

DISTANCE AND FACE-TO-FACE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS DISTANCE EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE METAPHORICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to determine and compare the metaphorical perceptions of face-to-face and distance education students towards distance education. The research was conducted using phenomenology pattern. Research data were obtained from 80 distance education students and 56 face-to-face education students using metaphorical perception form for distance education. Data were analyzed with the content analysis technique. Analysis of the data showed that distance education students produced 66 metaphors while face-to-face students produced 55 metaphors. In both groups, metaphors were grouped under three categories. Considering the categories, it was seen that “provided opportunities” and “limitations” categories emerged in both groups. Distance education is not indispensable for face-to-face students. Some of the distance education students prefer distance education because of desperation. As for sub-categories, it was seen that unlike face-to-face students, distance education students -perceived distance education as a road to dreams and they thought that distance education provided them to study while working in a job. While the most repeated metaphors in distance education students were “a golden blessing, a great opportunity, and indispensable”, face-to-face students repeated the “essential” metaphor the most.

Keywords: Distance education, student perceptions, metaphorical perception, qualitative research.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education is a form of education in which students are often or always physically separated from the instructor and the educational institution. Learning can take place in groups or individually or even without the instructor. This form of learning can be used blending with face-to-face learning. Students have to use some communication technologies in order to communicate with other students and the instructor in this form of education (Moore & Kearsley, 2012; Simonson, Smaldino & Zvacek, 2015). In distance education, students take their own responsibility for learning. Students should define their own goals, determine how they will reach these goals and how much they need to learn, create a learning plan, and evaluate their own learning (Zhao, Chen, & Panda, 2014).

Online learning is one of the most popular forms of distance education. It is a learning experiment which the learning content was delivered to students through technology, online course materials, and online interactions. Online learning allows education to reach a wide variety of student groups (Al-Ashmoery, 2015; Andrade, 2015; Fedyinch, Bradley & Bradley, 2015).

In recent years, a variety of studies were carried out to determine the students' perceptions of online learning quality (Jung, 2012). Bhagat, Wu, and Chang (2016) discussed the perceptions of students about online learning in four dimensions: instructor characteristics, social presence, instructional design, and reliability. According to Jung's (2011) study, the factors effecting the quality of e-learning are interaction, staff support, institutional quality assurance mechanisms, institutional trust, student support, information and publicity, and learning tasks. Similarly, a year later, Jung (2012) has tested the quality of distance education with a conceptual model consisting of ten dimensions: school's support of faculty, student support, information and publicity, course development, teaching and learning, interactive tasks, measurement and evaluation, infrastructure, internal quality assurance mechanisms and institutional reliability. As a result, it was determined that all these dimensions are important for evaluating the quality of distance learning.

Ward, Peters and, Shelley (2010) have found out that both instructors and students had a positive perception towards online learning. Based on the findings of their study, they have stated that the effectiveness of face-to-face learning could be provided in online learning, too. Furthermore, Lenka and Kant (2012) correlated the perception of online learning with biological variables. Oteng-Ababio (2011) determined that students had positive opinions in terms of providing satisfaction, the usefulness, and flexibility of distance education but negative perceptions about the exams. Especially, it was found that the untimely delivery of modules, poorly regulated modules, and exam programs were disturbing for students. According to Chen and Chen (2006), students have positive perceptions about the effectiveness of e-learning. Cigdem and Topcu (2013) also determined that the most important factor effecting students' satisfaction of e-learning is perceived usefulness. Perceived usefulness and perceived satisfaction varied according to the program in which students enrolled.

Perception is the process of gaining awareness, and understanding the environment by editing and interpreting information (Lenka & Kant, 2012). It is obvious that many studies were conducted to determine the perception of students about distance learning/online learning/e-learning. One of the methods used to identify the perception towards a subject is to determine the metaphors, which individuals have about the subject.

