

Determination of Preschool Teachers' Preference Reasons for Children's Books Used by Them in Their Classes

Murat Bartan^{1,*}

¹Department of Preschool Education, Faculty of Education, Kütahya Dumlupınar University, Kütahya, Turkey

*Correspondence: Department of Preschool Education, Faculty of Education, Kütahya Dumlupınar University, Kütahya, Turkey. E-mail: murat.bartan@dpu.edu.tr

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Abstract

Teachers are the people performing the most important role in the educational process. In particular, in preschool education, teacher qualifications have become more crucial since the preschool period is a critical year in terms of all aspects of the child's development. It is the most important period in which children's attitudes towards book develop. In the preschool period, books that teachers choose for children have been seen to affect the attitudes and viewpoints of children towards books in their later ages. In this context, the research was conducted with the aim of revealing what criteria preschool teachers choose for children's book that they use in their classes. A situational study is a qualitative study in which a situation is investigated in depth. 26 preschool teachers working at kindergartens and nursery classes in elementary schools which are affiliated to Kütahya Provincial Directorate of National Education participated in the research. Research data were collected with semi-structured interview questions. The data were categorized by content analysis. According to the results of the research, preschool teachers pay attention to the fact that the textbook is robust physically in the selection of the books they use in the classroom, that the content is simple to understand and that the language used is plain and that the known writers and publishing houses are also considered when choosing books.

Keywords: preschool, book, mother tongue

1. Introduction

Literacy is one of the most important skills that allow individuals to engage in lifelong learning. One must have developed literacy skill for learning. Early childhood period is important for gaining reading habit and skills such as reading comprehension, using language correctly and fluently, listening, and expressing oneself verbally and in written (Cevher Kalburan, 2010). Reading habit gained by children at a young age significantly affects their later years (Kardaş and Alp, 2013). Although children gain this habit after they start reading, developing a positive attitude towards books starts in the pre-school period. Familiarizing children with books in the pre-school period is the first and most important step to the formation of reading habit. Literacy awareness developing in the pre-school period affects the reading and writing skills to be acquired by children at the following education levels (Powell and Diamond, 2012).

Children's gaining reading and writing experiences such as noticing visual and written sources, realizing that writing has its unique characteristics, developing observation skills, and discovering that what is read can be written and what is written can be read in the pre-school period help them to be ready for the reading and writing process (Erdoğan, Özen Altinkaynak, & Erdoğan, 2013). In the pre-school period, these experiences are provided by children's literature works. Children's literature is defined as a set of products that enrich children's intellectual and emotional worlds through artistic visual and linguistic elements in accordance with their developmental levels from birth to adolescence (Sever, 2004; Gönen, 2014).

Children's literature plays an important part in pre-school education. This is because books should be read to children or presented to them in dramatic, visual, or auditory ways so that they can be acquainted with literature before they

start reading (Tuncer, 2016). Children in the pre-school education period do not have adequate experience of understanding and perceiving the world. Books are means that transfer the experiences of different people and periods and can guide them on the way to understanding and perceiving the world (Kıldan and Gümrükçü Bilgici, 2011). They are considered to be very important for children to develop positive attitudes towards books and reading. This raises the importance of the books to be chosen at pre-school education levels. Pre-school educators' book preferences and ways of presenting books are crucial points in terms of the skills to be given to children. Criteria for selection of books and their presentation to children should be determined for books to be useful to children (Saçkesen, 2008). It is important that educators have knowledge about the contents of the children's books read to children, their authors, the motives for the books, their titles, their sources, the authors' notes, illustrations, the compatibility of the illustrations with the written elements, the use of colors, and so on (Gill, 2009).

The literature review indicates that the points to consider in children's books fall into two main groups: physical features and content features.

1.1 Physical Features

1.1.1 Cover and Binding

The first point to consider in children's books is cover and binding. It is cover which will determine the child's emotional bond with the book. The cover should be lively, intriguing, and relevant to the content. The cover should contain illustrations and written elements reflecting its content. Colors should be harmonious on the cover of the book. In addition, the books to be given to children in the pre-school period should be durable. Hence, printing quality should be high, and the cover should be enduring. The books to be given to younger children should be made of cloth, paperboard, or plastics, and binding should be done through stitching (Gönen, 1998; Saracho, 1989; Tür, 2001; Yalçın and Aytaş, 2002).

