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The ecological background of education in Turkish cinema

Talha Göktentürk [1], Sevgen Özbaşı [2], Mehmet Hilmi Sağlam [3], Emre Yazıcı [4]

Abstract

Educational films, beginning with *Çalıkuşu* in the 1960s, have increasingly expanded their presence in Turkish cinema. These films not only reflect societal perceptions of education but also provide a condensed overview of the history of Turkish education. Thus, education in Turkish cinema has emerged as a significant cultural phenomenon. This study examined the most critically acclaimed Turkish film with an educational theme from each decade since the 1960s, as determined by Internet Movie Database (IMDb) scores (*Çalıkuşu, The Chaos Class, A Season in Hakkari, Bullshit, On the Way to School, and Brother's Keeper*). Phenomenology was used as the research design to examine how education is represented as a cultural and educational phenomenon in Turkish cinema. The data were analyzed using open coding within the thematic analysis method, using NVivo 8 software within the ecological framework. The findings revealed ecological patterns influencing the teacher-student relationship and identified the depiction of the "burnout school" in The *Chaos Class*. Qualitative models were developed for each film, and three key themes emerged: (1) The behaviorist approach is prominently reflected in the films, including those set in the 21st century; (2) Throughout cinematic history, characters such as teachers, students, school staff, and families are depicted as being influenced by complex ecological factors; and (3) In every decade, films provide rich insights into the ecological background of education, particularly in the areas of values education, teaching methods, classroom and school management, and measurement and evaluation. Thus, Turkish cinema not only serves as a mirror reflecting the trajectory of educational history but also holds the potential to shape society's perceptions of education.

Keywords

Turkish cinema
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[1] Department of Turkish Education, Faculty of Education, Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul, Türkiye, talhagoktenturk@gmail.com
[2] Department of Turkish Education, Faculty of Education, Başkent University, Ankara, Türkiye, sevgenozbas@gmail.com
[3] Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, Faculty of Education, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, dr.emreyazici@gmail.com
[4] Department of Turkish Education, Faculty of Education, Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul, Türkiye, mehmethilmisaglam@gmail.com

Introduction

Cinema has long been a powerful medium for capturing and reflecting the complexities of human experience. While the technology of photography introduced the ability to depict three-dimensional images, cinema expanded this capability by adding movement and flow, creating a new narrative form (Usai, 1996). Since its inception, countless films have been produced worldwide, each offering unique perspectives on reality (Walters, 2008). Films, though not direct reflections of reality, serve as windows into different cultural, social, and political contexts, providing audiences with rich, multidimensional narratives (Escher, 2006).

Turkish cinema, like other national cinemas, mirrors the cultural, geographical, and social realities of its time and place. The role of cinema in Turkish society has evolved from its early uses by official and semi-official institutions to communicate social messages (Beyoğlu, 2018) to its current place in the private sector, producing films that reflect the country's changing identity. Over time, Turkish cinema has shifted from a fairy-tale narrative style to a more realistic and individual-centered focus, particularly from the 1980s onward (Kibaroğlu, 2015; Yılmaz, 2011). This evolution reflects a deeper exploration of the individual's relationship with society, framed within the country's socio-cultural dynamics.

Despite the extensive production of films, there has been limited academic exploration of how Turkish cinema portrays educational environments and the broader ecological factors influencing them. This study seeks to address this gap by using an ecological model to examine how educational themes, particularly the teacher-student relationship, are depicted in Turkish cinema. While specific dimensions of education-themed Turkish films, such as teacher image, measurement and evaluation, classroom management, and values education, have been examined in previous studies (Akcan & Polat, 2016; Doğan, 2017; Kezer & Çetiner, 2019; Tofur, 2017; Ünal, 2020), the Turkish cinematic portrayal of education, with its unique cultural and socio-political backdrop, has not received the same level of scholarly attention through a systematic ecological framework. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity to understand how Turkish films reflect the complexities of education, particularly in the face of socio-economic disparities, linguistic diversity, and regional differences.

By situating this research within Turkey, a country marked by diverse ecological variables ranging from deeply personal factors to national-level influences (Göktentürk, 2021; Göktentürk et al., 2023), this study contributes to a broader understanding of how educational systems function within specific cultural and societal frameworks. Turkey's history of educational reforms (Aksit, 2007), socio-political challenges (Giorgetti, 2019), and cultural diversity (Kaya, 2010) makes it an ideal context to explore the intersection of education and cinema. Furthermore, understanding these portrayals in Turkish films can offer new insights into the ways educational environments are shaped by broader social forces, making the findings relevant not only to Turkey but also to international discussions on education and society.

To frame this analysis, the ecological model, developed by Zumbo (Zumbo et al., 2015), is employed. This model allows for a comprehensive examination of the individual's interactions within multiple layers of influence, from personal characteristics to broader societal and institutional factors. Previous studies have applied ecological frameworks to understand education (Göktentürk et al., 2023; Sağlam et al., 2023; Saglam & Goktenturk, 2024; Toprak Ay & Göktentürk, 2023), but none have systematically explored Turkish cinema's role in reflecting these ecological dynamics. By adapting Zumbo's model to this study, we aim to offer a nuanced understanding of how Turkish films depict the complexities of educational environments and their broader socio-cultural contexts. Thereby, this study addresses the gap in literature by applying an ecological model to examine educational themes in Turkish cinema. It aims to contribute to both cinema studies and educational research by offering a framework to understand how films can serve as mirrors of educational realities, shaped by ecological factors unique to Turkey. Through this approach, the study provides a deeper exploration of the cultural, social, and political forces at play in educational narratives. More specifically, it has the

potential to contribute to both education and cinema studies by offering a systematic framework for interpreting educational films across time, by making visible the ecological factors that shape teacher and student experiences, and by identifying recurring patterns that may inform future research, teacher education, and discussions of educational policy. In this way, the study expands the academic conversation on how education is portrayed in cinema and why such portrayals matter.

A Guide to Understanding the Background of Education in Turkish Cinema: The Ecological Model

In Turkish cinema, the description of the process through the eyes of the teacher and the student is typical. To examine the environmental factors presented in films, the study adopts an ecological approach, which should be considered a critical perspective within the Turkish education system (Göktentürk, 2021; Göktentürk et al., 2023; Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2024). This viewpoint, presented as an ecological system theory on child development, is based on the principle that a diverse environment has an impact on both the individual and the society in which the child lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979a, 1979b). Studies conducted in line with this theory, which has significantly influenced social sciences for approximately 40 years, have revealed that it would be wrong to examine any stakeholder in education circles independently of the ecological background (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Similarly, this model continued to advance in a variety of academic sectors in addition to education (Tudge et al., 2016).

After Bronfenbrenner's theory, the socio-ecological framework was developed to make the model more systematically applicable (Kilanowski, 2017). The model places the individual at the center and builds layers around the person, from the closest to the furthest. These strata extend to variables at the community level. In different studies, one or more of the necessary layers are adapted for research purposes (Ssewanyana et al., 2020; Townsend & Foster, 2013). Drawing from this foundation, Zumbo (2015) refined and expanded Bronfenbrenner's ecological insights to develop a more structured stratification system. His model offers a precise framework that responds to the evolving needs of educational research by addressing new variables within these ecological layers. In this study, Zumbo's model has been adapted into a four-layer structure to fully capture the environmental influences on both the teacher and the student. The framework used in this analysis is presented in Figure 1.

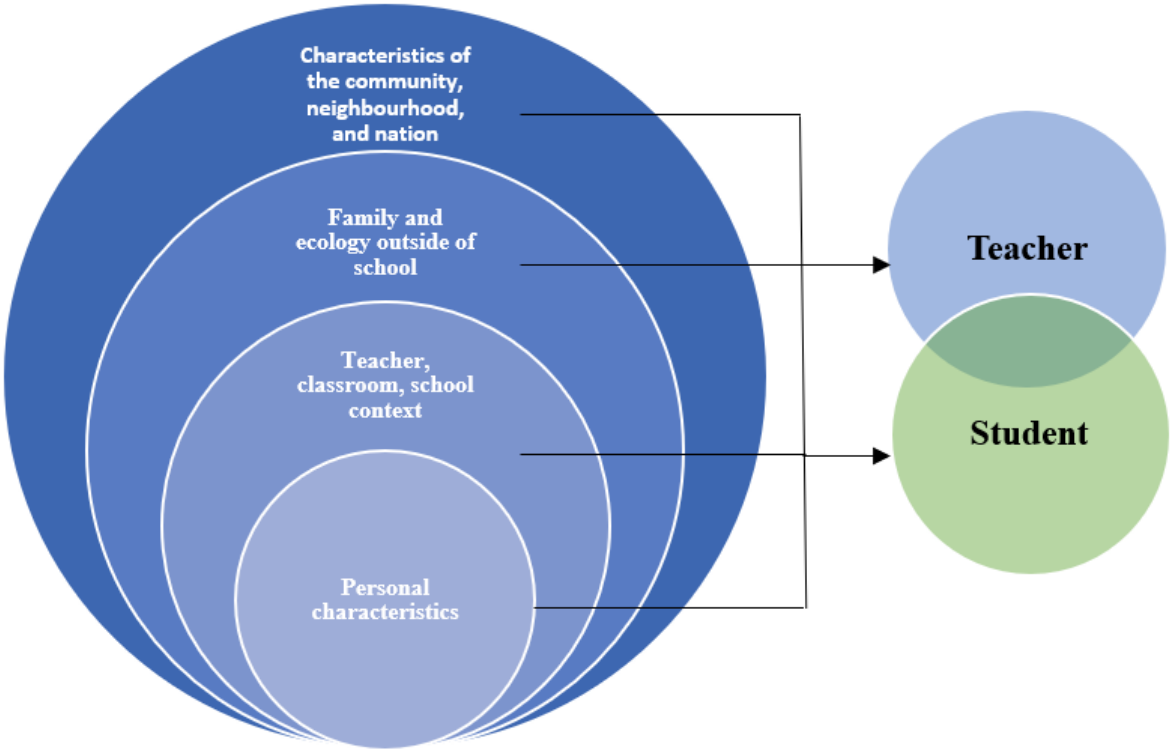

Figure 1. Ecological model for examining the education theme in Turkish cinema

The model organizes independent variables into four layers to explain the ecological background of both teachers and students in Turkish films. The first layer focuses on personal characteristics of the teacher or student, while the second layer encompasses environmental variables such as school culture, libraries, and playgrounds within the classroom or school boundaries. The third layer explores family and living environment factors, and the fourth layer reflects the broader education system, national traits, and societal influences on teachers and students.

This approach is particularly relevant given Turkey's rich and diverse ecological variables, which range from personal factors to national-level influences (Göktentürk, 2021). By systematically examining these layers, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Turkish films reflect and interpret the educational processes within these varied contexts. The use of Zumbo's ecological layers allows for a nuanced exploration of these dynamics (Göktentürk et al., 2023; Sağlam et al., 2023; Saglam & Goktenturk, 2024), making it possible to capture the full scope of influences on teacher-student interactions as depicted in Turkish cinema.

The ecological framework's emphasis on in vivo measurement (Zumbo, 2015, 2017) —capturing variables as they naturally occur in context—aligns well with the goal of analyzing films, which often serve as cultural mirrors reflecting the societal values, norms, and challenges of the time (Chapman, 2003; Grodal, 2009). By applying this model, the study moves beyond a simple content analysis of educational themes, delving into the deeper, context-driven factors that influence the portrayal of education in Turkish cinema. This theoretical approach not only enhances the academic rigor of the study but also positions it within the broader discourse on the role of ecological factors in education, offering new insights into how these factors are depicted and understood in different cultural contexts.

