Evolving images of British teachers: A literary and contemporary perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the evolving image of British teachers through the analysis of literary works and contemporary perceptions among Ukrainian students. Using Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* and Roald Dahl's *Matilda* as primary texts, the research employs thematic analysis to examine the contrasting depictions of authoritarian and nurturing educators. These literary portrayals are complemented by a survey conducted at Ushynsky University in 2023, which reveals a nuanced view of British teachers. While traditional perceptions of British educators as strict and authoritarian persist, there is a significant shift toward recognizing modern, supportive, and intellectual qualities. The findings indicate that contemporary educational practices emphasizing empathy, intellectual inspiration, and supportive teaching are increasingly valued. The study underscores the critical role of teachers in shaping both the intellectual and emotional development of students. It also highlights the importance of balancing discipline with empathy and intellectual rigor with support. This comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role of British teachers offers valuable insights for enhancing educational practices and policies, ultimately contributing to the improvement of teaching and learning quality.

Keywords: Teacher's image, British teacher, British literature, perceptions of educators.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of education, often celebrated as the bedrock of human civilization, has undergone a profound metamorphosis throughout the annals of time. A crucial aspect of this ongoing development is the continuous effort to sustain and refine the teaching profession, ensuring that educators are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the evolving needs of society. As Tatto (2021) emphasizes, the development of teacher professionalism depends not only on structured education but also on fostering a culture of inquiry and research within teacher training programs. This ongoing process is fundamental to maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of the teaching profession.

Teachers have remained steadfast torchbearers of knowledge, sculpting the very fabric of societies and nurturing the intellects of innumerable generations. The archetype of the teacher is a universal one, transcending borders, cultures, and epochs. Regardless of time or

place, teachers have perennially embodied the role of guides, mentors, and imparters of wisdom. They have been entrusted with the profound task of shaping minds, illuminating pathways to knowledge, and fostering the development of individuals within their respective societies. However, while the teacher's role remains central, contemporary educators face increasing pressures. As De Clercq, Watt, and Richardson (2023) note, excessive work demands can hinder teachers' professional engagement and well-being, while supportive leadership plays a key role in fostering ambition and motivation.

In the earliest chapters of formal education's history, we journey back to the ancient cradles of civilization, where pioneering pedagogues laid the foundational stones of the teacher's vocation. In Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, scholars and philosophers emerged as the torchbearers of knowledge, emphasizing disciplines

such as mathematics, literature, and ethics. These venerable educators were not only revered as transmitters of wisdom but also as custodians of moral and ethical values. Their teachings wove together the intellectual and the virtuous, shaping not only the intellects but also the characters of their pupils.

Yet, the evolution of the teacher's image is not confined solely to the ancient world. It is a narrative that unfurls across the span of history, and when we shift our focus to the British Isles, we encounter a unique and distinctive chapter in this grand tale.

Throughout British history, the role of the teacher has been intertwined with the broader tapestry of societal change and intellectual development. The emergence of monastic schools during the medieval period heralded an era when teachers were bearers of both religious and secular knowledge. The clergy often assumed the role of educators, imparting not only theological teachings but also secular subjects such as Latin and the classics. In this way, the British teacher became a custodian of knowledge in a world where learning was intrinsically linked to the divine.

As the pages of history turned, the Industrial Revolution brought seismic changes to Britain, and with it, transformations in education. British teachers found themselves at the forefront of a burgeoning industrial society, tasked with equipping the workforce with the skills needed to navigate an increasingly complex and mechanized world. As Sherman and Teemant (2022) argue, the role of teachers is not static but evolves in response to societal demands, shaped by the dynamic interplay between identity, agency, and institutional expectations. The role of the teacher expanded beyond the confines of the classroom, with educators assuming newfound responsibilities as architects of vocational training and engines of social mobility.

In the crucible of two World Wars, British teachers played an instrumental role in the reconstruction and rebuilding of a nation scarred by conflict. Their duty extended beyond the transmission of knowledge; it encompassed instilling hope, fostering resilience, and nurturing a sense of unity and purpose among the youth. The image of the British teacher as a pillar of strength and resilience became an enduring symbol of that era.

The latter half of the 20th century saw a profound expansion of access to education in Britain, as teachers endeavored to bridge social divides and ensure that every British child had an equitable opportunity to learn. Education was heralded as the great equalizer, and teachers were the conduits through which this vision was realized. However, the increasing emphasis on accountability, standardized performance metrics, and administrative oversight in the 21st century has reshaped the professional identity of teachers. As Skinner, Leavey and Rothi (2021) observe, growing managerial demands—ranging from rigid performance targets to curriculum changes and administrative burdens—have progressively diminished teacher autonomy. These structural shifts have not only altered educators' professional roles but have also contributed to heightened stress and declining well-being, raising concerns about the sustainability of teacher commitment in an increasingly bureaucratized system.

However, as we stand in the 21st century, the image of the British teacher is once again undergoing a transformation. The field of teacher education faces unprecedented challenges, marked by the inherent vagueness, ambiguity, and uncertainty surrounding the roles and responsibilities of educators. In an era where the blame for perceived inadequacies in education often falls on teachers, the deficiencies are frequently attributed to shortcomings in teacher training programs. Moreover, as Grace (2021) highlights, state intervention has steadily eroded teachers' professional autonomy in Britain. Over time, policies have increasingly centralized control over curriculum and teaching methodologies, reflecting broader socio-political shifts. The notion that teachers should have the autonomy to determine what and how to teach, once a defining feature of British education, has been progressively weakened by government interventions aimed at aligning education with national economic and political priorities. These developments place British teachers at the intersection of competing expectations, requiring them to balance historical traditions with evolving demands in an increasingly regulated educational environment.

