

## Reading and Writing Experiences of Middle School Students in the Digital Age: Wattpad Sample

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the in-school and out-of-school reading and writing experiences of middle school students. This study used phenomenology from qualitative research methods. All 12 participants (8 female, 4 male) were middle school grade 6 students. Various data collection techniques were employed: a survey and a semi-structured interview about the use of Wattpad, a semi-structured interview about the Turkish language subject, a semi-structured interview about the relationship between in-school and out-of-school reading and writing experiences, a diary of the students' Wattpad reading list, a diary of the students' Wattpad writing list, and the texts written by the students on Wattpad. Data collection lasted 16 weeks. The data collected from the survey questionnaire were analyzed descriptively. The data from the semi-structured interviews and diaries were analyzed using content analysis. The results indicated that most of the participants had a negative perception of in-school reading. Similar conclusions were drawn from the results in-school writing because most of the participants felt restricted and under pressure during the in-school writing process. Wattpad was considered a venue where participants can express themselves comfortably. The participants shared positive experiences characterized by willingness, diversity, meaningfulness, and entertainment. By contrast, in-school reading evoked negative experiences, such as feeling obliged, bored, and restricted, and perceiving the activity as meaningless. Out-of-school writing experiences were determined to promote internal motivation, to develop self-expression of one's anxiety and enjoyment alike, and to develop digital writing skills in out-of-school writing experiences. Overall, no relationship was found between in-school and out-of-school reading and writing experiences.

**Key words:** Wattpad, Out-of-school Reading, Out-of-school Writing, In-school Reading, In-school Writing

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between technology and education has been well established. The technological investments made by the Ministry of Education and the out-of-school digital environments to which students are exposed strengthen this relationship. These in-school and out-of-school digital environments lead to new trends in reading and writing habits. Blogger (<http://www.blogcu.com/>), Pinterest (<https://tr.pinterest.com/>), Wordpress (<https://tr.wordpress.org/>), Wix (<https://tr.wix.com/>), Weebly (<https://www.weebly.com/>), and Tumblr (<https://www.tumblr.com/>) are among the online sites students are exposed to. In this study, Wattpad (<https://www.wattpad.com/>) was used as content. Wattpad was selected in this study because it is an advanced language alternative that appeals to a broad target group, piques the interest of the participants, and promotes interaction.

Wattpad was founded by Allen Lau and Ivan Yuen in 2006. It is an application developed for online reading

and writing (Reid, 2016). Today, Wattpad has more than 65 million users (Wattpad, 2018). As the number of its users increases every day, Wattpad offers many new possibilities for enriching reading and writing experiences. It offers a free digital environment, feedback, and an experimental environment for new and even experienced writers (Ramdarshan Bold, 2018). Wattpad also offers reading opportunities and innovations; for example, it features readers' views on the chapters of a book and suggestions for new sections of texts (Sari, 2016). It also allows users to read and write texts in different contexts. It features a wide range of genres, including action, general fiction, paranormal, mystery/thriller, spiritual, horror, werewolves, fantasy, humor, young chick lit, romance, classics, vampires, science fiction, adventure, teenage fiction, random, fanfiction, historical fiction, and nonfiction (Wattpad, 2018). Offering these diverse options, Wattpad has paved the way for new trends in reading and writing habits.

A review of the literature on the reading habits of middle school students demonstrates that different results, both positive and negative, have been reached. Numerous studies have been conducted on the reading habits of middle school students (e.g. Can, Türkyılmaz, & Karadeniz, 2015; Karahan, 2016; Mete, 2012; Yılmaz & Çalışkan, 2017; Zorbaz & Habeş, 2015). In these studies, it was seen that students' reading habits are limited to in-school activities. Thus, the current study investigates why middle school students have not developed a reading habit. According to İşcan, Arıkan, & Küçükaydın (2013), middle school students do not have a reading habit; most of the students do not spend time willingly for out-of-school reading. The reading habits of middle school students also affect their writing habits (Elma & Bütün, 2015). Such habits can be improved by meeting the conditions of age. The perception of reading and writing in the digital age has changed, and reading and writing have become multimodal (Beazley, 2014; Darmanin, 2017; Relles & Tierney, 2013; Rozema, 2015; Sampson, Ortlieb, & Leung, 2016).

