



Research Article

Preschool teachers' book selection tendencies: an examination on picture books for children aged 3-6¹

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Abstract

Children's picture books, which are considered the first examples of children's literature, are books specially prepared for the early childhood period. Children's picture books are a literary genre with features that have the potential to support all the areas of development that children in the preschool age group may need. Children's literature products support all areas of development of the child, but also contribute to children's awareness of their physical characteristics through books and support their cognitive development through understanding and questioning the book, support language development through concepts and words learned from the book. Children's books with pictures become more permanent materials in gaining social values, acquiring desired and positive behaviors. Especially in the preschool period, it is seen that the intended education and the behaviors to be adopted are completed thanks to picture books. In this research, it is aimed to determine the most preferred books among the illustrated children's books prepared for children aged 3-6, published in 2021 and beyond, for teachers to read/teach in their classrooms for preschool children Dec. For the purpose in question, 110 teachers working in different preschool institutions throughout the province of Istanbul were reached through Google Forms. 132 different illustrated children's book titles were mentioned by the participants, and the 30 books that repeated the most among them were determined. It is thought that this study will inspire the reasons for choosing the most preferred illustrated children's books in the preschool age group or other studies in the field of content analysis of books.

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Introduction

In the Turkish Dictionary of the Turkish Language Association (TDK) (2024), "çocuk" (child) is defined as "a boy or girl in the developmental period between infancy and puberty; offspring, young one, lad, kid." The Oxford Dictionary defines child as "a young human being who is not yet an adult" (Oxford, 2024). Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states, "Every human being below the age of 18 years is considered a child" (UNICEF, 2024).

Onur (2019) explains the concept of childhood as "awareness of the nature of the child and understanding that the child is different from the adult," noting that this awareness develops in line with social changes.

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Literature is defined by Sever (2017) as “an act that offers examples from different dimensions of the reality of humans and life; that introduces the reader to a subjective reality woven with artistic sensitivity; that reflects the artist’s effort to comprehend life; and that brings lived or imaginary experiences into existence through words.”

Children’s literature is comprised of works that have the child and childhood at their foundation; that are suitable for the child’s emotional and thought world; that convey child reality and perspective; whose plot and characters are tailored to the child; and that express this content in a simple and sincere manner. It is described as a transitional literature that not only fosters reading habits in children but also facilitates their development in art, literature, and aesthetics, and conscientiously prepares them for adulthood (Şirin, 2019).

Children’s literature captures the child’s understanding, language, thoughts, perspective, and emotions, and expresses them naturally within texts. Additionally, it is important that these texts have an educational dimension, thereby making children’s books a significant tool supporting children’s development (Şahin, 2021).

Children’s literature products support all areas of children’s development. Through books, children become aware of their own physical characteristics, develop cognitively through comprehension and inquiry, and enhance their language by learning concepts and vocabulary. Moreover, the themes, subjects, events, characters, and their traits in books also support children’s moral, personal, and emotional growth. As a result, children come to know themselves and their surroundings and acquire many positive habits (Adıgüzel & Süslü, 2017).

Dillidüzungün (2013) defines picture books as works suitable for children aged 0–7 that contain narrative-like storytelling. Known in English as “picture books,” in French as “albums,” and in German as “Bilderbuch,” Tuncer (1994; as cited in Öztürk, 2022) describes them as a genre for children aged seven and younger, meant either to be read by adults to children or by children themselves.

Since children’s first encounters with literature often come via picture books, this genre holds an important place in children’s literature. Books read to children in early childhood are image-heavy. In the early years, children first experience image-only books, then image-rich, text-supported books, and finally text-heavy books (Şirin, 2016).

Picture books serve as lasting materials in imparting social values and fostering desired behaviors. Especially during the preschool period, such books are seen to effectively achieve educational goals and desired behaviors (Atabey, 2014). Picture books’ educational value is strengthened when they consider children’s developmental characteristics, needs, ages, and interests, allowing children to handle them physically and explore them independently. Through visuals, they concretize content and help children identify with the characters (Güzel-yurt, 2020).

According to Nodelman and Reimer (2003), quality picture books should exemplify literary principles, aid in expanding imaginative worlds, and enhance comprehension skills. They should encourage children to seek information on various topics, develop language and expressive abilities, and foster character identification. In addition, such books have the potential to correct children’s misconceptions, develop empathy, enrich vocabulary, support understanding of part-whole relationships, and foster cultural awareness.

For children’s literature to be effective and high-quality, it must meet certain criteria, structuring both content and form to match children’s developmental and cognitive traits. Three core criteria emerge in children’s literature: “child-centeredness,” “child reality,” and “child perspective” (Şirin, 2016). These concepts complement and reinforce each other to make works meaningful and impactful for children.

