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ONDOKUZ MAYIS UNIVERSITY  
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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAMME**



**THE STUDY OF THE TEACHER CHARACTERS AND THEIR  
EFFECTS ON THEIR STUDENTS' SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT IN THE  
CHILDREN'S NOVELS TITLED NO TALKING, SAHARA SPECIAL  
AND BECAUSE OF MR. TERUPT**

Master's Thesis

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2023

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## ÖZET

NO TALKING, SAHARA SPECIAL VE BECAUSE OF MR. TERUPT İSİMLİ ÇOCUK ROMANLARINDAKİ ÖĞRETMEN KARAKTERLERİNİN ROMANDAKİ ÖĞRENCİLERİN OKUL BAĞLILIĞI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİNİN İNCELENMESİ

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Çocuklar pek çok yeni olguyu ve değeri romanlar aracılığıyla keşfederler çünkü edebiyat pek çok konuda insanların düşüncelerini ve bakış açıları değiştirilmesinin yanı sıra yeni bilgiler öğretme potansiyeline de sahiptir. Çocuk edebiyatındaki farklı türler göz önüne alındığında, kurgu türünün çok esnek olduğu görülebilmektedir çünkü kurgu sayesinde yazarlar sayısız çeşitlilikte karakterler ve durumlar yaratma gücüne sahiptir. Bu kitapları çocukların sürükleyici bulabilmeleri için, kitaplardaki olguların, karakterlerin ve konuların çocukların hayatıyla ilişkili olması gerektiği düşünülmektedir. Bu sebeple, çocuk edebiyatında konseptlerin ve karakterlerin okuyucuya nasıl sunulduğu da büyük önem taşır. Okulun çocukların hayatında önemli bir yeri olduğu düşünüldüğünde, öğrenci-öğretmen ilişkisini konu alan kitaplar, çocukları akademik yaşama heveslendirmede ve okul-öğretmen ilişkisi ile ilgili olumlu duyguları güçlendirmede çok faydalı olabilir. Çocuk kitaplarında okul ve öğretmen imgelerinin olumlu resmedilmesi, çocukların okula karşı daha olumlu duygular beslemesine yardımcı olabilir. Bu sebeple, bu çalışma, 8-12 yaş grubuna uygun 3 popüler çocuk romanındaki dokuz öğretmene ait öğretmen imgelerini, etkili öğretmeni tanımlayan çalışmalar ışığında analiz ederek, bu öğretmenlerin romanlardaki öğrencilerin okul bağlılığı üzerindeki etkilerini değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kitaplardaki öğretmen imgeleri, nitel araştırma yöntemi olan içerik analizi yapılarak incelenmiştir. Seçilen kitaplar: Esmé Raji Codel'den Sahara Special, Andrew Clements'den No Talking ve Rob Buyea'den Because of Mr. Terupt'dır. Çalışmanın sonunda, kitaplardaki dokuz öğretmenden beşinin etkili öğretmenlere ait önemli özellikleri sergiledikleri ve kitaplardaki öğrencilerin okul bağlılığına farklı açılardan olumlu katkılar yaptıkları görülmüştür. Bu yüzden, kitaplardaki öğrencilerin hepsi sorunlarını çözüme ulaştırıp, öğretmenleri ve arkadaşları ile kuvvetli bağlar kurarak duygusal, davranışsal ve bilişsel okul bağlılıklarını artırmışlardır. Bu kitapların çocuklarda okul yaşamı ve öğretmenlere karşı olumlu duygular yaratmak için kullanılabilecek faydalı bir araç olabileceği görüşüne varılmıştır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Çocuk edebiyatı, Okula bağlılık, Öğretmen imgeleri

## ABSTRACT

THE STUDY OF THE TEACHER CHARACTERS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THEIR STUDENTS' SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT IN THE CHILDREN'S NOVELS TITLED NO TALKING, SAHARA SPECIAL AND BECAUSE OF MR. TERUPT

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Children discover many new concepts and values through children's books, it is because literature has a potential of teaching new knowledge as well as changing people's thoughts and perspectives on various subjects. When considering various genres in children's literature, it can be assumed that realistic fictions can be very powerful on children since through fiction, writers have the power to create an innumerable variety of characters and situations which might be related to children's lives so that children can find these books captivating and effective. For this reason, how concepts and characters are presented to the target audience in children's books becomes an important concern. Considering that school has an important place in children's lives, fiction books which focus on the student-teacher relationship can be very useful in encouraging children to academic life. Positive portrayal of school and teacher images in children's books can help children have more positive feelings towards school. For this reason, this study aims to analyze the images of nine teachers in three popular children's fiction books written for 8-12 years old, in the light of effective teacher qualities and students' school engagement. The effects of the teacher characters on students' school engagement in the books have been analyzed through content analysis, which is a qualitative research method. Selected books are Esmé Raji Codell's Sahara Special, Andrew Clements's No Talking, and Rob Buyea's Because of Mr. Terupt. As a result of the study, it has been seen that the five teachers out of nine in the selected books have exhibited the important characteristics of effective teachers. Therefore, all of the students in the books have increased their emotional, behavioral and cognitive school engagement by solving their problems and establishing strong bonds with their teachers and friends. It has been concluded that these books can be a useful tool to create positive feelings towards school life and teachers in children.

**Keywords:** Children's literature, School engagement, Teacher images

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This part focuses on presenting a framework of the thesis through the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the limitations.

This thesis focuses on images of teachers in three realistic novels for children of the 8-12 years old. The selected books are Esmé Raji Codell's *Sahara Special*, Andrew Clements's *No Talking*, and Rob Buyea's *Because of Mr. Terupt*. The images of teachers are analyzed through content analysis in terms of their personality traits and appearances. Based upon the teachers' images presented in the books, these teachers' effective teacher qualities, their relationship with the student in the books, and these teachers' effects on their students' emotional, behavioral and cognitive school engagement have been analyzed through the lens of discussions and studies in the related literature.

### 1.1. Background of the Study

It is a widely held belief that all humans are influenced by literary works to different extents, therefore it has long been an essential component of human life as people find an opportunity to express various concepts and feelings through literary works and reflect these emotions and ideas to their decisions and to their social relationships. Reading literary works, according to some recent empirical investigations, can enhance our capacity for empathy and social judgement (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Mar & Oatley, 2008). By increasing such capacities, humans improve their understanding of the world and as a result of this, they are quite likely to create strong bonds with life and with other individuals. Therefore, it might be assumed that as a powerful tool to strengthen social ties, shape people's opinions and broaden their horizons, it can also be used as an effective tool by teachers and parents to help children form positive opinions and feelings about various concepts and situations in life.

Children's literature offers many benefits to children through its diverse genres, one of which is fiction. This study focuses on realistic fiction for children aged between 8-12 as it is believed that such novels have a huge potential to offer a vast variety of themes, characters and situations that could be designed purposefully in order to convey a specific message to its readers. Thanks to the flexible nature of



fiction, which allows people to use it for its infinite diversity in themes, characters and situations, children may take vast amounts of benefits from fiction novels to improve their social-emotional and cognitive development. Langer (2013) states, “Reading literature involves cognitive dimensions that are critical components of intellectual development” (p. 162). It can be assumed that engaging with literature provides a broader proficiency in understanding and interpreting different forms of written materials. Additionally, reading empowers students to acquire knowledge across a range of subjects and helps them understand and express their thoughts and opinions in diverse contexts and situations effectively, and this contributes to their intellectual, social and emotional development. Through comprehension and interpretation of these literary texts, children may learn important values and effective ways to create social relationships, so children’s books may contribute to their social, emotional and cognitive development.

Considering the significant effects of literature on children, presentations of concepts, social interactions and characters become a major issue. (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Rosenblatt, 2005). Books focusing on major concepts in children’s lives, such as friendship, family, and school, are expected to have fair, positive and relatable representations of such concepts. It is believed that positive, fun and engaging narratives may help children reinforce their positive feelings about major issues in their lives. Based on this opinion, this thesis focuses on three popular children’s novels with school setting in order to find out how teachers are portrayed in the selected books and if the portrayed teachers manage to affect their students’ school engagement positively.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Numerous children’s books have teachers as the major characters. In certain instances, the images and implications of teachers in such books depict them as respected individuals who selflessly devote themselves to enhancing various aspects of their students' lives, such as academic achievements and personal development. Conversely, in other works, teachers are presented as unhappy individuals who hold contempt for their students and enjoy creating obstacles for them. Seeing various depictions of teachers in children’s books is quite natural since parents, students and teachers associate students’ academic, emotional and social development with teachers’ qualities and effectiveness.

There are numerous children's books with school setting which have been published and sold in millions around the world. All of these books portray teachers and school differently. Although there are more studies abroad related to images of teachers in children's literature, only a few studies have been conducted on this topic in Türkiye; therefore, it is believed to be a necessity for researchers to keep on analyzing these books continuously in terms of various aspects to understand the possible effects of these books on children and to make contributions to the related field. Considering the lack of studies on images of teachers, this study hopes to make contributions to the related fields and shed light on to the implications about teachers in the selected world-wide popular books for children.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

School engagement of students born after 2010, who are called Gen Alpha, is one of the popular subjects that have been focused on in the field of education in recent years as these students have been observed to lose their motivation towards school and academic work. It is stated that "Conflict situations often arise between teachers and children in which educators fail to respond appropriately and professionally, according to parents" (Spasova, 2022, p.65). Such problems may arise due to the fact that they are into technology and their values and priorities are highly affected by the changing modern world. Considering the conflicts which may negatively affect new generation children's school engagement and the positive effects of children's book on children, this study aims to analyze the teacher images in the selected popular children's novels in terms of teacher characters' effective teacher qualities, their relationship with the student characters and their effects on their students' school engagement in order to find out whether these books might make beneficial contributions to reinforce students' positive opinions about school and teachers to increase their school engagement.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

In order to accomplish the aims of the study mentioned above, this study seeks answers for the following research questions:

1. How are teachers portrayed in *No Talking* by Andrew Clements (2009), *Because of Mr. Terupt* by Rob Buyea (2010) and *Sahara Special* by Esmé Raji Codell (2003) in terms of personal traits and appearance?
2. Do teachers in *No Talking* by Andrew Clements (2009), *Because of Mr.*

*Terupt* by Rob Buyea (2010) and *Sahara Special* by Esmé Raji Codell (2003) display effective teacher qualities? If so, what qualities do they have?

3. Do teachers in *No Talking* by Andrew Clements (2009), *Because of Mr. Terupt* by Rob Buyea (2010) and *Sahara Special* by Esmé Raji Codell (2003) manage to build good teacher-student relationship?

4. Do teachers in *No Talking* by Andrew Clements (2009), *Because of Mr. Terupt* by Rob Buyea (2010) and *Sahara Special* by Esmé Raji Codell (2003) have positive effects on their students' school engagement?

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

There have been some studies examining school and teacher images in children's literature. Some examples of such studies are as follows; The Portrayal of Caring Teachers in Children's Literature: A Content Analysis by Brady (2009), The Portrayal of Teachers in Children's Popular Fiction by Niemi, Smith & Brown (2014), and The School Image in Children's Books by Yakar (2018). These studies and other similar studies mostly focus on images of teachers in terms of their common characteristic features and only present how they are portrayed. Unlike the aforementioned studies, this thesis deals with the effects of images of teachers in relation to a particular subject which is school engagement of student characters. Therefore, this study hopes to bring a different insight and make contributions to the related field. Additionally, the selected books in this study are worldwide popular, award-winning and best-seller books. Considering that these books have been highly preferred and read by a great number of children for years, this study is believed to gain importance for its detailed analysis of the teacher images presented in these books and their possible effects which they might create on children.

