

RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

The Metaphorical Expression of the “Education-Upbringing” Concept in English And Uzbek Languages

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Received: 29 January 2025 **Accepted:** 28 February 2025 **Published:** 31 March 2025

ABSTRACT

The article explores the metaphorical expression of the concept of education-upbringing (ta’lim-tarbiya) in English and Uzbek languages. Using the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the study analyses metaphorical expressions drawn from literary texts, proverbs, educational discourse, and language corpora. The research reveals that both languages use similar metaphorical domains - such as “growth, journey, and craftsmanship” - to conceptualize education and upbringing. However, cultural differences influence the depth and imagery of these metaphors. For instance, Uzbek expressions often reflect traditional and collectivist values, while English metaphors lean toward individual growth and self-discovery. The findings highlight the role of culture in shaping educational metaphors and contribute to a deeper cross-cultural understanding of how abstract concepts are linguistically constructed.

Keywords: Education, upbringing, metaphor, conceptual metaphor theory, English, Uzbek, cross-cultural linguistics, ta’lim-tarbiya.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “education-upbringing”, jointly expressed in the Uzbek language as “ta’lim-tarbiya”, are fundamental to shaping individuals and societies. In both English and Uzbek cultures, this notion carries deep-rooted values associated not only with knowledge transmission but also with moral, social, and emotional development. The process of education-upbringing is not merely instructional; it is also interpretive, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and the world. Given the abstract and multifaceted nature of these concepts, people often rely on metaphorical language to make sense of them in everyday discourse. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue in their seminal work “Metaphors We Live By”, metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but rather cognitive tools that help us conceptualize complex ideas through more familiar domains.

Metaphorical expressions of “education-upbringing” provide significant insight into how different cultures

perceive the development of human potential. In English, for instance, education is often framed through metaphors such as “Education is a journey” or “Learning is planting seeds” which reflect progress, growth, and transformation (Cameron, 2003). Similarly, Uzbek features vivid metaphorical expressions such as “Bola ko’chat, tarbiya suv” (A child is a sapling, upbringing is water) or “Ta’lim bu – nur, tarbiya bu – hayot” (Education is light, upbringing is life), which reflect the nurturing role of teachers and parents in shaping young minds. These metaphors are not coincidental; they reveal underlying cultural models and social expectations. Kövecses (2010) notes that metaphors are culturally grounded and often reveal a society’s core values, worldviews, and collective experiences.

Despite the presence of rich metaphorical representations in both languages, there is a noticeable gap in comparative studies that systematically examine how the concept of “education-upbringing” is metaphorically framed in

English and Uzbek. While there have been various metaphor studies in the field of education (e.g., Oxford et al., 1998; Saban, 2006), few have focused specifically on “ta’lim-tarbiya” as a dual concept with both pedagogical and moral dimensions. This oversight is particularly significant considering that “ta’lim-tarbiya” in Central Asian cultures is often regarded as a unified process where education (ta’lim) and moral upbringing (tarbiya) are inseparable (Tuychiev, 2020). In contrast, Western models often separate these two domains, emphasizing cognitive development in educational settings and relegating moral instruction to the home or society.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring and comparing the metaphorical conceptualizations of “ta’lim-tarbiya” in English and Uzbek through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. By analysing metaphorical expressions from literary texts, educational discourse, and cultural sayings, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the common metaphorical expressions used to represent “education-upbringing” in English and Uzbek? (2) How do these metaphors reflect the cultural and philosophical values of each language community? (3) What are the similarities and differences in the metaphorical frameworks of the two languages? These questions are critical not only for understanding cross-cultural perspectives on education but also for informing bilingual pedagogy, translation studies, and intercultural communication.

In an increasingly globalized world, the role of culture in language learning and teaching is becoming more significant. As Kramsch (1993) highlights, language is both a product of culture and a means of transmitting culture. Understanding the metaphors behind educational concepts can thus promote more effective communication, deeper intercultural awareness, and improved curriculum design. Moreover, examining metaphorical thinking in Uzbek and English can offer educators insights into how students from different linguistic backgrounds may perceive learning, success, discipline, and personal growth.

To this end, the present article adopts a qualitative, comparative approach, using conceptual metaphor theory as the analytical framework to identify and interpret metaphorical expressions related to “ta’lim-tarbiya”. Through this lens, the study not only highlights linguistic creativity but also reveals how educational values are conceptualized and transmitted across cultures.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative methodology grounded in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which asserts that metaphors are central to human thought and are not merely decorative elements of language but essential tools for understanding abstract concepts. The aim is to identify, analyse, and compare metaphorical expressions related to the concept of “ta’lim-tarbiya” (education-upbringing) in English and Uzbek, exploring how each language encodes cultural perceptions of education, upbringing, and personal development.

