

## **An Analysis of the Metaphorical Perceptions About the Piano by Fine Arts High School Students**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to determine, as expressed in metaphors, the attitudes of the students of music department in the Fine Arts High School (FAHS) in the 2019-2020 academic year. The study was carried out with 37 music students in 9th and 12th grades of Mersin Adiyaman Fine Arts High School. In line with the phenomenological research design, a form including the statement “The piano lesson is like... Because...” was used to collect the data for the study. Determining the attitudes of the students of the music department towards the piano is critical in terms of increasing the quality of piano learning and music education. Since metaphors are crucial in determining the student's attitude towards a musical instrument, the metaphors that are used by the student are extremely important. Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine the metaphorical meanings assigned to the piano by FAHS music students. The data were categorized by using content and frequency analysis techniques, which revealed 34 positive and three negative metaphorical definitions about the piano instrument. The findings indicate that most of the participants have positive metaphoric definitions of the piano.

**Keywords:** Piano, Fine Arts High School, Metaphor

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## Introduction

According to Palmquist (2001, p.1), "Metaphor, which is a linguistic tool that connects two objects or concepts, is regarded as a symbolic language structure in which two different ideas or concepts are linked to make a transition or comparison from one field of life to another. ...Metaphors appear in our daily language as nouns, verbs, or modifiers." Metaphor is to understand and experience anything from another point of view (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.5). The metaphor helps us in other ways as well: It allows us to connect the object or phenomenon that we try to understand to a network of concepts that belong to another meaning, to see it from different perspectives and to notice the situations that have been overlooked before (Taylor, 1984, p.103). When using metaphors, individuals can express their own truths, whether they are aware or not, by associating them with their own lives and experiences. (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p.56). Since the function of metaphors is "understanding," it is also used as a tool of perception in the education process (Woon and Ho, 2005, p.362).

In the process of music education, the piano, which is accepted as a basic musical instrument, supports the student in terms of reading, listening and playing music, and has a significant positive effect on achieving the targeted behavioral changes by mediating basic music studies and enabling the student to appreciate music and gain musical knowledge (Buchanan, 1964; Vernezza, 1967). Since FAHS students study in an educational institution that provides a professional foundation for music education, how they define the piano can greatly help designing the subsequent piano teaching and learning processes. How the student conceptualizes the piano in his/her mind can be considered as a description of his/her approach to the piano. The most important aspect of this definition is that if students have a negative approach to the piano, it is possible to identify this and then to identify the reasons. Thus, it may be possible to produce solutions to the identified problems and to turn any negative perspectives of the student into positive ones.

Although this study specifically focuses on the piano instrument, a remarkable number of metaphor studies have been conducted on music, especially in the last seven years. Some of these studies are as follows: Koca (2012) conducted a study on pre-school teacher candidates' perceptions of learning music through metaphors. Mustan-Dönmez and Karaburun (2013) examined the tradition of metaphorical narrative in folk songs, while Özkul (2013) identified metaphors in musical expression in terms of the relationship between music and language. Umuzdaş and Umuzdaş (2013) conducted a metaphorical analysis of pre-service teachers' perceptions of the music lesson. Babacan (2014) determined the metaphorical perceptions of a group of students studying at a fine arts high school about the concept of music. Mentiş-Köksoy (2015) conducted a similar study with a group of primary school pre-service teachers and studied their perceptions about the concept of music by using metaphors. Aydın-Uygun (2015) analyzed pre-service teachers' perceptions of traditional music genres through metaphors. Dinç-Altun (2014), on the other hand, metaphorically examined the

perceptions of a group of undergraduate students in a department of music teaching about the piano course. YAZICI (2019), who also studied the piano course, conducted a metaphorical study of the attitudes of the music department students attending the piano course in a Fine Arts High School.

### **Aim of the Study and Research Questions**

The aim of this study is to determine the perceptions of music students of a Fine Arts High School about the concept of "piano" by means of metaphors. To this end, some sub-objectives were determined and these research objectives were posed as the following questions:

1. What are the metaphors of music students of a Fine Arts High School regarding the concept of piano?
2. Under which conceptual categories can these metaphors about piano be classified according to their common characteristics?

### **Method**

This study uses phenomenology as its research design, which is used to investigate phenomena that we do not fully perceive in our daily life. Phenomenology focuses particularly on the phenomena that we are aware yet do not have a deep knowledge and perception of. Thus, it is used as a basis for defining a phenomenon in detail, explaining it through examples, and gaining a deeper understanding of it by tapping into the power of subjective information (Lightning and Lightning, 2011; Balci, 2011).