Metaphor and its usage in the description is one of the issues currently attracting the researchers' attention. It is indicated that there are numerous studies focusing on metaphorical perception in both national and international research area (McHaffie, 2000; Saban, 2009). A metaphor is a powerful mental tool that can be used to identify an abstract, complex and theoretical phenomenon with another phenomenon (Saban, Kocbeker & Saban, 2006). Kemp (1999) defined the metaphor as a shape of conversation in which something is described by likening it to another thing. Lakoff and Johnsen (2003) emphasized that metaphor is not only something about poetic imagination and words but also a concept related to thoughts and actions which are widely used in daily life. Additionally, they stated that actually, individuals' ordinary conceptual system is inherently metaphorical in terms of thinking and acting. Metaphors which have been known since classical times and have seen as valuable, and which is a natural part of a human communication through language (Falconer, 2008) help people to explain something by associating it with another thing (Saban, Kocbeker, & Saban, 2006). Furthermore, metaphors may provide a new insight for the history and everyday experience. Metaphors produced by students can help to understand the dominant experiences in the program (Kemp, 1999; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Meyer (2005) stated that metaphors could have advice about what distance education is and how students learn in distance education. It is important to determine how metaphors affect the understandings of individuals about the potential of distance education or how they are blocking the emergence of alternative ideas. Students can have various perceptions about online learning, and this leads students to produce various

different metaphors. Metaphors used in distance education may contain clues about the views of the present and future role of distance education (Meyer, 2005; Tuncay & Ozcinar, 2009).

There is a limited number of studies in the literature conducted in order to determine the metaphorical perceptions of students about distance education, and types of distance education. One of the most comprehensive studies was carried out by Tuncay and Ozcinar (2009). The researchers conducted the study to determine the face-to-face students' metaphorical perceptions about distance education and discovered that students produced quite different metaphors such as "ocean". Besides they have recommended that the metaphors about distance education should be investigated in a comprehensive manner. Falconer (2008) has carried out a study to examine the use of a metaphor for the purposes of teaching in online learning environments. However, this study was related to the only use of the metaphors not to the metaphorical perception. Senyuva and Kaya (2013) have conducted a study to determine the metaphorical perceptions of nursing students about the internet. The researchers have ascertained that students perceived the internet as an information source and they thought that it should be used consciously. In light of all these information, this study is considered to be significant in terms of determining students' perceptions of distance education and their opinions about the positive and negative aspects of distance education. Furthermore, this study is expected to provide valuable information to the literature because it compares the metaphorical perceptions of face-to-face and distance education students.

In this study, it is aimed to determine and compare the distance education and face-to-face education students' metaphorical perceptions of distance education. In this context, the research questions are as follows:

- Which metaphors do face-to-face education students have about the concept of distance education?
- Through which metaphors do the distance education students explain the perception they have about the concept of distance education?
- How do metaphorical perceptions of distance education differ between face-to-face students and distance education students?

METHOD

Research Model

This study was based on the qualitative research model. Qualitative studies aim to reveal the events and perceptions in a realistic and holistic manner, and in a natural setting by using qualitative data collection tools (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). Miles and Huberman (1994) have stated that qualitative studies provide rich and integrated content and they have great potential to reveal complex cases. In this study, students' perceptions of distance education were examined in detail without any intervention.

Research Design

In this study, phenomenology, one of the qualitative study patterns was used. Studies based on facts that we have no in-depth and detailed understanding are called phenomenological research (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). Phenomenological research defines the common meaning of individuals' experiences about a phenomenon or a concept (Creswell, 2013).

Study Group

The study group was determined by using the criterion sampling method which is one of the purposive sampling methods. The logic of criterion sampling is to select all cases providing certain criteria (Patton, 2014). In accordance with the features of criterion sampling, individuals from whom the data will be

collected should be experiencing the specified case and be capable of reflecting this case (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013).

In this context, there are two criteria in the study. The first criterion is that all students who are in distance education group have to be receiving courses at distance (through video conference and supported by a learning management system) and the second is that the face-to-face students should at least have some information about distance education. Computer and Instructional Technology Education (CEIT) Department students have courses about distance education, therefore, they have knowledge about it. In this context, data was collected during the 2015-2016 academic year from 115 distance education students who are studying in Computer Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Management Information Systems and CEIT departments of Ahmet Yesevi University and 59 face-to-face students in CEIT Department of Gazi University. However, only 80 metaphors from distance education students and 56 metaphors from face-to-face students could be used for some reasons such as inconsistency between descriptions and metaphors, repeated data and irrelevant metaphors.