### **1.6. Limitations of the Study**

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the study is limited to only three books which are Esmé Raji Codell's *Sahara Special*, Andrew Clements's *No Talking*, and Rob Buyea's *Because of Mr. Terupt*. There are numerous other books in children's literature with school setting including various portrayals of teachers; therefore, a general inference about teacher images in children's novels cannot be made via this study. Secondly, the target audience of the selected books is limited to the 8-12 age group according to the categorization of the publishers. Novels with school settings for different age groups<sub>4</sub> might have different implications and

portrayals of teachers. Lastly, all of the authors of the selected books are American. Therefore, different portrayals of teachers can be observed in different children's novels whose authors are from different countries since culture and tradition of different countries may vary and these differences may have significant effects on how teachers are depicted in the books.

### **1.7. Definitions of Key Terms**

**Children's Literature:** the body of written works in various genres that may also include corresponding visual elements aiming to entertain or instruct children (Fadiman, 2023).

**Fiction:** literary works of imagination which may also be inspired by true stories and which may include factual information.

**Images/Portrayal of teachers:** explicit or implicit attributions to teachers' features such as their appearance, age, gender, ethnicity, personality, and teaching styles.

**Effective teacher:** a knowledgeable and a well-prepared teacher who manages to create a social-emotional bond with students, create a fun and encouraging learning environment and use various techniques suitable for each and every student in class.

**School engagement:** students' motivation and efforts to engage in school environment emotionally, socially and academically.

**Cognitive:** mental processes such as understanding, thinking, remembering, modifying, learning, inferencing, interpreting,

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Children's Literature and Its Effects on Children**

The emergence of children's literature as a separate body of works in literature had become evident by the end of the 18th century (Fadiman, 2023). Since then, it has continued to evolve and expand in terms of its variety of genres and themes. Children's literature has different features when compared to adult's literature, it is because it mainly varies according to different age groups. Although the categorization of age groups for children's literature might show slight differences, it is generally categorized as; 0-3, 3-6-, 6-8- and 8-12, and for young adults as 13-15- and 16-18-year-olds. It also has various genres. One of them is fiction including various types such as fantasy, realistic fiction, biographical fiction, science fiction and historical fiction. Another genre is non-fiction including authentic biography, autobiography and factual books about various topics such as science, history or geography. Another genre is traditional literature including fairytales, legends, fables, myths and epics. Poetry is also an important genre including various forms such as nursery rhymes, narrative poetry with characters and plot, lyric poetry focusing on emotions, and visual poetry with words in shape of a visual representation of the subject of the poem. There are also picture books which are known as a format, not a genre and they tell various stories through pictures and short texts. Each of them provides numerous emotional, psychological, social and academic benefits to children through various narratives.

Through relatable characters and captivating stories, children's literature offers valuable life lessons, helping children discover their emotions and understand their own experiences better (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial for educators and parents to help children engage in suitable literary works among various genres of children's literature which meet their emotional and cognitive needs throughout different developmental stages in their lives.

Younger children who are aged between 3-6, might benefit from picture books or nursery rhymes, repetitive and catchy patterns along with colorful illustrations which contribute to their vocabulary development and phonological awareness as well as their knowledge of basic concepts about life such as animals, emotions, numbers, and colors (Mol & Bus, 2011). On the other hand, older children require

more complex plots, diverse characters, and thought-provoking themes which enhance their comprehension, interpretation and critical thinking skills in addition to their emotional and personality development such as empathy and moral values (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013). As children over 6 years old are into academic studies at different complexity levels, they may have more challenges at school when compared to pre-school children. In addition to academic challenges they may face, they may also find themselves in socially complicated situations at school and they may find it hard to overcome these challenging feelings or situations. Although children's literature varies for different age groups, it has some common positive effects for all age groups. These positive effects of children's literature on social relationships and on academic success are explained in the following discussions.

### **2.1.1. Effects on Emotional & Psychological Development**

Children's literature can help children develop a deeper insight about a variety of feelings and it can teach them how to communicate their thoughts and feelings more effectively by leading them to an emotional awareness. A research by Johnson & Brock (2018) suggests that exposing children to literature can have beneficial effects on the emotional growth of them. Children may identify themselves with particular book characters and find comfort that others also go through similar situations to their own or they can learn empathy by reading about other people's feelings through the lens of the characters in the books. To put it in a different way, reading children's literature can expose children to different perspectives and emotions, allowing them to develop a better understanding of others and their own feelings. Children's ability to improve their understanding of the world and to form a sense of identity could be aided by exposure to various characters and stories (Dresang, 1999). These various characters and stories can assist children in figuring out who they are, what they want or need, how they feel and where they fit in society and this may help them cope with challenging psychological states and emotions.

It has also been discovered that the activity of reading might have some beneficial therapeutic effects which is called bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is defined as an approach which uses literature as a helping tool to detect and to overcome the psychological problems people have (Öner, 2007). As literary works such as poetry, realistic fiction and biographical books include various social-emotional dilemmas which readers can familiarize themselves with. There are studies which emphasize

the strong relationship between the act of reading and mental health (Grabe, 2010; Proust, 2016). Thanks to the carefully selected books which include situations or characters appealing to each person's problem, people may find solace and strength to cope with their struggles and to improve their mental health.

Basen on the discussion about bibliotherapy, Heath, Smith & Young (2017) states that there might be children who struggle to cope with various emotional complications for various reasons and some of them may not have access to psychological aid or they cannot express their distress to their parents, teachers and friends. It is believed that with the help of bibliotherapy, children may face their problems and find solutions through stories and characters presented in books (Sevinç, 2019, p.484); therefore, children's books offer an opportunity for teachers and for parents to direct children's feelings about difficulties in life towards a more positive perspective and show them various ways to cope with negative feelings. During trying circumstances, such as when one is grieving the loss of a loved one, struggling against an adversary, or bullied at school, suitable literary works can bring a sense of solace and support (Engle & Black, 2008; Eren, 2014). This is a great way for children to relieve tension and anxiety because it allows them to escape from the challenges they face in the real world (Miller, 2019), and serves as a form of escapism for children which helps them temporarily forget about their problems and feel more relaxed.

All the benefits of children's literature mentioned above may help children build a stronger psychological and emotional state. However, it is essential to keep in mind that not all literary works may have beneficial contributions to emotional and psychological development of children. According to Hu and Fan (2019), it is essential for parents and educators to select literary works for children with great care. They should make sure that these works are appropriate for children's age group as well as their state of mind as different age groups display different cognitive and emotional skills. In addition to the benefits of children's literature on emotional and psychological developments, it may also make some contributions to children's overall academic achievement and the following discussion aims to explain its benefits for academic success.

### **2.1.2. Effects on Academic Achievement**

Children's literature is not only an excellent way to create positive impacts on children's emotional and psychological development, but also a way to learn new things. According to Van Kleeck (2003), "every time children share a book about an experience that they have not personally had or about a place that they have not been, they are without a doubt learning something new about the world" (p. 293). Therefore, children's books are effective tools that can help children form new ideas about various concepts and they are a practical tool to present factual knowledge about such subjects as science, history, geography, music, and language arts through captivating narratives. Although the main aim of literary works is not didactic, children can still contribute to their academic knowledge and success by gaining information about different subjects in a fun and engaging way thanks to children's literature.

Children's books might be an excellent way to increase their language skills, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and critical thinking abilities, all of which are vital for their overall academic achievement. Some studies show that primary and middle school children who read fiction for fun increase their reading skills and improve their general knowledge and academic performance (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Cheung & Andersen, 2003). Thanks to exposure to a wide range of words and language structures, children expand their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, which naturally leads them to improved comprehension and makes them more proficient users of language. They learn to understand and analyze texts and make connections between different pieces of information. Children's books often present interesting characters, plots, and moral dilemmas, encouraging readers to think critically and develop their cognitive skills such as comparison, inference, and reasoning. Through reading about problems and conflicts that characters need to overcome, children discover problem-solving strategies and develop their own problem-solving skills which are highly essential for academic achievement.

Children's books can also be used to teach foreign languages. With the help of engaging and fun stories which are suitable to readers' age and their current foreign language level, teachers and parents may create fun ways to increase children's exposure to the target language through children's books. This way, children can learn new vocabulary and language structures and improve their spelling. They can



also improve their pronunciation by reading these texts out loud.

Exposure to suitable literary texts also contribute to children's writing skills as these texts set an example of various ways of using the language to tell stories, to express opinions or to present facts. Having better writing skills is essential for most of the academic subjects. According to Krashen (2003) improved writing skills may help students to become better note-takers and learn new information easier which contributes to their learning process at school. Teachers can use children's books as a tool to encourage their students' written production. They can ask their students to summarize a book or write an alternative ending to a story and stimulate their students to have better writing skills.

Another benefit of children's books on academic success is about children's concentration time and their excitement to learn about various topics, which might be a great contribution to their academic success. As children's books offer captivating narratives, they may increase children's attention span. When they read for long periods of time, they may demonstrate a greater passion for reading and learning more. A research carried out by Ritchie, Bates & Plomin (2015) shows that children who read complex fiction for longer periods of time outperform their peers in terms of their academic performance on standardized examinations. When they find pleasure in reading literary works, it can increase their concentration span, motivate them to read more and help them during the written examinations. There are also studies showing a meaningful correlation between daily reading duration of primary and middle grade children and their mathematics test results and reading comprehension success (Blaabæk, 2020; Stanovich, 1993). Reading children's books may also have positive effects on children's verbal intelligence and make positive contributions to students' self-confidence and help them take part in lessons more actively. As children improve their verbal skills by improving their self-confidence and language skills through books, they may become less anxious to speak in front of teachers and peers and this may contribute to their school success.

Children's books may also decrease the anxiety levels of children about school subjects. In a study by Barnaby (2015), it is stated that children who read books including concepts related to mathematics become less anxious about the subject as some mathematical concepts are given to readers in a fun way through captivating stories. In such books, the main characters are students who find ways to overcome

their problems with mathematics lessons and improve their relationships with their teachers. Although anxiety at school may have various reasons behind it, children's books might provide emotional support to children to minimize their anxiety.

As stated in the discussions above, children's books can make enormous contributions to children's academic life. Therefore, it can be used as a useful tool in education if teachers understand how to pick and use it effectively by taking into consideration such important factors as their students' age, and their cognitive and emotional capacities.

As this study analyzes teacher images in three children's novels for 8-12 years old, defining the cognitive, social and emotional development of the 8-12 age group has a key role in this study; therefore, the following discussions aim to shed light on cognitive, social & emotional development of children of the 8-12 age group. However, it must be remembered that developmental stages may not be experienced to equal extents for each and every child as every child may differ in such factors as personal traits, socio-cultural background and socio-economic status. Thus, the following discussions might offer a general framework with commonly-held opinions about the developmental stages of the 8-12 age group.

## **2.2. Cognitive & Social & Emotional Development of the 8-12 Age Group**

### **2.2.1. Cognitive Development of the 8-12 Age Group**

Considering the discussions above, one of the most significant determinants while choosing suitable novels for children is the age of the target audience since different age groups have different cognitive abilities and these books should correspond to the cognitive abilities of the target audience. There are different definitions of cognition. Byrne (2019) defines cognition as "The term 'cognition' refers to all the activities and processes concerned with the acquisition, storage, retrieval and processing of information - regardless of whether these processes are explicit or conscious" (p.609). Neisser (1976) states "the term 'cognition' refers to all the processes by which the sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used. It is concerned with these processes even when they operate in the absence of relevant stimulation" (p.6). Thompson (n.d.) defines "Cognition refers to thinking and memory processes, and cognitive development refers to long-term changes in these processes" (p.9). As can be seen in these

definitions, although they have some differences, they all define cognition concurrently as a mental process which enables humans acquire, process, store and change the information gained through senses. Since birth, all humans develop their cognitive skills gradually and at different ages, they display different cognitive abilities.

While children of the 8-12 age group have specific cognitive abilities which younger children do not possess, they also have some cognitive limits which teenagers and adults have already overcome. According to Jean Piaget (1964), who is a Swiss psychologist, humans go through different cognitive stages which start from birth and continue until adulthood. Throughout these stages, human beings acquire distinct cognitive skills and overcome previous cognitive limitations which have great impacts on their further learning process. He categorized these cognitive developmental stages into four. The first stage is sensorimotor stage between 0-2 years old followed by preoperational stage between 2-7 years old. The third stage is concrete operational stage between 7-11 which is followed by formal operational stage from 12 to adulthood.

