



Metaphoric Perceptions of Academic Staff about the Concept of Research Assistant *

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the perceptions of academic staff in charge at education faculties about research assistants, who are members of the research team at universities, through metaphors. Being designed qualitatively, this study uses phenomenological model which is based on a person's description of a conscious experience related to a phenomenon and through which the researcher tries to reach each participant's life-world created by the participant's own subjective experiences. According to the analysis of the obtained data, the metaphors generated by academic staff about the concept of research assistant were grouped under nine conceptual categories. According to the results of this research, it was found that academic staff in charge at education faculty attributes both positive and negative meanings to the concept of research assistant. Research assistants are generally considered as people who are getting mature in academic sense, being trained by their supervisors and other academic staff, are obliged to spare time to any kind of duties such as paperwork, program making, announcing marks apart from academic works in their institution; therefore who cannot show enough interest to their own studies and have to cope with challenges in their academic development.

Keywords

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Introduction

Universities are the institutions that produce information through academic research and try to transform this information into product; they also bring up the human resource that the country requires in related fields. The share of the academic personnel at universities is substantial in terms of producing information and bringing up the human resource required by the country. Out of 130.653 academic personnel at universities in Turkey, 40.939 (31%) are research assistants, which constitute the largest group among academic staff (ÖSYM, 2013). The large size of this group, problems in the legislation and troubles occurring in practice lead to some sort of problems (uncertainty in job definition, various staff structures, indentures etc.) about the concept of research assistant which forms the basis of the human resources of universities in the future.

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According to Higher Education Personnel Law No. 2914 (1983), research assistants, who are placed among the academic staff at universities, are included within the class of assistant academic staff. According to Higher Education Law No. 2547 (1981), the job definition of research assistants is made as “instructor assistants who assist research, investigation and tests conducted in higher education institutions and carry out other duties assigned by authorized bodies”. The expression of “other duties” stated in this article is considered as a problem especially by research assistants because it creates an uncertainty in the job definition (Korkut, Muştan, & Yalçınkaya, 1999). In addition to this uncertainty in job definition, various staff structures are used in the employment of research assistants such as ÖYP (Academic Staff Training Program), 50/d, 33/a; vagueness in their authority and responsibility as an extension of the uncertainty in job definition; problems related to security, assignments, signed indentures and problems in personal benefits are considered as fundamental problems (Acar, Nemutlu, & Gürhan, 2004; Cangür, 2004; Demir, 1999; Kahraman, 2010; Korkut et al., 1999; Özdem, 2002; Sancak, Küpeli, & Beyit, 2010; Yaya, 2011).

The studies conducted specific to research assistants in Turkey have focused on burn-out syndrome of research assistants (Özkan, 2012; Selçukoğlu, 2001), their working life (Özaslan, 2010; Yaya, 2011), their job satisfaction (Cangür, 2004; Gülnar, 2007; Kılıç, 2002; Şahal, 2005; Uurlu, 2010) and their problems (Korkut et al., 1999; Özdem, 2002). In the study conducted by Bayar and Bayar (2012), on the other hand, the perceptions towards research assistants have been revealed through metaphors. Research assistants believe that the lack of effective protection of their rights by law and their disability to take part in decision making processes of working life have severe negative effects on their life quality (Özaslan, 2010). On the other hand, problems of research assistants, who continue their postgraduate education in another university than the institution where they have their own academic staff, form the significant part of the overall problems. In a study conducted by Özdem (2002), the challenges encountered by research assistants who continue their postgraduate education in another university through assignment of their university were determined as follows; signed indentures, lack of communication between related universities, crowded rooms, and negative treatment of others towards the assigned research assistants. Studies revealing that job satisfaction of research assistants is not high (Uurlu, 2010) also concluded that they define themselves as “slave” or “prisoner” (Akagündüz, 2012). In general, the studies revealed that research assistants have problems in their job definition, roles, responsibilities and status and these problems lead to severe challenges in training the academic staff of the future (Aytaç, Aytaç, Fırat, Keser, & Bayram, 2001; Brown-Wright, Dubick, & Newman, 1997; Demir, 1999; Korkut et al., 1999; Özaslan, 2010; Sancak et al., 2010; Sezgin, 2002; Yaya & Atanur Başkan, 2012).

