

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **The school image in children's books**

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**Literary works for children help the child to acquire reading habits and to be a helpful citizen in the society. Therefore, individuals obtain quality children's literature from the very beginning of childhood. In this context, the study aims to determine the reflection of the school concept in literary works prepared for children. No other individual study has been reported on the reflection of the school concept in children's books. Document analysis was used in the study. Ten story books and novels prepared for children with reflections of the school image in the study were examined. Documents examined in the study were obtained by means of an expert and read orally. Descriptive analysis was conducted followed by content analysis to analyze the data. The results of the study suggest that the school image is mostly positively reflected in the children's books and that success and internal and external properties of the school are important in shaping character of the individual. On the other hand, poverty affects the education of a child. The school image in children's books is important for children to read, and therefore the school image in children's books should be realistic and constructed in such a way as to positively affect the child's readership.**

**Key words:** Children's book, school, children's literature.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Literary works for children help both the child to acquire reading habits and to become beneficial to the society. Therefore, individuals meet children's literatures of quality from the very beginning of childhood. In this context, the study is to determine the reflection of the school concept in literary works prepared for children. The need for such research is that no other individual study has been reported on the reflection of the school concept in children's books, and that an individual spends a significant period of time in school.

Children's literature is defined as a literature that speaks in the language level of children in the age of development and adolescence, and helps them with the ability to understand and comprehend the world of

emotion and thought (Şimşek, 2002). The greatest difference between children's literature and that of adults is that the language material used is according to the child and the selected theme and subject are appropriate for the child's feelings, thoughts and imagination. In particular, it is imperative for children to meet works that can be a positive model in order for individuals to achieve the targeted positive traits as stated by Karatay (2007). The contradictory conditions of protagonists in tales, stories and novels portrays experiences of social problems which becomes a case studies for character formation; while the tales and stories in which such contrasts as good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, strong and weak compete, present a real world to

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the child.

Children's literature is not different from generic literature in terms of fiction and other features it should possess. However, the subject / theme and characters should be very well structured, especially in relation to the age of the individual that is of question. Children are influenced by the messages and characters in the texts they read. Educating the child through literary texts is a path that has been used since ancient times. Many positive behaviors and values can be conveyed to the child using emotions, thoughts and behaviors of the characters in the texts and through messages given in an implicit manner in the texts (Karatay, 2011; Karatay et al., 2015; Arıcı, 2016).

A good number of academic studies on character education through works written for children have been reported. In some of these studies, children's books can help the child to develop behavior and make decisions, so that children can find facts they might encounter in real life (Gibbs and Earley, 1994; Bohlin, 2005; Karatay, 2007). In other studies (Yilmaz, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Ezell et al., 2014), there is a very close relationship between literature and education, and many children's books of different kinds are basically prepared based on the principles preliminarily adopted for the child (Ezell et al., 2014).

Almerico (2014) suggested that the characteristics of good characters in literary works are transmitted to children who read these works, arguing that literature is basically a powerful educational tool. Yilmaz (2016a, 2016b, 2016c) states that many positive messages are conveyed to a child through the characters in fictional texts for children. In this context, myriad studies both in Turkey and in the world have been reported on the relationship between children's literature and character education (Gibbs and Earley, 1994; O'Sullivan, 2004; Karatay, 2007; Lintner, 2011; Klein et al., 2014; Almerico, 2014; Freeman, 2014; Karatay et al., 2015; Özdemir and Tulumcu, 2017). The common point of these works is that fictional qualities and character traits in both adult and children's books can create awareness in the readers of these works.

The school is defined in the dictionary as "the place where all kinds of education and training are conducted collectively" (TDK, 2011). The school is the first place in the life of an individual who begins to live in an independent environment from the family. So, the stress and yearning emerging by the separation from the family for the first time is an important milestone for the child. However, the school has a structure in which there are many different characters because it is a place where individuals from different parts of the society are educated. In addition, the school is also important for the child in terms of having many formal practices and a scheme that the child has not encountered before.

The school is also the name of a seventeen-year journey for a child who starts to study regularly from the pre-school period because an individual who continues to

study without break, must go to school for seventeen years to have a bachelor's degree diploma. During the school terms, the time an individual spends at school is almost more than that spent with the family (Gökçe, 2012). In this respect, it can be concluded that the effect of the time spent in school and the school itself plays a role in the character of the individual.

The fact that no study has been found on the concept of "school" in children's literature, which has a serious effect on the character formation of the individual in the relevant literature constitutes the departing point of this study. Therefore, the study aims to contribute to the related literature and to determine the reflection of the concept of "school" in children's books. In this vein, an answer was sought for the question "how and to what extent does the school concept appear in fictional texts for children?"