The ecological model, adapted for this study, provides a robust framework for analyzing how educational themes are depicted in Turkish cinema by examining the interplay between teachers and students within their broader ecological contexts. Turkish cinema often portrays the educational process through the experiences of teachers and students, highlighting the significant role that environmental factors play in shaping these experiences (Demir, 2020; Orta, 2007; Yetimova, 2019). By situating the analysis within the ecological framework, this study aims to uncover the complex relationships between individual characteristics and the broader societal and cultural influences that permeate educational environments.

In line with the ecological model adopted in this study, the research question is as follows: "How is education reflected in educational Turkish films when examined through an ecological perspective?" Thus, the behaviorist approach, which directed the Turkish education system from the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, will be handled. Further, the individual-centered paradigm, and the ecological environment, largely neglected by the constructivist approach (Bada, 2015), will be addressed. In this respect, the ecology-based model constitutes the main framework of the research.

Recent methodological discussions indicate that films and documentaries can function not only as pedagogical tools but also as valuable sources of secondary qualitative data when they are analyzed systematically in relation to a social phenomenon (Daniel et al., 2025). Likewise, phenomenological and film-based studies in education have shown that films can be used to examine pre-service teachers' perceptions, metaphors, and professional development in relation to educational themes (Çam, 2023; Tofur, 2018). These studies demonstrate that films are capable of revealing how educational meanings are experienced, interpreted, and narrated.

However, existing studies have generally focused either on the pedagogical use of films or on the analysis of specific educational elements in individual films. A systematic examination of the phenomenon of education itself across Turkish films from different decades remains limited. In this

respect, the present study is expected to contribute to the literature in several ways. First, it provides a diachronic framework for understanding how education has been narratively constructed in Turkish cinema. Second, it shows how teacher-student relationships are shaped by ecological layers extending from personal characteristics to national-level conditions. Third, it offers a conceptual basis for future qualitative and quantitative studies on recurrent patterns identified in the films, such as institutional burnout, socio-economic deprivation, and linguistic barriers.

Method

The central assumption of the study is that education in Turkish cinema can be approached as a phenomenon. Phenomena emerge when reality cannot be fully grasped in a direct or exhaustive way and when meanings extend beyond the individual into broader structures of experience (Husserl, 1999). Due to their nature, they can be studied by reducing them to a framework for research (Norlyk & Harder, 2010). In the reduction process, a framework should be created from the past to the research moment, and the research phenomenon that turns into an object of study should be specific (Giorgi, 1997). In this respect, the study adopts scientific phenomenology as a methodological orientation rather than philosophical phenomenology as a purely abstract position. Studies based on scientific phenomenology provide a framework and an understanding that facilitate the application of systematic methods (Giorgi, 2000). In film-based inquiry, phenomenology does not treat films as direct reality; rather, it approaches them as narrative representations through which lived experiences, perceptions, and social meanings become visible and open to interpretation. In this respect, films can be examined phenomenologically when they are treated as meaning-bearing depictions of a social phenomenon and analyzed systematically in relation to that phenomenon. Recent studies have shown that films and documentaries can function as qualitative data sources in such analyses (Daniel et al., 2025), while phenomenological and film-based studies in education have used films to examine professional development, educational perceptions, and classroom meanings (Çam, 2023; Tofur, 2018). Likewise, this study aims to create a framework and an understanding of the ecological background of students and teachers in Turkish cinema. Because education in Turkish cinema can be approached as a phenomenon, educational films were examined in this study as representations reflecting people's perceptions of reality through the lens of Zumbo's ecological framework (Göktentürk et al., 2023; Zumbo, 2015). By presenting the data through this lens, the study offers novel insights into how education is portrayed and affected by external ecological layers, addressing a gap in the existing literature on Turkish cinema and educational research. This methodological rigor ensures that the analysis aligns with the study's theoretical framework, providing a transparent and systematic approach to understanding the complex relationships depicted in the films.

Data Source and Selection of Films

As a qualitative study, this research used selected Turkish films as its data source. The films that are the subject of the study were determined by criterion sampling (Creswell, 2009). The period of 1960, when educational themes first appeared with feature film, was chosen as the starting point for the films in the study. Additionally, the periods when the behaviorist and the constructivist approaches dominated the Turkish education system determined the titles of the films examined. Films selected for a more systematic reflection of the transformations in Turkish society are divided into 10-year periods: 1960-69; 1970-79; 1980-89; 1990-99; 2000-09; 2010-2022. For each ten-year period, Turkish films with educational themes were first identified using Internet Movie Database's (IMDb) filtering system. Among the films listed within each period, the one with the highest IMDb rating at the time of the research was selected for analysis. In this way, each decade was represented by the educational film with the greatest observable audience-based impact within its own period.

Internet Movie Database (IMDb) scores were used as a criterion for identifying the film with the highest observable impact, in line with the literature (Canet et al., 2016). IMDb ratings are accepted as a significant index in terms of the quality of the movies due to their power of influence as the largest movie database (Kanika, 2017). For the same reason, determining the score of a film that will be released

on IMDb is the subject of different studies, such as machine learning (Bristi et al., 2019). A Bayesian calculation is used to determine the film scores. The formula used to calculate the overall movie score is presented below. In this calculation, the votes of all participants are equally included in the system. In the actual system of IMDb, there are criteria such as users with more points (i.e., some users' points are more valuable than others). In order to keep the system safe, the original formula is not shared with users (Azzeh, 2017).

$$\bar{p}_j = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} r_{ij}$$

$$IMDb\ Score_j = \frac{n}{(n+MinR)} \times \bar{p}_j + \frac{MinR}{(n+MinR)} \times \bar{p}$$

" $\bar{p}_j$" refers to the selected film. "n" refers to the total number of votes. *MinR* refers to the minimum number of votes required to be evaluated among the first 250 films. The commonly accepted threshold is 2500. The movies with the highest scores in the selected periods and containing the educational theme were included in the research. The films that are the subject of the examination in their final form are presented in Figure 2.

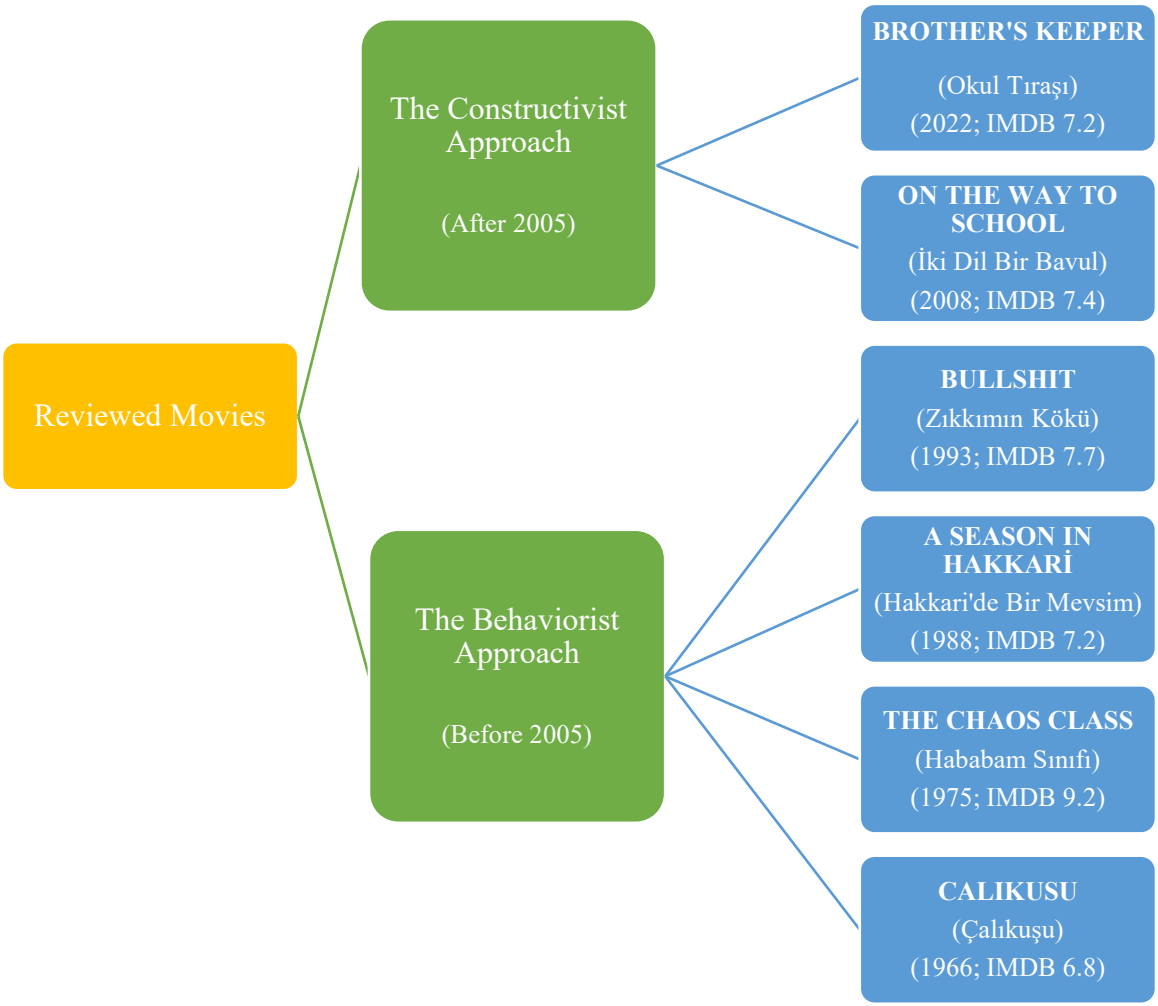

Figure 2. Selected Films Across Educational Periods in Turkish Cinema

Selected Film Corpus

Turkish cinema has a rich history of addressing educational themes, with films that reflect the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics of their time (Akıncı Yüksel, 2015). To gain a deeper understanding of how Turkish films depict educational environments and their complexities, it is useful

to focus on key films from different decades, as each decade in Turkish history represents a distinct sociocultural period that influences both the educational system and its portrayal in cinema (Akcan & Polat, 2016). The emergence of prominent films dealing with educational themes in Turkish cinema can be traced back to the 1960s and beyond, with IMDb ratings providing a useful metric for selecting the most influential films from each decade (Canet et al., 2016). Each of these films serves as a lens to explore how education is influenced by broader social, economic, and environmental factors. The final corpus consisted of six Turkish films selected from successive ten-year periods. These films constituted the analytical corpus of the study, as each represented a distinct historical moment in the portrayal of education in Turkish cinema. Together, they made it possible to examine how educational themes were depicted across different sociocultural periods and how these depictions corresponded to the ecological framework.

For the 1960-69 period, *Çalıkuşu* (IMDb 6.8), adapted from Reşat Nuri Güntekin's novel, was selected as the representative film. As one of the earliest prominent educational films in Turkish cinema, it marks the rise of education as a visible cinematic theme in the 1960s. This film, set in the late Ottoman Empire, tells the story of Feride, a teacher facing professional challenges and environmental hardships. *Çalıkuşu* reflects the societal expectations placed on teachers, particularly women, during this time (Demirel Değirmenci, 2021). The film portrays the teacher not only as a role model but also as an individual deeply shaped by the values of the society in which she operates (Akcan & Polat, 2016; Ünal, 2020). Taken together, these studies show that *Çalıkuşu* is significant not only as one of the earliest cinematic explorations of education in Turkey but also as a film reflecting both the individual and environmental challenges of the teaching profession.

For the 1970-79 period, *Hababam Sınıfı* (The Chaos Class, IMDb 9.2) was selected as the representative film. It emerged as a major cultural phenomenon in the 1970s. Directed by Ertem Eğilmez, this film is based on Rıfat Ilgaz's book and offers a comedic yet critical depiction of the education system. *The Chaos Class* presents a school environment rife with disciplinary issues, reflecting deeper systemic problems in education. It has been praised for its realistic portrayal of educational shortcomings, including ineffective evaluation methods, lack of motivation among students and teachers, and the burnout experienced by various stakeholders (Doğan, 2017; Kezer & Çetiner, 2019; Öztunç & Şanlı, 2019; Ünal, 2020). Taken together, these studies position the film as a key text for examining the intersection of education and social issues in Turkish cinema.

