



Metaphorical perceptions of adult chess players regarding the concept of “chess”

Behcet Oznacar ^{1*} , Meliha Aslam Orkun ² , Semay Çavuş ² , Aliye Osum ² 

¹Near East University, CYPRUS

²TRNC Ministry of Education, N. CYPRUS

*Corresponding Author: behcet.oznacar@neu.edu.tr

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to determine the metaphorical perceptions regarding the concept of chess held by adult chess players in Northern Cyprus. A qualitative research design was employed in the study. The research group consists of 30 participants living in four different districts of Northern Cyprus. Participants were asked to complete the semi-structured statement: “For me, chess is like because”. They were allowed fifteen minutes to answer the questions. The data obtained in the study were analyzed using the descriptive data analysis technique. Based on the research findings, various metaphors and accompanying explanations were gathered from the participating adults. These metaphors were ranked according to their frequency. The study identified metaphors related to the concept of chess such as passion, puzzle, life and mind game. A total of fourteen metaphors were obtained from the participants. The metaphors provided by the participants fell into four categories: chess as an emotional impact, chess as a cognitive activity, chess as a physical and behavioral activity and chess as a social activity. It was determined that the adults developed mostly positive metaphors regarding the concept of “chess.”

Keywords: chess, chess as a sport, cognitive domain, metaphor

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INTRODUCTION

Chess is not only a recognized sport but also an educational activity with substantial benefits for individual development. It has been shown that chess contributes to personal development, enhances educational and learning outcomes, and improves individuals' critical thinking and problem-solving skills in everyday life. Owing to these multidimensional benefits, chess has the potential to appeal to and positively influence a wide range of individuals across different age groups and backgrounds serving cognitive, social, and educational development.

While chess can be described as the intensive management of cognitive abilities—such as reasoning, long-term memory, and an extensive knowledge base—alongside factors like will, power and motivation (Blanch & Llaveria, 2021), it can also be defined as a performance-based sport involving two competitors (Aktitiz et al., 2021).

According to Chassy and Gobet (2015) chess is a mental sport played on a chessboard, comprising a large square area divided into 64 small black and white squares with each of the two opponents commanding 16 chess pieces. While definitions of chess often emphasize its nature as a cognitive sport, the fact that physical activity

levels are significant for players during tournaments which can last upwards of three to four hours stemming from the reality that chess is a strategic sport involving both mental and physical demands.

History of chess is traced to historical India, ancient Greco-Roman civilization, China, or the Kushan Turks of the period 50–200 AD (Murray, 1913). It is known not only as a war tactic but also as an entertaining game. Highly popular and valued in the Ottoman Empire, the game transcended the military and political spheres to become a part of literary production (Berdibek, 2015). As chess is fundamentally a game of strategy, it was widely regarded throughout the Middle Ages as a means of cultivating strategic thinking and tactical decision-making, and was consequently employed by rulers as a tool for preparing for warfare (Cazaux & Knowlton, 2017).

Looking at the history of chess in the Northern Cyprus, it is observed that the Cyprus Turkish Chess Federation was established in 1985 under the founding presidency of Yusuf Şentüğ through the collaboration of the chess associations of Nicosia, Famagusta, Yeni Erenköy, Lefke, and Kyrenia. In 1987, following the approval of its legal framework, the federation became the 13th officially recognized sports federation in the North Cyprus. Since 2013, the federation has continued to promote and expand the game of chess through a structured partnership with a private bank, supporting various initiatives aimed at increasing the popularity and accessibility of chess.

From early childhood onward, the acquisition of skills related to recognizing emotions, empathizing with others, and regulating behavior is considered crucial for both social adjustment and academic success (Durlak et al., 2011; Goleman, 1995). Chess is also believed to be a key tool supporting academic and social success. According to Aciego et al. (2012) chess emerges as a neuro-inclusive pedagogical strategy capable of fostering both cognitive and socio - emotional development during a critical stage of development. Gardner (1983) proposed that intelligence is not just a unidimensional construct; instead, individuals may exhibit abilities and predispositions across diverse domains, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences. For Sala and Gobet (2016), chess exerts this kind of a slight positive influence on both academic and cognitive abilities. Landau (2018) argues that conceptual metaphor theory is helpful to explain the cognitive strategies that people use to understand abstract ideas.