This intricate and demanding milieu poses formidable hurdles for teacher education in Britain (Ben-Peretz, 2001). The work of Sindelar and Rosenberg (2000) offers a discerning perspective on the complex web of demands that affect teacher education in Britain. These demands include legislative mandates dictating curriculum scope, restrictive regulations imposed by academic institutions, and a growing "consumer orientation" among higher education students. Furthermore, the persistent issue of severe teacher shortages casts a shadow, raising concerns that professional standards may be compromised. This, in turn, could result in a teaching workforce in Britain ill-equipped to meet the multifaceted demands of the profession.

In this contemporary era, where education remains more vital than ever, the evolution of the British teacher continues to be a story of adaptability and resilience. Teachers, infused with the spirit of tradition and innovation, must navigate the intricate interplay of historical legacy and modern exigencies. As we stand at the precipice of a new educational era, the role of the teacher remains pivotal in shaping not only the intellect but also the future of a nation.

In bygone epochs, the perception of a teacher was molded to align with specific criteria established by the state on behalf of the reigning sovereign, monarch, or the collective will of the people. These criteria often found expression in seminal texts or were overtly declared and disseminated in alignment with prevailing national perspectives and the envisioned archetype of the ideal future. Consequently, the role of a teacher assumed a pivotal position as a state and societal mission, with educators serving as the custodians and

architects of knowledge, cultural values, and aspirations, while also shouldering the responsibility of shaping the minds of future citizens.

This significant role bestowed upon teachers historically conferred upon them a distinct social standing, accompanied by tangible material advantages and moral support. These incentives served to galvanize their professional dedication and underscored their essential role within the fabric of society.

The image of teachers, particularly school principals, in English literature has undergone various transformations over time, and it has not always been depicted in a positive light. In British literary traditions, the portrayal of educators often reflects the broader societal perceptions and expectations of their respective eras. One common trope that has persisted in British literature is the representation of a closed and rigid educational system, where strict discipline, conformity, and even the use of corporal punishment were the norm. This image is deeply ingrained in British linguaculture and has left a lasting impression on how the teaching profession is viewed, both within and outside the United Kingdom.

Aim of the study

The current study seeks to shed light on this enduring image of the British teacher, focusing on its evolution and contemporary perceptions. To achieve this, the research examines the portrayal of British educators in three literary works: "A Little Princess" by Frances Hodgson Burnett, "Matilda" by Roald Dahl and "Gentlemen & Players" by Joanne Harris. Furthermore, the study explores how modern British teachers are perceived by Ukrainian students specializing in English language and literature. This aspect of the research provides valuable insights into how contemporary educators in Britain are viewed from an international perspective. It delves into the evolving role of teachers in today's educational landscape and investigates whether the traditional image of the stern, authoritarian British teacher still holds sway or if it has evolved in response to changing pedagogical practices and societal expectations.

Conducted at Ushynsky University, this research combines literary analysis with contemporary cultural perceptions, offering a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted role of the British teacher within the realm of linguacultural studies. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to cross-cultural educational discourse, providing a deeper understanding of how teachers are perceived both historically and in modern contexts. By bridging literary representations with contemporary student perspectives, the research offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to enhance teacher training and improve cross-cultural communication in education. Ultimately, it aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how linguistic and cultural factors intersect to shape our perceptions of educators and the educational systems they represent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Jennifer Nias's seminal work "Primary Teachers Talking: A Study of Teaching as Work" (1989), she situates the self-identity of primary school teachers within the social context of education in 1980s England. During this era, she noted a prevailing emphasis on individualism, isolation, a belief in personal autonomy, and the investment of personal resources within the teaching profession. Nias's most significant contribution was her distinction between the personal and professional dimensions of teachers' lives and identities. She argued that recognizing the personal dimension was crucial for a comprehensive understanding of teachers within their professional milieu. One of Nias's key findings was that the incorporation of the identity 'teacher' into an individual's self-image was a gradual process. Early-career teachers tended to perceive their substantial selves ('me') as relatively distinct from their social selves ('teacher'). It often took well into their second decade of teaching before they fully integrated their professional role into their self-image and self-identified as 'teachers.' Many teachers associated 'being a teacher' with 'being oneself' in the classroom and school environment. However, this concept was defined differently among individuals, ranging from finding their 'niche' to maintaining consistency between their school and personal selves. The cornerstone of this sense of belonging was the relationships formed with their students, emphasizing the creation of a sense of community and the integration of personal and professional connections. Furthermore, teachers derived personal and emotional satisfaction from their involvement in school activities, blurring the boundaries between their professional and personal lives. However, the integration of identities and the subsequent high levels of commitment to their work led to a paradox. The more teachers invested in their profession, the greater the demands placed upon them for even greater investment, ultimately resulting in reduced satisfaction when these demands became overwhelming.

Nias's research also shed light on differences in commitment levels among teachers, distinguishing between those perceived as 'caring about the children,' 'taking the job seriously,' and being 'real teachers' versus those whose interests lay elsewhere. Additionally, her work highlighted the inherent tensions and contradictions in the primary teacher's role. These conflicts arose from the opposing demands of nurturing and controlling students, as well as balancing individualized teaching with institutional requirements such as standardized curriculum delivery. Teachers often grappled with the inability to fully satisfy their own consciences and meet external expectations, leaving them under pressure, feeling guilty, and inadequate. Nias's research within the primary school context served as a foundational study, contributing to our

understanding of the complex interplay between personal, professional, emotional, and organizational components of teacher identity. While she acknowledged the concept of a continuous and stable 'substantive' self, Nias also underscored the social contingency of identities and the intricate interweaving of teachers' rationality, emotional responses, personal dispositions, and structural positions within the educational institution. In her view, all these factors, along with the institutional organization of the school, played pivotal roles in shaping and manifesting teachers' 'work identities.'

Cultural depictions of teachers and their profession are cultivated through a diverse array of sources, with notable influence stemming from media, newspapers, cartoons, and films. Among these, Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell's exploration has revealed the existence of what they term a 'cumulative cultural text' related to teachers. Their research serves as a conduit for perpetuating prevalent images and narratives associated with educators and teaching practices, with these representations often passing from one generation to the next (Weber and Mitchell, 1995).