These problems, which were also revealed by the findings of the studies related to research assistants, cannot be dissociated from the context they work in. It is necessary to reveal this context and the perceptions occurring within this context in order to determine and define the problems on the very basis. Since the concepts are abstract designs that people generate as a result of the experiences related to their daily life events, it is extremely important how people make sense of the concept of research assistant in their minds. Lakoff and Johnson (2005, p. 155), assert that these concepts, which emerge as a result of our experiences, are open-ended rather than being strictly defined and metaphors provide us the opportunity to make additional definitions to these open-ended concepts and expand their application area. The metaphor term, which consists of meta: over, excessive and pherein: carrying, loading words, refers to “carrying from somewhere to another place” (Levine, 2005) is derived from the same stem with metabolism, metamorphosis and metastasis; however the change in metaphor is much more stable, sound and important (Teoman, 2003). The metaphor term which finds its equivalence by various types of figure of speech in Turkey is defined by Kövecses (2002) as expressing a conceptual expression through another conceptual expression; while Lakoff and Johnson (2005) emphasize that the essence of metaphor is to understand and experience something according to something else.

Lakoff and Johnson (2005, p. 184) emphasize that although they are based on similarities, metaphors are not solely derived from the language; they are the consequence of a thought and action. The main function of metaphor is to ensure the comprehension of already isolated similarities, production of new similarities and a kind of experience which can include much more than all these. Metaphors are powerful cognitive tools that can be used to understand and explain a highly abstract, complex or conceptual phenomenon (Yob, 2003) and they are also used to strengthen the expression, enrich the language and transform thoughts into linguistic actions in the most effective way. The use of metaphor refers to a way of thought and perception which enable us to comprehend the world in general sense. Metaphor has a molder impact on not only the way of thinking, language and science but on self-expression as well (Morgan, 1998, p. 14). Being the reflections of the related environment and culture where they take place as building of the conceptualization process rather than being cognitive symbols of actions and thoughts; metaphors express the activities and thoughts of the people who use them.

Being very useful to create new meanings and explain assumptions; metaphors are also very rich resources for qualitative data, which can be included into qualitative research tradition (Fennel, 1996). Metaphor is a frequently mentioned concept in educational institutions and in the field of educational administration, as well as in studies related to education and school. In the literature review, it was found that studies on metaphor are generally grouped under three categories:

1. Studies on the structure and formation of metaphors (Baake, 2003; Black, 2004; Kövecses, 2002; Knowless & Moon, 2006; Lakoff & Johnson, 2005; Morgan, 1998; Picken, 2007).
2. Studies on the use of metaphors in teaching of any subject (Arslan & Bayrakçı, 2006; Botha, 2009; Guerrero and Villamil, 2002; Oxford et al., 1998; Özçınar & Tuncay, 2009).
3. Studies on the use of metaphors to reveal various cognitive perceptions (Aydoğdu, 2008; Botha, 2009; Cerit, 2008; Çelikten, 2006; Döş, 2010; Erginer, 2009; Erginer & Erginer, 2009; Inbar, 1996; Oğuz, 2009; Saban, 2004, 2008, 2009; Semerci, 2007; Shaw, Barry, & Mahlios, 2008; Yalçın, 2011; Yalçın & Erginer, 2012).

Metaphors as verbal reflections of people's perception towards external world are the most effective structures that can be used to reveal a person's perception towards any concept. This feature of metaphors ensure them to be used as an instrument to reveal how research assistants are perceived by academic staff with who they are always in interaction within any kind of activities. To reveal how they are positioned, perceived and explained in both their own mind and other academic staff' minds is important to obtain findings that can be used to determine and define the possible problems in selection and training processes; working lives of research assistants. Within this scope, the present study aims to reveal the perceptions of academic staff in charge at education faculties towards research assistants through metaphors.

