

## Understanding Foreign Language Teachers' Professional Identities Through the Use of Metaphors

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**ABSTRACT:** This study has been conducted to gain insight about the way how language teachers see themselves as professionals and how they compose their identities. To deepen understanding how language teachers enact their professional identities, 32 English language teachers at the preparatory school of a university were asked to describe their professional identities as English teachers through the metaphor they chose. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were used in this study. In the qualitative method, the data were collected by an interview form with two parts with the help of observational notes and analyzed by using content analysis. In content analysis, the metaphorical expressions were structured into seven thematic categories such as *Teacher as Guide*, *Teacher as Knowledge Provider*, *Teacher as Authority*, *Teacher as Nurturer*, *Teacher as Entertainer*, *Teacher as Craftsperson* and *Teacher as Captive*. In the quantitative method, language teachers' metaphors were investigated to understand the relationship between teachers' conceptions of their professional identity and their gender. According to results, it was revealed that there was no difference in the teachers' perceptions of their professional identities across genders. The findings of this study are believed to shed a light on language teacher education programs.

**Key Words:** Teacher Identity, Professional Identity, Language Teachers, Language Teaching  
**JEL Code:** C10, 120, 129

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### Metaforların Kullanımıyla Yabancı Dil Öğretmenlerinin Mesleki Kimliklerini Anlamak

**ÖZ:** Bu çalışma, dil öğretmenlerinin kendilerini profesyonel olarak nasıl gördüklerini ve kimliklerini nasıl oluşturduklarını anlamak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Dil öğretmenlerinin mesleki kimliklerini daha iyi anlamak için bir üniversitenin hazırlık okulundaki 32 İngilizce öğretmeninden seçtikleri metafor aracılığıyla mesleki kimliklerini tanımlamaları istenmiştir. Bu çalışmada hem nitel hem de nicel analiz yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Nitel yöntemde veriler, gözlem notları yardımıyla iki bölümden oluşan görüşme formu ile toplanmıştır ve içerik analizi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. İçerik analizinde, metaforik ifadeler *Rehber olarak Öğretmen*, *Bilgi Sağlayıcı olarak Öğretmen*, *Otorite olarak Öğretmen*, *Yetiştirici olarak Öğretmen*, *Eğlendirici olarak Öğretmen*, *Zanaatkar olarak Öğretmen* ve *Tutsak olarak Öğretmen* olmak üzere yedi tematik kategoride yapılandırılmıştır. Nicel yöntemde, öğretmenlerin cinsiyeti ile mesleki kimlik algıları arasındaki ilişkiyi anlamak için dil öğretmenlerinin metaforları incelenmiştir. Sonuçlara göre, öğretmenlerin mesleki kimliklerine ilişkin algılarında cinsiyetler arasında farklılık olmadığı ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışmanın bulgularının dil öğretmeni yetiştirme programlarına ışık tutacağı düşünülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Öğretmen Kimliği, Mesleki Kimlik, Dil Öğretmenleri, Dil Öğretimi  
**JEL Kodu:** C10, 120, 129

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## **1. Introduction**

The process of language education is changing day by day to keep up with the accelerating rate of globalization. Depending on this rapid change in the language educational context, the professional roles of language teachers change correspondingly. Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) state that teachers are expected to be prepared for new positions in order to keep up with the ongoing variety of culture, expansion of knowledge, and increased accessibility of knowledge. With the change in teachers' role, teachers recreate their perception of professional identities in accordance with the changing contexts. Moreover, according to Beijaard et al. (2000), teachers' perceptions of their own professional identities have an impact on their productivity and professional growth, as well as their capacity and propensity to adapt to changes in the educational landscape and incorporate those changes into their own teaching practices. Therefore, it is important to clarify teachers' professional identities and their perceptions of professional identities.