This change is accompanied by a need for environments that can cope with it. The interest in Wattpad is probably a result of this change and need. Wattpad is a social media platform in which students can read and write during out-of-school hours. Therefore, their experiences with this application should be determined in terms of the number of users and reading and writing activities. Reading and writing activities in this application should be considered because middle school students use this application without the supervision of teachers and family or fear of failure. According to a previous study (Deniz, 2015), middle school students particularly enjoy adventure, emotional, humor, science fiction, and crime stories. Wattpad classifies reading and writing activities falling into these genres. Determining students' experiences with using this application could provide an idea of the connection between in-school and out-of-school reading and writing activities. New text types were not given importance in the 2006 Turkish language curriculum, but they were introduced in the new Turkish Language Curriculum (2018). Blogs, social media messages, comics, and cartoons are the most popular among these text types. Through these text types, the daily life experiences of middle school students can be integrated into the teaching process (MEB, 2018). This new program has been undergoing regular trials since 2015. However, certain points in the program still remain unclear.

The purpose of this study is to determine the in-school and out-of-school reading and writing habits of middle school students, with emphasis on out-of-school reading and writing experiences. In addition, this study compares the out-of-school reading and writing experiences of middle school students with their in-school reading and writing experiences to understand why middle school students need to read and write outside school. In line with its purpose, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the middle school students' in-school reading and writing experiences?
2. What are the middle school students' experiences with using Wattpad?
3. What are the middle school students' out-of-school reading and writing experiences?
4. What is the relationship of the middle school students' in-school reading and writing experiences to their out-of-school reading and writing experiences?

## METHOD

### Research Design

The study was conducted to examine the reading and writing habits of middle school students. The previous section emphasizes the need for middle school students to focus on their reading and writing habits. To be able to talk about their reading and writing habits, students should also perform reading and writing activities willingly. However, a previous paper (İşcan, Arıkan, & Küçükaydın, 2013) reported that middle school students do not fulfill this condition because they have their own preferences in spending their out-of-school time, suggesting that reading and writing activities are not among the primary interests of students. Thus, middle school students cannot possibly talk about reading and writing habits. However, students perform reading and writing activities on Wattpad without any pressure. In this light, the students' perceptions of reading and writing experiences should be determined through Wattpad. Out-of-school experiences of middle school students can be connected with the Turkish language subject. In addition, the perceptions of middle school students toward in-school and out-of-school reading and writing activities should be determined in detail. Accordingly, this study is based on phenomenology, which deals with what an individual perceives (Creswell, 2007). In-depth information about the out-of-school and in-school experiences with reading and writing of middle school students was obtained. A long-term investigation of these experiences was necessary to ascertain their naturalness. Therefore, phenomenology was preferred.

### Participant Characteristics

This study used criterion sampling. At the beginning of the study, 32 students using Wattpad were identified and then evaluated according to the following criteria: (1) a Wattpad user for at least a year, (2) with at least three books on his/her Wattpad reading list, and (3) with at least two chapters written on Wattpad. Out of the 32 students, 12 (8 female, 4 male) middle school grade 6 students passed the data collection process in the study; 11 participants had a final grade of 5 in the Turkish language, and one participant had a grade of 4. Three participants had been using Wattpad for three years, and nine participants had been using Wattpad for four years. Nine students learned about Wattpad through a friend, two students discovered it by themselves, and one student learned about it through a teacher. The true identities of the participants are not indicated in the results section; only nicknames are used.

### Data Collection Techniques

The following data collection techniques were used: a semi-structured interview about the Turkish language subject, a survey and semi-structured interview about the use of Wattpad, a semi-structured interview about reading and writing on Wattpad and the Turkish language subject, a diary of the students' Wattpad reading list, a diary of the students' Wattpad writing list, and texts written on Wattpad.

#### Survey

The survey questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first section contains the personal information of the participant. The second part features 11 closed-ended questions to determine the existing situations of the students using Wattpad. The survey questionnaire was developed by primarily considering the aims of this study. The draft of the survey questionnaire, which consisted of 20 questions, was presented to two field experts for evaluation. After the expert evaluation, nine questions were removed from the survey, and the questionnaire was revised. Subsequently, a pilot scheme was conducted (Johnson & Christensen, 2007). An application group with the same features as the participants was selected for the pilot scheme (Altunışık, 2008). The unknown points identified during the pilot scheme were corrected, and the questionnaire was finalized for use in the actual survey.

#### Semi-structured interview

Three semi-structured interview forms were developed to determine the students' perceptions of the Turkish language subject, their perceptions of the use of Wattpad, and their perceptions of the reading and writing activities on Wattpad and the Turkish language subject. Three dif-

ferent forms were developed to collect detailed information. The same steps were followed in the development of the three forms. The questions were determined by considering the purpose of the research (Merriam, 2013). For this purpose, 11 questions about the students' experiences with the Turkish language subject were developed, 10 questions about the students' experiences with using Wattpad, and 13 questions about students' experiences with reading and writing activities on Wattpad and in the Turkish language subject. The questions were presented to three experts for content corrected (Glesne, 2013). After the expert evaluation, the questions that did not serve the research purpose or were considered unnecessary were removed. The forms were updated and used in the pilot scheme. The interview forms were finalized after the pilot scheme.