Method

The methodology of the research consists of research design, data collection tool, study group and data analysis.

Research Design

This research was planned qualitatively and phenomenological design was used. Phenomenology involves the description of a person's conscious experience about a phenomenon. The researcher makes effort to reach the life-world that each participant created by his/her own subjective experiences. Phenomenology investigates how people make sense of and perceives their experiences as an individual or in a group and how they transfer them to their mind; how they perceive, describe, remember, asses a phenomenon and what kind of language they use to transfer this phenomenon to other people (Patton, 2001). Phenomenology is people's conscious experience of their lives; in other words, a daily life and social action. Phenomenological approach is suitable for studying effective, emotional and frequently intense human experiences (Merriam, 2013). The phenomenon discussed in this study is research assistants who are working in universities.

Data Collection Tool

The electronic data collection tool used in the research consists of two parts. The first part includes questions to reveal demographic features of participants. The second part includes semi-structured sentences such as "A research assistant is like...; because..." in order to find metaphors created by participants about the concept of research assistant. The reason why participants are asked to complete semi-structured sentences is the fact that the used metaphor is usually not enough to make a description solely; it is desired to know why the produced metaphors are created; and to produce a valid reason for these metaphors.

Study Group

The participants of the research are 464 academic staff at education faculty who received data collection tool through e-mail and completed this tool. Data were collected from academic staff that were in charge at the education faculties in Turkey and were accessible through their e-mail addresses in the year 2013. 54 % of the academic staff were male (n=251), whereas 46 % of them were women (n=213). The electronic data collection tool generated by the researchers within the scope of the study was sent to 5321 academic staff at education faculty; various problems occurred in sending 478 e-mails. At the end of the data collection process which lasted for approximately 3 months with reminder e-mails, a total of 464 academic staff replied. E-mail addresses of academic staff were accessed from the websites of the education faculties. The data of the study group are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Distribution of Academic Staff by Titles

Title	n	%
Research Assistant	204	43.97
Research Assistant, Dr	22	4.74
Instructor	35	7.54
Lecturer	4	0.86
Assistant Professor	133	28.66
Associate Professor	41	8.84
Professor	15	3.23
Other	10	2.16

Table 2. Distribution of Academic Staff by Departments

Department	n	%
Computer and Instructional Technologies	29	6.25
Educational Sciences	145	31.25
Primary Education	150	32.33
Secondary Education of Social Science	8	1.72
Secondary Education of Sciences and Mathematics Education	28	6.03
Special Education	12	2.59
Turkish Language	27	5.82
Foreign Languages	27	5.82
Primary Education of Religion and Ethics	11	2.37
Fine Arts Education	16	3.45
Other	11	2.37

Data Analysis

The obtained data were analyzed through content analysis method, where categorical analysis techniques were used. The metaphors produced and interpreted by the participants of the research were analyzed through six stages. These stages are as follows: (1) naming, (2) eliminating, (3) recompiling, (4) category developing, (5) ensuring validity and reliability, (6) calculating the frequencies of the obtained metaphors.

In naming stage, all metaphors about research assistant concept, created by the participants, were alphabetically listed. At this stage, it was checked whether a particular metaphor was clearly expressed or not and the concepts which were not considered as a metaphor were removed. Also, it was observed that some of the participants created more than one metaphor, whereas some of them created none. In the elimination stage, the metaphors created by the participants were reviewed and the intended use of the metaphor's image was taken into account. The metaphors without a consistent relationship with the purpose were removed from the list. In the recompiling stage, valid metaphors, obtained after removing the metaphors that were not meeting the established criteria, were listed in alphabetical order again. In addition, a sample metaphor list, which consists of the statements thought to represent the metaphors in the best way, was formed including the reasons for each metaphor from participants' expressions. In category development stage, categories were formed through examining the metaphors created by the participants about research assistant concept in terms of their common features. In addition, quotations were made from participants' expressions while presenting the metaphors under conceptual categories. To ensure the validity and reliability, data analysis process was explained in detail; participants' statements were directly quoted while analyzing and interpreting the data and all metaphors were interpreted and necessary explanations were provided in the findings section. Another important factor for validity is the consistency with related studies (Ratcliff, 1995). Therefore, the related literature was reviewed, and it was seen that similar findings were obtained in similar studies.

