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Metaphorical Perceptions of University Students Regarding the Concept of "Academic"

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal university students' perceptions of the concept of "academician" through the metaphors they produce. The study was conducted with 270 undergraduate students studying at a state university. Employing a phenomenological design within qualitative research methods, this study integrates content analysis with thematic network analysis to analyze students' metaphorical perceptions of academicians, ensuring alignment between methodology and analytical techniques. The findings indicate that academicians are perceived as sources of knowledge and guides, but also as authoritarian, biased, and sometimes oppressive figures. The metaphorical analysis categorized academicians into seven groups: sources of knowledge and guides, disciplined and hardworking, enabling development and change, emotional and social, injustice and ego, negative perceptions, and ambiguity and contradiction. Gender differences show that females focus more on fairness and guidance, while males emphasize authority and oppression. By class, first- and second-year students view academicians as knowledge sources, whereas third- and fourth-year students perceive more injustice and stress. Overall, negative metaphors predominate (55%), indicating academicians are seen as significant sources of stress.

Keywords: *Academician, Metaphor, University students, Academic perception*

Öz

Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin "akademisyen" kavramına ilişkin algılarını, ürettikleri metaforlar aracılığıyla ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, bir devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim gören 270 lisans öğrencisi ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Nitel araştırma desenlerinden olgubilim (fenomenoloji) yaklaşımı benimsenmiş; öğrencilerin akademisyenlere yönelik metaforik algılarının incelenmesinde içerik analizi ile tematik ağ analizi birlikte kullanılarak araştırma deseni ile veri analiz teknikleri arasında uyum sağlanmıştır.. Bulgular, akademisyenlerin çoğunlukla bilgi kaynağı ve rehber olarak algılandığını; ancak aynı zamanda otoriter, taraflı ve kimi zaman baskıcı figürler olarak da değerlendirildiğini göstermektedir. Metafor analizleri sonucunda akademisyenler yedi kategori altında toplanmıştır: (1) bilgi kaynağı ve rehber, (2) disiplinli ve çalışkan, (3) gelişim ve değişimi sağlayan, (4) duygusal ve sosyal, (5) adaletsizlik ve ego, (6) olumsuz algılar ve (7) belirsizlik ve çelişki. Cinsiyete göre farklılıklar gözlenmiştir: Kadın öğrenciler daha çok adalet ve rehberlik vurgusu yaparken, erkek öğrenciler otorite ve baskı temalarını öne çıkarmıştır. Sınıf düzeyine göre ise birinci ve ikinci sınıf öğrencileri akademisyenleri bilgi kaynağı olarak görürken, üçüncü ve dördüncü sınıf öğrencileri daha çok adaletsizlik ve stres ile ilişkilendirmiştir. Genel olarak, metaforların çoğunluğu (%55) olumsuz içeriklidir ve akademisyenlerin önemli bir stres kaynağı olarak algılandığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Akademisyen, Metafor, Üniversite öğrencileri, Akademik algı*

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Introduction

Metaphors contain a symbolic language that "forms the basis of the intellectual processes that people use to determine reality, truths, and meanings" (Ortony, 1975). Balcı (2016, p.142) defined metaphor as the metaphorical reflection of social reality. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stated that metaphors are the primary linguistic tools discovered by human beings in order to understand, explain, construct, and organize the world. For this reason, they emphasized that metaphors will help in understanding how people construct their own reality and how they perceive the world.

Metaphors (analogies, metaphors, similes, and similes) are one of the most powerful mental tools that structure, direct, and control our thoughts about the formation and functioning of events (Saban, 2004). Metaphors, which are the link builders between what we have and what others, develop rich perspectives by producing new ways of seeing and adding new dimensions (Koro-Ljungberg, 2001). The essence of metaphors is to understand and experience something through something else. Metaphors, which constitute an important field of study not only in our daily lives but also in terms of academic research, also provide people with the opportunity to understand, interpret, and make sense of their surroundings and their lives (Tohidian & Rahimian, 2019). Again, metaphors act as a powerful cognitive model for understanding educational phenomena based on the previous experiences of educators and students (Botha, 2009)

Relevant debates in the literature on metaphorical perceptions of academicians highlight their roles in education. Internationally, studies like Al-Ibrahim and Al-Hussein (2024) on EFL students' metaphors for learning experiences position educators as guides, while Kaya et al. (2024) explore nursing students' perceptions of professors during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing themes of support and stress. Additional international research, such as Kurniati et al. (2022) on pre-service teachers' metaphorical perceptions of inclusive education in diverse cultural contexts, and Alshammari (2023) on EFL teachers' roles through metaphor analysis in Saudi Arabia, further illustrate global variations in perceptions of authority, guidance, and stress. These international perspectives emphasize the global relevance of metaphorical analysis in uncovering subjective experiences, such as stress and guidance in academic settings (e.g., Weaver, 2015; Itkin & Nagy, 2014). These align with Turkish literature, such as Tortop (2013) on teacher candidates' metaphors for university instructors as knowledge transmitters and Polat et al. (2013) on class teacher candidates' views of academicians as sources of information. Such research underscores metaphors' value in uncovering subjective meaning-making in academic contexts, extending beyond Turkey to global educational settings.