### **Participants**

This study implemented the purposive sampling method for the participant selection because it aims to determine the metaphorical perceptions of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students of FAHS music department about the concept of piano. The study was carried out with 37 music students studying at Adiyaman Fine Arts High School in the 2019-2020 school year. 45.95% of the participants were girls (n=17) and 54.05% were boys (n=20).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the Participants

<b>Characteristic</b>		<b>(f)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Age	14-15	10	27.03
	17-18	27	72.97
		37	100
Gender	Girl	17	45.95
	Boy	20	54.05
<b>Total</b>		37	100
Grade	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	10	27.03
	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	27	72.97
<b>Total</b>		37	100

### **Data Collection Tool**

A questionnaire was prepared to find out the Fine Arts High School music department students' mental images and reasons about the concept of piano. The questionnaire has two parts. In the first part, the students were asked about their age, gender and grade, and in the second part, they were asked to fill the gaps in the following sentence: "It is like a piano .... because ....". At this stage, the students were asked to think and write a about a single metaphorical image during half of a class period. In the metaphorical research questionnaires, the concept of "like" is stated in order to have the participants form the link between the subject of the metaphor and the source of the metaphor in an easier and clearer way. The concept of "because" is used because it provides a rationale for the metaphors written (Saban, 2009). As the documents providing the data source, these questionnaires completed by the students were used as the data collection tool for the current study.

### **Data Analysis**

The data in the study were obtained by content analysis. The primary aim in content analysis is to reveal the relationships among the concepts that can explain the data. Therefore, the collected data should first be conceptualized, and then the themes should be logically arranged in accordance with the determined concepts to explain the data accordingly. Thus, the data obtained by content analysis can be described and the facts in the data can be identified. The basis of content analysis is to be able to group similar data with certain concepts and themes together, and interpret them in a comprehensible way. The rationale underlying the digitization of the qualitative data obtained in this study through frequency analysis was allowing a comparison of the themes or categories identified during the analysis of the data, increasing the validity and reliability of the study, reducing bias, and enabling the re-evaluation of the findings in light of data from a larger sample by means of data collection tools such as questionnaires (Lightning and Lightning, 2011).

The metaphor analysis and interpretation were carried out in four stages: 1. Labeling, 2. Screening and elimination, 3. Compilation and category development, 4. Ensuring validity and reliability.

In order to label the metaphors, first of all, a temporary list of the metaphors was made in alphabetical order to see if the statements made by the students of FAHS Music department were clearly metaphors. At the stage of elimination, 8 of the 45 metaphors obtained from the music department students were eliminated because they were not actually metaphors, and 37 metaphors were retained. In the compilation and category development stage, the metaphors identified were divided and tabulated into two groups as positive and negative, yielding 8 positive and 2 negative categories.

In the fourth stage, to ensure validity and reliability, the list of metaphors subsumed by 10 categories were presented to three experts to have them check whether the metaphors represented the categories, and the experts were asked to develop a new list by using these categories and metaphors.

Consensus on all metaphors was clear, which proved the validity of the lists. In the next step, Miles and Huberman’s reliability formula [Reliability: Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement)] was used to test the reliability. This calculation showed that the reliability of the study was 100%. A reliability score above 70% is sufficient for a study to be accepted as reliable (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Thus, the lists in the study were accepted as reliable.

### Results

In this section, the metaphors formed by the participants about the “piano” are listed and presented in a table and interpreted in line with the purposes of the study.

#### The Metaphors Developed by the Fine Arts High School Music Department Students about the Piano

Under this heading, the metaphors developed by the participants are listed in alphabetical order and presented by indicating the number and percentage of the participating students expressing each metaphor.

**Table 2.** The FAHS Music Department Students’ Metaphors about the Piano and the Number and Percentage of Students expressing them

Category	Code	Metaphor	Students Expressing the Metaphor			
			(f)	(%)	Codes Total (f)	(%)
Positive Metaphors	1	My mom	1	2,702703	34	91,89189
	2	Friend	1	2,702703		
	3	Love	1	2,702703		
	4	Close friend	1	2,702703		
	5	My feelings	3	8,108108		
	6	Expression of my feelings	1	2,702703		
	7	Sun	1	2,702703		
	8	Life	2	5,405405		
	9	Philosophy of Life	2	5,405405		
	10	A part of my life	5	13,51351		
	11	A key that opens all the doors	1	2,702703		
	12	Indian TV Series	1	2,702703		
	13	Peace	1	2,702703		
	14	My heart	1	2,702703		
	15	The melody in my heart	1	2,702703		
	16	Sibling	1	2,702703		
	17	Savior Angel	1	2,702703		
	18	Breath	2	5,405405		
	19	My soul	1	2,702703		
	20	Piece of my soul	1	2,702703		
	21	Relaxing	1	2,702703		
	22	Joy	1	2,702703		
	23	Water	1	2,702703		
	24	Reflector	1	2,702703		
	25	Life style	1	2,702703		
Negative Metaphors	26	Nothing	2	5,405405	3	8,108109
	27	Drug	1	2,702703		
Total			37	100	37	100