Gary McCulloch's study delves into various literary representations of teachers, shedding light on their significance in understanding educational issues. Historically, fiction has often been overlooked as a valuable source for exploring the realm of education, although some research has highlighted its importance in deciphering educational dynamics. Dickens' vivid portrayals of teachers, such as Mr. Creakle and Dr. Strong in "The Personal History of David Copperfield" (1850/1948), have left indelible imprints on our collective imagination. Mr. Creakle is etched as the tyrannical 'tartar,' while Dr. Strong is idealized as 'the idol of the school' and 'the kindest of men, with a simple faith in him that might have touched the stone hearts of the very urns upon the wall' (Dickens, 1850/1948, p. 238). Thomas Hughes' "Tom Brown's School-Days" (1857/1967) similarly contributes to the creation of enduring images, portraying Dr. Arnold as an imposing, strict figure who ultimately embodies kindness (McCulloch, 2009). In the twentieth century, scholars like Richards (1988), and Carter (1990) have delved into fictional representations of secondary education in Britain, public schools, and university settings, respectively, enriching our understanding of the multifaceted role of teachers in literature (McCulloch, 2009).

The research "The Portrayal of Teachers in Children's Popular Fiction" delves into the representation of teachers and teaching in contemporary children's literature. The findings validate the persistent portrayal of teachers as "white, kind, conservative, women" who adhere to traditional values and are motivated by their genuine care for children. However, the study has uncovered some unexpected insights. Firstly, the narratives highlight the pivotal role of students in shaping teachers' identities. Secondly, there is a recurrent theme of students objectifying teachers, particularly in terms of their sexuality. Thirdly, teachers are frequently characterized as belonging to the working class in matters of social class. These results suggest a nuanced and ambivalent representation of teachers' identities, hinting at the perpetuation of gender-based power dynamics and objectification within the teaching profession (Niemi et al., 2014).

IMAGE OF THE TEACHER IN THE BRITISH LITERATURE

The development of global organizations and their leaders, who advocate for the protection of children's rights worldwide, is becoming increasingly active. These organizations work tirelessly to save children's lives, help them realize their potential, and meet their essential needs for education, psychosocial support, and healthcare. However, this increased activity does not imply that the problem of violations of children's rights has been entirely resolved. Therefore, it is crucial to address the issue of inadequate teacher behaviour towards children when studying literary works.

To explore the image of teachers representing the British education system of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to gain a deeper understanding of the student survey results, we suggest examining the portrayals of educators and school administrators in the works of Frances Hodgson Burnett and Roald Dahl.

Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel "A Little Princess" is a hallmark of the "golden age" of children's English literature. The characters in this novel provide educational insights for young readers and offer valuable lessons for adults.

A closer look at the novel's characters reveals the distinct influence of the Victorian era on the protagonist's demeanour and the narrative structure. Little Sarah exemplifies restraint, decency, unwavering morality, and a love of reading – attributes that were highly valued during this period and contributed to the creation of specialized children's literature. The Victorian influence extends to the education system depicted by the author. Most parents demanded strict discipline and a clear sense of right and wrong. Relationships between children of aristocratic and middle-class families were often strained, with minimal parental interaction – typically limited to once a day. Children were sent to boarding schools early on to prepare for future responsibilities, with girls groomed for advantageous marriages. Consequently, aggressive behaviour of teachers towards students was not uncommon, as children were often too afraid to report such mistreatment to their parents, normalizing such behaviour in their lives.

The plot of "A Little Princess" is simple to understand and incorporates elements of adventure, aligning with the traditional structure of children's literature and fairy tales.

One gloomy winter day, little Sarah Crewe arrived in London for the first time from India. Her father, Captain Crewe, brought her to a boarding school, not so much

for education (the child was bright and had mastered a certain curriculum on her own), but because it was expected. Every child of an aristocratic family had to undergo training and education for girls to be a worthy match for a future husband, attend social events, and so on. "During her short life, only one thing had troubled her, and that thing was "the place" she was to be taken to someday. The climate of India was very bad for children, and as soon as possible they were sent away from it – generally to England and school. She had seen other children go away and had heard their fathers and mothers talk about the letters they received from them. She had known that she would be obliged to go also…" (Burnett, 2018).

The little girl was given great attention and respect at the boarding school, including her room and maid, not because of her intelligence but because of her father's wealth. She quickly established good relationships with the other children; those who were friendly accepted her easily, while the aggressive ones had to tolerate her, as Miss Minchin, the headmistress, kept a close watch on them, motivated by her interest in Mr. Crewe's money.

Soon after, Sarah's father dies of a heart attack caused by an unsuccessful diamond mining venture. The girl is left destitute and, in her grief, becomes unwelcome. The headmistress despised Sarah, whom she had once favored, now seeing her as a burden. For two years, Sarah lived near starvation, dressed in rags, teaching younger children, and sleeping in a small closet with rats. During this time, she was expected to continue learning on her own, as Miss Minchin intended to use her as free labor in the future. Despite enduring physical and emotional pain, hunger, neglect, and harassment, Sarah Crewe continued to embody the image of a dignified, well-mannered, intelligent princess (a title she held until the tragedy struck).

After two years, Sarah was found by a friend of her parents who informed her that she was not impoverished but had instead become the owner of a vast fortune and diamond mines.

If we are to outline the image of Sarah Crewe, Frances Burnett crafted a complex and profound character who embodies multiple realms: the world of people, the spiritual world, and the fictional world. In the first world, Sarah navigates the social sphere within the confines of Miss Minchin's boarding school, interacting with both good and bad individuals. The second world, the spiritual realm, gives her the strength and ability to remain kind and compassionate; for instance, a starving Sarah gives four of her six buns to a beggar girl on the street because she cannot ignore someone in need. The third world is her imaginary realm. Sarah has a rich imagination, which she uses to create her fiction and integrate the experiences she gains from the books she reads. It is this imagination that helps her model moral values and behaviour. "If I am a princess in rags and tatters, I can be a princess inside" (Burnett, 2018). This behaviour underscores her exceptional personal qualities and, at the same time, the unfair and cruel treatment of Ms. Minchin.