Morgan (2006) claims that all organization and management theories are based on metaphor and has developed many organization metaphors such as machine brain and organism. Stirner used the metaphor of 'wheel in the head' as an activism that limits liberation (Spring, 1997, as cited in Yıldırım, 2013). Freire (2018) also used the metaphor of banking education to explain that traditional education commodifies individuals and restricts free thought forms. In her work 'No to Compulsory Education', Catherine Baker (2000) likened the school to an institution that keeps children under surveillance and acts as a guard while their parents work, and again used various metaphors.

Since metaphors shape beliefs, values, and attitudes, they have begun to be used as a data collection tool in many different disciplines to understand the nature of organizational life (Çelikten, 2006). It is emphasized that metaphors are the most accurate tools to reveal people's perspectives and to obtain information about their past experiences, thoughts and ideas about the present, and hopes for the future (Levine, 2005). In both national and international literature, it is seen that there has been an increase in the number of metaphorical studies on organizational issues such as organization, organizational culture, and organizational change (Ada & Gürcan, 2021; Itkin & Nagy, 2014; Weaver, 2015; Yılmaz & Polat, 2012).

Since metaphors reflect new and different views on how to better understand the world, using these mental tools is important in developing perception and understanding about organizations and similar complex structures. Metaphorical

language and thought play an important role in understanding organizations. In this respect, metaphors offer new perspectives and ways in understanding and managing organizations.

This study aims to reveal university students' perceptions of the concept of "academic" through the metaphors they produce. In line with this basic purpose, the research questions sought to be answered are as follows:

1. How do students express academics through metaphors?
2. Under which conceptual categories do the metaphors produced by students fall?
3. What are the differences in students' metaphorical perceptions of the concept of academic in terms of gender, department and class variables?

Method

This section includes the titles “Research Model”, “Study Group”, “Data Collection”, and “Data Analysis”.

Model of the Research

In the study, the phenomenology design, which is one of the qualitative research designs, was used because the meanings attributed to the concept of academic were examined in depth in line with the opinions of university students. In qualitative studies, the subject under study is investigated in depth in its natural environment and the meanings brought to the phenomenon are tried to be understood and interpreted (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Phenomenology studies, which are used to understand human experiences in certain situations and to try to convey these meanings in an empathetic and clear way (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007: 76), begin with the assumption that multiple realities are based on the perspectives of individuals. For this reason, an experience has a different meaning for each individual. The researcher investigates the thoughts and feelings of individuals (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Razavieh, 2010). Phenomenology researchers collect the opinions of the participants and try to determine what all the participants have in common while experiencing this phenomenon based on this. (Creswell, Iwamoto, and Caldwell, 2007).

The phenomenological approach emphasizes grasping the structural meaning of the subject's experience with the phenomenon and the researcher's awareness of their own perspectives, suitable for studying effective, emotional, and intense human experiences (Merriam, 2013). Using metaphors to determine thoughts of individuals in education can be effective (Tok, 2013). Considering university students' intense experiences with academicians, the phenomenological design provides a descriptive and interpretative perspective for understanding perceptions. To address the gap between the methodological approach and analytical adequacy, the study integrates thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) with content analysis. Thematic network analysis organizes themes into basic, organizing, and global levels, preserving actors' reflective engagements and meanings in experiential context, unlike frequency-oriented extraction that may abstract meanings. To further illustrate, the analysis process involved iterative coding where student justifications for metaphors (e.g., "book" as "educational and adding new things") were mapped to networks, preventing decontextualization and aligning with phenomenological emphasis on lifeworld reflections. For instance, basic themes (e.g., individual metaphors like "book") are linked to organizing themes (e.g., "source of information") and a global theme (e.g., "dual perceptions of guidance and stress"), ensuring meanings remain contextualized rather than reduced to frequencies. This justifies how the techniques serve phenomenological goals (Sundler et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018), strengthening the manuscript without reframing the research questions.

