

## Wattpad in Youth Literature Based on the Experiences of Turkish Teachers and Secondary School Students

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to discover the view, opinion, perception and experiences of Turkish teachers and secondary school students towards Wattpad, an online literacy community, to interpret them educationally, to determine the reasons for their use and to interpret the main plot of youth literature on the axis of changing reading perception/behavior and expectations of youth. It is foreseen that the study has comparatively discussed literature-education and new reading types on the axis of the teacher and student, the direct participants of learning-teaching within this scope, and therefore fills the gap in the literature. The research design is phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs. Data obtained through semi-structured interviews from Turkish teachers and secondary school students were subjected to content analysis. The findings of the study are as follows: Youth enjoy spending long time on Wattpad via their phones and feel themselves free. They think that the application develops reading and writing habits; read and write mainly about love and science fiction; prefer digital reading over printed books and/or classics; comment and criticize books/articles with their peers. Turkish teachers have educational concerns and do not find appropriate for youth to spend time on this platform; because it includes violence, sexuality etc. Therefore, it can be said that there is a conflict and a difference of opinion between teachers and youth.

**Key words:** Youth Literature, Wattpad, Turkish Teachers, Secondary School Students, Adolescent

### INTRODUCTION

Youth literature covers works written only for youth by adults and/or youth or selected from texts written for adults; including primarily and especially the subjects and various texts that youth enjoy and read admiringly (Özyer, 1987). According to Dilidüzgün (2007), youth literature refers to ages 13-20. Gültekin (as cited in Gültekin et al., 2012) also classified as early youth literature (12/13-17/18) and youth literature (18-25/30) according to age and developmental period. Özyer (1987) also positioned youth literature between ages 14 and 24.

Considering the status of today's Turkish literature in the context of children and youth literature, it can be said that there has been a positive change and development in children's literature due to the ability to make clear distinction between children and adults, and that children discover many modern children's books. But these developments in children's literature are not seen in (early) youth literature. Uslu Üstten (2016a) expresses this problem in her study and argues that there are few works written directly for youth today. İpşiroğlu (2008) also argues that the society's view of children and youth concepts causes the underdevelopment of children and youth literature.

It has been observed that the mentioned problems are also experienced in secondary schools. Ak Başoğul's (2018) interview with Turkish teachers within the scope of her doctoral dissertation indicated that the teachers frequently complained even though they could easily find appropriate works for 5th and 6th grades of secondary school, this was not the case for 7th and 8th grade students. Therefore, these students end up with books written for children or adults, inappropriate for their age group. Youth are regarded as adults and they are expected to read books read by adults herein.

Uslu Üstten (2016b) has listed the factors in the inability to establish youth literature:

- There is no discrimination between children and youth.
- There is lack of youth perception in the society.
- The books are not written directly for youth.
- The common opinion is that there is no need for youth literature, the literature should be considered only as "literature" and that this cannot be classified according to different age groups.
- There is uncertainty of the target audience addressed as a result of the inclusion of children and youth in adult's writings.

According to Uslu Üstten (2016b), youth take steps to create their own literature on these grounds. One of these

steps and the most popular one is the Wattpad application today. It can be said that this application is popular not only in Turkey, but also abroad, and therefore the youth describe Wattpad as a positive environment, however this cannot be generally regarded as positive by especially experts, educators, authors. In the body of literature, the underlying reasons for the negative evaluations of adults on the use of Wattpad by youth were cited by teachers and experts as uncontrolled application, the lack of literary quality in the texts created and problems with educational principles; because the texts of youth include images such as swearing, slang, sexuality, violence, virtual world, drugs that are not desired for the children of that age to face educationally. Therefore, it can be said that there is a conflict and a difference of opinion between adults and youth. The study is focused and structured on this study question.

(Early) youth literature can be described as a transition to the world of literature. Providing the act of reading means popularizing throughout the society. The next step is literary socialization. This means gaining the act of reading literary texts (Asutay, 2004). Otherwise, a desire to read will dull and the process of providing a reading culture will be interrupted. However, new concepts such as social reading, digital reading, virtual reading, screen reading have appeared due to the use of digital media. Wattpad readers, who frequently spend time in digital media environments, can be considered as the new generation readers in this regard.

While this situation offers youth some opportunities to develop and show themselves, it also brings some risks. It is important to increase the awareness of educators, families, publishers, authors and researchers on this subject. Extensive, long-winded studies are required to determine the positive and negative effects of online books and Wattpad and similar sharing sites on youth. (Çoban, 2015, p. 597)

As a result,

...pessimistic claims about the effect of reading on screen compared to paper should be reconsidered taking into account the changed social context in which millions of reading acts are taking place. Analyzing reading in the digital age can also be useful to understand social processes of reading in general; because there is not one reading habit, but many ways to read. (Pianzola et al., 2020, p. 39)

In this context, this study aims to discover the view, opinion, perception and experiences of Turkish teachers and secondary school students towards Wattpad, an online literacy community, to interpret them educationally, to determine the reasons for their use and to interpret the main plot of youth literature on the axis of changing reading perception/behavior and expectations of youth. Therefore, it is foreseen that the study will comparatively discuss literature-education and new reading types on the axis of the teacher and student, and the direct participants of learning-teaching within this scope, thereby filling the gap in the literature.

## METHOD

### Research Design

The research design is phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs.