1.1.2 Size

Pre-school children generally like reading books of different sizes. Large books allow children to follow illustrations well. It is very important that books have proper weights for children and are convenient to be used by them. Since these books will be in children's hands for a long time at this age group, importance should be attached to making them in sizes that allow holding in hand. Therefore, children's books should have sizes that are easy to hold in hands and may keep interest aroused. The most suitable sizes are sixteen to twenty-three centimeters (16 x 23 cm). When deciding on the sizes of children's books, attention should be paid to their portability in terms of weight and the space they occupy (Civaroglu, 2000; Güleç and Geçgel, 2005; Gürler, 1999; Oğuzkan, 2001; Tanju, 2010).

1.1.3 Paper

The kind of the paper used in children's books also affects children's attitudes towards them. The use of cloth or paperboard pages not only improves durability but also makes it easy for children who do not have developed finger muscles in early periods to turn them. Children's books should be made of matte paper that does not scatter ink and tire eyes or first quality paper that improves endurance. In addition, such paper should be easily cleanable. Since books will be held by young children in their hands for a long time, they should be produced out of quality materials such as cloth, paperboard, or rigid plastics that will not wear off easily (Civaroglu, 2000; Oğuzkan, 2001; Saçkesen, 2008; Tanju, 2010).

1.1.4 Page Layout

Font size should be adjusted in accordance with children's ages. The preferred font size for pre-school children should be large (the ideal one: 14-16), and lower cases should be used. Above-the-normal line spacing should be preferred. Children's books should have wide page margins. The thickness and page numbers of children's books should be determined in accordance with children's developmental levels (Civaroglu, 2000; Gürler, 1999; Oğuzkan, 2001; Saracho, 1989; Yılmaz, 1998).

1.1.5 Spelling and Punctuation

In children's books, attention should be paid to grammar and punctuation rules. Bold letters and wide spacing should be preferred for pre-school period. They should be faultless in terms of spelling, punctuation, and syntax. Single-subject sentences that are composed of five or six words and not very complex should be chosen for pre-school period children (Civaroglu, 2000; Oğuzkan, 2001; Saracho, 1989; Sever, 2004).

1.1.6 Illustrations

Illustrations and texts should be on the same page in the books prepared for preschool children. Pastel color

illustrations that have shadowy outlines and can give new ideas at every glance should be chosen. The illustrations in books should be made by expert people and have artistic quality. They should be large and put on the page in such a way that the entire page is covered. They should be relevant to children's age, psychology, and the theme of the book. In addition, they should be drawn in such a way that they are not find odd by children. They should be put in the most ideal place within the page layout, and thus, harmony of the page layout should not be disrupted. The books should give coverage to illustrations representing the figures of objects, animals, and people who they can see in their close environment (Civaroglu, 2000; Demircan, 2006; Gürler, 1999; Reese, 2008; Saracho, 1989; Tanju, 2010).

1.2 Content Features

1.2.1 Language – Style

Attention should be paid to language use in children's books. A simple, clear, and understandable language should be used. The style should be fluent. Children's books should be simple and short. They should sound nice and be rhythmic. New words should be relevant to children's age and concept levels. Children's books should not contain imaginary descriptions. Paragraphs should not exceed 3-5 sentences. Sound repetitions should be avoided, and new and up-to-date words that may improve children's vocabulary should be used. In addition, words should be used in their literal meanings. Books that not involve slang words, too many figurative expressions, and conjunctions and prepositions that are not much used by children should be preferred (Civaroglu, 2000; Demircan, 2006; Gönen, 1998; Saracho, 1989; Sever, 2004).

1.2.2 Theme and Subject

Themes should be clear and obvious. They should help to reveal a good subject matter. Children's books should often deal with helpfulness, being hardworking, love of family, harmony among friends, respect, and the like. Children's books should have a main subject matter, and the sense of excitement should be kept ignited. The subject matter needs to be clear, obvious, and easy to understand. The subject matters that are selected based on children's interests and needs should be instilled according to these characteristics. The selected subject matter should be linked to the main theme, and it should not lead to a confusion in the minds of children. The subject matters that are handled in children's books should involve the values that raise children's confidence. Children's books should allow both entertainment and the emergence of new emotions and thoughts (Civaroglu, 2000; Güleç ve Geçgel, 2005; Oğuzkan, 2001; Gündüz Sağlam, 2007; Saracho, 1989; Sever, 2004; Yalçın and Altaç 2002).

1.2.3 Character

Books for young children should involve few characters. There should be one or two main characters. These characters should not be fairy tale type characters, but from real-life or be realistic. There should be few characters. Supporting characters should be defined and embedded clearly around the main character. These characters can be grouped as children, adults, animals, things, and machines. There should be dramatic and entertaining elements in the text (Civaroglu, 2000; Güleç ve Geçgel, 2005; Oğuzkan, 2001; Kıbrıs, 2006; Yalçın ve Aktaş, 2002).