Table 2 shows that 37 FAHS music students developed 27 metaphors for the “piano” instrument. In the light of these data, it can be said that the FAHS students have a broad view of the piano instrument and assign various missions to the piano by putting it in different places in their lives. Most of the metaphors (91.90%) are positive while a small part (8.10%) is negative, which indicates that students have a positive attitude towards the piano.

It is observed that the students mostly use the “part of my life” and “my feelings” metaphors for the piano. This shows that students see the piano as an indispensable part of their lives and adopt it as a part of themselves, just like their feelings. In addition to these two metaphors with the highest frequency, the students’ metaphors “life, lifestyle, and philosophy of life” expressed in similar terms shows that students regard the piano as the center of their lives. In addition to the life definitions in clear terms, the “soul”, “part of the soul”, “my heart,” and “breath” metaphors can be interpreted as expressions that underline how vital the piano is for them to live.

FAHS students defined the piano as the social figure they saw closest to them by attributing some human characteristics to the piano, with metaphors such as “mother, friend, close friend, and brother”. This indicates how dear the piano is to them and how close they view it to themselves.

When all the metaphors are examined, it is seen that the piano has a fixed place in the students’ life and it has a positive effect not only on their academic achievement but also on their status in life. This issue will become clearer when the categories through which these effects are expressed are revealed.

### **Metaphorical Categories Developed by the Fine Arts High School Music Department Students on the “Piano” Instrument**

Under this heading, the metaphors developed by the participants are divided into categories and presented with the number and percentage of the participating students representing each category and metaphor.

**Table 3.** Positive Metaphors about the Piano and the Number and Percentage of the Students Expressing These

Category	Code	Metaphor	Student Example	Description	Student Expressing the Metaphor			
					f	%	Total	
					f	%	f	%
Pre-requisite	2	Life	“Life is the beginning of animation and piano is the beginning of music.”		2	5,405405	4	10,81081
	25	Savior Angel	“It is necessary for the basis of all music lessons, musically. The savior of my music.”		1	2,702703		
	28	Indian TV	“I love TV series. I love		1	2,702703		

		series	movies too. Because they have piano music.”				
Importance	11	Part of my life	“From my point of view, the piano is not just a practice in a music class. It has a very important place in my life. ”	5	13,51351		
	12	Philosophy of Life	“It is one of my indispensables.”	1	2,702703		
	3	Life style	“I love it so much, and I want to see more of it, but unfortunately we can't. It's very special for me. I'd love it to be my main instrument.”	1	2,702703		
	13	Part of my soul	“Each of its notes, each of its works reaches the deepest, most inaccessible points of my soul, appeals to my emotions and is an integral part of my life.”	1	2,702703	11	29,72973
	10	Joy	“This is the last instrument I'd give up in life. I want to advance on the piano and pass it on to the next generations. I love the piano. ”	1	2,702703		
	19	Mother	“It is indispensable for me. ”	1	2,702703		
	23	Feeling	“It is just as important to me as my feelings are.”	1	2,702703		
Need	29	My heart	“A person needs his heart to live, and a piano to have music.”	1	2,702703		
	1	Water	“You cannot live without water. I cannot live without the piano. ”	1	2,702703	3	8,108109
	27	Breath	“I cannot think of life without the piano. Without the piano, I feel something is missing in music.”	1	2,702703		
Support	33	Love	“Its sound gives me peace. Something that fixes all my troubles. ”	1	2,702703		
	30	Relaxing	“Every time I play it and listen to it, I feel great peace of mind and I forget all my troubles.”	1	2,702703		
	9	Key	“When I listen to a piece on the piano, my soul rests.”	1	2,702703	8	21,62162
	24	Breath	“You relax as you play, and that moment gives you life like a breath. It cleanses you of all your troubles.”	1	2,702703		
	16	My sould	“It gives me peace and rests my soul.”	1	2,702703		
	34	Sibling	“It is comforting like a brother.”	1	2,702703		