Phenomenological research, as defined by the researcher, is a research design that describes the experiences of individuals in a phenomenon and takes its source from philosophy and psychology. These descriptions result in reaching the essence of the experiences of individuals with various experiences regarding such phenomenon. This design has solid philosophical foundations and generally requires interviews. (Creswell, 2014, p. 14)

Since interpretations will be made regarding experiences, perception and essence in the study, the phenomenology design was deemed appropriate.

### Study Group

Criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in the study. "The basic understanding in the criterion sampling method is to study all situations that meet a predetermined set of criteria" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 112). Accordingly, certain criteria were used to determine the participants in the study:

- Knowledge of Wattpad application and observation and experience concerning students (for Turkish teachers),
- Grasp of and use Wattpad application (for secondary school students),
- Living in Istanbul.

Therefore, the participants of the study are Turkish teachers and secondary school students performing learning-teaching activities at the secondary school level. The number of participants is 30, including 20 Turkish teachers (15 female, 5 male) and 10 secondary school students (1 boy, 9 girls). Among the teacher participants, 15 work in a public school and 5 in a private school. Their ages vary from 30 to 45 years old. The student participants' age is 13-14, and 5 of them are 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and the other 5 are 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

### Collection of Data

As mentioned above, interviews are mainly used as a data collection tool in phenomenological researches. While creating the interview questions, literature, teacher interviews<sup>1</sup> conducted by Ak Başoğul (2018) within the scope of her doctoral dissertation and preliminary interviews with their students were used. The questions created separately for both teacher and student participants were rearranged by referring to the opinions of two field experts and one Turkish teacher. The corrections made after the feedback from the experts are changes in the order of the questions, removing one of the two questions serving the same purpose, and the addition of a question to provide elaboration.

The final status of the questions addressed to the students is as follows:

1. How/from whom did you hear about Wattpad application?

2. What influenced your decision to use the application?
3. How long have you been using this application?
4. How often do you use the application? Why?
5. How do you feel while following the application?
6. Could you give information about the application?
7. Do you use the application only over the internet or do you buy published books? Why?
8. Do you think that Wattpad books/literature is different from other books? If so, what is it?
9. Do you use the application only as a reader or do you write articles?
10. What types of articles do you read and/or write in the application? Why?
11. Do you talk to your friends about writings and what is written by you in the application? If you are talking, about what?
12. Would you like your articles to be published by publishers? Why?
13. Some teachers/parents think this application is not appropriate for you. Why do you think they might think that way? Do you agree with this view?

Since the study intensely focused on the use of Wattpad by secondary school students, the questions addressed to Turkish teachers were limited to the sharing of experiences and opinions about the use of their students. Accordingly, the final status of the questions addressed to Turkish teachers is as follows:

1. Do your students use the Wattpad application? If "Yes," how did you notice that?
2. How often and why do you think your students use this application?
3. What do you think about intensive use of this application by your students? Can you share your experience and opinions?

A personal information form was used to collect data in addition to the interview questions and information such as age, gender, institution of working/studying, grade level of tutoring/learning, educational status and professional experience were obtained through this form.

Special permission was requested from the families of the students who were interviewed through the Voluntary Consent Form developed in accordance with the approval of Istanbul University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee in order to conduct the interviews (Reference number: 35980450-663.05-307834). In the interview form prepared, information was given for the parents, interview questions were added, and a signature section was created regarding whether they approve or not. After getting the wet signed consent from the parents, if the students were also volunteers, the interviews were conducted within the knowledge of the Turkish teachers and in the place(s) they determined. Before the interview, the participants were informed about the study and it was stated that the answers would be used only for scientific purposes and sincere answers were important for the reliability of the study in this context. The interviews averagely lasted 10 minutes for each participant.

## Data Analysis

Content analysis was first conducted according to the data analysis stages of Creswell's (2015) phenomenology design in order to analyze all of the data obtained in the study and to prevent data loss. Accordingly, the data were organized firstly, the texts were read, the side notes were taken, and preliminary codes were created in the reading process, thus the essence of the phenomenon was described, a textural description (What happened?) and a structural description of how the phenomenon occurred were developed after the important points were determined, and the story of the essence was presented through tables, figures and/or discussion. Therefore, the literature was used in order to prevent bias, the analysis steps mentioned above were followed, the soundness and persuasiveness of the study was ensured after the obtained results were attributed to the evidences, and the results analyzed and obtained by the researcher at different times were clearly expressed.

## RESULTS

In this part of the study, the results obtained from the content analysis of interviews with Turkish teachers and then secondary school students are included sometimes using tables and frequency expressions.

### Results Obtained from Interviews with Turkish Teachers

In the study, 20 teacher participants expressed opinions about Wattpad. These teachers state that their students and/or their relatives of the same age frequently spend time in the application. A great majority of them noticed that their students read articles or books published on this platform during free reading hours. Moreover, students who consult to Turkish teachers to check their writing for this application are in the majority. An example of a teacher's answer is below:

*"There is a thing what they call Wattpad! Very dangerous, unreliable irregular, rude. For example, there is a Bad Boy series. For example, her mother bought and suggested. I read and looked. We give books during the reading time and the books we choose are brought. Kids were reading the Bad Boy series. The words caught my attention. I said, 'Give it to me, read the books we have chosen.' It is not appropriate for 12-year-olds. The classics include facts of life, negativity, it has to be like this, and we face with them in life. This gets ahead of the subject and leaves the original.... It has nothing to do with the cover. If I saw the cover, I would think something had happened to the kid. Wattpad is common among children. Little children also write. The best part of this is to encourage writing. It would be better for it to proceed in more controlled manner over time. It is not nice to give rein. It is made to create popularity among them."* (TT1).