Study Group

The study group consisted of 270 undergraduate students enrolled in the first, second, third, and fourth years of a state university during the 2024–2025 academic year. Including students from all academic years aimed to capture potential changes in perceptions of academics over time. The study group was determined using criterion sampling, a purposive sampling method in which participants

are selected based on their relevance to and knowledge of the research topic(Yıldırım & Şimşek,2013).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the students participating in the study

	n	%
Gender		
Male	120	45
Female	150	55
Department		
Social Sciences		
Psychology, Philosophy, Sociology, Literature, History, Geography	82	30.4
Arts and Communication		
Radio–TV–Cinema, Music, Painting	52	19,2
Sports Sciences		
Recreation, Coaching, Sports Management	62	23
Health Sciences		
Nursing, Child Development	74	27,4
Year of Study		
1st Year	65	24,1
2nd Year	70	25,9
3rd Year	70	25,9
4th Year	65	24,1

Table 1 indicates that of the 270 participants, 150 (55%) were female and 120 (45%) male. By department, 82 (30.4%) from social sciences, 52 (19.2%) from arts and communication, 62 (23%) from sports sciences, and 74 (27.4%) from health sciences. By grade level, 65 (24.1%) first-year, 70 (25.9%) second-year, 70 (25.9%) third-year, and 65 (24.1%) fourth-year participants.

Data Collection Tool

In order to reveal the metaphorical perceptions of the students participating in the study regarding the concept of 'academician', they were first given information about the metaphor. Then, the participants were asked to complete the sentence in the expression "Academician is like… because…" on the form, which also included their descriptive characteristics. The participants' descriptive information, the metaphors produced and their justifications constituted the main data source for the study.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis, a systematic technique where messages are objectively recognized and summarized into categories (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009, p. 269). To ensure analytical adequacy for phenomenological goals, thematic network analysis was incorporated to organize themes into networks, linking basic themes (metaphors) to organizing themes (categories) and a global theme (overall perceptions), preserving experiential context (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The analysis was conducted in four stages (Saban, 2008).

Coding and elimination stage: Data that could not explain "academician" as a metaphor or had no relation between metaphor and justification were eliminated from 320 metaphors (f=50). Thus, valid metaphors from 270 participants (f=160) were tabulated alphabetically from most repeated (Table 2).

Category development phase: The meaning of metaphors in terms of theme-subject-reason and relationship was determined, forming seven categories: (1) source of information and guidance, (2) disciplined and hardworking, (3) providing development and change, (4) emotional and social, (5) injustice and ego, (6) negative perceptions, (7) ambiguity and contradiction. Each metaphor was categorized by its final message (e.g., "bee" under negative perceptions for stinging). This was enhanced with thematic network analysis to maintain contextual integrity.

Validity and reliability stage: In the validity and reliability stage, the research process (research model, study group, data collection tool, analysis and interpretation of data) was reported in detail and clearly to increase the transferability of the research. In order to increase the consistency of the research, the originality of the data was given directly. At this stage, while the metaphors produced by the participants were analyzed, attention was paid to the creation of meaningful integrity of the categories. Opinions were obtained from two field experts in order to check whether the conceptual categories represented the obtained metaphors. The lists of conceptual categories and the obtained metaphors were given separately and they were asked to match. In order to ensure the reliability of the research, the matches made by the researchers and experts were compared and an attempt was

made to determine consensus and disagreements. In the calculation made using the agreement percentage formula of Miles and Huberman (1994, 64) [reliability = (consensus/consensus + disagreement) x 100], the agreement between the researchers and the expert was found to be .90. This value shows that the findings obtained in the research are reliable in terms of consistency.

Frequency and interpretation stage: Frequencies and word cloud were found with MAXQDA 24 and interpreted with literature data.

Findings

This section presents the word cloud of metaphors produced by participants regarding the "academician" concept, frequency table, categorization of produced metaphors, and metaphorical perceptions in terms of different variables (gender, class, and department), integrated into relevant subheadings for improved flow and readability.

The word cloud of the metaphors produced by the participants is presented in Figure 1.

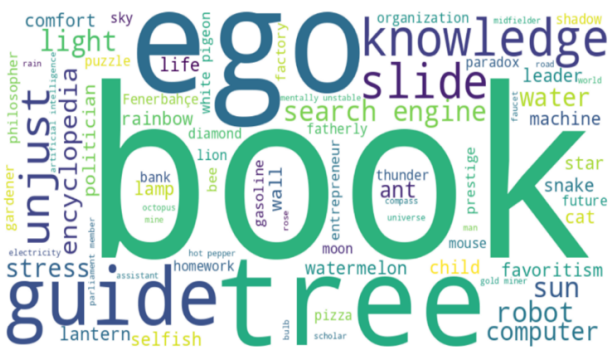

Figure 1. Word cloud of metaphors related to the concept of academic

Figure 1 shows that metaphors such as book, tree, ego, guide, information, slide are produced more (the size of the text shows that the metaphor is produced more) of the metaphors produced, all the metaphors produced by the participants are given in alphabetical order according to their frequencies in Table 2.

