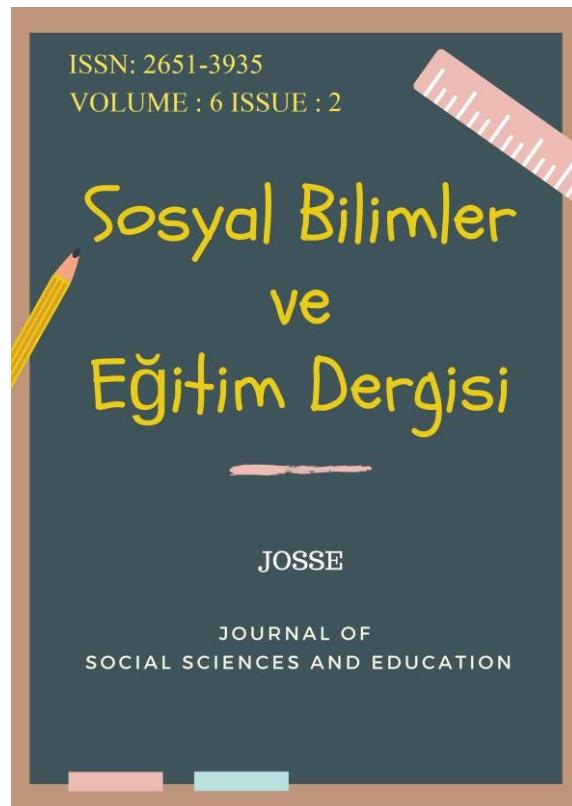


JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION (JOSSE)



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Article Type: Research Article

Received: 29.09.2023

Revision received: 22.10.2023

Accepted: 23.10.2023

Published online: 25.10.2023

Citation: Özdemir, D. (2023). Middle school eighth grade students' perceptions of the flag. *Journal of Social Sciences and Education*, 6(2), 432-465.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate middle school eighth grade students' perceptions of the flag. This study was conducted as basic qualitative research. The data were collected through a metaphor form and student drawings and analyzed using content analysis technique. 240 metaphor forms and 155 student drawings were analyzed. As a result of the research, 8th grade students produced 87 valid metaphors about the flag. The most produced metaphors are listed as homeland, independence, martyrs, freedom and blood. The results showed that the perception of the flag in the minds of the students was gathered under six themes: "flag as a historical heritage", "flag in terms of the values it represents", "flag as a representation of the country/homeland", "the flag in terms of the feelings it evokes", "flag as a unifying/protective element" and "the flag in terms of reminding place, person, and elements." It was determined that the theme of the flag as a historical heritage was the most prominent in both metaphors and student drawings, and that the students mostly viewed the flag as a national value symbolizing a long historical struggle.

Research Article

Received: 29.09.2023

Revision received:
22.10.2023

Accepted: 23.10.2023
Published online:
25.10.2023

Keywords: National value, flag, metaphor, drawing, student perception

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Introduction

Human beings are inherently social entities. Therefore, people are expected to take into account some values that exist in society and have the power to regulate social life to sustain their lives healthily (Doğanay, 1993). The family and school environment primarily play a role in the individual's realisation and learning of these values. Many different factors, such as friends, close environment and social media, can also be mentioned (Baloğlu & Balgamış, 2005; Fidan & Erden, 2001). Individuals learn whether behaviours are right or wrong, good or bad in the family environment. However, this learning is shaped according to the family's social, economic and cultural environment, not consciously or within a specific programme. Schools, on the other hand, try to impart values in society systematically and within the framework of certain programmes (Akkiprik, 2007; Deveci, 2008). Therefore, each country's education system aims to transfer national and universal values to individuals in addition to basic knowledge and skills (Varış, 1988).

Universal values are seen as values that concern the whole world and humanity. The elements that ensure the continuity, unity and solidarity of the society, adopted by the majority of the society and unique to that nation, constitute national values (Özlem, 1990; Yücel, 1993). There are different approaches in the literature about what national values are. However, in general, concepts and values within the scope of the state, homeland, nation, national anthem, flag, and army (Çetin, 2015; Demircioğlu & Tokdemir, 2008; Evin & Kafadar, 2004; Özbudun, 1997; Yılmaz, 2013), family, culture, language, religion, important historical personalities, traditions and customs (Karaçanta, 2013; Özkartal, 2009; Savaşkan & Arslan, 2015; Yıldız, 2018) are considered as national values. The national flag is one of the most important national values of the countries. Various studies have determined that individuals in different age groups (Demir, 2012; Demir Atalay & Fırat Durdukoca, 2018; Karaçanta, 2013; Kılıç & Demir, 2017) see the national flag of their country as an important national value. Acquiring national values is an indispensable part of countries' education systems. Because students' adoption of these values is considered important for the continuity of society

In Türkiye, ensuring that students become individuals who have adopted national and moral values, exercised their rights and fulfilled their responsibilities is among the main objectives of curricula (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018). Many courses at different levels of the education system are responsible for providing these values. However,

social studies is foremost course that prepares students for social life and enables them to gain responsibilities as good and effective citizens. While ensuring students' social adaptation, it considers the society's norms, cultures, and national and spiritual values (Aslan, 2016; Ross, 2006). Accordingly, in the curriculum, the main objectives are to ensure that students "grow up as citizens of the Republic of Türkiye who love their homeland and nation, know and use their rights, fulfil their responsibilities, and have a national consciousness" and "know the importance and ways of being a virtuous person by adopting national, spiritual and universal values" (MoNE, 2018, p.8). In addition, many learning outcomes in the programme can be associated with national values. In particular, in the fifth-grade Effective Citizenship learning domain, the learning outcome "Values our flag and the National Anthem, one of our symbols of national sovereignty and independence" (MoNE, 2018, p.19) emphasises the provision of learning about the flag as a national value in a concrete way.

Students' perceptions, experiences and learning about the flag cannot be limited to school because citizens of a country have continuous experiences with the national flag in their daily lives. In addition, as emphasised earlier, school environments and curricula such as social studies include learning about the flag in a structured way. Therefore, determining students' perceptions of the "flag" can reveal the meaning and importance of the national flag as a national value for them. In the related literature, various methods, such as interviews (Aydemir & Ulu Kalın, 2018; Birlik, 2022), word association tests (Nacaroğlu & Bozdağ, 2020; Üztemur & İnel) or some quantitative data collection tools (Sönmez, 2021; Şener & Boydak Özcan; 2013) have been used to determine students' perceptions towards some concepts. Moreover, metaphors are also frequently used in studies to determine students' perceptions (i.e. Coşkun, 2010; Güven & Güven, 2009; Güner, 2013; Kaya, 2014; Özdemir, 2012; Saban, 2008; Selanik Ay & Kurtdede Fidan, 2013; Yılmaz et al., 2013).

Lakoff and Johnson (2010, p.27), one of the pioneers of metaphor use, define metaphor as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing". According to Saban (2008), metaphor is to establish a relationship between two phenomena that are not similar and to evolve the existing mental schema into another mental schema. In short, metaphors are tools that enable individuals to express how they make sense of their lives, their environment, the events they experience, and the objects around them by using different analogies. Metaphors make it easier for the human mind to understand abstract phenomena that are difficult to explain by transforming them into concrete, more understandable expressions (Şeyihoglu & Gençer, 2011). Individuals frequently use

metaphors daily to express, strengthen and make sense of their wishes more effectively, consciously or unconsciously (Aykaç & Çelik, 2011). At the same time, metaphors give us clues about how individuals perceive the world (Yalçın Wells, 2015).