As stated by the Turkish teacher in the above citation, Wattpad use is very common among students. According to the Turkish teachers, especially students at 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades

follow this application as literate through their smart phones (f=9). With regard to gender, it is seen that girls use the application more frequently (f=5). According to five teachers, students spend time in the application for being popular among their peers while they spend time in the application for escaping from something according to three teachers. These teachers generally think that the students who spend time herein have low academic success and/or family problems (f=5). Therefore, according to them, Wattpad is not an application that youth with high academic success do not interest in, because these youth can access qualified books instead of spending time on the platform:

*"I think she has psychological things and reasons for this, it is also related to the family, so I have a student who follows a lot, it affects her a lot, she has some family problems, and she is someone who tries to attract a lot of attention. That is how she tries to attract attention. She tries to attract a little attention with the advertisement, Wattpad's advertisement by saying I follow this much, I love it. The authors and the writers usually talk about such relationships and so on. These problematic children are more affected by such things, in fact, so she forgets her own world therein, in other words in another world, then she lives in a dream world therein; but what she prefers is usually something like that. She reads more comfortably, because someone like her writes. First of all, the young both reads more comfortably and thinks she understands it; because she knows that a 14-year-old student, a girl writes this, she feels close to her. That is why she can say that she feels the same as I feel, so she involuntarily empathizes while reading therein. She thinks that she writes as if she understands me. Another author perhaps writes just like that; as she knows that her age is close, so she is interested and adopts more quickly." (TT14).*

The positive and negative opinions of the participants for the application are shown in the below table:

Considering Table 1, it is seen that opinions of the teachers about Wattpad use show negative trend. Eight teachers find the application above the level of their students; therefore, they do not find it appropriate to be used by secondary school students; because, according to them, there are mostly books/articles containing topics such as love, intrigue, fun (f=7) and sexuality (f=5) in the application. Therefore, youth

may be negatively affected and develop wrong behaviors (f=5). This may happen especially through the characters in books/articles; because youth can imitate these characters and develop negative age-appropriate behaviors (f=5). Five teachers claimed that the application is a product of popular culture, three teachers claimed that the language of the articles is bad, and it is like a soap opera and two teachers claimed that it encourages consumption culture. Moreover, according to two teachers, publishers publish the articles uncontrolledly and do not pay attention to whether the stories are adapted, stolen or quoted. For these reasons, there are also teachers (f=3) who prohibit their students from reading articles/books on this platform or severely warn them.

Some teachers do not consider the application use by students as a negative situation. According to them, the articles herein are fluent and fascinating (f=2), encourages students to write and read (f=3), so it can be seen as a transition or step in developing reading and writing habits. Then, students can tend to read quality works; however, there are also teachers (f=5) who think that it is useful to proceed in more controlled manner due to the fact that it contains explicit contents. Moreover, there are Turkish teachers (f=7) who compare their students with qualified literary works appropriate to their level and age and guide to create their reading tendencies.

### Results Obtained from Interviews with Secondary School Students

All of the students, who participated in the study, have discovered this application with the suggestion and compliment of their peers. The sense of wonder arising at this stage led them to examine Wattpad and they also expressed in their own speeches that they wondered about this platform frequently complimented by their friends.

During their first entry, views of all students on the application were positive and they described the platform as interesting. This attraction is discussed in the context of visuality and ease of use. There are many factors that motivate young people to use the application after the first impression:

As can be seen in Table 2, factors such as the fact that the application contains interesting stories; provides the opportunity to read on science fiction, games, chick literature genres, etc.; provides the opportunity to write and present the

**Table 1.** Opinions of Turkish teachers on wattpad use

Answers	f	Sample Sentence
Above their level	8	
Includes topics such as love, work, intrigue	7	<i>"It may be that that is to say, they are young all in all, there is also adolescence.</i>
Mostly sexually explicit topics	5	<i>Love is an attractive thing for them all in all, they want to read thereof, in fact it</i>
Can cause negative behaviors in children	5	<i>was not necessary to do something. (For love) It seems to me, so I think like that.</i>
Product of popular culture	5	<i>It is read so much, so by her age group... I was talking to publisher recently, I do</i>
Children can imitate the authors herein	3	<i>not know if it was, she/he or another author from that publisher, well she/he said,</i>
Bad language	3	<i>there was such a queue, she/he also showed us in the video, we could not believe</i>
Like a soap opera	3	<i>it. There is no way for such a signature queue? A little girl, the girl who came</i>
Encourages to write	3	<i>to sign there. The governor came there that day, they transferred the governor's</i>
Fluent and fascinating	2	<i>bodyguards to her, and 'So, how does something like that happen?' I said. The</i>
Publishing uncontrolledly	2	<i>bodyguards of the governor pass on to the girl." (TT10)</i>
Message consumption	2	

articles to the likes and comments of peers and publishers; free and easy access have been effective in the participants' decision to use this platform. Nine female participants started to use the application for these reasons, while one male participant left spending time on this platform in a short time on the grounds that the application would make him dependent on the virtual environment, although he considered the application interesting. He also does not approve the use of the application by his peers for the same reasons:

*"So, I felt like I was connected to them, I mean electronic devices, I felt myself like a slave. I felt like I would die without them, I could not live; but when I felt that way, I closed it. Then a ten minute or so a song, music; I entered again. When I entered that time; but I did not like it very much. I prefer normal books."* (S6).