Piaget's concrete operational stage corresponds to children aged between 7-11 and this stage may give an insight about children aged between 8-12. In this stage, children become more capable of doing more complex cognitive tasks. "According to Piaget, thinking in this stage is characterized by logical operations, such as conservation, classification, and allowing logical reasoning" (Börnert-Ringleb & Wilbert, 2018, p.1). Thanks to these cognitive skills, children of this age become better at learning various concepts in academic subjects such as mathematics, science and literature when compared to younger children who may struggle with understanding abstract concepts. They also become much better at problem-solving thanks to logical thinking, analyzing and classification skills (Börnert-Ringleb & Wilbert, 2018). When they are presented with new information or go through a new experience, they can analyze the situation by applying the logical operations mentioned above and as a result, they can solve problems and comprehend the new information. Cognition during this stage serves various functions, including the storage of students' prior knowledge, the reception and systematic recording of new information from educational resources, the association of new information with pre-existing knowledge, and the construction of a schema within a specific context

(Hayran & Beydoğan, 2017). These skills enable children to get better at such cognitive functions as comparison, categorization, inference and interpretation.

Based on the concrete operational stage, children's books which are suitable for the 8-12 age group are expected to have features which are suitable to children's cognitive abilities in this age group. From 8 years of age to 12, children's books may include details about more complex characters and abstract concepts including the characters' emotions, thoughts and problems (Guijarro & Zamorano, 2009). The stories can be longer within more chapters and may include less visuals as this age group have better memory, imagination and comprehension when compared to younger children.

### **2.2.2. Social & Emotional Development of the 8-12 Age Group**

As children get older, they become more aware of their own feelings and understand social relationships better as they go through social and emotional development via various experiences and interactions. According to Vygotsky and Bandura, humans develop their cognitive abilities with the help of socialization (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993). Unlike Piaget, who does not consider the role of social interaction in learning by focusing on cognitive development mostly as a biological process, Vygotsky and Bandura strongly believe that cognitive development of children heavily depends on children's social interactions with peers and adults. By observing, imitating, taking guidance from adults and making sense of the experiences, children improve their language skills, comprehension skills, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, all of which are also interrelated with cognitive development. Therefore, while understanding cognitive development stage of a child, his/her social-emotional development cannot be overlooked.

Different age groups have different social-emotional skills. As children of the 8-12 age group are less egocentric than younger children, their social and emotional skills are more improved which allow them to have better relationship with others and help them understand and control their emotions better. The social-emotional capacity of children between the ages of 8-12 is characterized by several distinct features. During this developmental period, children typically demonstrate an increasing ability to understand and manage their emotions effectively (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2014). They become more skilled in recognizing and

appropriately expressing a wide range of emotions, including both positive and negative ones. They develop higher empathy which means they understand feelings and conditions that other people are in and they can find similarities and differences between others and themselves (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993). This empathetic behavior helps them build better relations with peers and teachers at school. Furthermore, children at this stage start to have a growing sense of responsibility and self-regulation (Stan, 2004). They become better at setting goals, organizing their time and tasks, and facing challenges. They also display such social skills as cooperation, sharing, and resolving conflicts peacefully. Although these skills are not fully developed like in adults, it could be said that these skills start to emerge from the age of 7 and continue to develop gradually until adulthood depending on quality and frequency of the social interactions they have with peers and adults. The more they interact with others in various situations, the more they develop these skills.

Bernard (2002) also describes five essential features of social-emotional development of children as such: confidence, persistence, organization, getting along and emotional resilience. Confidence includes being independent and willing to take risks. Children between 8-12 start to form high opinions of themselves and claim to be respected. They start to become more independent while making decisions in everyday life situations. They like trying new things even though they might fail, and they develop a sense of self-confidence to speak in front of their peers. Persistence appears when they do not let go of tasks that might be boring or difficult (Bernard, 2006). This age group learn to work hard and acknowledge the value of putting effort to achieve things, especially at school. They develop organization and start realizing that they need to plan their time for school work and for play. Getting along with others is improved highly, especially at school, it is because they are supposed to build new relationships with their peers and their teachers. This requires certain skills such as being patient, tolerant and being able to control impulsive reactions. They also learn that there are certain rules of every relationship and they must respect the boundaries of others. Finally, emotional resilience is the ability to realize and control the emotions. For example, when they are upset with something or somebody, they start to think it through and find ways to deal with it like consulting to an adult or talking about it with the person directly.

All the abilities mentioned above start to appear and develop from 7 years of

age and continue until adulthood. Therefore, it can be said that 8-12 years of age is quite critical as they delve deeper into academic education during which they both form new opinions and improve their pre-existing knowledge about various concepts about life in order to improve their social skills. In such a critical period of time, children's books can be used as a tool to help children build effective social-emotional relationships. Stan (2014) states "...literature holds a prominent role in children's personal development since it is not only a tool in language learning but also a source of personal growth for learners" (p.455). Through books, especially novels, children may explore various emotions and challenging situations that they may not find a chance to experience in their own lives or they may find similar situations to their own and sympathize with the characters.

### **2.3. Children's Literature for the 8-12 Age Group**

Children aged between 8-12 are emotionally and cognitively more developed when compared to younger children. As they can think in a more complex way, they might be assumed to grasp and process the implications in children's books to a greater extent than younger children. Thanks to having a more developed cognitive and social-emotional capacity as mentioned in the previous discussions, they can improve their critical thinking skills, vocabulary and language use, comprehension skills and their empathy as well as their academic and scientific knowledge.

Children's novels suitable for the 8-12 age group may open the doors of new concepts and perspectives for them. Therefore, by selecting the suitable books, teachers and parents could benefit from children's novels to help this age group overcome or rationalize the problems they face at school or in social life and encourage positive feelings about school and teachers. Various genres might be suitable for the 8-12 age group such as poetry, biographies, realistic or fantasy novels, and fantasy. Among these genres, realistic novels can be one of the most engaging types for this age group as these books cover variety of thought-provoking themes and arouse children's curiosity to keep reading and to know what happens next.

Realistic novels targeting the 8-12 age group share some common features that align with children's cognitive, social and emotional development. These novels often feature relatable protagonists and engaging storylines, allowing young readers to connect with the characters and develop empathy (Gambrell & Jawitz, 2017).

Themes explored in these novels encompass a wide range of experiences, including friendship, family relationships, self-discovery, academic challenges and overcoming them (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013). These various themes provide children with opportunities to explore different emotions and have control over their own personal growth. However, teachers and parents must be aware of the cognitive, social and emotional needs and limits of the 8-12 age group while deciding the suitable novels for children among a great deal of options, it is because not all works create desirable effects. The depictions of tragic events like death or being separated from a loved one should be given carefully; it is because too much of sensitive content may negatively affect children.

#### **2.4. Images of Teachers in Children's Books**

As mentioned in the previous discussions, literature is an important tool to navigate opinions and feelings, therefore concepts presented in books gain great importance. For the 8-12 age group, school becomes an important part of their lives as they spend most of their time there with friends and teachers and they value their social relationships with their friends. They form opinions towards school, teachers and friendship through their own experiences, however not all of these experiences are positive. Building positive attitude and having motivation for school is a necessary component of good social-emotional development and academic success. For this reason, how teachers and school are presented in books for the 8-12 age group becomes a key issue.

There are a lot of movies, books, and stories where the main characters are teachers. Some of these works portray teachers as honorable people who make a lot of sacrifices to make their pupils' lives better in many different aspects, including academic and personal growth. In some other works, on the other hand, educators are depicted as people who actively despise their pupils and take pleasure in putting impediments in their path. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century to this day, school stories have been published (Yau, 2015), but stories of older centuries have major differences than today's school stories as the education systems, pedagogy, teachers, government policies and cultural attributions to teachers and to schools have changed a great deal. While the first examples of school stories were mainly about boarding schools and dominant teachers, today's novels with school setting are more fun and engaging and stories are usually told through the lens of student protagonists.

In a study by Barone, Meyerson & Malette (1995), books, films and TV shows from 1950 to 1990 in the U.S.A were analyzed and the results showed two types of teacher portrayals in all of these works: traditional and non-traditional. Traditional teachers are more common in all types of works. They are usually portrayed as being very dominant and strict. They have little interaction with their students. They are not forgiving and encouraging. They mostly care about academic achievement; therefore, they are not favored by their students (Yau, 2015). Non-traditional teachers, on the other hand, create a positive atmosphere in class and encourage their students. They have good relationship and they care about students' individual differences.

In another study by Sandefur & Moore (2004), novels for children between the years 1965 and 2000 have been analyzed. They have found out that traditional teacher images also constitute the majority in these works and these teachers are not caring, good looking, motivating and fun unlike non-traditional teachers who are loved by their students for being parent-like and self-sacrificing. In another study by Niemi, Smith & Brown (2014), teacher images in popular novels for children under the age of 13 were studied. It is stated in the study "teachers are portrayed, in text and picture, as White, kind, conservative, women who teach for the love of children" (Niemi et al., 2014, p.58). This study shows that there is a commonly preferred way of how teachers are portrayed in many children's books for 6-12 years old.

As can be understood from the discussions, teachers are attributed to various features in children's books. It is only natural for there to be such portrayals of teachers, considering that teachers have historically been the focus of criticism and have been linked to the success and failure of their students. Considering the fact that books have great impacts on children, it is crucial to ensure that the images of teachers in children's books are fair and factual as well as being positive and friendly. While selecting books with school setting, teachers and parents should be careful and find suitable works which mostly include positive images of teachers in order to help children develop positive thinking about school. Therefore, teachers portrayed in these books should display effective teacher qualities and school atmosphere should be inclusive. In order to understand what makes an effective teacher, many criteria should be taken into consideration, one of which is students' perceptions of effective teachers.



## **2.5. Characteristics of Effective Teachers**

Teachers are regarded as one of the main factors of students' success, therefore many studies have been conducted to understand what makes a teacher good or effective teacher. Although it is not quite possible to make a single definition of an effective teacher because of various factors such as teachers' personality, self-efficacy, self-perception, practical and theoretical knowledge, some common features could still be listed and agreed upon by teachers, students and researchers. According to Brown & Atkins (1993) effective teachers are caring, stimulating and systematic. Ramsden (1991) defines the characteristics of effective teachers as organized, stimulating, emphatic, encouraging, giving goals and explanations clearly. Entwisle & Tait (1990) states that effective teachers have teaching ability and openness to students. Lowman & Mathie (1993) highlights effective teacher qualities as teachers' intellectual excitement and a good rapport with their students. Cheung (2006) expresses the features of effective teachers as enthusiastic, sensitive to students' needs, willing to spend time on planning, and being tolerant to mistakes. Although each definition displays various features, they focus on similar qualities which can make a real impact on students' social and academic lives.

It is not completely possible to find out the qualities of effective teachers without understanding students' perceptions of good teachers. Thus, some studies were conducted to discover students' perceptions. In a study conducted among students aged between 7 and 17 by Kutnick & Jules (1993), common features of good teachers listed by the students are as follows: "Pretty (appearance), intelligent, kind, caring, parent-like, friendly, successful, humorous, tell stories, allow playing games" (p.406). The study also showed that younger students aged between 6-12 focus on emotional needs more than older students aged 12-17 (Kutnick & Jules, 1993). There are some common features in the list which are valuable for all the students regardless of their age such as kindness, being caring, being humorous. Primary and middle-grade students regard smart and fun teachers as good teachers and high school students reflect this as being well educated (Kutnick & Jules, 1993).

Another study among primary school students aged between 7-11 conducted by Bakx, Koopman, Kruijf and Brok (2014) mostly revealed personality related features as humor, kindness, nice appearance, honesty, cheerfulness and patience as important features of effective teachers. In terms of authority, most of the students in

the study reported good teachers as not angry, having fair discipline and not too strict. Students also express good teachers as the ones who dance, speak clearly, and organize games (Bakx et al., 2014).