Table 2.Metaphors produced by participants regarding the concept of academics

SN	Metafor	f	SN	Metafor	f	SN	Metafor	f	SN	Metafor	f
1	book	16	41	bee	1	81	factory	1	121	homework	1
2	ego	12	42	arlan	1	82	mouse	1	122	leader	1
3	tree	11	43	lion	1	83	fenerbahçe	1	123	organization	1
4	guide	11	44	moon	1	84	philosopher	1	124	paradox	1
5	information	8	45	babacan	1	85	future	1	125	puzzle	1
6	slide	7	46	gardener	1	86	entrepreneur	1	126	diamond	1
7	unfair	6	47	bank	1	87	thunder	1	127	pizza	1
8	search engine	5	48	gasoline	1	88	sky	1	128	prestige	1
9	sun	5	49	white dove	1	89	shadow	1	129	Unstable	1
10	light	5	50	information	1	90	rose	1	130	compass	1
11	robot	5	51	science	1	91	dream	1	131	ronaldo	1
12	encyclopedia	4	52	building	1	92	helicopter	1	132	artist	1
13	computer	4	53	empty glass	1	93	hitler	1	133	ivy	1
14	stress	4	54	chameleon	1	94	rooster	1	134	eraser	1
15	water	4	55	nose in the air	1	95	knowledge	1	135	squirrel	1
16	ant	3	56	refrigerator	1	96	light tower	1	136	question angel	1
17	selfish	2	57	monster	1	97	fate	1	137	irresponsibility	1
18	child	2	58	teapot	1	98	cactus	1	138	dictionary	1
19	wall	2	59	shepherd	1	99	pen	1	139	superman	1
20	lantern	2	60	know-it-all	1	100	mould	1	140	chief	1
21	rainbow	2	61	mountain	1	101	oil lamp	1	141	city	1
22	life	2	62	precious stone	1	102	closed box	1	142	painting	1
23	watermelon	2	63	iron	1	103	turtle	1	143	dessert	1
24	nepotist	2	64	sea	1	104	cake	1	144	technology	1
25	cat	2	65	warehouse	1	105	slave	1	145	tyrant	1
26	lamp	2	66	sea	1	106	bridge	1	146	seed	1
27	leader	2	67	thorny rose	1	107	impasse	1	147	torpedo	1
28	machine	2	68	dictator	1	108	kratos	1	148	traffic sign	1
29	politician	2	69	bottomless pit	1	109	rule	1	149	plane	1
30	comfort	2	70	dogma	1	110	wolf	1	150	careless	1
31	snake	2	71	dollar	1	111	bird	1	151	upper floor	1
32	star	2	72	emotionless	1	112	library	1	152	ironed shirt	1
33	hot pepper	1	73	world	1	113	machine	1	153	body	1
34	man	1	74	enemy	1	114	mine	1	154	rain	1
35	octopus	1	75	parent	1	115	fruit	1	155	sunlight	1
36	shopping	1	76	electricity	1	116	deputy	1	156	artificial intelligence	1
37	gold miner	1	77	diamond	1	117	tap	1	157	assistant	1
38	light bulb	1	78	veteran	1	118	river	1	158	food	1
39	coach	1	79	lacking empathy	1	119	ocean	1	159	crab	1
40	research	1	80	universe	1	120	midfield	1	160	road	1

Table 2 reveals that the frequency ranges of the produced metaphors vary between 16 and 1. The most frequently repeated metaphors are book (f=16), ego (f=12), tree (f=11), guide (f=11), information (f=8), slide (f=7), unfair (f=6), search engine (f=5), sun (f=5), light (f=5), robot (f=5), encyclopedia (f=4), computer (f=4), stress (f=4), water (f=4), ant (f=3). Other metaphors were repeated once or twice.

To visually reinforce the analytical connection between this raw data (Basic Themes/Metaphors) and the study's central conclusion, and in adherence to the requirements of the thematic network analysis (TNA) technique, the structure of the findings is presented in Figure 2.

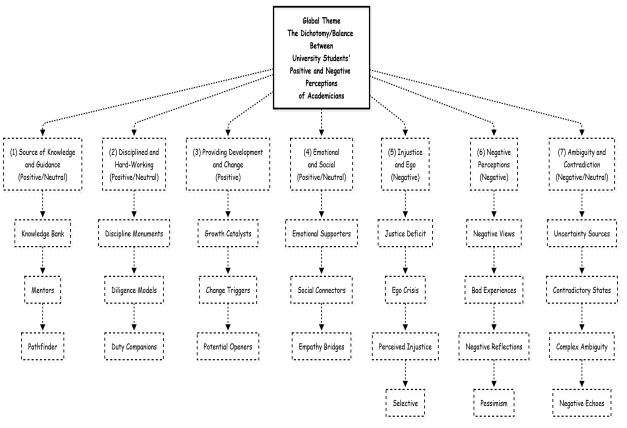

Figure 2. Thematic Network Scheme Regarding the Concept of "Academician"