The study focuses on the collection and analysis of metaphorical expressions from authentic sources in both languages. The data were drawn from a variety of sources including literary works, proverbs, educational discourse (such as speeches, pedagogical articles, and teacher manuals), and national corpora. In the case of English, data were retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and reputable literary and academic sources. For Uzbek, examples were collected from classical and contemporary Uzbek literature, widely known proverbs and sayings, educational materials, and the Uzbek National Corpus where accessible. The metaphorical phrases were selected based on their relevance to ta’lim-tarbiya and their frequency or cultural prominence.

To guide the data analysis, Conceptual Metaphor Theory was used to identify mappings between source domains (concrete, physical experiences) and target domains (abstract concepts such as education or upbringing). For instance, the Uzbek proverb “Suv bilan ekin o’sar, tarbiya bilan — odam” (Just as crops grow with water, people grow with upbringing) exemplifies the conceptual metaphor. Here, the physical act of watering crops (source domain) is mapped onto the abstract idea of moral and intellectual development (target domain). Similarly, in English, metaphors like “Learning is planting seeds” or “Education is a journey” are analyzed through the same cognitive framework, highlighting the metaphorical patterns that guide thought and discourse.

The collected data were coded and categorized into types of metaphors as defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and later expanded by Kövecses (2010). These include:

- Structural metaphors, where one concept is

structured in terms of another (e.g., Education is journey),

- Ontological metaphors, where abstract entities are treated as concrete (e.g., Knowledge is possession),
- Orientational metaphors, which involve spatial orientation (e.g., Intellectual growth is up).

Each metaphor was analysed for its linguistic expression, conceptual mapping, and cultural implications. For example, the Uzbek proverb “Tarbiya ildizi achchiq, mevasi shirin” (The root of upbringing is bitter, its fruit is sweet) metaphorically portrays upbringing as a plant with roots and fruits, suggesting that while the process may be difficult and strict, the outcome is rewarding. This metaphor aligns with similar English expressions like “No pain, no gain” or “Hardship builds character”, but the Uzbek version is deeply embedded in agricultural and nature-based imagery, reflecting the agrarian traditions and values of Uzbek society.

The metaphor “Ta’lim olgan bosh oldindan qimmat” (An educated head is valuable even before death) reflects an ontological metaphor that treats knowledge or education as value or treasure, resonating with English phrases like “Knowledge is power” or “Education is an investment.” These expressions reveal that both languages conceptualize education not only as a process but also as an asset that enhances personal worth and social status.

Reliability and validity in qualitative metaphor research are addressed through triangulation-comparing findings across multiple data sources-and inter-coder agreement. Selected metaphorical expressions were cross-checked with experts in linguistics and education to ensure consistency in interpretation. Furthermore, the study relied on established metaphor identification procedures such as MIPVU (Metaphor Identification Procedure of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) developed by Steen et al. (2010), which provides a systematic approach for identifying metaphorical language in discourse. This method involves determining the contextual meaning of each lexical unit, identifying a more basic meaning, and establishing whether the basic and contextual meanings contrast yet can be understood in comparison.

In terms of language balance, an effort was made to include an equal number of metaphorical expressions from both English and Uzbek, while also considering qualitative richness and cultural significance. While English

metaphors tend to emerge from formal educational discourses and literary expressions, Uzbek metaphors are often rooted in oral traditions and proverbial wisdom, reflecting collective social values and moral teachings. As Saban (2006) emphasizes, educational metaphors are often reflective of a society’s pedagogical beliefs, roles of teachers, and desired student characteristics.

In conclusion, this methodology enables a culturally sensitive, linguistically grounded exploration of how the concept of “ta’lim-tarbiya” is metaphorically constructed in two distinct language communities. By applying a rigorous metaphor analysis grounded in CMT and supported by authentic examples like “Suv bilan ekin o’sar, tarbiya bilan-odam”, this study contributes to the growing body of research on metaphor in education and cross-cultural linguistics.

RESULTS

The analysis of metaphorical expressions in English and Uzbek revealed several dominant metaphorical domains used to conceptualize “ta’lim-tarbiya” (education-upbringing). These metaphors reflect not only linguistic creativity but also cultural attitudes toward learning, moral development, and the societal roles of teachers, students, and parents. The findings are categorized into three key metaphorical frameworks: growth and nature, journey and path, and value and investment.