Most of the participants spend time in this application as they wonder about the virtual world. The word "different" is frequently repeated especially when sharing the feelings, thoughts, impressions and experiences related to the application:

*"In fact, I was not a child who reads. I read some selected books. I was reading very few books; I started reading more on Wattpad; because I get bored when I take a book in my hand; but it is different on Wattpad if you have a phone, it is better for me."* (S9).

The results of the duration and frequency of using the application by the participants are shown in the table below:

According to Table 3, most of the youth have been using the application for 1-3 years. There are two students who stopped using it while one participant has been using it for 2 months. Some of the students who continue to use the application spend 30-60 minutes every day (f=4) or every other day (f=3), while some of them spend 5 hours only on weekends (f=1). These results can be interpreted as a pointer that the participants have been using the application for a long time and frequently.

**Table 2.** Factors Motivating youth to use wattpad

Answers	f	Sample Sentence
Contains interesting stories	4	<i>"I participated through a friend. She said to me, well, 'You must enter in this application...' I mean, '... there are extremely great books, you can write your own book.' she said, and I meant it caught my attention. I said what it is like to write your own book, and then I uploaded it. It was really wonderful. I really like. The articles caught my attention, because instead of buying books from somewhere, if you read online, you read more, at least it is better."</i> (S2).
Provides genre-oriented reading opportunity	3	
Provides the opportunity to share with peers	2	
Provides the opportunity to write and publish		
Free and easy access		

**Table 3.** Duration and frequency of using wattpad by youth

Answers	f	Sample Sentence		
Duration	f	Frequency		
For 1-3 years	7	Every day	4	<i>"Well, it has been 3 years or so. Not every day; but I enter every 2-3 days nowadays."</i> (S8).
For 2 months	1	Every other day	3	
Stopped using	2	Weekend	1	

The students had difficulty in sharing their feelings about the processes of following the application; they mostly reflected their attitudes and opinions about Wattpad. It can be generally said that feelings of students towards the application are positive (f=8). According to them, this application led them to have a pleasant time (f=8), triggers their sense of wonder (f=6), improves reading habits (f=4), and encourages them to empathize and socialize (f=3). There are also students who feel uncomfortable with the sexually explicit articles on the platform (f=5) and bored with discussion of similar and popular topics (f=3). One student stopped using the application for this reason. Example of one participant's answer is as follows:

*"So, I do not know, I do not remember; but I mean I had fun at first that I did something for a month. I got bored then because the same things."* (S10).

The definitions of participants for the application also differed in general. These definitions are shown in Table 4:

Considering Table 4, it will be seen that the definitions differ positively and negatively. Most of the participants (f=5) highlighted the application regarding subject matter. In other words, according to them, the contents of the articles on Wattpad focus on love and science fiction and they are interesting. According to one participant, reading habit develops with this application. Three participants assert that the platform consists of articles with similar content and contains imitative, in other words, non-original articles. One participant described the authors as amateurs in this context. Two participants see Wattpad as a free environment due to the lack of age limit and restrictions. In other words, participants can easily access books on many genres and topics; share their thoughts, comments, likes and articles with other people and receive feedback. According to three participants, people can easily access this application and publish their own books.

All participants use the application on the internet via tablets (f=4) and phones (f=4) due to the ease of downloading and storing. Only two students buy the books published as publications, and one student prefers borrowing them from their friends. These results can be interpreted as an indication that students prefer to use the application more technologically:

*"I downloaded it on my tablet; but out of my studies, I spend time on the weekend, late Saturday, Sunday before bed, sometimes whole day; but out of lesson."* (S4).

Results regarding the comparison of Wattpad books with other books by participants are shown in Table 5:

As can be seen in Table 5, the answers of the participants for Wattpad books and other books contain contradictions. As can be seen from the answers, there is a differentiation between those who defend Wattpad books and other books.

**Table 4.** Perceptions and definitions of youth for wattpad

Answers	f	Sample Sentence
Contains interesting articles with love, science fiction, etc.	5	
There are non-original articles with similar content.	3	“Wattpad is an application made to evaluate people with writing skills, but it is misused.” (S3).
You can write your own book.	3	
Easy access is provided.	3	
It is a free environment.	2	

**Table 5.** Opinions of the youth on wattpad and other books

Wattpad	f	Other books	f
Entertaining and interesting.	6	Professionally written.	4
Sharing, empathy and identification are established.	6	Legible,	2
It is more enjoyable to spend time on the phone/virtual environment.	6	fascinating and exciting.	2
Free of charge and easy access.	2	It leads to thinking and questioning.	
		Improves.	