Figure 2, in line with the principles of phenomenological research and the requirements of the thematic network analysis (TNA) technique, visu-

ally illustrates the relationship between the metaphorical perceptions (Basic Themes) and the overarching research finding (Global Theme). This scheme depicts the hierarchical structure of the data, which was categorized into seven Organizing Themes (categories) based on the inherent relationships among the 160 Basic Themes (metaphors). The Basic Themes—such as 'Knowledge Bank,' 'Source of Dread,' and 'Ego Crisis'—were grouped according to their shared core meanings. These seven Organizing Themes subsequently converge to form the Global Theme: The Dichotomy/Balance Between University Students' Positive and Negative Perceptions of Academicians. The visual network clearly demonstrates the analytical journey, showcasing how the raw data (Basic Themes) systematically connect to and support the central finding (Global Theme). This presentation ensures alignment between the phenomenological methodological approach and the analytical technique employed, thereby enhancing the transparency and validity of the study.

Table 3 includes the conceptual categories created from the metaphors produced by the participants regarding the "academician" concept.

Table 3. Categories of Participant Metaphors for "Academician"

No	Conceptual Categories	Messages given by metaphors
1	Source of information & guidance	Behaviors facilitating student guidance
2	Disciplined and hardworking	High work pace and discipline
3	Providing development & change	Behaviors promoting growth
4	Emotional & social	Compassionate and devoted attitudes
5	Injustice & ego	Injustice and egoistic behaviors
6	Negative perceptions	Stress-inducing attitudes
7	Ambiguity & contradiction	Unpredictable actions.

Table 3 shows that 160 metaphors produced by students were classified under seven conceptual categories. When the findings of the metaphors and participant expressions in each category were evaluated, in the (1) information source and guide category, academics were seen as figures who convey information, guide students and contribute to their development. In the (2) disciplined and hardworking category, the intensive work tempo and disciplined structure of academics were emphasized, while in the (3) development and change providing category, the idea that academics contribute to students and help their development came to the fore. In the (4) emotional and social category, the meanings attributed to academics by people from their close circle were attributed to them, and their emotional aspects were highlighted. In the (5) injustice and ego category, more negativity-evoking emphasis was made, while in the (6) negative perceptions category, students defined academics as sources of stress and oppressive figures. In the (7) ambiguity and contradiction category, the inconsistent and unpredictable behaviors of academics were highlighted. While the produced metaphors were classified according to categories, some metaphors (comfort, homework, cat, prestige, turtle, octopus, upper floor, mouse, future) remained out of the category.

When classifying the metaphors as positive and negative, negative metaphors (55%) were used more than positive metaphors (40%). Additionally, neutral metaphors such as machine, robot, slide (10%) were used.

Source of Information and Guidance

Table 4 demonstrates that students produced a total of 52 metaphors regarding the academician concept in the “source of information and guide” category. Females used metaphors like "guide" and "light" more frequently (60%), reflecting a focus on guidance; 1st and 2nd-year students dominated with "book" and "knowledge" (70%); health sciences students used "encyclopedia" more (40%). This category, the largest, aligns with literature where academicians are seen as knowledge sources (Polat et al., 2013; 44%), similar to international studies like Al-Ibrahim and Al-Hussein (2024) on educators as guides in EFL contexts. Kurniati et al. (2022) on supportive roles in inclusive education, and Kaya et al. (2024) highlighting supportive roles amid stress.

Table 4. Metaphors in the information source and guide category

Category	Metaphor	Reasons
Information Source and Guide	Guide	It is like a bright path that guides our future. It guides our lives and allows us to discover ourselves
	Light	They light our way
	Book	Whatever you are looking for, they are there. They are educational and add new things to our lives
	Encyclopedia	They have a lot of knowledge and equipment. They know everything
	Traffic sign	They show where and how to go
	Compass	They show the right direction to the students
	Shepherd	They give direction to the students (herd). The responsibility belongs to them during the lesson.
	Road	They guide us on what we should do
	Lamp	They exhaust themselves and give light to others
	Lighthouse	They illuminate the darkness
	River	They drag us towards endless horizons with their ideas and knowledge
	Library	The articles they write with the knowledge they have acquired are not for every brave man
	Computer	They have all kinds of knowledge and equipment. They convey what they know
	Ocean	It has no end
	Universe	It contains a huge world
	Superman	It spares us, to some extent, from life's challenges
	Search engine	It is there for you. They store the desired information and guide us in accessing it
	Sun	They illuminate the dark side of our brain with their knowledge and experience
	Lamp	They guide us and illuminate our path
	Ocean	They have deep knowledge
	Faucet	Their knowledge flows as it flows
	Leader	They have modest knowledge and manage all subjects
	Food	We need it throughout our lives. It gives a feeling of satiety with the information transferred
	World	It constantly develops, repeats, is in a cycle
	Traffic sign	It shows where to go and how
	Moon	They become light in our lives and darkness
	Bottomless pit	It provides limitless value through knowledge
	Leader	They show the way and guide