One of the most prominent metaphorical domains in both languages is the growth and nature metaphor, where education and upbringing are viewed as nurturing processes akin to farming or gardening. In English, expressions such as “planting the seeds of knowledge” or “cultivating young minds” exemplify this pattern, positioning the teacher or parent as a gardener and the learner as a plant in need of care and development (Cameron, 2003). Similarly, the Uzbek language reflects this metaphor in proverbs such as “Suv bilan ekin o’sar, tarbiya bilan — odam” (Crops grow with water, people grow with upbringing), where “tarbiya” (upbringing) is conceptualized as essential nourishment for human growth. Another proverb, “Tarbiya ildizi achchiq, mevasi shirin” (The root of upbringing is bitter, the fruit is sweet), further supports this metaphorical framing. The emphasis in Uzbek metaphors on nature and cultivation reflects a cultural belief in gradual moral and intellectual development, often requiring patience, discipline, and long-term effort. This resonates with Lakoff and Johnson’s

(1980) idea of ontological metaphors, where abstract experiences are treated as concrete, physical processes.

The second major metaphor identified is the journey/path metaphor, common in educational discourse in both English and Uzbek. In English, education is often described as a journey, as seen in expressions like “a lifelong learning journey”, “on the path to knowledge”, or “students progressing along an educational track.” These metaphors emphasize movement, direction, and personal effort, highlighting the progressive nature of learning (Oxford et al., 1998). Uzbek uses a similar metaphorical structure, although it often intertwines with moral and spiritual dimensions. For example, the phrase “Ta’lim yo’li mashaqqatli, ammo savobli” (The path of education is difficult but rewarding) underscores the moral value of perseverance in the learning process. The journey metaphor also implies a shared responsibility between the guide (teacher) and the traveler (student), reflecting the cooperative nature of educational relationships in both cultures.

A third metaphorical pattern found in both English and Uzbek is the value and investment metaphor, where education is viewed as a possession, a resource, or a form of wealth. English expressions like “Knowledge is power,” “Invest in your education,” and “An educated mind is a valuable asset” reflect this conceptualization. These metaphors highlight the utilitarian function of education, linking it to economic, intellectual, or social capital (Kövecses, 2010). A parallel can be seen in the Uzbek proverb “Ta’lim olgan bosh oldindan qimmat” (An educated head is valuable even before death), which assigns inherent value to educational attainment, even beyond material or temporal concerns. This metaphor also carries ontological weight, where knowledge is treated as a tangible and enduring possession. The importance of education as a long-term investment is culturally embedded in Uzbek society, especially in relation to family reputation, social mobility, and moral standing.

While similarities exist between English and Uzbek metaphorical structures, there are notable differences in emphasis and cultural nuance. English metaphors tend to emphasize individual progress and personal growth, reflecting Western ideals of self-realization and autonomy. In contrast, Uzbek metaphors more frequently incorporate collective responsibility, moral obligation, and traditional wisdom, aligning with collectivist values and respect for elders and educators. For example, expressions involving

nature and agriculture in Uzbek often imply the teacher’s central role in shaping not just the intellect, but also the character and behaviour of the learner. This aligns with findings from Saban (2006), who notes that metaphors in educational discourse frequently reflect the sociocultural roles expected from both teachers and learners.

In conclusion, the analysis reveals a shared metaphorical foundation between English and Uzbek in framing “ta’lim-tarbiya” through nature, journey, and value-based metaphors. However, cultural specificity plays a crucial role in shaping how these metaphors are constructed and interpreted. Uzbek metaphorical expressions are often grounded in traditional agrarian and moral imagery, while English expressions reflect more modern, individualistic, and institutional interpretations of education and upbringing. These findings underscore the importance of understanding metaphor as a culturally embedded linguistic tool that can bridge or highlight differences in worldviews across languages.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that metaphorical expressions of “ta’lim-tarbiya” (education-upbringing) in English and Uzbek languages share several conceptual similarities, yet diverge in terms of cultural framing and socio-educational values. Drawing on the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the data confirms that abstract educational concepts are routinely structured through concrete experiences such as nature, journeys, and material value. This discussion interprets the implications of those metaphors and explains how they reflect the distinct educational philosophies, cultural norms, and worldview of each linguistic community.

One of the most salient insights is the “universal metaphor of growth and cultivation”, which appears across both languages. In both English and Uzbek, education and upbringing are conceptualized as nurturing a plant, as seen in expressions like “planting the seeds of knowledge” or “Suv bilan ekin o’sar, tarbiya bilan - odam.” These metaphors suggest that children and learners require care, support, and a conducive environment to develop. However, while the English metaphor tends to emphasize individual intellectual growth, the Uzbek variant carries a stronger social and moral dimension. The imagery of watering a crop not only conveys the idea of growth but also reflects a collective responsibility in the upbringing

process - parents, teachers, and even society are metaphorical gardeners. This echoes the findings of Kövecses (2010), who notes that while metaphorical domains may be shared across cultures, their internal mappings are often shaped by local values and practices.