A metaphor involves likening a concept, object, situation, activity, event, or phenomenon to another concept or situation by indicating the underlying reason for the comparison (Kövecses, 2002). In this process, the concept or situation serving as the point of comparison is typically the one that is better known. In this study, chess is the concept that is tried to be qualitatively explained with the help of metaphors. Quale (2002) also emphasizes the importance of familiarity with the specific attribute being compared when employing metaphors. Metaphors are also regarded as symbols used to articulate perceptions; consequently, they can assist in revealing the perceptions held by participants. Therefore, this study employed metaphors to explore participants' perceptions of the concept of chess. The resulting metaphors were analyzed and organized into four domains—emotional, cognitive, social, physical & behavioral which collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of how participants conceptualize chess.

Research Questions

The aim of this study is to determine the metaphorical perceptions of adult chess players in Northern Cyprus regarding the concept of "chess." Within the framework of this general aim, answers were sought to the following questions:

RQ1. What metaphors do chess players living in Northern Cyprus use to conceptualize chess?

RQ2. Under which conceptual categories can these metaphorical perceptions be grouped based on their shared characteristics?

METHODOLOGY

This study was based on the "phenomenology design," a type of qualitative research design. The study group consisted of adults who played chess in various regions of the Northern Cyprus in 2020. To determine the metaphorical perceptions of these adults regarding the concept of chess, a semi-structured form containing the statement "For me, chess is like..... because....." was used. The data obtained from the study were analyzed using content analysis.

Based on the factors mentioned above, the aim of this study was to determine the views of adults regarding chess in Northern Cyprus. The study was conducted using the metaphor analysis method, which is a qualitative research approach and 'Google Forms' was used as a tool to collect data. The participants consisted of 30 adults, distributed as 16

Table 1. Distribution of participants by gender

Gender	n	%
Women	16	53.33
Men	14	46.67
Total	30	100.00

women (53.33%) and 14 men (46.67 %). A convenience sampling method was employed in the study, and participants were selected on a voluntary basis.

Table 1 presents the gender distribution of the study participants. A total of 30 adults participated in the study, comprising 16 women (53.33%) and 14 men (46.67%).

To protect participants' confidentiality, identifying information such as their first and last names was not reported in the presentation of the findings. Instead, participants were assigned anonymized codes (e.g., P1, P2, and P3). Data were collected through a metaphor elicitation form, which was administered using Google Forms. Adults were asked to complete Google Forms administered via the internet. Young adults aged 18 - 25 from various regions were asked to fill out a form consisting of open-ended, fill-in-the-blank questions, accessed via a link sent to their mobile phones.

The metaphors gathered with the help of the data collection tool were analyzed through content analysis. Content analysis is defined as a systematic, replicable technique in which specific words are summarized into smaller content categories through coding based on established rules (Özkök et al., 2009). This technique allows for the derivation of more intelligible concepts and relationships from complex datasets, enabling the discovery of concepts and themes that might otherwise be overlooked or remain inaccessible through descriptive analysis alone. During the categorization process, attention was paid not only to the metaphor itself but also to its underlying rationale; this is because the same metaphor, when generated by two different individuals, may carry different meanings. Consequently, the content analysis was conducted with due consideration of the rationale behind each metaphor.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in the study was conducted in four stages: 1) coding and sorting; 2) compiling sample metaphors, 3) developing categories; 4) transferring data to digital sources.

Coding and Sorting

At this stage, the metaphors generated by the adults who play chess were first entered into Microsoft Excel and listed. The resulting preliminary list was then carefully examined to determine whether the chess-playing adults had clearly produced any metaphors. No data were excluded from the analysis; a total of 30 participants generated nineteen number of different metaphors and the study sought to draw conclusions based on these metaphors.