Drawings are the other data collection tool used in studies to determine student perceptions (i.e. Ahonen et al., 2018; Benek & Akçay, 2018; Cronin Jones, 2005; Kisovar Ivanda & Batarelo Kokić, 2013; Şahin Akyüz, 2016; Yavuz Mumcu, 2020). Drawings are an effective method for understanding children's feelings and thoughts that they cannot express verbally, and reliable and critical information about children can be obtained (Halmatov, 2016). When students are made to draw, they can be made to think about issues that are important to them in a meaningful way. When combined with drawings and narratives, it is easier to discover the meanings that children attribute to a certain phenomenon (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). Through drawings, children's inner worlds, as well as their experiences with the external world, their perception of the world, and their interaction with their environment and adults, can be revealed (Malchiodi, 2005).

In Türkiye, there are various metaphor and drawing studies in the literature to determine students' perceptions of the values in the curriculum or national values (i.e. Akyol & Kızıltan, 2019; Ceylan, 2016; Çapar, 2019; Çatak & Yıldız, 2018; Duran, 2018; Er Türküresin, 2018; Er Türküresin et al., 2018; Faiz & Karasu Avcı, 2019; Gazel & Yıldırım, 2018; Göksu, 2020; Gömleksiz & Öner, 2016; İnel et al., 2018; Karaçanta, 2013; Sönmez & Akıncan, 2013). Some studies have obtained limited data about the flag. (i.e. Kılıç & Demir, 2017; Özcel & Çelebi Öncü, 2021). There is a comparative study in the literature that includes Turkey (Becker et al., 2017). However, no study has been found to determine in detail students' perceptions of the national flag in Turkey. Therefore, the study has unique value. At the same time, as stated before, the flag is both a national value for societies and a symbol that represents important values such as independence and sovereignty. In this context, the research can reveal whether the expected meanings of the flag are formed in students' minds. It can contribute to a clearer understanding of national values. At the same time, determining students' perceptions about the flag can reveal how their experiences in their daily lives and learning in the school environment about the flag are reflected in them. Therefore, the study aimed to determine the perceptions of secondary school students about the concept of a flag, and answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the metaphors that students have about the concept of "flag"?

2. Under which themes and categories are the students' drawings and metaphors categorised?

Method

Model

The basic qualitative research was used in the study. This design is the most frequently used among qualitative research designs in the field of education. Basic qualitative research is concerned with how individuals interpret reality in the social world. In other words, it focuses on how individuals make sense of their lives and experiences. Researchers may not always conduct phenomenology, theory building, discourse analysis or ethnographic studies. Basic qualitative research enables qualitative research with an interpretive approach (Merriam ve Tisdell, 2016; Merriam, 2009). The research aimed to investigate the meanings that middle school students create in their minds about national flag of their countries.

Participants

In the study, data was collected from 8th grade middle school students who completed social studies courses which included concrete information about the flag at all grade levels. Convenience sampling, one of the purposeful sampling strategies, was used to determine the participants. It is a frequently used sampling method in qualitative research because it provides advantages to researchers in terms of speed, practicality and easy access. Data was collected in two stages. In the first stage, metaphor forms were distributed to a total of 250 volunteer students in 15 classes in five schools. However, 240 valid forms were analyzed. Of this participant group, 54.4% were girls, and 45.6% were boys. In the second stage, drawing papers were distributed to 170 volunteer students in the same classes, but 155 of them were included in the analysis. 15 drawings that were not complete enough to be interpreted were excluded from analysis. Of this participant group, 54.8% were girls, and 45.2% were boys.

Data Collection Tools

In basic qualitative research, interviews, observations or document analysis can be used to collect data (Merriam, 2009). In the study, metaphor form and student drawings were used to determine students' perceptions of the flag. Metaphors are frequently used as a data collection tool in qualitative research in the field of educational sciences. This is because

metaphors are a powerful tool for individuals to make sense of the world, and abstract concepts in our minds can be easily concretised through metaphors (İbret & Aydınözü, 2011; Ocak & Gündüz, 2006). Therefore, it is thought that students can make sense of the flag, which exists as a spiritual and national value in their lives and which they often have various experiences, more easily by concretising it in their minds. A form was prepared based on similar studies (i.e. Coşkun, 2010; Er Türküresin, 2018; Kaya, 2014; Saban, 2008). In the prepared form, students were asked to complete the statement “The flag is like..... Because.....” statement was asked to complete. A sample metaphor expression and explanation about a different concept were included in the form prepared to ensure comprehensibility.

Student drawings were also used in the study to diversify the data. Drawings, which are also one of the familiar activities of daily life, are seen as a powerful tool in conveying children’s thoughts as they come from within (Yavuzer, 2019). In this sense, in the study, students were asked to reflect on the first thing that came to their minds by thinking about the flag with their drawings. The students were left free for the drawings, but A4 size paper and different colours of dry paint were distributed. In addition, students were asked to explain their drawings with written expressions because the explanations accompanying the drawings enable the meanings attributed to the phenomenon to be discovered more easily (Einarsdottir et al., 2009).

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using the content analysis technique (Merriam, 2009). In content analysis, concepts that are similar and related to each other are interpreted by bringing them together within the framework of certain themes. In this regard, for the analysis of metaphors, firstly, the forms of all participants were numbered, and four forms that did not have a metaphor expression, two forms that did not have a valid metaphor quality (Turkish flag is as if it was washed with the blood of our martyrs, Turkish flag is a good thing), and four forms did not state a reason for the metaphor were eliminated. In the second stage, the metaphors created by the participants were analysed in terms of the relationship between the source and the subject and valid metaphors were determined. In the third stage, the metaphors produced by the participants about the concept of “flag” were brought together by taking into account their common features.

All drawings were numbered, and students were given a code with the same number as the drawing (S1, S2, S3, ...) for the analysis of the drawings. In determining the perceptions and thoughts about the flag, the elements included in the drawings and the students' written narratives were evaluated as a whole. Subsequently, each drawing was analysed independently and repeatedly, and the similar or different aspects of the drawings were tried to be understood. Thus, drawings with common features were tried to be grouped under similar themes. In the last stage, student drawings and metaphors were evaluated together, and common themes were determined.

Various strategies were followed to ensure credibility in the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016): (1) Data triangulation was provided through both metaphors and drawings. (2) Data were collected under the supervision of the researcher to ensure comprehensibility throughout the applications. (3) Written explanations were used to diversify data sources and to make better interpretations. (5) The data analysis process was explained in detail and reported. (4) Sample metaphor justifications, drawings and explanations of the participants were included. (f) The themes and categories were presented to the expert opinion, and inappropriate metaphors and drawings were discussed and finalised.

Ethics Committee Approval

In this study, all the rules specified to be followed within the scope of "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were complied with. The study was approved by the Kutahya Dumlupınar University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on the meeting dated 20.09.2023.

Findings

In this part of the study, all metaphors reflecting the meaning and perception formed in the minds of secondary school eighth-grade students about the flag were given, then the metaphors and drawings of the students were evaluated together, and the categories and themes under which their perceptions of the flag were gathered in terms of their common characteristics were examined.

Students' Metaphors of the Flag

All metaphors created by the students regarding the flag are presented in Table 1. According to Table 1, students created a total of 87 valid metaphors reflecting their perceptions of the flag. 27 of them were expressed by only one student, while the others were expressed by more than one student. *Independence* (f=24) and *homeland* (f=24) were the two most frequently created metaphors. *Blood* (f=17), *martyrs* (f=14), *freedom* (f=12), *bird* (f=11) and *soldier* (f=9) metaphors were also expressed by many students.

