

Metaphorical Perceptions of High School Students about the Literature Course

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Abstract

We aimed to determine high school student perceptions about the literature course based on metaphors. We conducted the study with the phenomenology model, a qualitative research method. The study group included 137 students (57 female and 80 male students) attending ninth to twelfth grades at four public high schools in Sinop province in Turkey. Forty-six students were 9th graders, 40 were 10th graders, 32 were 11th graders, and 19 were 12th graders. The study data were collected with the phrase “Literature course.... Is like..., because,...” completed by the participants. Descriptive analysis was conducted on the study data. Data analysis included elimination and selection, naming, category development, validity and reliability phases. The study findings demonstrated that 137 high school students came up with 126 metaphors. Fifty-four metaphors were produced by female students and 72 by male students. These metaphors included life (f12), poetry (f4), death (f2), art (f3), book (f7), dictionary (f4), sun (f3). Twenty-four metaphors were produced by the 9th graders, 30 by the 10th graders, 27 by the 11th graders, and 15 by the 12th graders. In conclusion, although certain metaphors were negative, the majority of the metaphors were positive.

Keywords: Literature Education, Literature Course, Metaphor.

Introduction

The metaphors are common terms used to interpret or reflect a phenomenon (Arslan & Bayrakçı, 2006). In Turkish, the term “mecaz” (simile) is often used for metaphor. It is possible to find more than one definition of metaphor in the literature. According to Sackmann (1989), metaphor is a lingual form where a concept or a term is used in a different context to reflect, and it is a thought and observation method according to Morgan (1998); Lakoff and Johnson (1980) described the metaphor as a way of explaining a concept with other similar terms.

According to Saban (2009), the power of a metaphor as a mental model derives from the explicit or implicit emphasis on the similarity of the two phenomena. Thus, the individual associates two dissimilar concepts or phenomena and transforms a certain comprehension to another one. Forceville (2002) explained the metaphor based on two basic concepts: the source and the target concepts. The source concept shares common features with and explains the target concept, while the target concept is the one that the individual aims to explain (Yılmaz, Göçen, & Yılmaz, 2013).

It is known that certain concepts such as simile, analogy, mimesis, figure of speech, and idiom transfer correspond to the term metaphor in literature. Thus, Altun (2003) emphasized that metaphors animate, beautify, and compound the expressions; hence, it is one of the literary arts.

Yunusoğlu (2003) argued that metaphors are the images of individual world perceptions and individual ideas about the objects, movements and events. Metaphors are employed in various fields such as cognitive sciences, literature and education to determine individual perceptions (Aydın, 2010; Bektaş, Okur, & Karadağ, 2014; Hacıfazlıoğlu, Karadeniz & Dalgıç, 2011; Özdemir, 2012; Saban, 2008; Töremen & Döş, 2009; Pilav & Topten, 2013). Metaphors are frequently used in education and play a key role in the interpretation of ideas since metaphors could clarify abstract concepts. Metaphors are also frequently used in literature classes since they allow the active verbal or written expression of student emotions, ideas, and dreams. Thus, the current study is considered important since it would contribute to the determination of the perceptions of the high school students about the abstract and broad concept of literature and the literature course by analyzing the discussing the metaphors associated with literature.

The Aim of the Study

We aimed to determine the metaphors associated with literature in general and the literature course in particular by high school students. Thus, the metaphors employed by the students were classified and interpreted based on the similarities of these metaphors, and the following research problems were determined:

1. What are the metaphoric perceptions of the high school students about the literature course?
2. What are the categories of the metaphors employed by the high school students?
3. What is the distribution of themetaphors employed by the high school students based on grade and gender variables?

Method

The research design, study sample, data collection and analysis are discussed in this section.

The Research Design

In the study, the phenomenology design, a qualitative research method, was employed. Phenomenological studies focus on the facts that are not supported by in-depth and detailed knowledge

and conducted to determine the individual perceptions about the phenomenon and related semantics (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

The Study Sample

The study group included 137 volunteering students attending 4 public high schools in Sinop province in Turkey. Fifty-seven students were female and 80 were male. Forty-six attended 9th grade, 40 attended 10th grade, 32 attended 11th grade, and 19 attended 12th grade. The participant demographics are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1 Participant Demographics (Gender)

Gender	f	%
Female	57	42
Male	80	58
Total	137	100

As seen in Table 1, out of 137 students, 57 (42%) were female and 80 (58%) were male.