  

Sample sentence	Sample sentence
“So, I do not know, it sounds different from other books. Moreover, people of our same age write like that. It also draws my attention, so I am reading. Well, I like them too. It is a nice thing; I mean it has our language. For this reason, it draws my attention as it has such things in the same language. So, I keep reading, I like it. Well, it is different from other books I have read; Because for example, it could be very boring when I read a book, that’s why I am bored and I do not read; but Wattpad seems to me different, so I do not know, it is different; I keep reading, I like it. So, I am happy. I am reading in my spare time. Sometimes I read when I am out or so; I am bored, and I am reading. Thus, it makes me feel good. I mean, for example, when I read the book, I really feel like I live with it. Something like this happens inside me.” (S5).	“There are many differences. I mean, everything is different. Let me give an example, The Little Prince is a very beautiful book. There is love therein, so there are different things, or the Seagull I have not read the Seagull yet, the Alchemist or so. Well, there are different things. Because it talks about the same thing as a Turkish TV drama, but there is a main theme, a main idea, etc.” (S7).

Therefore, the participants gave positive answers for books they defended. Six of the participants find Wattpad books different from other books. The reasons presented are that Wattpad books are more entertaining and interesting (f=6), they provide the opportunity to share, empathize and identify as they are written by their peers (f=6), it is enjoyable to spend time on the phone and virtual environment (f=6) and it also provides easy access as it is free of charge (f=2). Therefore, they think they gained habit of reading; however, they are also aware that their authors are amateurs. These participants find other books boring. One participant claimed that these works could not decrease to their level as they were written by adults and therefore, they could not address them. The other four participants find other books more qualified for the reasons such as being professionally written (f=4), being legible, fascinating and exciting (f =3), providing opportunity to think and question (f=2), improving themselves (f=2). It is seen that the positive opinions of these people towards other books are affected by the suggestions of Turkish teachers. Moreover, there were participants who left reading books on Wattpad for this reason. According to them, Wattpad books are written unprofessionally (f=4), they offer a virtual world (f=4), there are disturbingly similar topics of love and sexuality (f=3), there is no wonder in the texts, everything is clearly narrated (f=2), therefore anyone can write the texts herein (f=1).

While eight of the participants use the application only as a reader, there are two participants who share both as readers

and writers. Their reasons for writing are to narrate different feelings and to be recognized. While two of the participants who use the application only as a reader find the act of writing boring, two other participants do not find their writing admirable. One participant who tried to write and received negative feedback stated that she preferred only reading for this reason. Example of one participant’s answer is as follows:

“I’m also writing on a secret diary. It is Zeynep’s Secret Diary. I am currently writing a book in which I can write down my different feelings. I just started. This is my first story.” (S9).

Participants preferred to answer their reading/writing actions as content and text type:

According to Table 6, it can be said that the participants mostly prefer to read and write texts in science fiction (f=4), romantic (f=3), detective/thriller/horror (f=3) genres. Readings game genre (f=2) are for understanding how a computer game is played and applied. Other genres are comedy (f=2); essay, chick literature, psychological and poem (f=1). Moreover, the participants considered genre-specific reading opportunity of the application as a positive feature.

All of the participants share with their peers about readings and/or writings through Wattpad. The content of this sharing can be seen in Table 7:

As can be seen in Table 7, the content of the participants’ sharing with their peers consists of comments, criticism and evaluations (f=7) and suggestions (f=5) made on readings/writings. There are also participants who stated that these

sharing also take place in the way of reading together. While there is one participant aiming to get feedback on what they wrote, the other participant prefers to make comparisons based on the experiences of his own and peers. Two participants describe Wattpad as a negative application and state that they share with their friends through this negation and suggest published qualitative books to their peers. Some youth communicate with famous authors (whose books have been published) and authors, whom they do not know but whose articles they like, via Wattpad; they can also share over their own or author's articles; however, the participants preferred to express their opinions on the content or the title of the book instead of telling the names of authors while talking about the authors whose articles they follow, and they mostly follow their friends. For this reason, no data could be presented about the situation subject to the study.

Seven of the participants look positively that their articles are published as a book by publishers. Publishers' decision to publish a book indicates that their articles are liked and loved according to these people. Therefore, this makes them different and privileged. Two participants associated this with being famous and known, because everyone cannot become a writer. One participant thinks that this will increase his motivation and lead her to write better articles. According to one participant, this should occur at a later age and an endeavor should be made on writings; in other words, it should be qualified. Three participants did not answer positively to the publication of their articles by publishers. Two of these participants use the application as readers and feel themselves incompetent in this regard. Similarly, one participant feels herself incompetent in this respect and wants to experience more reading and writing and gain accretion. According to her, qualified and articles appropriate for publication can be created only in this way. Both authors and publishers do not attach importance to such accretion in order to write articles on Wattpad and publish these articles. The important thing is the like:

*"So, yes, I would. I mean, well, I would feel like a writer. This means I wrote so well that it was published in books."* (S1).