### **1.1. Teachers' professional identities**

The term identity has drawn the attention of many researchers (Wenger, 1998; Beijaard et al. 2000; Haamer, Lepp & Reva, 2014). As a broad definition, the term identity is a social and cultural construction of self, which is affected by the experiences during the life course and interaction with others (Swennen, Volman & Essen, 2008). According to Gee (2001) and Wenger (1998), identity development occurs through the participation of various communities of practice intentionally or non-intentionally and interpretation of oneself as a certain kind of person, and being recognized as such in this community of practice. When the term "professional identity" is taken into consideration, it has been described as a continuous and dynamic process involving the understanding and reinterpretation of one's own values and experiences that can be affected by personal, social and cognitive variables. (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 220). For the wellbeing of new members of the profession, it might be crucial that they acquire a distinct sense of professional identity as teachers (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011, p. 762). Thus, it is crucial to build one's individuality in order to become a successful teacher. This may be accomplished by combining individual ideas of teaching with self-perceptions, which are influenced by social and professional circumstances (Kreber, 2010). According to Thomas and Beauchamp (2011), "the self comprises not just conceptions of who am I as a person, but also of who am I as a teacher" (p. 763). As this study is related to language teachers, it is important to give some information about language teachers and their professional identities.

### **1.2. Language Teachers and their professional identities**

In terms of globalization, there is a growing demand for foreign languages to be able to act intercultural in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That is to say, learning a foreign language helps communicate with other people and cultures and foster other 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, such as networking in virtual interactions via technology. Therefore, the school curriculums have been planned to meet the demand for foreign language learning, which starts from the kindergarten. However, when learners acquire a new foreign language, their reactions to the encounter may change. At this point, language instructors have a crucial role in encouraging pupils to learn effectively and efficiently (Markley, 2004).

At this point, it is important to define the characteristics of language teachers (Girard, 1977; Prodomou, 1991; Brosh, 1996; Borg, 2006). For instance, according to Brosh (1996), a language teacher must possess strong knowledge, command of the target language, ability to arrange, explain, and clarify material, as well as the capacity to pique and maintain students' interest and motivation. Despite the fact that all teachers share some traits in common, some features make some teachers differ from the others based on the subject area they teach. In addition to the characteristics of language teachers, their professional identities and how they perceive their professional identities are also important. For this reason, much has been written about teachers' perceptions of their professional identities (Franzak, 2002; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011; Yeşilbursa, 2012) as their perceptions have a great influence on their teaching. One way to examine how language teachers perceive their professional identity is through the use of metaphor.

### **1.3. Use of Metaphors in Language Teaching and Learning**

Metaphor is described as an analogy that lets us translate one experience into the language of another experience to better grasp complicated subjects or novel circumstances (Holman, 1980; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Nikitina and Furuoka (2008) mention another important quality of metaphors. They

state that not only do they have the ability to help the cognitive process of humans, they can also decide how individuals behave on the basis of their interpretations of reality.

Based on these explanations, it can be said that metaphor is a great tool to provide insight into how language teachers and learners conceptualize their beliefs with teaching and learning. For instance, if a language learner describes learning as “climbing a mountain”, in fact, he or she wants to say something good about learning because the higher you climb the mountain of knowledge, the more you can see, the more you understand. When students’ other metaphors are taken into consideration about learning, some interesting contrasts can be observed like “savings account”, “light bulb” , “playing cards”, “detective”, “quest” and “planting flowers”. With only a few words, it can be understood how students feel towards learning process. The same situation is observed for also teachers. For instance, if a teacher says that “teaching is like surfing”, we can understand how s/he feels through the metaphor s/he used.

#### **1.4. Studies on Metaphors in Language Teaching and Learning**

The use of metaphors to understand language teachers’ and students’ perception in language teaching and learning has drawn the attention of many researchers in many studies (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Oxford et al., 1998; Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000; Şaban, Koçbeker & Şaban; 2007; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008; Alger, 2009; Pishghdam & Pourali, 2011; Yeşilbursa, 2012, Yuan et al., 2022). For instance, Thomas and Beukamp (2011) carried out a study based on the metaphors of new teachers connected to their professional identities at two separate phases, from the time just after their graduation through the spring of their first year of teaching. They discovered that the metaphors collected after graduation, were centered on assisting, nurturing, safeguarding, and assisting them in finding their path like *the captain of a boat* or *a coat hanger*. But in their first year of teaching, the participants were more concerned with themselves, their own classroom experiences, and their own survival, much like a Titanic survivor who did not have a lifeboat and had to swim to land. In Oxford et al.’s study (2008), the participants used 14 distinct metaphors to conceptualize the role of a teacher. Nevertheless, the metaphors that the researchers elicited were grouped into four philosophical perspectives on education: *Social Order*, *Cultural Transmission*, *Learner-Centered Growth* and *Social Reform*. There is another research conducted by Nikitina and Furuoka, (2008). In this study, three groups were formed for the metaphors about language teachers created by university students: 1) *Teacher as caretaker* 2) *Teacher as essential element* 3) *Teacher as giver*. Nikitina and Furuoka (2008) state that these metaphors indicate that the role of the instructor, as viewed by the participants, was to ensure the linguistic development of the learners and take care of their general well-being. (p. 198).

