EFL TEACHER CANDIDATES' CONCEPTUALIZATIONS of TRANSFORMATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHER: A METAPHORICAL ANALYSIS

Gülşah Öz

Aksaray University

Abstract: *The professional identity and pedagogical orientations of teachers play a crucial role in shaping the quality and effectiveness of education. Understanding how prospective teachers conceptualize their future roles is essential, as their perceptions influence their instructional choices and classroom interactions. This study explores how EFL teacher candidates metaphorically conceptualize the transformative language teacher and the characteristics they attribute to transformative teaching. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected from 30 fourth-year English Language Teaching (ELT) students at a state university in Türkiye. Participants generated metaphors to describe transformative language teachers, and data were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that teacher candidates perceive transformative language teachers as innovative and adaptable entities, facilitators and nurturers, and collaborators and guides. These metaphorical conceptualizations highlight the importance of learner-centered, technology-integrated, and reflective teaching practices in contemporary education. The study contributes to teacher education research by illustrating how metaphor analysis can provide deep insights into teacher identity formation and the adoption of transformative pedagogy. Implications for teacher education programs and curriculum development are discussed.*

Keywords: **EFL teacher education, metaphor analysis, qualitative research, teacher identity, transformative teaching**

1. Introduction

In today's society, considering the ongoing changes in the field of education, transformation is viewed inevitable and desirable quality in teachers whatever their fields of expertise. Unlike traditional classroom contexts and teacher centered teaching, adopting a transformative approach, and enhancing transformation of teachers are crucial in today's classrooms where students are digital natives, agents of change as well as autonomous. In other words, in the rapidly evolving educational era, teachers are expected to move beyond traditional, instructor-centered approaches and embrace transformative pedagogy that fosters critical thinking, learner autonomy, and adaptability (Mezirow, 1997; Freire, 1970). This paradigm shift toward transformative teaching is particularly relevant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where dynamic classroom environments require teachers to integrate interactive, student-centered, and technology-enhanced practices (Richards & Farrell, 2011).

In this regard, it is crucial to uncover how preservice teachers conceptualize transformative language teaching as these conceptualizations shape their professional identities and instructional choices. In the related literature, metaphor analysis is an effective method for examining teachers' implicit beliefs and pedagogical orientations, offering insights into how individuals conceptualize abstract ideas. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphor has the role of shaping the reality; furthermore, it exists autonomously and influences the development of new meanings. Metaphors offer significant insights into educators' attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives concerning their roles within the classroom. Recent studies in the related literature delineate that metaphors are frequently used to clarify meanings and interpretations associated with educational topics. In this regard, Forceville (2002) advocates that metaphors are used to assign new meanings to objects and to clarify life experiences. Within this concern, to explore preservice teachers' metaphors regarding transformative language educators offers valuable insights into their

beliefs and perspectives on taking transformative action in their teaching contexts providing effective instruction and ensuring student engagement.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Transformative Learning Theory and Teacher Identity

In this research, transformative learning theory and teacher identity were adopted as a theoretical lens. According to Mezirow (1997), the Transformative Learning Theory believes that learning encompasses critical reflection, personal development, and paradigm shifts, rather than merely the acquisition of knowledge. Transformative educators confront students' entrenched assumptions while promoting profound learning and independence. This method is especially related to EFL instruction, as students are required to communicate and employ the language genuinely. Recent research indicates that transformative learning is crucial in language education. In this sense, Leaver et al. (2021) contend that transformative education is vital for fostering language and intercultural competency. Furthermore, their research indicates that transformative techniques can produce more valuable and effective language learning experiences. Within this concern, it is clear that pedagogical methods are inherently connected to the personal attributes of the educator. Therefore, educators that promote transformative learning frequently view themselves as change agents, supporting students in self-discovery and critical reflection (Cranton, 2006), and this identity affects their responsiveness to students' needs, classroom dynamics, and pedagogical approaches.