For the 1980-89 period, educational themes continued to gain prominence in Turkish cinema with films like *A Season in Hakkari* (IMDb 7.3), *Teacher* (IMDb 7.2), and *Teacher Kemal* (IMDb 7). Among these, A Season in Hakkari was selected as the representative film of the decade. The film stands out for its portrayal of a teacher who is alienated from both his profession and his community (Ünlü & Serarslan, 2012). It highlights the teacher's struggle to adapt to a remote and harsh environment, portraying the rural-urban divide as a central conflict (Oğurlu, 2019). Despite these challenges, the teacher's perseverance and commitment to his students create a productive learning environment (Bıçak, 2021). Through its depiction of regional and socio-economic disparities, the film offers valuable insights into the societal factors shaping education in rural Turkey, making it an important example for examining environmental influences on education.

For the 1990-99 period, *Bullshit* (IMDb 7.7), adapted from Muzaffer İzgü's novel was selected as the representative film. The film tells the story of Muzaffer, a student whose education is deeply affected by poverty and living conditions. As Öztürk (2004) shows, both the novel and the film emphasize the role of socio-economic factors in shaping the student's educational journey. In this respect, Bullshit was selected for this study because it powerfully depicts how external factors, particularly poverty, create barriers to educational success. Therefore, the film provides critical insights into the broader socio-economic issues that impact education, making it a crucial text for analyzing the ecological dimensions of educational environments in Turkish cinema.

For the 2000-09 period, *On the Way to School* (IMDb 7.4) was selected as the representative film because of its focus on linguistically diverse educational settings. The film focuses on a teacher working in southeastern Turkey, where the heritage language (Kurdish) and the second language (Turkish) create significant barriers to learning (Yetimova, 2019). The film also highlights the theme of poverty, further complicating the teacher's role as a mediator between different cultural and linguistic groups (Akcan & Polat, 2016; Akıncı Yüksel, 2015). Accordingly, the film offers a strong example of how language barriers and socio-economic disparities function as ecological factors affecting education.

For the post-2010 period, *Brother's Keeper* (IMDb 7.4) was selected as the representative film. Although it has already attracted scholarly attention in relation to educational themes (Demirtaş, 2024), it has not yet been examined extensively from an ecological perspective. Taken together, these six films constituted the analytical corpus of the study. Their chronological distribution and thematic diversity made it possible to examine how educational narratives in Turkish cinema changed across periods and how these narratives reflected different ecological layers.

Data Analysis

In this study, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding aligned with the ecological framework, drawing on the methods recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis. The analysis process began with familiarization with the data, including multiple viewings of selected films and detailed note-taking to capture initial impressions and patterns (Creswell, 2016).

*Codebook development and coding process***.** A comprehensive codebook was developed in alignment with the ecological model. The codebook was informed by the four ecological layers, with each layer acting as a broad thematic category under which codes were nested. The process of creating the codebook involved identifying key themes from the films, such as teacher-student dynamics, environmental challenges, socio-economic factors, and systemic issues, which were mapped to relevant layers within the model. Each film was analyzed systematically, applying a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes were derived from the theoretical model (e.g., "school management" or "classroom management") while inductive codes emerged organically from the data, capturing unique nuances specific to each film. This approach ensured that the coding process remained grounded in the theoretical framework while allowing for flexibility in identifying new themes (Charmaz, 2006).

After developing the initial codebook, the codes and themes were subjected to an expert review to ensure their validity and reliability (Miles et al., 2014). The expert chosen for this review had extensive experience in qualitative data analysis and a thorough understanding of the ecological framework used in the study. Before providing feedback, the expert was required to view all selected films to understand the context fully. The review process aimed to identify discrepancies between codes and the content they represented, as well as any inconsistencies between codes and themes. The expert also offered suggestions for consolidating certain codes under broader thematic categories where applicable.

Based on the expert's feedback, several revisions were made to improve coherence. Discrepancies were addressed by refining certain codes, and overlapping themes were merged to ensure a clear and consistent thematic structure. A second round of expert review followed these revisions, leading to full alignment between the expert and the research team (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This external validation strengthened the reliability of the codebook and ensured that the coding process was transparent and aligned with the theoretical framework.

*Analysis of codes and themes***.** After coding, codes were grouped into higher-order themes, which were continually refined throughout the analysis process. These themes were linked to the ecological framework, providing a multi-layered understanding of the teacher-student relationships and broader environmental influences depicted in Turkish cinema. Inter-coder reliability was ensured through

multiple iterations of coding by different members of the research team, followed by discussions to resolve discrepancies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The external expert's validation further contributed to the reliability and accuracy of the thematic analysis. Finally, the results were synthesized into a cohesive narrative that connects the themes identified in the films to the broader ecological model.

Results

The research findings are organized chronologically, based on the periods during which the films were produced. Each film adheres to a linear timeline, portraying a specific time frame with a natural progression. The findings are presented in ten-year increments, which allows for the creation of a systematic framework. This approach enables the construction of a comprehensive overview, capturing the ecological background of teachers, students, and schools in Turkish education from the past to the present. The reports for each film are therefore arranged in a corresponding chronological order.

Calikusu (Çalıkuşu): The Ecological Background Influencing the Life of Teachers in the Ottoman Empire (1966)

The analysis of *Çalıkuşu* (1966) through the lens of Zumbo's ecological model reveals the profound impact of the Ottoman Empire's complex ecological background on the professional life of teachers, particularly female educators like the protagonist, Feride. The film's narrative aligns well with the four-layer ecological framework, demonstrating how individual characteristics, school and classroom environments, family and societal influences, and broader national dynamics interplay to shape the educational experiences depicted in the film. The created model is presented in Figure 3.

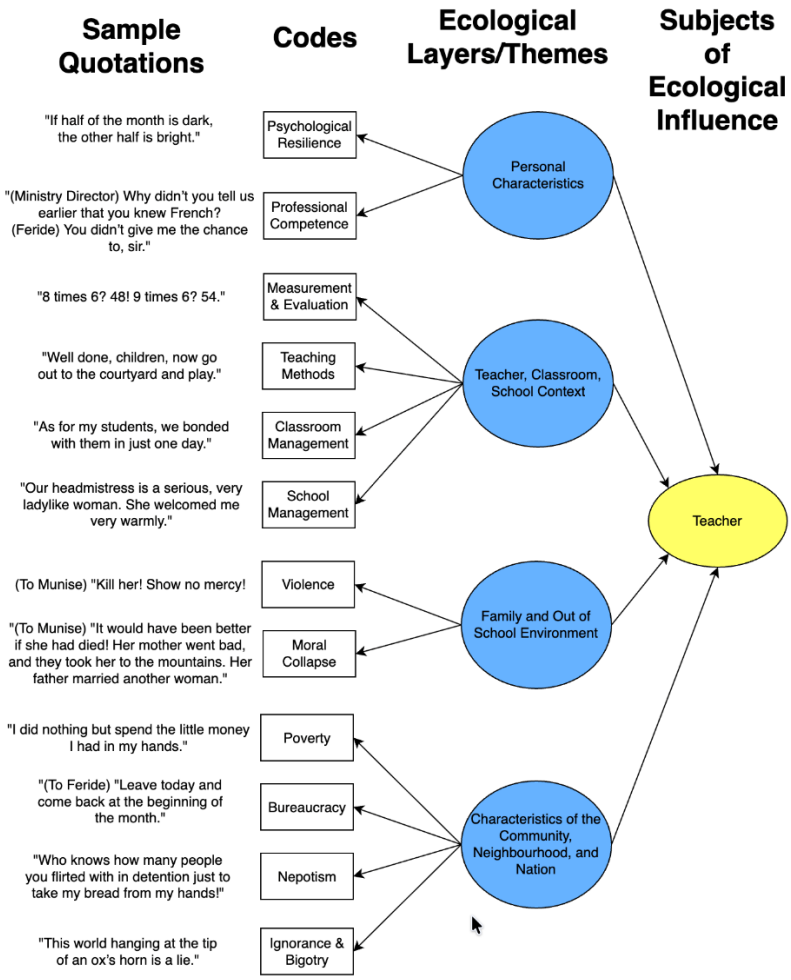

Figure 3. The Ecological Model of Calikusu (Çalıkuşu). Colors: Yellow for teachers, blue for the ecological model's layers/themes, colorless rectangles for the codes from analysis.

Layer 1: Personal Characteristics. Feride, the central character, embodies the traits of resilience and dedication, which are essential in navigating the challenging conditions of early 20th-century Ottoman society. Her *professional competence* is notable, as it is shaped by her education in a French school, which positively influences her communication skills and classroom management. Despite the adverse conditions she faces, including financial difficulties in the classroom and the village of Zeyniler, Feride manages to maintain a level of professionalism that allows her to connect with her students effectively. This layer underscores the significance of individual traits in determining a teacher's ability to adapt and thrive within the broader ecological context.

Layer 2: Teacher, Classroom, and School Context. The classroom in *Çalıkuşu* reflects a teacher-centered structure with rigid authority, following the behaviorist approach typical of the era. Measurement and evaluation focus on rote memorization, limiting both creative and critical thinking. The strict class order emphasizes discipline over intellectual exploration. Feride's strained relationship with the school administration highlights the systemic inefficiency and bureaucratic challenges that hinder educational reform. These issues mirror broader societal constraints, preventing effective teaching and learning.

Layer 3: Family and Ecology Outside of School. The non-school environment plays a crucial role in shaping the educational experience depicted in *Çalıkuşu*. The film vividly portrays the pervasive ignorance and moral degradation in the surrounding community as significant barriers to educational progress. Moreover, the stark gender inequality prevalent in Ottoman society—where the professional and personal lives of women are heavily restricted—directly impacts Feride's ability to perform her duties as a teacher. Domestic violence, peer bullying, and the deep-seated gender inequalities of the time further emphasize the oppressive nature of the external environment. These social factors create significant barriers to education, as students bring the weight of these external influences into the classroom. Feride's efforts to provide a positive learning experience are constantly challenged by these external pressures, illustrating how family and societal contexts can profoundly affect the educational process.

Layer 4: Characteristics of the Community, Neighborhood, and Nation. At this level, *Çalıkuşu* critiques the socio-political and economic conditions of the Ottoman Empire, illustrating how poverty, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and underdevelopment shape the educational landscape. Rural communities suffer from extreme poverty, lacking basic infrastructure like school buildings and educational materials, which hinders teachers like Feride from providing quality education. Bureaucratic stagnation further exacerbates these challenges, as the film portrays an inflexible state system that stifles educational reform and innovation, prioritizing order over meaningful learning. Teachers are left powerless, navigating a rigid structure that offers little support. The film also underscores the lack of human development in rural areas, where the state's neglect perpetuates cycles of poverty and socio-economic disparities. Ultimately, *Çalıkuşu* reflects a broader national struggle to modernize, exposing systemic failures that prevent progress and reform in education and society at large.

Overall, *Çalıkuşu* presents a teacher-centered but ecologically burdened educational world in which Feride's resilience and professional competence are persistently constrained by bureaucratic inefficiency, gender inequality, poverty, and moral decline. The film shows that education cannot be understood solely within classroom boundaries, because family, community, and national conditions directly shape the teacher's professional life. In this respect, *Çalıkuşu* offers a multi-layered ecological model in which individual dedication coexists with powerful structural limitations.

The Chaos Class (Hababam Sınıfı): A Burnout School (1975)

The Chaos Class (Hababam Sınıfı), released in 1975, provides a critical depiction of a dysfunctional educational environment, one that mirrors the systemic shortcomings of Turkish education during the era. Through the lens of Zumbo's ecological model, the film primarily foregrounds the *Teacher, Classroom, and School Context* layer and presents a distinctive model of a burnout school.

