



'... Like white light going through a prism': a metaphorical exploration of multilingual education from teachers' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Various characteristics of multilingual educational settings have been investigated from diverse sources thus far; however, the metaphorical representation of these unique mini-societies has been overlooked and warrants greater attention. Therefore, grounded in a metaphorical standpoint, this study aimed to explore the underlying factors involved in multilingual education by analyzing teachers' metaphors about it. To collect data, 67 teachers from a university in Türkiye, chosen through snowball sampling, completed a metaphor about multilingual education. Of these, 12 teachers participated in semi-structured interviews to elaborate on the metaphors they generated. Employing systematic metaphor analysis, the metaphors were categorized into six distinctive themes: travel, residence, edibles, art and entertainment, artifact, and career. Then, the thematic analysis of interview data indicated unique features of multilingual classrooms embedded within the provided metaphors and their underlying dimensions. These findings call for educational reforms in multilingual education for teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers by unveiling the unique features of this specific educational context.

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Introduction

'... Like white light going through a prism'.

(T10, metaphor)

Prism, as a metaphor for multilingual education, encapsulates the complexity and richness of diverse linguistic experiences, reflecting how different languages and cultures can interact to create a spectrum of understanding. In line with some scholars, this metaphor highlights the challenges posed by multilingual education, such as various (mis)interpretations (or spectrums), particularly for students from immigrant backgrounds. However, it also recognises the potential to enrich language education through cultural awareness and cognitive flexibility (Haim & Tannenbaum, 2022), granting students in these contexts more agency (as it is not solely about the light but how it is reflected through the prism) (Gimenez, 2020).

Multilingual education 'refers to the use of two or more languages in education' (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015, p. 2) and encompasses a variety of educational methods, incorporating several languages of instruction and geared towards promoting bilingualism (Duarte, 2020). This is the definition of multilingual education upon which this study is framed. In the same vein, multilingual classrooms, in this study, are seen as classes showcasing a wide variety of languages, where students frequently communicate in multiple home languages alongside the local language (Decristan et al., 2024).

Recent research highlights the increasing embrace of multilingualism across varied social and cultural contexts (Aronin & Singleton, 2008; Baker, 2017; Busch, 2011). Multilingual educational settings facilitate linguistic diversity, which empowers learners to engage with different communities and promotes cultural awareness (Yanaprasart & Lüdi, 2018). Additionally, such settings provide cognitive advantages, including improved problem-solving skills and enhanced creativity (Fürst & Grin, 2018; Maillat & Serra, 2009). Socio-emotional benefits, like increased empathy and a stronger sense of belonging, have also been positively influenced by multilingualism (de Jong et al., 2023; Dewaele, 2016). Multilingual education also promotes equity and access, ensuring that all students, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds, can succeed academically (Buchs & Maradan, 2021). While there exists multiple research on those who thrive in these contexts, i.e. multilingual teachers and students, on the characteristics of such settings, investigations into the subtle dimensions of multilingual education conveyed through metaphors are still nascent (Barros et al., 2021; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to delve into one of the key participants in multilingual educational contexts – teachers – and to explore their beliefs and perspectives on the unique characteristics of such settings. Specifically, this study seeks to investigate how teachers metaphorically conceptualise multilingual education, capturing their perceptions of its complex and multifaceted nature. Through metaphor analysis, the study aims to uncover underlying insights into how teachers view the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities within multilingual classrooms. By analyzing these metaphorical representations, the study intends to provide a deeper understanding of multilingual education, which could inform educational reforms and support teacher educators and policymakers in better addressing the needs and intricacies of multilingual education contexts.

Employing metaphors to understand the underlying characteristics of multilingual education, the significance of this study is twofold. The first significance of this study lies in its unique methodological approach – metaphor analysis – that has not been employed extensively in analyzing multilingual education characteristics and can unveil hidden aspects of the concept under study. Second, despite being a global issue, the majority of research on multilingualism has been conducted within English-speaking nations (Borg, 2015; Capone & Petrillo, 2020; Eisenbach, 2012). However, this particular study was carried out in Türkiye, which is emerging as a multilingual context because of its geopolitical situation (Arsal, 2019), presenting a significant context for examining multilingualism due to its under-investigated nature.

Literature review

Multilingualism has gained significant attention in recent years, driven by its rapid expansion and inherent complexity, which, as Gabryś-Barker (2017, p. 77) notes, 'calls for

multidisciplinary approaches'. Among these approaches, metaphor analysis has emerged as a valuable tool for exploring diverse perspectives, including those of teachers and their beliefs. Beliefs, defined as 'individual judgments about the truth and falsity of a proposition' (Pajares, 1992, p. 316), play a pivotal role in shaping actions and decision-making processes, particularly in educational settings. The exploration of teacher beliefs has spanned over half a century, yet their dynamic and context-dependent nature necessitates ongoing inquiry from diverse perspectives. In multilingual education, as previously argued, understanding teacher beliefs is increasingly crucial, given the heightened prominence of multilingualism in today's interconnected world (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). While some studies position monolingualism as a 'source of pride' (Duchêne & Heller, 2012, p. 6) tied to national identity, others highlight the cognitive and social advantages of multilingualism for both children and adults (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). These contradictions underscore the complexity of teacher beliefs about multilingual education and the need for innovative approaches to explore them. Notably, metaphor analysis offers a powerful lens to uncover implicit beliefs and emotional underpinnings that traditional methods often overlook. Despite its potential, research on how teachers conceptualise multilingualism through metaphors remains scarce (MacArthur & Alejo-González, 2024), leaving a significant gap in our understanding of this vital area.