2.2. Metaphor Analysis in Teacher Education

When the related literature is reviewed, it is clear that research has thoroughly investigated the conception of educators and their instructional duties, especially within the framework of educational reform. Metaphor analysis functions as a cognitive and linguistic approach that yields valuable insights into the construction and understanding of intricate abstract notions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). What is more, metaphor analysis is widely employed in teacher education to investigate pedagogical orientations, instructional identities, and educators' self-perceptions (Forceville, 2002). Metaphors in teacher education disclose underlying ideas about teaching, learning, and pedagogy (Saban et al., 2007). To illustrate, instructors who perceive themselves as "facilitators" or "guides" are more inclined to employ student-centered methodologies, while those who view themselves as "knowledge transmitters" tend to adopt teacher-centered strategies (Oxford et al., 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

As Farrell (2018) advocates, educators' pedagogical preferences and identities are shaped by their conceptual metaphors, which in turn impact their instructional methods. Teacher candidates, as future educators, develop metaphorical understandings during their teacher education programs, which may impact their teaching strategies and views on educational reform (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Given the increasing emphasis on 21st-century teaching skills such as technological literacy, adaptability, and learner-centered methodologies the shift from traditional to transformative pedagogies is not only desirable but also necessary (Kay & Greenhill, 2011).

2.3. Related Research

There has long been a division between traditional and transformative methods in the teaching profession. Long-standing practices that are seen in schools and that society has historically considered proper are referred to as traditional education. All pupils must learn the same content at the same time in traditional classrooms that ignore the diversity present in the classroom and prioritize teaching above learning and teacher-centeredness. In such classroom contexts, the instructor serves as the main authority figure and knowledge source while students are assumed as passive information consumers. In the relevant literature, teachers holding a traditional paradigm is frequently linked to such metaphors as "a sculptor," "a gardener," or "a captain," which convey ideas of command, molding, and direction (Oxford et al., 1998). However, given the uncertainties and complexity brought about by modern advances, it is imperative that people be lifelong learners and that innovation play a significant part in the acquisition and development of 21st-century abilities. According to this perspective, the adoption phase of any innovation is crucial to society (Rogers, 1983). In this regard, it is essential for today's societies to be brought up for quickly adjusting and reacting to the rapid pace of innovation and adaptation as Kılıçer (2011) advocated. Unlike traditional mode of teaching, transformative teaching supports contemporary educational approaches and methods that place an emphasis on learning that is focused on the individual learner as an agent and autonomous. Within this paradigm of transformative education, the instructor fosters students' critical thinking, agency, and creativity by serving as a mentor, collaborator, or facilitator. The relevant literature indicates the following common metaphors that highlight a transformative or innovative teacher's role in empowering students and co-constructing knowledge, including "a guide," "a bridge," or "a co-explorer," are representative of this paradigm (Mezirow, 1997).

Learning a foreign language is frequently challenging for students; therefore, creative organizing of various teaching activities including engaging teaching resources and methods is necessary. For instance, to utilize motivational teaching techniques like movies, videos, and websites while teaching reading skills (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011) can help students develop positive attitudes toward language courses by taking into account their needs. In addition, digitalizing language teaching using a variety of digital tools play a crucial role in the process of teaching foreign languages (Büyükaslan, 2007). According to Kay and Greenhill (2011), an innovative or transformative teacher appears to possess the 21st century educational approach that will allow people to succeed in all aspect of their lives. To help students develop these abilities, teachers should demonstrate excellent interpersonal and collaborative skills, technological expertise, inventive and creative thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Larson & Miller, 2011).

Based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) metaphor theory, it is clear that metaphors reflect more than just linguistic constructs serving as essential roles to individuals' understanding as well as perception of abstract and complicated concepts. Furthermore, according to this theory, metaphors are two main categories of word meaning extension that show how humans use common, concrete concepts to understand new, abstract ones based on their physical experiences. Within this theoretical perspective, it is essential to investigate perceptions regarding the concept of transformative language teacher. This study aims to investigate how EFL teacher candidates metaphorically envision the transformative language instructor and the attributes they associate with transformational instruction. In line with the purpose of the study, the following research questions were addressed:
1. How do preservice teachers metaphorically conceptualize the transformative language teacher?
2. What characteristics do they attribute to transformative teaching?