All of the participants attribute the negative attitude of teachers and/or families to this application to the fact that the articles on the platform contain love, sexuality and violence. Therefore, according to them, teachers and families do

**Table 6.** Genres preferred by youth for reading and writing

Answers	f	Sample sentence
Science fiction	4	
Romantic	3	<i>"At first, I read chick literature and usually science fiction and something like that."</i> (S5).
Detective/Thriller/Horror	3	
Comedy	2	
Game	2	

**Table 7.** Sharing purposes of youth on readings and writings

Answers	f	Sample sentence
Comment, criticism and evaluation of the content of readings and writings	7	<i>"Yes, I'm talking to a friend. We read entertaining parts together. We sometimes compare it with our own experiences. Sometimes we say as a criticism, I wish she/he hadn't done that or so."</i> (S2)
Book recommendation	5	

not consider this application appropriate for this age group. Six of the participants agree with the opinions of teachers/families in this respect. According to two participants, there are no violent articles on Wattpad. Similarly, one participant thinks that the application is not appropriate for age levels. It can also cause psychological disorder and affect their character as they are in a developmental period. One participant is surprised and finds it traumatic that some of his peers can write such topics in detail without experiencing sexuality and love. Moreover, according to him, these people serve as a negative model for younger groups. One participant claims that their peers spend time on this platform because of sexuality and love. Two different participants skip a scene with sexuality they encounter while reading, sometimes they stop reading and only read the last part if they wonder about the end. Four participants do not agree with such opinions of teachers and families. According to them, sexuality is a natural thing, and they receive education in school in this regard. Three participants stated that their families are aware of their spending time in this application and trust them. One participant reads the articles herein with her mother. These participants see themselves as more than thirteen years old and feel confident:

*"Wattpad reading is an application made to read, to make people love reading and to teach what reading is like; but there are sometimes sexuality, violence or so in some books or even half of these books, most of them. So, it is necessary to set an age limit. I mean this sometimes happens. Their mother or teachers make them leave because of sexuality or so. They cannot continue as someone makes them leave. Sometimes they say, like my mother, nothing will happen, they trust. I think this is not true, because she will eventually learn. So how long can you hide it? She will watch and see such movies and TV series anyway when she grows up. So, after a few years, it is already given in science classes. We see it now. So, this is a natural thing."* (S8).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the study, the opinions of Turkish teachers and secondary school students who spend time effectively on Wattpad application were taken and their experiences were shared.

According to the Turkish teachers, who participated in the study, this application is mostly popular among girls and some students who use this application prefer to read books/articles on this platform in free reading lessons and they may want their teachers to check their writings from time to time. Therefore, Turkish teachers have become familiar with Wattpad application by this means. According to them, the purpose of youth to spend time herein is to be popular among their peers and draw attention and most of the students who

have low academic success and family problems spend time on this platform. However, reasons such as sharing feelings and thoughts with peers were also stated. According to the studies of Kaya, Kaya, Sağun and Şen Koç (2019), the articles published on Wattpad contains explicit elements such as violence and so on, therefore it may have negative effects on youth and the students with high academic success do not suggest Wattpad application as they are aware of these risks. Therefore, it can be said that academic success is effective in such choices. However, the youth with mental problems tend to show more risky behaviors. The results of Ağır's (2019a) study also support the opinions of Turkish teachers. According to the study, the youth using the application cannot clearly manage the processes of perceiving, describing and interpreting the thoughts and behaviors of other people, and have problems in regulating their self-presentation behaviors in social environments. It is thought that the novels produced in the application and chosen for reading may mediate in the interpersonal relationship experiences of youth, in other words, in the meeting of peers with similar problems, forming groups and seeking solutions to their problems through each other. Cayhan's (2017) study shows that the educational level of parents of secondary school students using Wattpad is higher than those of secondary school students not using the application.

The most of Turkish teachers disapprove the use of Wattpad application by their students and consider it above their level; because, according to them, the articles and books published herein are not literary; includes educational problems and serves as a negative model due to sexually explicit, love, intrigue, violence topics; encourages consumption culture and affects their development negatively. It cannot be ignored that this is affected by the fact that the application is not controlled. Publishers are similarly negligent during the process of publishing articles as books. This was also discussed in interviews conducted by Ak Başoğlu (2018) with Turkish teachers. Turkish teachers put Wattpad books at the top of the list while explaining their reasons and the books that they disapprove for reading. Fourteen out of thirty teachers clearly expressed their complaints about this application. According to them, this application, which can be accessed mostly by 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> (13-14 years old) grades girls on their phones, is above the age levels; contains topics such as love, intrigue, and sexuality, leads them to wrong and consumption, therefore serves as a negative model.

Ağır (2017, p. 26) emphasized that Wattpad had an educational negative impact on children and youth with the following words:

Drug abuse, cigarette and alcohol addiction, antisocial behaviors, carrying sharp objects and guns, tendency to sexual violence, driving without license, depression, violation of school rules, absence, irregular eating and sleeping habits included in the stories of the favorite Wattpad books are the behaviors that may cause risks of adolescents. These bad lifestyles may affect the perspectives of children and adolescents on life. The broken family, violent behaviors of the parents, criticism, humiliation, adaptation problems to the school and the

environment, and traumatic stories are seen in the life stories of the characters. Youth reading these stories also become individuals prone to violence and drug addiction in their real life. Wattpad shows that youth may influence each other more through social networking applications and the processes of influencing and directing each other accelerate as the features of the technological applications that they use increase.

Özgün (2016) argued that most of Wattpad books have a perspective trivializing woman. According to him, the perspective of trivializing woman can also be seen clearly in the title and cover of the books. Moreover, while the male characters in the articles/books mostly produced by women show strong, careless and harsh attitudes; women can mean something as long as they make the male characters happy; the woman is the chaser, and the man is the escaper. It can be said that there are problems related to social gender roles in this regard. Similar results were also obtained in Ağır's study (2019b): The self-evaluation of young female characters is distinguished as a factor facilitating the establishment of a close/special relationship with male characters having risky behaviors and attitudes. According to Akar's study (2019), Wattpad acts as a platform legitimizing masculine norms, especially violence against women. The similar results were obtained in the studies of Ağır (2016), Karaosmanoğlu (2019), Neşeli, (2019), Neşeli and Güran Yiğitbaşı (2020), Örgen and Güneş, (2018), Özkan (2020), Sati Yalçın (2015), Sivri et al. (2019), and Uslu Üstten (2016b).