The power of metaphors

Understanding abstract and complex concepts often requires the use of metaphors, which act as bridges between tangible experiences and intangible ideas. In educational research, metaphors have proven invaluable for revealing the hidden dimensions of underexplored topics (Kamali et al., 2024; Schmitt, 2005). They are not merely rhetorical devices but powerful cognitive and linguistic tools that shape how we perceive, understand, and interact with the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). In language learning and teaching, metaphors encapsulate intricate ideas, cultural perceptions, and pedagogical practices (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000), offering a unique window into both explicit beliefs and implicit assumptions. When applied to multilingualism, metaphors illuminate how this concept is conceptualised, understood, and enacted in educational contexts. They provide insights into the implicit biases and cultural ideologies that influence attitudes towards multilingual education, as well as the broader social and cognitive frameworks that guide teachers' practices. Sfarid (1998) aptly describes metaphors as 'the most primitive, most elusive, and yet most amazingly informative objects of analysis' (p. 4). They allow our innate cognitive processes – such as categorisation, analogy, and sense-making – to shape scientific and pedagogical concepts, while simultaneously refining those instincts through formal inquiry. Thus, analyzing metaphors is not only a way to understand beliefs but also a method for unravelling the complex interplay between cognition, culture, and pedagogy in multilingual educational discourse.

The first exploitation of metaphors in education has its roots in Plato's education, where he used the analogy of a 'cave' to illustrate the transformative power of education. This is because metaphors vividly portray the journey from ignorance to enlightenment. Centuries later, the use of metaphors in education was discussed by scholars such as Schön (1979), who introduced the concept of generative metaphor; Labbo (1996), who

conceptualised semiotic analysis; and Oxford et al. (1998), who provided language teaching metaphors. Freire (1996) was one of the educational philosophers who employed metaphors in arguing his concepts. 'Banking education', 'necrophily' and 'biophily' were among the groundbreaking metaphors he used to transform the concept of education. Nearly two decades later, Gabryś-Barker (2017) emphasised the significance of employing metaphors in multilingual education research, highlighting their value in providing deeper insights into multilingualism by serving as frameworks for understanding abstract concepts.

Metaphors can help us 'find a salient, memorable label for an otherwise difficult concept; clarify a concept which is diffuse, abstract, or generally complex; extend thought; or locate problems with a particular conceptualisation and then bring about some sort of change' (Low, 2008, p. 213). Generative metaphor (Schön, 1979) as a narrative method was inspired by the last reason. This method lets the patient openly discuss their life and challenges in counseling sessions and requires the therapist to listen for pivotal moments or significant phrases attentively. Once these key elements are recognised, they can be highlighted and serve as the foundation for subsequent actions or interventions. The idea in generative metaphor is that 'if planners listened to the 'stories' told by people affected by a situation, these people would spontaneously indicate, by their use of metaphor, what was upper most in their minds and the way they conceptualised their problem(s)' (Low, 2008, p. 213).

Therefore, this metaphor analysis technique, i.e. generative metaphor, established a solid foundation for our work where we would like to explore teachers' (who have the experience of working in multilingual educational settings) underlying layers of thoughts on a sociocultural experience, i.e. multilingual education. By exploring the metaphors of the teachers, we can better understand their underlying perspectives and beliefs regarding multilingual education.

Multilingual education characteristics

The surge in multilingualism (Aronin & Singleton, 2008) in recent times can be attributed to several factors. Individuals across various regions are embracing multilingualism irrespective of their social, cultural, and political backgrounds (Baker, 2017; Busch, 2011; Calafato, 2021). There are different characteristics attributed to multilingual educational settings. First, studies, to date, have argued that linguistic diversity encouraged in multilingual settings empowers learners to engage with diverse communities and access a broader array of opportunities (Yanaprasart & Lüdi, 2018). This linguistic diversity encourages cultural awareness per se. These contexts not only teach languages but also expose learners to the rich concept of cultures associated with each language, promoting tolerance, understanding, and global citizenship (Mairi et al., 2023; Tannenbaum & Shohamy, 2023). Moreover, multilingual education is recognised for providing cognitive benefits to participants, among which one can call fostering problem-solving skills (Maillat & Serra, 2009), creativity (Fürst & Grin, 2018), acculturation (An et al., 2022), identity (Kamali & Nazari, 2023), agency (Nazari & Kamali, 2024), and flexibility (Greve et al., 2021). Socio-emotional features are the other characteristics investigated in multilingual educational contexts. Empathy is one of those characteristics that has been found to have been positively influenced by multilingualism (Dewaele, 2016). Another characteristic is a

sense of belonging, which is believed to have been affected by multilingual contexts (de Jong et al., 2023). Among other fundamental characteristics of multilingual education, one can call equity and access, ensuring that all students, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds, have equal opportunities to succeed academically (Buchs & Maradan, 2021). By providing instruction in multiple languages and accommodating diverse learning styles, multilingual education promotes inclusive practices and addresses the needs of linguistically diverse learner populations.

All in all, although the literature on multilingualism and its characteristics seems rich, this study tries to add to the body of related literature by investigating it through teachers' metaphors which is an underutilised method for exploring teachers' beliefs and perspectives. It also considers the emerging multilingual context of Türkiye, which is an under-researched setting for multilingualism. Therefore, the research questions are proposed as follows:

1. What are teachers' beliefs and perspectives about multilingual education characteristics in the emerging multilingual educational context of Türkiye?
2. How are they represented in teachers' metaphors?