#### Research diary

The students' thoughts and feelings about the books and texts they had read and written on Wattpad were determined using a research diary with questions aligned with the research purpose. The students' observations, comments, reactions, and feelings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013) were acquired by journaling.

#### Other documents

In this study, the reading lists and written texts that students had created through Wattpad were used as documents.

#### Data Collection Process

The data were collected in the first semester of academic year 2017–2018. The data collection process is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Data collection process

Process	Date
Informing the students about the content of the study	25.09.2017–29.09.2017
Identifying the students	02.10.2017–06.10.2017
Following up with the participant via Wattpad	09.10.2017–13.10.2017
Conducting the survey to learn about the use of wattpad	16.10.2017–20.10.2017
Interview about the turkish language subject	23.10.2017–03.11.2017
Interview about the use of wattpad	06.11.2017–17.11.2017
Interview about in-school reading and writing activities and out-of-school reading and writing activities	20.11.2017–01.12.2017
Checking whether the students' perceptions of turkish language subject were understood correctly	04.12.2017–08.12.2017
Checking whether the students' perceptions of the use of wattpad were understood correctly	11.12.2017–15.12.2017
Checking whether the students' perceptions of in-school and out-of-school reading and writing activities were understood correctly	18.12.2017–22.12.2017
Monitoring students' reading and writing activities on Wattpad	25.12.2017–12.01.2018
Collecting the diaries of reading lists on wattpad	25.12.2017–12.01.2018
Collecting the diaries of written texts on wattpad	25.12.2017–12.01.2018

As shown in Table 1, the data collection process lasted 16 weeks. A progressive process was applied to the data collection. Each data collection tool was intensively developed and implemented, explaining the data obtained from the previous data collection step to reach a detailed and concrete understanding of the phenomenon.

### Data Analysis

The obtained data were analyzed in stages. First, the researcher disregarded all the information about reading and writing. While developing the data collection tools and collecting the data, the students' experiences were ignored. The fact that the researcher had not signed up for Wattpad membership or did not have any blogs was also an important factor in leading the research process.

The data collected from the survey were analyzed through descriptive analysis because they were obtained through closed-ended questions. The analysis themes consisted of the survey questions. The answers from the semi-structured interview forms and the data obtained from the diaries were loaded into a qualitative data analysis program. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using content analysis. For the content analysis, the codes that accurately fulfill the expressions were first created. After encoding, codes that were related to each other were categorized under the same heading. Finally, the phenomenon covering all the categories was derived. The phenomenon in this study constituted reading and writing. The textural and structural descriptions of what the participants perceive and how they perceive the data were prepared.

The data collection process was performed for 16 weeks to increase the reliability of the study. During the development of data collection tools (Section 2.3), their validity and reliability were tested. When data were collected, data loss was prevented by using a voice recorder. The collected data were carefully transcribed. The transcripts were checked by a field expert to prevent mistakes. Data were then analyzed by a field expert. The reliability coefficient between the two different analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64) was 90%. The participants' views are presented with direct references in the next section.

To ensure the validity of the research, the researcher tried to maintain objectivity by excluding his knowledge and experience in the entire process. The researcher is capable of carrying out the hang-up process, which is important in a phenomenological study, because he had no previous experience with out-of-school reading and writing. After the data were analyzed, the participants were interviewed again. In the second batch of interviews, the participants were asked to check if the information and answers they provided were understood correctly, as indicated in Table 1.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is divided into four subsections based on the research questions.

### Results on the Students' In-school Reading and Writing Experiences

This section presents students' perceptions of and experiences with in-school reading and writing activities. Table 2 presents the views of the participants on their reading experiences.

**Table 2.** Students' experiences with in-school reading activities

Category	Code	f
Perspective	Not suitable for the level	2
	Boring	2
	Diversity	2
	Constructive	1
	Restrictor	1
	Compulsory	1
	Restricted subject	1
	Dislike	1
	Financial damage	1
	Incomprehensible	1
Criteria for book selection	Interest	5
	Subject	5
	Clarity	1
Emotion	Disinterested	5
	Get bored	2
	Belonging	1
	Dislike	1
	Desperation	1
Perception	Reading time	3
	Text type	2
	Unidentified	1
	Literary work and writer	1
	Diversity	1
	Self-development	1

As shown in Table 2, four categories of reading experiences were formed. For the students, their reading activity was primarily determined by reading time ( $f=3$ ), followed by text type ( $f=2$ ), unidentified ( $f=1$ ), literary work and writer ( $f=1$ ), diversity ( $f=1$ ), and self-development ( $f=1$ ). The following are the statements of Elif and İclal about reading time:

"Reading in the Turkish language subject means reading our books and the texts in our textbooks." (Elif, semi-structured interview)

"What comes to mind about reading time is what we have done on Tuesday" (Ahmed, semi-structured interview)

The above views show that students define reading as an activity for the subject. Notably, students' perceptions of reading were negative primarily because of the reading texts. First, the reading texts are not suitable for the level ( $f=2$ ) and are boring ( $f=2$ ). Ömer said the following about level suitability or age-appropriateness:

"The subjects are a bit heavy for my age; there are seventh-grade books that we need to read." (Ömer, semi-structured interview)

Ahmed also said that reading was boring.