The following agreement percentage proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 64) was used to calculate the reliability of the research;

$$\text{Reliability} = (\text{Number of Agreement}) / (\text{Total Number of Agreement} + \text{Disagreement})$$

While applying of this formulation, the situations where researchers used the same code for the participants' expressions were accepted as consensus (agreement); whereas the situations where the researchers used different codes were accepted as divergence (disagreement). Afterwards, coding made by the researchers was compared. Reliability was calculated as .89. In this method, the studies with consistency percentages above .70 were considered as reliable (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In frequencies calculation stage, the number of metaphors in each category and their frequencies were calculated.

Results

In order to reveal how the concept of research assistant is perceived, academic staff working at education faculties produced 163 metaphors. The metaphors obtained within this scope were grouped under nine conceptual categories. These conceptual categories are as follows; research assistant as a growing/maturing person; a person who is being shaped; a joker person, a person who gets exploited/obeys; a negative/ambiguous person; a person who questions/wonders, a hardworking person, a crusader/durable person, a changeable/situational person. In Table 3, conceptual categories of the produced metaphors are presented. A total of 92 metaphors were produced in the following categories: a person that gets exploited/obey, a negative/ambiguous person; a person as a joker and the metaphors produced in these categories comprise more than half of the all produced metaphors. The metaphor of "slave" (f=26) being produced in the category of research assistant as a person who gets exploited/obeys is the mostly expressed metaphor by the participants.

Table 3. Conceptual Categories, Number of Produced Metaphors and Frequencie

Conceptual Categories	Number of metaphors	f
Research assistant as a growing/maturing person	22	84
Research assistant as a person who is being shaped	9	11
Research assistant as a joker person	33	79
Research assistant a person who gets exploited/obeys	30	155
Research assistant as a negative/ambiguous person	29	33
Research assistant as a person who questions/wonders	12	20
Research assistant as a hardworking person	6	27
Research assistant as a crusader/durable person	15	15
Research assistant as a changeable/situational person	7	7
Total	163	431

Research Assistant as a Growing/Maturing Person

In the category of research assistant as a growing/maturing person, a total of 22 metaphors were produced by 84 participants. The metaphors produced in this category and their frequencies are as follows; apprentice (f=14), student (f=14), seed (f=12), sapling (f=11), child (f=9), instructor (f=5), article (f=2), caterpillar (f=2), river (f=2), farmer (f=1), smoke (f=1), athlete (f=1), water bottle (f=1), scientific preparation (f=1), queen bee (f=1), astronaut (f=1), migratory bird (f=1), pinnacle (f=1), sheep (f=1), cook (f=1), skyscraper (f=1), starting point (f=1). As can be seen, in the category of research assistant as a growing/maturing person 'apprentice', 'student', 'seed', 'sapling' and 'child' metaphors were mostly produced. Some quotations from participants' statements regarding the metaphors of this category are as follows:

"A research assistant is like an apprentice; because in the universities, as in the Ahi community, apprentices are raised by the masters." (P312)

"A research assistant is like an astronaut; because s/he needs to improve her/himself continuously and look at the world from outside." (P206)

"A research assistant is like a sapling because it requires effort and care to raise it. It is your future. Thus, you have to care about it and cultivate diligently so that you won't leave anything undone behind!" (P453)

"A research assistant is like a seed thrown into the soil; each day lived in academic world is full of variables which will determine his/her entity and power in his/her future life "(P407)

When the metaphors of this category were examined, it could be said that there is a perception as research assistants are seen by themselves and other colleagues in a process of continuous professional development and they should complete several preliminary stages to reach maturity. As can be seen from the above metaphorical expressions, research assistants are considered as one of the cornerstones that constitute the future of academic life and it is emphasized that they must be educated on solid foundations with careful steps.