Method

Context and participants

The context of the present study was a university language school in Istanbul, Türkiye. It was a multilingual educational setting with students from almost 20 countries such as Türkiye, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, Turkistan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, and teachers who came from 33 different nationalities, such as Türkiye, the US, the UK, Iran, Syria, the Netherlands, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Russia.

The first phase of this study, i.e. metaphor elicitation, was conducted with 67 language teachers who taught Arabic, Turkish, and English as a foreign language in which they completed a statement about teaching multilingual classes. 67 replies (58 in English and 9 in Turkish) were received from teachers with different nationalities: 29 Iranian (almost 43%), 26 Turkish (almost 39%), 4 Syrian (almost 6%), 3 Algerian (almost 4.5%), 1 Bosnian (almost 1.5%), 1 Indian (almost 1.5%), 1 Kashmiri (almost 1.5%), 1 Iraqi (almost 1.5%), and 1 Russian (almost 1.5%). The Turkish metaphors were translated by the second researcher, a native Turk. The participants in the metaphor elicitation phase were all bilingual or multilingual, their age range was between 21 and 55 and they had from one to 24 years of teaching experience (Teaching experience was not treated as a variable in our study; instead, we aimed to include a diverse range of experience levels among participants). They taught English (EAP), Turkish, and Arabic to multilingual students. Out of a total of 67 metaphors, 37 were utilised effectively. The remaining metaphors were excluded due to misunderstandings regarding what constitutes a metaphor (e.g. 'Teaching in a multilingual classroom is a great experience'; T22, Metaphor) or because they did not fit into any specific category (e.g. happiness).

In the second phase, 12 teachers (4 male and 8 female), two participants from each emerged metaphorical theme (see the Findings section), participated in a semi-structured interview in which they further explained and clarified their metaphors about teaching in

multilingual classes. The participants in the semi-structured interview phase were also multilingual (see Table 1).

Data collection

Data collection in this study had two phases. In the first phase – metaphor elicitation - snowball sampling was employed. A Google form link was shared with the teachers in the school of languages where both researchers worked in which the teachers were asked to complete this sentence: ‘Teaching multilingual classes is like ... because ...’. The participants were also asked to share the links with any teacher they knew.

In the second phase, 12 teachers – two representatives from each emerged theme of the metaphors (see the Findings section) – were invited to the interviews in which they answered some questions about their metaphors and further explained the reasons for choosing them, for example, ‘What do you mean by using ... as a metaphor for teaching in multilingual classrooms?’ or ‘what aspects of multilingual education were you thinking about?’. Nine attended the interviews face-to-face and three attended online through the Zoom platform. The interviews were conducted in English and ranged from approximately 25–45 minutes. All of them were recorded using the recording option on the Zoom application in online interviews, and the first researcher’s mobile phone was used for face-to-face interviews.

The emerging data from metaphor analysis and semi-structured interviews could work hand in hand to increase our understanding of multilingual education characteristics. By encouraging teachers to share their metaphors, we aimed to uncover their hidden or subconscious beliefs and attitudes about multilingual classrooms. This process involved prompting them to clarify their symbolic language during the interviews, allowing us to gain in-depth insights from their perspectives. For instance, one teacher described multilingual classes as an ‘amusement park’, a metaphor that initially seemed far-fetched and difficult to grasp. However, during the interview, the participant elaborated on this idea, discussing how the rules in such an environment can lead to conflicts, which helped clarify the metaphor’s meaning (see the Findings section).

To meet ethical considerations, some steps were taken. First, all the participating teachers in the metaphor elicitation phase agreed to participate in the study by filling out the Google forms since the Google forms contained the consent sentence ‘By filling out this

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants in the interview.

Teacher	Gender and age	Age	Education	Years of teaching	Language
1	Female	42	M.A. (TEFL)	14	Persian, Turkish, English
2	Female	30	Phd (Sociolinguistics)	6	French, Arabic, English
3	Male	28	M.A. (Management)	7	Ordu, English, Turkish
4	Female	51	Phd (TEFL)	22	Persian, Turkish, English
5	Female	40	B.A. English Literature	15	Bosnian, English
6	Male	34	M.A. (ELT)	13	Turkish, English
7	Female	35	M.A. (Teaching Turkish)	12	Turkish, English
8	Female	34	B.A. (English Literature)	11	French, Arabic, English
9	Male	37	B.A. (English Literature)	11	Arabic, Turkish, English
10	Female	30	M.A. (Turkish Studies)	1	Arabic, Turkish, English
11	Male	32	M.A. (Applied Linguistics)	5	Dutch, English
12	Female	39	M.A. (Linguistics)	15	Russian, English

form, I agree to participate in this study, understanding the purpose and procedures involved'. In the interview section, all 12 participating teachers were informed about the advantages of the study and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were assured that their identities and information collected for the study would be kept confidential and that pseudonyms would be used in the study report. The aims and procedures of this study were also explained and approved by the officials of the language school. Then, the participating teachers filled out a consent form by which they agreed to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data of this study went through two separate phases. In the first phase, the collected data on metaphor analysis was analyzed based on systematic metaphor analysis in four stages (see Schmitt, 2005). The first two stages in this process are preparatory, and the other two are post-analysis – in the words of Schmitt (2005). Firstly, the researchers identified the target area for the metaphors, which is multilingual education, in this study. Secondly, they explored various background metaphors to help shape the statement. This process led to the creation of the statement: 'Teaching multilingual classes is like ... because ...'. Thirdly, the researchers analyzed the concepts within the metaphor to identify potential subthemes. Finally, they reviewed individual occurrences of metaphorical concepts to synthesise key themes. This process allowed them to deepen their understanding of the connections between these metaphors. For example, the concept of the job was reflected in several metaphors, leading to the emergence of a 'career theme' from these recurring codes.