*“I think it’s bad. I am bored reading them.”* (Ahmed, semi-structured interview)

The students clearly do not see the reading texts in the Turkish language subject in terms of their content. They also seemed to be bored because the texts were not exciting or interesting. In the survey data, five students said that the texts used in the Turkish language subject did not address them, and five students said that the texts only aim to transfer knowledge. Similar results were obtained in the survey data regarding the reading books recommended by the Ministry of National Education. Therefore, the students had negative experiences with reading activities in the Turkish language subject.

In addition to the students’ views on reading, the students’ experiences with in-school writing were also determined. The details are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Student experiences with in-school writing activities

Category	Code	<i>f</i>
Main Purpose	Spelling and punctuation	7
	Content	5
	Plan	3
	Formal	2
Perception	Activity	5
	Text type	3
	Communication	1
	Pain	1
	Restraint	1
Perspective	Restrictor	4
	Time problem	2
	Variable	1
	Benefit us literarily	1
	Entertaining	1
Emotion	Unwillingness	1
	Restraint	3
	Happiness	1
	Strange	1
	Diffidence	1
	Worry	1

As shown in Table 3, four categories of in-school writing experiences were formed. Students define writing as a lesson activity ( $f=5$ ), text type ( $f=3$ ), communication ( $f=1$ ), pain ( $f=1$ ), and restraint ( $f=1$ ). The following statements support the definition of writing as a lesson activity:

*“The compositions or essays in the workbook.”* (Mevlüt, semi-structured interview)

*“Writing essays in the Turkish language subject and doing the activities in the workbook come to mind.”* (Ahmed, semi-structured interview)

*“The story, news, events, and lessons refer to writing in the Turkish language subject.”* (Havva, semi-structured interview)

The given statements demonstrate that writing is generally the activities carried out during the teaching process. Students’ emotions toward writing were negatively affected. As shown in Table 3, only one student expressed a positive feeling.

*“I feel free and happy when writing compositions in the Turkish language subject.”* (Şeref, semi-structured interview)

The primary cause of the negative in-school writing experiences is the restrictive quality of in-school writing, as shown in Table 3. The student views on this are as follows:

*“I think it’s bad, because we write in the exams in the way our teacher would like us to write. The subject is also chosen by our teacher. We could do better things if we chose the subject. At least we would be interested in something.”* (Ahmed, semi-structured interview)

*“We would have been more productive if we have chosen ourselves.”* (Ömer, semi-structured interview)

*“I cannot feel free if the subject is too restricted.”* (Hatun, semi-structured interview)

*“We have to limit our thoughts when the topic is given.”* (Berna, semi-structured interview)

These statements prove that students have negative experiences with in-school writing. For them, the writing activities in the school restrict their imagination and prevent them from expressing themselves freely.

The survey data also supported these views. According to the survey data, five students said, *“I am not interested,”* two students described in-school writing as *“obligatory,”* and one student said, *“I write willingly if I love the topic.”*

### Results on the Students’ Experiences with Using Wattpad

This section presents why the students chose Wattpad and what the application meant for them. In the survey data, the students’ reasons for being a member of Wattpad are as follows: the opinions presented are educated ( $f=5$ ); reading and writing books ( $f=3$ ); reading a book ( $f=1$ ); spending their leisure time ( $f=1$ ); testing ( $f=1$ ); and spending time ( $f=1$ ). According to the students, they use Wattpad for fun ( $f=7$ ); reading and writing ( $f=3$ ); just reading ( $f=1$ ); and just writing ( $f=1$ ). Table 4 presents the students’ experiences with using Wattpad.

As shown in Table 4, students assign different meanings to Wattpad. Ahmed, the most notable student, said

*“He is a friend in leisure time for me. Sometimes you feel so bad, but you cannot tell anybody. I’m out of the real world as I read the stuff. So I forget and it feels good.”* (Ahmed, semi-structured interview)

The students’ views suggest that Wattpad is a place where the students can walk away from everything and feel at ease. The other students’ views on using Wattpad support Ahmed’s experience.