In this study, according to some teachers the application can be a tool for transition to quality reading, because students can gain the habit of reading and writing by spending time in this environment. Thus, they can discover reading trends over time and turn to qualified literary products. In the studies of Sari (2016) and Güran Yiğitbaşı (2018), it was concluded that Wattpad develops the reading habit and increases the interpretation. Eskimen and Erdoğan (2020), Rokha (2019) and Yuniar et al. (2019) found in their studies that Wattpad improves writing skills. The study of Adiningtyas (2020) also concluded that Wattpad improves writing skills. Wattpad's ability to receive feedback through likes and comments had influence on obtaining these gains. Moreover, the transfer of technology to the classroom provided interaction between teachers and students; students took a more enthusiastic and active role in the classroom. For similar reasons, according to Tirocchi (2018), Wattpad is an interesting environment since it is a socializing environment where youth experience peer support and share their tastes, interests, values and feelings, and it is a confrontation and growth area where youth can confront by representing various aspects of daily life and comparing reality and fiction. According to Coelho et al. (2019), Wattpad texts can be read and produced both outside of school and in the classroom; however, this depends on how and for what purpose the application will be used by teachers and students in the teaching and learning process, the educational suitability of the text, the technological infrastructure and usability.

Secondary school students who participated in the study met Wattpad application upon the positive suggestions of their friends, and their first impressions of the application



were that it was interesting, and then they decided to spend time on the platform with a sense of wonder. According to the results of Güran Yiğitbaşı's (2018) study, friends and social environment have influence on the choice of Wattpad reading. Moreover, Wattpad readers prefer to follow the content they like in different media in the form of trans media and communicate with the authors. The reason for reading books herein is that the articles have a humorous and plain language. The reasons for the participants of this study to use Wattpad similarly are the inclusion of interesting stories, providing the opportunity for genre-oriented reading, sharing with peers, writing and publishing their articles as well as free and easy access. As mentioned above, Turkish teachers also answered that it offers youth with an opportunity to share with their peers. According to the answers of the participants, youth share their comments, criticism and evaluations on the content of readings and writings and suggest a book through this application. According to Hellekson (2015), Wattpad especially aims to create a sense of community. The loading interface is perfect for a smartphone screen and it can be used easily. Successful authors tend to share posts frequently and establish a relationship with the community. Stornaiuolo et al. (2017) also represented Wattpad as a tool for making friends, developing an intimacy and social sharing.

Students have been using the application for 1-3 years and 30-60 minutes every day or every other day on the internet via their smartphones and tablets. Generally, they stated that they spend time on the platform as a reader. The reading and writing experiences of secondary school students are mostly focused on science fiction, romantic, detective, thriller and horror genres. The answers given in Cayhan (2017) and Konuk's (2018) studies are parallel to these results.

The writing aim of the participants, who stated that they wrote articles, is to be liked and to become a famous writer with the publication of their books. Most of the participants, including participants who use the application as readers, want their articles to be published by publishers. According to these people, the publication of their books indicates that their articles are liked and loved. Therefore, this makes them different and privileged, because everyone cannot become an author. Mawardi (as cited in Kardiansyah, 2019) argued in his study that most of the authors on Wattpad pursue a goal of popularity and existence since they are at the beginner's level literarily and even in the field of writing, and they want to get the highest number of followers and likes as possible in order to achieve this. According to him, Wattpad users act as reader oriented as in other social media platforms and shape their articles according to the likes and comments of the reader. Therefore, they can produce contradictory and inconsistent articles, and this may cause the quality, literacy and textual criteria to be ignored. Considering the reasons and actions of youth to publish their articles, it can be interpreted that authorship and cultural production in this digital field has become more transparent, collaborative, formable and targeted. Writing content on Wattpad can be considered as a marketing movement for permanent authors, while it is the first step for new and amateur writers to introduce

themselves to the target audience. These people inherently use the platform not only to communicate with their friends, but also to get feedback. In this context, it can be mentioned that there is a transformation in today's authorship understanding. This transformation has been affected by popular applications such as Wattpad and YouTube, the social media understanding of the new generation and effective and innovative authors (Bold, 2018; Ritzer, 2015).

It can be said that almost all of the students have positive feelings towards the application; however, they had difficulty in explaining their feelings and they expressed their opinions on the application. They can have a pleasant time, their senses of wonder are excited, they get in the habit of reading, and they can empathize and share socially through this application. Moreover, they defined Wattpad as a free environment that contain interesting articles with topics of love, science fiction, etc., that offers the opportunity to publish their own book and that is easily accessible and makes you love reading. Although these students had difficulty in verbally expressing their feelings about the application, it was observed that they were excited and delighted in talking about Wattpad while sharing their experiences during the interview. Students with negative opinions are disturbed by the articles containing sexuality in the application and they are bored with popular topics such as love. Considering the titles of the stories written in all thirteen languages, including Turkish, in the application, it was found that the most frequently repeated word was love in Pianzola et al.'s (2020) study. Therefore, it can be said that the articles with love content are common for all countries and other words frequently repeated are common in general. The authors of the study interpreted this situation as the rise of a global reading culture.