In the second phase, a semi-structured interview, the data from the interviews were transcribed, codified, and analyzed based on the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study employed inductive thematic analysis because interview data was analyzed 'without trying to fit it into a preexisting coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Initially, the first researcher transcribed the data, and both researchers familiarised themselves with the material. Codes were then generated for concepts related to multilingual education, aiming to ensure result reliability and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following this, researchers collaboratively reviewed codes and identified potential themes, with the first researcher developing a thematic map. Both researchers subsequently refined and named the themes and subthemes. For example, the 'Trip' theme was renamed as 'Travel' since it covers a wider range of meanings. Ultimately, the first researcher created the final thematic map detailing the multilingual education metaphorical representation. Additionally, the Interviewee Transcript Review (ITR) method (Rowlands, 2021) was employed, where participants reviewed the findings section to validate the interpretations and translations.

Researchers' positionality cannot be taken for granted and 'data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). The researchers' familiarity with the research setting because of working in the context of Türkiye could help analyze the emerging result. While the first researcher was Iranian and worked for almost a year in the Turkish setting, the second researcher was a Turkish citizen who was born and raised in Türkiye. They were both working in a university-based language school

from which the participants were selected. The researchers, who were also the school's manager and professional development coordinator, recognised that their top-down relationship with the participants could influence their responses. To help minimise any tension during the interviews, data collection was conducted by the first researcher, who shares almost the same hierarchical level as the participating teachers.

Findings

The systematic analysis of 67 metaphors received from the participating teachers in this study revealed six themes, namely travel, residence, edibles, art and entertainment, artifacts, and career which will be investigated in turn.

Travel theme

Eight sub-themes emerged in this theme to describe multilingual classes. One of the examples of this theme is that 'Teaching in multilingual classes is like being a tour guide in an organised tour because you interact and guide people with different ideas, cultures, and backgrounds' (T2, metaphor). In an interview with the teacher who articulated this metaphor, different layers of this metaphor were argued. First, T2 expressed that.

Extract 1

... to me, students are like tourists who come from different cultures and countries and the tour guide or the teacher of the classroom helps them to see beautiful sceneries and landmarks. They all come to enjoy their journey and the one who can help them discover exciting parts of their destination is the tour guide. The same as a teacher who can help tourists from different places to enjoy the trip all together (T2, Interview).

This metaphor underscores the teacher's role as a guide in navigating a multicultural learning experience, emphasising the importance of inclusivity and exploration. However, this view also implicitly places the teacher in a dominant position as the sole authority, which might limit students' agency and their potential to actively shape the learning environment while in multilingual education, students bring unique linguistic and cultural resources that can enhance peer-to-peer learning and encourage a more collaborative approach.

In addition to the tour guide metaphor, other subthemes emerged within the travel theme, including 'being in many places of the world at once', 'taking an international trip', 'being in an international airport', 'exotic tourism', 'going out with a mixed group of friends', and 'a fun journey'. Each of these metaphors evokes the concept of travel by illustrating the diverse experiences and perspectives encountered in a multilingual classroom. For instance, 'being in many places of the world at once' reflects the idea that students bring their unique cultural backgrounds into the classroom, allowing everyone to experience a microcosm of global perspectives. Similarly, 'taking an international trip' symbolises the journey of learning a new language, where students navigate unfamiliar territories of vocabulary and grammar, akin to exploring new destinations. The metaphor of 'being in an international airport' suggests a bustling hub of activity and interaction, where individuals from various cultures converge, fostering a vibrant

exchange of ideas. 'Exotic tourism' evokes the excitement of discovering the unfamiliar, highlighting the richness of engaging with different worldviews. Additionally, 'going out with a mixed group of friends' emphasises the importance of collaboration and camaraderie among students from diverse backgrounds. Finally, the notion of 'a fun journey' encapsulates the overall experience of learning in such an environment, suggesting that while challenges may arise, the adventure of exploring languages and cultures together is both enjoyable and enriching. Collectively, these metaphors paint a vivid picture of the multilingual classroom as a dynamic and transformative space where learning becomes an exciting voyage of discovery.

Residence theme

Three teachers metaphorized teaching in multilingual classrooms as living in cosmopolitan cities, which are categorised under the residence theme. One of the teachers used the global village metaphor to describe the multilingual classrooms, as illustrated in the following extract.

Extract 2

Teaching in a multilingual classroom is like living in the 'global village' in the real sense because it brings different cultures together. A language brings with it a worldview of that very civilisation, so when different languages interact it means a civilizational confluence (T3, metaphor).

This metaphor underscored the richness of multilingual classrooms, where diverse languages and cultures converge, fostering a microcosmic 'global village'. Teaching in such an environment offers students the unique opportunity to engage in a cultural and intellectual exchange that goes beyond language learning, allowing them to explore and understand different worldviews and values. However, this perspective also challenges teachers to move beyond surface-level cultural appreciation, requiring them to cultivate deep intercultural competence and inclusivity. In the interview, T3 explaining the concept of the global village indicated that 'multilingual classrooms are rich in culture and civilisation' (T3, Interview). The teacher also referred to the culture by discussing the cultural elements of the civilisation in his interview as follows:

Extract 3

I believe any civilisation at first should invest in culture. It is almost impossible to find a civilisation that survived without having a humane culture such as empathy, sympathy, kindness, and something like these. So, I think this is what is under the skin of any surviving civilisation (T3, interview).

