

## THE IDEAL READER PERCEPTION OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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### Abstract

Literature theories presented till the last quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century has carried out criticism by considering either text, writer or the period of the writer has grown up. On the other hand; theories such as reader response theories, reception theory, feminist criticism place the reader in the center of the criticism. Accordingly, it is necessary to work on concept of reader and to define perception of participants about ideal reader. The current study is conducted to determine pre-service teachers' ideas and evaluation of "ideal reader". In the study, it is emphasized by the participants that ideal reader is anyone who comprehend, interpret and criticize the text. Moreover, ideal reader was perceived as receptor, trainee by participants; that's why, he was likened to an obese, library, consumer in a market. Nevertheless, friends and family members were referred as ideal readers, especially teachers. Furthermore, it can be said that participants have pragmatist perspective about reading and they read for pleasure and information.

**Keywords:** Ideal reader, perception of pre-service teachers reader, reading.

### ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ İDEAL OKUR ALGILARI

#### Özet

Yirminci yüzyılın son çeyreğine kadar ortaya konan edebi eleştiri kuramları, ya metni ya yazarı ya da yazarın içinde yetiştiği dönemi dikkate alarak eleştiriye gerçekleştirmiştir. Öte yandan okur merkezli eleştiri kuramları, alımlama estetiği, feminist eleştiri, izlenimci eleştiri gibi kuramlar okuru eleştirinin merkezine almışlardır. Bu bağlamda okur kavramı üzerinde durmak ve ideal okur alımlamasını belirlemek gerekmektedir. Bu araştırma, öğretmen adaylarının "ideal okur" kavramı üzerine düşüncelerini, değerlendirmelerini belirlemek için gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmada ideal okurun okuduğunu anlayan, yorumlayan ve okuduklarına eleştirel bakan bir okur tipi olduğu katılımcılar tarafından öne çıkarılmıştır. Ayrıca ideal okur bir alıcı, öğrenci olarak algılanmış bu doğrultuda ideal okur obeze, kütüphaneye, marketteki müşteriye benzetilmiştir. Bununla birlikte öğretmenler, arkadaşlar ve sıklık düzeyi düşük de olsa, aile bireyleri ideal okur olarak işaret edilmiştir. Aynı zamanda katılımcıların okuma eylemini eğlenmek, birtakım bilgileri edinmek için faydacı bir bakış açısıyla gerçekleştirdikleri söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** İdeal okur, öğretmen adaylarının algıları, okur, okuma.

#### Introduction:

Reading is making sense of messages sent through symbols, signs, images even though there are many definitions available in literature. On the other hand, Manguel (2007) has a different point of view toward reading act. According to Manguel (2007), reading is making

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sense of any visual message by the reader. By considering definition above, the followings are called as reading: the act of tracker in the forest, musician performing through musical notes, fisherman deciding to sail by looking at the clouds on the sky. Therefore, there are writer (the one sending message), reader (making sense of the message) and message (Jr, 1978). Göktürk (2002: 13) states “any work of art has realized its aim when the recipient gets the message.” In other words, reader is important and necessary for the existence of a literary. Sartre (2008: 76) states “There is no need to suspicion because we are writing for universal readers and the expectations of the writer is directed to all people”. He also indicates that literary works are written for reader. While talking about reading and reader, Eco (1981) notifies that reading is neither critical interpretation nor hermeneutic issue, anymore. Reading is a case relevant to the reactions given by the reader while reading. Meanwhile, he means the importance of the reader in the construction of meaning. It can be deduced from the citations that the current study deals with the reader and related definitions rather than text or writer.