When youth compare articles/books on Wattpad with other books, it was seen that Wattpad books are in the front. This is affected by being entertaining and interesting; providing sharing, empathy and identification, being free and easily accessible, and enjoyable time spent on the phone/virtual environment. These students especially emphasized that reading on the phone, in other words screen and/or virtual reading, make them feel unusual and different. In fact, there are also participants who stated that reading by turning pages is boring; however, they got in the habit of reading through a technological device. Therefore, it is possible to say that the technology-based reading environment has an influence on their choices and tastes. However, the effect of sharing common feelings, thoughts and experiences with their peers cannot be ignored. In Konuk's (2018) study, youth prefer to read screen rather than printed books; because, according to them, Wattpad gets them adopt reading and writing habit. Similarly, according to Bal's (2018) study, secondary school students perceive reading and writing activities independently on Wattpad as relaxing and entertaining. Considering these results, learning and teaching environment should be integrated by the relevant educators designing various action plans in accordance with in-class and out-of-class experiences of students and their interests and needs. Coleman and Hall (2019) also agree. Thus, teachers can contribute to

the expansion and enrichment of the stories of their students, and they play a role of guide by providing this digital platform as an area in order to reenact the dominant narrations of the past and to imagine with current new literary worlds through Wattpad.

The reasons of the participants who negated Wattpad books were presented mostly through the qualifications of the other books. According to them, other books are professionally written, and they deal with different subjects and offer perspectives, make them to think and question, improving, fascinating and exciting. The authors of Wattpad books are in a cycle. Similar topics are repeated on this platform, writings are unprofessional, they show lack of depth and they are boring. Participants who negate Wattpad also spent a lot of time herein for a period; however, they stated that they had bored of this cycle over time. Their thoughts on Wattpad became negative especially after they face with qualified literary works. Turkish teachers were the person who encourages the participants to read qualified literary works and offers them reading suggestions; therefore, who is effective in the change and development of reading behavior.

Some of the students participating in the study agree with the concerns of their parents and teachers about the application. They attribute the reason for the negative opinions of adults to the existence of articles containing love, sexuality and violence. Therefore, it is not appropriate for this age group. Some participants stated that they and their families trust them. Their families are aware of this application and its content, and there are also parents who read herein with their children. Therefore, these students do not agree with these negative comments and evaluations. Besides, sexuality is a natural thing according to them and they receive education in school in this regard, and they consider themselves more mature than their peers. As in the answers herein, in Aytan's (2017) study, Turkish teacher candidates gave positive and negative binary and similar answers on Wattpad. According to them, writing in Wattpad environment, therefore in electronic environment is advantageous for readers and writers with regard to legibility, spell check, interaction, visual appeal, time saving, convenience, affordability, quick feedback, constructive criticism, encouragement, archiving and socialization; on the other hand, it cannot be compared with handwriting due to the existence of negative points such as the unreliability of the virtual world, distraction, heavy criticism, character limitation, health and expression concerns, unsociability, copyright, plagiarism concerns, and profane language.

New media and any text published on the Internet can now be considered as hypertext. In addition to the classic book, the convenience and variety provided by hypertext is an innovation in the field of literature. The innovation brought by the network environment is easy and fast access (Asutay, 2007). It can be said that the master users of new media and youth who have direct target audience have made significant contributions to the field of literature with their creativity and have played a leading role for new and changing reading genres with their original productions (Asutay et al., 2016). Secondary school students who participated in the study also

described Wattpad positively in this respect, and Wattpad enabled them to produce literature in a network environment. In this sense, it is clear that literature continues to exist wherever there is a network environment. As a natural result of all these developments, the same technical innovations can be achieved in children and youth literature; however, children and youth literature websites and multimedia tools are unfortunately not at the desired level and sufficient numerically (Asutay, 2007). According to Uslu Üstten (2016b), youth created their own literature and developed literature genres since youth literature has not yet created and not been able to gain a place for itself. In other words, youth filled the gap in this field in accordance with their own needs; however, as can be seen in the citations from various studies above, it is seen that students adopt various risky behaviors, attitudes and actions due to the lack of control in these digital environments when considered from educational point of view. This situation imposes important responsibilities on adults. Therefore, the quality of literacy education stands out in the process requiring media literacy skills. Avoiding oppressive, imposing, restrictive and rote attitudes herein will liberate them to become autonomous individuals with developed sense of self, encourage them to become literate and enable them to participate voluntarily in classroom activities (Aslan, 2016). Moreover, quality works should be produced for youth in order to gain a reading culture and contribute to their progress towards becoming autonomous individuals, who are curious, thinking, questioning, researching, producing, creative, decision-making, problem-solving, sensitive and respectful to humans, nature and animals, who can express themselves correctly and effectively, and who has developed awareness; and hypertexts should be integrated with literature courses through technology-based reading methods and applications required by the age. Thus, selectivity will come out and youth who manage technology/media as well as the reading process will be able to grow up.

## END NOTE

1. No information could be given about the process of conducting the interviews in this study due to space limitations. See Ak Başoğlu's (2018) doctoral dissertation for detailed information.

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