Similarly, Groves & Welsh (2007) state “Characteristics such as knowledge, enthusiasm, approachability, consistency, fairness, respect of students and making learning relevant to their lives are consistently identified as important to students” (as cited in Brown, Oliver, Hodgson, Palmer & Watts, 2008, p.30). So, students find it easier to create a bond with teachers who value personal relations with each student and offer fun lessons through authentic materials and topics.

Another widely recognized study has been conducted by Walker (2008). Based on his observations of fifteen years of teaching experience in addition to the answers of the students about effective and good teachers, he has created a list which includes the most important twelve characteristics of effective teachers which are; prepared, positive, hold high expectations, creative, fair, display a personal touch, enrich the sense of belonging, compassionate, humorous, respectful, forgiving and apologizes when mistaken.

In another study conducted in Türkiye by Doyran (2000), primary and middle grade students described good teachers as the ones who motivate, encourage, and build a positive relationship. Baytur & Razi (2015) also found similar results in their study with primary and middle school students. Some features of effective teachers from students’ perspectives in their study are as follows: friendly and caring, strict, fair, managing class effectively, young, good-looking, humorous, uses games and technology, and the main authority in the class.

To sum up, effective teachers have some common features for both researchers and students such as being kind, caring and humorous. Being creative in classroom is also important for students. For older students, academic issues are also important as well as teachers’ personality and they expect their teachers to be competent in their subjects and explain the topics clearly. For primary and middle grade students, being parent-like and caring seem to be a prior feature. It could be assumed that building a good relationship with their teachers comes first for all students of 6-12 years of age and academic issues comes later and all of them highly value personal relations with their teachers and this may affect their attitudes towards school.

## **2.6. Importance of Teacher-Student Relationship**

In school environment, children's relationship to teachers as well as their peers is in the center of their social-emotional needs since a good teacher-student relationship provides many benefits to children. It is known that fulfilling emotional needs is a priority for children as stated in the above discussions about effective teachers. Koca (2016) states "Teachers may operate as social agents, and they can affect students' intellectual and socioemotional experiences by creating a classroom setting that stimulates both student motivation and learning" (p.2). Therefore, to create a bond with the students, teachers can be supporting, caring, respectful, and they can acknowledge their students' social, emotional and cognitive needs. An effective relationship can be built through immediacy, a term used by Mehrabian (1971) to define how people feel about the intimacy level in relationships. Immediacy can occur verbally and nonverbally (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Teachers who use verbal immediacy typically learn their students' names and always address them with their names. They value and respect their students' opinions by giving them opportunities to express their ideas. They also care about students' overall well-being and they do not neglect students' emotions and ask them how they are feeling from time to time. As for nonverbal immediacy, teachers smile a lot and avoid being intimidating so that all students can find it easy to approach the teacher. Teachers also make eye-contact with their students and let the students know that they are being listened and their existence is acknowledged.

All these verbal and nonverbal encouraging behaviors mentioned above may result in good teacher-student relationship and students may benefit from this in various ways. Koca (2016) states "Studies have shown that positive teacher-student relationships can lead to a warm classroom environment that facilitates successful adaptation in school and thereby increases student motivation to learn" (p.2). When teachers manage to create an encouraging and positive relationships with their students, a high-quality interpersonal communication occurs and this contributes to students' academic achievement as well as their social-emotional development (Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Hattie, 2009; Cornelius-White, 2007) as students also believe that their academic performance and social well-being at school highly depend on their relationship with their teachers. For this reason, they need caring, fair, friendly and inclusive teachers.

In addition to its benefits for academic performance and social-emotional states of children, a good teacher-student relationship also contributes to children's school engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004). Although there are many factors which increase students' school engagement, a good relationship with teachers is one of the main factors that increases students' motivation towards school and their sense of belonging, so they become more willing to go to school, take part in school work or in other school activities. Increased school engagement also helps students be more social and have better relationships with peers as well.

## **2.7. School Engagement**

Although there is not one single definition of school engagement, all definitions of it in related literature have some dimensions in common. School engagement, in general terms, can be defined as students' motivation and willingness towards going to school, engaging in academic work and creating social interactions with peers and teachers (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). School engagement has recently been a very popular concept, it is because parents and educators have realized that today's students have started to lose their interest in academic life due to the changing trends in social life and technology. Due to the advances in technology and easier access to information, students have started to question the purpose of going to school and getting a diploma. Popular culture, media and the Internet have created new professions, some of which do not require any academic education and diploma, but provide high income and popularity. Children of different age groups have started to take these popular figures of the Internet as idols; therefore, they have gradually started losing their motivation towards academic education (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002). This has created anxiety in parents and educators; as a result, studies on students' school engagement have become a hot topic and various aspects of it have been discussed.

School engagement is defined in three main aspects; emotional engagement, behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement and all three aspects are related to each other (Fredricks et al., 2004). Emotional engagement can be regarded as the most important aspect of school engagement, it is because, without the existence of emotional fulfillment, behavioral and cognitive engagement is not very likely to occur. Emotional engagement can simply be described as students' feelings towards school, teachers, peers and academic work and these emotions can be explained in

much simpler terms as liking, sense of belonging, value and willingness or the opposite feelings. The intensity of these feelings is one of the factors that affect students' engagement proportion in class and in school. If a student is emotionally engaged, this may not show the same emotional intensity for every student as each student has experience the emotions at different levels; therefore, their engagement levels also differ.

Another factor which effects emotional engagement at school is teachers. Teachers have a primary role for children as mentioned in the previous discussions since children spend a lot of time at school and the main adult authority is the teacher; therefore, being liked, cared, approved, known and respected by teachers is the major step of a successful emotional engagement for children. Another important factor which affects emotional engagement is fulfillment of sense of belonging (Bencivenga & Elias, 2003; Booker, 2006) and this emotion related two main factors; a good relationship with peers and a good relationship with teachers. To conclude, emotional engagement is expected to increase when students exist in supporting, caring, friendly and inclusive classroom environment; therefore, they are likely to build good relationship with peers and teachers and this results in the emergence of sense of belonging.

Behavioral engagement includes three aspects; positive conduct, involvement in learning and involvement in activities (Fredricks et al., 2004, p.62). Positive conduct includes such behaviors as avoiding unwanted or aggressive attitudes, obeying class and school rules, cooperation and treating others with respect, all of which can be defined as desired behaviors at school. Involvement in learning includes, as its name suggests, taking active part in learning process in class, doing homework, showing interest to lessons, asking and answering questions. Finally, involvement in activities, which is the last aspect of behavioral engagement means being willing to join social activities in class and in school.

Cognitive engagement is closely related to learning activity itself. If students are cognitively engaged, they become able to organize themselves, use different strategies in learning process, comprehend and analyze, plan and monitor, manage their time and take responsibility (Corno, 1993). Cognitive engagement is highly driven by motivation. Cognitive engagement includes almost the same aspects of intrinsic motivation which defines people's inner will to do a specific task rather than

an outer factor that pushes them to do it. Therefore, cognitively engaged students can have autonomy while doing various tasks related to school, find a meaningful reason to do these tasks and gain mastery in the end.

To sum up, there are three domains of school engagement as emotional, behavioral and cognitive engagement and they have effects on different outcomes. There are also various factors which have effect on students' school engagement such as good relationship with teachers and peers, positive classroom environment, stimulation of autonomy, designing engaging tasks and giving support. When children are provided with these factors, they are very much likely to engage in school in all three domains.

## **2.8. Studies on Children's Literature & Images of Teachers**

### **2.8.1. Related Studies in Türkiye**

As for studies which deals with images of teachers in children's literature, there are only a few studies on conducted in Türkiye. A study by Yılmaz & Yakar (2022) focuses on teacher and principal characters in six children's novels written in Turkish. They have found that teachers and principals in these books do not reflect effective teacher qualities. On the contrary, most of them are portrayed as extremely disciplined, discriminative offensive (Yılmaz et al., 2022, p.201). These kind of books which include negative portrayals of teachers and principals are not suggested for children as they may strengthen negative feelings about schools and teachers.

Similarly in another study, Türkyılmaz (2012) focuses on children's novels by Aytül Akar, a Turkish author. Five books by Akar, whose main characters are primary school students, have examined closely in terms of the portrayal of teachers, their attitudes towards students and their teaching practices. The findings have demonstrated that two types of teachers. The first group of teachers display positive qualities such as being fair, motivated to teach, good at classroom management and forgiving while the other group of teachers are offensive, extremely disciplined, boring and firm believers in punishment.

There are also other studies which focus on images of teachers; however, these studies focus on cinematic portrayals of teachers. These studies are as follows: Teacher Image and Historical Change of Teaching Profession in Turkish Cinema (Çak, 2020), Teacher's Image in Turkish Cinema (Efendioğlu, 2013), and Images of Teachers in

Movies and How They Promote Change in Their Students Using Classroom Management Strategies (Gökmen, 2018). As the images of teachers in movies is not fully relevant to the aim of this study, these studies are not explained in detail in this discussion.

In addition to the studies mentioned above which focus on images of teachers, there other studies conducted in Türkiye dealing with children's literature in different perspectives. Most of them deal with children's books in terms of their thematic diversity, their potential use for educational purposes and their potential effects on children's social, emotional, psychological and cognitive development. For example; studies conducted by Kanger (2007), Keskinoglu (2008), Destebaşı (2011), and Demirbaş (2012) focus on the effects of children's literature on children's personality development in terms of moral values. These studies have been conducted among 5-6-7-8 grade students in different schools in Türkiye and they all have found that children's novels, in which the main characters experience some social relationship problems, have improved students' understanding of the importance of moral values and have improved the students' moral maturity.

Another research by Karagül (2018) similarly puts forward that children's literature have positive impacts on children's psychology and when used a tool for bibliotherapy, positive effects have been observed among children who struggle psychologically. In another study by Eren (2014), carefully written novels about peer bullying such as Anne Fine's *The Angel of Nitshill Road* and Jacqueline Wilson's *Bad Girls* for children aged 8-12 may show strategies to children who are bullied (p.153). To sum up, all the studies mentioned in above discussions mainly focus on the potential of children's literature in order to teach various concepts to children, raise awareness or the potential benefits of children's literature to overcome the problems that children may have in their lives. However, there are more studies abroad which focus on images of teachers in children's literature.

### **2.8.2. Related Studies Abroad**

Unlike Türkiye, there are many studies which focus on teacher images in children's literature. Although they discuss different aspects, they all aim to demonstrate various portrayals of teachers in various books. For example; a widely known study by Niemi, Smith and Brown (2014) have analyzed 74 children's books

of Western context in which teachers are the major characters. They examined the images of teachers in terms of physical appearance, their teaching skills, teacher-student interaction, and socio-cultural aspects such as teachers' gender, race and financial situation. They have gathered important findings. The prominent findings are; in total 56 of the teachers are female and only 18 of them are male, 70% of the teachers are Caucasian, male teachers have more dynamic clothing style while female teachers are dressed more collected, all teachers belong to average income group, and male teachers are usually associated with fun while female teachers with help and caring.

Another study by Bi and Fang (2020) aims to find out whether modern-day portrayals of teachers in children's books have changed positively after Chinese post-Mao era. It is stated that because of the social and political fights in the country during Mao's reign, teachers lost their dignity in real life and in literary works as they were seen as rebels; however, in modern-day China, the dignified portrayals of teachers have been restored. The study suggests that thanks to the changing Chinese society, different portrayals of teachers have appeared such as selfless, promoting moral values, polite, and supportive.

A similar study has been done by Yau (2014) focusing on the portrayals of teachers in Taiwanese context between 1960 and 2012. One hundred and one books has been examined and the results have shown three major characteristics for images of teacher as the first one is having positive attitudes. The second major characteristics is that most of time teachers are portrayed as a strong animal and the characteristics is most of the teachers are Han Chinese. In addition to these, teachers in children's book in Taiwan are mostly portrayed as supportive, inclusive, and student centered.

