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# Examining the views of preschool education teachers on the content, illustrations and physical characteristics of the picture story books used in education

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## Abstract

In this study, it is aimed to determine the opinions of Preschool Education Teachers regarding the Content, Illustrations and Physical Features of Turkish Picture Story Books. A “Personal Information Form” and a “Questionnaire” is used to determine the information and views of the teachers on the Turkish Picture Story Books. The research is carried out on 304 preschool education teachers working in independent nursery schools and classes in Ankara. Data is analyzed in the SPSS software suite. When the results are examined, it is found out that in general the preschool education teachers have insufficient information on the physical, illustration and content features of the illustrated books; however, they stated that the books found on the market do not bear the desired characteristics.

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*Keywords:* Illustrated books; selecting books; preschool teacher.

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## 1. Introduction

Teachers of early childhood education observed while performing several activities in a class atmosphere are among the most important models for the children. Teachers should continuously renew themselves in order to improve their professional competency. In order for the children to gain life experiences in different areas, it is important that the books which the teacher is using for educational purposes have good aspects. Good and qualified books offered to children will both increase their interests for the book and help creating the foundations of reading habit.

Yılmaz, who has drawn a general framework for the individual and social conditions providing opportunities for gaining the habit of reading and using a library and developing them, indicates that families and teachers who can act sensibly and wisely play an important role on laying the foundation of these habits (Yılmaz, 2000:281-282). Teacher's being a model also becomes important in developing the habit of reading. If a student notices a book in

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teacher's hand he/she will realize that the teacher has the reading habit and imitates him/her (Küçükahmet , 1987:102). The other factors affecting reading positively are the libraries. Libraries contribute people's obtaining knowledge in different subjects, supporting their assignments, developing the reading skills and acquiring the like for reading (Bayram, 1990:11). According to Yalçın (2004), a decrease in the like for reading particularly among the children and the young people may cause problems in the future of the society as well as the cultural, scientific and art world of the country.

Glossary(1943) defines picture story books as "the books including pictures partially or wholly and adopted according to the needs and interests of young children"; Montresor(1971) defines them as "the books the content of which are enriched by pictures". Celia(1988) depicts the picture story books as, "the books where illustration has a great importance and which are created for the children aged 0-7 years and also which can cover almost every subject" (Indorser: Hunt, 1991). Although different definitions have been made with regards to the picture story books, it is seen that these are close to each other and complementing one another. Picture story books have a great importance of the lives of particularly pre-school children (Gönen, 1989; Gönen, 1993 ). Picture story books tell stories through word and picture combinations enrich a concept and give various information. Pre-school and school-aged children start to develop concepts of literature and reading by listening to the picture story books read to them. Picture story books are the first books that children experience (Cullinan and Galda, 1994; Gönen, 1989; Gönen, 1991).

Under the scope of this study, it is aimed at identifying the views of teachers of Independent Kindergartens and nursery classes of Ministry of National Education regarding the content, illustration and physical characteristics. The population of the research covers teachers working in independent kindergartens and nurseries of Ministry of National Education in Ankara city centre in Turkey in 2006-2007 education term. The sample consists of 304 preschool teachers working in 24 independent kindergarten classes and 100 primary school nursery classes chosen with stratified and cluster random sampling methods from eight district centres of Ankara. In the study, "Personal Information Form" regarding the demographical information of the teachers and the "Questions Sheet" which includes 27 questions and was developed by the researchers in order to identify the teachers' views on Turkish picture story books were used as the data collection instrument.

The data gathered in the study were analysed in SPSS 15.0 Software Program. These data were assessed in terms of percentage and frequency distributions. When the results are examined, it is seen that in general pre-school teachers indicate that picture story books have insufficient information in terms of content, illustration and physical characteristics and therefore the books on the market do not have the desired features. As a result of the study, it is recommended that the writers of picture story books, children's books and especially the teachers, who do not have sufficient knowledge about the picture story books and their characteristics, and the publishers should be informed by the experts of the field by means of seminars. Hence, it is thought that books may become more beneficial for child development.

## **2. Findings And Discussion**

In this study made with 304 teachers in 24 independent kindergartens and 100 primary school nursery class in Ankara, teachers' habit of using picture story books in classes and their views regarding these books were examined. The average of 50 % of the 304 teachers in sample group is between the ages of 32-43 and only one of them is a male. 56,9% are graduated from Child Development and Education Department of a university, 25% are graduated from Preschool Education Department, 7,2 % are graduates of Open Education and 2,3% are graduates of a masters program. 32% of the teachers are working in a independent kindergarten, 62,8 % are working in a nursery class of a primary school and 4,6 % are working in practising kindergarten of a girls' vocational school. 57% of the teachers have been teaching for more than 12 years. 90% took the lecture of Children's Literature during their education. 55, 6 % declared that they are reading in order to have general knowledge and 51 % for professional development. While assessing a conclusion of a study made Özen (2001) indicated that 8% of the teachers in Turkey didn't read books at all, 39% didn't want to give information on this issue and young teachers read less. In a study made by Bayram (2001), it is seen that 60, 7% of the subjects 32 % of whom are working in the field of education don't have the habit of reading. 62, 2 % of the teachers are reading newspaper every day, 25, 7 % have got a magazine that they read regularly. Most of them are reading novels or occupational books and the least preferred type is cyclopaedia.

