems that could arise for various reasons at the workplace and to improve existing health and safety conditions (Erdoğan and Genç, 2023). Occupational health and safety includes issues such as identifying potential hazards in workplaces, eliminating or minimizing these hazards, providing employees with the necessary training and information, creating safe working conditions and creating a working environment in compliance with existing laws. (Bağcı et al., 2024). Therefore, occupational health and safety refers to all the measures taken to prevent dangers that might arise from any kinds of substances, auxiliary products, tools and equipment used to fully ensure the health and safety of employees (Stokes and Cuervo, 2009). As a matter of fact, occupational health and safety is directly or indirectly linked to many factors such as production technologies in workplaces, equipment used, ergonomics of working conditions, age and skill levels of employees, type of enterprise, relevant legal regulations and the characteristics of the working environment such as ventilation, cleaning, temperature, etc. (Altun and Altun, 2024). Based on these, occupational health and safety aims to prevent or minimize injuries and accidents that could occur at work, as well as to create safe and healthy working environments for employees (Çinar et al., 2013).

Occupational health and safety training aims to inform employees about the dangers they may encounter, provide information about protection methods and safety precautions, and at the same time, increase the safety awareness of employees and make their behaviour safer (Canoğlu et al., 2023). The Action Plan suggested by Anonymous (2010) is of great importance in terms of raising awareness about teachers' safety and emphasizing the necessity of providing training. Additionally, systematic and scientific research conducted to prevent risks that occur at workplaces for various reasons and endanger human health are considered as an important part of occupational health and safety training (Van and Koç, 2020). There is a rapid change and transformation in every field of life which inevitably affect educational organizations (Şabano, 2023). Schools are among the basic institutions of the society and have a critical role in educating and raising young

generations, equipping them with knowledge and developing their abilities (Kuru and Kazancı, 2023). For this reason, they should be safe and comfortable environments for students, teachers and all other employees (Kandakai and King, 2002). Schools exist to meet the individuals' educational needs, but they also bring some health and safety risks due to their crowded population (Türkoğlu and Balkan, 2020). Therefore, providing a healthy and safe learning environment in the education sector can significantly contribute to the safe upbringing of young generations who build the future of the country (Uçan et al., 2023).

Accidents and diseases in educational environments have an adverse effect on all the stakeholders such as students, teachers, school administrators and others (Gündüz et al., 2023). Identifying potential threats in schools, evaluating the risks that may arise from these threats and taking precautions against them and making emergency plans are important to ensure a healthy and safe educational environment (Türkoğlu and Balkan, 2020). Thus, in achieving the goals set in such an environment, teachers have the opportunity to make their decisions freely and express and implement their innovative ideas (Çay and Eratay, 2019). On the other hand, the fact that educational institutions are free from negativities such as stress and anxiety create a favourable environment for both students and teachers or other staff to continue their work safely (Altun and Altun, 2024). In this respect, it is critical for teachers, students and other staff to be in a safe environment, informed about possible risks and trained on how to act against these risks (Çay and Eratay, 2019). Accordingly, if teachers, who are in the closest contact with students, are knowledgeable about occupational health and safety and implement this knowledge when necessary, will reduce school accidents and contribute to a healthy and safe environment (Deliönü and Utlu, 2016). In this context, the opinions and feedback of teachers, who are key actors of the educational institutions and always in contact with students, parents, administrators and other staff, are of great importance in terms of maintaining health and safety in educational settings (Özakca et al., 2023).