Another study by Bushner (2001) analyzes American novels for children of primary and middle grade students. It is stated that books for primary grade students portrays teachers' appearance, their teaching instructions and their relationships with students. While some of these teachers good-looking, young, encouraging and dedicated, there are also teachers who are old, grumpy and more teacher centered. Similar portrayals of teachers also exist in books for middle grade children. Additionally, the finding show some categorizations of teacher images; teachers with positive manners are usually good looking while teachers who have negative attitudes are usually old, fat or ugly.



### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

In order to analyze the texts in the selected books and find images of teachers, their effective teacher qualities and how they impact their students' school engagement, content analysis is used in this study as a qualitative research method. The essence of a qualitative study lies in its interpretive character, as it revolves around interpretation, experience, comprehension, and shaping the social world (Mason, 2003); therefore, conducted studies which aim to analyze images of teachers in literature or in movies or what kind of teachers are regarded as effective teachers by children are mostly qualitative studies, it is because the data require interpretation to assign meaning.

Content analysis is believed to be suitable for this study as it provides a great opportunity to the researcher to discuss the feelings and opinions of the characters as well as various implications through dialogues and situations presented in the texts. As Krippendorff (2013) states, content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p.24). Therefore, depending on the conducted studies in related literature and discussions stated in the previous chapter, the researcher has located and interpreted data from the selected books via content analysis to answer research questions of the study.

#### **3.2. Data Collection & Sampling**

In this study, data are collected through purposive sampling and the books have been selected according to the purpose of this study which is to investigate images of teachers in realistic fiction books for children aged 8-12 and these teachers' effects on their students' school engagement in the books. Firstly, realistic fiction books for children with school theme for ages 8-12 have been searched on the Internet. In the next step, the books have been filtered according to their publication date and ratings in order to examine relatively recent and popular books; therefore, books published before 21<sup>st</sup> century have been eliminated. As a result of the filtering steps mentioned, five popular books have become prominent. The researcher has examined the content of the books and decided to use three of them as they present a great amount of data about various teacher characters who have considerable effects on their students

which makes this sampling purposive. The selected books for the 8-12 age group are; Andrew Clements's *No Talking*, Rob Buyea's *Because of Mr. Terupt* and Esmé Raji Codell's *Sahara Special*, all of which have been written by American authors. When sampling is completed, the researcher has moved on to the last step which is determining the coding categories as an important part of data collection and analysis.

### **3.3. Coding**

Coding categories enable researchers to study the main focus of the study consistently, and to locate relevant data in an organized way in data analysis process. As Fraenkel & Wallen (2009) states "After the researcher has defined as precisely as possible what aspects of the content are to be investigated, he or she needs to create categories that are relevant to the investigation" (482). Depending on the research questions, four main categories have emerged to help analysis of the teacher images in the books. These categories are as follows; images of teachers in terms of personality traits and appearance, effective teacher qualities, teacher-student relationship, school engagement and they have been defined in detail through related literature.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

Data have been analyzed according to the criteria stated by Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) about how to analyze relevant data in content analysis. Firstly, the aim of the study has been determined which is locating the images of teachers in the selected books in terms of their personality traits and physical appearance, and their effects on their students' school engagement. Next, relevant terms have been defined such as school engagement, teacher-student relationship, qualities of effective teachers and images of teachers in children's books in related literature. In the following step, sampling plan has been developed and coding categories have been created and relevant data have been located in the books according to the categories created by the researcher. Finally, the researcher has analyzed the data which match and exemplify the defined categories and interpreted the data in accordance with the discussions in related literature.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter explains the findings of the study obtained from the selected books through content analysis. The teacher characters in the books have been analyzed in four categories for each book separately. These categories are as follows: images of teachers in terms of personality traits and appearance, effectiveness of the teachers, teacher-student relationship, and student's school engagement.

### 4.1. Analysis of *Sahara Special* by Esme Raji Codell

In order to interpret the images of teachers and these teachers' effects on their students' school engagement in *Sahara Special* by Esme Raji Codell (2003), understanding the main student character is of great importance. Sahara is a girl who repeats the fifth grade. Her father has left Sahara and her mother. This impacts Sahara's behavioral and cognitive engagement at school negatively. Because of her silence and her lack of school work, the school administration believes that it is better for her if she gets Individualized Attention at school with a Special Needs Teacher. At this point, the word special starts to have negative connotations for her. She states this as in the following quotation "They've got a whole story in their heads about why you're out there instead of a nice, cozy classroom. Stupid? Unlucky? Unloved?" (Codell, 2003, p.5). It can be inferred that Sahara, when separated from her classmates, feels unwanted and insufficient. She feels ashamed of having sessions with a special needs teacher and she fears being mocked by her friends.

On the other hand, Sahara loves reading and frequently goes to library to sit quietly and read various books because it makes her feel "calm and ordinary" (Codell, 2003, p.24), it is because reading has a therapeutic effects on her (Heath et al., 2017; Sevinç, 2019). She states this positive psychological effect in these lines; "When I read those books, the rest of the world melts away" (Codell, 2003, p.24). It can be seen that when she reads, she finds an opportunity to imagine and isolate herself from the problems she has in her life. It can be assumed that reading books is a way for her to decrease her stress level. Sahara's perspective towards reading offers positive implications about the psychological effects of literature on children.

She also loves writing. She wishes to be a very famous author one day. However, she hides all her writings so that no adult can read them. As she has no interest in school work and making friends, she does not worry if teachers are aware

of her skills or not. It can be inferred that Sahara fails to create an effective bond with her teachers; therefore, she does not care what her teachers think about her.

Soon before the school starts, Sahara starts the sessions with the Special Needs Teacher. There is another student in these sessions named Darrell. He is extremely aggressive and disrespectful towards his teachers and he also repeats fifth grade like Sahara. When Darrell becomes too aggressive during these sessions, Sahara's mother comes to school and convinces the principal to let Sahara repeat fifth grade without Special Needs Teacher like any other failed student. Thanks to her mother's efforts, Sahara is now released from these special sessions. She feels more confident and less special.

On the first day of the school, Sahara meets her new classmates as her former classmates have moved on to sixth grade. She feels good about it as she sees it as an opportunity for a fresh start with new friends. This year, there is a new teacher at the school and the whole class is excited to meet her on the first day. Even Sahara is excited about the new teacher. She states her interest in the new teacher as "Maybe I'll have new friends, but my mind is not really on my classmates. There is someone left I need to meet" (Codell, 2003, p.33). Her excitement can be interpreted that Sahara puts her teacher in the center of her own well-being at school. Her curiosity about the new teacher shows that she still expects and hopes for an opportunity to build an effective relationship with her teacher. Therefore, all the images of teachers and their effectiveness are given through Sahara's opinions in the following discussions.

#### **4.1.1. Images of Teachers**

There are two teachers in the book. The first teacher introduced to readers is Special Needs Teacher who is named as Peaches by Sahara. The second teacher is Miss Pointy who is the new teacher and also the main teacher character in the book. Very few details are presented about Peaches as it does not play an important role in Sahara's life. It is given in these lines as "In my mind, I just call her Peaches. In the real world, I didn't call her anything" (Codell, 2003, p.6), it is because she does not even remember her real name and she does not engage in a conversation with her. The information about Peaches is limited as she has a limited access to Sahara's life. No information about her appearance is mentioned. As for her personal traits,

Peaches is portrayed as a very organized teacher. Sahara states “Peaches seemed very organized. I bet nothing fell out of her desk in her whole life” (Codell, 2003, p.7). This may show that she is a disciplined person. Sahara also states that she has never seen her laugh, so it can be inferred that Peaches is not very friendly and her cold attitudes make her less approachable for a social-emotional relationship.

As Miss Pointy, the new teacher, is the main teacher character in the book, there are many details about her. There is a great deal of data about her appearance and her personality. Her appearance is depicted in detail by Sahara’s perspective. It is only natural to see a detailed depictions of her appearance in the book as children in real life also take interest in their teachers’ appearance as an important quality (Kutnick & Jules, 1993; Bakx et al., 2014). Miss Pointy’s physical appearance is so distinctive, unusual, crazy, a little old-fashioned but eye-catching for Sahara that Sahara cannot stop looking at her for a while. This distinctive look of hers is explained as follows:

Her hair was copper like a lucky penny, but when the light hit it a certain way, it seemed almost green, a deep green, like she colored it with a dye made from tree leaves. It was held back with sparkling dragonfly barrettes, but there was no help for it. It was wild hair. She was pale, but I couldn’t decide for sure if she was white or Asian or Puerto Rican, or maybe light-skinned black. She wore lime eye shadow and heavy black liquid eye-liner, making her expression catlike. She wore a yellow dress that looked like it was made of tissue paper, kind of old-fashioned and grandmotherly, but hanging slightly over her shoulder. Her bra strap was showing. She looked less like a teacher and more like one of those burnt-out punk-rocker teenagers who hang out in front of the Dunkin’ Donuts on Belmont, near the L stop. Only grown (Codell, 2003, pp.37-38).

In different chapters, more details about her appearance are given as “Miss Pointy is ... pointy. Her nose is pointy. Her ears are pointy. Her shoes are pointy. And boy, are her fingers ever pointy. Sometimes even her voice is pointy” (Codell, 2003, p.56). It can be inferred from the depictions given above that Sahara makes inferences about Miss Pointy’s character depending on her look. Miss Pointy’s clothes do not match with the usual teacher images in Sahara’s mind, and this immediately makes Miss Pointy a different and exciting character for Sahara. As she has shown excitement about having a new teacher this year, her first impression about Miss Pointy is of great importance, it is because she may finally find a chance to create a relationship with a teacher who is different than the others.

As for Miss Pointy’s personal traits; she is portrayed as an inclusive and caring teacher throughout the book, as she treats Sahara and Darrell in the same way she treats

other students. She often smiles and behaves friendly. She uses irony while communicating with her students in order to make jokes or to warn the students without offending them. She values literature and loves sharing stories with her students in class. She is also parent-like towards her students and takes interest in their problems. As these personal traits of Miss Pointy are also related to effective teacher qualities which are discussed in the related literature, detailed analysis of her personality has been done through her effectiveness as a teacher in the following discussion in order to avoid repeating the data.

#### **4.1.2. Effectiveness of the Teachers**

As Peaches displays no qualities of effective teachers in the book, she fails to create a good relationship with the students. Peaches constantly makes notes about Darrell and Sahara during their sessions which makes Sahara very uncomfortable. Once she gets angry with Darrell, she threatens to call his mother. As Peaches cannot find a way to change Darrell's behaviors, she wants him out of her program. Later in the story, she visits Miss Pointy's class during the lesson and asks how Sahara and Darrell are doing in front of their classmates and that embarrasses them. It could be ascertained that Peaches does not display any effective teachers qualities.

Miss Pointy, on the other hand, shows many features of effective teachers that are mentioned in the related literature through conducted studies. These qualities she displays are as follows:

She stimulates curiosity which is an effective teacher quality (Walker, 2008; Groves et al., 2007). When she first enters the class, she directly goes to her desk without saying a word to students and takes out interesting personal items such as flowers, a vase, and some crystal balls (Codell, p.23). She starts talking about flowers and farmer's market while organizing her belongings which shocks the students. They all start listening to her very carefully to understand what she is trying to tell them. Then, she stands up and writes her name on the board and gives a brief information about herself. By staging such an interesting entering to the classroom, Miss Pointy creates confusion and shock and grabs their attention immediately.

She sets her rules which is also an effective teacher quality (Walker, 2008; Groves et al., 2007). She asks her students about the rules in the classroom. Students tell her usual rules such as no hitting, no being late, no eating and no screaming. She

tells them that there are no rules starting with “no” (Codell, p.38). She encourages them to use a positive language to change the way they think.

She acts as the main authority (Bakx et al., 2014; Baytur et al., 2015). She decides who is going to sit with who and displays authority in the first lesson. This is also considered as an effective teacher quality as studies have shown that children expect their teachers to be the main authority in class.

She relates new information with her students’ own experiences and with their existing knowledge by using a simple language to convey the meaning clearly and this contributes to her effectiveness (Doyran, 2000). When she explains a word or a concept that students do not know, she gives relatable and simple examples from students’ school experiences or social relations.