	31	Friend	“Every time I feel sad, I talk to my piano and relax.”	1	2,702703		
	22	Peace	“I get a peace of mind when I play the piano.”	1	2,702703		
Gaining Knowledge	21	Sun	“I am enlightened as I play the piano. I develop by applying what I have learned.”	1	2,702703	1	2,702703
Motivation	12	Philosophy of Life	“I have been in a whole different world since the piano has entered my life. My dreams have changed completely. My philosophy has become completely different. It has increased my motivation for life.”	1	2,702703	1	2,702703
	32	Close friend	“When I play it, I share my pain, my joy, my excitement, my happiness, my sadness, and I play with my emotions at that moment.”	1	2,702703		
Reflection of Feelings	17	My feelings	“It reflects my feelings.”	2	5,405405		
	8	Reflector	“I reflect through it what I can’t express”	1	2,702703	5	13,51351
	4	Expression of My Feelings	“When I feel bad, and when I feel good, I tell it about my feelings, like a comrade who accompanies me, and my piano tells about my feelings to those around me.”	1	2,702703		
Imagination	26	The Melody in My Heart	“Every time I play it, every time you press a key, it takes people away and takes you where you want them to be. The piano is like a journey.”	1	2,702703	1	2,702703
Total				34	91,90	34	91,90

Table 3 above clearly shows that the FAHS students developed 34 positive metaphors in eight categories (prerequisite, importance, need, support, gaining knowledge, motivation, reflection of feelings, imagination). In addition, some similar metaphors (breath, philosophy of life) having been placed in different categories is due to the meanings attributed to the metaphors created. At the same time, the fact that similar metaphors (life, part of my life, way of life, philosophy of life) fall into different categories shows that the same analogies from different perspectives were given for the piano.

Among the positive metaphors, the “importance” category was identified as the category in which the highest number of metaphors were expressed by the participating students, with a value of 29.72%. When we consider the metaphors such as “it is a part of my life, the philosophy of life, and

the way of life” in the category of *importance*, it is evident that the participants view the piano as crucial as life. Similarly, the “mother” metaphor shows that the participant cares about the piano as much as her mother, an important social figure in life. The metaphors of “joy” and “feeling” in the category of *importance* further show the extent to which the participating students adopt the piano as an abstracted human.

With a percentage of 21.62%, the *support* category, which includes eight of the metaphors developed by the participants for the piano, demonstrates that the piano has a relaxing effect like providing support for a close friend or relative, as well as having a therapeutic effect. For example, when the metaphors of “breathing, love, relaxing, key, soul, and peace” and the explanations of these metaphors are examined, it is clear that the piano has a healing and therapeutic side, which is noticed by the students. Music therapy helps foster social relations in the society, brings solutions to social problems, boosts individuals’ self-confidence, and makes physical exercises easier for individuals with physical problems. Music therapy, which is extremely important in people’s lives and treatment processes, extends to Africa, is historically rooted in America, Asia, Europe, and many Turkish civilizations (Çengel, 2006). The metaphors developed in the present study support many previous studies confirming the positive effects of music therapy, and the piano can be said to be good for the soul since it acts as a channel that directs emotions towards positive practices. On the other hand, when we look at the explanations of the metaphors of the “sibling” and “friend” in the *support* category, the piano emerges as a feature that supports lightening the human mood.

The “prerequisite” and “reflecting feelings” metaphors take the third place with a frequency of four and percentage of 10.81%. Looking at the explanations given for the “life” and “savior angel” metaphors in the *prerequisite* category, it is obvious that the piano is viewed as the cornerstone of music for students. Particularly in the description of the *savior angel* metaphor, the statement “it is necessary as a foundation for all music lessons” summarizes the view that the piano is a sine qua non for music education. When the category of *reflecting feelings* is examined, it can be seen that the piano is a communication tool for students to express their feelings easily. Considering that these high school students, being adolescents, may have particularly hard time expressing their emotions, the explanations they provide for the “friend, my feelings, reflector, and expressing my emotions” indicate that the piano is an important communication tool that they use to express their emotions.

Metaphors in the *need* category (8,10%), which has a similar meaning to that of the category of *importance* indicating that the piano is an important part of life, forming the basis of vital functions and even life itself for the participating students, are expressed as “my heart” and “water.” The explanations given for these metaphors underline that the piano is a necessary instrument for music education.