Data Collection

“..... is like; because.....” sentence pattern is commonly used in metaphorical perception studies (Saban, 2009). Accordingly, in this study data were collected using the “Metaphorical Perception Form for Distance Education” form, which was developed by the researcher considering the subject area expert opinions and common usage in the literature. In this form, students were asked to fill in two gaps: “Distance education is like because”. The aim of the data collection tool is not only to obtain metaphors, but also to learn why students indicate the metaphors. For this reason, in order to gain deeper knowledge, to understand the student's perception more reliably (Ekici, 2016), the question of “because.....” is added. Data collection tool was implemented by the researcher to the face-to-face education students, and the electronic version of the form was delivered to distance education students via e-mail by the information technologies department of the university.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the content analysis method. This method consists of coding, identifying themes, and organizing the data according to codes and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because this study is a metaphorical study, codes were obtained from the metaphors stated by students. In order to ensure the reliability of the study, “compliance percentage” proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was calculated. Compliance percentage formula is as follows: $\text{Reliability} = (\text{Consensus}) / [(\text{Consensus}) + (\text{Dissensus})] \times 100$. Because the categorization process was made separately for face-to-face students and distance education students, the compliance percentage was calculated separately for each categorization process. In order to calculate the percentage of compliance, metaphors are firstly divided into categories and subcategories by a researcher. The convenience of the categories was discussed with another researcher, and then the researcher put the metaphors under the identified categories. After this process, the compliance percentage between the two encoders was found to be 68% for the face-to-face group and the 49% for the distance education group. Thereupon, the researchers performed the categorization process over again discussing incompatible categories. Later on, the compliance percentage was calculated as %89 for both face-to-face and distance education groups. According to Miles and Huberman, at least 70% compliance for reliability between coders is required. Thus 89% indicates that the desired confidence level is reached.

FINDINGS

Determining Face-to-face Education Students' Metaphorical Perceptions of Distance Education

Under this heading, metaphors stated by face-to-face students about distance education, categories under which these metaphors were grouped and examples of metaphors for each category are given.

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that students use all the metaphors only once, except “essential” ($f=2$). Indeed, when looking at the descriptions of metaphors, it is seen that many metaphors in the table indicate very similar things. For instance, 23 of the metaphors emphasize that “distance education is independent of time and place” (see Table 2). Sample descriptions for the metaphors are given in Table 3.

Table 1. Metaphors stated by face to face students about distance education

Metaphor sequence	Metaphor name	<i>f</i>	Metaphor sequence	Metaphor name	<i>f</i>
1	Essential	2	29	The system I dislike when I need	1
2	Chili pepper	1	30	Ladle	1
3	Encyclopedia	1	31	Dictionary in my library	1
4	Stay in purgatory	1	32	Library	1
5	Elevator	1	33	Make-up	1
6	Do more work with less energy	1	34	Spaceless school	1
7	Freedom	1	35	Music	1
8	Feast relatives came only to feast	1	36	Breath	1
9	Breast milk for babies	1	37	Virtual world	
10	Free home	1	38	Virtual classroom	1
11	Knowledge competition	1	39	Magic wand	1
12	Vessels in a body	1	40	Political programs	1
13	Learn many things from my location	1	41	cold sandwiches	1
14	Safety pin	1	42	Social network	1
15	Chocolate	1	43	Social networking site	1
16	The place where I earn my livelihood	1	44	Continuous innovation	1
17	Orders from home	1	45	My phone	1
18	My home school	1	46	To add salt to salty food	1
19	Elementary school, high school, college of future	1	47	Airplane	1
20	Higher education of future	1	48	Kite	1
21	Imagination remaining training	1	49	Something very easy to reach	1
22	Life	1	50	Paid internships and an area that I developed myself	1
23	Breakfast I made every morning	1	51	Bed	1
24	Fast train	1	52	A watch without the hour and minute hand	1
25	Hobbies implemented	1	53	Food	1
26	The person comes to my rescue when I need	1	54	Non-compulsory course	1
27	Medicine	1	55	4,5 G	1
28	To reach the desired thing	1			
				<i>TOTAL VIEW</i>	56

Table 2. Distribution of metaphors in categories (stated by face-to-face students)

Categories		The number of metaphors (f)	%
1.1. Structural opportunities	Time and place independence	23	32,86
	Others	13	18,57
1.2. Instructional opportunities		14	20
1.3. Financial opportunities		4	5,71
2. Limitations		6	8,57
3. Not to be indispensable		10	14,29
Total		70	100.0