3. How do these conceptualizations align with their beliefs about the teaching profession?

3. Methodology

In this study, the phenomenology design, which is one of the qualitative research designs, was used. The phenomenology design focuses on phenomena that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this design, it is aimed to describe the world experienced by individuals and to explain the essence of lived experiences in order to discover the common meanings underlying a determined phenomenon (Baker et al., 1992). Within this perspective, this qualitative study attempts to identify the underlying values and ideas that influence their professional identities by looking at the metaphors they connect with transformational language teachers. Participants of this study included EFL teacher candidates studying at a state university in the department of foreign languages education. The participants were chosen by purposive sampling method and 30 teacher candidates (11 male and 19 female) participated into the research on a voluntary basis.

To answer the research questions within the aim of the study, an open-ended written interview form was designed by the researcher. The open-ended written interview form included two sections i.e., personal information and open-ended questions. In the first section, demographic questions such as gender, age were asked while in the second section of the written interview form, the following four open ended questions were administered to the participating teacher candidates: (1) The transformative language teacher is like.......... Because............ (2) Who is the transformative language teacher and what are the characteristics or qualities of transformative language teachers in your opinion? (3) How transformative pedagogy and metaphor relate to your teaching profession?

After collecting response to the related open-ended questions above through a Google form, the data obtained from 30 EFL teacher candidates was analyzed through content analysis. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018), content analysis allows for the visualization of conceptual interpretations of the gathered data as well as their relationships. In this regard, the data were coded, categorized, and findings were presented based on the emerged themes.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study investigated how EFL teacher candidates metaphorically conceptualize the transformative language teacher and what characteristics they associate with transformative teaching. Thematic analysis of their metaphorical expressions resulted in three major themes as delineated in Figure 1, below.
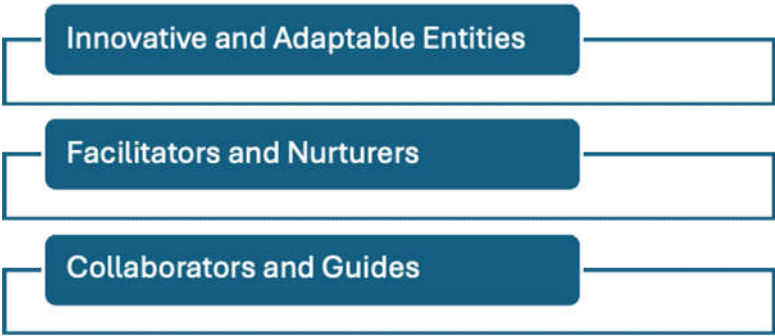
Figure 1. Themes Emerged Based on the Participants' Metaphors Analysis

Based on the analysis, the participating teacher candidates' metaphors and related explanation were illustrated under each theme in Table 1.

Table 1. Metaphors for Transformative Language Teacher

Theme	Metaphor	Explanation
Innovative and Adaptable Entities	A new model car	Can meet the needs and expectations.
	Technology	Teachers improve themselves like technology.
	Time	It is evolving and changing.
	An intellectual	Continually renews themselves.
Facilitators and Nurturers	A book	Provides information and increases perspective.
	A coach	Continually works to ensure students' improvement.
	A gardener	Nurtures each student's potential to grow and flourish.
	A nurturing guide	Assists students in developing themselves while benefiting from coursebooks.
Collaborators and Guides	A friend	Learns together with students while having fun.
	A guide	Tries to reach modern teaching methods and helps students.
	A model	Focuses on holistic student development playing a role model.

These themes highlight the ways in which preservice teachers perceive transformative educators, emphasizing adaptability, emotional support, and collaborative teaching approaches. Below, each theme is discussed in relation to existing literature.

4.1. Transformative Language Teachers as Innovative and Adaptable Entities

The first theme that emerged from the data represents transformative language teachers as dynamic, innovative, and continuously evolving individuals. Participants used metaphors such as:

A new model car – because they can meet the needs and expectations of students.

Technology – because, like technology, transformative teachers improve themselves and acquire new knowledge.

Time – because a transformative teacher is always evolving, adapting to change.

These metaphors reflect a perception of transformative teachers as professionals who embrace change, integrate new pedagogical strategies, and keep pace with modern educational trends. The frequent reference to technology indicates that preservice teachers recognize the role of digitalization, blended learning, and innovative tools in contemporary language education (Dudeney, et al., 2013).