Because *Private Çamlıca High School* is depicted as a boarding school, stakeholder behaviors are represented almost entirely within school-related roles and institutional interactions. In this respect, even when the film presents decisions or dispositions that may seem individual, these are constructed not as expressions of an autonomous personal sphere but as extensions of stakeholder roles such as teacher, student, administrator, or school staff. Accordingly, these behaviors were interpreted through classroom practices, school management, and stakeholder relations rather than as part of an independent personal domain. Therefore, the film was analyzed within the *Teacher, Classroom, and School Context* layer. The ecological model developed from this analysis is presented in Figure 4.

Classroom Management. The film portrays a chaotic disciplinary climate, where traditional methods of classroom management have collapsed under the weight of institutional neglect and disinterest. Disciplinary punishment is ineffective, as both teachers and students have become disillusioned with the value of education. This is exacerbated by the authoritarian language used by teachers, which is characterized by teasing, humiliation, and targeting specific students. The breakdown of authority is most evident in how teachers oscillate between authoritarianism and indifference, reflecting a broader system of ineffective management. At times, teachers resort to praise and advising, but these gestures are often undermined by more dominant negative interactions like the use of "you-messages" and threats.

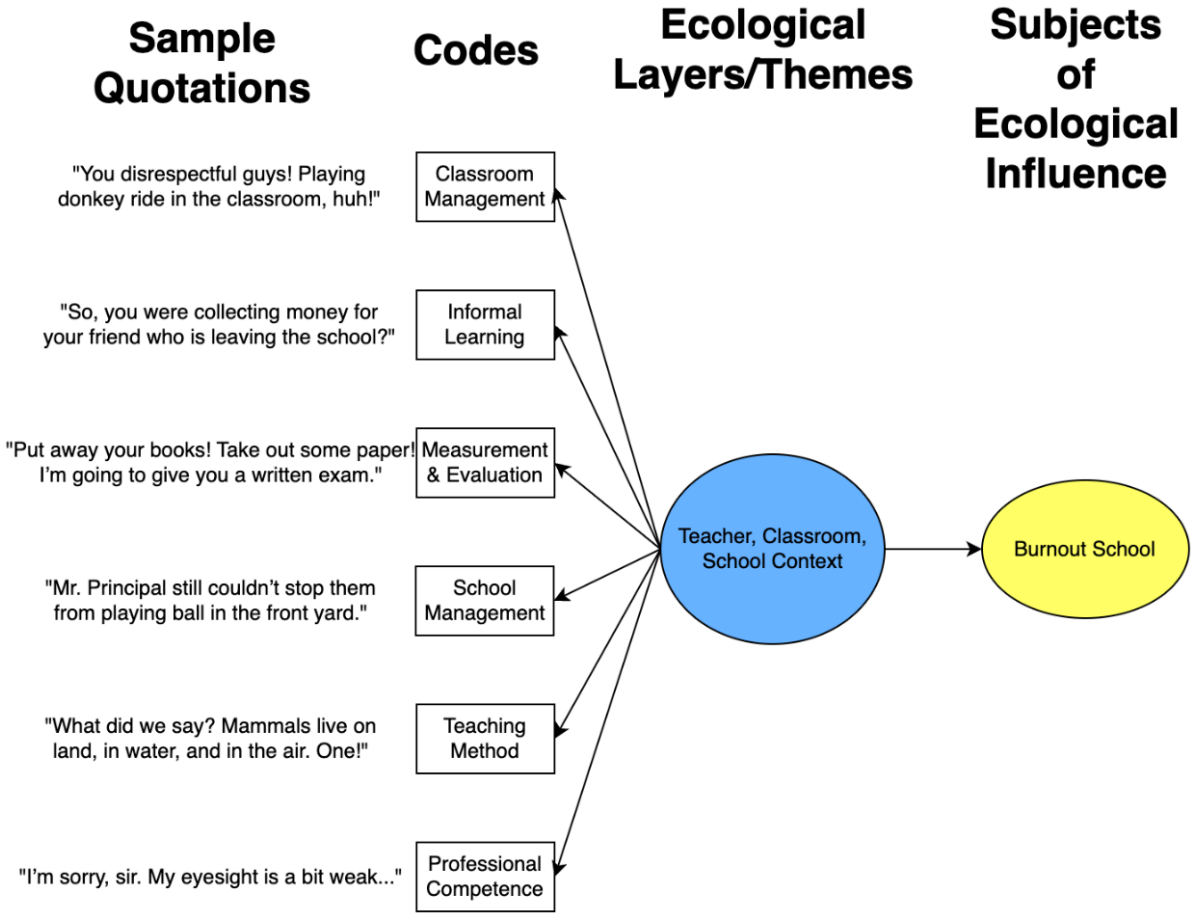

Figure 4. The ecological model of The Chaos Class (Hababam Sınıfı). Colors: Yellow for the school, blue for the ecological model's layers/themes, colorless rectangles for the codes from analysis.

Informal Learning. Within this disordered school environment, informal learning assumes a unique role, often fostering values like justice, honesty, idealism, respect, fidelity, and helpfulness. However, these ideals are juxtaposed with a corrupt system where these values are not consistently upheld. The students engage in various forms of cheating, often with the assistance of school staff like Hafize Ana, a janitor who helps the students undermine the educational process. This duality between the formal and informal education systems highlights the ethical dilemmas that pervade the school. The informal learning environment, although intended to promote moral development, becomes tainted by the pervasive corruption within the school.

Measurement and Evaluation. Evaluation practices in *The Chaos Class* are emblematic of the behaviorist approach, focusing almost exclusively on measurement at the remembrance level. Both oral and written examinations are used, but the purpose of these evaluations is reduced to formalities. Students frequently cheat with the knowledge and, at times, the assistance of the staff, rendering these assessments meaningless. The emphasis on rote memorization without fostering critical thinking further deepens the disconnect between the school's stated educational objectives and the actual learning environment.

Professional Competence. Teachers in the film are depicted as physically present but mentally disengaged from their roles. Their lack of professional ethics and class management competence is evident throughout, contributing to the overall atmosphere of neglect and apathy. This professional inadequacy is a core reason for the school's dysfunction, as the teachers' inability to manage their classrooms or engage with students effectively leaves the school environment in disarray.

School Management. The film's portrayal of school management is a sharp critique of institutional dysfunction. The principal is depicted as a figure more concerned with economic management and personal gain than the well-being of the students. Work distribution and professional orientation are neglected, contributing to an overall atmosphere of professional burnout among the teachers. The school's institutional culture is one of disinterest, corruption, and inefficiency, where educational success is neither expected nor prioritized. The film underscores the lack of proper governance and leadership within the school, which leads to further deterioration of the learning environment.

Violence is a recurrent theme in *The Chaos Class*, with instances of aggression between principals, students, and teachers. This pervasive violence is both a symptom and a cause of the school's collapse. Obedience to authority is demanded, but respect for authority is absent, resulting in a climate where violence and coercion replace genuine engagement and discipline. The film paints a grim picture of a school where fear and intimidation have become the primary tools for maintaining order, further alienating students from the learning process.

Teaching Methods. Teaching methods in *The Chaos Class* are limited and outdated, with a heavy reliance on question-answer sessions and presentation-based teaching. The lack of creativity and the failure to engage students with more innovative or interactive approaches to learning highlight the school's systemic issues. Organizing activities such as creative drama or engaging students in meaningful discussions is absent, reinforcing the rigid and uninspired instructional framework.

Overall, *The Chaos Class* portrays a school in which nearly all educational processes are absorbed into institutional dysfunction. Classroom management, informal learning, assessment, teaching methods, violence, and school administration converge to form a burnout school model characterized by behaviorist routines, professional disengagement, and systemic collapse. In this film, the model is constructed primarily from school-based ecological factors, as the film does not provide sufficient data to analyze out-of-school conditions systematically. Rather than presenting isolated educational problems, the film depicts the school itself as the central ecological source of deterioration.

A Season in Hakkari (Hakkari'de Bir Mevsim): The Struggle of an Isolated Teacher in a Harsh Environment (1983)

A Season in Hakkari (Hakkari'de Bir Mevsim) provides a compelling portrayal of the challenges faced by a teacher sent to a remote, rural village in southeastern Turkey. Through Zumbo's ecological framework, the film illustrates how various layers of influence—from personal characteristics to societal factors—shape the teacher's experiences and the broader educational environment. The four layers of the ecological model—Personal Characteristics, Teacher, Classroom, and School Context, Family and Ecology Outside of School, and Characteristics of the Community, Neighborhood, and Nation—are used to analyze the factors contributing to the teacher's struggle in this isolated setting. The created model is presented in Figure 5.

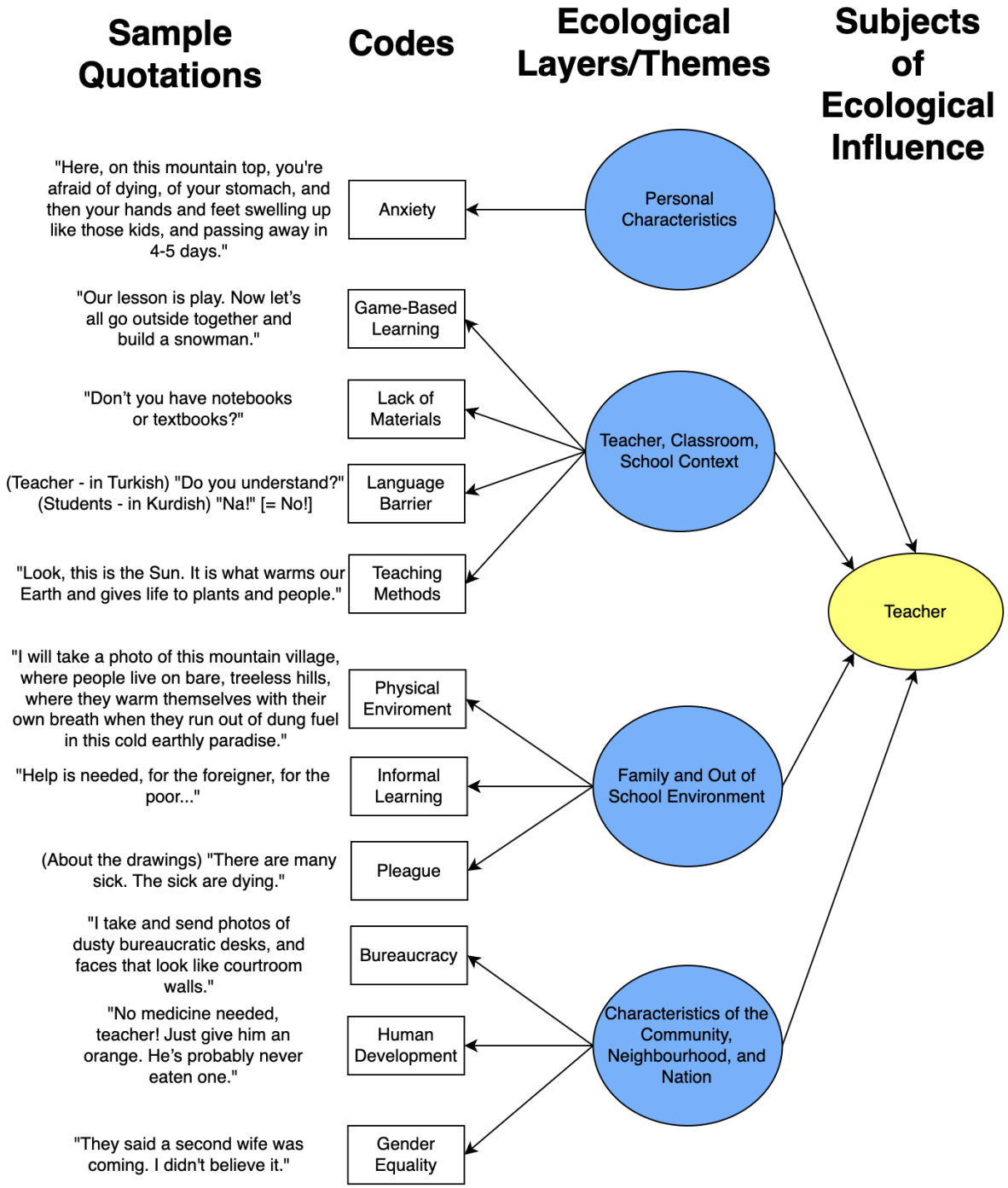

Figure 5. The ecological model of A Season in Hakkari (Hakkari'de Bir Mevsim). Colors: Yellow for teachers, blue for the ecological model's layers, colorless rectangles for the codes from analysis.