Table 1

Flag Metaphors of Students

No	Metaphor	f	No	Metaphor	f	No	Metaphor	f
1.	Independence	24	31.	History	2	61.	Pen	1
2.	Homeland	24	32.	Land	2	62.	Eagle	1
3.	Blood	17	33.	Phoenix	2	63.	Poplar Tree	1
4.	Martyrs	14	35.	Star	1	64.	Cat	1
5.	Freedom/Liberty	12	34.	Main Hero	1	65.	Clothing	1
6.	Bird	11	36.	Monument	1	66.	Book	1
7.	Soldier	9	37.	Mother	1	67.	Commander	1
8.	Flower	5	38.	Love	1	68.	Wolf	1
9.	Trust	6	39.	Father	1	69.	Leader	1
10.	Türkiye/Our Country	5	40.	Leading Role	1	70.	Mehmetçik(Turkish Soldier)	1
11.	Life	4	41.	Blank Canvas	1	71.	Happiness	1
12.	Symbol	4	42.	Courage	1	72.	Music Genre	1
13.	Honesty	4	43.	Plane Tree	1	73.	Organ	1
14.	Gift	3	44.	Sea	1	74.	Ozone Layer	1
15.	Key	3	45.	Epic	1	75.	Immortality	1
16.	House	3	46.	Friendship	1	76.	Originality	1
17.	Shield	3	47.	Effort	1	77.	Soul	1
18.	Nation	3	48.	Souvenir	1	78.	War	1
19.	Family	2	49.	Story	1	79.	Assurance	1
20.	Whole/Unity	2	50.	Light	1	80.	Infinity	1
21.	Wave	2	51.	Roof of the House	1	81.	Honour	1
22.	Sovereignty	2	52.	Veterans	1	82.	Painting	1
23.	Carpet	2	53.	Corn Poppy	1	83.	Turk	1
24.	Character	2	54.	Sun	1	84.	Conscience	1
25.	Identity	2	55.	Trust	1	85.	Puzzle Piece	1
26.	Sacred Artifact	2	56.	Source of Faith	1	86.	Food/Meal	1
27.	National Anthem	2	57.	Human	1	87.	Armor	1
28.	Wind	2	58.	Image/Symbol	1			
29.	Surname	2	59.	Heart	1			
30.	Hawk	2	60.	Castle	1			
						Total		240

Themes and Categories Regarding Students' Flag Perceptions

When the metaphors and drawings created by the students about the flag were analysed, it was seen that they were grouped under 6 themes in terms of their common characteristics: (1) *flag as a historical heritage*, (2) *flag in terms of the values it represents*, (3) *flag as a representation of the country/homeland*, (4) *flag in terms of the feelings it evokes*, (5) *flag as a unifying/protective element*, and (6) *the flag in terms of reminding place, person, and elements*.

Flag as A Historical Heritage

Considering both the metaphors and drawings of the students, most students associated the flag with the difficulties, struggles and sacrifices experienced in the historical process and considered it as a value that should be seen as a relic of this process. Students created metaphors symbolising the War of Independence in this theme with the highest frequency of metaphors. As seen in Table 2, *martyrs* ($f=13$) is the metaphor with the highest frequency in this theme. This is followed by *homeland* ($f=8$) and *soldier* ($f=7$). The explanations of the students who produced the related metaphors are actually similar. The students identified the flag with those who took part in the national liberation war and those who were martyred, stated that it symbolised the liberation struggle for the homeland and that the flag reminded the soldiers because of their role in this process. Other metaphors with high frequencies were listed as *life/soul* ($f=8$), *trust* ($f=8$), *honour* ($f=8$), and *gift* ($f=8$). Similar emphases are observed when analysed with all metaphors with lower frequencies. The students stated that the losses and sacrifices in the long and challenging liberation war process made the flag a symbol of this process and that they saw it as a trust that should be kept above everything else.

Table 2

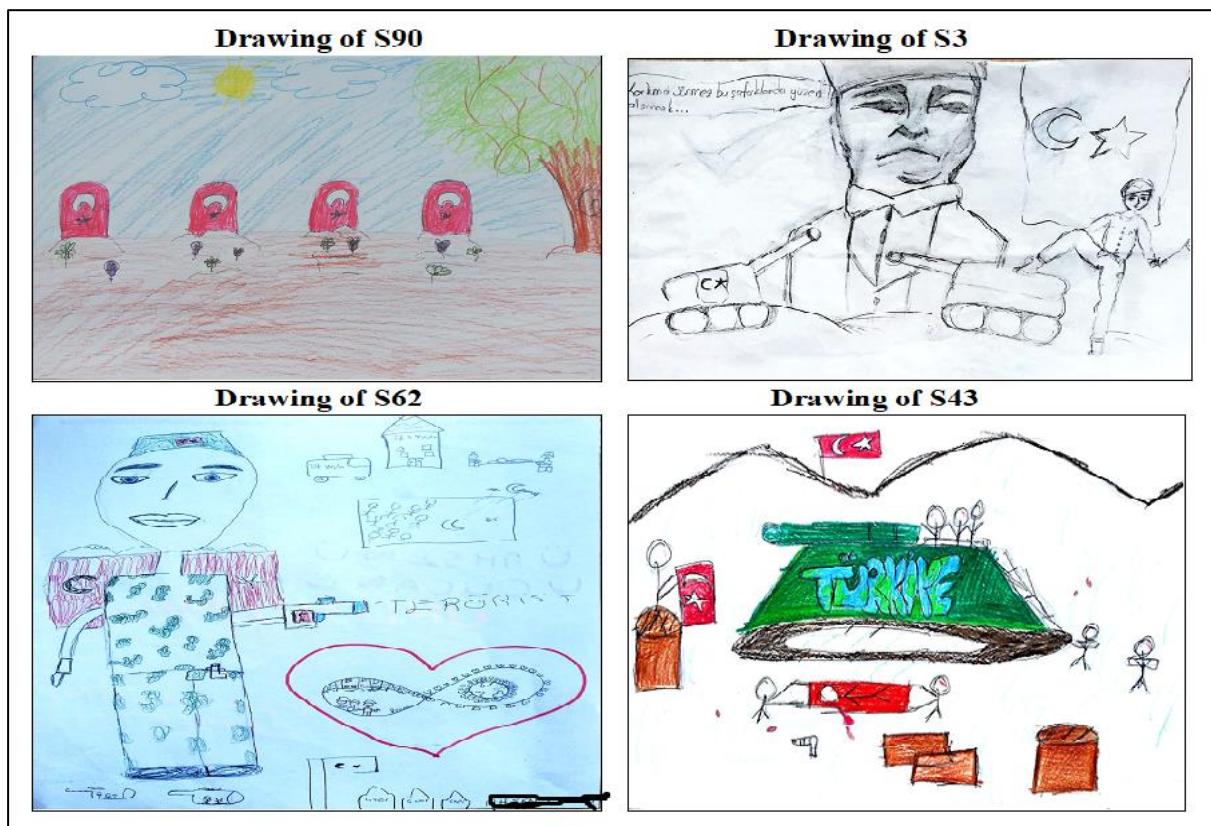
Metaphors and Sample Extractions Related to Theme of Flag As Historical Heritage

Metaphor	f	Student Number	Sample Extractions
Martyrs	13	194	Since our martyrs fought by sacrificing their lives, our lands and our flag are the memories left to us from them. We should take care of this flag like our eyes.
Homeland	8	229	Because every time I look at our flag, I remember the sacrifices made for this homeland and our martyrs.
Soldier	7	91	The flag has come to us from our ancestors and history who faced difficulties. We should sacrifice our blood and lives for the flag.