According to Table 2, an important part of the metaphors (n=56) are related to the opportunities provided by distance education. While ten metaphors emphasize that distance education is not indispensable, four metaphors mention the limitations of distance education. Totally, students stated 55 metaphors but because some metaphors are related to more than one category, the total number of metaphors under categories is seen as 70. Metaphors for each category/subcategory, and the sample explanations for the categories/subcategories were given in Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 3. Metaphors located under the “*opportunities provided*” theme and sample explanations

Theme	Category	Subcategory	The number of metaphors (f=54)
Opportunities Provided	1.1. Structural	Time and place independence	Essential (1), Do more work with less energy (6), Freedom (7), Free home (10), Learn many things from any place (13), Orders from home (17), My home school (18), Elementary school, high school, college of future (19), Life (22), To reach the desired thing (28), Library (33), Spaceless school (34), Virtual classroom (38), Magic wand (39), Social networking site (43), My phone (45), Plane (47), Kite (48), Something very easy to reach (49), Bed (51), A watch without hour and minute hand (52), Non-compulsory course (54)
		Others	Chili pepper (2), Elevator (6), Do more work with less energy (6), Vessels in a body (12), Safety pin (14), Fast train (24), Dictionary in my library (31), Breath (36), Cold sandwich (41), Social network (42), Paid internships and an area that I developed myself (50), Bed (51)
	1.2. Instructional		Essential (1), Breast milk for babies (9), Knowledge competition (11), Vessels in a body (12), Safety pin (14), Elementary school, high school, college of future (19), Higher education of future (20), Breakfast I made every morning (23), Hobbies implemented (25), Ladle (30), Library (32), Virtual world (37), Virtual classroom (38), Continuous innovation (44)
	1.3. Financial		Free home (10), The place where I earn my livelihood (16), Hobbies implemented (25), Paid internships and an area that I developed myself (50)

Sample explanations for “Time and place independence” sub category:

PF: (Person-Face to Face) shows quotations from the face to face education students.

My phone; I can get what I want and when I want without losing time (PF16)

Magic wand; Spaceless and timeless, accessible anywhere, anytime (PF27)

Bed; It is a system that you can access easily when you want (PF36)

Sample explanations for “Other opportunities” sub category:

Fast Train; You can go away immediately (PF28).

Elevator; It creates a new way to the people even inhibits the sports provided by stairs (PF48).

Dictionary in my library; I can search anything that prepossess me when I need. (PF53).

Sample explanations for “Instructional opportunities” sub category:

Library; I get the information I need when I want (PF1).

Higher education of future; People can meet their training needs, professional development and personal development needs by getting a profession at an early age through distance education. Distance education is the most efficient way for these (PF11).

Vessels in a body; Vessels distribute the heart pumped blood throughout the body. Distance education is like this. What a teacher tells reaches thousands of students (PF33).

Sample explanations for “Financial opportunities” sub category:

Hobbies implemented; I can get training all areas I wish. I can overcome the moral and material problems (PF7).

The place where I earn my livelihood; I work part-time at distance education centre of the university. I earn a little money there and it makes me feel better. I also learn many things there (PF8).

Paid internships and an area that I developed myself; A good experience for me in my student life (PF17).

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that there were 54 metaphors (77.14%) under the “opportunities provided by distance education” theme. Metaphors are grouped under the structural opportunities, instructional opportunities and financial opportunities categories. Additionally, structural opportunities category is divided into 2 sub categories of "independence of time and space" and "other". Students mostly emphasized time and space independence of distance education (32.86%). Distance education is considered as a system which is capable of delivering the desired information easily at any place or time without the obligation to go to the school. In the “others” category, structural opportunities stated by the students except time and place independence are located. In this category, some features of distance education were settled such as being fast, funny, flexible, practical etc.

The instructional opportunities of distance education (20%) is another feature stated by the students. According to the students, distance education provides lifelong learning. Besides, distance education is massive, in another words distance education can reach very large audiences of different ages and abilities, and it has the potential to take the place of face-to-face education in the future. Distance education has very wide and rich sources of information and everyone can benefit from these resources as they wish.

There are financial opportunities provided by distance education (5.71%), too. In this category, most of the statements about working in a distance education centre are located because face-to-face students haven't benefited sufficiently from distance education. One student noted that distance education was economic and financial difficulties can be overcome with distance education.