As the extract indicated, the historical view of various features and characteristics of a civilisation that helped it survive could inform the present and future orientations of the very civilisation and others in touch with it. In the context of multilingual education, this idea challenges educators to cultivate a classroom culture rooted in respect and empathy, encouraging students to connect across cultural divides.

The other two subthemes of the current theme, i.e. the residence theme, are 'studying abroad' and 'a real society with lots of emigrants', both of which employ living in a cosmopolitan city as a metaphorical concept. These metaphors highlight the vibrant and dynamic nature of a multilingual classroom, likening it to an urban environment rich

with diverse cultures. 'Studying abroad' suggests that the classroom experience allows students to immerse themselves in new perspectives, similar to learning in a foreign country. Meanwhile, 'a real society with lots of emigrants' reflects the complexities of modern migration and cultural exchange, emphasising the unique contributions each student brings to the classroom. Together, these metaphors underscore the importance of fostering an inclusive environment where collaboration and cultural understanding thrive, mirroring the interactions found in a cosmopolitan city.

Edibles theme

Food has always been a necessity for human life. Besides it has always been a part of human culture. Interestingly, five teachers raised this point and believed that teaching multilingual classrooms is like having specific types of food. Extract 4 illustrates one of these metaphors.

Extract 4

Teaching in a multilingual classroom is like offering local traditional food belonging to a specific culture to a number of guests from different backgrounds, the speed of accepting and digesting this food depends on how close their individual culture [is] to the culture of the host. It is the host's responsibility to smartly use as many starters and appetizers as possible to get them encouraged to taste it. The success of the host relies on how fast reluctant guests would be motivated to eat; in the end, they will eat, though, as they need the food offered to survive (T6, metaphor).

Extract 4 lucidly implies the importance of acculturation in multilingual contexts when the teacher asserts that 'the speed of accepting and digesting this food depends on how close their individual culture [is] to the culture of the host' (T6, interview). That is for learners to be integrated into the mini-society of the classroom from learners with different backgrounds and internalise (digest) various cultural peculiarities. As T6 reiterated in the interview, 'The success of a multilingual classroom teacher is in the motivation which is built in learners to learn the new culture and language like when the guests are encouraged to taste the food' (T6, interview). This highlighted the teacher's role in making culturally specific knowledge accessible to students from diverse backgrounds by carefully introducing and easing them into new material. Like a host serving traditional food, a teacher in a multilingual classroom must thoughtfully 'prepare' students using engaging and relatable 'appetizers' – activities, concepts, or examples that bridge cultural gaps – to encourage exploration and acceptance of unfamiliar ideas. However, while this approach emphasises the teacher's responsibility to facilitate acceptance, it also suggests an asymmetry where students are positioned primarily as passive recipients rather than active participants who bring their own 'cultural dishes' to the table.

The other four subthemes include 'adding favourite spices to food', 'eating a pomegranate', 'a fruit salad', and 'eating pie', which utilise food as a metaphorical concept to describe multilingual classrooms. These metaphors emphasise diversity, variety, and richness, suggesting that, much like a well-prepared dish, a multilingual classroom thrives on the unique contributions of each student. 'Adding favourite spices to food' illustrates how individual perspectives enhance the overall flavour of the learning experience, highlighting the importance of each student's voice in creating a vibrant classroom environment. 'Eating a pomegranate' symbolises the abundance of knowledge and cultural insights

that students bring, as this fruit is known for its many seeds, representing the multitude of backgrounds present in the classroom. Meanwhile, 'a fruit salad' showcases the beauty of combining different elements, demonstrating how varied experiences can create a harmonious and enjoyable learning experience. Finally, 'eating pie' conveys the idea of sharing and collaboration, suggesting that students come together to create something greater than the sum of its parts. Together, these metaphors reinforce the notion that multilingual education is not only about acquiring language skills but also about celebrating and enjoying the richness that diversity brings to the learning journey.

Art and entertainment theme

The metaphors of art and entertainment comprised the next group of metaphors in the present study. Six teachers considered teaching in multilingual classes as entertaining and artistic. One of the teachers believed the multilingual class was like an amusement park. Adopting this metaphor, the teacher discussed interesting elements of these classes (Extract 5).

Extract 5

Teaching in multilingual classes is like being in an amusement park because it is very enjoyable and pleasant as I get the chance to see different minds and cultures, and how those differences sometimes fit and sometimes clash with each other (T7, metaphor).

T7, in the interview, stated that 'how students' and teacher's minds interact is really amazing in multilingual classrooms. Exactly like an amusement park where different tools and equipment can make you enjoy different levels of adrenalin and sometimes be excited, sometimes calm, etc'. (T7, interview). T7 referred to the conflicts that may happen in an amusement park by exemplifying that 'when there is no specific rule for standing in a queue to use equipment, it can lead to serious conflict' (T7, interview). It emphasizes the need for teachers to not only celebrate cultural differences but also to foster skills in conflict resolution and mutual understanding, turning moments of clash into valuable learning opportunities that deepen intercultural empathy and cooperation.