Disciplined and Hardworking

Table 5 illustrates that students produced 15 metaphors in this category. Males and 3rd-4th year students emphasized "ant" and "machine" (55%), with sports sciences students noting discipline (35%). This aligns with Bayar and Bayar (2012), where academicians are perceived as having an intense work pace, and internationally with Itkin and Nagy (2014) on organizational metaphors emphasizing efficiency and Alshammari (2023) on disciplined roles in EFL teaching.

Table 5. Metaphors in the disciplined and hardworking category

Category	Metaphor	Reasons
Disciplined and Hardworking	Ant	They work non-stop. They rush to everything
	Machine	They works non-stop and is unaware of most things
	Robot	They repeat memorized knowledge, confined within set boundaries
	Factory	It loads software onto brains that cannot work on their own and makes them work
	Bee	It swells as well as gives honey
	Teapot	Knowledge is patiently cultivated; results emerge over time
	Coach	Because it helps us develop
	Chief	He is a master at directing his players
	Fenerbahce	Despite all the difficulties, they continue to provide information without giving up
	Wall	They always stand upright
	Rule	They have strict rules that they set for themselves.
	Orderly	They love discipline
	Initiator	They are involved in every activity.
	Science	The more they learn, the more they want to teach
	Kratos	They are like warriors
	Lion	We listen to them, motionless and silent.
	Technology	"They continuously renew and enhance their knowledge

Providing Development and Change

Table 6. Metaphors in the category of providing development and change

Category	Metaphor	Reasons
Providing Development and Change	Tree	Their roots reach deep knowledge. They bear fruit as they are nourished. They rest in their shade
	Seed	They shape life with the information they give to people
	Fruit	It spreads seeds into the future
	World	They are in constant change and movement
	Water	If it flows, it becomes moisture, if it falls, it becomes a waterfall, if it stops, it becomes a lake
	Philosopher	They constantly question and encourage us to think
	Sea	Their contribution to our development is limitless.
	Pen	They spread knowledge objectively
	Machine	They work non-stop. They research and write non-stop

	Research	They are very curious and open to learning
	Iron	They are continuously shaped through challenges and life experiences
	Body	They facilitate our development through their knowledge
	Midfield	They affect the center of a student's development
	Assistant	They support future generations by transferring knowledge
	Dream	They help our dreams come true
	Life	They guide our lives
	Star	They become a light for students in their first steps
	Eraser	Instead of covering up their mistakes, they erase them and help us get on the right path.
	Leader	They excel at generating innovative solutions
	Questioning Angel	They ask questions about a subject, get to the root of the problem and question the question.

Table 6 shows 20 metaphors in this category. Females and lower-class students used "tree" more (65%), health sciences dominating (40%). This finding resembles Demirbilek and Atila (2021), associating education with growth, and Kaya et al. (2024) on transformative roles in nursing education , as well as Kurniati et al. (2022) on development in inclusive settings.

Emotional and Social

Table 7. Metaphors in the emotional distance and social category

Category	Metaphor	Reasons
Emotional and Social	Shadow	They are with you at all times.
	Fatherly	They try to manage all the students at the same time.
	Veteran	Under these conditions, giving information to this difficult generation is the greatest effort.
	Superman	It saves us, even if only a little, from the ignorance and difficulties of life.
	White Dove	They convey the beauties of life to us. They open a white Page in our lives.
	Rain	As it rains, they make trees and flowers bloom.
	Shopping	We give back what we have taken from them in the exam.
	Rare gem	They are rare and important.
	Bird	They fly to their future and land on their dreams.
	Rainbow	Each color has a different meaning. Each color is unique.
	Man	They meet everything with maturity.
	Diamond	They are priceless.
	Gardener	They patiently nurture students' knowledge
	Parent	They develop them with their knowledge. They set an example with their behavior.
	Diamond	They are very valuable, not everyone who wants can buy it. People cannot take their eyes off them
	Bridge	They create a connection between people with different ideas and bring them together.
	Rose	They fade when plucked

Table 7 indicates 14 metaphors. Balanced across genders, but arts students used "friend" for social aspects (45%). This parallels Arslan and Bayrakçı (2006) on emotional distance in teacher-student relations, and internationally with Botha (2009) on metaphors fostering empathy and Alshammari (2023) on relational roles in EFL contexts.