In another study, Saban, Koçbeker and Saban (2007) asked prospective teachers how they described the concept of “*teacher*” through metaphors. Then, they categorized these metaphors generated by their participants under six themes, which are *teacher as knowledge provider*, *teacher as molder/craftsman*, *teacher as counselor*, *teacher as nurturer/cultivator*, *teacher as facilitator/scaffolder* and *teacher as cooperative/democratic leader*.

On the other side, Fenwick (2000) studied with 65 adult educators in Canada and collected data from her participants in order to explore their professional identities. She divided the metaphors that were aroused into four images: *Adventure Guide*, in which teachers were tasked with leading pupils on an adventure; *Outfitter*, in which teachers' tasks included showing students how to accomplish a challenging objective before providing them with all the required gear. In *Fire-starter*, teachers were tasked with inspiring students to wonder, seek, be empowered, and to ignite their "fire" of curiosity or desire to learn. The last one was *Caregiver*, in which teachers’ job was to help students grow fat and healthy in knowledge

#### **1.5. Purpose of the study**

The majority of the studies focused on the metaphors produced by prospective and novice teachers and their conceptions about teaching and learning. However, there are limited studies conducted to examine language teachers’ perspectives in terms of their professional identities (Yeşilbursa, 2012; Oktay & Osam, 2013). Therefore, in order to fill the gap in the research, this study was carried out, which aimed to analyze how English language teachers at a Preparatory School of a university view

their professional identities through the use of metaphor. It was essential to implement this study in order to understand teachers' perceptions about their professional identities in their teaching process. Teachers' gender was also aimed to be investigated to further identify the effect of this factor on their perceptions of professional identity. Based on this,

The research questions driving this study are:

1. What, if any, patterns can be drawn from the metaphors that English language teachers at a Preparatory School of a university use to define their professional identity?
2. Is there a gender difference in metaphor usage?

Considering the limitations of the study, the target population of the current study included all English teachers at the preparatory school of a university. When evaluating the research and its contributions, it is important to take into consideration the limitations caused by the limited sample size of teachers from the same department. Another disadvantage of this research is the restrictions on the usability of results.

### **1.6. Context and Participants**

The participants for this study were 32 English teachers. All of the participating teachers—24 women and 8 men—were fluent in English. 21 of them were Turkish, six were from the United States, one from Ukraine and one from Ireland, and three were from the United Kingdom. They had between two and 10 years of teaching experience. They had degrees in Translation, English Language and Literature, and English Language Teaching.

The researcher used purposive sampling for this study. Fraenkal and Wallen (2006) state that “the researchers use their judgment to select a sample that they think will provide the data they need on the basis of prior knowledge” (p. 99). However, the most surprising thing was all of the teachers were highly interested in participating in this study and were eager to learn the findings of the study.

### **1.7. Data collection and analysis procedures**

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis were used in this study. In the qualitative method, the data were collected using a two-part interview form. In the first part, the demographic information of language teachers was asked to explore if gender affects their metaphor production. In the second part, teachers were asked “*What metaphor would you use to describe yourself as an English teacher*” as in Thomas and Beauchamp's study (2011) in order to get a better understanding of how the teachers perceived their professional identities. The researcher also obtained the appropriate approval from the Head of the preparatory school to distribute the semi-structured interview form during the spring semester.

Data analysis was done using content analysis. The following steps were taken during the analysis of the metaphors in this study: coding and sorting, creating themes, and validating. The metaphors and their entailments were placed verbatim beside each other during the coding and sorting step, and those that did not fit the definition of a metaphor were left out. The entailments from the elicited metaphors were evaluated and emergent themes were classified in the second step. To test the validity of these categories, the themes and categories were examined by two university professors who were blind to the study's purpose.