The image of Sarah as a child with unique abilities represents young learners who are capable of purposefully and obediently integrating into the educational system and mastering the curricula offered by educational institutions. However, the system depicted in the novel is more of a battleground for social and moral rights to education and upbringing. Humiliation, physical punishment, and lack of communication form the foundation of her experience at the boarding school.

Roald Dahl's literary fairy tale was written almost a century later than Frances Burnett's "A Little Princess", and it describes the problems of the early twentieth century, as the author himself was the subject of bullying at school. According to T. Kushnirova, the author's life material "is transformed into a mythological-authorial model of society, which is primarily based on an irreal core" (Kushnirova, 2018). "Matilda" depicts a brilliant girl who refuses to be confined by her circumstances. Though she is only five years old, Matilda is exceptionally intelligent. She learned to write at the age of three and loved books more than anything else in the world. Matilda frequented the village library on her own to indulge her passion for reading. Unfortunately, her parents are quite inadequate and uneducated, and they are irritated by their child's desire to learn and grow.

At the school where she soon finds herself, Matilda encounters the principal, Mrs. Trunchbull, and her primary school teacher, Miss Honey. Mrs. Trunchbull is a cruel and unbalanced person who despises children and people in general. She mocks and mistreats the teacher and students with cynicism and aggression. Feeling helpless, Matilda discovers she has a gift of telekinesis – the ability to move objects with her mind. This unexpected discovery enables Matilda to punish the evil headmistress. Mrs. Trunchbull leaves, allowing Miss Honey, who is her niece and has been mistreated and deprived of her inheritance by Mrs. Trunchbull, to reclaim her house and wealth.

Thus, a young girl finds herself in a world that forces her to fight against injustice, not just for herself but for others as well. The protest against the cruelty of adults (highlighting not only the problem of communicative and physical interactions between the principal and the children but also the issue between children and parents, where the latter prefer to remain within the system because it is easier for them) leads to the desire to free the kind and fair Miss Honey from her oppressive situation.

By preserving the basic elements of a fairy tale, Roald Dahl and Frances Hodgson Burnett use the technique of antithesis, endowing their characters with traits of good and evil. This technique helps to emphasize the image of the aggressive headmistress.

When studying children's literature, it is important to remember that fairy tales, like authors' works, are typically divided into two worlds: real and unreal. The characters' world is split into positive and negative, with images representing good or evil. Analyzing Roald Dahl's "Matilda," Tetiana Kushnir traces the tendency of

an unreal chronotope that borders on the real and transforms into a fairy tale. Roald Dahl's children's prose primarily relies on an irreal chronotope, which occasionally borders on reality and shifts into the realm of fairy tales. The fairy tale genre, originating from folklore sources, in the British writer's work, approaches an individual-author myth with features of the fantasy genre (Kushnirova, 2018). A similar intention is found in the novel "A Little Princess": the world of a fragile girl stands in opposition to the forces of evil, cruelty, and injustice.

Accordingly, the motif that unites these two works is the binary motif of good and evil. In both novels, evil is depicted through the social models created by the authors. This evil is embodied by the principals, who, as representatives of educational institutions, should ideally reflect the traits of intelligence, education, psychological stability, and moral integrity. Unfortunately, these principals are portrayed as cruel, mercenary, and devoid of human emotions. The prevalence of such negative depictions stems from the harsh treatment of children in schools during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Roald Dahl, the author of "Matilda," imbued Ms. Trunchbull with autobiographical elements, drawing from his own experiences of physical punishment at the hands of his headmaster during his childhood.

Thirst for authority, illicit enrichment… ("During the last year the story of the diamond mines had suggested all sorts of possibilities to her. Even proprietors of seminaries might make fortunes in stocks, with the aid of owners of mines. And now, instead of looking forward to gains, she was left to look back upon losses" (Burnett, 2018). "… I was left to live alone with my aunt. She became my legal guardian. She had all the powers of a parent over me. And in some way or another, she became the actual owner of the house… …my aunt told me I owed her a lot of money. Because I've been feeding you for all these years and buying your shoes and your clothes!" She told me it added up to thousands and I had to pay her back by giving her my salary for the next ten years. "I'll give you one pound a week of pocket money," she said. "But that's all you're going to get." She even arranged with the school authorities to have my salary paid directly into her own bank. She made me sign the paper" (Dahl, 2020) and the role of an important figure in elite society have created the image of a cruel and heartless leader and teacher in one person. Here, anger and aggression are not mitigated by intelligence and education; instead, they become integral parts of the individual's personality, uniting the three dimensions of the artistic image: the objective/ontological, the subjective/cognitive, and the expressive/sensory. The depiction of both headmistresses is highly symbolic, clearly reflecting and expressing their feelings, thoughts, aspirations, and aesthetic emotions. "It was just then that Miss Minchin entered the room. She was very like her house, Sara felt: tall and dull, and respectable and ugly. She had large, cold, fishy eyes, and a large, cold, fishy smile" (Burnett, 2018). "She was above all a most formidable female. She had once been a famous athlete,

and even now the muscles were still clearly in evidence. You could see them in the bull-neck, in the big shoulders, in the thick arms, in the sinewy wrists and the powerful legs. Looking at her, you got the feeling that this was someone who could bend iron bars and tear telephone directories in half. Her face, I'm afraid, was neither a thing of beauty nor a joy forever. She had an obstinate chin, a cruel mouth and small arrogant eyes… She looked, in short, more like a rather eccentric and bloodthirsty follower of the stag hounds than the headmistress of a nice school for children (Dahl, 2020). Portrait strokes provide an understanding of the author's image creation and form the basis for their visualization. Subsequently, they comprehensively and fully reflect the objective psychological characteristics and manifestations of character in behavioral situations.