Children’s books are important sources for imparting appropriate values, and authors should first consider how children approach events and situations in their writing (Üzel, 2007). Dereli İman (2014) likewise emphasizes that children can be imbued with values through behaviors and knowledge shaped by the characteristics of their era. Children’s literature works are also viewed as tools for cultural transmission. Picture books help children recognize cultural norms and practices and reveal that they can be active agents in solving dilemmas and challenges they encounter (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016).

In Oğuzkan’s (2013) classification, children’s publications are examined under two main categories: formal and content-related. Formal attributes include elements such as book size, paper type, page layout, fonts, spelling and

punctuation, illustrations, and cover design; while content-related features include theme, subject, characters, structure, style, and language.

When choosing preschool books, adults sometimes overlook children's interests and preferences; however, one should not forget that the target audience of picture books is children. It is vital not only to create meaningful, quality works that children enjoy reading, but also to provide children access to these works (Ulusoy, 2016).

To fully benefit from picture books—works with high potential to support all developmental areas for preschool children—it is essential to select the right book. Two key criteria emerge in book selection: the book must be suitable for the child's developmental traits, and it must appeal to the child's interests. Suitability to developmental traits relates to illustration, content, and formal characteristics of the book (Deniz & Gönen, 2020).

Problem of Study

This study aims to identify the picture books most frequently preferred by preschool teachers for reading to or with children in their classrooms, specifically among books published in or after 2021 and intended for the 3–6 age group. In line with this general objective, the research seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

- Which picture books for the 3–6 age group are most preferred by preschool teachers?
- What is the distribution of the most preferred picture books for the 3–6 age group according to their year of publication?
- What is the distribution of the most preferred picture books for the 3–6 age group according to their publishing houses?
- What are the topics and themes addressed in the most preferred picture books for the 3–6 age group, as selected by preschool teachers?

Method

This section of the study includes the research design, study group, data collection tools, data collection process, ethical considerations, data analysis, and limitations.

Research Model

This study was conducted to identify the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6 by preschool teachers and to analyze the subjects and themes addressed in these books. The research was designed in accordance with a qualitative research approach.

In the first phase of the study, the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used to determine the books most frequently selected among picture books published for the 3–6 age group in 2021 and later. Phenomenology is a design that aims to understand individuals' perceptions and feelings based on their lived experiences with a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). In this context, data collected from preschool teachers—the target population—were used to identify the most preferred books.

In the second phase of the study, the document analysis method was employed to examine the subjects and themes found in the identified books. Document analysis is a method that involves systematically examining written materials that contain information about the phenomena or events under investigation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). This method allows for the content-based evaluation of both printed and digital materials (Kıral, 2020).

This study only included picture books published in or after 2021. This temporal limitation was set in order to more effectively analyze the transformations that occurred in children's literature following the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic brought about changes in children's social, emotional, and cognitive needs, leading publishers to adopt visibly new approaches in their selection of content and themes. It was observed that themes such as emotional awareness, empathy, self-confidence, acceptance of differences, and love for nature became more prominent in the books examined. These themes appear to aim at addressing the emotional disruptions caused by the pandemic and at offering children safe pathways for social interaction. Additionally, it was noted that the visual design quality and the instructional elements of post-2021 books have qualitatively improved. In this regard, limiting the scope of the study to books

published after 2021 has contributed to generating findings more aligned with current educational needs and teacher preferences.

Study Group

The sample group of the study consists of 110 preschool teachers working in various early childhood education institutions across Istanbul. The number of participants was determined to be sufficient in order to enhance the validity of the study. The purposive sampling method was employed. This is a non-probability sampling approach, which has been found to be useful in many cases for exploring and interpreting particular phenomena (Tarhan, 2015).

In applying this method, variables such as the teachers' field of graduation, type of institution they work in, and years of professional experience were taken into consideration.

The demographic characteristics of the teachers, who constituted the sample and played a role in the identification of the books examined in this part of the study, are presented and interpreted in Table 1 along with their frequency (f) and percentage (%) distributions.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the teachers

Characteristic	Variable	f	%
Gender	Female	100	90,9
	Male	9	8,2
	Other	1	0,9
	Prefer not to say	-	-
Age	18-25	12	10,9
	26-35	63	57,3
	36-45	32	29,1
	46-55	3	2,7
	56 and above	-	-
Years of Experience	0-5	36	32,7
	6-10	35	31,8
	11-15	23	20,9
	16-20	12	10,9
	21 years and above	4	3,6
Field of Graduation	Preschool Education	61	55,5
	Child Development	36	32,7
	Other	13	11,8
Type of Educational Institution	Independent Kindergarten	36	32,7
	Preschool Class Attached to a Primary School	38	34,5
	Nursery/Daycare under Ministry of Family and Social Services	4	3,6
	Other	32	29,1
Total Number of Teachers		110	100

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the teachers who participated in the study. The majority of the 110 participating teachers were female. While 90.9% (f=100) of the participants were women, 8.2% (f=9) were men. Additionally, 0.9% (f=1) of the participants identified their gender as "other," and no participants selected the "prefer not to say" option.