Following this procedure, the themes with similar entailments were divided into seven groups. As a final step, the metaphors that were collected from the male and female teachers were classified. There were 28 metaphors in all (20 from female teachers, 8 from male teachers). Statistical analysis was used in the study's last phase to investigate the relationship between the teachers' perceptions of their professional identities and their gender. Data was processed with SPSS.

## **2. RESULTS**

### **2.1. Results of the content analysis**

The results of the content analysis revealed that 28 metaphors could be grouped under seven headings. In fact, there were 32 metaphors used by the teachers. However, four metaphors were excluded from the list because they did not qualify as metaphors. The categories in order of the most common to least common are ‘*guide*’ (35.8%) with ten metaphors; ‘*knowledge provider*’ (14.3%), ‘*authority*’ (14.3%), ‘*nurturer*’ (14.3%) with four metaphors each; ‘*craftsperson*’ (7.1%),

'entertainer'(7.1%), 'captive'(7.1%), with two metaphors. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentages of the metaphors in each theme for each group. The metaphor 'guide' received the highest percentage among these seven themes, which shows that teachers view themselves as a 'guide' in students' learning process.

**Table 1.** Teachers' Perceptions of Their Professional Identities By Means of Metaphors

	<b>Teachers (n=28)</b>	<b>Female (n=20)</b>	<b>Male (n=8)</b>
Metaphors	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
Guide	10 (35.8)	7 (35)	3 (37.5)
Knowledge Provider	4 (14.3)	3 (15)	1 (12.5)
Authority	4 (14.3)	2 (10)	2(25)
Nurturer	4 (14.3)	2 (10)	2 (25)
Entertainer	2 (7.1)	2 (10)	0
Craftsperson	2 (7.1)	2 (10)	0
Captive	2 (7.1)	2 (10)	0

In the following section, each metaphor was analyzed scrutinisingly. The frequency and percentage of metaphors within each group of participants were calculated to see whether gender makes a difference in teachers' conceptions.

### 2.1.1. Teacher as Guide

The most frequently appearing metaphor among teachers was 'guide', with a percentage of 35.8%. Learning was often depicted as climbing mountains and an adventurous tour. One participant sees herself as a 'tour guide', because her job is to guide students in the education system. She states that

Through the guiding nature of teaching, I motivate my students to walk on this journey on their own and use the skills and knowledge that I have given them before. In each journey, they may experience different knowledge but I hope to provide them with the most valuable knowledge that will benefit for their teaching life.

Another teacher sees herself as a "guidebook" and explains why she chooses this metaphor as follows:

Students should be able to pick and choose what sections are good for themselves and what is not applicable through my guidance. They know that the things in the book are continuously changing and the topics should be current all the time as observed in my teaching. Therefore, the students trust me and let me guide them in their learning process like a guidebook.

One teacher describes himself as a "mountaineer" because he believes that he can guide his students in a challenging adventure.

Climbing a mountain is like learning English. Once you get beyond the initial, really difficult part, it eases off and starts to become less steep. At that point, you are certain of reaching the summit. However, different things may happen when you get there. A few students may go on without any problems and finally reach their chosen goal but other may give up climbing (learning English) as soon as they realize the difficulty of the task. On their adventurous journey, I try to guide them to use their chance to reach the summit.

One of the teachers sees herself as a guide. She expresses her feelings as follows:

I see myself as a guide because I show them different ways and explain each of these ways to give an idea, help them, visualize themselves on these roads, teach how to behave there and then leave them free to choose their own way and also guide them again to find another different way to go further. We never stop. Investigate more and more.

As seen in Table 2, ten out of 28 metaphors fell into the under *teacher as a guide* category. The metaphor '*guide*' developed by teachers emphasized the educator as a guiding person who helps learners explore or find their ways on a learning journey.

**Table 2.** Teacher as Guide

	Teachers	Female	Male
Metaphors	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
Guide	10 (35.8)	7 (35)	3 (37.5)
Total Metaphors	28	20	8

**2.1.2. Teacher as Knowledge Provider**

The second metaphor among teachers was '*knowledge provider*', with a percentage of 14.3%. In this category of metaphors, teachers viewed themselves as both the source (e.g., *rose, ocean, and library*) and the transmitter of knowledge (e.g., *sun*). Saban et al. (2007) used this metaphor in their study. In their study, there were five dominant metaphors: *sun, candle, tree/fruit, light and flower* under this category. They think that “the teacher’s knowledge is endless (e.g., *fountain, spring*), knowledge is seen as a product (e.g. *book, television*) or as means of learning (e.g., *pen, writer*)” (p. 129).