Injustice and Ego

Table 8. Metaphors in the injustice and ego category

Category	Metaphor	Reasons
Adaletsizlik ve Ego	Unfair	They discriminate between students. They make unfair evaluations. They favor students
	Ego	He derives satisfaction from personal achievements and by demeaning others. He tends to belittle his peers. They exhibit egocentric behavior, prioritizing their own desires. Such individuals display narcissistic traits. They perceive themselves as superior and avoid accountability for substandard educational outcomes.
	Interpretation	They became academics through influence
	Nepotism	Does not treat students equally
	Dictator	As I said, they are scary
	Politician	They are not open to criticism
	Empathy deficit	They act like they've never been students
	Mountain	Their ego is insurmountable
	Airplane	Their swagger is insurmountable
	Lion	They think they're the king of the jungle
	Helicopter	They're so cool and egotistical
	Wolf	Students are sheep punished by academics
	Dollar	They keep rising
	Selfish	They don't think about anyone but themselves.
	Cake	They keep swelling

Table 8 reveals 28 metaphors in the "injustice and ego" category. Males and upper-class students used "dictator" and "ego" more (60%), with social

sciences dominating negative views (40%). This indicates injustice perception, similar to Bayar and Bayar (2012), where academicians are seen as authoritarian, and Al-Ibrahim and Al-Hussein (2024) noting bias in educational metaphors, as well as Kurniati et al. (2022) on power imbalances in inclusive education.

Negative Perceptions

Table 9. Metaphors in the Negative

Category	Metaphor	Reasons
Negative Perceptions	Stress	It triggers nervousness and future anxiety
	Slide	They only serve the function of reading slides. They do not make any explanations. They don't care about our opinions. They start and finish
	Monster	They crush those smaller than themselves
	Prickly rose	They are thorny to make students suffer. Their thorns prick the student
	Rooster	They make a lot of noise (talk) for no reason.
	Hitler	They talk, we keep quiet and listen.
	Oppressive	They threaten with grades and repeating the class.
	Dictator	I am a firm believer, they are scary
	Tyrant	They care about students. They are extremely distant. they won't help. They threaten you with bad grades and repeating the grade. They do not understand the student's situation. They almost never give any privilege
	Crab	They are like a herd who do not want their colleagues to advance and constantly drag them down
	Careless	They don't care much about the education of students
	Arrogant	They usually give answers to get rid of them
	Bank	They want more than what they give
	Know-it-all	They have relevant and irrelevant ideas about everything
	Dogma	They spread the information they learn. They don't meet the needs of the student
	Politician	They are not open to criticism, you exist as long as you accept their rules
	Empty glass	They act like wise men but they are not in reality
	Slave	They comply with and submit to the system.
	Cactus	They prick like thorns
	Empathy deficit	They make you live as if you have not passed through your student years
	Electricity	They strike
	Mold	They have an unproductive and inefficient structure within the formal education mold
	Irresponsibility	They never follow the planned hours
	Wall	They do not want to establish a relationship with students, they are condescending, soulless
	Refrigerator	They all act cold, they are as cold as ice
	Closed box	They do not convey their thoughts in great detail
	Robot	We fail to form a secure emotional connection
	Emotionless	They disregard students' opinions on any subject
	Child	When they don't get something they want, they sulk. They act like we have to do everything
	Ivy	They get more and more wrapped up
	Mentally distressed	Is it because they work so hard? I don't know, but they're a little weird.

Table 9 demonstrates 32 metaphors in the "negative perceptions" category. Upper classes and males used "stress" and "robot" more (65%), arts students noting "wall" for disinterest. This finding resembles Demirbilek (2021), where distance education is perceived negatively by some students, and internationally with Kaya et al. (2024) on stress during pandemics and Kurniati et al. (2022) on negative views in inclusive contexts.

Ambiguity and Contradiction

Table 10. Metaphors in the ambiguity and contradiction category

Category	Metaphor	Reasons
Ambiguity and Contradiction	Thunder	They give peace to some and scare others.
	Snake	They are two-faced. They change skin according to their environment. It is not clear what they are
	Sun	Desirable during winter, unwelcome in summer.
	Ego	They harm lives and alienate students from education
	Chili pepper	Show initial kindness followed by revenge
	Chameleon	They exhibit situationally variable personalities
	Blind knot	It is incomprehensible what kind of structure they have. They are all very complicated and unsolvable.
	Paradox	They are complicated and never understood
	Sweet	A little is nice, a lot gives you a stomachache.
	Fate	Some make you smile, some make you crawl.
	Gasoline	Sometimes they take the student forward, sometimes they burn him/her.
	Star	There are many but only a few of them show the way.