Soul/life	4	52	We have martyred fathers, brothers, sisters, brothers, relatives and many more for the sake of our flag, so the flag is our life. I will give my life for this flag, for this homeland.
Trust	4	41	We must protect the independence that we gained thanks to our ancestors. It is our duty to protect and protect our flag. When a bad word is said about our flag, I feel as if my own honour and honour have been damaged. (...) The flag is entrusted to us by our ancestor Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.
Honesty	3	85	
Gift	3	132	Our flag is entrusted to us by our ancestors. If it were not for them, maybe we would not be able to live as a free state.
Identity	2	162	Our flag is the symbol of which country we are a citizen of and our history. (...) After the devastating war we fought in our time, our homeland was cleared of enemies by sacrificing even lives. Our flag was raised to immortalise the bloodshed.
Sacred artefact	2	59	
History	2	202	It is based on the events that countries have experienced in the past. I think it is the same in other countries.
Land	2	204	We gave many martyrs to plant the flag on these lands. We called the lands where we hung our flag homeland. We struck fear into the enemy. Now, in order to protect our flag, we must first protect our lands.
Monument	1	84	The blood of tens of martyrs was shed for our flag (...) For this reason, our flag is a monument that always reminds us of them by floating in the sky.
Epic	1	17	It is like a symbol of our ancestors' struggle for us.
Effort	1	44	Since it was won with the struggle of our soldiers and martyrs, it shows the efforts of that country.
Veterans	1	173	It has participated in many wars, and died for it, but it has come out of all wars intact.
Souvenir	1	88	Our martyrs sacrificed their lives and fought for our lands, our flag is the memory left to us from them. We must look after this flag like our eyes.
Story	1	74	Our flag tells us how our martyrs fought.
Image	1	231	It tells more than one emotion, thought and experience with a single visual; flags.
Human	1	242	By learning about people's pasts, we get to know them better and gain knowledge. Flags also have a history and if we learn about this history, we will learn new information.
Pencil	1	119	The soldiers under that flag made history.
Leader	1	225	It is like a leader. For example, Ataturk. Thanks to him, revolutions have changed. I think the flag is like a leader.
Mehmetçik (Turkish Soldier)	1	138	The colour of our flag is not yellow or blue but blood red. It represents the soldier.
Happiness	1	222	Whenever people look at the flag, they should be happy to see how Atatürk founded this country with what difficulties.
Freedom	1	162	There is the blood of our martyrs on that flag, and unless every inch of the land of this homeland is watered with blood, that flag will remain with us.
War	1	169	Because the flag was won in war and died for it.
Total	65		

Figure 1

Sample Drawings Related to Theme of Flag As Historical Heritage



Similarly, the highest number of drawings ($f=63$) belong to the theme of the flag as a historical heritage. In this sense, students mostly depicted the *War of Independence* in their drawings. Also, *war*, *martyrs*, *the blood of martyrs*, *soldiers*, and *Atatürk* are the elements that are frequently discussed in the drawings. In addition, some students associated the recent *15th of July and terrorist attacks* with the flag. In the student explanations of all drawings, the difficult struggles, wars fought, and blood shed for the flag are emphasised. According to the students, since the flag symbolises this process, it should be highly valued, and always protected, and similar sacrifices should be made when necessary. Some sample student drawings and explanations are given in the following:

S90: Soldiers were martyred for the sake of the homeland and the flag.

S3: Our flag reminds me of the shed blood of our martyrs, our martyrs who died for the sake of this homeland and the National Anthem.

S62: Our martyrs found our flag in their struggle to save our homeland and to save us. At the same time, they fought to protect our flag. For this reason, when the flag is mentioned, many people think of homeland, soldier, city, etc.

S43: (...) Our martyrs were martyred in the War of Independence and our flag was formed. Our martyrs became martyrs by going in front of the enemies for us.

Flag in terms of the Values it Represents

Another prevalent theme where metaphors were frequently produced was the flag, particularly in relation to the values it symbolises. Many students, associating the flag with independence and freedom, crafted metaphors reflecting these values. Apparently, *independence* (f=24) and *freedom* (f=12) were the most recurrent metaphors within this theme. However, some students opted for different elements symbolising these values as metaphors. For instance, metaphors like a *bird* (f=9) and *honesty* (f=3), which were more frequent in this theme, along with *sovereignty*, *key*, *shield*, *spirit*, *wind*, and *assurance*, were articulated by linking them to freedom and independence. Additionally, one student conveyed disagreement with associating the flag with independence, metaphorically referring to it as empty fabric.

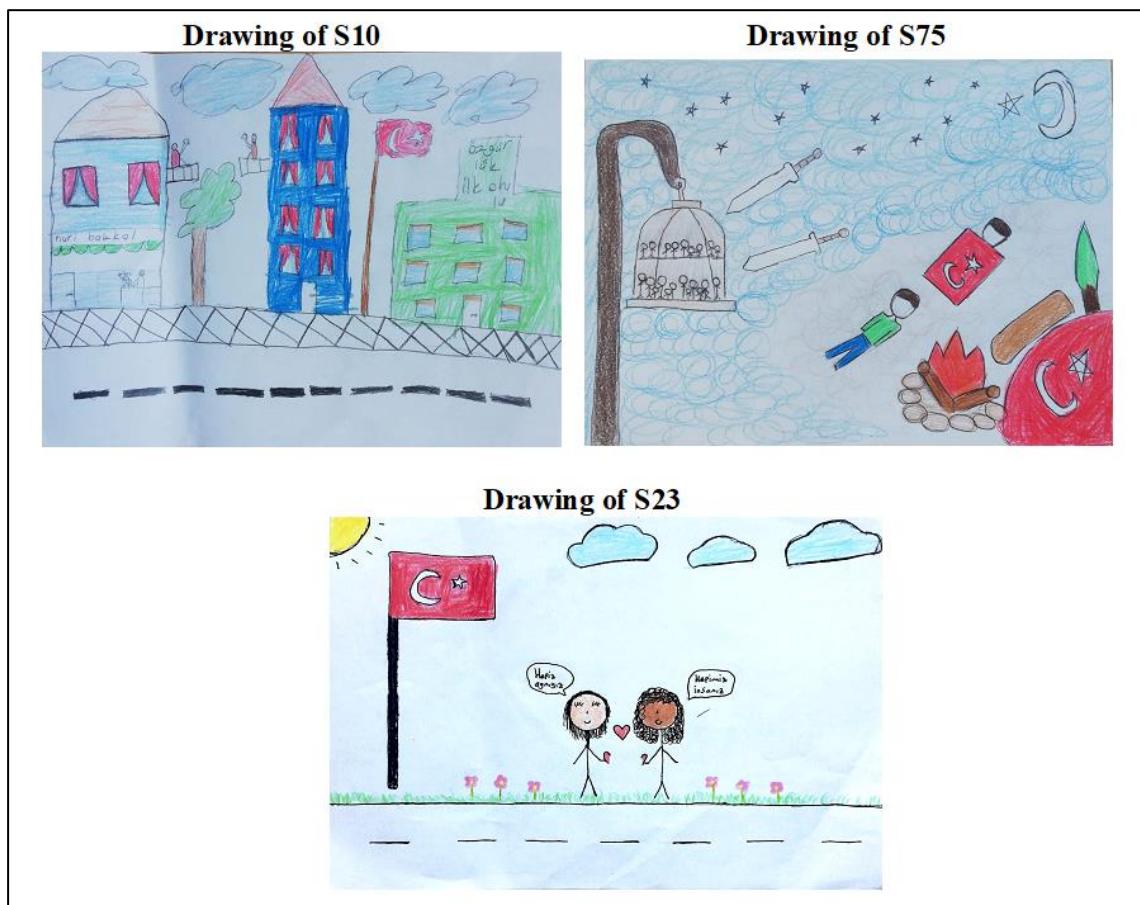
Table 3

Metaphors and Sample Student Extractions Related to Theme of Flag in terms of the Values it Represents