She spends time alone with her students which is another quality of effective teachers (Walker, 2008; Groves et al., 2007). Every day she keeps a different student with her after school to clean the classroom and erasers so that she can spend some time alone with the students to chat and create bond with them. She sometimes uses this time to change an unwanted behavior or to motivate a student.

She uses humor (Walker, 2008). She often makes jokes during the lesson or she uses humor to warn or criticize the students. An example of the use of humor to warn a student who thinks that the activity they’re doing is boring, she says “If that word comes out of your mouth, you will be sent to the nurse. She’ll give you a shot on your south side to cure your *boringitis* and send you home” (Codell, 2003, p.49). All the students laugh including the student who says the activity is boring. The students immediately get energized and start doing the work, so being humorous is highly valued by the students (Walker, 2008; Groves et al., 2007; Bakx et al., 2014; Baytur et al., 2015).

She treats all her students equally and set high standards (Walker, 2008; Groves et al., 2007). It is stated “In class, Miss Pointy ignores Darrell’s Special Needs. She calls on him the same as everybody else. She waits a long time for him to answer” (p.58). It can be seen that she treats Darrell like everybody else and expects him to do all the work that other students do and this is realized by other students so they slowly see Darrell as an equal member of their class. Miss Pointy also avoids labelling her students. During a conversation with Sahara’s mother, when Miss

Pointy is asked if she has read the school records about Sahara, Miss Pointy states her opinions on labelling children as “I hate reading records. If a kid is wild, or slow, or can’t read, it’ll show in good time. I have eyes. I don’t need those records” (p.101). Even though a student has a problematic history, she prefers making up her own mind about students. Sahara’s mother feels relieved, because she thinks Sahara might have chance for a fresh start Miss Pointy. Being fair and not having prejudice contributes to her effectiveness (Walker, 2008).

She gives a fresh start to every day. She greets her students at the doorway every morning and uses a technique to increase their concentration at school. She asks them to put all their troubles into the imaginary trouble basket before entering the class. Sahara says “She stands at the doorway every morning, smiling like she’s auditioning to be a movie star, but she blocks the door and nobody gets in until they the trouble basket” (p.57). By doing so, she gives them a fun start and aims to direct her students’ emotions to a more positive direction during the day.

She reinforces positive behaviors (Walker, 2008). She gives stickers to her students, but she does not give them very often; therefore, getting a sticker becomes a challenge for the students. When a student manages to get one, he/she feels accomplished and the other students are stimulated to get one for themselves.

She knows details about her students (Walker, 2008). She takes personal interest in her students. She learns their individual differences, likes and dislikes. Sometimes, she lends a book to a student to help him/her overcome a specific problem through the messages the book gives to readers or she leaves notes to her students’ journals related to each student’s interests. For example, every time Sahara submits an empty journal, Miss Pointy consistently writes the same feedback to her which says “a writer writes” (Codell, 2003, p.84) and finally Sahara starts writing in her journal. As Miss Pointy knows that Sahara desires to be a writer one day, she uses Sahara’s desire to encourage her.

She uses literature as a tool. She often has her students sit in a circle in the classroom and tells them various stories from history, fables or reads poems. She asks questions to stimulate their critical-thinking skills and never directly gives the moral of the story so that students can express various opinions about it. She uses children’s literature as a tool to give a warning to students, to correct misbehaviors



or to change students' perspectives about various topics.

As can be seen in the above listed traits of Miss Pointy, she displays many qualities of effective teachers which correspond to primary and middle-grade children's perspectives about effective teachers. These qualities naturally lead Miss Pointy to a strong relationship with her students.

#### **4.1.3. Teacher-Student Relationship**

Peaches, the special needs teacher, fails to build a good teacher-student relationship with Sahara and Darrell. In the book, her interaction with only two students is presented. During the sessions with Sahara and Darrell, she has difficulties in getting answers from the students to her questions. Sahara states how Peaches fail to communicate with them as stated in the following quotation "She would sometimes ask me if I had done my homework and I would pretend I didn't hear" (Codell, 2003, p.6) and also as "Darrell grunted at her as if anytime she asked him something she was disturbing him" (Codell, 2003, p.7). As can be understood from these lines, the students are reluctant to engage in any kind of conversation with her. Sahara does not even remember her name as she has never needed to start a conversation with her. Thus, it can be inferred that Peaches does not have a good relationship with the students.

Miss Pointy, on the other hand, builds an effective teacher-student relationship with the students in her class. All the students including Sahara and Darrell start admiring her in time. They respect her, follow the class rules, do their school work, keep a journal regularly and expect feedback from Miss Pointy as they value her opinions about themselves.

Miss Pointy discovers personal interests, fears and strong sides of her students and develops an individualized relationship with each student. For instance; an immigrant student stays quiet during her lessons because of her insufficient language skills, and Miss Pointy regularly gives her different children's books which are suitable to her language level to help her improve, or when Sahara gets sick and cannot go to school for a week, she visits her home and submits Sahara's homework personally showing a caring attitude. She extends her relationship with Sahara to out-of-class environment and this creates a considerable emotional impact on Sahara.

Another example of a good teacher-student relationship is that Miss Pointy

refuses to send Darrell out with Peaches during the lesson. When Peaches comes to the class to take Darrell to a session, Miss Pointy rejects her request and keeps Darrell in the class. This makes Darrell feel that he is cared and accepted by his teacher as a valuable member of the class. By doing so, Miss Pointy acts protective and caring and Darrell feels as an equally valued member of the class, so he increases his emotional bond with Miss Pointy.

#### **4.1.4. Students' School Engagement**

It has been found that all the students' school engagement increases thanks to Miss Pointy's effective teacher qualities and her good relationship with her students. Firstly, their cognitive and behavioral engagement increases. They become more excited and motivated before every lesson with Miss Pointy. During her lessons, all students are focused on her and they actively engage in discussions by raising their hands impatiently. They all start to enjoy different subjects such as geography, literature and mathematics. Darrell starts to submit his homework and Sahara starts to share her writings with Miss Pointy. She improves her writing skills through the feedback she gets from Miss Pointy. Through the stories Miss Pointy shares with the class, they learn the importance of morals and respect. They become more aware of their attitudes and stop making fun of each other's deficiencies. Darrell decreases his aggressive behaviors in class which is another implication of behavioral engagement and start having better relationships with his classmates as a part of emotional engagement. Sahara also values Miss Pointy and opens up to her. As a result of her emotional engagement with her teacher, she naturally starts to have interactions with her classmates and this increases her sense of belonging to school.

#### **4.2. Analysis of *No Talking* by Andrew Clements**

Dave Packer and Lynsey Burgess are two popular students among the fifth graders. They are both very self-confident, academically successful and very social students with leadership skills, but they do not like each other, it is because they both have negative opinions about the opposite sex. This is stated in the following lines; "Dave had zero tolerance for girls, and Lynsey had less-than-zero tolerance for boys" (Clements, 2009, p.19). Dave says that girls talk more than boys and Lynsey takes this as a challenge. They organize all the boys and the girls in the fifth grade to join a contest. This is a no-talking competition for two days. They set a rule and allow

themselves to use only three-word sentences in case the teachers or the principal ask them questions, it is because total silence might get them in trouble at school. The fifth graders are called “The Unshushables” by the teachers (Clements, 2009, p.31). When the students start the contest, all the teachers and the principal realize this unusual silence and they all give different reactions to this situation. Images of teachers, their effective teacher qualities, teacher-student relationship and their effects on the students’ school engagement have been analyzed through the reactions given by the teachers.

#### **4.2.1. Images of Teachers**

There are six teachers who are portrayed in the book. These teachers are; Mrs. Marlow (the science teacher), Mrs. Akers (the music teacher), Mr. Burton (the reading & literature teacher), Mrs. Henley (the physical education teacher), Mrs. Escobar (the mathematics teacher), Mrs. Overby (the social studies teacher). All of the teachers are portrayed in terms of their personality traits, and no information about their physical appearances is located.

Mrs. Marlow, the science teacher, is a middle-aged woman with seventeen years of teaching experience. She is portrayed as a “science-minded” and a “curious” person (Clements, 2009, p.53). Her curious personality is also stated in “And there was nothing Mrs. Marlow liked better than a good experiment” (Clements, 2009, p.54). She is also an organized person as stated in “Mrs. Marlow began to adjust her afternoon lesson plan” (Clements, 2009, p.54). When she enters the class and realizes that students are unusually quiet, she prefers observing the students to understand while trying to have a lesson with them instead of asking them directly. This is stated as “But Mrs. Marlow was watching for anything that might give her a clue about this unusual behavior” (Clements, 2009, p.55) and this strengthens her curious personality image. However, she fails to figure out what is happening in the class, and her mood immediately changes. She is not very patient, so she stops trying to understand and tells them to read a chapter in the book and does not make any more contact with the students until the end of the lesson. Another example that shows her intolerant personality is “...the whole class began arguing, and that had started a huge free-for-all that didn’t end until she banged on her desk with a book” (Clements, 2009, p.56). This shows her intolerance to any kind of disruptive behaviors in her lessons.

Mrs. Akers, the music teacher, is portrayed as an active and a hasty teacher. As soon as she enters the class, she tells her students to open up the songs books and she starts playing the song right away. When students sing the song in three-word chunks, she gets angry, but she does not give a harsh reaction and decides “to be a good sport” about it (p.66). So, she can be assumed to have a tolerant personality as she asks students to hum to fill in the gaps in the song if they do not want to say all the words. It is assumed that she is a problem-solver and a creative teacher when necessary.

Mrs. Henley, the gym teacher, is portrayed as care-free person. This is expressed as “News had gotten to most of the teachers that the fifth graders had gone quiet, which didn’t bother the gym teacher at all” (Clements, 2009, p.67). She gives them a ball and let them play Dodgeball while sitting at the corner and watching them. She asks no questions at all. She is very indifferent to her students.

Mr. Burton, the reading and language arts teacher, is explicitly introduced to readers as a patient and a humorous teacher in this line “Unlike Mrs. Marlow, Mr. Burton had a lot of patience and a pretty good sense of humor” (Clements, 2009, p.68). He immediately turns this contest into an activity in his lesson. He starts reading a short story and asks students to move the story forward using three words only. He has a very positive attitude and he smiles very often. He has a creative mind and he enjoys the lesson as it is not ordinary. In another lesson, he tells the students that there will be no talking, but only writing during the lesson and asks students to communicate with at least four people through notes during the lesson. He observes the students and makes notes during the lesson. He has a curious mind and he is open to new experiences in class which makes him a flexible teacher. He is also a master’s student in Human Development, so it can be said that he is eager to learn and improve himself.

Mrs. Escobar, the mathematics teacher, is a very intolerant and a strict teacher. When she enters the class, she immediately starts the lesson. When students answer her using only three words, she gets angry. It is stated in these lines as “Mrs. Escobar got right down to business” (Clements, 2009, p.110), “Mrs. Escobar was starting to boil over. ‘I am not amused by this, Lynsey. I know what you’re doing and I will not stand for it. Now stop it!’” (Clements, 2009, p.112) and “Dave knew that look on teacher’s face. It meant trouble, serious trouble. And not just for Lynsey. He held his breath, waiting for the explosion” (Clements, 2009, p.112). All these lines portray

Mrs. Escobar as a distant, cold and quick-tempered person. However, when Dave stands up and starts writing the solution of a math's problem in a different way, she feels good about it and immediately softens her attitude and decides to give this contest a chance to have a more engaging lesson, so she shows flexibility to some extent and this contributes to her image positively.

Mrs. Overby, the social studies teacher, takes this as a social experiment. She does not feel like she is challenged by the students, on the contrary, she has a positive attitude towards the contest. This is stated "She decided that this no-talking craze was actually a pretty good social experiment. Plus, she didn't feel like the kids thought they were winning and she was losing - it wasn't like that" (Clements, 2009, p.118). These lines show that she might feel challenged by the students and this may affect her decisions. She also talks to other teachers to see how they're handling the situations, so she is open for any contributions from her colleagues. This shows a collaborative image of her as a teacher.