Table 2 Participant Demographics (Grade)

Grade	f	%
9th grade	46	34
10th grade	40	29
11th grade	32	23
12th grade	19	14
Total	137	100

As seen in Table 2, 46 (34%) were 9th grade, 40 (29%) were 10th grade, 32 (23%) were 11th grade, and 19 (14%) were 12th grade students.

Data Collection

Study data were collected from the attending studying four public high schools in the province of Sinop. After the necessary authorization was obtained to collect the study data, a form was developed by the author and distributed to the volunteering students. This form included of two sections. In the first section, the students were asked to respond to two questions about their gender and grade. The second section included a fill-in-the-blanks question. The question asked the students to identify the concept that they associated with the literature course and to indicate the analogy.

Data Analysis

After the collection of the study data, valid metaphors determined by the students were classified based on similarities. Descriptive analysis was employed to analyze the study data. The metaphors were classified based on similar themes and these themes were transferred into tables, including the theme frequencies. Thus, the findings are presented in an organized manner, including interpretations. Metaphor analysis was conducted in four stages: elimination and selection phase, determination of the themes, categorization, and validity and reliability. The study data were coded by the author to facilitate interpretation. Direct student quotes included the codes assigned to the participants and their gender (e.g., female student 1: FS1).

Data analysis included the stages of elimination and selection, naming, categorization, validity and reliability. In the elimination and selection phase, the forms that did not include metaphors were excluded based on the presence of a metaphor or an analogy, or whether these included multiple metaphors. Thus, the valid metaphors were determined, and 11 forms that included invalid metaphors were excluded from the analysis. In the second stage, names were assigned to the metaphors indicated by the students and these metaphors were listed. In the categorization phase,

metaphors were conceptually categorized based on similarities and six categories were determined. In the validity and reliability stage, the categories were submitted to two experts and revised based on expert comments. Data reliability was determined with the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The study data were analyzed independently by the author and two field experts, and data reliability was determined based on the comparison of the analyses. The agreement between the author and the field experts was considered as the evidence of reliability. The above-mentioned formula was used to determine that the reliability coefficient of the data was 96%. A reliability coefficient of 70% or above is accepted to reflect reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Findings

In this section, the metaphors determined with the student responses to the question “Literature course is like ..., because...” are classified based on themes and presented in tables. The similarity of the metaphors is determined based on the analogies indicated by the students. The analogies were also classified and categorized in six groups. The metaphors developed by the high school students about literature course are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Metaphors about the Literature Course

Metaphor (n=137)	f	Metaphor (n=137)	f	Metaphor (n=137)	f	Metaphor (n=137)	f
life	12	sun that opens to the past	1	pepper	1	hair	1
book	7	light	1	homeland		painting	1
dictionary	5	lighthouse	1	phone	1	rainbow	1
poem	4	water drops	1	lemon	1	a road to infinity	1
water	4	guide	1	articulate individual	1	organ	1
novel	3	cloud	1	story	1	school	1
tree	3	imagination	1	eternity	1	forced labor	1
course	2	rathole	1	the backbone of Turkish	1	complete failure	1
sun	3	time	1	our name	1	science	1
art	3	calendar	1	rhyme	1	a course to learn proper language	1
infinity	3	child	1	compass	1	honey	1
fundamental course	2	emotional tool	1	tree root	1	void	1
notebook	2	galaxy	1	soil	1		
game	2	moon	1	gesture	1		

death	2	atom		teacher	1		
last minute goal	1	psychiatrist	1	flower	1		
language of the heart	1	bottom of the ocean	1	pizza dough	1		
mother	1	Gemini	1	space	1		
cloth	1	air	1	music	1		
therapy	1	need	1	basketball	1		
history book	1	treasure	1	crop	1		
poetry book	1	reading	1	concrete	1		
history	1	culture	1	righteousness	1		
pain	1	relearning Turkish	1	tool	1		
Total=126							

As seen in Table 3, 137 high school students indicated 126 metaphors. Metaphors such as life (f12), book (f7), dictionary (f5), water (f4), poem (f4), tree (3), novel (f3), sun (f3), art (f3), course (f2), death (f2), fundamental course (f2), notebook (f2), culture (f2), game (f2) were mentioned by more than one student. Cloud, void, last minute goal, language of the heart, mother, cloth, therapy, history book, poetry book, history, pain, sun that opens to the past, whistling, lighthouse, water drops, guide, imagination, rathole, time, calendar, child, emotional tool, galaxy, moon, atom, psychiatrist, bottom of the ocean, Gemini, air, need, treasure, reading,

relearning Turkish, pepper, game, homeland, phone, lemon, story, culture, backbone of Turkish, our name, rhyme, compass, root of a tree, earth, gesture, teacher, flower, pizza dough, space, music, basketball, crop, concrete, accuracy, play, hair, painting, rainbow, road to infinity, organ, school, forced labor, eternity, complete failure, science, a course to learn proper language, tool, articulate individual, and honey metaphors were mentioned only once by the students.