For the reasons mentioned above (Altun ve Altun, 2024; Burucu ve diğerleri, 2023; Türkoğlu ve Balkan, 2020) revealing teachers' perceptions of occupational health and safety is of great importance since their perceptions play a critical role in teaching and learning processes. It is also anticipated that it will be very useful to investigate teachers' perspectives on occupational health and safety and to take steps based on them contributing to the educational processes. To this end, this study unveils teachers' perceptions of occupational health and safety through metaphors.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Identifying potential threats in schools, assessing the risks that may arise from these threats, taking precautions against these risks, and making emergency plans are of great importance to maintain a healthy and safe educational environment (Türkoğlu and Balkan, 2020). Indeed, in a healthy and safe educational environment, teachers can freely make their decisions to achieve the predetermined goals, and have the opportunity to express and implement innovative ideas (Çay and Eratay, 2019). Previous research investigated teachers' awareness and opinions on occupational health and safety (Çay and Eratay, 2019; Gündüz et al., 2023; Özakca et al., 2023; Şabano, 2023; Türkoğlu and Balkan, 2020; Uçan et al.2023); however, a through literature review showed that teachers' perceptions of occupational health and safety were not revealed through metaphors. In this sense, the current study has the potential to contribute to the existing literature employing a different perspective. This study unveils teachers' perceptions of occupational health and safety through metaphors. To this end, it sought answer to the following questions:

    i.   Which metaphors do teachers use to describe *"occupational health and safety"*?

    ii.   What categories and themes do these metaphors fall under by their justifications?

METHOD

Research Model

This study reveals teachers' mental images of *"occupational health and safety"* through metaphors. To this end, the study employed *metaphor analysis* (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2016) as a qualitative design which has various approaches (Merriam, 2018). Metaphors were categorized based on their similarities. It was considered that teachers attributed different meanings to occupational health and safety, which is of great importance to schools. To reveal these meanings, it was thought that it would be appropriate to utilize metaphors that allow individuals to make sense of their perceptions, identify the similar and different aspects of two objects and realize the relationships between them (Dilekçi, 2019; Eminoğlu Küçüktepe ve Gürültü, 2014; Palmquist, 2001; Uymaz ve Cebeci, 2024). Additionally, the subjectivity of experiences in revealing thoughts using metaphors can be stated as the main distinctive feature of metaphor analysis (Mertens, 2010). In this context, data were collected from teachers at different levels and with different personal

variables. In addition, data from disadvantaged schools in terms of occupational health and safety were also collected and included in the study.

Study Group

The study group included pre, primary, and secondary and high school teachers working in the central district of Batman province in the 2023-2024 academic year. The researcher employed the maximum diversity sampling (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2018) which maximizes participant diversity relevant to the research. This method aims to reach more comprehensive and generalizable results through a sample having different characteristics (Yağar and Dökme, 2018). The diversity in this research was based on the school level which the participants were teaching at. The study group included 109 teachers who voluntarily participated in the research. Of these participants, 50.5% were female and 49.5% were male. Of the teachers 15.6% were teaching at preschool, 52.3% at primary school, 26.6% at secondary school and 5.55% at high schools. As for the ages of the participating teachers, 23% of them were aged between 21-30; 53.2% between 31-40; 22% between 41-50 and 1.8% between 51-60. Lastly, 73% of the teachers had undergraduate and 27% postgraduate degree.

Data Collection Tool and Data Collection

A through literature review was conducted prior to preparing data collection tool (Bozkurt, 2020; Dilekçi et al., 2021; Jensen, 2006; Kaya and Dilekçi, 2021; Saban, 2008; Schmitt, 2005). The data collection tool was compromised of two sections. In the first section, questions were about participants' demographics and the second section included the following form *"Occupational health and safety.................. is like, because.................."*. The first part of this form aimed to reveal teachers' perceptions of *"occupational health and safety"* while the second part aimed to reveal the justification for the metaphor. The metaphors used by the teachers constituted the main data source of the research.