In terms of age, most teachers were in the young adult or early adulthood stages. Specifically, 57.3% (f=63) of participants were between the ages of 26–35, while 29.1% (f=32) were between 36–45. A total of 10.9% (f=12) were between 18–25, and only 2.7% (f=3) were between 46–55. No participants were over the age of 56.

A significant portion of the participating teachers had been in the profession for less than ten years. While 32.7% (f=36) had 0–5 years of experience, 31.8% (f=35) had between 6–10 years of experience. Additionally, 20.9% (f=23) had been teaching for 11–15 years, 10.9% (f=12) for 16–20 years, and 3.6% (f=4) had 21 or more years of experience.

The majority of the participants had graduated from departments related to early childhood education. Specifically, 55.5% (f=61) graduated from the Preschool Education Department, while 32.7% (f=36) were graduates of the Child Development Department. A smaller portion, 11.8% (f=13), reported graduating from other departments.

The teachers worked in various types of early childhood education institutions. Of all participants, 32.7% (f=36) worked in independent kindergartens, and 34.5% (f=38) in preschool classes attached to primary schools. A total of 3.6% (f=4) worked in nurseries and daycare centers affiliated with the Ministry of Family and Social Services. Meanwhile, 29.1% (f=32) selected the “other” option.

Data Collection Tool

The data were collected through a Google Forms questionnaire designed specifically for this research. The survey link was distributed via email and social media channels to the selected participants. The response period was limited to two weeks to ensure accessibility and ease of participation. A total of 110 responses were collected anonymously and voluntarily, enabling participants to respond more honestly.

The questionnaire was designed to identify the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6, as selected by preschool teachers. The content of the questionnaire included the following two sections:

Personal Information Form

Designed to collect demographic data such as age, gender, field of graduation, type of institution, and years of experience.

Book Preference Form

Participants were asked to list three picture books published in or after 2021 that they most frequently read or used in their classrooms for children aged 3–6.

As a result, 132 different book titles were suggested by the 110 participating teachers. Among these, the 30 most frequently mentioned books were identified (see Appendix 1). These books formed the main data set for further content and thematic analysis.

Data Collection Process

The data were collected entirely online via a Google Forms survey. The form link was shared with participants through email and social media. Participants were given two weeks to complete the survey. All responses were anonymous and submitted voluntarily, which contributed to the reliability of the data by allowing for more honest answers.

Data Analysis

The frequency, percentage, and distribution of the most preferred books were calculated based on the collected data. In the analysis of the picture books, the texts were examined in accordance with the “Evaluation Form for Formal and Content Features of Picture Books,” which was developed based on expert opinions (see Appendix 2). The books were analyzed based on textual expressions, illustrations, and character representations. Themes and topics were categorized and presented in tabular form. Table 2 presents the formal characteristics of the selected picture books aimed at the 3–6 age group.

Table 2. Formal features of picture books

	Content Features	Translated Books						Domestic Books						Total					
		Y		P		N		Y		P		N		Y		P		N	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Is the language used in the book appropriate for the developmental level of preschool children?	20	100	-		-		9	90	1	10	-		29	96,67	1	3,33	-	
2	Is the theme addressed in the book clear, precise, and understandable?	19	95	1	5	-		10	100	-		-		29	96,67	1	3,33	-	
3	Does the author's intended message encourage a positive outlook on events?	19	95	1	5	-		10	100	-		-		29	96,67	1	3,33	-	
4	Does the author's intended message arouse curiosity in children?	20	100	-		-		9	90	1	10	-		29	96,67	1	3,33	-	
5	Are the problems addressed in the book resolved by the end of the story?	17	85	3	15	-		10	100	-		-		27	90	3	10	-	
6	Are the characters (humans, animals, plants, etc.) relatable for the target audience?	20	100	-		-		10	100	-		-		30	100	-		-	
	Total	15	95,83	5	4,17		-	58	96,67	2	3,33		-	173	96,11	7	3,89	-	

Table 2 presents data regarding the formal features of the picture books analyzed in this study, targeting children aged 3 to 6. As shown in the table, the format and size of the books, the paper quality, the font size used, the relevance of the book cover to the content, the durability of the cover material, and the quality of the bookbinding were all found to be appropriate for both translated and domestic books.

Regarding font characteristics, it was determined that 90% (f = 18) of the translated books and all of the domestic books used suitable fonts. However, 10% (f = 2) of the translated books were rated as only partially appropriate in this aspect. In terms of illustration-text alignment, 90% (f = 9) of the domestic books were fully consistent, while one domestic book (10%, f = 1) was deemed partially appropriate.