Layer 1: Personal Characteristics. In *A Season in Hakkari*, the teacher's personal characteristics are shaped primarily by the intense anxiety he experiences as a result of being placed in an unfamiliar, isolated environment. The overwhelming challenges of adapting to rural life, coupled with the emotional isolation and cultural differences, create a sense of profound anxiety that defines much of his professional and personal experience. The film portrays the teacher as someone ill-prepared for the harsh realities of the village. His urban background leaves him struggling to navigate the local customs, language barriers, and the extreme physical conditions. The anxiety generated by this new environment is not just personal but also professional, as the teacher constantly questions his ability to perform his duties effectively. The culture shock and feelings of alienation compound his anxiety, leaving him emotionally detached from both the community and his students.

Layer 2: Classroom and School Environment. The classroom and school environment in *A Season in Hakkari* is starkly under-resourced, with a severe lack of basic educational materials, poor infrastructure, and minimal administrative support. The teacher is left to manage his classroom in an environment that is physically and emotionally taxing. The harsh weather, dilapidated school building, and absence of a structured educational system all contribute to a challenging learning environment. Classroom management is particularly difficult, as the teacher must cope with the language barrier, a recurring issue throughout the film. Most students speak Kurdish as their first language, while the teacher communicates in Turkish, creating a significant obstacle to effective learning. The lack of educational materials further exacerbates the situation, limiting the teacher's ability to engage the students in meaningful learning. Additionally, the film presents the teacher's struggle with maintaining professional competence in an environment that offers little support, reflecting a broader systemic issue in rural education. The limited educational methods available in this context reinforce a behaviorist approach, where rote learning and basic question-answer techniques dominate. The teacher's efforts to implement more engaging pedagogical methods are stifled by the overwhelming lack of resources and the school's isolation from national educational reforms. This layer highlights the profound impact of material and institutional constraints on the educational process in remote areas.

Layer 3: Family and Ecology Outside of School. The broader ecological context outside the school plays a crucial role in shaping both the teacher's and the students' experiences. The film vividly depicts the economic hardships faced by the local population, where poverty is pervasive, and access to basic necessities is limited. These socio-economic conditions directly impact the students' ability to engage in education, as they are often preoccupied with family responsibilities and survival needs, leaving little room for academic pursuits. The teacher also confronts cultural norms that conflict with his urban values, particularly concerning gender roles, family structures, and traditional practices such as polygamy. These cultural dynamics further alienate him from the community and complicate his efforts to integrate into the local society. The ecological influence of the family and the broader community creates barriers to the teacher's attempts to foster a productive educational environment, as students are heavily influenced by the socio-cultural practices of their families.

Layer 4: Characteristics of the Community, Neighborhood, State, and Nation. At the broader societal level, *A Season in Hakkari* highlights the challenges posed by the remote and isolated nature of the village, which significantly hinders educational efforts. The film shows how the local structure, shaped by geographical and socio-cultural factors, delays the achievement of educational goals. The community's distinct cultural characteristics and local dynamics create barriers that complicate the teacher's ability to implement standardized educational practices. The socio-cultural differences within the region are reflected in the teacher's struggles to adapt to the local customs and languages, which are different from the urban environment he is familiar with. However, rather than focusing on divisions, the film suggests that these ecological differences—both social and cultural—present unique challenges to the teacher's efforts to connect with his students and the community.

Overall, *A Season in Hakkari* presents education as a struggle shaped by isolation, material scarcity, and socio-cultural distance. Across all ecological layers, the teacher's anxiety, the under-resourced school setting, the community's harsh living conditions, and broader regional inequalities

interact to constrain educational practice. The film therefore constructs an ecological model in which rural education is defined by the simultaneous pressure of personal, institutional, and macro-level challenges.

Bullshit (Zıkkımın Kökü): The Ecological Background of Students' Educational Life (1993)

The film *Bullshit (Zıkkımın Kökü)*, adapted from Muzaffer İzgü's novel, provides a powerful depiction of how socio-economic factors influence a student's educational experience. Through Zumbo's ecological model, the film's portrayal of the protagonist Muzaffer's life is examined across four layers: Personal Characteristics, Teacher, Classroom, and School Context, Family and Ecology Outside of School, and Characteristics of the Community, Neighborhood, and Nation. The created model is presented in Figure 6.

Layer 1: Personal Characteristics. At the core of Muzaffer's character is an intense love of reading, which serves as a crucial personal trait that influences his educational journey. Despite the challenging socio-economic conditions, Muzaffer's passion for knowledge and books drives him to excel academically. This intrinsic motivation to learn and grow intellectually becomes a key factor in his ability to overcome the numerous obstacles he faces. This personal trait stands in stark contrast to the external difficulties he encounters and plays a pivotal role in his ability to persist in his education despite the overwhelming obstacles. The film emphasizes how individual characteristics, such as a student's love of learning, can serve as a form of resilience in the face of adversity. However, this personal characteristic is also constantly tested by the socio-economic hardships that threaten to undermine his academic potential. This layer demonstrates the complex relationship between personal motivation and external factors, showing how Muzaffer's passion for education acts as both a coping mechanism and a catalyst for his success.

Layer 2: Classroom and School Environment. The school environment in *Bullshit* reflects the systemic issues of the Turkish education system during the 1990s, particularly in underfunded rural areas. The film portrays the classroom as a place where students are subjected to rigid, behaviorist teaching methods focused on memorization and repetition. Evaluations, both oral and written, are based on students' ability to recall information rather than engage in critical thinking or creativity. This educational approach limits students' opportunities for intellectual growth and development. The film critiques the lack of pedagogical innovation, where students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in their learning. Teachers in the film, though well-meaning, are constrained by the broader system, which prioritizes discipline and rote learning over fostering a more holistic educational experience. Muzaffer's classroom interactions highlight the disconnection between what is taught and the students' real-life experiences, further contributing to their disengagement from the learning process. Despite these challenges, the classroom also serves as a space of relative stability for Muzaffer, where his love for reading and learning is nurtured, albeit within the confines of a rigid educational system. This layer underscores the importance of classroom environments in shaping a student's educational trajectory, even when the teaching methods are limited.

Layer 3: Family and Ecology Outside of School. The socio-economic realities of Muzaffer's family and community play a significant role in shaping his educational experience. Poverty is a recurring theme in the film, with Muzaffer's family struggling to provide for basic needs, let alone support his academic pursuits. Muzaffer is forced to work outside of school to contribute to the household income, which limits his ability to focus on his studies. This dual burden of school and work creates a significant challenge, as Muzaffer is constantly torn between his responsibilities at home and his desire to excel academically. The film also portrays the broader community context, where education is often seen as secondary to the immediate economic needs of the family. However, despite these obstacles, Muzaffer finds opportunities for learning outside the formal school setting, such as through his local library. This informal learning environment provides him with an outlet to pursue his intellectual interests, demonstrating how community resources can sometimes mitigate the negative effects of socio-economic hardship.

Overall, *Bullshit* reveals how a student's educational life is shaped by the interaction between personal resilience and socio-economic deprivation. Although Muzaffer's love of reading sustains his motivation, the film shows that rigid school practices, poverty, family responsibilities, and limited opportunities outside school continuously shape and restrict his educational path. In this respect, the film offers a student-centered ecological model of persistence under structural disadvantage.

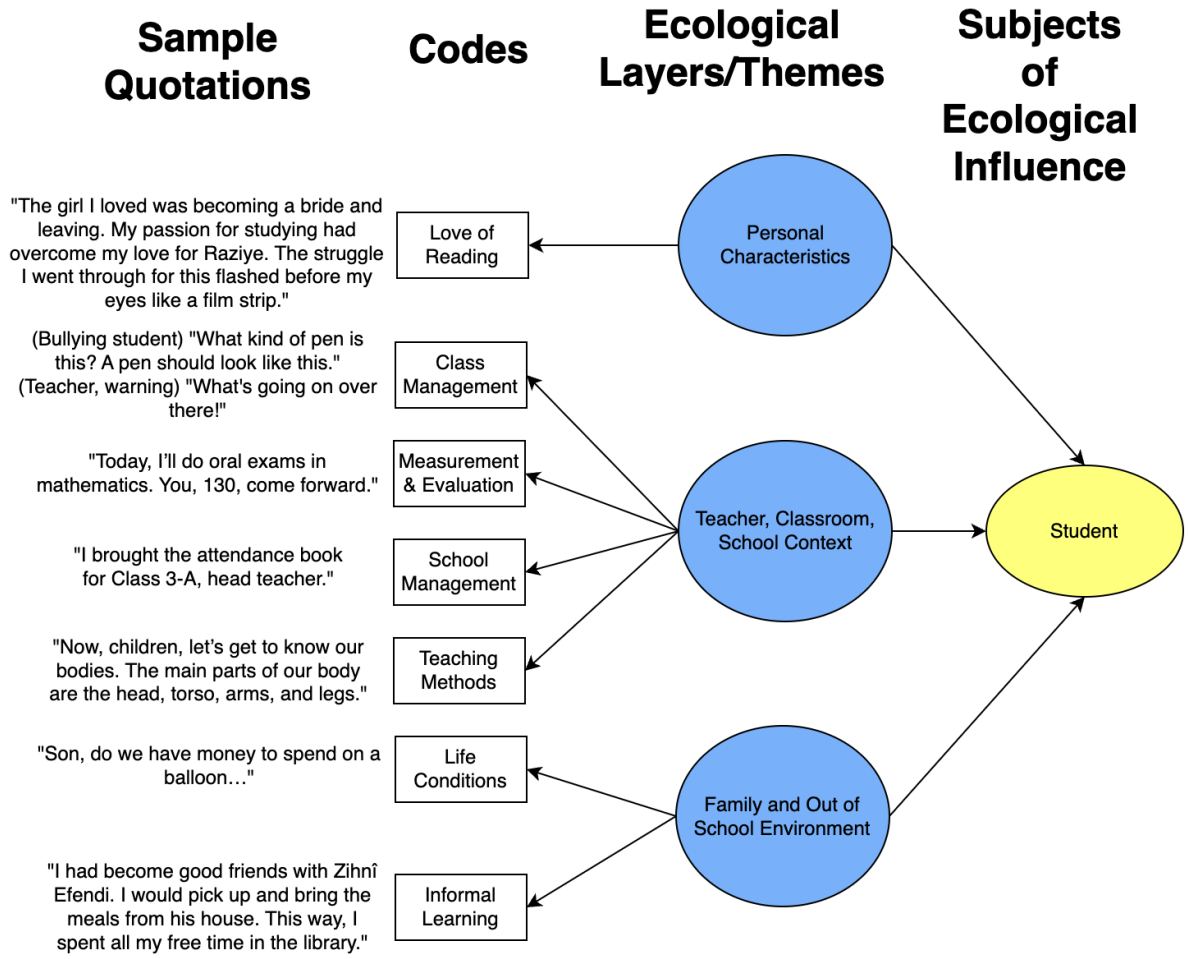

Figure 6. The ecological model of Bullshit (Zıkkımın Kökü). Colors: Yellow for students, blue for the ecological model's layers, colorless rectangles for the codes from analysis.