Who is reader, which qualifications has he got? Reader is a person deciphering the meaning presented by symbols, signs and images. In the process of making sense of the symbols, reader’s experiences about signs, his mood and the reason behind his reading are effective. It is seen that Harris and Hodges (1981) describes concept of reader as the one reading; the one addressing audience; the one charged in order to evaluate an article and to grade a test. As for Özdemir (2013: 32), reader is the one trying to get the meaning in the text. Besides, it is seen that some litterateurs define reader as the one giving life to literary work, reforming the literary work with the refence to their experiences and expectation (Eco, 2009; Göktürk, 2002; Moran, 2008; Aytaç, 2003). Montaigne (1997: 29) also states that a good reader can find out the wealth, sense in the text. He says “an advanced reader finds different beauties that the writer has not even thought, he brings new senses in the text.” “Advanced reader” notion of Montaigne is associated with good reader and ideal reader concepts. Who is a good reader, what are the qualifications differentiating him from others? According to Özdemir (2013: 33), a good reader should have some features as the following: “He should recognize the genre of text and key concepts. He should have a skill to make use of the text in order to have fun or to rest and to learn.” Özdemir’s (2013) good reader concept coincides with an analytic and “model reader”. However, reader response criticism literary theories aim to make readers get pleasure and to consider the impressions given on readers. Therefore, good and ideal readers of the theories have different qualifications.

Akerson (2010: 190) looks for an answer to the question, who is reader, within the context of reception aesthetic. He comes up with three kinds of readers by considering Daemmrich (1974):

1. Reader aiming to get information,
2. Reader looking for the same life and experiences what he has got. He wants to find the same attitudes that he has in the text.
3. Reader looking for aesthetic pleasure.

First two readers type of Daemmrich and “good reader” notion of Özdemir are almost the same. This kind of reader reads for benefit and profit. On the other hand, it can be expressed that reader of Konstanzt’s school is similar to the third kind of reader. They read only for aesthetic pleasure.

Nabokov (2014) has a finding about a good reader as the following: “A reader should notice details; he should not read biasedly. If he reads by considering some prejudices. According to Nabokov, an ideal reader is the one having imagination, memory, vocabulary and sense of art (Nabokov, 2014: 37). It can be deduced from the definition of Nabokov that he also has a perspective similar to theorists placing the pleasure forward.

Nevertheless, Manguel (2013) has written a chapter titled “The Notes About Description of Reader” in his book, *A Reader on Reading*. He describes the ideal reader by various adjectives. In the chapter, he uses some statements similar to other writers’ good reader, model reader, and implied reader; however, it is also seen that he uses varying statements, too. Manguel (2013: 187) states “ideal reader recreates the story. Ideal reader is an interpreter.” Contrary to modern literature approach, it is possible to come up with different comments, attitudes toward the text in postmodern literature approach. In this sense, reader recreates the text suitable to his expectations and experiences; namely, he is active rather than being passive (Özbek, 2004).

Manguel (2013), Nabokov (2014) and Eco (2009) all mentioned what is pointed by Özbek (2004) and they come together about interpretation. Özbek claims “According to postmodernism, a literary work is never completed or it should not because works renew themselves with the ones reading.” This case makes clear the reason behind the advice given by the writers about reading the work more than once. “Messages are hidden in the text and comprehending the message is the duty of reader” (Özbek, 2004: 27).

Nabokov (2014) states that a good reader coincides with one of the characters in the text. Manguel (2013) also supports this claim by expressing “An ideal reader has got sense of decency in Don Quijote, craving in Madame Bovary, lust in Wife of Bath, Ulysses’s adventurous spirit, audacity in Holden Caulfield. Ideal readers love one of the characters in the book and ideal reader is the main character of the book.”

A good reader, according to Nabokov (2014) may have an aim to enjoy, to learn and to experience magician feature of the writer; however, a good reader is the one wanting to experience magician feature of the writer instead of learning and enjoyment for him. There is a similar case in Manguel’s (2013: 189) work and he states “an ideal reader does not deal with the data errors, truth of the document, historical accuracy and topography because ideal reader is not an archeologist.” According to Eco (2009), the one looking for his own experiences in the fictional works is not a model reader but an empirical reader. Moran (2008: 233) does not also approve the readers’ reading for knowledge rather than aesthetic pleasure. He expresses “if we read an artwork for other purposes instead of pleasure, we do not have an aesthetic attitude. Likewise, attitudes of a publisher reading a novel by considering the rate of sales are related to the practical purposes on productions.”