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

The study was designed by document analysis. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011) define document analysis as a type of analysis for written and oral materials. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is functional in that it provides an opportunity for detailed examination. In the study, document analysis was conducted since the reflection of the school image in the fictional books prepared for children was examined.

### Documents examined

In the study, ten books in the type of stories and novels prepared for children between 10 to 14 years with reflections of the school image were examined. The stories and novels were examined because fiction-based expressions are present more in these types than in other literary genres (Table 1). Table 1 contains information about the documents examined and selected based on the expert's opinion. Since a certain number of books were enough to satisfy the data analysis, searching for more resources was avoided. In this context, ten different works from eight different publishing houses were studied. Abbreviations related to the mentioned sources are given to facilitate citation of the documents examined in the text.

### Data collection and analysis

Stories and novels that included the school image were obtained to collect the data. Experts were consulted with regards to the content of the works whether they are suitable for children and their ages. Afterwards, resources were read by the researcher orally. In addition, the works were descriptively analyzed taking into consideration the "school" image because descriptive analysis is generally used to classify the resources, while the content analysis is employed to deepen the research. Following the descriptive analysis, content analysis of the data collected was conducted. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the work, the data set was read several times, and direct as well as indirect citations were made. In addition, to provide coding consistency during analysis, a qualitative research expert was consulted in the cross section of the study and the consistency between these codes was calculated according to the reliability formula of Miles and Huberman (1994)

Table 1. Sources examined in the study.

Title	Author	Publishing house	Edition year	Number of pages	Abbreviation
Günişliğine Yolculuk	Adnan Binyazar	Can Çocuk	2015	181	GY
Okul Arkadaşım	Melisa Gürpınar	Özyürek Yayıncılık	2016	160	OY
Küçük Öğretmen	Arif Berberoğlu	Evrensel Çocuk Kit.	2012	72	KÖ
Okul Radyosu Yayında	Ülker Kurtan	Abm Yay.	2016	196	ORY
Çılgın Okul	Duran Çetin	Nar Çocuk	2017	159	ÇO
Okul Yolunda	Filiz Tosyalı	Özyürek Yayıncılık	2012	176	OY
Of Yaa! Yine mi Ödev?	Şebnem Güler Karacan	Nesil Çocuk	2013	112	OYM
Okul Fena Karıştı	Birsen Ekim Özden	Timaş Çocuk	2017	184	OFK
Okul Ne Zaman Biter?	Mustafa Orakçı	Timaş Çocuk	2017	91	ONZB
Sınıfta Kalanlar Okul Açtılar	Miyase Sertbarut	Çizmeli Kedi	2013	96	SKOA

(Reliability = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) for which the consistency level must be 70%. The results proved 83%.

## FINDINGS

In the present study, the first finding that draws attention to this study is the success. Those who go to school continuously target the success and fear failure. In one of the books examined was "I swore on my own every morning I go to school." No laziness, no failure, I do not have that right (Sertbarut, 2013: 19), which could be regarded as examples. In addition, the children talk to each other about the school environment and the expectations from them even before the school started and statements as "There was time for the school to start, but Ismail's situation created a fear in myself" (Sertbarut, 2013: 14) could illustrate the situation. Besides, school failure and the fear of failure are also remarkable. There are those who left school because of the failure in school, as well as those who started working immediately. Statements like "Celo, after his father's meeting with the teacher, never came back. His father found a job near the pizza restaurant for the child. (Sertbarut, 2013: 39)" suggest, the parents can demand that their children end their education because of failure in the school.

Failure in school can sometimes even lead to the idea of escape from home. "Let's plan together if anybody comes. I'm sick of being told stupid, chowder-head every day at school. Are you used to it?" (Sertbarut, 2013: 48) this shows that children are both suffering from the insults at school as well as from the failure they experience. Besides, there are students who struggle to go to better schools and become more successful and better educated. It is possible to see this situation from the statements: "Some children in school are preparing for the examinations. They want to go to the best schools, get the highest score ( Sertbarut, 2013: 21)".

Another characteristic that is seen in children's books is the physical structure of the school and the effect of the activities related to learning at school on children. On the

first day of school, the statements uttered by the teacher are "Welcome to school. Here you will learn to read and write. You will work hard. You will be good people after all (Çetin, 2017: 48)". These statements are remarkable in terms of expressing the mission attributed to the school. The teacher emphasizes that as a result of the children's misbehavior, the school is not a place of naughtiness but a learning space (Çetin, 2017: 96).