Overall, none of the 30 analyzed picture books were found to be formally inappropriate in any of the evaluated categories. These findings suggest that recently published picture books for children aged 3–6 meet the formal design standards suitable for early childhood development. The content-related features of the analyzed books are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Content Characteristics of Picture Books for Children

	Content Features	Translated Books						Domestic Books						Total					
		Y		P		N		Y		P		N		Y		P		N	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Are the format and size of the book suitable for the developmental level of preschool children?	20	100	-		-		10	100	-	-	-		30	100	-		-	
2	Does the paper quality facilitate reading the text and examining the illustrations?	10	100					10	100					30	100				
3	Are simple and decoration-free fonts used in the book?	18	90					10	100					28	93,33	2	6,67		
4	Is the font size appropriate for the preschool period	20	100					10	100					30	100				
5	Does the book cover provide clues about the content	20	100					10	100					30	100				
6	Is the book cover made of durable material suitable for long-term use?	20	100					10	100					30	100				
7	Is the binding material adequate to prevent the book from falling apart easily?	20	100					10	100					30	100				
8	Do the illustrations correspond with the text?	20	100					9	90	1	10			29	96,67	1	3,33		
	Total	158	98,75	2	1,25		-	79	98,75	1	1,25		-	237	98,75	3	1,25		

The distribution regarding the appropriateness of content features in the picture books included in the data set for children aged 3–6 is presented in Table 3. It was found that the characters in the books were relatable for the target audience in both translated and local books.

The following content features were deemed appropriate in 96.67% (f=29) of both translated and local books, and partially appropriate in 3.33% (f=1):

The language used is suitable for the developmental level of preschool children.

The theme is clear, precise, and understandable.

The author's message promotes a positive outlook on events.

The story sparks curiosity in children.

Regarding whether the problems presented in the book were resolved by the end of the story, 85% (f=17) of translated books met this criterion fully, while 15% (f=3) were partially appropriate. All local books fulfilled this criterion entirely. No books were found to be inappropriate in terms of their content features among the 30 picture books analyzed.

Limitations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data confidentiality was strictly maintained. All ethical principles and scientific research standards were rigorously followed throughout the study. This study has several limitations:

- The research was conducted only in the province of Istanbul, and thus the findings may not be generalizable to all of Turkey.
- The sample consisted of 110 preschool teachers working in various institutions, which may not reflect broader professional trends.
- The study was limited to picture books published in or after 2021 that are intended for children aged 3–6.
- Data were collected online using a digital form, which may have excluded teachers who had limited access to technology or lacked the time or ability to complete the form.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data confidentiality was strictly maintained. All ethical principles and scientific research standards were rigorously followed throughout the study.

Results

In this section of the study, the findings obtained in line with the research questions are presented. The results are organized under four sub-problems, and frequency and percentage distributions are provided in tables along with their interpretations.

Picture Books Preferred by Preschool Teachers

Within the scope of this sub-problem, the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6 by preschool teachers were identified. Table 4 presents the frequency and percentage distributions related to these preferences.

Table 4. The Most Preferred Picture Books for Children Aged 3–6 According to Preschool Teachers

Book Title	Author / Translator	Publication Year	Publisher	f	%
1. The Kissing Hand	Audrey Penn / Pınar Savaş	2023	Butik Yayıncıları	19	17,2
2. Elmer	David McKee / Beyza Beçerikli	2023	Mundi Çocuk	18	16,3
3. The Dot	Peter H. Reynolds / Oya Alpar	2024	Altın Kitaplar	17	15,4
4. Three Cats and a Wish	Sara Shaheen / Fatih Erdoğan	2024	Yapı Kredi Yayıncıları	15	13,6
5. The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle / Fatih Erdoğan	2024	Mavibulut Yayıncıları	12	10,9
6. Different But the Same	Feridun Oral	2024	Yapı Kredi Yayıncıları	12	10,9
7. Shy Bear Monty	Duncan Beedie / Ali Berkay	2024	Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayıncıları	12	10,9
8. Little Acorn	Melanie Joyce / Anıl Ceren Altunkanat	2023	Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayıncıları	9	8,1