One of the teachers presents the reasons for her choice of '*rose*'.

I see myself as a rose as I think that I have a great attraction on students with my beautiful smell. They may be influenced by my beauty of smell, which can increase their concentration in the lesson. Thanks to it, they will be ready for the lesson and open for new knowledge.

As for the metaphor '*ocean*', the reasons given by the teacher developing this metaphor are as follows:

I see myself as an ocean. Ocean contains lots of living creatures and currents in it. As an English teacher, I help to navigate the students’ educational path through my source of knowledge as I want them not to be lost in the learning process.

Another teacher sees herself as a '*library*' and states that students can find every kind of information thanks to me as I see myself as an organized collection of sources of information like a library.

One teacher expresses her thoughts for the metaphor '*sun*' as follows:

As the sun lights our world, the teacher also lights his students with his endless knowledge. The students are never lost in the dark as there is always a bright light illuminating the students. Therefore, I see myself as a sun in my teaching life.

In Table 3, four out of 28 metaphors fell into the under *teacher as a knowledge provider* category. Metaphors “*sun, library, ocean and sun*” in this category were used to depict EFL teachers’ professional identities as a process of providing or transmitting knowledge to students, who are the recipients of knowledge.

**Table 3.** Teacher as Knowledge Provider

	Teachers	Female	Male
Metaphors	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
Knowledge Provider	4(14.3)	3(15)	1(12.5)
Total Metaphors	28	20	8

**3.1.3. Teacher as Authority**

Four metaphors represented the teacher as an authority with a percentage of 14.3%. These included *captain of a ship, conductor of an orchestra, coach of a basketball team and a shepherd*. The teachers in this category believed that teachers have control and power over the teaching and learning process.

One of the teachers sees herself as a “*captain of a ship*”. She expresses her feelings as follows:

I see myself as a captain of a ship because I always sail on unknown waters with students to arrive at our destination. Although we always study together with them, I have more responsibility if something goes wrong in the classroom. I am always prepared to unexpected disasters like misunderstandings, disruptive behaviors etc.

Another teacher sees herself as a “*conductor of an orchestra*” and explains why she chooses this metaphor as follows:

The conductor is the single leader responsible for the success of his players like me. I am the single leader in the classroom and I am responsible for the success of my students. My students are like players in an orchestra under my baton, who are totally different from each other but each of them are responsible for his or her success. If they don’t participate in the lesson, they fail like the orchestra. If one of the players doesn’t play his/her instrument, there won’t be any music.

As for the metaphor ‘*coach of a football team*’, the reasons given by the teacher developing this metaphor are as follows:

Language learning requires great discipline in order to be successful. I try to provide discipline in the classroom for my students to learn like a coach of a football team. I define my aims at the beginning of the term clearly and try to train my students to realize our aims at the end of the term.

One teacher views himself as a shepherd and gives his reasons for this metaphor as follows:

I see myself as a shepherd because I’m trying to have the students succeed in what I’m trying to teach and considering the bell on the sheep’s neck as success and myself as the shepherd trying to put the bell on the sheep’s neck so that the others follow it and help me achieve my goal in my teaching career.

In Table 4, four out of 28 metaphors were under the category of *teacher as an authority*. Although the number of teachers who chose this metaphor was the same, the percentages of female (10%) and male (25%) teachers showed a big difference as the number of female and male teachers were not the same. In accordance with their perceptions, the metaphor ‘*authority*’ symbolizes an authoritative person who has power to influence his or her students.

**Table 4.** Teacher as Authority

	Teachers	Female	Male
Metaphors	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
Authority	4(14.3)	2(10)	2(25)
Total Metaphors	28	20	8

### 2.1.3. Teacher as Nurturer

The metaphors generated in this category were mainly related to nurturing and providing support that promotes students’ knowledge and skills (e.g. *gardener*) and preparing children for life (e.g. *father*, *mother*).