On the Way to School (İki Dil Bir Bavul): Addressing Educational Challenges in a Multilingual Context (2008)

On the Way to School (İki Dil Bir Bavul) presents the educational challenges faced by a teacher working in a predominantly Kurdish-speaking region in southeastern Turkey, where the national curriculum is delivered in Turkish. The analysis of this film through Zumbo's ecological model examines how four layers—Personal Characteristics; Teacher, Classroom, and School Context; Family and Out of School Environment; and Characteristics of the Community, Neighborhood, and Nation—interact to shape the educational environment portrayed in the film. The created model is presented in Figure 7.

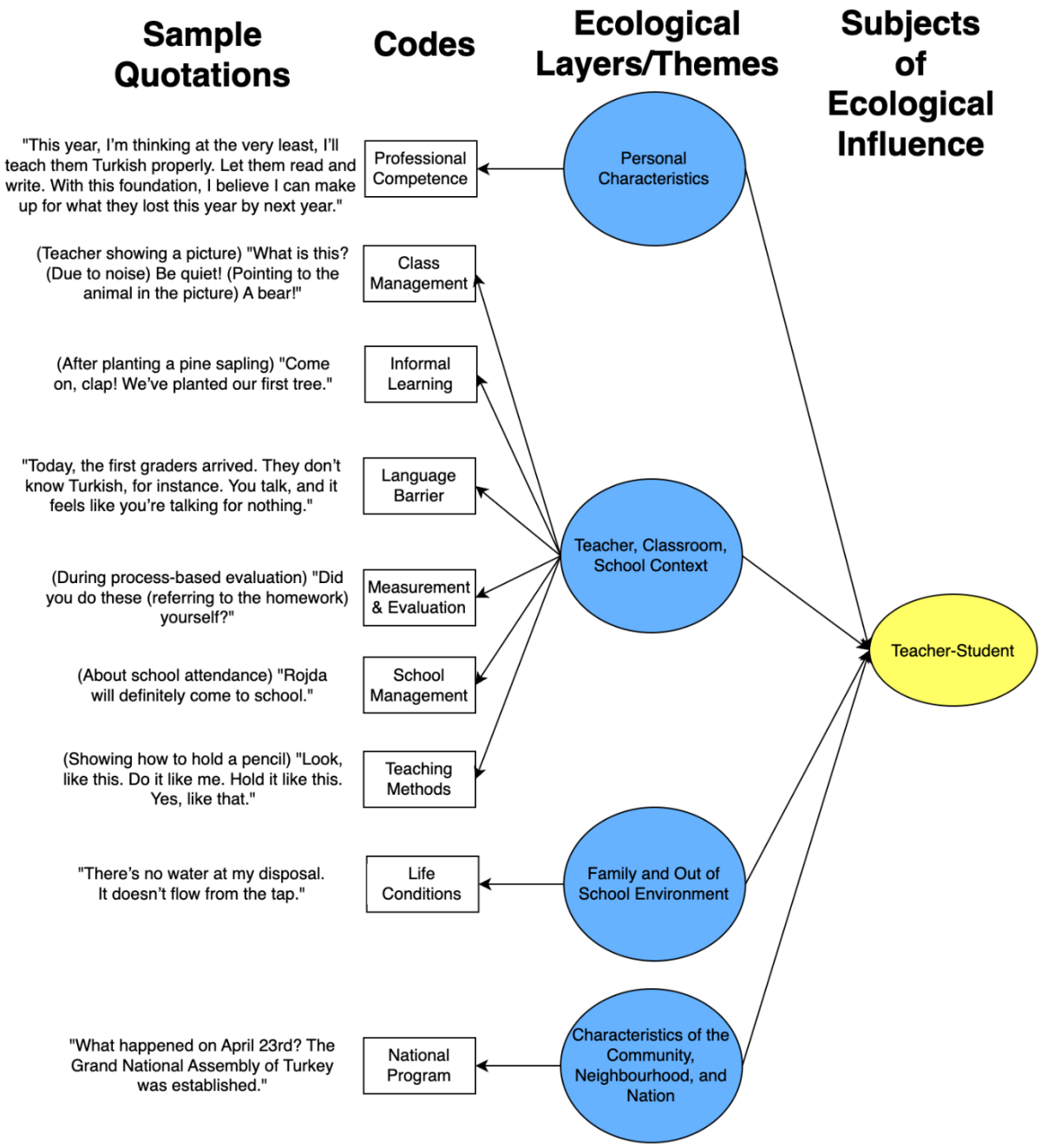

Figure 7. The ecological model of On the Way to School (İki Dil Bir Bavul). Colors: Yellow for teachers, blue for the ecological model's layers, colorless rectangles for the codes from analysis.

Layer 1: Personal Characteristics. In this layer, the teacher's personal characteristics are integral to his ability to navigate the multilingual classroom. The film emphasizes his professional competence and dedication to his role, despite being sent to a remote and unfamiliar environment. His motivation to teach in such a challenging context stem from his strong sense of duty, yet the film also reveals the psychological toll this situation takes on him. As the language barrier complicates his efforts, the teacher's frustration grows, revealing the emotional burden placed on educators working in isolated regions. This layer highlights the importance of individual resilience and competence in addressing the linguistic and cultural challenges of the classroom.

Layer 2: Teacher, Classroom, and School Environment. The classroom environment in *On the Way to School* is marked by limited resources and a lack of administrative support. The teacher operates in an isolated setting without any visible bureaucratic oversight, which forces him to juggle multiple

responsibilities beyond the scope of typical teaching duties. These conditions reflect the broader systemic challenges faced by educators in remote regions. Due to these constraints, the teaching methods and assessment processes depicted in the film are heavily influenced by a behaviorist approach. The teacher frequently uses you-messages in classroom management, and there is little evidence of the constructivist approach, which is still not fully integrated into the educational practices of the region. This layer illustrates how the lack of resources and support systems restricts the potential for innovative teaching practices and perpetuates a focus on rote learning.

Layer 3: Family and Ecology Outside of School. The socio-economic realities of the students' family environments play a crucial role in their educational experiences. Poverty is a pervasive issue, limiting the students' access to educational resources and affecting their ability to fully engage in the classroom. At home, the students are immersed in their heritage language, Kurdish, which contrasts with the Turkish language used at school, creating a cultural and linguistic disconnect. This dual linguistic reality further complicates the students' academic performance, as they struggle to bridge the gap between home and school life. Despite these challenges, the film highlights how certain cultural values, such as respect for the teacher, support the creation of a positive learning environment, allowing the students to engage with their education despite the obstacles.

Layer 4: Characteristics of the Community, Neighborhood, and Nation. The implementation of the national education program in *On the Way to School* plays a central role in shaping the students' experience. On one hand, the Turkish education system introduces Kurdish-speaking students to Turkish as their second language, which helps them integrate into the national culture and acquire the linguistic skills necessary to participate in the broader national educational framework. By being exposed to Turkish, the students become familiar with the cultural and social norms of the country. Through events like the celebration of April 23rd, Turkey's national Children's Festival, the film shows how such activities serve as cultural touchpoints, reminding students that they are part of a larger national community with shared traditions and values.

However, the film also highlights the challenges that arise during the implementation of the national curriculum in a multilingual setting. The teacher, despite his best efforts, finds it difficult to apply the exact program due to the linguistic needs of the students, who have little to no understanding of Turkish at the start of the school year. Instead of strictly following the national curriculum, the teacher is compelled to focus on teaching Turkish as a second language, as this becomes the immediate priority for the students' academic development. While the national program aims to foster unity and cultural integration, the lack of flexibility in adapting the curriculum to the linguistic realities of the classroom creates significant obstacles for both the teacher and the students.

Overall, *On the Way to School* demonstrates that education in a multilingual rural setting is shaped by the interaction of personal dedication, limited school resources, poverty, and national language policy. The film shows that the teacher's professional role extends beyond instruction to adaptation, mediation, and survival within a linguistically unequal context. In this sense, its ecological pattern is built on the tension between constructivist expectations and behaviorist realities in practice.

Brother's Keeper (Okul Tıraşı): The Violent School (2021)

Brother's Keeper (2021) offers a harrowing depiction of a boarding school where violence permeates every level, from the administration to the students. Through the lens of Zumbo's ecological model, the film explores how the environment, institutional practices, and broader societal factors contribute to a culture of violence and neglect, ultimately impacting both teachers and students. The created model is presented in Figure 8.

Layer 1: Personal Characteristics. In *Brother's Keeper*, both teachers and students display personal characteristics shaped by the harsh environment of the boarding school. The teachers are portrayed as emotionally detached and overwhelmed by the demands of their roles, which diminishes their professional competence and leads to symptoms of burnout. The school's environment generates a sense of frustration, which results in the teachers' lack of motivation and empathy toward the students.

Burnout manifests in their emotional withdrawal and reduced ability to engage effectively in their roles as educators. Students, on the other hand, demonstrate a mixture of resilience and vulnerability. While some students manage to cope, many struggle under the psychological toll of the boarding school environment, where emotional support is minimal, and they are left to navigate their education under challenging circumstances. This layer emphasizes how the individual characteristics of both teachers and students are influenced by the stress of the school context, with burnout emerging as a consequence for the teachers, further impacting the school's overall atmosphere.

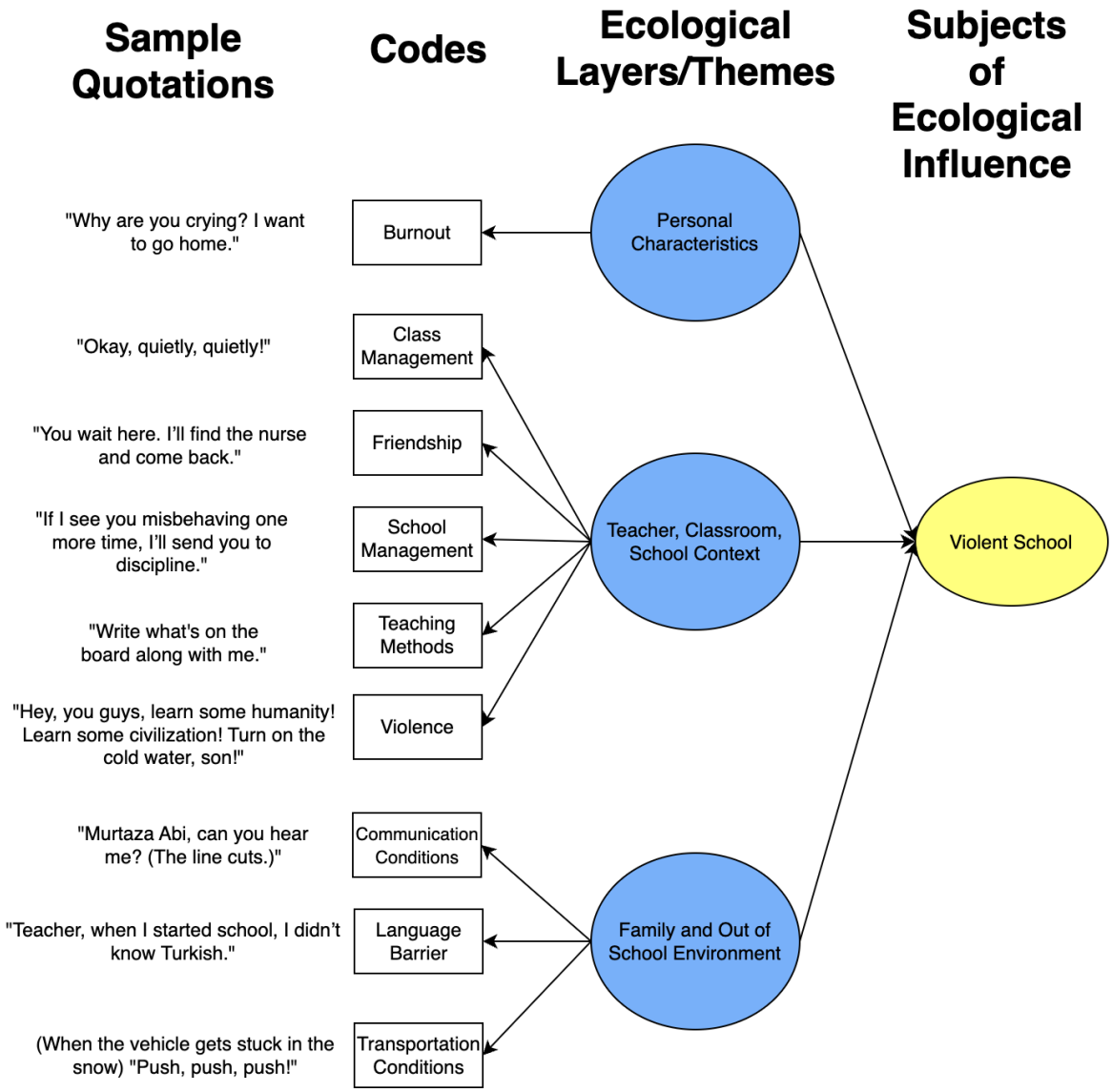

Figure 8. The ecological model of Brother's Keeper (Okul Tıraşı). Colors: Yellow for teachers and students, blue for the ecological model's layers, green for the themes from analysis.