Metaphor	f	Student Number	Sample Extractions
Independence	24	77	The flag is proof of a country's independence.
Freedom	12	158	The places where our flag is located show me that Turks live there and they are free.
Bird	9	258	Because birds are always free, flags symbolise their country's independence and freedom.
Honour	3	211	A community that is not free cannot protect its honour, family values, and sanctities; to do all these, it needs to be a sovereign state. Therefore, the flag is also its honour as it is the symbol of the country's independence.
Sovereignty	2	174	Our flag is an indicator that people in our country have rights and that people can govern themselves.
Key	1	189	It is like the key to a locked dungeon. Without that key, you cannot reach your freedom.
Blank Canvas	1	234	Because national independence cannot be attributed to an object, if we can use all our rights freely, we do not need an object to indicate our independence.
Shield	1	147	It protects us from enemies. As long as it flutters, no one can touch us.
Eagle	1	200	Because the eagle represents freedom and independence.
Wolf	1	117	Countries with a flag are fond of their freedoms and do not easily let themselves be leashed like wolves.
Soul	1	275	The things I mentioned represent the individual himself; in this sense, the flag represents his homeland, his nation, his freedom, and his will.
Wind	1	118	It blows wherever it wants; it is free and independent.
Assurance	1	232	Flags are the guarantors of nationalism and national independence
Total	58		

Figure 2

Sample Drawings Related to Theme of Flag in terms of the Values it Represents



In some student drawings, the values identified with the flag have been attempted to be depicted. However, compared to metaphors, the number of drawings related to this theme is more limited ($f=20$). Like metaphors, primarily, *independence* and *freedom* have been highlighted in student drawings. Only one student has associated the flag with the value of *equality*. For example, in S10's drawing, the name given to the school, "*Freedom Primary School*," can be seen as a detail reflecting the image of the flag in the student's mind. Also, S10 has used the phrase "*The flag allows us to live freely*" in the explanation. Similarly, the emphasis on people in a birdcage in S75's drawing indicates that the flag is associated with freedom and independence. S75 explained the drawing as "*What I want to say in this picture; when our country was occupied, people's freedom was restricted as if they were put in a cage (...). Under the leadership of our great leader Atatürk, our country has gained its independence.*" S23 has associated the flag with the value of equality with the statement,

“When I see our flag, it comes to my mind that there is no racism in our country and every person is equal.”

Flag as a Representation of the Country/Homeland

As a representation of the *country/homeland*, the flag is another theme for which many students ($f=45$) have created metaphors. The highest frequencies belong directly to the metaphors of *homeland* ($f=14$) and *Türkiye/our country* ($f=5$). The metaphors of *nation* ($f=3$), *national anthem* ($f=2$), *key* ($f=2$), *whole/unity* ($f=2$), *character* ($f=2$), *surname* ($f=2$), and *symbol* ($f=2$) have also been created by more than one student. When all metaphors are examined, it is seen that some students think that the flag represents a country, the homeland, and the people living in it in every aspect. According to the students, every country has its own unique flag; a country without a flag is unthinkable, and the flag represents that country on different platforms. Table 4 provides all the metaphors created by the students and related example expressions.

Table 4

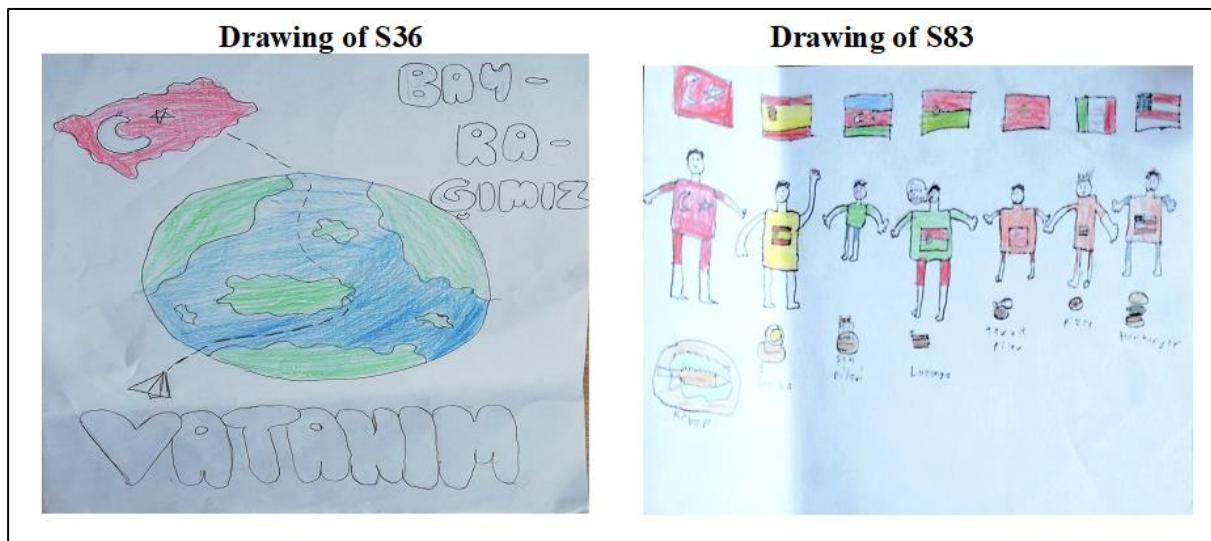
Metaphors and Sample Extractions regarding the Theme of Flag as a Representation of Country/Homeland

Metaphor	f	Student Number	Sample Extractions
Homeland	14	205	The flag shows us the beliefs, values and history of the homeland in which it is located with the symbols on it.
Türkiye/Our Country	5	248	Because it is the first symbol of our country that comes to mind and stands out, even if our name is not written in institutions and organisations and NATO etc. If the flag is hanging, this shows that we are a member.
Nation	3	60	There cannot be a nation without a flag.
National Anthem	2	11	When the flag was mentioned, I thought of different national poems of each country, such as our national anthem.
Key	2	210	Because each nation represents itself uniquely itself and opens itself.
Whole/Unity	2	191	Because I think it represents unity and solidarity and every community has a flag and it is like their logo.
Character	2	215	Since people reflect their characters, I made such an analogy because I think that flags reflect their countries.
Surname	2	176	Because it determines our lineage or culture, so I liken it to a surname.
Symbol	2	220	Because every country has a different flag that represents that country.
Main Hero	1	208	Because it is the main thing that represents a nation.
Leading Role	1	82	If we think of a country as a film, the flag is the leading role of the film. If there is no flag, there is no excitement, there is no enthusiasm, there is no public security, and most importantly, if there is no flag, there is no country.
Source of Faith	1	10	Without our flag, there is no homeland, and our faith ends.
Cat	1	198	Because it cannot be separated from its owners.
Clothing	1	31	If you take off a person's clothes, the situation he falls into is the same as a nation taking down its flag.

Commander	1	236	Because the flag is a head that carries everything of that country.
Flower	1	165	Every country has its own flag, but in my eyes, there is no flag like our flag.
Originality	1	254	Because each flag is different and each flag represents its own country.
Conscience	1	276	The things I have mentioned represent the person himself, and the flag represents his homeland, nation, freedom and will in this sense.
Puzzle Piece	1	237	In fact, although it looks as small and simple as a piece of fabric, it is a perfect symbol representing all countries. It is a part of us that completes and represents us.
Food/Meal	1	161	Just as food cannot be without salt and oil, the flag, homeland and nation cannot be in the state. The flag is the freedom, happiness and peace of the nation.
Total	45		

Figure 3

Sample Drawings Related to Theme of Flag as a Representation of the Country/Homeland



Considering the metaphors, it can be said that fewer students ($f=17$) made drawings within the scope of this theme. In the related drawings, the students included elements and explanations emphasising that the flag represents countries and homelands. For example, S36 "*The flag reminds me that I belong to this country. In other words, it reminds me of Türkiye.*" S83 stated that each country has its own flag, representing the characteristics of those countries.

The Flag in terms of the Feelings it Evokes

This theme of the flag consists of metaphors and student drawings expressing the intense emotions students feel when they think about, see, or hear about their national flags. As seen in Table 5, the *flower* ($f=4$) is the metaphor with the highest frequency. Students have expressed that they see the flag sometimes as a flower of unreachable beauty on the top of a

mountain and sometimes as a rare flower in the world, being impressed by its beauty, or as seen in the example given in the table, they have expressed the protective instinct they feel while watering a flower. In this context, through some metaphors, students have emphasised the beauty of the flag (e.g. painting, phoenix, poplar tree, corn poppy), expressed enthusiasm towards the flag (e.g. phoenix, wave, sacred artifact), intense love, commitment (e.g. love, life/soul, courage, honour, infinity, music genre), trust, peace, happiness, and pride (e.g. book, freedom/liberty, light, sun, sea).