The following quotation of a teacher presents the reasons for her choice ‘*gardener*’:

Sometimes I see myself as a gardener trying to create a garden with my students, because the more I try to nurture the students, the more I hope they grow. But sometimes, I feel like I’m working on a garden in a bad climate or with bad tools (no technology, no resources, no training) and on bad days, I feel like my seeds, the students aren’t any good. But I can say, the tools, climate and seeds are all important for me as a successful teacher.

Another teacher sees herself as a ‘*mother*’ and explains her choice as follows:

I see myself as a mother because I always show affection towards them and I try to feed them with my information all the time. The more information I provide them, the more they want to learn.

Two teachers view themselves as ‘*father*’. One of them states that

Because of my age, all of my students call me as a father. It is sometimes good to hear this because it shows that they really love me like their father. Fathers always want to grow up their children in a very good condition. They try to nurture their children all the time like me. Therefore, I see myself as a father.

In Table 4, four out of 28 metaphors were under the category of *teacher as a nurturer*. In this category, teachers generally view themselves as a person who provides environment for his or her students to promote growth.

**Table 5.** Teacher as Nurturer

	Teachers	Female	Male
Metaphors	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
Nurturer	4(14.3)	2(10)	2(25)
Total Metaphors	28	20	8

**2.1.4. Teacher as Entertainer**

There were two metaphors (7.1%) under this category. In this category, while one teacher takes the role of actress (e.g. *actress*) who uses acting in order for their children to understand more and provide a comfortable environment for students to express themselves well, the other one chooses the metaphor '*puppeteer*' who makes her students happy during the lesson.

As for the metaphor '*puppeteer*', the reasons given by the teacher developing this metaphor are as follows:

I see myself as a puppeteer because I like to have fun and entertain students during the lesson, but at the same time I like to have some discipline in the classroom and control over what and how I teach.

The following quotation of a teacher presents the reasons for her choice '*actress*':

I believe that students are more engaged and behave better when I teach them by using acting such as role-playing; gestures, etc. Thanks to acting, I can grab and hold the students' attention easily to the lesson.

In Table 5, two out of 28 metaphors were under the category of *teacher as an entertainer*. The number of teachers who are grouped under the category '*teacher as an entertainer*' is less than the previous categories. It can be said that most of the teachers do not view their professional identities as an entertainer. It is also striking that male teachers did not use any metaphor that are suitable for this category.

**Table 6.** Teacher as Entertainer

	Teachers	Female	Male
Metaphors	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
Entertainer	2(7.1)	2(10)	0
Total Metaphors	28	20	8

**2.1.5. Teacher as Craftsperson**

Two metaphors represented the teacher as a craftsperson with a percentage of 7.1%. These included *painter* and *designer*. In this category of metaphors, teachers perceive themselves as a skilled person who aims to produce useful products from the raw materials. Students are the raw materials which can be educated through a skillful teacher.

One of the teachers views herself as *painter* and states that

I see myself as a painter because teaching is related to style. You can paint different pictures but you have a style. Teaching is the same thing. You can teach the same subject to different students but you have your own style while teaching.

Another teacher sees herself as a ‘*designer*’ and explains her choice as follows:

I see myself as a designer because I design my teaching according to my students’ needs. I try to do my best in order for them to reach their learning goals. Whenever they have problems in their learning, I change my design and prepare them the best learning environment.

In Table 6, two out of 28 metaphors were under the category of *teacher as a craftsman*. Male teachers did not prefer using any metaphor under this category because they gave priority to other metaphors.

**Table 7.** Teacher as Craftsman

	Teachers	Female	Male
Metaphors	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
Craftsman	2(7.1)	2(10)	0
Total Metaphors	28	20	8

### 2.1.6. Teacher as Captive

The metaphors generated in this category were mainly about teachers’ disappointment in terms of their profession (e.g. *prisoner, a mouse in a trap*).

As for the metaphor ‘*prisoner*’, the reasons given by the teacher developing this metaphor are as follows:

I see myself as a prisoner in the heavy curriculum. I can’t see any improvement in my profession. I do the same things every year. Since I have to follow the pacing schedule, I cannot do something different with my students.

Another teacher views herself as ‘*a mouse in a trap*’ and expresses her feelings as follows:

I see myself as a mouse in a trap because of my students’ negative attitudes towards learning English. I am doing my best to have my students love English. Despite my efforts, they ignore learning a new language. It is my last stand in my profession because of these students’ behavior like a mouse waiting to be rescued in the trap.