Table 4. Metaphors located in the “*limitations*” category and sample explanations

Category	Number of the metaphors (f=6)
2. Limitations	Stay in purgatory (4), Imagination remaining training (21), The system I dislike when I need (29), Political programs (40), To add salt to salty food (46), 4,5 G (55)
Sample explanations for “Limitations” category ; 4,5 G; You have many expectations but you get nothing (PF3). Imagination remaining training; There is no teacher and classroom neither (PF52) To add salt to the salty food; I think distance education is unnecessary and certainly should not be in this way. Students usually don’t care about these courses (PF56).	

When the metaphors stated under the “limitations” category are examined, it is seen that students mentioned some limitations of distance learning such as not meeting expectations, being bored or not having a classroom environment. In addition, one of the students indicated that she could not feel herself as a student. Another student stated that distance education was student-centred and she did not like the student-centred education. Besides, some of students stated that they use distance education only for their needs or because they have no other choice.

Table 5. Metaphors located in the “*not to be indispensable*” category and sample explanations

Category	Number of Metaphors (f=10)
3. Not to be indispensable	Encyclopaedia (3), Feast relatives came only to feast (8), Knowledge competition (11), Chocolate (15), Person come to my rescue when I need (26), Medicine (27), Make-up (33), Music (35), Cold sandwich (41), Food (53)
Examples of explanation for “Not to be indispensable” category; Music, it is in every aspect of our lives but if not we don’t feel a lack (PF30). Make up, it is in my life when necessary, but it is not indispensable if I don’t need it (PF39). Feast relatives came only to feast, I don’t visit him as long as I do not have to see him (PF51).	

Examining table 5, it is seen that some of the students stated that they would use distance education only when they need it, and when they were done with distance education they would remove it from their life. However, some of them stated that the value of distance education could change from person to person. They also stated that distance education meant a lot for the people who want to get something from it while it would not mean anything for others.

Determining Distance Education Students’ Metaphorical Perceptions of Distance Education

Under this heading, metaphors stated by distance education students, categories under which these metaphors were grouped, and examples of metaphors for each category are given in tables.

Table 6. Metaphors stated by distance education students about distance education

Metaphor Sequence	Metaphor Name	f	Metaphor Sequence	Metaphor Name	f
1	A golden blessing	7	34	Fast food	1
2	A great opportunity	3	35	Bus, arriving late	1

3	Indispensable	3	36	The opportunity I found on the ground while searching in the sky	1
4	Flotation ring	2	37	The opportunity to make my dreams real	1
5	Gift	2	38	A new gateway to life	1
6	Medicine	2	39	The opportunity of my life	1
7	Essential	2	40	Peacefully played violin, piano, guitar	1
8	3-wheel bike	1	41	A second chance	1
9	5-stars formal education	1	42	Take medicine	1
10	A formidable mountain	1	43	Internet	1
11	Honey	1	44	Online shopping	1
12	Compensation of some regret	1	45	To find money in the pocket of winter coat.	1
13	Using computer	1	46	Penny bank	1
14	A step	1	47	Nuts	
15	hit two birds with one stone	1	48	Tea with lemon	1
16	Our village	1	49	The way that makes easy to get education.	1
17	Bridges on the Bosphorus	1	50	Alternative to formal education	1
18	Mobile phone	1	51	Freedom	1
19	Tea	1	52	An expensive gift	1
20	To eat the stale chickpeas in the cookie plate	1	53	To play street ball	1
21	Crumpets in thick syrup	1	54	My last remedy	1
22	Dual nationality	1	55	The newest system machine	1
23	Democracy	1	56	Dessert	1
24	An integral part of educational life	1	57	The voice on the end of the line	1
25	Revolution in education	1	58	To see the train on the railway platform while thinking missed it	1
26	To live freedom in education	1	59	Remote control	1
27	The free face of education	1	60	Writhe in a long well	1
28	The most practical educational tool	1	61	Pangs of conscience	1
29	My favourite thing	1	62	Earn money from where you lie.	1
30	To watch my favourite film at home without going to the cinema	1	63	A new opportunity	1
31	The school at home and in bus	1	64	The car picks you up while you hitchhiking.	1
32	The classroom in our house	1	65	YouTube	1
33	Services from our house	1	66	Saving of time	1
				<i>TOTAL VIEW</i>	80