*“It’s really nice to have followers. You see that what you write is admired and it excites and satisfies you.”* (Havva, semi-structured interview)

*“It is a feeling that is known by others. It’s great that others read what you wrote.”* (Savaş, semi-structured interview)

*“Writing on Wattpad evokes a very enthusiastic feeling. Writing is a very nice practice for me.”* (Elif, semi-structured interview).

**Table 4.** Students' experiences with using wappad

Category	Code	f
Perception	Reading and writing	3
	Important	2
	Inexperience	1
	Get information	1
	Experience	1
	Socialization	1
	Quiescence	1
	Book writing	1
	Encouraging for young writers	1
	Fun	1
Emotion from using of wappad	Intrinsic satisfaction	6
	Feel important	4
	Happy	1
Reason for signing up	Popularity	5
	Digital literacy	3
	Preparing for the future	1

"It feels good because your efforts do not go down the drain." (Berna, semi-structured interview)

The desire to be popular also emerged in the interviews. In relation to this view, students said the following:

"Because I want to put on side." (Cuma, semi-structured interview)

"It is important because you are being followed and are known by others." (Savaş, semi-structured interview)

"I think they want to be popular. Personally, I do not want that. They want to be loved. They may want to hear expressions of admiration." (Ahmed, semi-structured interview)

"It's important for being popular, and your books are liked." (Ömer, semi-structured interview)

Clearly, students' perceptions of Wattpad are different from their perceptions of in-school activities. They have introduced an additional variable: the possibility of having followers, which social media has provided. For the students, the feedback they receive from their peers on Wattpad is important.

### Results on the Student's Experiences with Out-of-school Reading and Writing

Students' views of and experiences with out-of-school reading and writing activities are presented in this section. Only one of the survey participants said that the reading process via Wattpad did not suit him. Other students reported a positive opinion on the out-of-school reading process. Each participant's reading list was derived from their Wattpad user pages. Students created a library that contains the books they like and read. The following are some examples of the students' reading lists:

"Leaves of Daisy: It is about a woman who is struggling with her life. When I read the description of the book, I really loved this fictional story." (Mevlüt, diary)

"Crack-Brained: Four brothers time-traveled to ancient times because of Russia's time machine. I added it because it was a very funny fictional story. I could not stop myself from laughing while reading the first few chapters of this funny story." (Hatun, diary)

"Line Space Love: A phone number comes out of a book bought by a girl, and she meets the owner of this phone number. I added it because it was interesting. There are sad events that the girl narrated in the book. Despite this, it is interesting." (Ercan, diary)

"Wattpad Court: It was written in response to cliché writing and events on Wattpad. I read all the chapters lovingly and added it because it is an extraordinary fictional story. A writing that you will never get laughed at." (Aydan, diary)

The students' reading lists show that the students prefer texts that address their interests. Participants had varying experiences with reading via Wattpad. Table 5 presents the students' experiences with out-of-school reading activities.

**Table 5.** Students' views on out-of-school reading activities

Category	Code	F
Genre	Chick lit	3
	Fear	2
	Tension	2
	Fiction	2
	Love	2
	History	1
	Adventure	1
	Atatürk	1
	Comic	1
	Mystery	1
	Fanfiction	1
	Loneliness	1
	Youth	1
	Young fiction	1
	Libretto	1
Fantastic	1	
Criterion For Reading	Action	1
	Interest	7
	Subject	4
	Neutral	3
Emotion	Labor	1
	Happy	4
	Entertaining	1
	Worry	1
	Excitement	1

As shown in Table 5, the students chose different genres. The dominant genres are young chick lit, fanfiction, and young fiction. The students clearly read according to their interests, as Elif said.

"I do not add to my list those that I do not like. I must read that the book that appeals to me, that will give me plea-

sure, and that will make me wonder.” (Elif, semi-structured interview)

Table 5 shows that the rich content offered by Wattpad can address the issue of out-of-school reading. Consequently, under emotion, the “Happy” code had the highest frequency value ( $f = 4$ ), as shown in Table 5. The students’ views support this result.

“It’s nice and sometimes it feels strange. It’s a great feeling that Wattpad has books of different genres, and I read so many people’s thoughts.” (Hatun, semi-structured interview)

“Reading a book is a beautiful thing in itself; it is even better to read Wattpad. Both the writers and readers there are increasing their success, and we have read books from new writers.” (Elif, semi-structured interview)

“It feels good because when you read other people’s books, you try to write better.” (Berna, semi-structured interview)

These views imply that out-of-school reading activity evokes happiness from the students because of the following the written texts receive from readers. Participants also shared their views on out-of-school writing; these views are presented in Table 6. Only one student presented a negative view on the out-of-school writing process. Other students stated that they liked writing because they felt free writing on Wattpad. Students tend to write without any pressure and write texts of different genres on their own pages. The texts written by the participants and their thoughts on them are as follows:

“*The Last Light of the Sun: The book talks about a girl named Güneş, whose mother and father were separated. She went to Istanbul with her cousins and started a new life there. It’s my life that made me write this. I wanted to write a book based on my life and my memories, and then it inspired me. I first identified the character and then wrote the separation of the mother and father. I was inspired by my older cousins, and thus, I created characters that looked like them. I think I will continue this way. As I was writing, I felt like a character myself. I felt like I was writing a life that resembled my life. This book is not finished yet, but while I am writing, I feel very excited and happy. I want this book to be very successful.*” (Mevlüt, diary)

“*My Hope is Exhausted: This book is about love. Actually, I’m not exactly sure. It talks about a daughter named Kumsal, who is moving to Izmir to start a new life. She talks about the events she encountered there. This is the reason why I write this story, but I have not yet decided what lesson to convey. Because I saw it in my dream, I decided to write.*” (Ahmed, diary)

“*Live to Die: This story talks about a woman and how she had suffered. This woman has a baby. It is a story about how powerful women battle violence against women. I felt very excited as I was writing this story. Some comments about the book are of course offensive, but I will not stop writing. I will continue to write with determination. I just think I need to improve myself.*” (Elif, diary)

“*Diary of a Schizophrenic Girl: This story presents the diary of a girl admitted to a mental hospital. Everyone writes a book about the same thing. I wanted my story to be special to me. It makes me feel nice to write different stories. It feels*

*good to write different stories. I am happy when I write. I enjoy it when I’m done.*” (Havva, diary)

“*So Glad I Have You: This story talks about the life of a girl determined to overcome obstacles and the friendship of a child who believes that her life is over. My purpose for writing this story is to help our special friends and not judge them. I had a friend who could not walk, and I had a withdrawn friend. I was inspired by that. As I wrote, I always told my friends. Sometimes I felt sad, but sometimes I laughed.*” (Hatun, diary)

These sample texts prove that the students had written texts on different subjects. The written texts were mainly based on the participants’ experiences. They were all trying to express a sentiment that was important to them. This observation can be summarized briefly by Havva’s statement: “*Everyone writes a book about the same things. I wanted my story to be special to me.*” The students were interviewed to find out more about their writing experiences on Wattpad. The data obtained from these interviews are given in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Students’ views on out-of-school writing activities

Category	Code	$f$
Genre	Fiction	4
	Chick lit	3
	Adventure	2
	Love	2
	Immediate environment	1
	Fear	1
	Romanticism	1
	School	1
	Youth	1
Emotion	Intrinsic satisfaction	8
	Happiness	2
	Fear	1
	Excitement	1
	Worry	1
Reasons for writing	Internal motivation	6
	Development of writing skills	1
	Friend	1
	Previous readings	1
	Competition	1
	Variable	1

The data in Table 6 show that the genres the students write are as varied as those they read outside of school. Among these genres, fiction was the most popular ( $f = 4$ ). The participants were inclined to use their imagination freely. Other genres such as chick lit, love, the environment, romance, youth, and school appeared moderately frequently in the out-of-school writing experiences of the students. The results on the most written genres supported the students’ views on the emotions out-of-school writing activities arouse in them, in which intrinsic motivation had the highest frequency value

( $f=6$ ). Şeref and Cuma's views on the subject are as follows:  
 "I dream or imagine. What would I do if my life is like. ? I write because I want to write." (Şeref, semi-structured interview)

"I want to be a well-known writer in the future. This dream supports my writing. Sometimes, I write after being inspired by a song, text, or film. But I'm more inspired when I'm unhappy." (Cuma, semi-structured interview)

Şeref's and Cuma's statements indicated that the participants act upon an internal trigger to write. This emotional state is reflected in Savaş's opinion: "The story I write and share represents me and it makes me very proud." (Savaş, semi-structured interview)

### Results on the Differences between the Student's Experiences with In-school and Out-of-school Reading and Writing

This section discusses the differences between the participants' experiences with in-school and out-of-school reading and writing. The differences are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Differences in in-school and out-of-school reading experiences

Category	Code	$f$
Content	Request against obligation	4
	Fun against boring	3
	No difference	2
	Diversity against constraint	1
	Meaningfulness against meaninglessness	1
	Lengthy against short	1
Criterion for Reading List	Unrelated	9
	Related	2

Bal and Şeref said that no difference existed between in-school and out-of-school reading experiences. However, Table 7 shows that most of the students' experiences were in favor of out-of-school reading. The most prevalent sentiment is against the compulsory quality of in-school reading, as exemplified in the following statement:

"While every book on my Wattpad reading list is interesting and enjoyable, I do not like every book I read in the Turkish language subject." (Hatun, semi-structured interview).