Complying with the research ethics principles, the researcher obtained the ethics committee permission from Batman University Ethics Committee. Before the data collection, the participants were informed about the research and that the data would be used for only scientific purposes, and it was stated that participation was completely voluntary. The data collection was carried out face to face personally by the researcher during a two weeks interval in June, 2024. Although 115 teachers participated in the study, six metaphors were excluded since the reasons for the metaphors

were not meaningful or did not match the metaphor. Thus, the data analysis was conducted through metaphors of 109 participants.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content and descriptive analysis, which are widely used approaches in qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Content analysis is the process of collecting and organizing data in line with certain concepts and themes and interpreting them in a way that the reader can easily understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). On the other hand, descriptive analysis is an approach that uses direct quotes to reflect the participants' views as they are (Creswell, 2012; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The analysis included different stages as *"coding and sorting, sample metaphor image compilation, category development, validity and reliability"* (Saban, 2008 cited in Kaya and Dilekçi, 2021). The first stage, coding and sorting, was the detailed investigation of metaphors and their justifications. This stage resulted in the exclusion of six metaphors from the analysis because the metaphors were not justified, irrelevant, or the metaphor and justification were not consistent. A sample statement was *"Occupational health and safety is like nemo because it is lost in our country."* Following the sorting, the participants were coded as "V1, V2, V3, V4…..". In the sample metaphor image compilation stage, the metaphors were put in alphabetical order to check if the same metaphors were based on similar justifications. In the third stage, category development, the metaphors were categorized into themes by their justifications. The last stage was validity and reliability. In this stage, the researcher used triangulation to ensure validity and reliability. The two investigators examined the data, and the reliability was calculated according to Miles and Huberman (1994) formula *(Reliability=Consensus/(Agreement + Disagreement) x 100)* which yielded a 96% agreement between the coders. The threshold suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) is ≥80% which indicates the current research satisfied the reliability criteria. When there was a disagreement on the themes, the coders and researchers re-examined and reached an agreement. To ensure the internal validity, the number of participants was kept as high as possible which was 109 and it was considered sufficient to reach the conclusions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Another strategy to ensure the internal validity was to give direct quotes (Creswell, 2012; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

FINDINGS

Metaphors of occupational health and safety

Teachers used 68 different metaphors of occupational health and safety. Of these metaphors 48 were used only once and the remaining 20 metaphors recurred more than once. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of metaphors regarding the concept of occupational health and safety.

Table 1.

Frequencies and percentages of metaphors

No	Metaphor	*f*	*%*	No	Metaphor	*f*	*%*
1	Life preserver	10	9.1	**41**	Essentials	1	.9
2	Seat belt	8	7.3	**42**	Body	1	.9
3	Shield	6	5.5	**43**	Food	1	.9
4	Traffic lights	3	2.7	**44**	Concrete	1	.9
5	Lifeguard	3	2.7	**45**	Superman	1	.9
6	Steel vest	3	2.7	**46**	Guide	1	.9
7	Insurance	2	1.8	**47**	Mechanism	1	.9
8	Water	2	1.8	**48**	Motivation	1	.9
9	Mother	2	1.8	**49**	Iron	1	.9
10	Helmet	2	1.8	**50**	Family	1	.9
11	Trust	2	1.8	**51**	Traffic policeman	1	.9
12	Breath	2	1.8	**52**	Shell	1	.9
13	Lifetime	2	1.8	**53**	Right	1	.9
14	Right to live	2	1.8	**54**	Golden	1	.9
15	Foundation	2	1.8	**55**	Ladder	1	.9
16	Warning sign	2	1.8	**56**	Child	1	.9
17	Crash helmet	2	1.8	**57**	Lifeblood	1	.9
18	Skeleton	2	1.8	**58**	Iceberg	1	.9
19	Car	2	1.8	**59**	Barricade	1	.9
20	Teacher	2	1.8	**60**	Tyre	1	.9
21	Traffic rules	1	.9	**61**	Blood	1	.9
22	Job	1	.9	**62**	Friend	1	.9
23	Driving	1	.9	**63**	Doctor	1	.9