When Table 6 is examined it is seen that students mostly stated the metaphor “golden blessing” (f=7). Besides, while “a great opportunity” and “indispensable” were repeated three times and “Flotation ring, Gift, Medicine, and Essential” were repeated twice, remaining metaphors were stated only once. These statements indicate that distance education students have a quite positive perception of distance education. Themes, categories and subcategories created considering the metaphors stated by the distance education students are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Distribution of the metaphors in categories (stated by distance education students)

Categories	Subcategories	Number of Metaphors (f)	%
1.1. Structural opportunities	Time and place independence	27	25.54
	Being able to continue education while working in a job	24	21.82
	Others	16	14.54
1.2. Instructional opportunities		16	14.54
1.3. The way to dreams		8	7.27
1.4. Financial opportunities		7	6.36
2. Limitations		7	6.36
3. Desperation		5	4.54
		110	100.0

When Table 7 is examined it is seen that a very large part of the metaphors (90.07%) stated by distance education students as well as the face-to-face students (77.14%) are about the opportunities provided by distance education. The most important point to be considered in this table is that “being able to continue education while working in a job” (21.82%) and “a road to dreams” (7.27%) categories were added to opportunities provided by distance education which is different from the categories of the face-to-face students. Probably, face-to-face students ignored the “being able to continue education while working in a job” aspect of distance education because they have not got any job yet. Besides, in addition to the categories of face-to-face students, “desperation” (4.54%) category is included. What students mean with “desperation” and “a road to dreams” is discussed in detail in the following tables. Metaphors for each category/subcategory and the sample explanations for the categories/subcategories were given in Table 8, Table 9, and Table 10.

Table 8. Metaphors located under the “*opportunities provided*” theme and sample explanations

Theme	Category	Sub Category	Number of Metaphors (f=99)
Opportunities Provided	1.1. Structural opportunities	Time and place independence	A great opportunity (2), Medicine (6), 5-stars formal education (9), Crumpets in thick syrup (21), Democracy (23), An integral part of educational life (24), Revolution in education (25), To live freedom in education (26), The most practical educational tool (28), My favourite thing (29), To watch my favourite film at home without going to the cinema (30), The school at home and in bus (31), The classroom in our house (32), Services from our house (33), Fast food (34), The opportunity I found on the

	ground while searching in the sky (36), Peacefully played violin, piano, guitar (40), Online shopping (44), Alternative to formal education (50), Freedom (51), To play street ball (53), Dessert (56), The voice on the end of the line (57), Remote control (59), Youtube (65), Saving of time (66)
Being able to continue education while working in a job	Golden blessing (1), A great opportunity (2), Indispensable (3), Flotation ring (4), Gift (5), Essential (7), Honey (11), A step (14), Hit two birds with one stone (15), Bridges on the Bosphorus (17), Dual nationality (22), A second chance (41), Tea with lemon (48), The way that makes easy to get education (49), Alternative to formal education (50), My last remedy (54)
Others	A golden blessing (1), Indispensable (3), 3-wheel bike (8), Using computer (13), Our village (16), Mobile phone (18), Tea (19), The free face of education (27), The opportunity I found on the ground while searching in the sky (43), To find money in the pocket of winter coat (45), Nuts (47), Freedom (51), Earn money from where you lie (62)
1.2. Instructional Opportunities	A golden blessing (1), Indispensable (3), Gift (5), Compensation of some regret (12), Crumpets in thick syrup (21), An integral part of educational life (24), The classroom in our house (32), Fast food (34), Peacefully played violin, piano, guitar (40), To find money in the pocket of winter coat (45), Nuts (47), Freedom (51), The newest system machine (55), A new opportunity (63), The car picks you up while you hitchhiking (64)
1.3. The way to dreams	Flotation ring (4), A step (14), The opportunity to make my dreams real (37), The opportunity of my life (39), A second chance (41), To find money in the pocket of winter coat (45), An expensive gift (52), To see the train on the railway platform while thinking missed it (58)
1.4. Financial opportunities	Indispensable (3) Flotation ring (4), A step (14), Crumpets in thick syrup (21), An integral part of educational life (24), A new gateway to life (38), Penny bank (46)
Sample explanations for “Time and place independence” sub category: PD: Person-Distance shows quotations of distance education students.	
To live freedom in education; It does not require the time and space to learn (PD4)	
The opportunity I found on the ground while searching in the sky; As one of the person who is exposed to hardships of formal training for years in three different university, I think be able to study engineering at home while drinking my tea is incredibly pleasant and comfortable (PD31).	
Remote control; It bring the same opportunity to you, without having to go to school (PD12).	