The distribution of the metaphors indicated by the high school students based on gender is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Distribution of the Metaphors about Literature Course Based on Gender

Female (n=57)				Male (n=80)			
Metaphor	f	Metaphor	f	Metaphor	f	Metaphor	f
life	6	sun that opens to the past	1	life	6	soil	1
eternity	3	light	1	book	6	gesture	1
tree	3	lighthouse	1	water	4	teacher	1
course	2	water drops	1	notebook	2	flower	1
poetry	2	guide	1	novel	3	pizza dough	1
air	1	dictionary	1	dictionary	3	space	1
need	1	imagination	1	art	2	music	1
treasure	1	rathole	1	sun	2	basketball	1
bottom of the ocean	1	time	1	poetry	2	crop	1
Gemini	1	calendar	1	fundamental course	2	concrete	1
death	1	child	1	culture	2	righteousness	1
therapy	1	emotional tool	1	game	2	honey	1
art	1	galaxy	1	pepper	1	hair	1
cloud	1	moon	1	relearning Turkish	1	painting	1

void	1	sun	1	homeland	1	rainbow	1
last minute goal	1	atom	1	phone	1	road to infinity	1
language of the heart	1	psychiatrist	1	lemon	1	organ	1
mother	1	complete failure	1	story	1	school	1
cloth	1	articulate individual	1	need	1	forced labor	1
book	1			backbone of Turkish	1	death	1
history book	1			our name	1	science	1
poetry book	1			rhyme	1	a course to learn proper language	1
history	1			compass	1	tool	1
pain	1			tree root	1	reading	

As seen in Table 4, the study group produced 126 different metaphors, where 54 were produced by female students and 72 were produced by male students. It was observed that 7 metaphors [life (f12), poetry (f4), death (f2), art (f3), book (f7), dictionary (f4), sun (f3)] were produced by both female and male students. The most indicated metaphor (f12) by male and female students was “life”. Certain analogies produced by the students for the life metaphor are presented below:

Literature course is like life, because we always encounter it. (MS8)

Literature course is like life, because it is very difficult. (FS41)

Literature course is like life, because as we submerge into literature, we submerge into life. Literature is a reflection of us, people, the society, and the environment. (FS26)

Literature course is like life, because we can achieve the things we could achieve in life in this course beforehand. (FS46)

Thus, high school students indicated a higher number of positive metaphors about the literature course. On the other hand, the students also indicated certain negative metaphors (death, forced work, rathole, a complete failure, pain, void, cloud). Certain student statement examples are presented below.

Literature course is like a cloud, because it destroys our love for poetry, like the cloud destroys the sun. (FS15)

Literature course is like a rathole, because it includes too many concepts and one cannot memorize them all, it is really a difficult course. I am lost in words when I study literature. (FS37)

The distribution of metaphors developed by the high school students about literature course bade on the grade level is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Distribution of the Metaphors about Literature Course Based on Grade

#	9th grade metaphors	10th grade metaphors	11th grade metaphors	12th grade metaphors
1	cloth	child	art	poetry book
2	book	air	cloud	history book
3	eternity	need	void	tree
4	imagination	treasure	last minute goal	pain
5	poetry	bottom of the ocean	language of the heart	life
6	emotional tool	tree	mother	articulate person
7	psychiatrist	Gemini	course	history
8	school	honey	sun that opens to the past	sun
9	hair	therapy	light	road to eternity

10	life	guide	lighthouse	rainbow
11	art	dictionary	water drops	teacher
12	story	life	rathole	gesture
13	reading	book	tree	soil
14	righteousness	death	time	galaxy
15	novel	forced labor	calendar	moon
16	notebook	painting	atom	
17	rhyme	game	culture	
18	water	concrete	organ	
19	science	crop	basketball	
20	a course to learn proper language	pizza dough	music	
21	our name	flower	space	
22	backbone of Turkish	compass	novel	
23	culture	relearning Turkish	water	
24	fundamental course	sun	life	
25		culture	tree root	
26		lemon	tool	
27		water	complete failure	
28		phone		
29		homeland		
30		pepper		