24	Barrier	1	.9	64	Roof	1	.9
25	Life philosophy	1	.9	65	Freedom	1	.9
26	Sky	1	.9	66	Smoking	1	.9
27	Sea	1	.9	67	Breast milk	1	.9
28	Armour	1	.9	68	Parachute	1	.9
29	Exhalation	1	.9				
30	Water jug	1	.9				
31	Tree root	1	.9				
32	Glass	1	.9				
33	Life	1	.9				
34	Backbone	1	.9				
35	Life insurance	1	.9				
36	Disease	1	.9				
37	Future	1	.9				
38	Life circle	1	.9				
39	Guarantee	1	.9				
40	Medicine	1	.9		**Total**	**109**	**100**

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of metaphors regarding the occupational health and safety. The findings suggested that the frequencies ranged between 1 and 10 (.9% and 9.1% respectively). The most frequently recurring metaphor is *"life preserver"* (f=10; 9.1%) which is followed by *"sealt belt"* (f=8;7.3%), *"shield"* (f=6; 5.5%), *"traffic lights, lifeguard, steel vest"* (f=3; 2.7%) and *"insurance, water, mother, helmet, trust, breath, lifetime, right to live, foundation, warning sign, helmet, skeleton, car, teacher"* (f=2; 1.8%). Based on these metaphors, it can be concluded that teachers' perceptions of occupational health and safety is positive. These metaphors were put under the themes by their justifications.

Themes emerged from the metaphors

Based on the similarities of the metaphors, nine themes emerged which were *"protectiveness, preventativeness, need, essentiality, supportiveness, continuity, systematizer, resilience,* and *universality"*

Table 2.

Frequencies and percentages under the themes

Themes	Metaphors	Number of metaphors	f	%
Protectiveness	Life preserver (10), seat belt (8), shield (6), steel vest (3), lifeguard (3), helmet (2), crash helmet (2), trust (2), teacher (2), mother (2),barrier (1), armour (1), superman (1), iron (1), family (1), shell (1), iceberg (1), roof (1), water jug (1)	19	49	45
Preventativeness	Warning sign (2), driving (1), sky (1), sea (1), freedom (1), parachute (1), life insurance (1), disease (1), medicine (1), life circle (1), guarantee (1), guide (1), child (1), tyre (1), barricade (1), future (1)	16	17	15,6
Essentiality	Water (2), breath (2), life philosophy (1), tree root (1), golden (1), lifeblood (1), blood (1)	7	9	8,2
Need	Insurance (2), smoking (1), exhalation (1), glass (1), life (1), essentials (1), body (1)	7	8	7,3
Supportiveness	Food (1), concrete (1), motivation (1), ladder (1), doctor (1), friend (1)	6	6	5,5
Continuity	Life (2), car (2), job (1), mechanism (1)	4	6	5,5
Systematizer	Traffic lights (3), traffic policeman (1), traffic rules (1)	3	5	4,6
Resilience	Skeleton (2), foundation (2), backbone (1)	3	5	4,6
Universality	Right to live (2), breast milk (1), right (1)	3	4	3,7
	Total	68	109	100

As Table 2 shows, teachers used 68 different metaphors. The most metaphor fell under the theme of *"protectiveness*" (f=49; 45%) which was followed by *"preventativeness"* (f=17;15.6%), *"essentiality"* (f=9;8.2%), *"need"* (f=8; 7.3%), *"supportiveness"* (f=6; 5.5%), *"continuity"* (f=6; 5.5%), *"systematizer"* (f=5, 44.6%), *"resilience"* (f=5;4.6%), and *"universality"* (f=4; 3.7%). The themes and the teachers' perceptions are presented below through direct quotations.

Protectiveness: Under this theme, there were 19 different metaphors, representing 45% of the total. The justifications of these metaphors can be listed as protecting against accidents, acting as a shield, providing confidence against possible dangers, and ensuring life safety. The most frequently recurring metaphors under this theme are *life preserver* (f=10), *seat belt* (f=8), *shield* (f=6), *steel vest* (f=3), *lifeguard* (f=3), *helmet* (f=2), *trust* (f=2), *teacher* (f=2) and *mother* (f=2). Below are some direct quotations from participants' statements.