Table 5

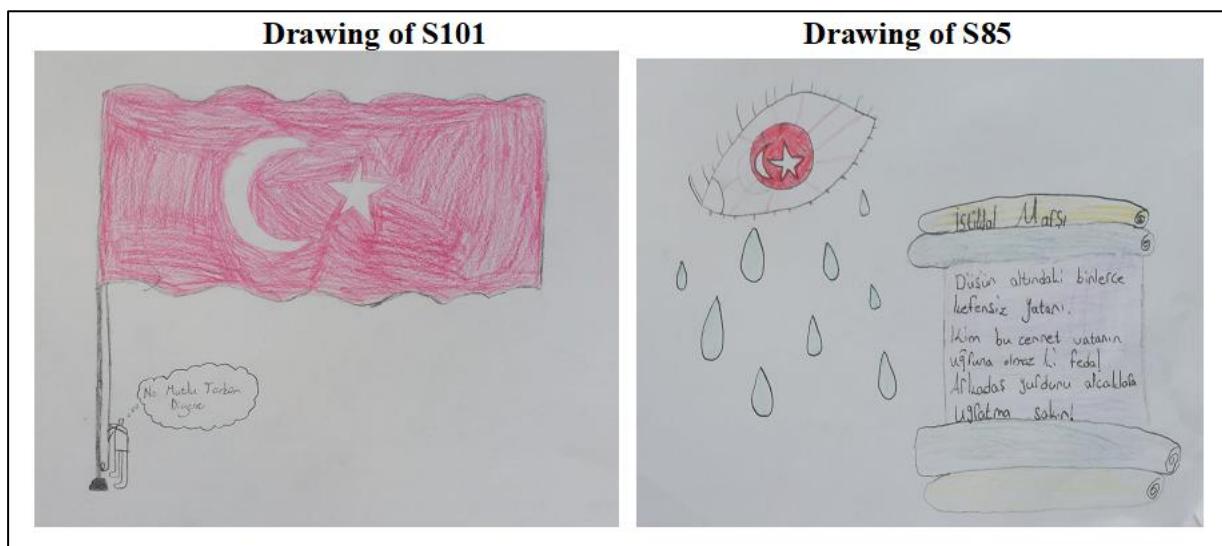
Metaphors and Sample Extractions Regarding the Flag Theme in Terms of Feelings What it Evokes

Metaphor	f	Student Number	Sample Extractions
Flower	4	143	We protect our flag as we grow and protect it by watering it, and no one can tear it away from us.
Wave	2	152	Our flag waves in the sky with the wind and makes us proud every time it waves.
Sacred artifact	2	69	When we look at it, we get excited and show respect.
Bird	2	126	When the flag waves in the sky, it looks like a bird, it spreads its wings like a bird and soars.
Star	2	194	Because it shines like that.
Hawk	2	124	The flag rises as high as it wants in the sky and fascinates those who look at it.
Homeland	2	231	When I look at our flag, I remember how much our martyrs loved our nation our society and I am touched.
Phoenix	1	150	It is uniquely beautiful and floats freely in the air. Even if there are millions of stars in the sky, we love only one of them and give them a value that no one else can give them. (...)
Love	1	219	Isn't that what love is all about? Not seeing its flaws, not seeing anyone else but it and putting it in the most important place. (...) It is in our hearts forever.
Courage	1	105	Every nation that has a flag is willing to risk sacrificing itself for it.
Sea	1	239	It is full of peace.
Soldier	1	76	When I look at it, I feel as confident as I feel when I look at soldiers.
Corn Poppy	1	136	It shows itself with its red colour in the fields and greenery. It is like our red flag in the deep blue sky.
Sun	1	128	It illuminates and gives peace wherever it is.
Trust	1	201	Because you feel safe in the shadow of your flag.
Light	1	29	The moon and stars on the flag symbolise the bright future of the Turks.
Picture/Symbol	1	231	It tells more than one emotion, thought and experience with a single visual; flags...
Poplar Tree	1	94	Like the leaves of the poplar tree, it flutters freely in the sky without any obstacle.
Book	1	121	Living under this flag gives me happiness. Just like when I read books that give me happiness.
Freedom/Liberty	1	230	It makes me feel fresh.

Honour	1	54	The flag is not a piece of cloth and cannot be trampled underfoot.
Painting	1	182	Our flag suits the sky very well and like a painting, you can stand in front of it and watch it for hours.
Turkish	1	70	Like the Turks, it flies bravely in the sky and no one can take it down.
Flower	1	57	We protect our flag as we protect it by watering it and no one can tear it away from us.
Heart	1	92	I can't live without a heart.
Music Genre	1	145	Once you choose one, it is hard to part with it.
Organ	1	150	The flag is a part of our nation. A part of our nation is a part of the people.
Infinity	1	175	The meaning of our flag for our nation is very great and will exist forever, the inseparable part of this nation will exist forever in the flag.
Total	37		

Figure 4

Sample Drawings Related to the Flag Theme in Terms of Feelings What it Evokes



In some student drawings, feelings about the flag were attempted to be depicted ($f=21$). However, the related drawings were mostly distinguished by the students' explanations. Consistent with the metaphors, the emotions that the students portrayed about the flag were listed as love, respect, happiness, loyalty, sadness, pride, enthusiasm, excitement, joy, and longing. Some sample drawings are given below. For example, S101 drew a picture of themselves raising the flag in their drawing and made an explanation as follows: "*The Turkish flag teaches love, respect, teaches respectful posture, teaches love for the homeland, teaches dependence, makes you feel proud.*" S85 explained their drawing as "*I tried to depict people crying for it.*" S35 said, "*My feelings while drawing this picture are pride, love for homeland, happiness, respect, and independence.*" As can be seen in the

sample explanations, the feelings expressed are not only for the flag but also for the values and elements it represents.

Flag as a Unifying/Protective Element

Some students have expressed that the flag has a structure that brings people together in a country and protects them. In this context, the metaphors with the highest frequency in this theme are *house* (f=3), *family* (f=2), and *shield* (f=3). The related metaphors for this theme and sample student explanations are given in Table 5.

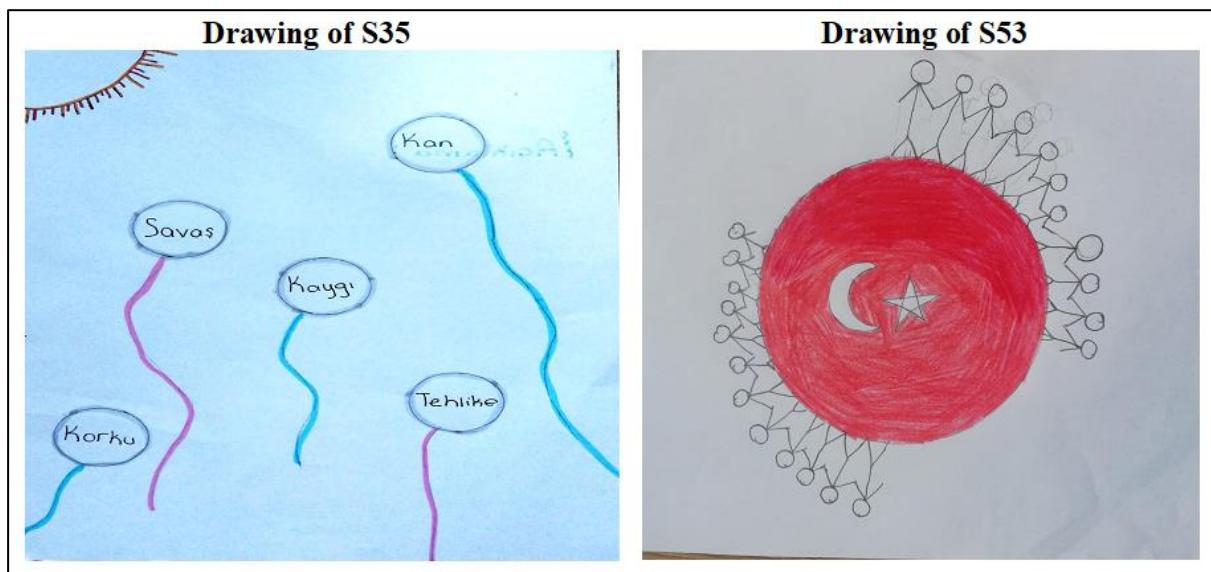
Table 5

Metaphors and Sample Extractions Regarding the Theme of Flag as a Unifying/Protective Element