Compiling sample metaphors

At this stage, the metaphors began to be re-examined. During the analysis, a "sample metaphor list" consisting of 19 metaphors were created.

Developing categories

The metaphors generated were examined under emotional, cognitive, social, physical, and behavioral categories. At this stage, the

Table 2. Independent metaphors

	Metaphor	f	%
1	Work	1	3.3
2	Lesson	2	6.7
3	Life	5	16.7
4	Passion	2	6.7
5	Knot	1	3.3
6	Brain Storming	3	10.0
7	Sport	1	3.3
8	Puzzle	1	3.3
9	Mind Game	4	13.3
10	Heavy Bag	1	3.3
11	Bridge	1	3.3
12	Waiting Room	1	3.3
13	Ladder	1	3.3
14	Complex Math Problem	1	3.3
15	Dead End	1	3.3
16	Traffic	1	3.3
17	School	1	3.3
18	Therapy	1	3.3
19	Marathon	1	3.3
Total		30	100.0

fundamental insights yielded by the 30 metaphors were considered, and an attempt was made to decipher the messages they sought to convey.

- Emotional Domain:* The metaphors grouped in this category convey messages regarding the emotional responses of adults who play chess toward the game. This category includes metaphors reflecting positive attitudes, such as passion, life, and therapy.
- Cognitive Domain:* The metaphors in this category convey messages regarding the role of the cognitive domain. Alongside metaphors reflecting a positive attitude—such as a lesson, brain exercise, jigsaw puzzle, or mind game. There are metaphors reflecting a negative attitude, such as a knot or a complex math problem.

c) *Physical and Behavioral Domain:* The metaphors gathered in this category represent the physical and behavioral realm experienced by adults while playing chess. Alongside metaphors reflecting negative attitudes such as a staircase, a heavy bag, a waiting room, or traffic. There are metaphors reflecting positive attitudes, such as a marathon or sports.

d) *Social Domain:* This category includes metaphors reflecting positive attitudes such as work, bridges, and school alongside metaphors reflecting negative attitudes such as dead-end streets.

Transferring data to digital sources

The chess-playing adults participating in the study generated 19 different metaphors regarding the concept of chess. The metaphors most frequently cited by the participants were: life ($f = 5$), Mind Game ($f = 4$), and brain storming ($f = 3$). **Table 2** presents the metaphors generated by the participants across the entire study, along with their corresponding frequencies and percentages.

Table 2 presents 19 independent metaphors. In the analysis, the metaphors were evaluated based on the ultimate message intended to be conveyed and were organized into four domains—emotional, cognitive, social, physical & behavioral—which collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of how participants conceptualize chess.

FINDINGS

According to the findings of **Figure 1**, the majority of the expressions are categorized under the “Other” heading, which comprises 14 different unique metaphors and accounts for nearly half of the total distribution (%46.7). Among the primary thematic categories, “Life” emerged as the most prominent metaphor with a share of %16.7, followed closely by “Mind game” at %13.3. The metaphor of “Brain storming” constitutes %10.0 of the data, while “Lesson” and