9.	The Power of Love	Caroline Richard / Ülker Yıldızımcı	2024	Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayıncıları	9	8,1
10.	My Mom's Bag	Sara Şahinkanat	2024	Yapı Kredi Yayıncıları	8	7,2
11.	Who's Afraid of Little Red Riding Hood?	Sara Şahinkanat	2023	Yapı Kredi Yayıncıları	8	7,2
12.	Pezzettino	Leo Lionni / Kemal Atakay	2024	Elma Çocuk Yayınevi	8	7,2
13.	Who Stole the Bear?	Helen Stratton Would / Derya Çebi	2024	Yapı Kredi Yayıncıları	7	6,3
14.	Oh No, My Heart Is Broken!	Elif Yemenici	2024	Redhouse Kidz Yayıncıları	7	6,3
15.	The Sleepwalking Elephant	Behiç Ak	2022	Can Çocuk Yayıncıları	7	6,3
16.	My Dad's Blanket	Sara Şahinkanat	2024	Yapı Kredi Yayıncıları	6	5,4
17.	Stick Man	Julia Donaldson – Axel Scheffler / Nevin Avan Özdemir	2024	Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayıncıları	6	5,4
18.	Rhinos Don't Eat Pancakes	Anna Kemp / Gülbilin Bilgen Baltacıoğlu	2023	Altın Kitaplar	6	5,4
19.	Raging Spider Rıza	Tülin Kozikoğlu	2023	Redhouse Kidz Yayıncıları	6	5,4
20.	Supertato	Sue Hendra - Paul Linnet / Alp Gökalp	2022	Beta Kids	6	5,4
21.	What's Behind the Wall?	Ayşegül Dede	2022	Timas Çocuk Yayıncıları	5	4,5
22.	The Lion Who Said No	Christine Beigel – Herve Le Goff / Güçlü Özkkök	2022	1001 Çiçek Kitaplar	3	2,7
23.	Dogs Don't Do Ballet	Anne Kemp / Gülbilin Bilgen Baltacıoğlu	2022	Altın Kitaplar	3	2,7
24.	A Day in the Forest	Melanie Joyce / Filiz Sarıalioğlu	2021	Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayıncıları	3	2,7
25.	It's Hard to Be a Baby Octopus	Sara Şahinkanat	2024	Yapı Kredi Yayıncıları	3	2,7
26.	One for You, One for Me	Jörg Mühle / Selen Akhuy	2022	Kuralı Çocuk	2	1,8
27.	Library Bunny	Annie Silvestro / Nurten Hatırnaz	2024	Beyaz Balina Yayıncıları	2	1,8
28.	The Very Impatient Caterpillar	Ross Burach / Büşra Oktay	2024	Beyaz Balina Yayıncıları	2	1,8
29.	Hugless Douglas	David Melling / Yağmur Yavaş	2022	Uçan Fil Yayıncıları	2	1,8
30.	Bear Feels Sick	Karma Wilson / Gülbilin Bilgen Baltacıoğlu	2023	Altın Kitaplar	2	1,8

Table 4 presents the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6, as selected by preschool teachers who participated in the study. The participants were asked to list three picture books published in 2021 or later that they read or have read in their classrooms to preschool children. A total of 110 teachers participated in the survey, and they listed 132 different picture book titles. From these, the 30 most frequently mentioned books were selected and included in the analysis.

At the top of the list is *The Kissing Hand*, chosen by 19 teachers (17.2%). It is followed by *Elmer*, selected by 18 participants (16.3%), and *The Dot*, mentioned by 17 teachers (15.4%). In fourth place is *Three Cats and a Wish*, preferred by 15 participants (13.6%). *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *Different But the Same*, and *Shy Bear Monty* all share the fifth, sixth, and seventh positions, each selected by 12 teachers (10.9%).

Little Acorn and *The Power of Love* were chosen by 9 participants (8.1%), placing them in eighth and ninth place, respectively. *My Mom's Bag*, *Who's Afraid of Little Red Riding Hood?*, and *Pezzettino* ranked tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, with 8 mentions each (7.2%). *Who Stole the Bear?*, *Oh No, My Heart Is Broken!*, and *The Sleepwalking Elephant* were each selected by 7 teachers (6.3%), placing them thirteenth to fifteenth.

Books ranked sixteenth through twentieth—My Dad's Blanket, Stick Man, Rhinos Don't Eat Pancakes, Raging Spider Rıza, and Supertato—were each chosen by 6 teachers (5.4%). What's Behind the Wall? ranked twenty-first with 5 mentions (4.5%).

Four titles ranked from twenty-second to twenty-fifth—The Lion Who Said No, Dogs Don't Do Ballet, A Day in the Forest, and It's Hard to Be a Baby Octopus—each received 3 mentions (2.7%).

Finally, the bottom five books on the list, each selected by 2 teachers (1.8%), are One for You, One for Me, Library Bunny, The Very Impatient Caterpillar, Hugless Douglas, and Bear Feels Sick.

Distribution of Preferred Picture Books by Year of Publication

In the analysis of this sub-problem, the distribution of the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6 by preschool teachers was examined according to their year of publication. The frequency and percentage distributions of these publication years are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of the most preferred books by year of publication

Publication Year	f	%
1. 2024	15	50
2. 2023	7	23,3
3. 2022	7	23,3
4. 2021	1	3,4
Total Number of Books	30	100

Table 5 presents the distribution of the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6, selected by preschool teachers, according to their publication years. It is observed that half of the most preferred books ($f=15$, 50%) were published in 2024. When the distribution by publication year is examined, 7 books (23.3%) were published in 2023, another 7 books (23.3%) in 2022, and only 1 book (3.4%) was published in 2021. This finding suggests a notable preference for newer publications among preschool teachers.