**Table 4.** Negative Metaphors about the Piano and the Number and Percentage of the Students Developing These

Category	Code	Metaphor	Student Description Sample	Student Representing the Metaphor			
				(f)	(%)	Codes Total	
						(f)	(%)
Addiction	37	Drug	“Once I press that key, it's hard to let go again. I want to play day and night without doing anything else.”	1	2,702703	3	8.10
Negative Attitude	35	Nothing	“I want to develop in other fields of music.”	2	5,405405		

Looking at Table 4, it is clear that the FAHS music students developed two metaphors (drugs and nothing) in two categories (addiction and negative attitude). However, a small number of FAHS music students seem to develop negative metaphors for the piano. Although the drug metaphor in the “addiction” category is included as a negative element in this table, when we look at the explanation part of this metaphor, it actually becomes evident that the student has a great interest in and love for the piano. However, addiction is categorized as a negative metaphor as addiction is always considered something negative regardless of its exact type. The “nothing” metaphor, which includes the direct negative expression in the table, shows that the students who wrote this expression developed a negative attitude towards the piano because of their interest and positive attitude towards other instruments.

### Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to analyze the perceptions of FAHS music students about the piano instrument through metaphor. It was found that that the participants developed a total of 37 metaphors for the piano instrument. In terms of their common characteristics, these metaphors were grouped under 10 different categories, 8 positive and 2 negative. In total, FAHS students developed 27 different metaphors. Considering that 37 students participated in the study and these students developed 27 different metaphors, it is evident that the participants perceived the piano from various perspectives.

The results of the study indicate that the category of “importance” (f=11, 29.72%) is the category in which the students developed the highest number of metaphors, which is followed by “support” (f=8, 21.62%), reflecting feelings” (f=5, 13.51%), and “need” (f=3, 8.10%).

The most frequent positive metaphors are “part of my life” (f=5, 13.51%), “my feelings” (f=3, 8.10%), and “life, philosophy of life, and breath” (f=2, 5,40%). This shows that the students view the piano as important as their life and hold it as dear as their emotions. In particular, the explanations of the participants that the piano is a basic and necessary instrument for music education is evidence that they truly recognize the importance of the piano.

The most frequent negative metaphor in the study is “nothing” ( $f=2$ , 5.40%), and “drug” ( $f=1$ , 2.70%), with only three of the 37 participants having negative attitudes towards the piano.

In the relevant research literature, research on perceptions about musical instruments in general and about the piano in particular is quite limited.

The majority of the previous metaphor studies focus on music and music courses. However, although “music” constitutes the overarching theme, it may be more beneficial to recognize the attitudes of the students on the musical instruments used in the education of music and to eliminate any negative attitudes they may have. However, in his study focusing on the metaphors developed by a group of FAHS students majoring in music, Yazıcı (2019) identified 91 different metaphors related to the “piano course”, revealing 52 positive, 37 negative, and 2 both positive and negative attitudes. Yazıcı (2019) concluded that FAHS music department students mostly developed positive attitudes towards the piano course. Thus, Yazıcı’s (2019) study is similar to the results of the current study. When they tested the performance and intrinsic motivation indicators of the perceived classroom environment and achievement goal variables, Church, Elliot and Gable (2001) found that particular perceptions of the classroom environment influenced students’ orientations in achievement goals. Therefore, improving the perceptions about the teaching-learning environment and the tools (musical instruments) in this environment will positively affect students’ perceptions about the music course (Church et al., 2001). For example, if the student loves the piano in her/his classroom during the music education, s/he will be interested in making music and will be able to love the course; however, if s/he doesn’t like the instrument, there might even be a risk of losing interest in music. Therefore, it may be appropriate to focus on metaphor studies related to the instruments used in the teaching of music for the selection of the right instruments.

Based on the results obtained from the study, the following suggestions can be made. In the light of the data obtained from this study, it can be suggested that students should be provided more detailed information about the importance of the piano. Furthermore, the reason behind having negative attitudes towards the piano needs to be further investigated so that these negative attitudes can be transformed into positive attitudes. In addition, further quantitative studies supported by qualitative studies should be carried out by involving a higher number of student participants. As mentioned in the explanations of many students, the piano is an indispensable instrument in the music education process. The piano is the most effective auxiliary instrument at the beginner-level music education, as its keys provide ready-to-use sound frequencies. Thus, the student does not have to worry about having the correct holding position to find the right sound frequency, as in playing a violin. The correct hand position on the piano are only necessary for a healthy practice technique. Therefore, researchers interested in conducting future metaphor studies are highly recommended to focus greater attention on the musical instruments used in music education.

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