1.2.4 Plan

The authors should plan children's books in a such a way that they can appeal to their readers. The events taking place in children's books should display consistency between feelings and thoughts as well as between the subject and the theme. In addition, the events should be narrated in a plain language avoiding any unnecessary details. The story should be fictionalized in such a way that children's interest and curiosity are ignited from the beginning until the end (Oğuzkan, 2001; Sever, 2004).

In this sense, the criteria for selecting the books used by the teachers in the preschool period are seen as an important element. This research is important in terms of revealing which criteria the preschool teachers take into consideration in the process of choosing children's books that they use in their classrooms.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This research was conducted with a basic qualitative research design. Basic qualitative research is the most widely used qualitative research type in applied fields. Basic qualitative research is conducted to understand how people make sense of their experiences and to make sense of the meaning that an individual creates as a result of interaction with his / her environment. In the basic qualitative research method, data are collected through interviews, observations and documents, and analyses are presented in a comprehensive description of the findings, and in the form of themes and categories (Merriam, 2015).

2.2 Study Group

Easy-to-use situation sampling was put to use in the study group selection. This method allows the researcher to choose a situation that is close and easy to access (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In this context, 26 preschool teachers who work at kindergartens and primary school nursery classes in elementary schools in Kütahya under the Directorate of National Education participated in the research. The demographic information of the teachers who participated in the research is given in the table below.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Study Group

	Demographic information	N
Gender	Male	4
	Female	22
Professional Seniority	1-5 years	5
	6-10 years	8
	11-15 years	11
	16-20 years	2
School	Kindergarten	17
	Primary School Nursery Class	9
Graduation	Formal Education	22
	Open Education	4
Total		26

When Table 1 is examined, a total of 26 preschool teachers, 4 male and 22 female, participated in the study. While 17 of the teachers work in kindergarten, 9 of them work in primary school nursery classes. 22 of the teachers were graduated from formal undergraduate programs and 4 of them were open education graduates.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

The research data were collected by a semi-structured interview form containing 5 open-ended questions. Questions are related to the physical properties of books, the content of books, the feature of the language used in books, the characters in the books and the authors of the books.

2.4 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was done in the form of basic descriptive statistics in analysing the obtained data. The views of the teachers were made into theme through the content analysis. Themes and frequency values are given in tables. Themes with frequency values of 10 or more are presented in tables.

3. Results

In the research conducted in order to determine the reasons why preschool teachers prefer the children's books used in their classes, the following findings were obtained as a result of the analyses of the collected data.

Table 2 Preschool Teachers' Views about Physical Elements of Books While Choosing Them

Theme	f
The durability of binding of the book	26
Quality of the paper	26
Size of the books	22
Type font and type size	20
Pictures	20
Colours	17
Spelling rules, punctuation marks	15
The harmony between picture and text	14
Characteristic of the outer book cover	10

When table 2 was examined, the preschool teachers' opinions on the first feature that the teachers take the books physically into consideration when choosing books, all of the teachers (f = 26) stated that they took “Durability of binding of the book and Quality of the paper” into account the most. T21 stated that “I mostly take quality and durability take into consideration while choosing books”. In view of the other views of the teachers, respectively, (f=22) “Size of the books”, T12 stated that “I choose books in the size that children can comfortably hold”. Some of the teachers (f = 20) stated that they chose to book according to “Font type and font size” and “The use of pictures“. While Ö4 expressed the fact that “I take the font size into consideration”, T1 stated that “the vivid colour and being effective of the pictures are the main reasons to choose the book”. When the table is examined, the other views of the teachers, respectively, are “Colours”, “Spelling rules and punctuation marks”, “The harmony between the picture and text”, “Characteristics of the outer cover”. Provide dates defining the periods of recruitment and follow-up and the primary sources of the potential subjects, where appropriate. If these dates differ by group, provide the values for each group.

Table 3. Preschool Teachers' Views Regarding What Topics They Choose as a Content When Choosing Books

Theme	f
Simple and comprehensible content	26
Meeting the needs of children	26
Appropriate for children's developmental levels	25
Providing universal values	21
Giving information	20
Being compatible with the outcomes of the curriculum	17
Related to solving a problem	17
Being practical	12
Characteristics of heroes in the book	10