Metaphor	f	Student Number	Sample Extractions
House	3	53	It enables a nation to live a happy life in unity and solidarity under the same roof.
Family	2	99	It keeps everyone together.
Shield	2	190	It is like a shield to protect the country at the beginning of the country.
Castle	1	181	Castles protect the people living in them from enemies and no one can easily enter it. Our flag protects us and our homeland from enemies and allows us to live safely.
Mother	1	2	It protects us like our mother.
Father	1	1	Without our flag, we would be left in the middle.
Plane Tree	1	270	A whole nation lives in its shadow.
Friendship	1	63	The flag is just like friendship. It connects the people of the country to which it belongs and creates a bond between people.
Roof of the House	1	122	Just as circles become whole under a roof, nations become whole under the flag.
Ozone Layer	1	142	The flag protects us from enemies as the sun protects us from harmful rays.
Immortality	1	138	It carries the blood of our martyrs and they will protect us forever. As long as they are there, this flag will never come down.
Passion	1	205	Because it unites us and keeps us united and keeps us united.
Armor	1	111	It protects us from enemies.
Total	17		

Figure 5

Sample Drawings Related to the Theme of Flag as a Unifying/Protective



In the drawings of 15 students, it was highlighted that the flag brings together the citizens of a country and has a protective feature. For example, S53 drew people gathering around the flag and stated that the flag symbolised unity and solidarity. S35, on the other hand, symbolised the negativities that disappeared with the presence of the flag with the balloons flying away in the drawing. According to S35, the flag, which makes these feelings disappear, has a protective feature. The student said, "*I think that when a country has no flag, there is no security in that country. As long as the flag of a country exists, blood does not flow, and tears do not flow; our mothers do not wait anxiously. In other words, in a country with a flag, there is no war, worry or fear. The nation would be under security.*"

Flag in terms of Reminding Place, Person, and Elements

Some students associated the flag with various places, individuals, or physical elements that are reminiscent to them. Two students who created the related metaphors compared the flag physically to a carpet, and one student likened it to a soldier as they observed flags wherever soldiers were present (Table 6). Moreover, this theme emerged more in student drawings ($f=27$).

In the drawings, the school environment was predominantly utilised. For example, S77 stated that they thought of school and the National Anthem when they thought of the flag. In

addition to these, *soldiers*, *Atatürk*, *Anıtkabir*, and *national holidays* were depicted as they reminded students of the flag.

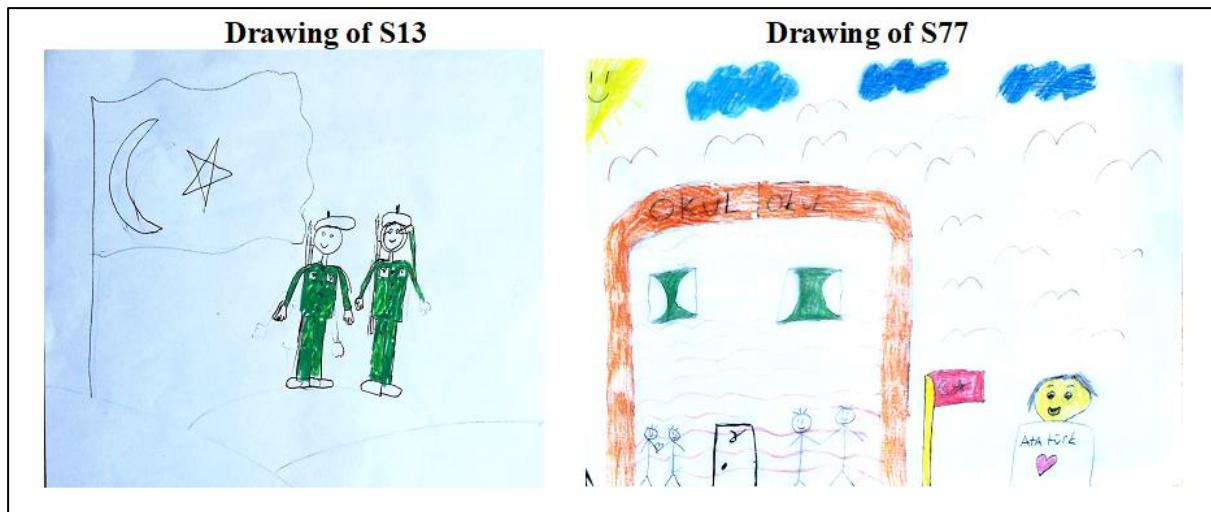
Table 6

Metaphors and Sample Extractions for the Flag Theme in Terms of Reminding Place, Person, and Elements

Metaphor	f	Student Number	Sample Extractions
Carpet	2	228	Because the flag and the carpet are similar
Soldier	1	36	It is everywhere where there are soldiers (battalion, school, uniform).
Total	3		

Figure 5

Sample Drawings Related to the Flag Theme in Terms of Reminding Place, Person, and Elements



Discussion and Results

This study aimed to reveal the perception of the flag in the minds of secondary school students. Metaphors and student drawings were used together to provide a richer data source. As a result of the research, it was determined that students produced 87 valid metaphors about the flag. However, students associated the flag more with metaphors such as homeland,

independence, blood, martyrs, freedom, bird and soldier. Similarly, in the study conducted by Özcel and Çelebi Öncü (2021), students explained the meaning of the flag with the concepts of homeland, nation, independence, freedom, and martyr's blood. In Kılıç and Demir's (2017) study, Afghan secondary school students mostly used the words freedom, independence, red colour, blood of martyrs, and crescent star to describe the Turkish flag. The fact that immigrant children in Türkiye have the same perceptions of the national flag may be due to socio-cultural similarities or the reflection of the education given in schools and courses.

The results of the study showed that the students' perceptions of the flag reflected in their metaphors and drawings were grouped under six themes: "flag as a historical heritage", "flag in terms of the values it represents", "flag as a representation of the country/homeland", "the flag in terms of the feelings it evokes", "flag as a unifying/protective element" and "the flag in terms of reminding place, person, and elements". It was determined that the theme of the flag as a historical relic was more prominent in both metaphors and student drawings and that students mostly saw the flag as a national value symbolising a long historical process and the struggle for liberation. Metaphors with higher frequencies, such as blood, homeland, martyr, and soldier, were included in this theme. Students consider martyrdom in the War of Independence and even in the more recent 15th of July and terrorist incidents as a sacrifice that was and should be made for the sake of the homeland and flag. According to them, the flag is, therefore, a trust that needs to be protected. There are supportive research results in the literature. For example, it was determined that primary school students at an earlier age similarly regarded the flag and the National Anthem as an important cultural heritage (Tuncel & Altuntaş, 2020). In Özcel and Çelebi Öncü's (2021) study, according to primary school students, the flag and the National Anthem are vital because they are the product of difficult struggles in the past. Students associated the flag and the National Anthem with martyrs. There are similar perspectives in the international literature. For example, the American flag is associated with meanings and values such as freedom, solidarity, and selfless sacrifice (Kemmelmeier & Winter, 2008).