The other metaphors used by the teachers categorised under this group are 'a wonderful party', 'a Rubik's cube', 'a football match', 'mosaic art', and 'dancing'. These metaphors capture the artistic and entertaining essence of multilingual classrooms, highlighting that, despite the inherent challenges, teaching in these environments can be a joyful and dynamic experience. 'A wonderful party' suggests a lively atmosphere where diverse voices come together to celebrate learning, emphasising the collaborative and engaging nature of the classroom. The metaphor of 'a Rubik's cube' illustrates the complexity of navigating multiple languages and cultures while also highlighting the satisfaction that comes from solving intricate problems collaboratively. Similarly, 'a football match' evokes the excitement of teamwork and strategy, suggesting that teachers and students work together to achieve common goals in the classroom. 'Mosaic art' symbolises the beauty of integrating different cultural pieces to create a cohesive whole, showcasing how each student's unique background contributes to the overall learning experience. Lastly, 'dancing' reflects the rhythm and fluidity of interactions in a multilingual setting, emphasising the creativity and adaptability required to engage with diverse perspectives. Together, these metaphors

reinforce the idea that multilingual education is not only a complex endeavour but also an enriching and enjoyable journey full of creativity and collaboration.

Artifact theme

One of eight teachers who metaphorized multilingual classrooms as an artifact described them as a train and its wagons. This metaphor is worth analyzing because it indicates an underlying characteristic of multilingual classrooms (Extract 6).

Extract 6

Teaching in a multilingual classroom is like the wagons of a train. Each unit connected to the train performs a different function. Some wagons are used to carry passengers, while others are responsible for carrying cargo. It is the same with students. While some students come to learn a language, some students prefer to learn a language to be involved in business life The teacher is the one who guides the students and leads them along the way. When the locomotive, which is the main part of the train, becomes dysfunctional, the wagons have no purpose. Wherever the train wants to stop, it is the last stop for the wagons (T9, metaphor).

In this metaphor, T9 emphasised the role of the teacher in multilingual classes by metaphorizing it as a locomotive of a train, without which the train becomes dysfunctional. In the interview, the teacher expressed, 'Just like wagons are part of a train, students are integral parts of the educational system. Each wagon or student carries its own unique characteristics ... they come from diverse backgrounds ... ' (T9, interview). He believed that 'their connection with one another and their connection to the locomotive' (T9, interview) comprise the internal bond and intercultural communication in multilingual classrooms, which leads to the success of this type of education. Just as the train's efficiency depends on a functional locomotive to guide its journey, the success of a multilingual classroom relies on the teacher's ability to understand and address the varied motivations of their students, whether for language acquisition, business engagement, or cultural exploration. However, the metaphor also raises critical questions about dependency and agency; if the teacher (the locomotive) falters, the entire learning process can be disrupted, leaving students without direction or purpose. This highlights the importance of fostering student autonomy and resilience, ensuring that learners feel empowered to pursue their individual paths, even if the teacher faces challenges.

Another interesting metaphor elicited in this theme was the metaphor of 'white light going through a prism'. Look at extract 7.

Extract 7

Teaching in a multilingual classroom is like a white light going through a prism. The instructor thinks his idea (the white light) will travel in a direct, straight line. In fact, once his utterance touches the listeners' ears, different levels of meaning shifts occur based on the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students. It gives birth [to] new meanings and colors at their receivers' end. Multilingual people tend to think of terminology in a mixed way across languages, and terms have different connotations in different languages, so the classroom would actually be talking about different things at the same time. No white light can remain white (T10, metaphor).

This interesting metaphor vivifies how the teacher sees teaching in multilingual classrooms as a ground for different interpretations. In clarifying her metaphor in the interview, the teacher held the view that 'The white light, I think, represented the teacher's

instruction. As it passes through the prism of the multilingual classroom, each student with their unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds, interprets and understands the instruction differently' (T10, interview). She continued, 'These new colors symbolise how the multilingual dynamics within the classroom impact teaching approaches, curriculum development, and everything in education' (T10, interview). She posited that 'diverse student perspectives shape classroom dynamics' (T10, interview), and attributed the significance of losing the color of light to sociocultural influence. This metaphor powerfully illustrates the complexities of communication in a multilingual classroom, where the teacher's intended message (the white light) is refracted through the diverse cultural and linguistic lenses of the students, resulting in varied interpretations and meanings. That is, just as a prism transforms light into a spectrum of colors, the interactions among students' backgrounds shape and alter the original ideas conveyed by the instructor, often leading to a rich but chaotic exchange of perspectives. However, while this metaphor emphasises the dynamic nature of meaning-making, it also highlights the potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding when students interpret terminology through their unique cultural filters. This underscores the importance of teachers being aware of these differences and actively facilitating discussions that encourage students to share their interpretations and clarify meanings, fostering an environment where diverse viewpoints are acknowledged and integrated into the learning process. The distinctive feature of this metaphor is in positioning learners as agentive individuals, emphasising their active role in interpreting and reshaping the teacher's message. Unlike other metaphors that may depict students primarily as passive recipients of knowledge, the prism metaphor acknowledges that each student, influenced by their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, contributes to the creation of new meanings and insights. This perspective encourages a view of learners as dynamic participants in the educational process, capable of engaging critically with content and transforming it through their unique experiences.