When Table 3 was examined, preschool teachers' views regarding what topics they choose as a content when choosing books, all the teachers (f=26) who participated in the study stated that they chose books according to the “Simple and comprehensible content and Meeting the needs of the children”. Ö3 stated that “the thing that I pay the most attention to is the content which is simple and understandable” and Ö9 stated that “the books to be chosen should give the content in the simplest way and in accordance with the needs of the children”. The vast majority of teachers (f=25) stated that “They had chosen books according to the level of children's development”. T5 stated that “when choosing books, I take into account the development level of children” and T7 stated that “the ages of children are effective in choosing books”. It is observed that teachers (f=21) give importance to “Providing universal values” when looking at their answers. T23 stated that “it is important to give universal truths and values as a subject in books”. Some of the teachers (f20) stated that “They gave importance to information given by books when selecting books”. T14 stated that “I certainly attached importance to the books giving new information to children when selecting books”. When the table was examined, in the views of the teachers, respectively, teachers stated that they chose books according to “Being compatible with the outcomes of the curriculum”, “Related to solving a problem”, “Being practical” and “Characteristics of heroes in the book”.

Table 4. Preschool Teachers' Views regarding the characteristics of the language used in the book when choosing a Book

Theme	f
The language should be simple and comprehensible	26
Containing new words	20
Including daily spoken language	15
Consisting of short sentences	13
Comply with grammar rules	12
Offering spelling rules	11

When table 4 was examined, all teachers (f=26) stated that “The language should be simple and comprehensible” was the first element when choosing a book. T22 stated that “the most important element of the book is the language used in the book” and T11 stated that “the first element I take into consideration that the language of the book should be simple”. Some teachers (f=20) stated that they attached importance to “the books containing new words”. T5

stated that “it is important that books should contain new words”. Nearly half of the teachers (f=15) assumed that “books including daily spoken language is important” and T9 stated that “books should have the words used in daily life”. Some of the teachers (f=13) pointed out that “sentences should be short enough”. T10 stated that “it is necessary for books to have short sentences in the children’s books”. Less than fifteen teachers (f=12) signified that “Books should comply with the grammar rules”. T13 stated that “children’s books should not contain inverted sentences and should comply with the grammar rules”. Nearly one-fourth of the teachers (f=11) mentioned that “Books should offer spelling rules”. T2 stated that “children’s books should specify punctuation marks and gain familiarity about the spelling rules to the children”.

Table 5. Preschool Teachers' Views Regarding the Characteristics of Heroes in the Book When Choosing a Book

Theme	f
Showing proper behaviours	24
Be of the interest to the children	22
Including animal characters	20
Including human characters	17
Improving the imagination	14
Offering problem solving	10

When table 4 was examined, considering the views of the preschool teachers regarding the characters in the book chosen by them, the majority of the teachers (f=24) found it important that characters in the book should “Show proper behaviours”. T8 stated that “the first element I look for in children’s books is the characters showing proper behaviours”. T14 signified the importance of “characters that show proper things to the children”. Most of the teachers (f=22) stated that “they gave importance to the characters are the one who we haven’t run up against in the books before”. More than half of the teachers (f=20) mentioned that books “Including animal characters” were important for them. T1 stated that “books with animal characters interest the children”. T26 uttered that “children like the books having animal characters a lot so that I gave importance to that issue”. When the table examined, the other views of the teachers are respectively like that “Including human characters”, “Improving the imagination” and “Offering problem-solving” and they choose books also according to these.

Table 6. Preschool Teachers' Views Regarding the Writers or Publishing Houses When Choosing a Book

Theme	f
Well-known writers	22
Well-known publishing houses	20
Books recommended by commissions	15
According to their own search	14
According to their friends’ suggestions	11
Books fees	10

When table 6 was examined, considering the views of the preschool teachers regarding the writers or publishing houses when choosing books, most of the teachers (f=22) stated that the first thing that they took into consideration was “Well-known writers”. T4 expressed that “when choosing books, I mostly look for the well-known writers” and T3 stated that “when choosing books, I picked the books of the familiar writers that I know”. Nearly all of the teachers (f=20) mentioned that they chose “Well-known publishing houses”. T12 expressed that “I mostly picked the books from publishing house that I know and follow”. More than half of the teachers (f=15) I choose “Books recommended by commissions”. T17 stated that I chose “Books pointed out by commissions of preschool education”. T19 expressed that “I choose the books printed by TÜBİTAK commissions”. When the table is examined, the views of the teachers are, respectively, “According to their own search”, “According to their friends’ suggestions” and “Books fees”

4. Discussion

In the research conducted in order to determine the reasons how preschool teachers prefer children's books used in their classes, it was seen that teachers chose books for their classes according to different criteria in the selection of books.

It is seen that the first characteristic that the teachers physically consider books when choosing books is that Durability of binding of the book and Quality of the paper. According to Saracho (1989), children's books should be durable and print quality should be high. He stated that the binding of the book should be durable and pleasing to the eye (As cited in: Saçkesen, 2008). In some studies, similar results can be seen in Gündüz Sağlam (2007); Saçkesen (2008); Kıldan and Gümrükçü Bilgici (2011); Yükselen, Yumuş and Işık (2016).