However, it is also possible to find lines (OA, 119) which emphasize that the education provided at school is not only what can be used in everyday life (OA, 119) but also an ongoing process outside the school (Çetin, 2017: 157). Observations of the physical appearance and possibilities of the school the children attend are also the reflections of the characters in children's books. Such statements as "My school is like a majestic monarch sitting on its throne, situated in a large garden, with a timber ridge whose reputation is apparent at first sight. Maybe it was a little old, old-fashioned, but all the way up to the neighborhood gave an awe-inspiring feeling to those around it. It would create a feeling that it could not be approached easily. The large garden was full of great, high trees (OA, 36-37)." These descriptions are important in terms of the place of the school in the child's world. While the teachers and administrators were talking to each other, they mentioned the redesigning of the school environment in accordance with the children's needs (Çetin, 2017: 28).

The excitement that children experience when they start school is among the most important aspects of the school in the works examined. It is possible to follow what the school means for first year students from the following lines: "A new space, different faces and a different environment. These are impressions that the children who are coming to sign up are not accustomed to. While some perceive it as a new playground, for some it is a new space where they will continue regularly based on what they have heard from their brothers and sisters' school" (Çetin, 2017: 7).

Besides, the first day of the school is one of the important points in the works that can be immediately

understood from the behaviors of the children who have just started school (Çetin, 2017: 45). It is possible to find lines in descriptions that portray schooling as a very important change in the life of a child, such as setting up another planet, and that the school is a whole new set of duties and responsibilities (OA, 32 to 33). While in some works the school is presented as a huge and gigantic structure (8 to 9) where one can be lost especially for the children who are far away from neighboring and sharing in the apartment life, in other words school is described as a separation and impenitent sadness for those who are very dependent on their mothers. This sadness is so great that from time to time even the compassionate attitudes of teachers and administrators can not remove it (Çetin, 2017: 8).

An important reflection observed in the sources is that daily works and courses in schools are closely related with a routine. The opinion "this is what you always do at school (Orakçı, 2017: 62)" explains how children feel about school. However, there are occasional practices that change this routine. The most striking one is being a guard student. Keeping guard for the students who see the duty as an extraordinary privilege rather than a duty means a time frame in which only the superiors can do, the freedom to come to the school without a bag, and a time when it is not necessary to enter the classes (Orakçı, 2017: 47). The school newsletter is another one of the reflections that can be evaluated outside the routine in the school. The school newsletter is seen as an important activity for children interested in the newsletter. Children collect news and take pictures for this newsletter (Ekim, 2017: 19,22). Another practice that can be considered besides school paper is the school notice board. Pictures taken and classified based on a theme by responsible students are shown on the school notice board (Kurtan, 2016: 12). The school radio draws attention in the works as a remarkable extracurricular activity for children. The radio is considered to broadcast only in the school, sometimes play songs, and sometimes promote the development of the school (Kurtan, 2016: 30). The effect of the school on human character attracts attention in the works examined. The school has a formative influence on the child's life (Gürpınar, 2016: 25), and that many behaviors / considerations among important values are acquired at school. The following lines illustrate the fact: "To preserve that unique nature that the world offers us is perhaps due to the loyalty to a primary school in a neighborhood because where we are born, live and start to grow up shapes us. (Gürpınar, 2016: 39)"

The way to the school is also an important observation seen in the works. Children living by small coastal towns near the sea have a chance to walk to the school while children living in big cities go to school with services that are like prison vehicles covered with metal bars (Tosyalı, 2012: 5). However, it can be considered in this context that children see it as a game to walk to the school when it is beautiful (Tosyalı, 2012: 5) and regard walking to the

school with their friends as a privilege and power they settle by emigrating (Sertbarut, 2013: 17).

Another important notice is the access to the school, which is to start and attend the school. It is not possible for children in the places with no school or where there is only primary school to continue their education in their vicinity (Binyazar, 2015: 30). Children who must teach themselves and continue school when they are at the age of 14 in the third grade of primary school are also included in the works (Binyazar, 2015: 65). Poverty is also one of the most important causes of attending school late, which is very frequently seen in the works so much so that there are even some children who are unable to afford to go and enroll at school (Binyazar, 2015: 173). Due to the financial difficulties, the difference in dress and the dietary needs of the children satisfied by the school and the presence of only bagels and tea in the canteens of the schools where the poor children attend (Gürpınar, 2016: 80) are important signs of poverty. In connection with poverty, the boarding school is one of the main observations in the works examined. There is a high interest in these schools because of the financial burden on the parents.

As a matter of fact, children who prefer boarding schools in their works usually are from the poor families. Therefore, most of the time, applicants to boarding schools are enrolled by drawing lots because applications are more than the available school facilities (Berberoğlu, 2012: 55). The problems of the children who are forced to continue their education away from their families at a young age in the boarding school are also observed in the works. The aspirations of children towards their homes and their families are evident (Berberoğlu, 2012: 41).