Special attention should be given to the coded markers in the names of the headmistresses (specifically, Miss Trunchbull, whose name consists of two roots: "Trunch" – meaning a small stump as a phallic symbol, and "bull" – meaning a bull) and their psychological portraits, which include descriptions of their characteristic traits and properties. "She had large, cold, fishy eyes, and a large, cold, fishy smile" (Burnett, 2018). "Her face, I'm afraid, was neither a thing of beauty nor a joy forever. She had an obstinate chin, a cruel mouth and small arrogant eyes. And as for her clothes ... they were, to say the least, extremely odd. She always had on a brown cotton smock which was pinched in around the waist with a wide leather belt. The belt was fastened in front with an enormous silver buckle. The massive thighs which emerged from out of the smock were encased in a pair of extra-ordinary breeches, bottle-green in colour and made of coarse twill. These breeches reached just below the knees and from there on down she sported green stockings with turn-up tops, which displayed her calf muscles to perfection. On her feet, she wore flat-heeled brown brogues with leather flaps" (Dahl, 2020).

These characteristics reveal to the reader traits of the character, demonstrate their social and financial status, describe the individual's worldview, and highlight the character's conflicts with others, emphasizing the contrast between them. «The analysis shows that Dahl presents his characters as either completely good or completely bad. By employing the strategic function of emotional and cognitive coercion, in particular through physical description, Dahl attempts to establish an image of the characters in the readers' minds that is either positive (Matilda and Miss Honey) or negative (the Wormwoods and Miss Trunchbull). Once the reader's image of the characters is firmly established, it is easier for Dahl to either justify or condemn the characters' behaviour and actions...» (Martens, 2015).

Both authors attempt to somewhat soften the role of the despotic headmistresses through the gentle attitudes of other characters. This is evident in the behavior of Miss Honey, who tries to protect her students, and Miss Amelia, Miss Minchin's sister. However, both women are oppressed by the same treatment and fear as the young pupils, making any help they offer to the children

merely a "double-edged sword."

When comparing the two works, it is clear that both Frances Burnett and Roald Dahl narratively outline the characters of Miss Honey and Miss Amelia, who possess the qualities of good teachers and reflect the limitless potential for personal growth in their students. The worldview of these two educators contrasts sharply with the actions and behavior of the administrative staff, who are uninterested in improving the quality of teaching and learning or in creating conditions conducive to professional development. The power of the educational managers has turned into an organized force focused on material enrichment, achieved through intimidation, brute force, disdain, and humiliation. Consequently, the school appears as a place of disputes and conflicts, marked by absolute despotism aimed at maintaining unchallenged authority.

The tactlessness and mercantilism of dogmatic headmistresses can lead to tragedy. Only the artistic narrative allows for a happy ending in both works. Unfortunately, in real life, such actions result in suicides, the destruction of children's psyches, and their involvement in religious and criminal groups, among other negative outcomes.

Analyzing both works, we can conclude that the embodiment of authoritarianism and aggressive behavior is represented by the managerial figures—characters driven by a desire for wealth and power, as seen in the behaviors of Miss Minchin and Miss Trunchbull. Since such works are based on the "good vs. evil" paradigm, their narrative structure adheres to classic architecture. This is clearly highlighted by the dominant victory of good over evil.

In "A Little Princess," despite the malice, mercantilism, and aggression, there emerges a composite image of a teacher who possesses extensive knowledge and a kind heart. From her first days at the school, Sarah Crewe teaches French to the timid Ermengarde and later becomes a central figure in helping others with their studies. Even when her role as a "princess" is diminished, she studies at night with the intention of becoming a teacher herself, so she can share her knowledge and kindness with other children.

Miss Honey, despite the intense fear she felt from just hearing or seeing Miss Trunchbull, continued to stand up for her students' rights. She remained an embodiment of goodness, attention, and respect for her pupils.

Both "A Little Princess" and "Matilda" possess the architectural structure of a fairy tale, where goodness always dominates. Thus, we can confidently state that in British children's literature, despite the generalized image of the evil headmistress, there exists a composite image of the good teacher who is capable not only of teaching but also of nurturing their students. However, to highlight this figure, Miss Minchin and Miss Trunchbull are contrasted sharply.

PERCEPTIONS OF BRITISH TEACHERS: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

To explore the perceptions of British teachers and their evolving roles within contemporary educational settings, we developed a questionnaire aimed at Ukrainian students specializing in English language and literature at Ushynsky University. This survey was designed to capture a broad spectrum of views on the image of British teachers, their teaching methods, and the qualities that students associate with them.

By analyzing the responses, we aim to provide valuable insights into how modern British teachers are perceived by students from an international perspective. This investigation not only delves into the traditional and contemporary images of British educators but also sheds light on the cultural influences that shape these perceptions. The findings of this survey will contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted role of British teachers within the realm of linguacultural studies, offering a nuanced view of how cultural factors intersect to shape our perceptions of educators and the educational systems they represent.

Table 1. Perception of the image of a teacher in British culture.

Response category	Number of students	Percentage (%)	Mean score	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
a) Strict and authoritarian	40	35.09	3.51	1.22	0.35
b) Friendly and supportive	35	30.70	3.07	1.17	0.38
c) Intellectual and inspiring	30	26.32	2.63	1.13	0.43
d) Other (please specify)	9	7.89	0.79	0.88	1.11
Total	114	100	2.75	1.10	0.40

The fact that 35.09% of students view British teachers as "Strict and authoritarian" suggests that traditional perceptions of British educators as disciplinarians were still dominant. This perception might be influenced by historical depictions in literature and media, where British teachers often embodied strictness and discipline. Classic works often portrayed teachers in a rigid, authoritative manner, which could significantly

influence students' perceptions.