"Occupational health and safety is like a life preserver because its existence gives confidence." (V19)

"Occupational health and safety is like a life preserver because just as a person who does not know how to swim in the sea increases the possibility of drowning if he does not take a life preserver, occupational health and safety is also a life preserver-like protection against dangers." (V6)

"Occupational health and safety is like a seat belt because it minimizes the negativities and reduces the risks at accidents." (V9)

"Occupational health and safety is like a seat belt because very simple precautions can prevent serious negativities. However, no matter how simple and practical the precautions are, we only put them into practice if there are sanctions." (V21)

"Occupational health and safety is like a shield because it provides protection against risks. It allows us to foresee risks and take precautions." (V17)

"Occupational health and safety is like a steel vest because it is an effective armor that will save a person. A steel vest is bulletproof." (V48)

"Occupational health and safety is like a lifeguard because it protects people against accidents and injuries." (V108)

"Occupational health and safety is like a helmet because it protects against any kinds of dangers." (V37)

"Occupational health and safety is like a helmet because it protects against possible risks and accidents." (V101)

"Occupational health and safety is like trust because you feel safe." (V109)

"Occupational health and safety is like a teacher because you feel safe with them. Also, a teacher is a safe haven." (V98)

"Occupational health and safety is like a mother because it protects you from any kind of harms." (V100)

Preventiveness: Under this theme, teachers used 16 different metaphors, representing 15.6% of the total. The justifications of these metaphors were as follows: taking precautions against possible negative situations, complying with the rules and taking precautions, informing about dangers in advance and providing assurance against risks. The most frequently recurring metaphors under this theme are the *warning sign* (f=2) which was followed by *driving* (f=1), *sky* (f=1), *sea* (f=1), *freedom* (1), *parachute* (1), *life insurance* (f=1), *disease* (1), *medicine* (1), *life circle* (f=1), *guarantee* (f=1), *guide* (f=1), *child* (f=1), *tyre* (f=1), *barricade* (f=1) and *future* (f=1). Below are some direct quotations from participants' statements.

"Occupational health and safety is like a warning sign because it notifies potential risks and takes a preventive approach." (V7)

"Occupational health and safety is like driving a car because if the rules are not followed and the drivers are not careful, very serious accidents could occur." (V10)

"Occupational health and safety is like the sky because you never know what will happen." (V22)

"Occupational health and safety is like the sea because if you are not careful, unintended consequences could occur." (V23)

"Occupational health and safety is like freedom because if the necessary precautions are taken at school, we can be free." (V26)

"Occupational health and safety is like a parachute because a parachute that does not open results in ninety-nine percent of deaths. When the safety precautions are not taken, fatal accidents occur." (V30)

"Occupational health and safety is like a disease because if precautions are not taken, they cause negativities." (V42)

"Occupational health and safety is like medicine because if precautions are not taken in time, negativities will occur." (V51)

"Occupational health and safety is like life circle because negligence and situations where precautions are not taken will restrict our lives." (V49)

"Occupational health and safety is like the future because if occupational health and safety is implemented, it will be our future." (V45)

Essentiality: Under his theme, teachers used seven different metaphors, representing 8.2% of the total. The justifications of these metaphors were as follows: an inseparable part of life, its existence saves lives, and it has vital importance. The most frequently recurring metaphors are *water* (f=2)

and *breath* (f=2). The other metaphors are *philosophy of life* (f=1), *tree root* (f=1), *gold* (f=1), *lifeblood* (f=1) and *blood* (f=1). Below are some direct quotations from participants' statements:

"Occupational health and safety is like water because while its presence saves lives, its absence results in unfavorable damage." (V20)

"Occupational health and safety is like breathing because it is indispensable for humans." (V84)