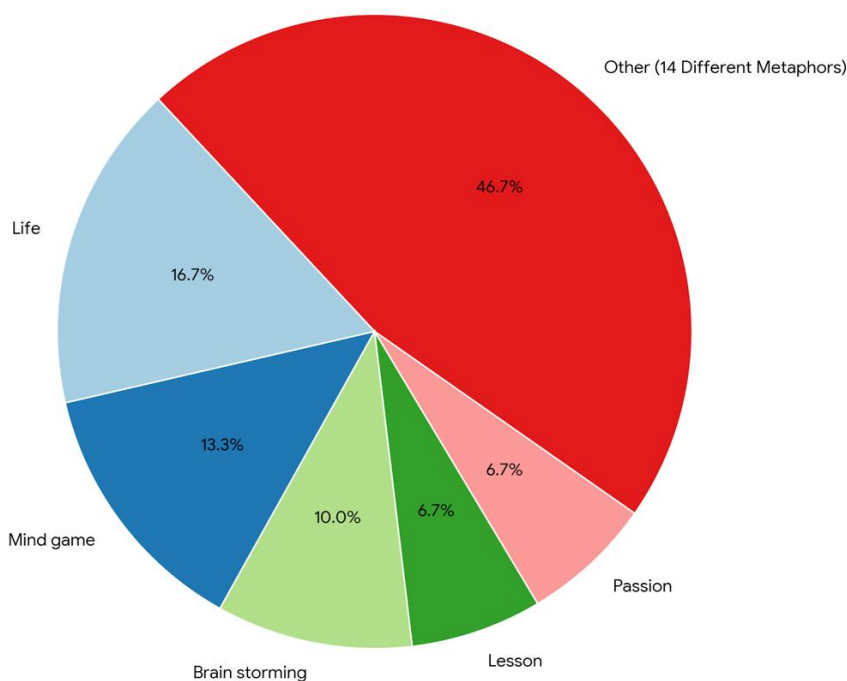


Figure 1. Frequency distribution of metaphors (grouped) (Source: Authors' own elaboration)

"Passion" represent the remaining segments with equal shares of %6.7 each.

Table 3. Metaphors generated by chess-playing adults regarding the concept of chess that were evaluated within the emotional domain category

Metaphor	f	Rationale
Life	5	-Just as in life, winning at chess requires looking ahead and formulating a sound plan. -Our lives consist of moments that oscillate between victories and defeats. -It encompasses every kind of emotion related to life. -It is like a reflection of life. -It is a way of life.
Passion	2	-Engaging my mind brings me both happiness and excitement. -In every game I play, I want to improve myself and do better.
Therapy	1	-It helps me relieve my stress.

As shown in **Table 3**, participants generated a total of seven valid metaphors that can be classified under the "emotional impact" category. This category encompasses instances where participants metaphorically depicted the concept of chess and reflected their emotions associated with it. An analysis of the metaphors reveals that five of them liken chess to life, while two reflect the participants' view of chess as a passion. Only one participant ($f = 1$) defined chess as a form of therapy.

Table 4. Metaphors generated by chess-playing adults about the concept of chess under the 'cognitive' domain category

Metaphor	f	Rationale
Mind Game	4	-It both sharpens the mind and entertains. -It sharpens the mind. (x3)
Brain Storming	3	-It enables me to think, analyze, and make the right decision at every move. -It keeps my mind constantly active. -It enhances my thinking ability.
Lesson	2	-It is like solving problems. -Every game teaches me something new.
Knot	1	-It is very difficult and complex.
Complex Math	1	-It is very difficult to solve.
Prob.		
Puzzle	1	-Not every piece is suitable for every square.

Table 4 indicates that participants generated a total of 12 different metaphors associated with the "cognitive impact" category. Within this category, four participants ($f = 4$) perceived chess as a mind game and reported that playing chess enhances their cognitive abilities. Three other participants see chess as a brain storming facility that keeps the mind active. Two participants ($f = 2$) conceptualized chess as a lesson. Additionally, one participant ($f = 1$) compared chess to a knot that requires solving, another likened it to a complex mathematical problem ($f = 1$), and one participant ($f = 1$) metaphorically described it as a puzzle.

Table 5. Metaphors generated by chess-playing adults about the concept of chess under the 'physical and behavioural domain' category

Metaphor	f	Rationale
Ladder	1	-Moving forward requires effort.
Heavy Bag	1	-It instills a sense of responsibility.
Waiting Room	1	-Sometimes it takes a very long time.
Marathon	1	-It demands endurance and patience.
Sport	1	-It teaches disciplined work.
Traffic	1	-You cannot predict the next move of the vehicles around you.