Distribution of Preferred Picture Books by Publishing Houses

In the analysis of this sub-problem, the distribution of the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6 by preschool teachers according to publishing houses is presented in terms of frequency and percentage in Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of the most preferred books by publishing house

Publishing House	f	%
1. Yapı Kredi Yayıncıları	7	23,5
2. Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayıncıları	5	16,7
3. Altın Kitaplar	4	13,4
4. Beyaz Balina Yayıncıları	2	6,7
5. Redhouse Kidz Yayıncıları	2	6,7
6. 1001 Çiçek Kitaplar	1	3,3
7. Beta Kids	1	3,3
8. Butik Yayıncıları	1	3,3
9. Can Çocuk Yayıncıları	1	3,3
10. Elma Yayıncıları	1	3,3
11. Kuraldisı Çocuk	1	3,3
12. Mavibulut Yayıncıları	1	3,3
13. Mundi Çocuk	1	3,3
14. Timaş Çocuk Yayıncıları	1	3,3
15. Uçan Fil Yayıncıları	1	3,3
Total Number of Books	30	100

As shown in Table 6, the distribution of the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6, according to publishing houses, indicates that the top three publishers are Yapı Kredi Yayınları with 7 books (23.5%), Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları with 5 books (16.7%), and Altın Kitaplar with 4 books (13.4%). Beyaz Balina Yayınları and Redhouse Kidz Yayınları are in fourth and fifth places with 2 books each (6.7%). The remaining ten publishing houses are each represented by 1 book (3.3%) in the list of the 30 most preferred books. These include: 1001 Çiçek Kitaplar, Beta Kids, Butik Yayınları, Can Çocuk Yayınları, Elma Yayınları, Kuraldisı Çocuk, Mavibulut Yayınları, Mundi Çocuk, Timaş Çocuk Yayınları, and Uçan Fil Yayınları.

Topics and Themes in the Preferred Picture Books

In this sub-problem, the subjects and themes covered in the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6, as selected by preschool teachers, are presented with their frequency and percentage distributions in Table 7.

Table 7. Subjects and themes of the most preferred picture books

Book Title	Author	Subjects	Themes
The Kissing Hand	Audrey Penn	Separation anxiety, parent bond	Separation anxiety, trust, parent-child bond
Elmer	David McKee	Acceptance of differences, self-esteem	Diversity, self-esteem, social inclusion
The Dot	Peter H. Reynolds	Self-confidence, creativity	Self-confidence, creativity, encouragement
Three Cats and a Wish	Sara Şahinkanat	Friendship, empathy	Friendship, cooperation, empathy
The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle	Life cycle, learning	Nature cycle, learning, development
Different but the Same	Feridun Oral	Diversity, togetherness	Diversity, unity, solidarity
Shy Bear Monty	Duncan Beedie	Shyness, social interaction	Shyness, courage, social relationships
Little Acorn	Melanie Joyce	Patience, growth	Patience, growth, love of nature
The Power of Love	Caroline Richard	Love, emotional development	Love, empathy, emotional development
My Mother's Bag	Sara Şahinkanat	Imagination, discovery	Imagination, curiosity, exploration
<i>Who's Afraid of Little Red Riding Hood?</i>	Sara Şahinkanat	Courage, critical thinking	Courage, critical thinking, reinterpretation of classic tales
Pezzettino	Leo Lionni	Self-acceptance, individuality	Self-acceptance, individuality, confidence
<i>Who Took the Moon?</i>	Helen Stratton Would	Friendship, sharing	Friendship, sharing, problem-solving
<i>Oh No, My Heart is Broken</i>	Elif Yemenici	Emotional awareness	Emotional awareness, empathy, healing
Sleepwalking Elephant	Behiç Ak	Imagination, adventure	Imagination, adventure, subconscious
<i>My Father's Blanket</i>	Sara Şahinkanat	Family bonds, trust	Family, trust, love
Stick Man	Julia Donaldson	Homesickness, determination	Family longing, perseverance, adventure
<i>Rhinos Don't Eat Pancakes</i>	Anna Kemp	Imagination, family relationships	Imagination, belief, family ties
<i>Angry Spider Rıza</i>	Tülin Kozikoğlu	Emotion management	Anger control, self-growth
<i>Supertato</i>	Sue Hendra	Heroism, kindness	Heroism, courage, kindness
<i>What's Behind the Wall?</i>	Ayşegül Dede	Curiosity, exploration	Curiosity, discovery, learning
<i>The Lion Who Said No to Everything</i>	Christine Beigel	Stubbornness, change	Stubbornness, change, social adaptation
<i>Dogs Don't Do Ballet</i>	Anna Kemp	Pursuing dreams	Dreams, perseverance, challenging prejudice
<i>A Day in the Forest</i>	Melanie Joyce	Love of nature	Nature, daily life, environmental awareness
<i>It's Hard to Be a Baby Octopus</i>	Sara Şahinkanat	Coping with difficulties	Self-acceptance, resilience, self-confidence
<i>One for Me, One for You</i>	Jörg Mühle	Sharing, fairness	Sharing, justice, friendship
<i>Library Bunny</i>	Annie Silvestro	Love of books, learning	Reading, learning, curiosity
<i>The Very Impatient Caterpillar</i>	Ross Burach	Patience, growing up	Patience, transformation, change
<i>Hug Me, Bear!</i>	David Melling	Love, physical affection	Love, empathy, importance of touch
<i>When Bear Gets Sick</i>	Karma Wilson	Illness, helpfulness	Illness, friendship, kindness