## DISCUSSION

Examining the observations of the school concept in children's books, it was found that the school concept was reflected in works with different features and images. The presence of the school concept in children's books in terms of success is a point drawing attention. It is important in this context that children work tirelessly to be successful, and that their families put pressure on their children consciously or unconsciously in this regard.

However, the point that is of importance is that success is considered only in academic sense by both parents and teachers. When children's academic achievements such as literacy and mathematics are taken into consideration, their achievements in areas such as painting, music and sports are ignored. In this respect, it can be pointed out that only teachers and parents who focus on academic success of the children are criticized. On account of failure, leaving the school and escaping from the house is another image obtained in terms of success. Another important issue in this regard is that teachers consider children's leaving school as a solution for the problem rather than focusing on the solution.

Another observation in the texts is that parents lead children to work at an early age due to short-term economic concerns rather than promoting school success and attendance. Thus, it can be concluded that efforts should be made to change the perception of the parents and the society in the works. In the works examined, some of the children want and endeavor to continue their education in more qualified schools as a continuation of the success. This can be viewed as a successful reflection of the school image on the children's books.

One other school image seen in the fictional books for children is centered on the physical structure of the school and the educational activities in the school. The effects of the physical characteristics and facilities of the school on the children vary as the years pass. While the meaning of school for children varies at early ages, at older ages this can change, and after graduation, the school is depicted as a place where old and beautiful memories are formed for the individual. Another point focuses on educational activities held in the school. Teachers constantly warn children about life and what they learn in school can be used in daily life. Thus, children question the quality of education in the schools in these works. It is important to note that teachers warn that learning is not only academic but a life-long process and try to improve the physical facilities of the school considering children. Here, it can be acknowledged that positive messages are presented to the child readers.

The excitement to start school and the stress of being separated from family and having an independent time slot in a different environment are other reflections of the school concept in children's books. It is certainly one of the important turning points of everybody's life for every individual to start study. Meeting with new people and different personalities creates a great source of excitement for the child. By emphasizing that the enthusiasm that happens is normal when starting school and that a child could be excited in every new environment for the first time, child reader gets prepared for life. Another one is that starting school restricts certain freedoms that children have. Messages are conveyed here related to life underlining that schooling brings some duties and responsibilities. The stresses that the children experience which are too much dependent on the family, when they start to study are covered in the works. In the same works, both the children and the families who raise their children in an overprotective manner are being criticized.

Another feature of the school concept in children's books is the school routines. The days, lectures and activities that always start in the same way in the school are frequently mentioned in the works. In this way, message is given that each institution in life runs on a certain routine and works are done in a certain way. However, some tasks and activities that the child can take out of this routine are also striking. Even though the watcher is reflected as a way to get rid of the student's routine, the duties and responsibilities of the watcher learner cannot be passed unspecified. Thus, the child is

reminded that the duty and responsibility of the child is inevitable and necessary. Practices such as school newsletters, school slips and school radio can also be considered important in this context because these duties take place outside the school routine through some student initiative. It is aimed to encourage the readers by giving place for practical duties in the works which bring together the student's effort and responsibility and emphasize the importance of having the support of teachers and parents in this issue. This is important for child readers.

Acquisition of both academic understanding and emotional and behavioral skills reflected in children's books is an important aspect of the school concept. It is communicated to the reader that the school has a crucial role in shaping the character of the person and the school develops a person by emphasizing the effects of friends, teachers, and administrators on the individual. The path and vehicles used to go to school are also important observations in the works. The fact that children regard it as a game to go to the school when the weather is fine shows that they are still children though they are old enough to go to school. The difficulties and problems of urban life are expressed by comparing the children who go to the school on foot and live by the seaside with those going to the school in shuttles whose windows are covered by iron bars.

Poverty is also an aspect of the school reflected in children's books. Children who cannot go to the school because of poverty and must leave due to financial difficulties right at the beginning are conspicuous. However, having to continue school in a boarding school and so longing for the family can be regarded as another reflection related to poverty. There are two fundamental messages to be presented with the child readers: first everyone can be poor or fall into a poor situation after being wealthy. Nevertheless, one should go to school. Second, the possibilities for children who are well-off may be a dream for children in a poor situation. In this context, both messages in children's books written on school are positive and necessary.

In conclusion, this study, which examines the school concept reflected in children's books, shows that school image is mostly positively reflected in children's books. It was found that success and both internal and external facilities of the school have been found to be important in shaping the character of the individual, and that poverty is a condition affecting the education of the child. It was also found that the school image in children's books is important for child readers in this sense, so the school concept in children's books should be realistic and should be constructed in such a way that it can have a positive effect on child readers.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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