Research Assistant as a Person Who is Being Shaped

In the category of research assistant as a person who is being shaped, a total of 9 metaphors were produced by 11 participants. The metaphors produced in this category and their frequencies are as follows; soil (f=2), mineral (f=2), pawn (f=1), computer program (f=1), ship (f=1), wood (f=1), child (f=1), play dough (f=1), green wood (f=1). Some quotations from participants' statements regarding the metaphors of this category are as follows:

"A research assistant is like a mineral. Process it, gain it." (P101)

"A research assistant is like play dough because everyone tries to shape it according to his/her own benefit." (P269)

"A research assistant is like a computer program; because he works according to the software which was installed by his teacher or advisor." (P166)

Metaphorical expressions of this category emphasize that research assistant is taken a back seat and he is developed through direction determined by other people in the academic community.

Research Assistant as a Joker Person

In the category of research assistant as a joker person, a total of 33 metaphors were produced by 79 participants. The metaphors produced in this category and their frequencies are as follows; joker personnel (f=17), I can do any work you need (f=8), Swedish-cutter (f=7), aspirin (f=5), helper (f=5), immediate member (f=4), butler (f=2), English wrench (f=2), spare tire (f=2), super hero (f=2), patch (f=2), heavy worker (f=2), Hurmuz with seven husbands (f=1), housewife (f=1), magic wand (f=1), multi-purpose sport hall (f=1), programmed machine (f=1), octopus (f=1), elixir (f=1), chameleon (f=1), genie (f=1), locomotive (f=1), Godsend (f=1), processor (f=1), mother (f=1), backfill material (f=1), earth mover (f=1), rummikub (f=1), road assistance (f=1), emergency health service (f=1), assistant player (f=1), assistant coach (f=1), backup force (f=1). It can be seen that the metaphors of this category consist of the ones with a positive perception. Some quotations from participants' statements regarding the metaphors of this category are as follows:

"A research assistant is like backup force in an army; because our assistant friends help whenever a need is required related to teaching." (P318)

"A research assistant is like a Swedish-cutter. It can conduct multiple duties simultaneously (office works, research, lecturing, and syllabus)." (P353)

"A research assistant is like an aspirin because it can cure anything. S/he conducts academic research, gives lectures, follows homework, makes examinations, and carries out any other duty. In addition, s/he can never get sick, never take a report, never get hungry or tired; etc." (P300)

"A research assistant is like a rummikub, you can use it anytime you need instead of a missing stone." (P360)

"A research assistant is like a backfill material (plaster); because you can fill any gap with it." (P342)

The metaphors of this category indicate that academic staff has a positive perception about research assistants. Research assistants are perceived as individuals who help their colleagues, support them in possible areas, and complete different tasks given to them successfully.

Research Assistant as a Person Who Gets Exploited/Obeys

In the category of research assistant as a person who gets exploited/obeys, a total of 39 metaphors were produced by 155 participants. The metaphors produced in this category and their frequencies are as follows; slave (f=26), laborer (f=19), servant (f=15), soldier (f=14), secretary (f=11), equerry (f=4), carrier (f=16), robot (f=4), office boy (f=3), donkey (f=3), worker bee (f=3), dog (f=3), base of the building (f=3), officer (f=3), waiter (f=2), errand-boy (f=2), grass (f=2), driver (f=1), silence (f=1), tongs (f=1), a lame leader (f=1), easy touch (f=1), watcher (f=1), whipping boy (f=1), a teenager having identity depression (f=1), a tree yielding different fruit (f=1), obeying child (f=1), zero (f=1), remote controller (f=1), middle child (f=1), victim (f=1), rusty pencil (f=1), battery (f=1), candle (f=1), the biggest invention (f=1), rabbit (f=1), ladder step (f=1), housekeeper (f=1), secretive (f=1). Some quotations from participants' statements regarding the metaphors of this category are as follows:

"A research assistant is like a carrier because s/he carries whatever you put on her/him; s/he carries the works of the whole department; conducts any kind of duty; does not make distinction between works; s/he can be loaded with more works than s/he can carry" (P46)

"A research assistant is like a laborer because s/he has to conduct works that no instructor wants to conduct for a very little amount of money." (P181)

"A research assistant is definitely like a secretary; because our work is not being in charge of researche it is solely doing paper works correctly.... And being tamed under the perspective of an officer..." (P261)

"A research assistant is like a donkey; because all the burden of the faculty is on them." (P3)

"A research assistant is like a slave because s/he cannot stand up against any duty under existing conditions." (P87)

"A research assistant is like a private soldier because his/her status is at the bottom of the school; s/he has to say okay for everything asked and conduct all donkeyworks of the department." (P354)

"A research assistant is like a battery because s/he consumes all her/his energy until the completion of the doctorate for others; meanwhile s/he is consumed." (P399)

"A research assistant is like a candle... as it burns, it is consumed." (P441)

The metaphors of this category revealed that participants have a negative perception about research assistants. It was pointed out that research assistants are forced to do a lot of work that do not contribute to their academic development and seen as chore; they are at the bottom of the hierarchical chain, thus they don't have the right to speak; they undertake more works than they can carry and they are experiencing burnout. It can be said that uncertainty of the professional definition of research assistantship has an impact on this negative view.

Research Assistant as a Negative/Ambiguous Person

In the category of research assistant as a negative/ambiguous person; a total of 29 metaphors were produced by 33 participants. The metaphors produced in this category and their frequencies are as follows; bank officer (f=3), ostrich (f=2), chick (f=2), empty tin (f=1), retired (f=1), bat (f=1), mannequin (f=1), a person at the middle layer (f=1), a person who is unwilling to work (f=1), time bomb (f=1), an undefined object (f=1), festive clothes (f=1), Garfield (f=1), megalomania (f=1), a genitor who pretends to be busy (f=1), a person waiting for a train (f=1), nothing (f=1), walking through a dim road (f=1), love (f=1), titanic (f=1), lazy (f=1), looking for something in the crowded (f=1), a community stuck between two mosques (f=1), motor (f=1), submarine (f=1), weak ring (f=1), toilet brush (f=1), oppressed ant (f=1), prince (f=1). Some quotations from participants' statements regarding the metaphors of this category are as follows:

"A research assistant is like love; as there is no happy love; there is no happy research assistant." (P351)

"Today, a research assistant is like nothing. They have no respect, no reverence, and no fidelity. They act like they know everything. They only show off. The only thing they care about is not undertaking responsibility and learning, but getting paid without doing anything." (P313)

"A research assistant is like prince because (s)he does not lecture, only conducts academic works." (P143)

"A research assistant is like festive clothes because they undertake duty only twice a year, by making consultancy during enrolling or supervising exams." (P127)

The metaphors of this category indicate that academic staff has a negative perception about research assistants. The metaphors produced in this part can be interpreted as there is a perception that research assistants attempt to skive off or they don't have professional commitment.

Research Assistant as a Person Who Questions/Wonders

In the category of research assistant as a person who questions/wonders; a total of 12 metaphors were produced by 20 participants. The metaphors produced in this category and their frequencies are as follows; scientist (f=5), researcher (f=4), traveler (f=2), question mark (f=1), turkey (f=1), follower (f=1), radar (f=1), tiger (f=1), terminal (f=1), problem solver (f=1), explorer (f=1), equation with multiple variables (f=1). Some quotations from participants' statements regarding the metaphors of this category are as follows:

"A research assistant is like a question mark; because this person, who is at the very beginning of the academic life, gets into a questioning process which will not end until the end of his/her life." (P20)

"A research assistant is like a bus terminal because the information that arrives and departs is limitless." (P273)

"A research assistant is like an explorer because s/he is curious enough to explore; objective enough to see what has been already discovered; self-sacrificing enough to stay away from the loved ones in order to get informed during her/his most beautiful years; devoted enough to be captain and staff in different ships." (P412)

The metaphors of this category emphasize some basic skills that a scientist should have, such as wondering, perceiving, thinking, criticizing, evaluating.