Table 7 presents the distribution of subjects and themes in the most preferred picture books for children aged 3–6, as selected by participating preschool teachers. Books such as The Kissing Hand, My Father's Blanket, and Oh No, My Heart is Broken address themes like trust, love, anxiety, and emotional awareness. Titles such as The Power of Love and Hug Me, Bear! emphasize compassion and empathy. Meanwhile, books like The Dot, Pezzettino, and The Very Impatient Caterpillar explore themes of self-confidence, self-expression, and patience.

Discussions

Children's books that contribute to children's indirect acquisition of skills about events and people are said to support all developmental areas, especially children's reading skills. Among different types of children's books, those addressing early childhood are known as picture storybooks (Akar et al., 2021). It is stated that a large part of picture books for children consists of illustrations composed for children and that these books contribute to the development of children's vocabulary and aesthetic perception (Işitan, 2016). While it is emphasized that children's literature products prepared according to children's ages and developmental characteristics play an important role in improving preschool children's language skills, it is also noted that they positively contribute to early literacy skills (Duran & Can, 2021).

Woolley and Cox (2007) revealed that books designed and created in accordance with children's developmental level contribute to the development of reasoning, judgment, understanding and interpreting their own and others' emotions, critical thinking, and different thinking skills regarding situations and events experienced by children. It has been stated that it is very important to bring children together with children's literature works that teach reading and writing skills, strengthen their communication skills, and support developmental areas at an early age (İpek Yükselen, 2021).

This study aimed to determine the most preferred picture books for children aged 3-6 by preschool teachers. The results obtained from 110 teachers participating in the study show that preschool teachers frequently prefer books that support language development in this age group, are enriched with visual elements, have strong storytelling, and are generally bestsellers. When studies on best-selling picture books in the literature are examined, it is seen that the most preferred picture books for ages 3-6 that preschool teachers choose to read in their classes overlap with these bestsellers. In their research, Topçam and Yorulmaz (2023) examined the values contained in the 14 best-selling picture books. Among the best-selling books were The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Shy Bear Monty, My Mother's Bag, Little Oak Acorn, Who Stole the Moon?, Different But the Same, My Father's Blanket, and Three Cats and a Wish. Additionally, among the best-selling books examined, 8 were published by İş Bankası Publications and 7 by Yapı Kredi Publications.

In their study, Bağcılı Kahraman et al. (2020) examined children's rights in best-selling picture books. Among the best-selling picture books they addressed were Three Cats and a Wish, Angry Spider Rıza, It's Hard to Be a Baby Octopus, My Mother's Bag, Different But the Same, Stick Man, and Sleepwalking Elephant. Öksüz et al. (2018) analyzed the 15 most recommended picture books on social media platforms in terms of values included in the Life Sciences Curriculum. The most recommended books on social media platforms included Three Cats and a Wish, It's Hard to Be a Baby Octopus, Oh No, My Heart Is Broken, Who's Afraid of Little Red Riding Hood?, The Dot, My Mother's Bag, and Stick Man.

High-quality picture books are expressed to have features such as being suitable for the child's developmental level in terms of illustration, content, and physical characteristics, being curiosity-arousing, and engaging (Yıldız et al., 2016). It has been stated that books should contribute to the perceptual development of preschool children by meeting their needs to play, have fun, and learn through exploration through their content and formal elements (Toran & Dilek, 2017). When a content analysis was conducted on the 30 most preferred picture books for the 3-6 age group determined within the scope of this research, it was seen that the vast majority of the books support children's cognitive, emotional, social, and language development.

The books primarily focus on topics that support children's emotional development. Books such as The Kissing Hand, My Father's Blanket, and Oh No, My Heart Is Broken address themes such as trust, love, anxiety, and emotional awareness, and contribute to children's development of coping skills for these emotions. Similarly, works such as The Power of Love and Hug Me, Bear! allow children to internalize feelings like compassion and empathy.