Uzbek metaphors also display a moral and didactic tone, often warning or advising on the consequences of educational neglect or the importance of strict yet loving guidance. For example, “Tarbiya ildizi achchiq, mevasi shirin” (The root of upbringing is bitter, the fruit is sweet) embodies a culturally accepted belief that proper moral formation is difficult but ultimately rewarding. This metaphor aligns with traditional pedagogical models in Uzbekistan that promote discipline, perseverance, and respect for elders as integral to education. In contrast, English metaphors such as “learning is a lifelong journey” or “follow your educational path” focus more on personal growth, autonomy, and discovery. These differences mirror the contrast between collectivist Eastern values and individualist Western ideologies, as supported by cultural linguistics literature (Sharifian, 2017).

The journey metaphor appears in both languages but functions differently within their respective educational narratives. In English, “education is a journey” often connotes self-paced learning, exploration, and transformation, reflecting modern Western education’s learner-centered orientation. This metaphor supports the idea that learning is not linear and that each individual has a unique path, pace, and destination. Uzbek interpretations of the journey metaphor, such as “Ta’lim yo’li mashaqqatli, ammo savobli,” stress not only the difficulty of the learning process but also its spiritual reward, indicating a deep link between education and ethical or religious virtue. This suggests that in Uzbek culture, learning is not only about acquiring knowledge but also about cultivating one’s soul and character - a view grounded in Islamic educational traditions (Tuychiev, 2020).

The value and investment metaphors - e.g., “Knowledge is power” in English and “Ta’lim olgan bosh oldindan qimmat” in Uzbek—indicate that both cultures regard education as a long-term asset. However, while English expressions tend to emphasize instrumental or economic value, such as better job prospects or social mobility, Uzbek metaphors often imply inherent and lasting worth, even beyond death. This can be linked to the high cultural status of the educated person (olim, donishmand) in

Central Asian societies and the belief in education as a source of spiritual prestige rather than merely professional advantage.

These metaphorical differences reflect deeper cognitive and cultural models. According to Saban (2006), metaphors used in educational settings are shaped by a society’s expectations of the teacher-learner relationship, the purpose of education, and the ideal citizen. In the Uzbek context, where moral upbringing (tarbiya) is inseparable from intellectual instruction (ta’lim), metaphors are more holistic, integrating values, behaviour, and social cohesion. In contrast, English metaphors - especially in contemporary contexts - tend to focus more narrowly on individual success, creativity, and independence. This shift parallels the rise of progressive, student-centered learning models in many Western countries.

In sum, the discussion reveals that metaphor is not only a cognitive device but also a cultural mirror. Through the analysis of metaphors related to “ta’lim-tarbiya”, we gain insight into how English and Uzbek speakers perceive education, not just as a technical process but as a moral journey, a social investment, and a lifelong cultivation of the self.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the metaphorical conceptualization of the “ta’lim-tarbiya” (education-upbringing) concept in English and Uzbek, applying the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to uncover how abstract educational ideas are expressed through concrete and culturally meaningful images. Through a comparative analysis of metaphorical expressions drawn from literary texts, proverbs, educational discourse, and language corpora, the study identified three dominant metaphorical domains shared by both languages: growth and nature, journey and path, and value and investment.

While both English and Uzbek languages use similar metaphorical structures to conceptualize education and upbringing, the analysis revealed key cultural differences in the way these metaphors are framed and interpreted. In English, metaphors tend to emphasize individual growth, personal exploration, and self-investment, reflecting modern, learner-centered educational ideologies. In contrast, Uzbek metaphors often carry moral, communal, and spiritual values, portraying education and upbringing

as collective responsibilities rooted in tradition, patience, and long-term outcomes. Proverbs such as “Tarbiya ildizi achchiq, mevasi shirin” and “Suv bilan ekin o‘sar, tarbiya bilan - odam” highlight the enduring cultural emphasis on moral development and the nurturing role of society in shaping the individual.

The findings underscore the importance of viewing metaphors not only as linguistic expressions but as cognitive and cultural tools that reveal how different societies conceptualize fundamental processes such as education. By interpreting the metaphorical frameworks in both languages, this study contributes to cross-cultural linguistic research, intercultural communication, and comparative education studies. As Sharifian (2017) argues, language is a vessel for cultural conceptualizations, and metaphor is one of the primary mechanisms through which these conceptualizations are transmitted and sustained.

This research also carries pedagogical implications. Understanding how different cultures metaphorically represent education can aid educators, curriculum designers, and translators in crafting more culturally responsive materials. It may also support language learners in navigating educational discourse more effectively by raising their awareness of metaphorical thinking in different cultural contexts.

In conclusion, the metaphorical expression of “ta’lim-tarbiya” reflects not just linguistic creativity but also the philosophical and ethical orientations of English and Uzbek speakers toward education. Future research could expand this study by examining additional languages, exploring the influence of religion and historical change on metaphor use, or analysing metaphor use in classroom interaction. Ultimately, metaphors offer a window into the soul of a culture—and in the case of education, they reveal how deeply rooted our views on learning and upbringing truly are.

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