There is implied reader concept of Iser (1978), too. Implied reader refers to one having reading habit. “Although it is claimed that implied reader is not ideal reader, it is understood that Iser means a literary scholar qualified and critic reader (Aytaç, 2003: 154). According to Iser (1978), implied reader can be defined as a text hypothetical reader of the text. Implied reader lives and is planned within the text. This reader is a structure and he cannot be described as qualified reader.

As for Pamuk (2011: 15), he divides readers into two as naive and sentimental readers. He wants to have with neither naive nor sentimental readers. He wants to have a reader sentimental as well as naive because a naive reader cannot focus on the text as he perceives the text as real and a sentimental reader looks for mistakes in the method and fiction as a result he cannot enjoy the text.

Within the context of Pamuk’s (2011) naive reader, Eco (2009: 88-89) exemplifies reader’s reception and extreme comment as the following: One of them is the comment of Italian King about pastoral that he saw in art gallery and the other comment is an example about a reader reading Foucault Pendulum and confusing fictional and real by considering given dates. Eco describes this kind of readers are model readers. Eco (2009) mentions empirical and model reader as the following: “Model reader of a story is not an empirical reader... Empirical reader can read the text diversely. Moreover, there is not something directing him how to read because

he uses the text as an ambition case coming from outside of the text or stirring within the text coincidentally. There are different reader types in literature about reception aesthetic called such as ideal reader, implied reader.” (17). “Power of model readers is defined through the genetic codes transferred by text. Model readers created, confined in the text can benefit from the freedom at a certain level provided by text” (26). According to Eco (2009), every text has a model reader and he performs within the lines defined in work. Model reader of train schedule and Joyce are different from each other. Model reader is the one collaborating with writer (27). Empirical reader makes use of his own features such as knowledge, idea, and experience while comprehending. That’s why; empirical reader is different from model reader. Model reader can interpret the text by considering the boundaries present in the text; however, this is not valid for empirical reader. Empirical reader tries to search for the authenticity of the text with the help of his own experiences, knowledge (Eco 2008; 2009). Kay (1983) has defined Eco’s model reader in a similar way to Iser’s implied reader. Ideal reader is defined as reader created in the interpretation of a certain text and unique to that text. He interprets the text according to the opportunities provided in it. It should not be expected to go beyond what is presented in the text by ideal reader of Kay (1983). This is an act which can be performed by qualified reader. Ideal reader, model reader, empirical reader, naïve reader, sentimental reader... It is seen that there are different types of readers considering different point of views no matter which name is given. Moreover, it is clear that it is difficult and impossible to come up with a single definition of ideal reader. By considering different point of views, different litterateurs have come up with ideal and advanced reader definitions which are similar in various ways but also differentiating in other aspects. In this regard, the current study is conducted in order to answer the questions such as who the ideal or model readers of pre-service teachers are, what their metaphors are in relation to ideal reader and what their qualifications are. Besides, followings are the sub-problems of the study:

1. Who are the ideal readers for prospective teachers and what are his qualifications?
2. Who do the prospective teachers take into consideration as ideal reader in daily life?
3. What are the metaphors of prospective teachers in relation to ideal reader?

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Model:**

Researcher has administered a semi-structured interview form to students of Turkish Training Department and it is comprised of open ended questions. In data collection, semi-structured interview method is chosen because it is easy to prepare and it enables to use

different techniques in data analysis (Willig, 2008: 23). “Descriptive analysis” is used in the analysis of the acquired data. Data is summarized according to previously defined themes and interpreted. Besides, citations are frequently used in order to present opinions of interviewed or observed individuals clearly. Acquired data is organized and interpreted to submit reader in this method of analysis so that data is described clearly and systemically. Then, descriptions are explained and interpreted; cause and effect relationship is examined, got the result” (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2008: 224).

### Participants:

In data collection process, semi-structured interview form is administered to 93 students studying in Turkish Training Department in spring term of 2013- 2014 academic year at Ahi Evran University Faculty of Education.