25% declared that they didn't read due to lack of time. In Yılmaz's (2002) study, it is stated that 44, 9% of the teachers aren't reading due to lack of time and 33% of them aren't reading as the prices of books and magazines are regarded as high. This result is in parallel with the conclusions of this research.

92, 1 % of the teachers in the study have a bookcase at their homes. 87, 5% have a library at the schools they work. 60, 5% make the children in their class use the school library. There is a public library near the schools where 21 % of teachers are working. 93% of classes have book corners. 90% of the teachers indicated that they read picture story books to children, 44.1 % of them stated that in addition to these, they also read science books and reference books, 13,8% said that they read comics. The least read type is biographies. In this study, it is found that 94, 4% of the teachers advise the parents to read books to their children at home. 80, 3% stated that they bought books considering their author, subject, illustrations and physical characteristics. The least considered characteristic is the author with 2% rate.

Table 1: The distribution of the pupose of teachers' reading books to children

The Purpose of reading books	f	%
To entertain and rest children	38	12,5
To support educational programs	43	14,1
To make children like books and literature	41	13,5
To contribute cognitive development of children	53	17,4
To support social-emotional development of children	45	14,8
To meet the needs and interests of children	31	10,2
To support children's language development	60	19,7
To increase childrens book reading habits	45	14,8
Because children want it	16	5,3
All of the above	228	75

In Table 1, 19,7 % of the teachers indicate that they are reading in order to support children's language development, 17,4 % say they are reading in order to contribute cognitive development of children. 75% mark the statement that states all of them are important. This shows that teachers are making multipurpose use of the books, which is a desired conclusion.

97, 4% of the teachers demand that children bring picture story books to school while 80, 9% ensure that children exchange them. This is a significant result as many children encounter with books by this way. 93, 4 % of the teachers state that they buy new picture story books for their classes every year and 83, 9% states that administrators of the school support them in their buying a new book for the school every year.

Table 2: The distribution of teachers' finding the books on the market sufficient in terms of content, style and language, physical characteristics and illustration

Characteristics	Yes		No		Some are Sufficient	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Content	156	51,3	88	28,9	56	18,4
Style and Language	138	45,4	97	31,9	66	21,7
Physical Characteristics	156	51,3	76	25,0	70	23,0
Illustration	144	47,4	85	28,0	74	24,3

63,5 % of the teachers state that they find the number of picture story books on the market sufficient while as seen in Table 2, 51,3% find them sufficient in terms of content, 45,4 % find the books sufficient in terms of style and language, 51,3 % find them sufficient in terms of physical characteristics and 47,4 % find them sufficient in terms of illustration, which demonstrates that books should be improved in terms of content, style, language, physical characteristics and illustration. In the study by Gönen made in 1991, it is seen that most of the parents found the number and characteristics of picture story books in the market in insufficient.

It is also found that, 94, 4 % of the teachers in the study recommend the families that they read books to their children at home.

Table 3: The distribution of kinds of activities performed by teachers in order to develop children's habits of reading picture story books

<b>Kinds of activities performed by teachers in order to develop children's habits of reading picture story books</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
I take them to book fairs and exhibitions and make them buy books.	39	12,8
I lead them to bookstores.	63	20,7
I take them to the school library	83	27,3
I take them to the public/children libraries in the neighbourhood	19	6,3
I establish a class library together with the children	254	83,6
I advise book reading studies at home with the family.	154	50,7

When the kinds of activities performed by the teachers in order to develop children's habit of reading picture story books are examined, it is seen that 83, 6 % of teachers establish a class library with children, 50, 7% advise the families to read books with the children at home, 27, 3 % take the children to the school library and 12, 8 % take them to book exhibitions and fairs 6, 3 % take the children to the public or children libraries in the neighbourhood. As a result of a study by Yılmaz (2002) on the habits of reading and using the Public Library of the primary school teachers in Ankara, teachers were found to have insufficient levels of reading habits or using the Public Library due to reasons resulting from the education system. These results support our study.