In the study performed by Gündüz Sağlam (2007) about the evaluation of the preschool children's books by parents and teachers, the fact that durability of binding of the book in choosing a book is a significant one. In the study to determine the views of parents and preschool teachers in the selection of children's books, Saçkesen (2008) touched upon the importance of the binding of the book and the quality of paper used in preschool teachers' selection of children's books. Kıldan and Gümrükçü Bilgici (2011), in their study on determining the views of the parents of preschoolers on the criteria of selecting children's book, concluded that children's books should be durable materials in terms of external structure characteristics, quality paper in books, as well as good binding of the books, were important.

In the study conducted by Yükselen, Yumuş and Işık (2016) that examines preschool teachers' book choices, they concluded that the preschool teachers took the paper used in children's books with high quality and durable binding into consideration in the selection of children's books as the most important elements. When the results of the above researches are examined, it is seen that the results of this study coincide with the results.

According to the other opinions of the teachers, respectively, it was seen that the teachers paid attention to the Size of the books, Font type and font size, Pictures, Colours, Spelling rules and punctuation marks. The harmony between picture and text is also a prominent result of the study of Yükselen, Yumuş ve Işık (2016). They also stated that they chose books according to the Characteristics of the outer cover.

When preschool teachers' views regarding what topics they choose as a content when choosing books were examined, all the teachers participating in the research stated that the books were chosen according to "Contents of the books that can be simple and comprehensible and Books meeting the needs of the children". In the study conducted by them, Kıldan and Gümrükçü Bilgici (2011) concluded that parents chose books according to the same characteristics. When other views of the teachers were examined, some views, respectively, appeared related to Appropriate for children's developmental levels and providing universal values. Same results can be seen in the study conducted by Kıldan and Gümrükçü Bilgici (2011), and Yükselen, Yumuş and Işık (2016). And also, the same results can be seen in the study conducted by Gündüz Sağlam (2007), and Kıldan and Gümrükçü Bilgici (2011). The other views in this study are being compatible with the outcomes of the curriculum, Related to solving a problem being practical and Characteristics of heroes in the book.

When preschool teachers' views regarding the characteristics of the language used in the book when choosing a book was examined, all the teachers stated they attached importance to the language should be simple and comprehensible as the first feature. This coincides with the result of the study conducted by Kıldan and Gümrükçü Bilgici (2011). Other views of the teachers are, respectively, containing new words, including daily spoken language, Consisting of short sentences, Comply with grammar rules and Offering spelling rules.

When preschool teachers' views regarding the characteristics of heroes in the book when choosing a book were examined, it was seen that teachers noted that Showing proper behaviours, Be of the interest to the children, Including animal characters and Including human characters. Another view in this research is that it is significant to give importance to Improving the imagination in books. Gündüz Sağlam (2007) reached the same result. The other teacher views are that they choose books according to books offering problem-solving.

When preschool teachers' views regarding the writers or publishing houses when choosing a book were examined, teachers stated that the first characteristic of the books is Well-known writers. The other views of the teachers are, respectively, Well-known publishing houses and Yükselen, Yumuş ve Işık (2016) found the same result in the study conducted by them. In the study conducted by Kıldan and Gümrükçü Bilgici (2011), they found that parents gave importance to the writers and publishing houses. The other views in this research are that teachers choose books according to Books recommended by commissions, According to their own search and Books fees.

When the results of the research are examined in general terms, the preschool teachers stated that the books they use in the classroom should have physically durable bindings and the paper used in the books should be of high quality. Preschool teachers stated that when choosing books, the theme should be simple and comprehensible, and books should meet the needs of children. Regarding the characteristics of the language used in selecting a book, they stated that the language should be simple and comprehensible, and they paid attention to the characters mentioned in the

book which should give the correct behaviours and be interesting. In the views of the teachers related to the writers or publishing houses while choosing books, it was seen that they chose books according to books with well-known writers.

4.1 Recommendations

According to the results of the research conducted in order to determine the reasons related to the preschool teachers' preference on the children's books they use in their classes, the following suggestions are determined.

- It can be ensured that preschool teachers can examine children's literature products in a more detailed way and they can be offered to teachers both in their undergraduate and professional terms.
- Specific criteria for books to be used in the preschool period can be determined by both academicians and teachers.
- Preschool undergraduate programs may include topics related to the selection of books among children's literature courses.
- In-service training of teachers can be given information about new and correctly published works.

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