Sample explanations for “Being able to continue education while working in a job” sub category:

A step; I think studying while working in a job would move me to a top spot in the industry (PD64).

Golden blessing; I am married and I have three children, besides I can't get off work. But, through distance education I raise my education level (PD75).

A gift; Because it is a great opportunity to complete their education for employees, those who have to work and people with disabilities (PD14).

Sample explanations for “Others” sub category:

A golden blessing; there is no compulsory attendance (PD77)

Using computer; Everything can be solved with a click (PD60)

Internet; I can get instant access to my courses and notes (PD22)

Sample explanations for “Instructional Opportunities” sub category:

The newest system machine; it provides opportunity to students to convert theoretical knowledge to practice (PD23).

Fast Food; If you don't have enough time, then you apply to distance education to improve your education level (PD72).

Crumpets in thick syrup; Depending on the instructor distance education can be much more quality and understandable from face to face education. Beside this, distance education prevents inconveniences while going to school and meanwhile it avoids unnecessary hours spent. People can get quality education from where they sit and they can listen courses again and again whenever they want. If the instructor is dedicated she answers all the questions instantly and she can serve additional materials so can double the understandability of the course by face to face education.

Sample explanations for “The way to dream” sub category:

The opportunity to make my dreams real; I always want to study on computers and electronics (PD74).

The opportunity of my life; My greatest dream is to become an engineer (PD42).

To see the train on the railway platform while thinking missed it; To learn that I could reach my dream while I was thinking that I am late for my dream of becoming an engineer (PD38).

Sample explanations for “Financial opportunities” sub category:

Penny bank; It helps to increase our savings (PD21).

A step; I think studying while working in a job would move me to a top spot in the industry (PD64).

Indispensable; Thanks to emerging communication systems (personal computer, smartphones, iPad, internet networks, etc.) it is extremely easy access to information (PD50).

When Table 8 is examined, it is seen that students stated 99 metaphors (97.07%) about the opportunities provided by distance education. Distance education students stated that distance education is a road to dreams (7.27%), and they mentioned the same categories (structural opportunities, instructional opportunities, and financial opportunities) with face-to-face students. Distance education students mostly emphasized the feature of being independent of time and place (25.54%) as face-to-face students did. One of the most important findings of the research is that category named “being able to continue education while working in a job” (21.82%) is very important for distance education students but not for the face-to-face students. Face-to-face students did not even mention it. Besides, under the “others” category, metaphors which belong to the features of being fast, flexible, funny etc. are gathered.

Students emphasized the instructional opportunities of distance education (14.54%) such as the wealth of the course contents, availability of the teaching staff, and providing learning opportunity based on interest etc. Some students mentioned educational opportunities provided by distance learning by comparing the distance education to face-to-face education. Distance education is seen as “the way to dreams” (7.27%) by distance education students. Because a large part of these students are working in a job, they are only able to continue their education through distance education. Some students are also able to resume the education which they left in the past for some reasons. It is thought that “the way to dreams” category was not stated by the face-to-face students because their age and experiences are different from the distance education students.

Distance education students, like face-to-face students, also mentioned the financial opportunities of distance education. However, a different point stands out here. As the face-to-face education students emphasized much more about the aspect of making money by working in distance education centers, distance education students mentioned that distance education was economic in terms of time and money, and it allows for earning money through providing the opportunity for both working and learning. It can be said that the determinations of individuals who experienced the distance education personally are more realistic.

Table 9. Metaphors located under the “*limitations*” category and sample explanations

Category	Number of metaphors ($j=7$)
2. Limitations	Medicine (6), A formidable mountain (10), Our village (16), Bus, arriving late (35), The voice on the end of the line (57), Writhe in a long well (60), Pangs of conscience (61)
Sample explanations for “Limitations” category:	
Bus, arriving late, Although not timely, delivers you to your destination (PD52)	
Writhe in a long well, You need to do research on your own to get to the source of knowledge (PD9).	
Pangs of conscience, I think I would be an engineer without learning enough (PD55).	