As seen in Table 5, 24 metaphors were indicated by the 9th graders, 30 were indicated by the 10th graders, 27 were indicated by the 11th graders, and 15 were indicated by the 12th graders. The ninth-grade students indicated the following metaphors: cloth, book, eternity, imagination, poetry, emotional tool, psychiatrist, school, hair, life, art, story, reading, truth, novel, notebook, rhyme, water, science, a course to learn proper language, our name, backbone of Turkish, culture, and fundamental course. The tenth-grade students indicated the following metaphors: child, air, need, treasure, bottom of the ocean, tree, Gemini, honey, therapy, guide, dictionary, life, book, death, forced labor, painting, game, concrete, crop, pizza dough, flower, compass, relearning Turkish, sun, culture, lemon, water, phone, homeland, and pepper. The eleventh-grade students indicated the following metaphors: art, cloud, emptiness, last minute goal, language of the heart, mother, lesson, sun that opens to the past, light, lighthouse, water drops, rathole, tree, time, calendar, atom, culture, organ, basketball, music, space, novel, water, life, tree root, vehicle, and complete failure. The twelfth-

grade students indicated the following metaphors: poetry book, history book, tree, pain, life, articulate person, history, sun, road to eternity, rainbow, teacher, gesture, earth, galaxy, and moon. Certain metaphors (book, life, novel, water, tree, culture) were indicated by more than one grader, while others were indicated by the students in a single grade.

The metaphors presented in Table 3 were grouped under 6 categories based on the analogies mentioned by the students:

1. Literature course as a concrete concept
2. Literature course as an abstract concept
3. Literature course as a healer of the soul
4. Literature course as an instructor/guide/occupation
5. Literature course as a communication tool
6. Literature course as a meaningless/boring occupation

The metaphors associated with the above-mentioned classifications are presented in the following tables:

Table 6 Literature Course as a Concrete Concept

Metaphor (n=126)	f	Metaphor (n=126)	f
book	7	soil	1
dictionary	5	concrete	1
poetry	4	calendar	1
water	4	flower	1
tree	3	history book	1
novel	3	poetry book	1
notebook	2	story	1
pizza dough	1	tree root	1
cloud	1	lemon	1
water drops	1	honey	1
crop	1	cloth	1
space	1	treasure	1
galaxy	1	moon	1
Total=47			

As seen in Table 6, high school students indicated 47 metaphors in the literature course as a concrete concept category. Among these metaphors, the book (f7) and the dictionary (f5) were the most frequent metaphors. Certain student responses in this category are presented below:

Literature course is like a book, because both reading books and literature are essential. (FS54)

Literature course is like a calendar, because it reflects yesterday, today and tomorrow. (FS40)

Literature course is like a tree root, because if we cannot express ourselves, that tree would be uprooted. (MS49)

Literature course is like a child, because it entertains, teaches and open to innovations. (FS4)

Literature course is like concrete, because it is the foundation of Turkish. (MS66)

Table 7 Literature Course as an Abstract Concept

Metaphor (n=126)	f	Metaphor (n=126)	f
life	12	eternity	1
art	3	time	1
air	1	need	1
culture	1	righteousness	1
road to eternity	1	imagination	1
homeland	1	atom	1

bottom of the ocean	1	science	1
tool	1	our name	1
backbone of Turkish	1		
Gemini	1		
Total= 32			

As seen in Table 7, 32 metaphors were indicated in the category of literature course as an abstract concept. The most frequent metaphor was life (12). Certain participant statements are presented below:

Literature course is like life, because the things we learn in life will never end. (FS49)

Literature course is like life, because it is the only course that could change our lives by reading. (MS50)

Literature course is like art, because the linguistic and literary styles and genres of different periods touch our hearts and instill beauty. (FS13)

Literature course is like time, because we learn literature by living. We do not know what will happen in future. (FS39)

Literature course is like an atom, because it is not visible, but several generate topics. (FS53)

Table 8 Literature Course as a Healer of the Soul

Metaphor (n=126)	f	Metaphor (n=126)	f
therapy	1	psychiatrist	1
music	1		
Total= 3			

As seen in Table 8, three metaphors were indicated in the category of the literature course as a healer of the soul. High school students associated the literature course with therapy, psychiatrist, music, and mother metaphors. Certain statements in this category are presented below:

Literature course is like a psychiatrist, because we tell our emotions to both and relax. (FS57)

Literature course is like therapy, because it observes human emotions and thoughts, concerns, and the ideas and behavior of individuals with internal peace and happiness in addition to science and logic. (FS12)