Layer 2: Classroom and School Environment. The school environment in *Brother's Keeper* is marked by strict authoritarian control, where disciplinary methods take precedence over pedagogy. The teachers often resort to physical violence, such as slapping students, as a primary means of maintaining discipline. A notable disciplinary practice in the film is the shaving of students' hair in a distinctive manner whenever there is a perceived problem with behavior. This practice not only humiliates the students but also reinforces the atmosphere of fear and control that dominates the school environment. Authoritarian communication styles, including scolding and threats, are commonly used to enforce rules and maintain order, further alienating the students. Classrooms are structured around traditional,

behaviorist teaching methods, focusing on rote learning and memorization, leaving little room for critical thinking or creative engagement. The lack of proper health care and basic resources further compounds the difficulties faced by both teachers and students. A key scene in the film depicts a student's medical emergency, which highlights the administrative inefficiencies and the limited access to proper care within the school. The rigid structure and lack of flexibility within the school system hinder the educational experience, demonstrating the need for a more supportive, adaptable, and compassionate educational environment.

Layer 3: Family and Ecology Outside of School. The socio-cultural backgrounds of the students, particularly those from isolated areas, add complexity to their educational experience. One significant challenge for *some* students, as depicted in the film, is the language barrier. These students come from homes where Kurdish is spoken, and when they start school, especially in the first grade, they struggle to understand Turkish, the language of instruction. While most of the movie is presented in Turkish for the audience, specific scenes show the difficulty some students face as they transition into an environment where they are required to use Turkish in all academic settings. This language barrier complicates their ability to engage with the curriculum and adapt to the school environment. The school's rigid disciplinary approach and lack of resources do little to support these students' linguistic adjustment. The disconnection between the students and their families is compounded by the remote location of the boarding school. With limited opportunities to maintain regular contact, the emotional distance created by the separation adds to the students' sense of isolation. While the boarding school is intended to provide a stable educational environment, it often fails to address the specific linguistic and emotional needs of some students, further complicating their adjustment to this isolated and challenging setting.

Overall, Brother's Keeper presents a violent school environment in which educational life is shaped by authoritarian discipline, neglect, emotional isolation, and institutional failure. The interaction of burnout, resource scarcity, language-related difficulties, and boarding-school separation produces a dense ecological pattern affecting both teachers and students. Rather than depicting violence as incidental, the film presents it as a systemic condition embedded in the structure of the school.

Creating a Unified Framework of Educational Themes in Turkish Cinema

The analysis of these six films reveals a coherent ecological framework that demonstrates how Turkish cinema has portrayed the educational journey over time. While each film uniquely depicts different aspects of education, certain patterns emerge across the ecological layers of *Personal Characteristics*; *Teacher, Classroom, and School Context*; and *Family and Out of School Environment*. However, *The Chaos Class* stands as an exception, as it primarily focuses on one layer: *Teacher, Classroom, and School Context*. In this film, professional competence is portrayed as part of the school's burnout environment rather than a separate theme. The unified framework is presented in Figure 9.

Early films like *Çalıkuşu* and *The Chaos Class* reflect a behaviorist approach to education, characterized by teacher-centered methods, strict discipline, and rote memorization. *The Chaos Class* confines its exploration of educational challenges within the school environment, depicting resource scarcity, institutional burnout, and outdated pedagogical practices. The film focuses on the internal dynamics of the school, and while the influence of family and external socio-economic factors is not explored, this can be considered a limitation of the film's scope rather than an absence of such influences in reality.

In contrast, more recent films like *On the Way to School*, *Brother's Keeper*, and *A Season in Hakkari* introduce additional complexities such as linguistic barriers, socio-cultural isolation, and the clash between urban and rural life, particularly in remote areas. These films extend the analysis beyond the school environment, highlighting how both in-school and out-of-school factors shape educational experiences.

In *A Season in Hakkari*, the focus is on a teacher's struggle to adapt to a rural, culturally isolated community. The film emphasizes the interaction between the teacher's personal characteristics and broader socio-economic conditions. As the teacher attempts to educate students in a remote village, the film underscores the isolation and challenges faced in rural education, revealing how community, socio-cultural differences, and national-level factors influence the educational process. This portrayal demonstrates the deep impact of socio-economic factors on the education system, emphasizing how both teachers and students are shaped by the larger ecological context.

Similarly, *On the Way to School* portrays the teacher's challenges in adapting to a multilingual classroom, reflecting the system's attempt to embrace constructivist ideals. However, behaviorist methods still dominate, largely due to systemic constraints and a lack of resources. *Brother's Keeper* delves into the emotional and social isolation experienced by students in rural boarding schools, underscoring the impact of the school's structure on student well-being.

Bullshit presents an alternative perspective by focusing on the personal resilience of a student navigating both economic hardship and a rigid educational system. While the film retains the behaviorist approach seen in earlier depictions of education, it bridges the gap between in-school experiences and external socio-economic challenges, highlighting the broader struggles faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The unified framework developed in this study, summarized in *Figure 9*, provides not only a picture of recurring ecological problems but also a diachronic view of how educational stakeholders respond to them across different periods. Despite the 2006 curriculum reform, which promoted constructivist methods, behaviorist practices such as rote memorization and authoritarian discipline continue to be depicted in these films. This persistence reflects the gap between policy changes and the realities of educational practice, particularly in under-resourced environments. At the same time, the teacher profile undergoes a meaningful transformation. In *Çalıkuşu*, the teacher is portrayed as a figure who attempts to overcome structural deficiencies through personal sacrifice, moral commitment, and individual effort. In later films, however, this compensatory role gradually weakens. In *The Chaos Class*, institutional disorder and professional inadequacy become normalized within a burnout school model; in A Season in Hakkari and On the Way to School, teachers continue to struggle but respond through constrained adaptation and pragmatism rather than transformative agency; and in Brother's Keeper, prolonged deprivation is accompanied by emotional withdrawal and burnout. Thus, while bureaucratic problems, material scarcity, and unequal educational conditions remain visible across decades, the teacher profile shifts from self-sacrificing endurance toward fatigue, limited agency, and, in some cases, professional exhaustion.

A similar continuity-with-variation is observed in the responses of administrators and the surrounding social environment. The films do not indicate a clear linear transition from passive acceptance to rights-based collective action. Rather, earlier narratives tend to present structural disruptions as conditions to be endured or managed through personal effort, whereas later films make frustration, improvisation, and partial adaptation more visible. Even so, these responses rarely develop into sustained institutional initiative. In this respect, Turkish cinema suggests not that ecological barriers disappear over time, but that the ways of negotiating them become more explicit, fragmented, and emotionally costly.

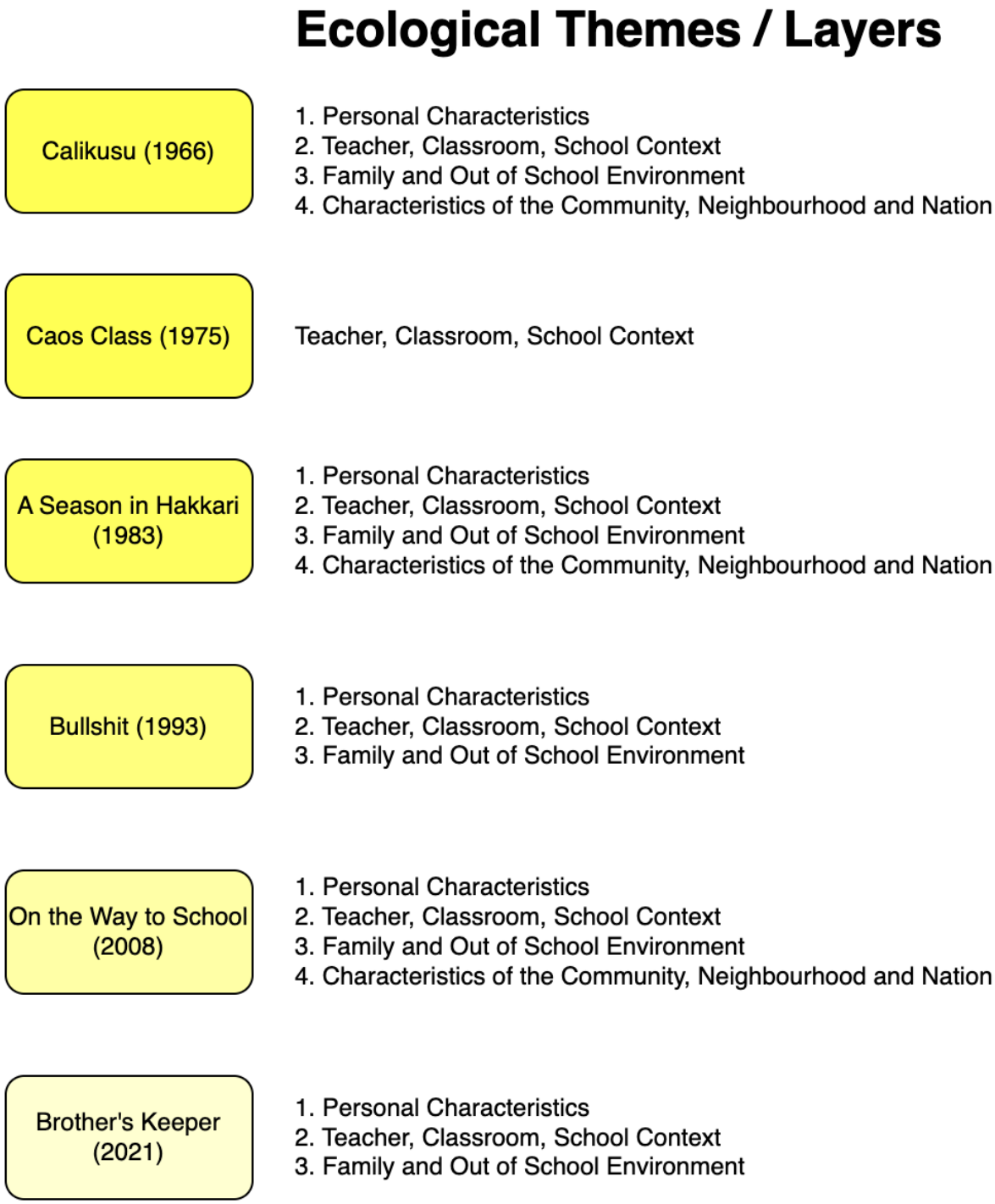

Figure 9. Unified framework of educational themes in movies

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how Turkish cinema reflects educational themes through an ecological framework, focusing on six films that span several decades. The findings reveal a complex interplay of personal, institutional, and societal factors that shape the educational experiences portrayed in these films. The study highlights a persistent behaviorist approach to education across different periods, despite the formal adoption of constructivist ideals in the 2006 curriculum reform (MoNE, 2006).