Research Assistant as a Hardworking Person

In the category of research assistant as a hardworking person; a total of 6 metaphors were produced by 27 participants. The metaphors produced in this category and their frequencies are as follows; ant (f=11), bee (f=10), hardworking person (f=3), gear wheel (f=1), doping (f=1), machine (f=1). Some quotations from participants' statements regarding the metaphors of this category are as follows:

"A research assistant is like an ant. Because s/he has to work, run and conduct works without any stop." (P298)

"A research assistant is like a worker bee. Because her/his work is to work and conduct assigned duties continuously." (P48)

Research Assistant as a Crusader/Durable Person

In the category of research assistant as a crusader/durable person; a total of 15 metaphors were produced by 15 participants. The metaphors produced in this category and their frequencies are as follows; walking through a challenging road (f=1), ladder (f=1), swimmer (f=1), slope (f=1), turtle (f=1), a computer game in which obstacles never end (f=1), climber (f=1), camel (f=1), runner (f=1), water (f=1), tired person (f=1), Pluto (f=1), laborer (f=1), patience stone (f=1), roly-poly (f=1). As each produced metaphor was expressed by 1 participant; each metaphor comprises 6.6% of the all produced metaphors in this category. Some quotations from participants' statements regarding the metaphors of this category are as follows:

"A research assistant is like a slope; because first of all you encounter challenges; you make effort and get tired. However, at the end of this slope, you reach the flatness and so get relax." (P140)

"A research assistant is like a computer game whose obstacles never end, because when you think all the works have been done; new problems will be awaiting for you." (P142)

"A research assistant is like a climber because s/he needs to make effort patiently and resolutely in order to reach the peak ..." (P175)

The perception of research assistant as a hard-working and crusader person emphasize various challenges of academic life and reveal the importance of dealing with these challenges fearlessly and working continuously.

Research Assistant as a Changeable/Situational Person

In the category of research assistant as a changeable/situational person; a total of 7 metaphors were produced by 7 participants. The metaphors produced in this category and their frequencies are as follows; mirror (f=1), tree (f=1), cat (f=1), cloud (f=1), sea (f=1), luck (f=1), not too bad (f=1). Some quotations from participants' statements regarding the metaphors of this category are as follows:

"A research assistant is like clouds in the atmosphere; because this person's discipline, success, works and quality may vary according to cadre type, relationship with other academic staff, approach of the students and faculty." (P288)

"A research assistant is like sea; because sometimes it looks turquoise and bright; sometimes it gets cloudy; at night it breaks the lights of city and brings beauty to the city. We also may get tired due to heavy work load. However, our main goal is clear and special." (P304).

It can be seen that the contextual conditions of research assistants could affect how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by their colleagues. Moreover, related metaphors point that some variables such as the institution in which they work, position type, advisor or faculty staff of her/his department, and students' profile have also an impact on their academic performance.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

In this study, it was aimed to reveal how the concept of research assistant is perceived by academic staff working at education faculties of Turkey. Academic staff's research assistant perceptions were analyzed by means of metaphors. Metaphors are powerful cognitive tools that can be used to understand and explain a highly abstract, complex or conceptual phenomenon (Yob, 2003) and they are also used to enforce the expression, enrich the language and transform thoughts into linguistic actions in the most effective way (Palmquist, 2001). The metaphors obtained within this scope were grouped under nine conceptual categories. These categories are as follows; research assistant as a growing/maturing person; a person who is being shaped; a joker person, a person who gets exploited/obeys; a negative/ambiguous person; a person who questions/wonders, a hardworking person, a crusader/durable person, a changeable/situational person. Under the light of these categories, it can be seen that there are both negative and positive perceptions about research assistants. Research assistants are generally considered as people who are getting mature in academic sense, being trained by their tutors and other academic staff, are obliged to spare time to any kind of duties such as paperwork, program making, announcing marks apart from academic works in their institution; therefore who cannot show enough interest to their own studies and have to cope with challenges in their academic development.