The close percentage (30.70%) of students who saw British teachers as "Friendly and supportive" indicates a significant shift towards recognizing more modern,supportive teaching practices. This aligns with contemporary educational trends emphasizing empathy, emotional intelligence, and student-centered learning approaches. The growing acknowledgment of these qualities suggests that students were aware of and valued more progressive educational practices.

With 26.32% of students associating British teachers with being "Intellectual and inspiring," it is clear that a considerable portion of students viewed educators as intellectual role models who inspired academic and personal growth. This perception underscored the respect and admiration for the intellectual contributions of teachers and their ability to motivate students to pursue knowledge and creativity.

The 7.89% of students who provided alternative descriptions indicated that there were diverse or nuanced views that did not fit neatly into the predefined categories. This suggests that students might have varied experiences or influences that shape their perceptions of British teachers in unique ways. These could include exposure to different teaching styles, personal interactions with educators, or individual preferences and values.

Table 2. Characteristics associated with a British teacher.

Response category	Number of students	Percentage (%)	Mean score	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
a) Disciplined	38	33.33	3.33	1.21	0.36
b) Tolerant and respectful	28	24.56	2.46	1.10	0.45
c) Intellectual and knowledgeable	40	35.09	3.51	1.22	0.35
d) Other (please specify)	8	7.02	0.70	0.84	1.20
Total	**114**	**100**	**2.75**	**1.09**	**0.40**

The second question aimed to uncover specific characteristics that Ukrainian students associate with British teachers. The distribution of responses provides several important insights:

- The most frequently chosen characteristic, with 35.09% of students, was "Intellectual and knowledgeable." This reflects a strong perception of British teachers as highly educated and well-informed individuals, suggesting that students valued the academic and intellectual prowess of British educators. The high percentage of students associating British teachers with being "Intellectual and knowledgeable" underscores the expectation that British teachers embodied intellectual rigor and expertise. This expectation is likely rooted in the image of Britain as a nation that highly values and respects education. The perception of Britain as a country with a prestigious educational system and a long history of academic excellence contributes to this view, reinforcing the belief that British teachers must uphold these high standards and continued to inspire students through their intellectual capabilities.

- Close behind, 33.33% of students selected "Disciplined." This indicates that many students still associated British teachers with a sense of order, structure, and adherence to rules. This characteristic complemented the traditional image of British educators as figures of authority who uphold discipline in the classroom. The significant association with discipline indicates that the traditional value of maintaining order and structure in education remains influential. This characteristic was often seen as essential for creating an effective learning environment where students could focus and thrive.

- With 24.56% of students choosing "tolerant and respectful," there is a significant acknowledgment of these positive interpersonal qualities. This reflects a perception of British teachers as fair and considerate, promoting an inclusive and respectful learning environment. The notable percentage of students recognizing "tolerant and respectful" as key characteristics pointed to an evolving perception of teachers as not just authoritative figures but also as empathetic and respectful individuals. This shift aligned with contemporary educational practices that prioritize emotional intelligence and respectful interactions, emphasizing tolerance and respect for diversity.

- A smaller group of students (7.02%) provided other characteristics, suggesting diverse views that may include additional qualities not covered by the predefined options. This could include characteristics such as creativity, approachability, or adaptability, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the teacher's role. The responses under "Other" might suggest that there were additional qualities students appreciate in teachers, reflecting the complexity and diversity of the teaching role. These views might offer valuable insights for further research and understanding of student expectations.

Table 3. Main roles and functions of a teacher in the British education system.

Response category	Number of students	Percentage (%)	Mean score	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
a) Transmitting knowledge and skills	45	39.47	3.95	1.28	0.32
b) Motivating and inspiring students	35	30.70	3.07	1.17	0.38
c) Developing social and interpersonal skills	28	24.56	2.46	1.10	0.45
d) Other (please specify)	6	5.26	0.53	0.74	1.40
Total	114	100	2.75	1.07	0.39

The third question aimed to identify the main roles and functions of teachers in the British education system as perceived by Ukrainian students.

- The majority of students (39.47%) believed that the primary role of a British teacher was to transmit knowledge and skills. This reflects a traditional view of teaching, emphasizing the importance of academic instruction and the teacher's role as a subject matter expert. It highlighted the expectation that teachers were the main source of knowledge and responsible for equipping students with essential academic competencies. The high percentage of students emphasizing the transmission of knowledge and skills suggested that academic instruction remained a core expectation of teachers. This traditional view underscores the fundamental role of educators in ensuring students' achievements of academic proficiency and mastery of subject content.

- A significant portion of students (30.70%) viewed motivating and inspiring students as a key function of British teachers. This underscores the importance of teachers not only as instructors but also as motivators who encourage and inspire students to reach their full potential. It reflects a modern educational perspective where emotional and motivational support is critical for student success. The significant recognition of the motivational and inspirational role of teachers reflects the evolving nature of education, where fostering a positive and encouraging learning environment is essential. This role was crucial for student engagement and long-term academic and personal development. This emphasis on motivational and inspirational teaching was characteristic of British pedagogical culture. An example can be seen in the film "Dead Poets Society," where the character of John Keating, portrayed by Robin Williams, inspires his students to think independently and embrace their individuality. The character of Keating was based on a real teacher, Sam Pickering, who taught at Montgomery Bell Academy, where the film's screenwriter, Tom Schulman, was a student. This example highlights the cultural value placed on teachers who went beyond traditional instruction to foster a deep, personal connection with their students and inspire them to achieve greatness.

- With 24.56% of students recognizing the development of social and interpersonal skills as a main function, there was a clear acknowledgment of the role teachers play in fostering essential life skills. This includes helping students develop effective communication, teamwork, and social interaction abilities, which are crucial for personal and professional success in today's interconnected world. The acknowledgment of the importance of developing social and interpersonal skills highlights a holistic approach to education. It indicates that students valued the role of teachers in preparing them not only academically but also socially and emotionally for the challenges of the modern world.