Lawmaker	While some struggle, some sleep.
Pizza	It is luck that they are good.
Mine	Their target and timing of outburst are unpredictable
Watermelon	Outcomes are uncertain; soft inside, hard outside
Squirrel	jumping from branch to branch
City	They have every street.
Table	It changes depending on where you look.

Table 10 illustrates 19 metaphors in the "ambiguity and contradiction" category. Balanced across genders, but 3rd and 4th years and sports students used "snake" and "mine" for unpredictability (50%). This situation overlaps with Bayar and Bayar (2012), where academicians exhibit inconsistent behaviors, and Weaver (2015) on variable organizational metaphors, as well as Alshammari (2023) on ambiguous roles in EFL teaching.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study analytically demonstrates that university students' metaphorical perceptions of academicians reveal a duality: positive roles as guides and knowledge sources contrast with negative views of authority, stress, and inconsistency, with negative metaphors dominating (55%). This predominance suggests systemic issues in academic-student interactions, potentially leading to alienation and reduced engagement, calling for interventions like professional development programs to foster empathy and fairness. The findings show that university students' perceptions of academicians are broad and grouped under different categories. While some students see academicians as information providers, guides, disciplined, hardworking, development-supporting individuals, others define them as unfair, egoistic, authoritarian, favoritist figures. This situation reveals that academicians' roles in educational processes are evaluated in both positive and critical frames. The research findings are largely consistent with similar studies.

In this study, the information source and guide category was the one with the most metaphors produced. Students described academicians with metaphors such as "guide", "light", "book", and "compass". This is consistent with Polat, Apak, and Akdağ (2013), where academicians are seen as information sources and guides at a high rate (44%). In Tortop (2013), the category with the most metaphors about university instructors is imagined as information source and transmitter. Similarly, Bayar and Bayar (2012) emphasize academicians' information source and guiding roles. Internationally, Al-Ibrahim and Al-Hussein (2024) show similar guiding roles in EFL learning experiences.

In the disciplined and hardworking category, students' depiction of academicians with metaphors like "ant", "machine", and "bee" shows they are perceived as disciplined and hardworking. This finding overlaps with Bayar and Bayar (2012), where academicians are defined as individuals with intense work pace.

In this study, academicians were seen as figures contributing to students' development with metaphors like "tree", "seed", and "water". This finding shows similarity with Demirbilek and Atila (2021), where science is associated with development and change.

Students' definition of academicians with metaphors like "shadow" and "fatherly" reflects emotional distance and coldness perception. This situation parallels Arslan and Bayrakçı (2006), drawing attention to distance in teacher-student relationships.

In this study, academicians' definition with negative metaphors like "unfair", "ego", and "dictator" shows the existence of injustice and authoritarianism perception among students. Similarly, Bayar and Bayar (2012) state that academicians are perceived as authoritarian and closed to criticism.

Students' definition of academicians with negative metaphors like "stress" and "monster" shows the existence of negative perceptions. This finding shows similarity with Demirbilek (2021), where distance education is perceived negatively by some students.

In this study, academicians were perceived as uncertain and contradictory figures with metaphors like "thunder" and "snake". This situation overlaps with Bayar and Bayar (2012), where academicians may exhibit inconsistent behaviors.

When evaluated in terms of gender, women focused more on whether academicians were fair or

not, while men imagined academicians as powerful or oppressive figures.

When evaluated in terms of the class variable, new students saw academicians more as information sources, but this perception changes in later grades, defining them as unfair or oppressive figures.

When evaluated in terms of the department variable, in Social Sciences, academicians were defined as more authoritarian, egoistic, or guiding, while in Arts and Communication, as flexible but sometimes indifferent and favoritist. In Sports Sciences, the disciplined and normative aspects of academicians were emphasized, while in Health Sciences, metaphors like computer, book, light were used intensively.

Students perceive academicians more as negative figures. The greater use of negative metaphors also shows that academicians are perceived more as sources of stress in students' eyes. Students' definitions of academicians through metaphors are an important reflection of experiences and expectations in the academic environment. The existence of negative perceptions indicates that academicians need to review student relations and teaching methods. Academicians establishing more effective communication, improving teaching techniques, and exhibiting fairer attitudes in academic processes can contribute to positive academician perceptions in students. Future studies should examine negative perceptions' causes and solutions in depth. Additionally, studies examining how academician perception changes in different student groups can help make the academic environment more inclusive.

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Informed Consent: Electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants before they began the questionnaire; participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured.

Data Availability: Due to privacy and confidentiality considerations, raw survey data are not publicly available. De-identified datasets and analysis materials (e.g., codebooks and regression outputs) are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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