Table 9 Literature Course as an Instructor/ Guide/Occupation

Metaphor (n=126)	f	Metaphor (n=126)	f
course	2	science	1
Fundamental course	2	sun that opens to the past	1
game	2	light	1
reading	1	lighthouse	1
a course to learn proper language	1	compass	1
relearning Turkish	1	teacher	1
articulate person	1	basketball	1
school	1	painting	1
guide	1		
mother	1		
Total= 21			

As seen in Table 9, 21 metaphors were developed by the high school students in the literature course as an instructor/guide/occupation category. The most frequently mentioned metaphors were “course” (f2), “fundamental course” (f2) and “game” (f2). Certain statements in this category are presented below:

Literature course is like a mother, because it teaches speaking, walking, life, right behaviors, and prepares (the individual) for life. (FS20)

Literature course is like a lighthouse, because it enlightens all literary artists and social life of the past. (FS32)

Table 10 Literature Course as a Communication Tool

Metaphor (n=126)	f	Metaphor (n=126)	f
emotional tool	1	language of the heart	1
phone	1		
Total= 3			

As seen in Table 10, three metaphors were indicated in the literature course as a communication tool category. High school students produced metaphors such as emotional tool, phone, and language of the heart. Certain statements in this category are presented below:

Literature course is like language of the heart, because we can only tell about the heart through literature. (FS19)

Literature course is like an emotional tool, because it teaches how to reflect one’s emotions. It allows one to pick the best and special words for expression. (FS45)

Table 11 Literature Course as a Meaningless/ Boring Occupation

Metaphor (n=126)	f	Metaphor (n=126)	f
death	2	complete failure	1
pain	1	forced labor	1
void	1	rathole	1
pepper	1	last minute goal	1
Total= 9			

As seen in Table 11, nine metaphors were indicated in the literature course as a meaningless/ boring occupation category. Students considered the literature course meaningless and associated it with death, void, forced labor or rathole. Certain statements in this category are presented below:

Literature course is like death, because it is no longer literature but a course. Thus, it is bound to disappear without interest. (FS11)

Literature course is like forced labor heart, because it is a boring and suffocating course. (MS78)

Literature course is like a lar minute goal, because when your numerical score is not OK, you have to select a verbal occupation: (FS17)

Concluding Remarks, Discussion and Recommendations

The current study, conducted to determine the metaphors developed by high school students about the literature course, revealed the following findings:

Hundred thirty-seven students who participated in the study indicated 126 valid metaphors; 9th grade students indicated 24, 10th grade students indicated 30, 11th grade students indicated 27 and 12th grade students indicated 15 metaphors. These metaphors were categorized as follows: “literature course as a concrete concept, literature course as an abstract concept, literature course as a healer of the soul, literature course as an instructor/guide, literature

course as a communication tool, and literature course as a meaningless and boring occupation”. The most frequently indicated metaphors were life (f12), book (f7), dictionary (f5), water (f4), poetry (f4), tree (3), novel (f3), sun (f3), art (f3), and course (f2).

Literature review revealed similar studies conducted to determine the perceptions of high school students about literature. In a study carried out by Pilav and Üstün (2013), it was concluded that 276 high school students attending 4 high schools indicated 96 metaphors associated with literature. The “life” (f26) metaphor was the most indicated metaphor in the study. Eskimen (2019) investigated the metaphors about literature indicated by 187 students. It was concluded that the students produced 75 metaphors about literature. Again, the most frequently indicated metaphor was “life” (f23).

Other studies have been conducted on metaphors as well. Candan and Öztaş (2017) conducted a study to determine the metaphors about history as indicated by 160 junior high school students and reported that the students produced 130 valid metaphors. Öztürk (2007), reported that 316 students produced 106 metaphors in 12 categories in a study conducted to determine the metaphors about geography produced by pre-service social studies, classroom and science teachers. In similar studies conducted on the metaphorical perceptions of college students, Kaygana (2013) determined the metaphors indicated by 110 pre-service Turkish language teachers about novels and concluded that pre-service teachers produced 66 valid metaphors. In another study conducted by Yazıcı (2012), it was reported that 77 Department of Turkish Language and Literature graduated produced 60 metaphors.

In general, it was observed that participating high school students indicated positive metaphors about the literature course in the present study. However, certain students considered the literature course boring and meaningless and associated the course with metaphors such as a rathole, death, pain and void, demonstrating that certain students disliked the literature course. Thus, literature course instructors should select more interesting resources and material in the course.

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