Participants frequently associated transformative teachers with change, modernity, and adaptability. The metaphors "a new model car," "technology," and "time" suggest that preservice teachers perceive transformative educators as continuously evolving professionals who embrace innovation and remain updated with 21st-century teaching trends. One participant described transformative teachers as:

"*A transformative teacher is like an app that is constantly updated. If they don't update themselves, they become obsolete.*" (Participant 5)

This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning for educators. According to Redecker and Punie (2017), modern teachers must be digital innovators, critical thinkers, and adaptive learners in order to respond to rapid shifts in education. In a similar vein, Gu and Day (2013) stress the importance of teachers' adaptability and resilience, stating that successful teachers are those who consistently improve their abilities to accommodate a range of student requirements.

Additionally, a common topic in the metaphors of the participants was the incorporation of digital pedagogies and technology, which reflected the increasing need that teachers use technology to improve language acquisition (Dudeney et al., 2013). This research highlights the need for digital literacy and the efficient use of educational technology in EFL classrooms to be prioritized in teacher preparation programs (Benson, 2011).

4.3. Transformative Language Teachers as Facilitators and Nurturers

The second theme represents transformative teachers as guiding figures who nurture students' growth and autonomy. Participants frequently used metaphors such as:

A gardener – because they nurture each student's potential to grow and flourish.

A coach – because they continually work to ensure their students' improvement and advancement.

A nurturing guide – because they help students develop themselves while also benefiting from structured learning.

The aforementioned examples illustrate that transformative educators promote their students' linguistic, cognitive, and personal development alongside the dissemination of knowledge. The gardener metaphor illustrates that education is a natural, student-centered process where educators nurture students' originality and curiosity instead than imposing a rigid curriculum. The constructivist and humanistic teaching paradigms, which underscore

the significance of educators in cultivating an inclusive, participative, and supportive learning environment, align with this perspective (Nunan, 2015; Mezirow, 1997).

The gardener metaphor is significant as it highlights the transformative teacher's role in fostering students' autonomy and personal growth. Constructivist methods, which perceive learning as an organic, self-directed process rather than a passive transfer of knowledge, align with this perspective (Nunan, 2015; Mezirow, 1997).

Participants regularly emphasized the emotional significance of transformative educators, noting that they provide both emotional security and support.

"*A transformative educator resembles a lighthouse—they guide students without imposing a specific path*." (Participant 13)

This result corresponds with studies on positive psychology in education, emphasizing the significance of instructors' warmth, compassion, and encouragement in creating an effective learning environment (Seligman, 2011). When teachers provide emotionally secure learning environments, they can enhance students' self-confidence, willingness to engage in language acquisition, and overall well-being (Gregersen et al., 2021). The findings of this study reveal that emotional intelligence training ought to be integrated into teacher education programs to assist future educators in cultivating the skills necessary for fostering supportive, student-centered learning environments.

4.4. Transformative Language Teachers as Collaborators and Guides

The third important element regarding transformative teachers as collaborators and co-learners rather than authoritarian figures. Participants provided the following metaphors, including:

A friend – owing to their collaborative learning experience with students while relishing the process.

A guide - as they enable students to explore knowledge rather than simply convey it.

A co-explorer - engages in a learning journey with their pupils rather than adopting the exclusive position of authority in the classroom.

This transition from teacher-centered education to student-centered, collaborative learning is underscored by these parallels. Transformative educators act as facilitators, enabling students to take ownership of their education, in contrast to conventional hierarchical methods. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which emphasizes learning as an interactive and collaborative process, corresponds with this approach. This viewpoint is essential to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which promotes peer contact, student involvement, and genuine communication (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). A participant emphasized the necessity of diminishing the hierarchical gap between students and educators:

"*A transformative teacher is like a bridge between students and real-world knowledge. They don't dictate; they facilitate*." (Participant 24)

This is consistent with critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), which posits that education ought to be a democratic and collaborative process in which students and teachers participate in dialogue and joint problem-solving. The teacher's function is to facilitate critical thinking, informed decision-making, and active participation in the learning process (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Moreover, some participants highlighted that transformational educators promote student freedom and autonomy, consistent with previous literature on learner autonomy (Benson, 2011; Little, 2007). This viewpoint asserts that educators should enable pupils to cultivate self-directed learning processes rather than simply imparting knowledge.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated EFL teacher candidates' metaphorical conceptualizations of the transformative language teacher, identifying three primary themes: (1) innovative and adaptable entities, (2) facilitators and nurturers, and (3) collaborators and guides. These themes highlight preservice teachers' views of transformational educators as dynamic professionals who integrate innovation, provide emotional and academic support, and foster collaborative learning environments.