In Table 7, two out of 28 metaphors were under the category of *teacher as a captive*. Male teachers did not have negative feelings towards their profession when compared to female teachers. This can be the result of female teachers’ being more sensational towards their profession.

**Table 8.** Teacher as a Captive

	Teachers	Female	Male
Metaphors	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)
Captive	2(7.1)	2(10)	0
Total Metaphors	28	20	8

## 2.2. Results of statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was based on the findings of the qualitative analysis of the metaphors generated by the teachers. It was performed to understand the relationship between teachers’ gender and their perceptions of their professional identity.

According to results as Table 9 shows, there is no statistically significant difference in teachers’ perceptions of their professional identities across genders because Chi-square value 4,235 with degrees of freedom (df) 6 is non-significant at a level 0.05 since p (0,645) is greater than 0.05.

**Table 9.** Cross-tabulation of teachers' gender and perceptions of their professional identity

		Metaphors							Total
		Authority	Captive	Craftsperson	Entertainer	Guide	Knowledge	Nurturer	
Gender	Female	2	2	2	2	7	3	2	20
	Male	2	0	0	0	3	1	2	8
	Total	4	2	2	2	10	4	4	28

Pearson Chi-Square:  
P-value=0,645

### 3. Discussion

The results of the current study show that teachers in this study used different metaphors to make their abstract and complex ideas more clear. Based on the first reasearch question, " , teachers' metaphors were analyzed. Categories like as *Teacher as Guide*, *Teacher as Knowledge Provider*, *Teacher as Authority*, *Teacher as Nurturer*, *Teacher as Entertainer*, *Teacher as Craftsperson* and *Teacher as Captive* emerged from the analysis. When teachers' preference list was analyzed, some differences could be detected. For example, male teachers did not use any metaphors under the category of *entertainer*, *craftsperson* and *captive*.

The reason for this can be explained as male teachers in this study may give more priority to guiding their students than entertaining them or producing new products, which can be the result of Turkish education system. In Turkish education system, students' academic success is given importance under the teachers' forcible guidance. Therefore, male teachers may not be in favor of having fun and joy or producing talented students in teaching as they prefer guiding them in their learning process. The metaphor 'guide' was not only favored by male teachers but by female teachers as well because it also has the meaning of leadership in it. It can be also interpreted as a reflection of the culture of teaching among the teachers. Although students-centered teaching is more common, the teacher-centered teaching approach is still the most preferred approach. The number of male and female teachers who used metaphors under the category of *authority* and *nurturer* is the same. What is striking is that in other studies (e.g. Saban et. al, 1990), female participants generated more metaphors related to the themes of *Teacher as Nurturer*. Saban et al. (1990) state that "female students have been exposed to nurturing experiences more than their male peers or that this conception fits best with the female role stereotype" (p. 135). However, the number of female teachers under the category of *knowledge provider* is more than the male teachers. In Saban et al.'s study (1990), the number of female participants for the metaphor '*knowledge provider*' is also more than male participants. For the second question, the results show that there is no statistically significant difference between teachers' gender and their perceptions of professional identities. However, the primary metaphor '*guide*' selected by female and male teachers shows that both female and male teachers share the same ideology in terms of their professional identities. In other words, teachers in this study puts emphasis on providing motivation and attention when students get confused and feel desperate by using the metaphor '*guide*'. Can et al. (2011) state that the predominance of the metaphor '*guide*' means "a step forward in defining the scope of teaching" and a higher level of clarity in their comprehension of the components of language teaching (p. 117).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The teachers participating in this study showed that they were confident using different metaphors to explain their perceptions about professional identities. Thanks to their metaphors, some information about their teaching style and method they use in the classroom can be learned. By using metaphors, teachers also find a chance to consider their professional identities in more personal ways in the complexities of teaching. Teachers' awareness of their professional identity is necessary because they are the initiator and facilitators of learning. However, further studies should be conducted in order to understand teachers' professional identities through the use of metaphors. Future studies should pay close attention to how

these metaphors affect teachers' teaching strategies and students' learning in various circumstances. This study was limited with the sample being selected only from the same university. It is possible to include more teachers from different cities in future research to broaden the applicability of the findings. The same question could be asked to the teachers in different universities to understand the differences and similarities between teachers' perceptions of professional identities.

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