When Table 9 is examined, it is seen that distance education students stated the limitations of distance education (6.36%) as the face-to-face students did. Some of the students complained about the lack of dedicated instructors and some of them stated that distance learning provided the easy way to get a certificate/diploma.

Table 10. Metaphors located under the “*desperation*” category and sample explanations

Category	Number of Metaphors ($j=5$)
3. Desperation	Bridges on the Bosphorus (17), To eat the stale chickpeas in the cookie plate (20), Take medicine (42), Tea with lemon (48), My last remedy (54)
Sample explanations for “Desperation” category:	
Bridges on the Bosphorus; We have no alternative way to become an engineer while we are working in a job (PD20).	
To eat the stale chickpeas in the cookie plate; The most fresh and delicious parts of the cookies are eaten and so we can only eat the remaining rotten cookies (PD40).	
Take medicine; You don’t want to do but there is no other choice (PD66).	

Metaphors stated by students who preferred distance education because of desperation and some examples of explanations about those metaphors are located in Table 10. According to this, these students preferred distance education not very willingly, they preferred it because they had no other choice. However, when

compared with the opportunities provided by distance education (90.07%), it is seen that the rate of the “desperation” category (4.54%) is lower than opportunities.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this study, metaphorical perceptions of face-to-face students and distance education students about distance education were determined, and then categories and sub-categories under which these metaphors were gathered were compared between two groups. Both of the two groups stated that distance education provided structural, instructional and financial opportunities, but besides these opportunities, it has some limitations. The structure is related to what extent the curriculum can adapt or respond to students’ individual needs (Moore, 1993). Distance education provides students a lot of structural flexibility. In distance education, individuals can study in their own time and from their own place as Naidu (2014) has stated. Additionally, students mentioned that distance education has many instructional opportunities such as studying the learning material again and again and accessing the latest materials about the subject. Similar results have been reached in the literature (Allen, Bourhis, Burrell, & Marby, 2002; Ally, 2008; Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, & Stevens, 2012).

Ally (2008) has stated that students are able to continue their education even in the workplace thanks to the flexibility of distance education, in other words, they have the opportunity to study while working in a job. While structural opportunities were divided into “time and place independence” and “others” sub-categories in the face-to-face students, “being able to study while working in a job” was added as a sub-category along with these categories by the distance education students. This difference between the groups may be because of the fact that one of the groups has no distance learning experience. As it has been stated by Shen, Co, Tsai, and Marra (2013) previous distance learning experience affects students’ perceptions.

The physical separation of students and instructor in terms of time and place is the keystone of the distance education (Moore, 1996). When this separation is psychological and communicational, the transactional distance which occurred between students and the instructor can be an obstacle to efficient learnings (Moore, 1993). Indeed, some of the distance education students emphasized that sometimes they need more communication with the instructor. This result Paechter, Marier and Macher (2010) have stated that the best predictors for learning achievement and course satisfaction are students’ perceptions of the instructor’s expertise in e-learning, and her/his counseling and support.

Distance education offers opportunities that could make conditions more equitable for disadvantaged groups to continue their education or to improve themselves (Robinson, 2008). In this study, some students stated that they resumed their education thanks to the distance education and some stated they study in a department which they cannot even imagine. Distance education helps the students to continue their education by overcoming many obstacles. However, some distance education students stated that they prefer distance education because of desperation. Many of the students are working in a job, thus they have no other alternative to receive an undergraduate education. Similarly, face-to-face students stated that distance education was not indispensable. Many studies (Allen et al., 2002; Powell, 2007) indicated that satisfaction levels of distance education students are as high as face-to-face students. However, as noted by Simonson (1997) some students prefer distance education because it is convenient for them, despite the fact that they do not want to receive distance education. To overcome this situation, it may be useful to make arrangements to engage students in the learning process more.

Finally, it can be said that distance education has both opportunities and limitations. Face-to-face students and distance education students have common and different perceptions of distance education. However, the perception of distance education students is more positive because they experience it personally and it

provides many opportunities to them such as studying while working and studying in the department that they always dreamed about.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Distance education students participated in this study were studying at a private university. Therefore, different results can be obtained from the students who are studying at a public university. It is suggested to include a public university's students to the study group for future researches. Besides, face-to-face students participated in this research were studying in a department related to computer science. More comprehensive information about the technical problems experienced in distance education can be obtained from the students of the departments which are not related to computer science.

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