This statement encapsulated the participants' feeling of being pressured in their in-school reading experiences. Notably, the students were not under any pressure in their out-of-school reading experiences. The students also perceived the reading process in the Turkish language subject as boring.

"The books for the Turkish language subject are boring, but the books on Wattpad are very entertaining." (Savaş, semi-structured interview)

"The books for the Turkish language subject are boring; they only give information. They are not well-written and do not capture my interest. Wattpad is more fun." (Ahmed, semi-structured interview)

"The books for the Turkish language subject are very boring, but those on Wattpad are fun." (Efe, semi-structured interview)

These observations suggested that the participants had negative experiences with in-school reading. By contrast, out-of-school reading activities offered fun experiences. Furthermore, the students stated that the reading options in the Turkish language subject are limited, whereas out-of-school reading activities offer various reading options.

Numerous differences were identified between in-school and out-of-school writing experiences, as shown in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Differences between in-school and out-of-school writing experiences

Category	Code	$f$	
Content	Request against obligation	4	
	Freedom against restraint	3	
	Diversity against unity	1	
	Lengthy against short	1	
	Limitless against time limit	1	
	Specific against general	1	
	Self-confidence against inadequacy	1	
	Readiness against boredom	1	
	Aim	Intrinsic motivation against compulsion	4
		Willingness against fear of failure	2
Fun (only Wattpad)		2	
Fun (both)		1	
Digital writing against traditional writing		1	
Freedom against guidance		1	
Imagination against indirect experiences		1	
Feel free		Only Wattpad	8
		Both	2
		Only in school	1
Concern about grammar	Only in the Turkish language subject	8	
	Wattpad	1	
	Both	1	
Transfer of information	Neither	1	
	Unrelated	7	
	Related	3	

As shown in Table 8, the participants compared in-school writing experiences with out-of-school writing experiences in five dimensions (categories). Among these, content had the highest frequency value ( $f=14$ ). With regard to content, the participants often considered in-school writing activities a necessity. Havva expressed this sentiment as follows:

"I am like a bird in a cage when I write a composition in the Turkish language subject. I write because I have to write. By contrast, when I write on Wattpad, I can spread my wings and write freely." (Havva, semi-structured interview)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Efe, Hatun, and Berna. For them, in-school writing is a task that they have to accomplish because they are obligated to do so, whereas out-of-school writing is done willingly. Similarly, under the “aim” category, the students relate in-school writing to fear of failure, as expressed in the following statements:

*“I write for fear of failure in the Turkish language subject, whereas I write to describe myself on Wattpad.”* (Hava, semi-structured interview)

*“I write to get a high grade in the Turkish language subject.”* (Ahmet, semi-structured interview)

These statements implied that the students were under pressure when writing in school. Cuma was the only student who said he felt free when writing in school and not when he is writing outside the school because he did not feel free in a virtual environment (Cuma, semi-structured interview). In-school writing experiences dominated in terms of concern about grammar. Many of the participants stated that they did not pay attention to grammar rules in out-of-school writing. Another notable observation that can be drawn from Table 7 is that most students found no relationship between in-school and out-of-school writing experiences. The lack of relevance can be explained by the following statements:

*“No, I’m not impressed because most Turkish language lessons contain information. The stories on Wattpad are fictional.”* (Ahmet, semi-structured interview)

*“I cannot say I am very much impressed. If I just write a paragraph that I like in a composition, I can detail it and use it on Wattpad. So, I am not impressed.”* (Elif, semi-structured interview)

Despite the views on this irrelevance, Hatun said, *“Of course I am impressed because what I read gives me an idea.”* (Hatun, semi-structured interview).

## Discussion

The results of this study show that an uncertainty exists in the participants’ experiences with in-school reading processes. Moreover, the perceptions on the reading process are directly related to the content. Ürün, Karahan, and Taşdan (2016) stated that students view reading as a necessity and expect a response. Pittman and Honchell (2014) also support the results of this study by emphasizing the importance of the content selected for reading. The students’ views on the content are not their own and can be said to be due to exposure. This can be said to be a result of the behavioral perspective in which student needs are not taken into consideration (Kohn, 1996). Ceran (2015) also yielded similar results in her study of seventh-grade students. The reading process in the Turkish language curriculum does not address the students’ interests. For this reason, most participants perceive the reading process negatively. McQuillan (2013) supports this finding, indicating that middle school students have negative views toward reading. However, Başaran and Seyit (2009) presented a different result in their study of fifth grade students; according to them, the students have a positive view of reading in the Turkish language subject. Durukan (2011) likewise stated that students who read texts in the Turkish language subject have a positive opinion.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the results on in-school writing activities. The participants prioritize spelling and punctuation, formality, and plan of the text in in-school writing. Similarly, Perez–Gore, McCormick, Burton, and Siddique (2014) asserted that middle school students pay attention to spelling and punctuation when studying their mother tongue. These results show that the participants do not consider in-school writing as a means of expressing themselves; rather, in-school writing is a means to satisfy formal requirements. These findings are consistent with those of the current study. The students believe that the main aim of in-school writing is to transfer knowledge. Güfta and Özçakmak (2013) also reported that Turkish language lessons in middle school were taught as lesson content. Thus, in-school writing does not promote individuality. Most of the participants feel restricted and under pressure during the in-school writing process. According to Bandura (1997), the people people are not just reactive; they want to reflect their thoughts on their behavior. Ates and Akaydin (2015) emphasized that students should not be pressured. Müldür and Çevik (2017) stated that middle school students can express themselves comfortably while they are writing in the Turkish language.