Among the books supporting children's social development, *Three Cats and a Wish*, *Who Stole the Moon?*, *One for You, One for Me*, and *Dogs Don't Do Ballet* stand out. These books teach social skills such as cooperation, sharing, friendship, and respect for differences through storytelling. Especially books like *Elmer* and *Different But the Same* convey acceptance of differences and the value of diversity, thereby contributing to an inclusive learning environment.

Another notable topic is the frequent presence of themes related to individual development and self-awareness. Books such as *The Dot*, *Pezzettino*, and *The Impatient Caterpillar* aim to support children in areas of individual development like self-confidence, self-expression, and patience. Additionally, works like *It's Hard to Be a Baby Octopus* and *Shy Bear Monty* help children recognize themselves, identify their emotions, and accept them.

Many of the books also focus on imagination and exploration. Books such as *My Mother's Bag*, *Sleepwalking Elephant*, *Rhinos Don't Eat Crepes*, and *What's Behind the Wall?* encourage children to develop creative thinking skills and foster a positive attitude toward learning.

Lastly, some books highlight values such as love for nature and environmental awareness. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *Little Oak Acorn*, and *A Day in the Forest* contain messages aimed at helping children get to know nature and understand natural processes.

Overall, the books preferred by preschool teachers stand out as quality works that provide multifaceted contributions to children's developmental areas through both educational and entertaining content, while also conveying fundamental human values. In this respect, picture books are seen as indispensable tools in the educational process during early childhood.

The reasons why these books are preferred by teachers are not limited to their literary qualities but are also related to their usability in classroom applications, their ability to capture children's attention, and their developmental appropriateness. Especially books with rich visual content extend children's attention spans, helping them focus on the story being told while also developing their visual literacy. Additionally, through identification with the characters, children learn to generate solutions to situations they encounter in stories and internalize what they learn through connections to real life. In this way, picture books are not only a source of entertainment but also valuable pedagogical materials that support the teaching process.

The findings of the study indicate that guidance materials and training should be increased to enable teachers to make more conscious choices when selecting children's books. Furthermore, considering the effects of digital books on child development, more research is needed in this area. In line with these findings, producing materials suitable for child development and using these materials effectively in the educational process will contribute to improving the quality of early childhood education.

In conclusion, this study provides important data for understanding preschool teachers' preferences in selecting picture books and sheds light on future studies. It is believed that these results will guide educators, families, and publishers in fostering a love of reading in children from an early age. Moreover, considering the limitations of the study, factors such as sample size and regional distribution should be taken into account regarding the generalizability of the results. Factors affecting teachers' book preferences, including their professional experience, should also be examined separately. Future research could include a large-scale analysis by comparing book preferences of teachers from different regions and cultural backgrounds.

Recommendations

In this study, a survey was conducted with 110 preschool teachers to identify the most preferred picture books for children aged 3-6. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are presented:

Suitability of Book Selection for Developmental Stages

Preschool teachers should prioritize materials that support children's cognitive, language, and emotional development when selecting books. Accordingly, publishers and authors are encouraged to produce books enriched with content and visuals appropriate for developmental stages. Increasing the number of books focused on emotional development and those that support social skills would be especially beneficial.

Guidance Materials for Educators

It is recommended to prepare guidance materials that teachers can use when selecting children's books. These guides could include information on which developmental areas the book content supports, which values it emphasizes, and the appropriate age groups. This would help teachers make more informed choices.

Supporting Family Involvement

Families play a crucial role in fostering children's reading habits and instilling a love of reading at an early age. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers encourage parental involvement by informing families about recommended books. Organizing guides with book recommendations suitable for children or educational seminars for parents would be useful to increase family participation.

Increasing Visual and Linguistic Diversity

Picture books for children aged 3-6 should enhance children's awareness of cultural diversity and improve language skills. In this regard, publishers and authors are encouraged to produce more content that includes diverse cultures, traditions, and languages. This approach will contribute to children's early social and cultural awareness.

Development of Book Evaluation Criteria

The criteria preschool teachers consider when selecting books are important for determining content appropriate for children's development. Therefore, it is recommended that teacher education programs and preschool education curricula comprehensively address the criteria for evaluating children's books and train prospective teachers in this area. This will help teachers develop conscious book selection skills.

Supporting Research on Digital Books

Considering the rise of digital books in recent years, more research on the effects of digital books on children aged 3-6 is recommended. Investigating the impacts of digital books on children's language, cognitive, and social development will enable teachers and parents to use digital materials more consciously.

These recommendations are expected to help preschool educators and families make more informed choices when selecting books for children. Additionally, they may serve as a guide for publishers and authors to produce materials appropriate for child development.

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