"Occupational health and safety is like a philosophy of life because it is an inseparable part of our lives." (V18)

"Occupational health and safety is like the root of a tree because a tree needs to hold on to the soil in order to survive. Similarly, occupational health and safety is indispensable for employees." (V34)

"Occupational health and safety is like lifeblood because it gives us new life." (V85)

"Occupational health and safety is like blood because it is vital for humans." (V99)

Need: Under this theme, teachers used seven different metaphors, representing 7.3% of the total. The justifications of these metaphors were providing security in every profession, its necessity is understood when a deficiency occurs, its absence can cause great destruction and it is always essential for human life. The most frequently recurring metaphor under this theme is *insurance* (f=2) which is followed by *smoking* (f=1), *exhalation* (f=1), *glass* (f=1), *life* (f=1), *essentials* (f=1) and *body* (f=1). Below are some direct quotations from participants' statements:

"Occupational health and safety is like insurance because it is a guarantee for human health in any profession and field." (V16)

"Occupational health and safety is like smoking because its importance is understood when its harms are revealed." (V28)

"Occupational health and safety is like exhalation because just as our body is adversely affected when we have trouble in exhalation, we will also have problems in our working lives without occupational health and safety." (V32)

"Occupational health and safety is like glass because it is not noticed but its absence drags it into the abyss." (V35)

"Occupational health and safety is like life because without it, our lives are always in danger." (V36)

Supportiveness: Under this theme, teachers used six different metaphors, representing 5.5% of the total. The justifications of these metaphors were as follows providing physical, mental and social support to the employee, keeping the employee on their feet, giving a feeling of security, and protecting human health. All the metaphors under this theme recurred only once and they are *food* (f=1), *concrete* (f=1), *motivation* (f=1), *ladder* (f=1), *doctor* (f=1), *friend* (f=1). Below are some direct quotations from participants' statements:

"Occupational health and safety is like food because it supports and protects our body." (V56)

"Occupational health and safety is like concrete because it prevents dangers." (V57)

"Occupational health and safety is like motivation because it takes the physical and mental conditions and expectations of employees to the highest level." (V66)

"Occupational health and safety is like a ladder because its existence and solidity make you feel good." (V79)

"Occupational health and safety is like a doctor because it protects human health." (V97)

Continuity: Under this theme, teachers used 4 different metaphors, representing 5.5% of the total. The justifications of these metaphors were being an inseparable part of working life, continuous and indispensable for working life. The most frequently recurring metaphors under this theme are *life* (f=2) and *car* (f=2) which are followed by *job* (f=1) and *mechanism* (f=1). Below are direct quotations from participants' statements:

"Occupational health and safety is like life because if there is no safety, there is no life." (V78)

"Occupational health and safety is like a car because it requires maintenance and regular work. It does not tolerate mistakes." (V71)

"Occupational health and safety is like a job because if there is no occupational health and safety, there is no job." (V8)

"Occupational health and safety is like a mechanism because a single malfunction affects the whole." (V64)

Systematizer: Under this theme, teachers used three different metaphors, representing 4.6% of the total. The justifications of these metaphors were providing and maintaining order, preventing accidents, giving confidence with its existence, regulating or completely eliminating risky factors at the workplace. The most frequently recurring metaphor under this theme is the *traffic lights* (f=3) which is followed by *traffic police* (f=1) and *traffic rules* (f=1). Below are direct quotations from participants' statements:

"Occupational health and safety is like traffic lights because it prevents accidents at work." (V38)

"Occupational health and safety are like traffic lights because it shows us how we should behave" (V80)

"Occupational health and safety are like traffic police because it protects employees, production, and the workplace and ensures order." (V4)

"Occupational health and safety are like traffic rules because if we follow the rules, our lives will be easier." (V5)