Consistent with constructivist, humanistic, and critical pedagogical frameworks, the research findings support the theory that transforming language teachers foster student engagement, autonomy, and reflective learning rather than only delivering knowledge (Mezirow, 1997; Nunan, 2015; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Reflecting the challenges of twenty-first-century education, participants underlined the value of student-centered pedagogies, emotional intelligence, teacher adaptability, and technological integration in the classroom (Redecker & Punie, 2017; Benson, 2011). Analyzing metaphorical representations and clarifying how preservice teachers build their professional identities helps this study to have important consequences for preservice teacher education, curriculum design, and professional development in EFL instruction.

In addition to the stressing areas that require more attention in preservice teacher preparation, the results have significant consequences for initiatives and teacher educators aiming at developing future teachers. Through emphasizing creative and adaptable entities, the issue highlights the need of teacher training courses including digital pedagogies. Redecker and Punie (2017) and Dudeney et al. (2013) both agree that future English as a foreign language teachers absolutely must possess the technology abilities needed to appropriately include digital tools, blended learning, and technologies supporting classroom instruction. Teacher education programs need to offer preservice teachers courses and seminars on digital literacy, online learning settings, and adaptable teaching strategies in order to make them equipped with adequate knowledge and skills in teaching foreign language profession.

According to Mercer and Gregersen (2020), the facilitators and nurturers theme highlights how essential it is to provide English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers with training in socio-emotional learning (SEL), emotional intelligence, and student care. Modules that incorporate mindfulness, empathy training, and approaches that enhance motivation should be included in teacher education programs. These modules should encompass the development of classrooms that are inclusive, encouraging, and emotionally stimulating. What is more, it is congruent with social constructivist and communicative approaches (Vygotsky, 1978; Richards & Rodgers, 2014) because the concept of collaborators and guides, which places an emphasis on the benefits of collaborative teaching strategies, is used. Project-based learning, group discussions, peer mentorship, and co-teaching strategies should be emphasized in teacher training (Benson, 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). This would help learner autonomy and student involvement in the learning process. Teacher education programs can better educate preservice teachers to adopt transformative teaching approaches by combining these pedagogical principles. This will ensure that preservice teachers can adapt to current classroom environments, lead a learner-centered teaching with their students in their teaching contexts, and reflect on their own teaching practices.

This research provides valuable insights into how EFL teacher candidates metaphorically envision transformative teaching; however, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The study was conducted with just 30 preservice teachers from a single state university in Turkish EFL context, hence limiting the generalizability of the findings. To examine the influence of institutional and cultural variances on metaphorical conceptualizations of transformative education, future research should expand the sample size and include cross-cultural comparisons. Moreover, the utilization of self-reported metaphors in this

study may have resulted in responses being influenced by individual biases, prior educational experiences, or societal conventions. A comprehensive knowledge of how educators construct their professional identities in practice may be achievable with a mixed-methods approach that includes classroom observations, interviews, and reflective teaching journals. Furthermore, this study solely captures preservice teachers' impressions at a certain moment, hence lacking longitudinal data. A longitudinal study design may be employed in future research to investigate the evolution of metaphorical conceptualizations from teacher training to actual teaching practice. This may lead to a more profound comprehension of how instructors' instructional attitudes and pedagogical orientations evolve over time due to their practical teaching experiences. Additionally, this study did not consider how specific teacher training interventions influenced participants' perceptions of transformative teaching. As a recommendation, future study may investigate how preservice teachers' conceptualizations are shaped by exposure to diverse pedagogical frameworks, digital literacy education, or experiential learning programs.

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