Table 5 shows that six different metaphors are categorized under the 'Physical and Behavioural Domain' category. One participant ($f = 1$) resembled chess to a ladder that moves up, another participant saw it as a heavy bag. One of the participants negatively commented chess as a waiting room that takes time. Other one described it as a marathon which requires endurance. One participant see it as a sport and another as a traffic that one can never predict the next move like the vehicles does.

Table 6. Metaphors generated by chess-playing adults about the concept of chess under the 'social domain' category

Metaphor	f	Rationale
Work	1	-I earn money from this.
Bridge	1	-It allows me to communicate with different people.
Dead end	1	-I get lost in crowded environments.
School	1	-Communication is limited during the game but learning is essential.

Table 6 shows that four different metaphors are categorized under the 'Social Domain' category. One participant ($f = 1$) saw chess as a work and said that he/she play it to earn money, another participant metaphorically likened it to a bridge that connects him/her to other people though communication. One of the participants negatively commented chess as a dead end. Other one described it as a school.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It has been observed that adults mostly develop positive metaphors regarding chess. This result indicates that adults find relaxation and happiness in playing the game. Furthermore, participants agree that chess could be included in school curricula as a compulsory subject due to the benefits it offers. In **Table 6**, "School" and "Bridge" metaphors shows how participants see chess as an educative tool and let people communicate and interact positively with others. Chess is often accepted as a universal language that brings people together across generations, cultures, and experiences, creating a shared space where people can connect and interact socially. McEwan and Gutwin in parallel (2016) argues that chess moves themselves function as communicative acts that create shared understanding between players.

This study conducted with 30 adults and as a result, 19 metaphors were identified; it was observed that 12 of these reflected a positive perception, while 7 reflected negative perceptions. Recent studies (Aciego et al., 2012; Çobanoğlu & Gökalep, 2015; Kaya, 2014; Kazemi et al., 2012; Sala et al., 2015) confirms the benefits of this game that it has mostly positive cognitive effects on individuals.

Research findings especially the metaphors detected in **Table 4** indicate that adults view chess not merely as a game, but as an integral part of life and a sophisticated intellectual pursuit. This demonstrates that chess contributes to essential cognitive and life skills; such as problem-solving, independent thinking, assessing probabilities, anticipating risks, analytical thinking, and maintaining focus. Bilalić et al. (2007) similarly argue that young people see chess as the best example of an intellectual activity among games. It is evident that chess is perceived not just as a pastime, but as a multidimensional mental and life practice. Furthermore, the participants' characterization of chess as a metaphor for life is a noteworthy aspect of the findings.

Adults who play chess achieve more victories in life because they contemplate and strategize their next moves in life, thereby increases their chances of success. Furthermore, since chess enhances players'

perspective on life and fosters creativity, it boosts the likelihood of success in life for those who play the game. Therefore, life metaphor dominating the findings of Table 3 is significant. Ilić (2008) resembles the chess to life metaphorically by stating that: "Life itself corresponds to chess; complex life situations in which we interact with other people trying to achieve our goals correspond to a game of chess."

It was also observed that some of the study participants associated chess with education. When this aspect is considered, it becomes evident that the game is viewed as a significant educational tool, extending beyond a mere leisure activity. In their statements, participants emphasized aspects of chess such as "brain storming" and "puzzle." These points indicate in parallel with Ermiş and Akyol (2022) findings that chess has a positive impact on cognitive development in adults. These perceptions further support the view that chess is regarded not only as a recreational activity but also as a meaningful medium for intellectual engagement and lifelong learning (Burgoyne et al., 2016).

In conclusion, the findings of this study, consistent with those of Dikmen et al. (2026), indicate that participants perceived chess as contributing to holistic development across four interrelated dimensions: cognitive, emotional, social, and physical/behavioral. This multidimensional perspective is consistent with the holistic development approach, which conceptualizes learning as extending beyond cognitive achievement to encompass learners' and participants' emotional, social, behavioral, and physical development.

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AI declaration: The authors stated that AI tools were used solely for language editing and stylistic refinement.

Declaration of interest: No conflict of interest is declared by the authors.

Data availability: Data generated or analyzed during this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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