Resilience: Under this theme, teachers used three different metaphors, representing 4.6% of the total. The justifications of these metaphors are as follows: giving strength and confidence to the employee, keeping the employee on his feet and supporting the employee. The most frequently recurring metaphors under this theme are the *skeleton* (f=2) and *foundation* (f=2) which are followed by *backbone* (f=1). Below are direct quotations from participants' statements:

"Occupational health and safety is like a skeleton because just as the skeleton keeps the body standing, occupational health and safety keeps the employee standing." (V31)

"Occupational health and safety is like a foundation because if the foundation is not strong, anything can happen." (V104)

"Occupational health and safety is like a backbone because with the precautions taken, it protects the employee and keeps him standing." (V40)

Universality: Under this theme, teachers used three different metaphors, representing 3.7% of the total. The justifications for these metaphors were as follows: it is a natural right, requirement for all workplaces and under any circumstances. The most frequently recurring metaphor under this theme is the *right to live* (f=2) which is followed by *breast milk* (f=1) and *right* (f=1). Below are direct quotations from participants' statements:

"Occupational health and safety is like the right to live because a person can perform his/her own talents thanks to it." (V75)

"Occupational health and safety is like breast milk because it is people's most natural right." (V29)

"Occupational health and safety is like a right because it should be provided to all employees." (V74)

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study unveiled teachers' perceptions of occupational health and safety through metaphors. It also aimed to identify similarities and differences between teachers' perceptions. The participants used 68 different metaphors to describe occupational health and safety. Of these metaphors 48 recurred once and 20 more than once. The most frequently recurring metaphor is *"life preserver"* which was followed by *"seat belt"*, *"shield"*, *"traffic lights"*, *"lifeguard"* and *"steel vest"*, respectively. The metaphors used by the teachers and their justifications showed that teachers' perceptions of occupational health and safety were positive. This finding is consistent with the previous literature (Çay and Eratay, 2019; Deliönü and Utlu, 2016; Gündüz et al., 2023: Türkoğlu and Balkan; Uçan et al., 2023).

The metaphors were categorized under themes by their justifications and nine themes emerged. These themes were as follows: *protectiveness, preventativeness, need, essentiality, supportiveness, continuity, systematizer, resilience, and universality*. The most metaphors were under the protectiveness theme. The justifications of the metaphors under this theme were protecting against accidents, acting as a shield, providing confidence against possible dangers, and ensuring life safety. Uçan et al. (2023) suggested that health and safety measures taken in schools could be protective. Thus, schools can be considered as environments where necessary security measures are taken, possible risks are controlled, a safe atmosphere is provided, and health and hygiene standards are met (Açıkgöz, 2022).

The second theme with the most metaphors was preventativeness with the following justifications: taking precautions against possible negativities, complying with the rules and taking precautions, informing about dangers in advance and providing assurance against risks. Rusu-Zagar (2013) remarked that occupational health and safety in schools could be achieved by providing the most appropriate working conditions and preventing accidents and diseases. On the other hand, it

was suggested that teachers took an active role in taking preventive measures by informing students about the dangers and risks at school (Çelebi et al., 2024). Occupational health and safety includes different measures to ensure a safe working environment by taking into account physical and psychosocial health risks (Bağcı et al., 2024). Additionally, it was suggested that non-teaching staff should be informed and trained on occupational health and safety in order to prevent dangers at schools (Deliönü and Utlu, 2016). However, it is also remarkable that teachers are not well-informed on occupational health and safety (Yivli, 2018).

The preventativeness was followed by essentiality and need under which there were seven metaphors. The justifications of the metaphors under essentiality were as follows: an inseparable part of life, its existence saves lives, and it has vital importance. As these justifications indicate, it is of great importance for the health and well-being of all the stakeholders that schools provide a safe environment (Gündüz et al., 2023). Şener et al. (2023) suggested that taking the necessary precautions, eliminating risks and providing the training on occupational health and safety for teachers, students and other staff in educational institutions was of great importance for human life. Similarly, justification for the metaphors under the theme of need can be listed as follows: providing security in every profession, its necessity is understood when its deficiency is revealed, its absence can cause great destruction, it is always essential for human life and constitutes integrity. In this regard, Antoine et al. (2013) argued that a comprehensive approach should be adopted in occupational health and safety in schools.