In the study, students created many metaphors related to the values they thought the flag represented. Similarly, some students reflected the elements symbolising the related values in their drawings. The two main values that students reflected in their metaphors and drawings were independence and freedom. In addition, in only one student's drawing, the flag was associated with the value of equality. Also, in the studies conducted in different samples on the concepts of independence and freedom in the literature (Çapraz & Özkal, 2021; Ulu

Kalın & Koçoğlu, 2017), participants associated these concepts with the flag. The fact that students see the flag as a representation of these values is consistent with the social studies course outcomes. The curriculum (MoNE, 2018, p.19) has an outcome directly related to the flag: "Values our flag and the National Anthem, which are symbols of national sovereignty and independence." When the outcome is examined, it is seen that the flag is handled as a symbol of independence and freedom. In addition, it is stated that the values of independence and freedom should be provided to the students in the learning area where the relevant outcome is located. Accordingly, it can be said that students' perceptions coincide with what is conveyed in the lessons. In the study conducted by Kılıç and Demir (2017), it was concluded that the source of information about the flag was mostly Social Studies and Turkish lessons. Aydemir Ustaoğlu and Çelik (2023) tried to determine students' perceptions of social studies with emblem and logo design. As a result of the research, it was determined that the most frequently used element in the emblems and logos prepared by the students was the flag after people and trees. These findings can be accepted as evidence of the place of the social studies course in learning about the flag.

The flag is assumed to be one of the best symbolic expressions of a country and national identity in the literature (e.g. Guéguen et al., 2017; Nesiba, 2022; Schatz & Lavine, 2007; Skitka, 2005). National symbols have functions such as signalling group membership and evoking emotions and thoughts associated with the nation (Becker et al., 2017; Butz, 2009; Schatz & Lavine, 2007). They help to embody the nation and the nation-state (Kemmelmeier & Winter, 2008). In the research, students reflected perceptions in this direction. The third theme in which students produced the most metaphors was the theme of the flag as a representation of country/state. In addition, some students made related drawings. Some studies in the literature revealed overlapping results. For example, in the study of Özkan and Taşkın (2014) and Er Türküresin (2018), the flag was among the most frequently produced metaphors for the concept of homeland. In addition, pre-service teachers evaluated the flag as a value reflecting loyalty to the homeland, a symbol of the existence of societies and proof of the existence of countries (Demir Atalay & Fırat Durdukoca, 2018). In the study of Türkcan and Bozkurt (2015), it was observed that the majority of the students explained the concept of citizenship with belonging to a place and conveyed this situation in their drawings with the flag scheme. While describing the concept of citizenship with their drawings, the most preferred images were themes such as the Turkish flag, Atatürk, the national anthem, unity and solidarity. In this study, some students created drawings and metaphors belonging

to the flag theme as a unity/protective element. It was observed that the students considered the flag as an element that brings people living in that country together and protects the existence of a country. This study result supports the belief that the flag symbolises a country's existence and its inhabitants' membership to that country. Therefore, the flag has a meaning that reflects citizenship identity, as revealed in Türkcan and Bozkurt's (2015) study.

In the study, many students made metaphors and drawings reflecting their intense feelings about the flag. These students created metaphors, emphasising that they were especially impressed by the beauty of the flag. In addition, emotions such as enthusiasm, intense love, respect, loyalty, trust, peace, happiness, pride and instinct to protect the flag were reflected in drawings and metaphors. This result of the study can be seen as a reflection of the traditional understanding of patriotism because it is frequently emphasised in the literature (e.g. Butz, 2009; Çolak, 2022; Skitka, 2005; Wolf, 2007) that there is an interchangeable relationship between loyalty to the national flag, patriotism and patriotism. In some studies in Türkiye, it was concluded that participants at different age levels (e.g. Göksu, 2020; Naziroğlu & Göksu, 2018) had similar views. In a study conducted by Becker et al. (2017) in 11 countries, including Türkiye, it was determined that there is a relationship between nationalism, patriotism and positive feelings and associations towards the flag in all countries. In the study, the more nationalistic and patriotic people felt about their country, the more they associated positive emotions with their flag. Skitka (2005) states that research shows that attachment to the national flag increases more, especially when national security is threatened. Therefore, the strong historical and emotional attachments to the flag that emerged in this study can be explained by the current and historical developments that threaten national security in Türkiye. For example, some students reflected the source of attachment to the flag as the 15th of July and terrorist incidents in their drawings.

The last theme reflecting the students' perceptions of the flag in the study includes some places, people or physical elements that remind the flag. Despite the small number of metaphors belonging to the related theme, many student drawings included elements that physically resemble the flag, places where it is frequently seen and people with whom it is associated. Consistent with the other themes, Atatürk and soldiers were reflected in the drawings as reminders. However, the most common element in the drawings was the school. As is known, the flag is an integral part of many public spaces in Türkiye. In this regard, it is usual for students to reflect the school environment, where they frequently see the flag, have experiences related to it and which constitutes an integral part of their lives, in their drawings.

In line with this finding, in the study conducted by Alan et al. (2021), the figure of the Turkish flag was prominent in children's school drawings.

Considering the results of the study in general, in conclusion, it can be said that secondary school students have a strong emotional attachment to the national flag as a national value. This attachment is largely due to its historical background and the values and concepts it is thought to represent. All these results can be said to reflect the widely accepted and expected patriotic understanding of students in Türkiye. On the other hand, more comprehensive studies on patriotism mention different dimensions of patriotism. The results of this study show that symbolic (Huddy & Khatip, 2007; Parker, 2009) and blind patriotism (Schatz et al., 1999), which are emphasised in the literature, are more prominent among students. Blind patriotism or uncritical patriotism is a commitment that respects and unconditionally supports authority figures (Schatz et al., 1999). Symbolic patriotism is closely related to emotional attachment to flags, symbols and national anthems. This form of patriotism, which can also be seen as a part of blind patriotism, has some structural differences. Blind citizenship has a more cognitive structure (such as ideology) in the relations between individuals and the state. It tends to support the laws and practices of the state unconditionally. Symbolic patriotism creates a relatively concrete and affective dimension to the country and its core values through symbols (Parker, 2009). This can be explained by the fact that they receive messages in the relevant direction more intensively in educational environments and their social lives. Ersoy and Öztürk's (2015) study supports this interpretation. In the related study, pre-service teachers stated that they received more blind patriotism messages in the pre-university education process.

Recommendations

The study basically showed that the students expressed a strong emotional attachment to the national flag. Accordingly, it can be said that students have widely accepted patriotic values. However, such requirements and intense interest in national symbolism are associated with reflections of blind patriotism, including intense emotional identification with the nation, solid national loyalty and rejection of national criticism (Schatz et al., 1999). It can also lead to the adoption of the extremes of blind patriotism. Therefore, it can be suggested that teachers should include practices that support critical and constructive patriotism and active citizenship in their lessons.

The research also has some methodological limitations. The study was conducted with students from middle socio-economic level schools in only one province in Türkiye. Although it coincides with the results of other studies in the literature, it cannot be said that it reflects the cultural diversity in Türkiye. For this reason, similar studies can be conducted with larger, more diverse or different samples. In addition, no other studies in the literature examine students' perceptions directly with the flag in detail. This research has original value in this respect. However, it is limited to metaphors and drawings selected as data collection methods. Therefore, different data collection tools can reveal perceptions about the flag. Qualitative research strategies such as case studies and mixed research approaches can be used to obtain more in-depth and holistic data.

Ethics Committee Approval

Name of the Committee that Made the Ethical Evaluation: Kütahya Dumlupınar University Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee

Date of Ethical Review Decision: 20.09.2023

Ethics Assessment Document Issue Number: 351

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