From a diachronic perspective, one of the most notable findings is that the persistence of ecological barriers is accompanied by a change in the form of educational response. Bureaucratic obstacles, material deprivation, and regional inequality recur across the films; however, the capacity of teachers and other stakeholders to confront these difficulties does not remain stable. In the earlier period, especially in *Çalıkuşu*, educational disruption is countered through the teacher's personal dedication and willingness to compensate for structural shortcomings. In later periods, this compensatory pattern becomes increasingly fragile. The teacher in *A Season in Hakkari* struggles under the weight of isolation and anxiety, the teacher in *On the Way to School* relies on practical adaptation to meet immediate classroom needs, and *Brother's Keeper* presents a context in which emotional withdrawal and burnout become more visible. Accordingly, the films suggest a historical movement from idealized endurance toward constrained adaptation and institutional fatigue.

Another prominent feature of this study is that the films provide a broader framework for understanding the experiences of teachers and students. The analysis of *Çalıkuşu* highlights various challenges, such as the difficulties faced by female teachers (Demirel Değirmenci, 2021), the role of values education as part of informal learning (Ünal, 2020), and the potential of teachers to serve as role models (Akcan & Polat, 2016). The findings also reveal that teachers are significantly affected by issues such as ignorance, moral decline, and poor economic conditions. Bureaucratic inefficiencies make professional life challenging, with nepotism and incompetence emerging as significant obstacles (Ak & Sezer, 2018). This film reflects the persistence of nepotism from the Ottoman era to the present and provides evidence of the ongoing psychological and physical abuse experienced by female teachers for over a century (Ak & Sezer, 2018; Bölükbaşı, 2015; Robinson, 2000). These findings suggest a more traumatic and chronic problem affecting professional success, as the negative environment inhibits teachers' potential, presenting a narrative where the teacher is depicted as struggling rather than thriving.

The Chaos Class offers a comprehensive portrayal of a school consumed by negative influences, providing a model for understanding a "burnout school" through an ecological lens. Previous studies have examined various aspects of the film individually (Akcan & Polat, 2016; Doğan, 2017; Kezer & Çetiner, 2019; Tofur, 2017; Ünal, 2020), but this study reveals how the deteriorations at the national level are mirrored in the school's informal learning processes. The breakdown of the school's structure is evident in its methods, with teachers experiencing both mental and physical professional inadequacy. The film depicts a deliberate representation of a dysfunctional school, where all stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, principals, and staff—are affected by burnout as part of a complex ecological pattern (Ünal, 2020; Wallace & Pocklington, 2013). Burnout is particularly prevalent among teachers (Friedman, 1991; García-Carmona et al., 2019) and students (Walburg, 2014), contributing to a school culture marked by professional disengagement and systemic failures. The film's portrayal emphasizes the need to address burnout at the institutional level to improve the educational environment. The Chaos Class not only highlights educational issues of its time but also offers insight into the broader impact of burnout on school stakeholders. Teachers exhibit a lack of interest, students display negative attitudes, and even support staff are shown violating norms. This comprehensive portrayal underscores the importance of understanding burnout more deeply by identifying the school-based sub-themes that define a "burnout school."

Studies on *A Season in Hakkari* have often focused on simple realities (Bıçak, 2021; Oğurlu, 2019; Ünlü & Serarslan, 2012). While previous research noted the influence of rural-urban conflict (Oğurlu, 2019), this study reveals a systematic pattern of negative ecological impacts. The teacher is portrayed as struggling with depressive tendencies and negative interactions with educational macrostructures, such as schools and the broader education system. Socio-economic factors serve as mediators that exacerbate the adverse effects of the ecological background on the educational process. The ongoing relevance of these challenges, such as economic difficulties (Leibowitz et al., 2015; Özdemir & Orhan, 2019) and regional disparities (Aygül & Korkmaz, 2018), suggests that the themes presented in the film remain pertinent today, highlighting the long-term validity of these issues.

Bullshit provides a critical depiction of socio-economic realities affecting students, aligning with the narratives of *A Season in Hakkari* and *On the Way to School*. The film underscores the persistent impact of economic conditions and bureaucratic challenges on student life, suggesting that these issues are deeply entrenched in Turkish education. The ongoing relevance of these factors is supported by contemporary studies highlighting the effects of bureaucracy (Züngür, 2022) and economic conditions (Elitok Kesici & Ceylan, 2020) on students.

On the Way to School focuses on the challenges of second language teaching and the broader ecological factors impacting teachers' professional lives. The film portrays the teacher as a motivated role model, navigating the complex dynamics between heritage and second language education (Yetimova, 2019). Unlike earlier studies that primarily highlighted the effects of poverty (Akıncı Yüksel, 2015), this study emphasizes the broader ecological context. The film also underscores the disparities in academic opportunities and outcomes based on geographic location (Anıl, 2009), contrasting the rural eastern setting with urban schools in films like *The Chaos Class*.

Brother's Keeper, set in the 21st century and the constructivist period of the Turkish education system (MoNE, 2006), provides a model that reflects the enduring influence of behaviorist approaches. The film underscores the significant impact of socio-economic and cultural factors on school stakeholders, illustrating the complex interplay between ecological contexts and educational practices. Notably, the most prominent educational films in Turkish cinema often highlight severe challenges in Turkey's eastern provinces, issues that continue to be reported in contemporary literature (Özdemir & Erol, 2021).

Finally, the study revealed that education-based films in Turkish cinema exhibit a rich ecological pattern across the 20th and 21st centuries. More importantly, this pattern is not limited to the repetition of the same problems; it also reflects changes in how these problems are experienced and negotiated. The selected films do not provide strong evidence of a clear transition toward rights-based or institutionally transformative responses among administrators or the wider social environment. Instead, they portray a movement from normalized endurance toward more visible frustration, local improvisation, and limited forms of adjustment. In this sense, the historical change reflected in Turkish cinema lies less in the disappearance of structural barriers than in the increasing fragility of those expected to cope with them.

The findings also suggest that these films may be used as reflective materials in teacher training. More specifically, they can help pre-service and in-service teachers examine how classroom management, teacher identity, professional burnout, socio-economic inequality, language barriers, and school culture are shaped by broader ecological conditions. In this respect, films such as *Çalıkuşu*, *The Chaos Class*, *A Season in Hakkari*, *On the Way to School*, and *Brother's Keeper* may be incorporated into teacher education courses to support discussion, case-based interpretation, and critical reflection on the relationship between educational practice and context. Such use would allow teacher candidates not only to evaluate instructional methods, but also to recognize how institutional, familial, and societal conditions influence teaching and learning processes (Çam, 2023; Tofur, 2018).

Although the ecological model that forms the framework of the study has been studied in different areas, its use in the analysis of motion pictures/movies, according to the knowledge of the authors, has been realized for the first time with this study. Therefore, the results are rewarding for many researchers in a wide range of fields, from cinema to education. The findings might provide the basis for further quantitative investigations in a subsequent study. In particular, the factors affecting the burnout school and the variables affecting the professional lives of teachers and the educational lives of students can pave the way for structural equation modelling and other correlational studies. In addition, it is possible to carry out new studies based on the principle that cinema is an alternative source of reality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has undertaken a comprehensive examination of the representation of education in Turkish cinema, seeking to uncover patterns and insights across various films. The results have shed light on the consistent ecological pattern that has permeated Turkish cinema throughout its history. Notably, the films analyzed up to 2022 provide little evidence of creative thinking skills as a visible educational priority. Furthermore, the dynamic relationship between cinema and societal conditions, with movies shaping their content to resonate with audiences and generate economic returns, highlights the interplay between education, economy, and social dynamics.

One of the principal contributions of this study is the broader framework it offers to both educators and students. Analyses of specific films, such as *Calikusu*, *The Chaos Class*, *A Season in Hakkari*, *Bullshit*, and *On the Way to School*, illuminate a range of issues faced by educators and students, including the challenges of female teachers, values education, teacher role modeling, bureaucracy, economic hardships, and systemic challenges that have persisted over time. These findings emphasize the need for systemic changes in education, professional development, and economic support for educators.

Moreover, this research underscores that the issues depicted in these films continue to be relevant in contemporary society, demonstrating the enduring impact of socioeconomic and cultural factors on the educational landscape. The films, produced in various periods and socio-cultural contexts, provide a glimpse into the multifaceted nature of educational challenges in Turkey. Lastly, the application of an ecological model to analyze these films represents a novel approach within the academic discourse. The findings of this study have implications beyond the realm of cinema and education, presenting a unique opportunity for interdisciplinary research.

This study offers a valuable perspective on how cinema can serve as a mirror reflecting the educational and societal challenges of its time. The ecological model employed here has unveiled rich patterns and potential areas for future exploration. It provides a steppingstone for future research in various fields, from cinema studies to educational policy, allowing for more in-depth investigations into the ecological and systemic factors affecting education in Turkish society. In essence, the films explored in this study not only tell a story but also offer a mirror through which we can gain insight into the evolution of education and society in Turkey. They serve as a compelling reminder of the importance of addressing systemic challenges in education and fostering an environment that enables both educators and students to thrive.

Suggestions

Based on the findings and discussions of this study, several suggestions are proposed to enhance future research and practical applications in the fields of education and cinema. This study has highlighted the potential of ecological frameworks in analyzing educational themes in Turkish cinema. Future research could extend this approach by incorporating quantitative methods, such as structural equation modeling, to explore the relationships among the factors identified in the films. Investigating models like the “burnout school” and examining the impact of socio-economic and cultural factors on teachers' and students' lives could deepen the understanding of these dynamics and validate the patterns observed in this study.

The analysis emphasizes the role of cinema as a reflective medium that mirrors societal attitudes towards education, revealing persistent challenges such as economic hardships, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and cultural conflicts. Educators and policymakers could leverage films as tools in professional development programs to provide insights into the socio-cultural dynamics of educational environments. This approach can foster a deeper awareness of the ecological factors affecting education and support educators in adapting their teaching strategies to better meet the needs of diverse classrooms. When considered together with the broader teacher education literature, such films may also contribute to discussions of how listening (Kurudayıoğlu et al., 2021; Uzun & Aytan, 2024), reading (Göktentürk et al., 2025), speaking (Ensar & Gündüz, 2022), and writing practices (İpek & Karatay, 2023;

Karatay et al., 2023), together with classroom management, shape student participation and development. In light of the motivation-related patterns observed especially in Bullshit, future studies could also examine how students' intrinsic motivation and teacher practices interact with ecological constraints in shaping educational outcomes, particularly in view of recent evidence on teacher-related motivational factors (Göktentürk & Oluşan, 2026).

Despite educational reforms (MoNE, 2006), this study underscores the continued prevalence of behaviorist approaches in Turkish education, as reflected in the films analyzed. Bridging the gap between policy and practice remains crucial, particularly in under-resourced and linguistically diverse settings. More targeted interventions are needed to fully implement constructivist ideals in classrooms, ensuring that policy changes translate into meaningful improvements in teaching and learning.

Recognizing cinema as a valuable source of educational insight, future studies could explore how other media, such as television series and documentaries, depict educational environments and influence public perceptions. Expanding the scope of research in this direction could offer further understanding of the cultural narratives surrounding education in Turkey and beyond.

Lastly, it is important to note that this study is limited to films produced up until 2022. Future research could incorporate more recent works to capture evolving trends in the depiction of education. Additionally, expanding the analysis to include a broader range of films, including those with lower visibility, could enrich the understanding of how various ecological factors shape educational portrayals.

Appendix

Readers can reach the findings of qualitative analysis (i.e., themes and codes) by using the following link.

https://educationandscience.ted.org.tr/article/view/2460/supplement

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