### Results:

In this part of the study, opinions of the prospective teachers about “ideal reader” concept will be categorized and discussed. Sentences are considered as units and sentences are grouped by considering statements. Their frequency is identified and noted.

#### 1. Findings concerning the first sub-problem:

Table 1: The Answers About “Who Are The Ideal Readers for Prospective Teachers and What Are His Qualifications?”

<b>The sentences about ideal reader description.</b>	<b>(f)</b>
- He or she comprehends, interprets and has critical thinking ability for reading materials.	(64)
- The ideal readers are not inactive.	(43)
- The ideal readers read already.	(40)
- The reading is part of ideal readers' life and they love reading.	(34)
- They know that the reading materials make improve them.	(30)
- They read in order to get goals. They don't lose their time by reading unqualified materials. They read books which like it.	(28)
- They know contemporary books.	(20)
- They read every reading materials, every genre.	(19)
- The ideal readers speak and write very well.	(17)
- The ideal readers read the materials just like a protagonist of books and when he or she start reading the ideal readers go fiction.	(16)
- The ideal readers know very much about all of thing.	(10)
- The ideal readers have wide aspect about events and concepts.	(7)
- The ideal readers don't have prejudice about any books.	(6)
- The ideal reader has library.	(4)
- The ideal reader should be model for other readers.	(2)
- The ideal readers know very much about classical books.	(1)
- They are sensitive about their environment.	(1)
- The ideal readers are patient.	(1)
- They must read books which read it before.	(1)
- When they read their language abilities improve.	(1)

- They can read with electronic books.	(1)
- The ideal readers read when they get spare time.	(1)

The question which is about the definition of ideal reader and ideal reader's qualifications is asked prospective teachers in order to define their perceptions. Sentences are categorized by considering to semantic proximity and synonym feature of the given answers. When the answers are examined, the salient feature of "ideal reader" is that he is **a reader comprehending, interpreting and criticizing what he reads**. Prospective teachers have uttered similar statements for 64 times.

In the answers of prospective teachers about ideal reader's qualifications, it is frequently stated that he should get the message. Accordingly, the statement "**ideal reader is the one who is not passive**" has been repeated for 43 times. In fact, the first expressed feature of an ideal reader is that he should comprehend what he reads and likewise, it is not expected for a reader to be passive during the comprehension process of the text because he takes notes and increases the intelligibility.

The third statement frequently repeated is that "**ideal reader always reads books and various reading materials**". This statement has been stated for 40 times. The case shows that the prospective teachers have a perception that ideal reader always reads. Ideal readers are the one reading all the time for prospective teachers.

The following is another perception of prospective teachers: ideal readers like reading in addition to abundance in their reading frequency. The statement "**Ideal reader is the one assuming reading as a part of the life and they like reading**" has been repeated for 34 times.

Another perspective about ideal reader is that **ideal reader knows what they read contributes and improves him**. From this point of view, it can be considered that almost one third of the participants have a pragmatic point of view because 30 statements has been uttered parallel to statement above.

There are also statements having pragmatic perspective and repeated for 28 times. The statement is that **ideal reader reads for a purpose, he does not read the book he does not like and he does not spend time on reading unqualified books**. When the two statements are combined, it can be deduced that more than half of the participants read for pleasure or information. However, contrary to what is expressed, it is detected that participants have uttered that **ideal reader reads any kind books and reading materials** for 19 times.

The statement, **ideal readers follow newly published books** has been uttered for 20 times. Another interesting point is that prospective teachers claim that **ideal readers express**

**themselves in written or verbal forms effectively.** This is repeated for 17 times. It can be said that almost one fifth of participants think that advanced readers are also good narrators.

Another statement repeated for 16 times is that **ideal readers read the text as if he lives in fictional world and puts himself into one of the character's shoes.**

Once again by considering pragmatic point of view, it is thought that reading enhances individual's knowledge. Accordingly, **ideal readers have knowledge about many issues and have high general knowledge level** statement has been uttered for 10 times.

It is observed that the participants think that reading changes one's world view although its frequency is low. Likewise, it is stated for 7 times that **ideal reader does not ignore that a case may have many reasons behind by keeping things in perspective.** Similarly, the statement, **ideal reader is not biased about any books** has been repeated for 6 times.