In this study, the results show the positive perceptions of participants toward the use of Wattpad. Wattpad is considered a venue in which participants can express themselves comfortably. Other studies (Davies, 2017; Güran Yiğitbaşı, 2018; Korobkova, 2017) support this result. This perception stems from the intrinsic satisfaction and feeling of importance the students experience from using Wattpad. The result obtained by Ramdarshan Bold, 2018 supports this finding in terms of Wattpad being a place against the power of printed publications. In addition, the main reason for the participants’ positive views on out-of-school reading and writing is the desire to become popular. Other studies (Bello, 2012; Ramdarshan Bold, 2018; Güran Yiğitbaşı, 2018) support this result. According to Wenger (1998), people communicate with close and distant people to enhance their sense of belonging.

The participants’ choice of genres varied in out-of-school reading. Therefore, out-of-school reading is not limited to the participants. In fact, the participants’ criterion for reading selection supports this result. Most participants read books that attract their attention. This result is supported by Wenger’s (1998) and Bandura’s (1997) theory. In particular, people should not be restricted according to Bandura (1997). Furthermore, the participants had no negative experiences with out-of-school reading. Different results have been obtained on the relationship between in-school and out-of-school reading experiences. According to the participants, no relationship exists between in-school reading and out-of-school reading. However, Liu and Ko (2016) stated that reading written texts is the basis for digital reading. The experiences of the participants varied in terms of content. The participants have positive experiences with out-of-school reading, which are characterized by willingness, diversity, meaningfulness, and fun. The results of other studies (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006; Zucker, 2018) in terms of rich content and diversity support the result of

this research. By contrast, in-school reading is related to feelings of obligation, boredom, restriction, and meaninglessness. Owusu-Acheaw (2014) noted that fear of failure was experienced in-school reading experiences and the students' in-school reading experiences are boring. Therefore, out-of-school writing presents more positive experiences than in-school writing does. Out-of-school writing experiences aim to fulfill an internal motivation and allow one to express oneself, have fun, and improve one's digital writing skills. By contrast, in-school writing experiences aim to fulfill subject requirements and ensure that students receive a high score in exams. Therefore, no relationship exists between in-school and out-of-school writing. This sentiment is confirmed by most of the participants. Similar results were obtained in previous studies (Cooperman, 2018; Turner & Hicks, 2016), which reported that in-school writing processes cannot acquire sufficient skills for out-of-school writing. Ramdarshan Bold, 2018 posited that individuals can easily express themselves and a sense of otherness on Wattpad traditional publishing is insufficient in this respect. Similarly, most participants shared that they perform in-school writing tasks out of necessity. Consequently, they attach more importance to grammar accuracy in in-school writing. Correct grammar is not considered a skill by the participants. Most of the students focus on grammar out of an external motivation, a standard to be fulfilled. Students are only evaluated by the teacher; thus, the only purpose of in-school writing is to obtain a high score in exams (Witte, 2013). Technology pervades the out-of-school life of students; thus, schools are restricted and limited in terms of technology for the students (Spire, Lee, Turner, & Johnson, 2008). Finally, the participants feel less free during the in-school writing process.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine middle school students' experiences with reading and writing. For this purpose, data about the students' reading and writing experiences were collected. Using phenomenology as the research design, this study was able to obtain the information needed for its research purpose. Results showed that the students had negative experiences with in-school reading and writing, which could be attributed to the disregard for the interests and needs of the students. This situation exerted pressure on the students, who consequently considered in-school reading and writing activities obligatory. By contrast, out-of-school reading and writing activities provided a relaxing environment, thereby prompting the students to perceive these activities as fun. In consideration of these results, the teaching process should integrate in-school reading and writing experiences with out-of-school reading and writing experiences. Teachers can integrate the informative aspect of in-school reading and writing with the aesthetic aspect of out-of-school reading and writing activities. Through such integration, the reading and writing activities can meet the requirements of the age. With the identified problems as a guide, action plans can be prepared, and action research can be realized.

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