#### **4.2.2. Effectiveness of the Teachers**

Based on the analysis of teacher images in the books, their effectiveness can be listed as follows:

Mrs. Marlow displays only a few qualities of effective teachers. She is well prepared for her lessons. She is experienced and knowledgeable in her subject. She knows her students' names. She asks facilitating questions about science. On the other hand, she has very little patience. She is too disciplined and gets angry easily. They feel threatened when she starts losing her patience and this creates anxiety in her students.

Mrs. Akers has higher tolerance than Mrs. Marlow. She gets frustrated when students refuse to sing the song properly by speaking in an uneasy tone. She addresses to her students with their names. However, she displays an important effective teacher's quality which is creativity and ability to adapt her lesson spontaneously. She turns the lesson into a game to make students sing a song which proves her creativity. She is also quite determined to have an active and a fun lesson with the students against all odds during the lesson time. She respects her students and gives them opportunity to continue their experiment while restoring the order in her class without arguing with the students.

Mrs. Henley is mentioned very briefly in the book. She does not display any features of effective teachers. She has no interaction with the students. She gives them a ball and sits at the corner the lesson. She sees their no-talking contest as an opportunity to have an easy lesson. From her perspective, the less the students talk in her lessons, the better the lessons are. She has no ambition and creativity to observe and use this unusual contest for educational purposes.

Mr. Burton is the most effective teacher in the book. He likes teaching and he has a good sense of humor which is appreciated by his students. He is patient and knows their students' names. He has a curious mind and his approach to no-talking contest is educational. He aims to take benefit of the contest and use it to stimulate children's critical-thinking, oral and written production skills. At the end of the first lesson completed despite the no-talking contest, all students feel fulfilled and clap their teacher. Mr. Burton himself is a master's student, so he likes to improve himself as a teacher and as a person which is also valuable feature of effective teachers. When teachers have a meeting to find a solution to end the contest, Mr. Burton is the only teacher who tries to give more time to children to complete their competition, it is because he seizes the contest as an opportunity to stimulate creativity.

Mrs. Escobar is a very strict, socially distant teacher whose focus is mostly on teaching her subject in an environment in which students obey her rules. These features of Mrs. Escobar make her an ineffective teacher. However, she has one positive feature; fairness. When she insists on getting the answer of a math's problem in a way that has taught the students, Dave stands up and writes the solution in a different way on the board. Although it is not what she expects, she admits that Dave's way is also very smart, practical and acceptable., so she shows that she is a fair person and she can be flexible from time to time. Her behavior makes students feel joyful.

Mrs. Overby is patient. She knows her students' names. Her overall attitude towards students is positive and encouraging. She does not mind the no-talking contest. She is tolerant and agreeable. She explains her expectations clearly for the lesson during no-talking contest and reach an agreement with the students, so she is good at communication. She allows them to give presentations in pairs so each student in every pair can take turns to speak in three-word sentences to complete the presentation. She uses the benefits of team work. When her lesson is finished,

students leave her class feeling successful and confident.

#### **4.2.3. Teacher-Student Relationship**

In terms of teacher-student relationship, there is not much data found in the book. All teachers are presented in the classroom environment in terms of how they handle no-talking contest. However, the implications about the teachers' relationship with their students might be inferred from their portrayals and from their effective teacher qualities.

Among the teachers mentioned in the book, Mr. Burton, Mrs. Overby and Mrs. Akers might be assumed to have a good teacher-student relationship as they are more agreeable, creative, encouraging, patient and flexible when compared to other teachers who are strict, quick-tempered and less flexible. When Mr. Burton's, Mrs. Overby's and Mrs. Akers's lessons are over, students realize that they have had fun despite the no-talking contest, so this increases their bond with these teachers.

#### **4.2.4. Students' School Engagement**

In *No Talking* by Clements, there are multiple teacher characters instead of a single main teacher character. These teachers encounter the students only in classroom environment. In the book, students themselves have an active role as starting a contest at school which is regarded as a great opportunity for some teachers although some others perceive it as a disruptive act. However, there are implications of the effects of these teachers on students' school engagement.

Firstly, Dave and Lynsey, as a representative of all the boys and the girls in fifth graders express their dislike for the opposite gender. This situation prevents their interaction with the opposite sex and they mostly make good friends from the same sex. When they challenge each other and start no-talking contest, the reactions of the teachers become a key role during their journey and show some effects on their behavioral and emotional engagement.

When students show courage and organize themselves for a collective act, they get support from three of their teachers; Mr. Burton, Mrs. Overby and Mrs. Akers. Although it is not easy for these teachers to immediately adapt and continue having proper lessons due to the contest, they choose to respect, understand and support the students to improve their self-confidence, determination and creativity. They encourage the students to find a way to meet the requirements of the lessons without

quitting their contest. Getting such support and empathy from the teachers, students feel secure, cared and respected, therefore they show high emotional and cognitive engagement in these teachers' lessons. They engage in activities and submit homework more willingly to these teachers. They increase motivation towards these teachers' lessons. Additionally, they find motivation to continue the contest with the support of these effective teachers and learn to stick together against the intolerant teachers. On the other hand, they choose to stay quiet in Mrs. Marlow's and Mrs. Escobar's lessons as they are intimidated by teaching attitudes and personal traits of these teachers. As a result of this experience, Dave and Lynsey stop being enemies and start liking each other. It could be concluded that all teachers indirectly help them improve their emotional engagement which prominently observed as increased social relationships with peers.

#### **4.3. Analysis of *Because of Mr. Terupt* by Rob Buyea**

The book tells the story through the lens of seven students who are at fifth grade; Peter, Jessica, Luke, Alexia, Jeffery, Danielle, and Anna. They all have various behavioral, academic or social-emotional problems. The class has a new teacher at fifth grade named Mr. Terupt. He is portrayed through students' opinions. Thanks to numerous positive qualities he has, he manages to create a great deal of impact on the students. When Mr. Terupt suffers an accident and cannot come to school for a while, these seven students realize how important Mr. Terupt has become in their lives. In order to understand Mr. Terupt's portrayal in the book, analyzing students' opinions is crucial.

##### **4.3.1. Images of Teachers**

Mr. Terupt's portrayal is analyzed in terms of his personality traits and physical appearance. There have also been found some generalizations about teachers. The portrayals of Mr. Terupt and teachers in general from students' perspectives are as follows:

Peter is the class clown. He spends a lot of time in the restroom to make irritating jokes to younger students. He has behavioral problems and has very negative opinions about all teachers. He says "It's our bad luck to have teachers in this world, but since we're stuck with them, the best we can do is hope to get a brand-new one instead of a mean old fart" (Buyea, 2010, p.1). For Peter, older teachers are



usually strict and mean while younger teachers are more easy-going and agreeable. He associates teachers' discipline with their experience and age; therefore, he says "New teachers don't know the rules, so you can get away with things the olde-timers would squash you for." (Buyea, 2010, p.1) and "I was getting a rookie teacher-a guy named Mr. Terupt" (Buyea, 2010, p.1). He believes that Mr. Terupt is young and inexperienced and he can get away with his wrong behaviors.

Jessica; she is a new student. She comes from California and lives with her mother. She is extremely nervous about being the new-girl at the school. However, Mr. Terupt welcomes her with a friendly smile during their first encounter and says that he is also new at school. This immediately gives Jessica a relief. Mr. Terupt says "Well, this is my first day, too. So I guess we'll try to figure things out together" (Buyea, 2010, p.6). When Mr. Terupt sympathizes with her, she feels a bond with her teacher and quickly calms down. This can be seen in the following lines: "he looked up from his desk and smiled at us. It was a friendly one" (Buyea, 2010, p.6) and "somehow, he made my butterflies disappear and my tongue shrink" (Buyea, 2010, p.7). he is portrayed as an empathetic person.

Luke; he likes school and he is a hardworking student. He likes being challenged by difficult tasks. He is used to getting good marks and winning the challenges during lessons, so he gets upset when he is not the best. He has no problem with homework and engaging in the lessons. He doesn't like group work as he thinks he works much better and more effective on his own. From his perspective young teachers are portrayed as inexperienced, but Mr. Terupt is special although he is a new teacher. It can be seen as "Maybe it was because he was a first-year teacher and didn't know better. But I don't think that was it. Mr. Terupt is a special teacher" (Buyea, 2010, p.31). here, it can be observed that there is a general opinion about new teachers and their lack of knowledge in general.

Alexia; she does not have much interest in academic work. She is more into fashion. She likes wearing stylish clothes and make up. She is also a bully. She makes fun of other students, especially of Danielle for being fat. She likes calling mean names to her friends. She is not liked by most of the students; however, she gets along with Peter as he also does not mind getting into trouble like Alexia. From Alexia's perspective, Mr. Terupt is cool and nice because he is new and different. She says "I have this new guy for a teacher. That's so cool. Mr. Terupt was nice. He

let us sit in tables, not rows” (Buyea, 2010, p.12). It can be seen that Mr. Terupt is portrayed as a new, cool, different and an open-minded teacher.

Jeffrey; he is a lazy student. He does not like school and finds himself stupid. He submits very sloppy works. He thinks Alexia is dumb, Luke is smart, Danielle is fat, and Peter is wise. From Jeffrey’s perspective, new teachers are generalized as not being smart enough to figure out the naughty acts of the students. On the other hand, he gives a different opinion about Mr. Terupt. This can be seen as “I wanted to tell Mr. Terupt that Peter spent all his time in the bathroom messin’ around. But Terupt figured it out, even if he was new. He seems smart” (Buyea, 2010, p.15). It can be seen that being a new teacher is associated with inexperience; however; Mr. Terupt is portrayed as a smart teacher although he is new and young.

Danielle; she lives on a farm with her mother, grandmother and grandfather. She lacks self-confidence because she is overweight. She is bullied by Alexia and she does not have any friends. She says “Nobody wants to be friends with the fat kid” (Buyea, 2010, p.16). For this reason, she is not happy at school as she feels lonely. Her image of Mr. Terupt is also very positive. She thinks he is nice and funny. She states her opinions about Mr. Terupt and her feeling of loneliness as “School wasn’t great. My teacher seemed pretty nice and funny, but none of that matters when you don’t have friends” (Buyea, 2010, p.16).

Anna; she is extremely shy. She never willingly raises her hand. She tries not to be noticed by her teachers; therefore, she intentionally keeps quiet and avoids eye-contact. She does not have any close friends; it is because she thinks her best friend is her mother. On the other hand, she is a very good observer. Her portrayal about Mr. Terupt is shaped by her keen observations. The data showing images of Mr. Terupt are as follows: “Right away, I could tell he was a reader, because there were books everywhere in our room” and “Mr. Terupt was young and athletic. He didn’t wear a wedding ring” (Buyea, 2010, p.20). It can be seen that Mr. Terupt is good looking. He loves reading and it is implied that he is single.

Based on the students’ depictions of Mr. Terupt, it can be inferred that although he is a young and a new teacher, he is smart and knowledgeable r unlike all other new teachers which are generalized by the students as novice and naïve. He is also kind, nice, funny, creative, special, cool, different, empathetic and friendly. As for

appearance, he is described as an athletic-looking person. These images about Mr. Terupt are obtained through students' opinions about him. In order to contribute more to figure out how Mr. Terupt and teachers are portrayed, data related to teacher effectiveness also provides more information.

#### **4.3.2. Effectiveness of the Teachers**

Mr. Terupt displays many features of effective teachers. He is very patient. When students display unwanted behaviors, he warns them immediately, but he often uses humor and irony, so no student gets offended but they understand the warning clearly. Luke states this as "Classic Mr. Terupt. Instead of blowing up, he was funny about it, but in a serious way. He sat Peter out for the rest of the activity and had a talk with him" (Buyea, 2010, p.56). As could be seen in these lines, he is usually very clear when he warns a student, but he never lets them feel threatened or offended in front of the other students.