- A smaller group of students (5.26%) provided other roles and functions, suggesting a variety of additional responsibilities that teachers might have. These included roles such as mentoring, providing emotional support, fostering creativity, integrating technology, and promoting critical thinking, indicating the diverse expectations and multifaceted nature of the teaching profession. The responses under "other" suggest that there were additional roles and functions that students associated with teachers, pointing to the complex and diverse nature of teaching. This indicated a need for teachers to be adaptable and versatile in addressing various student needs and expectations.

Table 4. Perception of the level of formality in teacher-student interactions in British classrooms.

Response category	Number of students	Percentage (%)	Mean score	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
a) Highly formal, with clear boundaries and respectful language	30	26.32	2.63	1.13	0.43
b) Moderately formal, with a balance of professionalism and friendliness	45	39.47	3.95	1.28	0.32
c) Relaxed and informal, allowing for open discussions and familiarity	32	28.07	2.81	1.17	0.42
d) Other (please specify)	7	6.14	0.61	0.78	1.28
Total	**114**	**100**	**2.75**	**1.09**	**0.40**

The largest group of students (39.47%) perceived teacher-student interactions in British classrooms as moderately formal, with a balance of professionalism and friendliness. The mean score of 3.95 and a relatively low coefficient of variation (0.32) indicated that this was a widely shared perception, suggesting that students appreciate a balanced approach where teachers maintained professionalism while being approachable and friendly.

A significant portion of students (26.32%) viewed interactions as highly formal, with clear boundaries and respectful language. The mean score of 2.63 and a coefficient of variation of 0.43 suggest a moderate level of agreement on this view. This reflected the traditional British emphasis on respect and formality in educational settings.

Another notable group (28.07%) perceived the interactions as relaxed and informal, allowing for open discussions and familiarity. The mean score of 2.81 and a coefficient of variation of 0.42 indicated that this perception is also relatively common, reflecting a more modern approach to education that values open communication and less rigid boundaries.

A smaller group of students (6.14%) selected "other," suggesting diverse views that include additional nuances not covered by the predefined categories. This group provided specific examples such as context-dependent formality, where interactions shift between formal and informal based on the lesson or activity; personalized interactions, where teachers adjust their level of formality according to individual student needs and relationships; and a mix of traditional and progressive practices, where formality is maintained in certain aspects while fostering a more relaxed environment in others. The high coefficient of variation (1.28) indicated a wide range of opinions within this group, highlighting the complexity and diversity of perceptions regarding formality in teacher-student interactions.

Table 5. The role of discipline in the classroom environment of a British teacher.

Response category	Number of students	Percentage (%)	Mean score	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
a) Strict discipline is essential for effective learning	40	35.09	3.51	1.22	0.35
b) A balanced approach that emphasizes respect and self-discipline	60	52.63	4.56	1.18	0.26
c) Discipline is not a significant focus in the classroom	14	12.28	1.23	0.88	0.72
Total	**114**	**100**	**3.10**	**1.09**	**0.35**

The largest group of students (52.63%) believed that a balanced approach that emphasizes respect and self-discipline was characteristic of British classrooms. The mean score of 4.56 and the relatively low coefficient of variation (0.26) suggested strong agreement among students about the importance of balance in classroom discipline. This approach aligns with modern educational practices that promote mutual respect and self-regulation among students, indicating a shift away from strictly authoritarian methods. The majority favoring a balanced approach suggests that contemporary educational practices in British classrooms emphasize a blend of respect, self-discipline, and structure. This understanding stemmed from cultural traditions in Britain that valued both academic rigor and the development of personal character. British educational philosophy traditionally integrated the cultivation of social and emotional skills with academic achievements, reflecting the broader cultural emphasis on producing well-rounded individuals prepared for personal and professional success in an interconnected world. This approach not only enforced rules but also fostered an environment of mutual respect and personal responsibility, rooted in the long-standing British values of fairness, respect, and holistic education.

A significant portion of students (35.09%) viewed strict discipline as essential for effective learning. The mean score of 3.51 and a coefficient of variation of 0.35 indicated a moderate level of agreement on this view. This reflects the traditional perspective that maintaining strict order and discipline was crucial for creating an environment conducive to learning and minimizing disruptions. This view was deeply rooted in British cultural and educational traditions that emphasized respect for authority and structured learning environments. Historically, British education characterised by a rigorous and orderly approach, as seen in the traditions of British boarding schools and grammar schools, which long upheld high standards of discipline and academic excellence. These institutions often highlighted the role of discipline in fostering a sense of responsibility, diligence, and respect for societal norms. The emphasis on strict discipline in British culture can be traced back to the Victorian era, when education was seen as a means of moral and character development, preparing students not only for academic success but also for their roles as disciplined and responsible citizens. This traditional view continued to influence contemporary educational practices, reflecting a cultural heritage that values order, respect, and high academic standards.

A smaller group of students (12.28%) believed that discipline was not a significant focus in the classroom. The mean score of 1.23 and a higher coefficient of variation (0.72) suggested more diverse opinions within this group. This indicates that while some students may

see less emphasis on discipline as beneficial, others may not view it as effective for classroom management and learning. This perception reflected a progressive strand within British educational culture that valued student autonomy and creative freedom over strict disciplinary measures. In this context, the reduced emphasis on discipline aligns with a more liberal educational philosophy that encourages independent thinking and self-expression, rooted in broader British cultural traditions of individuality and innovation. However, the diversity of opinions also suggested that this approach may not universally resonate, highlighting ongoing debates within British education about the best ways to balance freedom and order in the classroom.

Table 6. Importance of humour or wit in the teaching style of a British teacher.