Table 4: The distribution of teachers' reading books to the children in their classes

<b>The Frequency of Teachers' Reading Books to Children</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Once a day	231	76,0
Twice a day	54	17,8
Others	14	4,6
No answer	5	1,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>100,0</b>

In Table 4, when the distribution of teachers' reading books to children is examined, 76% of the teachers are found out to be reading once a day while 17, 8 % are found out to be reading books to children twice a day. However, it is necessary that teachers spend at least 20 or 30 minutes a day on reading books to children. It is requested that teachers examine the picture story books in terms of content, illustration, physical characteristics and the following results are obtained;

Table 5: The distribution of the views of teachers on the physical characteristics of picture story books they read

Physical Characteristics of Picture Story Books	View	f	%
The size of the book can be small or large	True	170	56
	False	134	44,1
White paper should be used in the book	True	169	55,6
	False	135	44,4
The paper used in the book should be bright	True	122	40,1
	False	182	59,9
It is not important that the cover of the book is bright	True	95	31,2
	False	209	68,8
The book should be carried easily	True	238	78,3
	False	66	21,7
The best kind of paper chosen for the book is glossy paper	True	147	48,4
	False	157	51,6
The best type of binding children's books is binding with stapler.	True	190	62,5
	False	114	37,5

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that while 56% of the teachers state that the size of the book can be small or large, 55,6% state that white and thick white paper should be used as the paper of a book, 68,8% state that the cover of the book should be thick, 78,3% state that the book should be carried easily and 51,6% state that it is not suitable to use glossy paper, 62,5 % of the teachers have the opinion stapled should be used for book binding. However; sewing is best for binding picture story books for children.

Table 6: The distribution of the views of teachers on illustration characteristics of picture story books they read

Illustration Characteristics of Picture Story Books	View	f	%
Pictures should be simple, comprehensible, suitable for the subject	True	276	90,8
	False	28	9,2
2/3 of the page setup (the way of placing pictures and text on the page) should include pictures and 1/3 should include text.	True	221	72,7
	False	83	27,3
Pictures in the book should have the power of movement and narration.	True	254	83,6
	False	50	16,4
Pictures should generally be in pastel colours	True	88	28,9
	False	216	71,1
There should be a ornamented frame outside the pictures in the book.	True	40	13,2
	False	263	86,8
The picture and the text should be related with each other and pictures should be located near the text to which it belongs.	True	264	86,8
	False	40	13,2

When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that 90,8 % of the teachers state that illustrations should be simple and suitable for the subject, 72,7 % state that 2/3 of the page setup should include pictures and 1/3 should include text, 83,6 % state that pictures in the book should have the power of movement and narration, 28,9 % state that pictures should generally be in pastel colours and finally 86,8 % state that the picture and the text should be related with each other. These are generally the desired results; the only unexpected result is that they think that the pictures shouldn't be in

pastel colours. This demonstrates that teachers should be informed about the colouring of the illustrations. In picture story books, whatever the illustrating technique that the painter use is, it is required that the illustrations should support the story of the book, be understood by children, be located at the same page with the text and shouldn't have a style that can damage the unity of the book (Uzmen, 1993).

**Table 7: The distribution of the views of teachers about the content characteristics of picture story books that they read**

<b>Content Characteristics of Picture Story Books</b>	<b>View</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
The content and language of the book should be suitable for the age and developmental level of the children	True	296	97,4
	False	8	2,6
The story must have a main idea	True	230	75,7
	False	74	24,3
The story should have introduction, body and conclusion parts	True	256	84,2
	False	48	15,8
The book should meet the interests and psychological needs of children	True	268	88,2
	False	36	11,8
The genre of the book should be rhythmic and sand nicely	True	242	79,6
	False	62	20,4
Sentences used should be correct grammatically	True	279	91,8
	False	25	8,2
It should enrich the vocabulary.	True	275	99,5
	False	29	9,5
It should teach the child.	True	189	62,2
	False	115	37,8

When Table 7 is examined, it is seen that 97,4 % of the teachers state that the content and language of the book should be suitable for the age and developmental level of the children, 75,7 % state that the story must have a main idea, 84,2 % state that the story should have introduction, body and conclusion parts, 79,6 % state that the style of the book should be simple, 91,8 % state that sentences used should be correct grammatically. 62,2 % of the teachers declare that books should teach the child, which is not correct. Books shouldn't necessarily teach. Uzmen (1993) connotes that the person who will write a picture story book should determine the age group that he/she addresses, identify the subject and main idea of the book after learning the characteristics, interests and desires of these children; furthermore the characters that will shape the subject, time and place of the story should be determined.

### 3. Conclusion and Acknowledgements

It is required that teachers make children use the school library more often. Furthermore, more children's and public libraries should be opened in the neighbourhood of the schools and they should be made functional. It is significant that teachers read books to children considering that it will contribute all developmental fields. However, teachers do not spend enough time on discussion after reading a book. While teachers find the number of books sufficient, they find them in terms of content, illustration and physical characteristics 50% sufficient, which shows that these aspects of picture story books should be developed more. Taking children to school or children's libraries, bookstores more and ensuring that more books are read to children every day will be helpful in developing reading habits in children. Pre-school teacher candidates should have adequate education on children's literature and library usage in their undergraduate studies. It can be suggested that pre-school teachers are given in-service training with regards to characteristics of picture story books and how to use them and also publishers give more importance on content, illustrations and physical characteristics of the books. The Ministry of Education should help teachers in supplying reading materials such as picture story books and magazines.

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