Essentiality and need themes were followed by supportiveness. The metaphors under this theme was justified as follows: providing physical, mental and social support to the employee, keeping the employee on his feet, providing confidence with its existence and observing human health. It can be stated that occupational health and safety should be encouraged by trainings, notifications, effective communication and feedback (Burç et al., 2024). At the same time, it is stated that parents and the society should take a supportive and active role in this process (Gündüz et al., 2023). The sixth theme with the most metaphors was continuity which was justified by being an inseparable part of working life, continuous and indispensable for working life. Similarly, as stated in Action Plan suggested by Anonymous (2010), to ensure continuity teachers should be informed about and trained on occupational health and safety. On the other hand, it is also stated that these efforts should be consistent and occupational health and safety should always be on the agenda (Kılkış and Demir, 2012).

The analysis of metaphors developed by teachers reveals that the theme of continuity is followed by the themes of systematizer, resilience, and universality, each represented by three metaphors. Teachers perceive occupational health and safety as a form of systematizer for several reasons: it establishes and maintains order, prevents accidents, instills confidence through its presence, and regulates or eliminates risky factors at workplace. From this perspective, it is essential that occupational health and safety measures are implemented, regularly inspected, and continuously improved (Canoğlu et al., 2023). Consistently, Burç et al. (2024) emphasized the need to assess and identify risks in schools, prepare emergency plans, and raise staff awareness to facilitate necessary improvements and arrangements. The perception of occupational health and safety as a symbol of resilience among teachers is attributed to its role in providing strength and confidence to employees, sustaining their well-being, and offering support. Occupational health and safety aims to prevent potential accidents, minimize occupational diseases, and foster a safe, supportive, trustworthy, and sustainable working environment (Bağcı et al., 2024). Furthermore, teachers view occupational health and safety as a universal right, recognizing that it should apply to any workplaces and be accessible at any time and under any conditions. Çetindağ (2010) highlighted the importance of regular training and information dissemination, stressing that these regulations are necessary for everyone. This perspective is echoed by Aytaç et al. (2016), who argued that occupational safety was not solely the responsibility of a single person or department; rather, it requires collective ownership to create a safe working environment.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations. The first limitation is that the participants are confined to teachers working in public schools. The second limitation is that the study was conducted solely within the province of Batman. The third limitation is that participants' opinions were restricted through the use of a semi-structured interview form.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. Given that teachers generally have a positive perception of occupational health and safety, it is essential to pay close attention to their views on this subject. Educational environments can be made safer based on teachers' perceptions of occupational health and safety. Improvements that support the educational process can be implemented in this regard. Enhancements made in alignment with teachers' opinions may

facilitate students' development in academic, social, and cultural aspects as a whole. Through the measures taken in this context, it is possible to establish a classroom culture focused on occupational health and safety, which can contribute to a broader school culture. Considering that the majority of the metaphors used by teachers reflect a theme of protectiveness, it is recommended that all factors posing risks to occupational health and safety within the educational process be entirely eliminated or that their negative impacts be minimized, thus providing a safe and protective educational environment. Furthermore, by implementing all necessary precautions, a secure, comfortable, and healthy environment can enhance the quality of the educational process and contribute to achieving objectives. A safe and protective classroom and school environment is believed to foster a successful and supportive educational process by mitigating adverse conditions. Additionally, based on teachers' perspectives on occupational health and safety, it is suggested that training programs aimed at raising awareness on the issue be provided to all stakeholders (teachers, students, administrators, and parents). Comparative analyses involving the views of teachers and other stakeholders, such as students, administrators, and parents, can be conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods to elucidate the perspectives of relevant individuals.

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