Response category	Number of students	Percentage (%)	Mean score	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
a) Very important, it helps create a positive learning environment	54	47.37	4.39	1.15	0.26
b) Somewhat important, it adds a touch of entertainment to the classroom	36	31.58	3.51	1.22	0.35
c) Not important, it should focus solely on delivering the content	24	21.05	2.11	0.99	0.47
Total	**114**	**100**	**3.34**	**1.12**	**0.34**

The largest group of students (47.37%) believed that humour or wit was very important in the teaching style of a British teacher, as it helps create a positive learning environment. The mean score of 4.39 and a relatively low coefficient of variation (0.26) indicated a strong consensus among students. This reflected an appreciation for the role of humour in making learning enjoyable and engaging. While British culture was often seen as reserved and formal, humour plays a crucial role in social interactions and was a valued tool for building rapport and easing classroom tensions. The use of humour aligned with the British tradition of wit and irony, which can make lessons more relatable and memorable for students.

A significant portion of students (31.58%) viewed humour as somewhat important, adding a touch of entertainment to the classroom. The mean score of 3.51 and a coefficient of variation of 0.35 suggest moderate agreement on this perspective. This indicated that while humour is appreciated, its role was seen more as a supplementary element rather than a core component of teaching. In British culture, where subtlety and understatement were often appreciated, humour could serve as a gentle way to maintain student interest and break the monotony of academic rigor without detracting from the seriousness of the subject matter.

A smaller group of students (21.05%) believed that humour is not important and that teaching should focus solely on delivering content. The mean score of 2.11 and a higher coefficient of variation (0.47) indicated more diverse opinions within this group. This view might stem from a traditional British educational approach that values discipline and academic focus over entertainment. British classrooms, particularly in more formal settings, might prioritize a structured and content-driven approach to ensure that educational standards and objectives are met. This perspective underscored the balance British teachers must strike between maintaining academic rigor and incorporating humour to enhance the learning experience.

DISCUSSION

The portrayal of teachers in literature, as exemplified by Frances Hodgson Burnett's "A Little Princess" and Roald Dahl's "Matilda," provides a vivid depiction of the complex and often contradictory image of educators. Both authors create characters that embody the binary motif of good and evil, which serves to highlight the contrasting qualities of teachers and headmistresses within the British educational system.

In "A Little Princess," Sarah Crewe is depicted as a resilient, kind, and intellectually curious girl who, despite enduring severe hardships, maintains her dignity and compassion. This portrayal not only reflects the potential positive influence of a good teacher but also underscores the resilience and moral strength required to thrive in an oppressive environment. Miss Minchin, the headmistress, represents the authoritarian and cruel side of the educational system. Her merciless behaviour and obsession with wealth and power illustrate the darker aspects of school management during that period.

Similarly, in "Matilda," Roald Dahl presents Miss Trunchbull as a tyrannical and abusive headmistress who epitomizes the negative extremes of disciplinary authority. In stark contrast, Miss Honey is portrayed as nurturing, supportive, and deeply invested in her students' well-being. This dichotomy between the oppressive headmistress and the compassionate teacher serves to emphasize the importance of empathy,

understanding, and genuine care in the educational profession.

These literary works highlight the significant impact that teachers and school administrators can have on their students' lives. The negative portrayals of Miss Minchin and Miss Trunchbull are contrasted with the positive influences of Sarah Crewe and Miss Honey, underscoring the critical role of educators in shaping both the intellectual and emotional development of their students.

Transitioning from these historical and literary perspectives to contemporary views, the survey conducted among Ukrainian students at Ushynsky University reveals a nuanced perception of British teachers. While traditional views of British educators as "strict and authoritarian" persist, there is a notable shift towards recognizing more modern, supportive, and intellectual qualities. The students' responses indicate an appreciation for teachers who not only maintain discipline and order but also inspire and support their students' growth.

The survey results suggest that Ukrainian students value the intellectual and knowledgeable aspects of British teachers, viewing them as highly educated and well-informed. This perception aligns with the historical image of British educators as pillars of academic rigor and intellectual excellence. However, there is also a significant recognition of the importance of empathy, respect, and support in the teacher-student relationship. The students' acknowledgment of the need for a balanced approach to discipline and the incorporation of humour and wit into teaching styles reflects contemporary educational trends that prioritize emotional intelligence and student-centered learning.

Overall, the findings highlight the evolving image of British teachers, blending traditional authoritative traits with modern, empathetic approaches. This evolution mirrors the broader changes in educational philosophy, which increasingly emphasize holistic student development and the creation of supportive learning environments. The contrast between the literary portrayals and contemporary perceptions underscores the ongoing transformation in the roles and expectations of teachers, driven by cultural, historical, and pedagogical influences.

Conclusion

The study of British teachers through the lens of literary analysis and contemporary survey responses highlights the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the teaching profession. Literary works like "A Little Princess" and "Matilda" provide deep insights into the contrasting images of educators, portraying both the oppressive and nurturing sides of the profession. These narratives emphasize the profound influence that teachers can have on their students' lives, shaping their intellectual and moral growth. The survey results from Ukrainian students reveal an evolving perception of British

teachers. While traditional images of strict disciplinarians remain, there is a significant recognition of qualities such as empathy, intellectual inspiration, and supportive teaching practices. This reflects a broader educational shift towards valuing holistic student development and creating positive, inclusive learning environments. Together, the literary analysis and contemporary survey findings offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex role of teachers. They underscore the importance of balancing discipline with empathy and intellectual rigor with support to effectively meet the diverse needs of students. The dual role of teachers as both authority figures and compassionate mentors is crucial for fostering academic excellence and personal growth. The study provides valuable insights into the evolving image of British teachers. It highlights the necessity for educators to adapt to changing educational paradigms, integrating traditional strengths with modern, supportive approaches. This comprehensive view informs educational practices and policies aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, ultimately contributing to the betterment of educational systems.

Future research in this field could expand on the comparative analysis of teacher perceptions across different cultural and educational contexts, examining how governmental regulations and pedagogical traditions influence the evolving image of educators. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate how these perceptions change over time, particularly in response to shifts in educational policies, teacher training programs, and societal expectations. Further exploration of the role of media representations in shaping public and student attitudes toward teachers would also provide valuable insights into the intersection of education, culture, and social perceptions.

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