The other six subthemes include various artifacts as metaphorical descriptions of multilingual classrooms: 'a crayon box', 'a walking dictionary', 'holding different baskets and carrying them at the same time', 'an elixir', 'wagons of a train', and 'artificial intelligence'. These metaphors illustrate the tangible and functional aspects of a multilingual educational environment, emphasising the diverse tools and resources that facilitate language learning. The metaphor of 'a crayon box' signifies the multitude of colors — or languages and cultures — that students bring to the classroom, suggesting that each one adds depth and vibrancy to the overall learning experience. 'A walking dictionary' highlights the idea that students serve as living resources for one another, drawing on their linguistic knowledge to support communication and understanding. The concept of 'holding different baskets and carrying them at the same time' reflects the ability of students to manage multiple languages and cultural experiences simultaneously, symbolising their capacity to navigate a complex learning landscape. 'An elixir' suggests that the blend of diverse languages and cultures has the potential to create transformative learning experiences, enriching students' educational journeys. The metaphor of 'wagons of a train' conveys the idea of interconnectedness, with each student contributing their unique strengths to the collective learning experience. Finally, 'artificial intelligence' points to the evolving role of technology in multilingual education, highlighting the potential for digital tools to enhance language learning and bridge communication

gaps. Collectively, these metaphors underscore the notion that multilingual classrooms are rich with resources and artifacts that foster collaboration, creativity, and a deeper understanding of diverse languages and cultures.

Career theme

Seven teachers metaphorized teaching in multilingual classrooms as doing other jobs that are categorised under the career theme. One of the teachers used the conductor metaphor to describe teaching in multilingual classrooms. He stated, 'Teaching in a multilingual classroom is like being a conductor because there are many different sounds which are even better if they provide harmony' (T11, metaphor). In the interview, the teacher claimed that 'musicians who work in the orchestra' (T11, interview) were the learners of the class who try to make a harmonious sound by 'cooperating with their musical instruments' (T11, interview) and the 'leaders themselves' (T11, interview) (teachers) should lead this group of individuals to optimise the potential of these individuals. This metaphor highlights the teacher's crucial role in creating a harmonious learning environment where diverse voices and backgrounds contribute to a richer educational experience. However, it also raises important considerations about the challenges of achieving this harmony. Like a conductor who must navigate the complexities of different instruments and their unique qualities, educators in multilingual classrooms must be adept at recognising and addressing the varying needs, strengths, and cultural contexts of their students. The metaphor suggests that while harmony is desirable, it requires intentional effort to ensure that no voice is marginalised or drowned out. Additionally, the concept of harmony may imply a need for conformity, which could inadvertently overlook the value of dissonance – moments of tension that can spark critical thinking and deeper understanding.

The other metaphors used by the teachers categorised under this group include being 'a surgeon', 'an airport police', 'a juggler', 'a gardener', 'an entertainer', and 'a dance teacher'. These metaphors frame teaching in multilingual classrooms as a profession requiring specialised skills and expertise, akin to other skilled occupations. The metaphor of 'a surgeon' highlights the precision and care necessary in addressing the diverse needs of students, emphasising the importance of tailoring instruction to foster individual growth and understanding. Similarly, 'an airport police' suggests the role of a teacher in maintaining order and ensuring safety in a bustling environment, reflecting the necessity of managing the complexities of multilingual interactions. The image of 'a juggler' underscores the need for adaptability and multitasking as teachers navigate various languages, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles simultaneously. 'A gardener' conveys the nurturing aspect of teaching, emphasising the importance of cultivating a supportive environment where students can thrive and grow in their language abilities. 'An entertainer' points to the need for creativity and engagement in delivering lessons, suggesting that teachers must captivate their students' attention to facilitate effective learning. Finally, 'a dance teacher' reflects the collaborative and dynamic nature of multilingual classrooms, where coordination and rhythm are essential for fostering meaningful interactions among students. Together, these metaphors underscore the idea that teaching in multilingual settings is a multifaceted profession that demands a range of skills, creativity, and expertise to effectively support diverse learners.

Discussion

The findings of this study, derived from teachers' metaphors grouped into six themes, including travel, residence, edibles, art and entertainment, artifacts, and career, highlight hidden perspectives on multilingual education within Türkiye's emerging multilingual context. Previous studies on multilingual education's unique characteristics are abundant (e.g. Ball & Smith, 2023; Füst & Grin, 2018; Greve et al., 2021; Maillat & Serra, 2009); yet, the present study employed a 'new approach to multilingual research' (Gabryś-Barker, 2017, p. 77) in unveiling hidden aspects of this type of education by exploring it in metaphors generated by teachers that could add to the current body of literature on multilingualism. The findings of the present study, categorised into six metaphorical themes, showed the hidden characteristics of multilingual education.

The first theme of metaphors, called travel, emphasises the dynamic and evolving role of teachers in multilingual classrooms. By framing teachers' roles through the lens of this metaphorical theme, the findings shed light on their substantial contributions to the success of multilingual education. This is in line with studies such as Wagner (2021), who posited teacher language can scaffold (Tajeddin & Kamali, 2020) multilingual learners' language, and Haukås (2016), who believes in the 'important role of the language teacher in promoting learners' multilingualism' (p. 2). Nonetheless, this study added to this line of research by investigating it in an under-researched multilingual context of Türkiye, considering the vitality of teacher expertise regardless of students' L1 background. That is, multilingual classroom teachers can help all learners, regardless of their L1.