It is not possible to expect the existence of a reader without a library or a library without any readers; however, it is seen that the statement, **ideal reader has a library** has been uttered only for 4 times in interview forms.

It is noticed that **ideal reader is a type of reader imitated by other readers** is stated for two times. It can be deduced that ideal reader has a role as a model but what is pointed out here is not his personal features.

Along with the statements stated more than once, the followings are uttered only for once: **“ideal reader has comprehensive knowledge of classics”**; **“ideal reader is a patient reader”**; **“ideal reader should read the book he read before, again”**; **“ideal reader also develops all skills in language learning”**; **“he can perform e- reading”**; **“ideal reader reads not always but in his spare time”**.

## 2. Findings concerning the second sub- problem:

In the answers given to this question, prospective teachers point out their teachers either in previous education levels or in bachelor's degree as ideal readers. Teachers have been implied as ideal readers for 41 times, friends have been stated for 19 times and one of the family members for 9 times.

It directs one to think that family members are regarded as ideal readers in low frequency level although they live together and it is possible to consider them role models. Moreover, another confusing issue is that 29 of the participants have said that they have nobody to consider as an ideal reader. The number equals almost one third of the participants. In



addition, none of the readers accept themselves as ideal readers. Ones who are prospective teachers do not regard themselves but their teachers as ideal readers.

### 3. Findings concerning the third sub- problem:

Metaphors are categorized by the researcher. In the first group among three formed groups, ideal reader is resembled to machines and emphasized that ideal reader always studies. In the second group, ideal reader is associated to recipient things because of his need to information. In the third group, transmitter feature of ideal reader has been emphasized as a teacher or light bulb.

The followings are the things resembled to ideal reader and their frequency in the first group: factory (*f* 3), train, robot (*f* 2), machine, car, watch. It is also seen that ideal reader has been associated to either various animals or occupations as he studies all the time: ant (*f* 2), eagle looking for a victim, bookworm (*f* 3), critic (*f* 2), scientist (*f* 2), one picking a rose (*f* 2), builder's laborer, officer, cook, athlete, editor, policeman, gardener, puzzle (*f* 2).

Ideal reader has been resembled to a teacher as he is thought to disseminate knowledge he got in the books. The metaphors are sometimes objects, living being and sometimes people such as glow- worm, mirror (*f* 2), fashion, label, teacher (*f* 5), tree (*f* 3), sun (*f* 3), moon, rain (*f* 3), person addressing to others, saint, chair, friendship.

In the third group, there are some metaphors related to recipient feature of ideal reader. It is seen that the number of the metaphors produced in that way is strikingly high: developing technology, well, obese (*f* 5), consumer in a market (*f* 3), lover, sage, library (*f* 3), ocean, sapling (*f* 2), milking woman, wheat, mouse, a 3-4 year old child, sea, facebook, customs officer, bee, one collecting newspaper coupon, the thinker, chess player, one liking to observe a bear, a recluse, an enduring building, three meals a day.

### Conclusion:

According to the answers given by the pre-service teachers, the most important feature of "ideal reader" is that he has ability to criticize the text and makes interpretation in order to comprehend. Accordingly, Uygur (1985) expresses that the main reason behind reading is to get the text and the "meaning" by any means. Eco (2008: 46- 47) says "any object whether terrestrial or celestial has mystery. If a mystery is solved, it implies about another mystery and this will lead to ultimate mystery gradually. There is not an ultimate mystery, anyway. Ultimate mystery of getting hermetic knowledge is to know that everything is mystery." The mentioned reader knows that in fact, any deciphered meaning has another meaning in it. However, Özbek (2007), states that it is important to get what you read in order to have a reading habit. Eagleton

(2004: 133) thinks that the meaning is not comprised of only the messages sent in the text. He emphasizes the function of the reader and the society in the formation process by saying that the meaning of the text is not something internal but it is also a result of the relationship among other texts, code and norms in literature and society. Meaning also changes according to the “expectations” of the reader. Manguel (2013) has a concept called reception aesthetic and it is similar to the idea mentioned above. According to him, ideal readers will not enjoy the texts he read before as they get older.