In addition, it was stated that research assistants help their advisors and assist other works in the faculty; they make effort to reach information continuously, they are hardworking, they can show positive development if there is a positive environment available. Furthermore, there are also negative perceptions such as they do not do anything, they do not respect, they get paid but do not take responsibility etc. However, while evaluating the results it should not be ignored that 40 % of the group from who the data have been collected was consisted of research assistants.

In the study conducted by Yılmaz, Yılmaz, and Göçen (2015), exploring teacher candidates' perception about "research assistant" concept through metaphors, the metaphors that came to the fore were "student", "teacher", "worker", "researcher", "coolie", "ant", "slave", "bee". In the study conducted by Bayar and Bayar (2012); "slave" and "ant" were the most frequently repeated metaphors for research assistants. In another study conducted by Acar et al. (2004), it was found that most of the research assistants at Pharmacy Faculty of Hacettepe University (54.3%) feel like students who study and make homework all the time. Considering the metaphors produced in this study, it was found that the slave metaphor (f=26) was the most frequently expressed metaphor and the perception of

research assistant as an obeying entity was very dominant among all perception towards research assistants; our findings are compatible with the findings of the related research in terms of slavery; however, there is no concordance with the findings of the abovementioned research in terms of perceptions towards the hardworking features of research assistants. In the current study, it was found that the perception towards the hardworking features of research assistants is in the background compared to other categories. It can be assumed that this result may be due to different academic titles of the participants in the study group.

Sancak et al. (2010) touched upon the fact that the vague definition of research assistants is interpreted by the administrators with a high hand and the lack and unfair distribution of personnel cadres lead to problems. In their study, Bayar and Bayar (2012) found that university students and academicians consider being informative and helping as positive features of research assistantship; whereas being obliged to conduct any kind of duties and busy schedule were seen as negative features. It was found that the majority of negative metaphors focus on the vagueness of job definitions. Similarly, Doğan (2013) conducted a study related to the problems of new-established universities and faculty members stated that the unclear definition of the concept of research assistant duty makes people think that research assistant may conduct any kind of duties and this situation affects their academic studies negatively. In a study conducted by Korkut et al. (1999), it was found that most of the research assistants (92.5%) agree with the view that the authority and responsibilities parts of the job definition are unclear and there is a chaos about this issue. In addition, the rate of those who have duties other than those stipulated in the regulations was found to be around 40%. The present study also found that the flexibility of the job definition loads heavy burden on research assistants and they are forced to conduct works under any conditions just like a joker personnel. Furthermore, there were statements about the fact that they have to conduct all commands given by their advisors and other teachers and other academic staff due to similar reason.

According to the results of the study conducted by Acar et al. (2004), the future anxiety of research assistants about their professional life was found to be high and it was assumed that this result was derived from the duty extensions and changes in cadre assignments. This study found that the future of research assistant depends on the few words of their advisors and other academic staff, which transformed assistants into people who obey and feel obliged to conduct any given duty.

According to the results of the study, the lack of a clear job description of research assistantship has led to the emergence of different perceptions about the concept of research assistant. Therefore, studies about the job description of research assistants should be conducted. The current study covered only academic staff being in charge at education faculties. By designing a similar study including the staff of other faculties, the similarities and differences in the perception may be analyzed. In addition, this study was conducted with all faculty members, such as research assistant, assistant professor, associate professor, professor. Comparative studies can be conducted by collecting data solely from research assistants or assistant professors.

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