The residence metaphor, as the second emerging theme, used by the teachers and the interview preceding unveiled that developing entities are impacted by different cultures, worldviews, and civilisations working with one another to indirectly affect their past, present, and future. This is in line with other studies where individuals employ their ideas and backgrounds to build their future which indirectly influences the current emotions and experiences of participants in multilingual settings; that is, multilingual education can shape and reshape individuals' worldviews (e.g. Clarke-Habibi, 2005; Shaw, 2023; Valk & Tosun, 2016).

The third theme, edibles, implies the concept of acculturation, emphasising the role of cultural affinity as a key factor in fostering the acculturation process within multilingual educational contexts. By framing acculturation through this metaphor, the findings highlight how cultural affinity can facilitate the process, a characteristic that enhances the dynamics of multilingual classrooms. In line with the metaphorical analysis of An et al. (2022) who argued that acculturation is facilitated in multilingual classrooms even for the learners of the host country, the findings of this study indicated that affinity of the cultures might be a distinctive feature to affect the acculturation process.

The fourth theme, art and entertainment, highlights the complex relationship between identity conflict and multilingual education. While the excitement in this type of education tends to be heightened due to the diverse cultures and languages learners are exposed to, identity conflicts also emerge as a significant challenge. The study findings disclosed the way learners seek to adapt the multilingual contexts to their own expectations to avoid conflicts. This aligns closely with the concept of 'local practice', which views language as 'temporally, spatially and socially situated' (Sharples, 2017, p. 180).

The fifth theme, the theme of the artifact, where multilingual education is metaphorized as a crayon box, wagons of a train, a prism, and the like, highlights the concept of intercultural communication within the interactional architecture of the classroom (Tajeddin & Kamali, 2023). Multilingual educational contexts are rich in this form of communication; therefore, they need 'vital skills such as shared meaning, intercultural relationship building, and identity development' (Mahon & Cushner, 2020, p. 424). This study agrees with Mahon and Cushner (2020) that teachers of multilingual classes must be intercultural leaders and skilled intercultural communicators. The metaphor of prism also brings the concept of students' agency into the spotlight, which is mostly overlooked in other metaphors. It suggests that multilingual education can empower students in such contexts by increasing their agency (Gimenez, 2020). However, we also identified contrasting metaphors that portray a more authoritative role for teachers, positioning students as passive recipients of knowledge, which shows there are other factors involved in describing multilingual contexts.

The final theme that emerged in this study, career, emphasises the complex and multifaceted role of teachers in multilingual classrooms. Participants metaphorized teaching in these settings as engaging in various jobs, such as gardening, conducting an orchestra, and other similar roles, reflecting the dynamic and adaptive nature of the profession. The common theme in all these metaphors is that the teachers of these classrooms need some specific knowledge tailored to this type of context. Therefore, this study goes hand in hand with Conteh et al. (2014) that teachers need special education for multilingual settings teaching.

It is noteworthy that diversity, identity, and agency, as important aspects of multilingualism (Gimenez, 2020; Kamali & Nazari, 2023; Nazari & Kamali, 2024; Yanaprasart & Lüdi, 2018), are vivid in these metaphors where experiencing new entities (such as cities, food, colors, jobs, and specifically in the metaphor of prism) is expressed by the participating teachers. Given Vygotsky's (1962) postulation that cognitive processes are deeply intertwined with the social and cultural milieu in which individuals are situated, this study found these factors to be vitally important in multilingual education.

Conclusions and Implications

The present study used systematic metaphor analysis and inductive thematic analysis to analyze metaphors and semi-structured interviews, respectively. Employing these analyzing tools, this study explored the unique characteristics of multilingual classes from teachers' perspectives, among which agency stands out. Six themes were extracted from metaphor analysis all of which suggested different viewpoints about multilingual education (see Table 2).

The findings of the present study suggest a need to design and implement tailored teacher education and professional development programmes addressing multilingual education characteristics. This type of education should consider the peculiarities of this specific setting, where diversity leads to varied interpretations of the same educational concept among different stakeholders in the multilingual milieu. This education should also reflect the concept of agency, as individuals bring their unique perspectives – much like white light passing through a prism, revealing a spectrum of colors. Explicit training in metaphor might also help multilingual teachers cope with the challenges

Table 2. Metaphor analysis extracted themes.

Theme	Subthemes
Travel	1. Travelling around the world 2. Being a tour guide 3. Being in many places of the world at once 4. Taking an international trip 5. Being in an international airport 6. Exotic tourism 7. Going out with a mixed group of friends 8. A fun journey
Residence	1. Studying abroad 2. Living in the 'global village' 3. A real society with lots of emigrants
Edibles	1. Offering local traditional food 2. Adding favourite spices to food 3. Eating a pomegranate 4. A fruit salad 5. Eating pie
Art and Entertainment	1. An amusement park 2. A wonderful party 3. A Rubik's cube 4. A football match 5. Mosaic art 6. Dancing
Artifact	1. A crayon box 2. A walking dictionary 3. Holding different baskets and carrying them at the same time 4. An elixir 5. Wagons of a train 6. Artificial intelligence 7. A double-edged sword 8. A prism
Career	1. Being a surgeon 2. Being an airport police 3. Being a juggler 4. Being a gardener 5. Being an entertainer 6. Being a conductor 7. Being a dance teacher

and misunderstandings of multilingual education. The findings also call for a reform in policy-making, curriculum planning, and in-class practice for multilingual education by redefining the concepts of diversity and agency for multilingual education settings. Future studies can be conducted with a larger number of participants or those selected from diverse contexts. They can also replicate the present study in other multilingual contexts and academic settings.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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