One of the results acquired out of semi-structured interviews is that pre-service teachers have a pragmatic point of view. The statement “ideal reader knows that what he reads helps him develop himself” has been uttered for 30 times by the participants. In fact, this perspective is not the possessed not only by prospective teachers but also all society. Likewise, Özbay and Bahar (2012) get the similar result in their study. The result is that one getting a good education is a “qualified reader”; ones not getting a good education is regarded as “unqualified reader” in regard to perception of society. Education is associated to reading and that is why education process is expressed with an only word “to read”. According to the association of publishers school books are bestseller and one person buy 3,9 books in a year in Turkey in 2013. Nevertheless, litterateurs emphasize that ideal or qualified readers should read for pleasure (Nabokov, 2014; Eco, 2008-2009; Manguel, 2013). Besides, ideal reader described by the pre-service teachers looks for knowledge and training, the benefit and easiness they acquire out of what they read. Accordingly, participants have likened ideal reader to obese, consumer and library as considering his “glutton” and consuming feature. Contrary to litterateurs, participants have not stated even once that ideal reader reads for aesthetic pleasure.

Moran (2008) has a different point of view. He says “it does not accord with aesthetic attitude if they are read to acquire information. One reading a novel, which is about the events in Africa in order to learn about inhabitants’ customs, traditions has informational attitude not aesthetic. For some people, they relate what they read to their own life. They identify them and their lovers with characters in the books. They get another non- aesthetic pleasure out of these identifications.” As opposed to Moran’s (2008) statement, participants has expressed that ideal reader reads materials only for himself or his development. Although the statement above has been uttered low in frequency, it shows that the participants have pragmatic perspective. In addition, it is seen that for 40 times, participants say ideal reader reads any books and reading materials. It means they read every reading materials.

For 16 times, prospective teachers have stated that ideal reader should read the text by putting himself into one of the characters’ shoes in the fictional world. Likewise, Manguel

(2013) has said that ideal reader should fall in love one of the characters in the text; however, one should keep in his mind that fictional and real lives are different from each other. Besides, one should be aware of that insensible line. Likewise, qualified reader should not ignore fictional text's fictive structure. "The claim which is about to learn the exact history of the world by considering historical structure created in fictional works is definitely wrong. Qualified readers should notice the difference between reality and fiction." (Nabokov, 2014: 36). In addition, Pamuk (2011) has described the reader confusing real and fictional world as "naïve reader".

One of the results acquired is that participants point out their teachers in previous education levels or at undergraduate level as ideal readers. Likewise, friends and family members are also stated as ideal readers despite the low frequency. Moreover, it directs one to think that almost one third of participants express that I do not know anybody to consider as ideal readers. In addition to that, none of the participants accept themselves as ideal readers but their teachers although they, themselves are teacher candidates.

All in all, prospective teachers present an ideal reader having pragmatic perspective beyond "ideal reader who is one of the elements of literary criticism" handled in literature (Jr, 1978). This kind of reader reads only the books that he can benefit and does not read others. Reading based on learning and pleasure is performed but reading based on aesthetic pleasure is ignored. This reader has been resembled to "obese" by participants. Teachers helping to develop participants in educational process have been considered as ideal readers. No matter how described, a qualified reader dealing with reading and reading materials; reading at any chance; having a book, magazine... etc. notebook and pencil with him is pretty important in the formation of a society thinking in critical and creative way and establishing democracy.

### **Recommendations:**

By considering the results, it is necessary to change perspectives of prospective teachers studying at Turkish language education department. In this sense, artistic and aesthetic feature of reading should be emphasized. On the other hand, there are exams in every phase of education system. The mentioned exams are carried out in multiple choice tests. Reading is an act almost always practiced in order to do homework. To overcome these, homework and exam anxiety should be ruled out. Moreover, the readers should be encouraged to read for aesthetics rather than pragmatic purposes.

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