He is caring and protective towards his students. He provides his students a sense of belonging to a group, which is an important emotional need for all children. As an example of this; when the fire marshall at the school asks Mr. Terupt to take down all his students' posters off the wall, he replies "I'm not taking them down. You have no idea how hard my kids worked on these" (Buyea, 2010, p.33). He says these words while pointing out Jefferey's poster, who is notoriously a lazy student. When students witness this conversation, they feel protected. Jeffrey, who is normally a very lazy student, states "Terupt stuck up for us. Our hard work mattered to Terupt-even mine. I owe him now" (Buyea, 2010, p.33) and other students agree with him. After this incident, Jeffrey starts trying to do some work only to be worthy of his teacher.

He usually organizes activities and competitions and tries to make these activities different. He is very creative. His efforts to make difference is one of his distinct features. His creative nature can be seen through Peter's opinion as "So I liked Mr.T's next idea. He never ran out of ideas" (Buyea, 2010, p.78) and his feature to be different as "He said "We're going to have holiday party like every other class, but it's going to be different. "Of course, that's no surprise" I blurted out. Everybody-even Mr. T- cracked a smile, because I was right" (Buyea, 2010, p.78). It can be seen that it is known by all the students that he makes difference in everything with his

creativity.

He encourages teamwork in his class. This can be seen as “The students’ desks were arranged in five tables of four. So right away I knew we had a teacher who was into teamwork and who probably didn’t mind a little talking-otherwise, we would have been in old-fashioned rows” (Buyea, 2010, p.20). He especially assigns projects which require teamwork to have them learn to work together and take responsibility.

He is also very inclusive. He never tolerates mocking and bullying. Anna, a very shy student, states her gratitude to Mr. Terupt for not allowing bullying as “I have never had a teacher stick up for me before. I’d get picked on and made fun of, and my teachers never did anything. Mr. Terupt did something. I loved him for that” (Buyea, 2010, p.94) What he does is; he gives a serious speech to Alexa about it and shows authority. Moreover, he asks his student to form groups and visit the Collaborative Classroom for children in their school with a range of special needs. Later, he gives them an opportunity to discuss their experiences with these students. By doing so, he gives a different perspective about those students. All students, even Peter and Alexa who constantly make fun of those children and calling them mean names, create an emotional connection as they spend time with those children and change their attitudes towards them.

#### **4.3.3. Teacher-Student Relationship**

All his effective teacher qualities mentioned above also point out the kind of relationship that establishes with his students. The two important elements in the nature of the teacher-student relationship in the book are social- emotional fulfillment of the students. Mr. Terupt combines his effective teaching skills with his friendly and understanding personality and this leads to effective teacher-student relationship. Depending on his positive images from students’ perspectives and the inclusive nature of his teaching style mentioned in the discussions above, he manages to reach out each and every student in his class, taking their strengths and weaknesses into consideration.

#### **4.3.4. Students’ School Engagement**

Depending on the examples presented in the discussion above, it has been found that Mr. Terupt has positive impacts on his student’s school engagement cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally. He never tolerates bullying and Danielle

feels valued. She gains self-confidence and makes new friends through group works and projects, thus she grows a sense belonging to school which improves her behavioral and emotional engagement as well as her cognitive engagement. Mr. Terupt treats Peter kindly and warns him consistently and earns his respect. he helps him engage in school work with the help of various fun projects. Peter changes his negative behaviors and realizes that school can be fun and he becomes more engaged. He challenges Luke with creative tasks and improves his cognitive engagement more. Additionally, by putting him into group work, Mr. Terupt increases his social interaction with his friends which makes positive effects on his cognitive engagement. Anna, who is very shy, and Jessica, the new girl, find a chance to get to know each other much better thanks to the projects they prepare together and they become close friends. Their behavioral and emotional engagement increase and this also affects their cognitive engagement as they feel more motivated towards school work. Alexia stops bullying others thanks to Mr. Terupt and his carefully designed project about Collaborative Classroom. Additionally, Mr. Terupt gives her a serious talk which help her increase her empathy for others. In the end, Alexa starts earning her friends' respects and she start making real friends. This increases her social & emotional engagement; as a result, she starts paying more attention to school work to prove her academic capacity to Mr. Terupt and to her friends. Finally, Jeffrey also increases his cognitive and emotional engagement. When Mr. Terupt treats him the same way with the others and never lower his expectations from him, he starts to gain more self-confidence. He stops having negative opinions about himself. He starts putting an effort into school work to make Mr. Terupt happy, it is because he believes he owes this to his teacher. As a result, it can be seen that all the students increase their school engagement in various aspects thanks to Mr. Terupt.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

### 5.1. Concluding Remarks

This study has analyzed teacher images and their effective teacher qualities in three realistic novels suitable for children aged between 8-12. The images of nine teachers have been studied in terms of their effectiveness and their impacts on their students' school engagement. Content analysis, as a qualitative research method, has been used in the study as it provides opportunity with the researcher to interpret the data found in the selected books. In order to analyze the data in an organized way, the researcher has defined categories to study depending on the discussions and the studies in the related literature. According to these discussions and studies, four categories emerged; images of teachers with two sub-categories as personal traits and appearance, effective teacher qualities, teacher-student relationship and school engagement. All data have been interpreted in accordance with these four categories to answer the following research questions:

1. How are teachers portrayed in *No Talking* by Andrew Clements (2009), *Because of Mr. Terupt* by Rob Buyea (2010) and *Sahara Special* by Esmé Raji Codell (2003) in terms of personal traits and appearance?

2. Do teachers in *No Talking* by Andrew Clements (2009), *Because of Mr. Terupt* by Rob Buyea (2010) and *Sahara Special* by Esmé Raji Codell (2003) display effective teacher qualities? If so, what qualities do they have?

3. Do teachers in *No Talking* by Andrew Clements (2009), *Because of Mr. Terupt* by Rob Buyea (2010) and *Sahara Special* by Esmé Raji Codell (2003) manage to build good teacher-student relationship?

4. Do teachers in *No Talking* by Andrew Clements (2009), *Because of Mr. Terupt* by Rob Buyea (2010) and *Sahara Special* by Esmé Raji Codell (2003) have positive effects on their students' school engagement?

As for the first research question; data have showed various images of teachers in the selected books:

In *Sahara Special*, Miss Pointy is portrayed in detail in terms of her appearance and personal traits. She wears colorful clothes and her hair color is "copper like a lucky penny" (Codell, 2003, p.37). She has a pale skin and she wears make up which

gives her a cat-like look. She does not fit into classic teacher image for Sahara. As for her personal traits, she is portrayed as inclusive, caring, friendly, parent-like and a keen reader of literary works. The other teacher Peaches, who is a special needs teacher, has very little interaction with Sahara; therefore, she is portrayed as distant, boring and very organized. No information about her physical appearance is given in the book.

In *No Talking*, there are portrayal of six teachers. There is no information about their physical appearances. The data include only their personal traits. Mrs. Marlow, the science teacher, is very science-minded, curious, but very intolerant for disruptive behaviors, quick-tempered and very disciplined. Mrs. Escobar, mathematics teacher, is also very intolerant and strict like Mrs. Marlow. However, she is more open to change her opinions when a logical argument is given by her students, so she is agreeable to some extent. Mrs. Akers, the music teacher, is very active, creative and more tolerant when compared to Mrs. Marlow and Mrs. Escobar. Mrs. Henley, the gym teacher, is very care-free, almost totally indifferent to her students. Mr. Burton, reading and language arts teachers, has the most positive image among the teachers in the book. He is portrayed as highly curious, fun, creative, devoted to teaching and learning as he himself is also a master's student. He is supportive and encouraging. Finally, Mrs. Overby, social studies teacher, is portrayed as a friendly and open-minded teacher.

In *Because of Mr. Terupt*, Mr. Terupt is first believed to be an inexperienced teacher by his students for being young; however, he turns out to be quite the opposite. He is extremely loved by his students as he is disciplined, kind, nice, funny, creative, special, cool, different, inclusive, smart and friendly. His physical appearance is described as athletic.

As for the second and the third research questions; data have showed that some of the teachers in these books display various qualities of effective teachers as a result of this, they manage to create a good teacher-student relationship with their students. These teachers are as follows:

Miss Pointy in *Sahara Special* activates her students' curiosity, sets rules clearly, relate the lessons to students' own experiences, uses humor, greets them at the door to have them leave their troubles in the imaginary trouble basket before they

enter the class, and use literature as a tool to teach morals and values. Thus, she manages to create an effective teacher-student relationship with all her students, especially with Sahara and Darrell who seem to be struggling more than the other students.

In *No Talking*, Mrs. Marlow is well-prepared before her lessons and she asks questions to stimulate her students' critical thinking skills. Mrs. Akers is creative and able to adapt her lesson quickly into a different style to overcome the problem occurred by no-talking contest. She turns the lesson into a game and manages to have a fun music lesson. Mr. Burton has a curious mind. He stimulates children's critical-thinking skills as well as their oral and written production skills, and he likes to improve himself. Mrs. Overby is good at communication. She is encouraging and patient. Mrs. Escobar shows only one quality of effective teachers which is being fair to all students. Mrs. Henly display no qualities of effective teachers. As for the teacher-student relationship, based on the effective qualities they have, all the teachers, except Mrs. Escobar and Mrs. Henley, manages to create a positive teacher-student relationship at different levels as they are approachable and supportive.

In *Because of Mr. Terupt* Mr. Terupt display many qualities of effective teachers. He is patient, disciplined, humorous, caring, protective, smart, knowledgeable, creative, inclusive, fair, and friendly. Therefore, all the students love him and he has effective teacher-student relationship with his students. He changes students' opinions about teachers, it is because most of the students associate age with experience. The older a teacher is, the more experienced and stricter he/she gets; however, as Mr. Terupt manages to create a disciplined but a fun classroom environment, students start to respect him and change their opinions. As a result of this, he succeeds in establishing social, emotional and personal relationships with each student.

As for the fourth research question; Nine teachers are portrayed in the selected books; however, only five of them manage to create positive impacts on their students' school engagement. These teachers are; Miss Pointy in *Sahara Special*, Mr. Burton, Mrs. Overby and Mrs. Akers in *No Talking* and Mr. Terupt in *Because of Mr. Terupt*. These teachers' students show considerable improvements in their emotional engagement to school as they feel cared and understood by these teachers. The students fulfill their needs for belonging. As a result of this, they start to create



better social relationships with peers and take more active part in school work or in social activities and this leads them to a higher behavioral engagement. They slowly abandon their problematic behaviors such as bullying, calling names, making fun of other, and aggressive actions as a result of increased behavioral engagement. Thanks to the increased cognitive engagement, the students also improve their engagement to school work. As these teachers offer encouraging, creative and fun classroom environment, the students have come to realize that school work can also be enjoyable, as a result, they start studying more willingly.

## **5.2. Implications and Suggestions**

This study may offer useful implications for educators. As mentioned in the related literature through conducted studies, children's literature might create some effects on children and it also helps them overcome various problems which they encounter in their academic and social lives. Realistic novels like *Sahara Special*, *No Talking* and *Because of Mr. Terupt* may open new horizons to students and help them sympathize with the characters presented in the books. Thanks to effective teacher images in the selected books children may start forming more positive opinions about teachers and school since these books also include valuable details from perspectives of teacher characters. Through understanding teachers' perspectives, children may make more sense of their teachers' reactions at school.

It can also be inferred that even the teachers with negative attitudes in these books can make some contributions by implying that supporting one another may help people overcome many obstacles and motivate children for team-work. Thus, when teachers detect the obstacles which their students cannot overcome on their own, they can offer books to their students which contain various characters having similar problems, so children can find relief that others also go through similar problems and they do not feel alone. The benefits of children's books mentioned in this study may have great impacts on children's emotional, social and cognitive development and may result in an active engagement at school emotionally, behaviorally and cognitively.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### Publications:

1. **Altan, A.** (2023). Characteristics of Effective Teachers and Evaluation of Teacher Images in Patricia Polacco's Story Books for Young Readers. *JournalNx*, 9(6), 120-125.