

Examining the Criteria for Preferring Illustrated Children's Books by Parents with 0-3 Years-old Children

Ebru Hasibe Tanju Aslışen^a, & Sakine Hakkoymaz^{*b}

* Corresponding author

E-mail: sakine.hakkoymaz@hku.edu.tr

a. Child Development, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Ankara, Türkiye.

b. Primary School Teaching and Faculty of Education, Hasan Kalyoncu University, Gaziantep, Turkey, Türkiye.

Article Info

Received: September 26, 2023

Accepted: October 20, 2023

Published: November 11, 2023



10.46303/tpicd.2023.13

How to cite

Tanju Aslışen, E. H., & Hakkoymaz, S. (2023). Examining the criteria for preferring illustrated children's books by parents with 0-3 years-old children.

Theory and Practice in Child Development, 3(2), 71-97.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/tpicd.2023.13>

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ABSTRACT

In this study, it is aimed to examine the knowledge levels of parents with children aged 0-3 regarding the criteria they consider when choosing a children's picture book. The study was carried out with a qualitative research approach. The study group consists of 69 parents with children aged 0-3, and the data of the study were collected through a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. After the data were subjected to content analysis, they were presented in tables. As a result of the research, it has been revealed that parents with 0-3 year old children should have quality children's books and the features they pay attention to when choosing children's books, the child's interest, internal structure and external structure. It has been found that when choosing a children's picture book, parents pay particular attention to its suitability for the age and development of the child, its plain language, the presence of vivid colors and its non-violence. The content of the images is thick cardboard and the book is neatly bound with the appropriate font and image size. By looking at the outer coating and quality of quality paper, they think about whether it is educational, entertaining, creative and contains a concept of value.

KEYWORDS

Children's picture books; children's literature; parents; 0-3 year-old; book preference criteria.

INTRODUCTION

The first years of life are considered to be magical years when the foundations of children's emotions, thoughts, behaviors and habits are laid, and their development is rapid and open to environmental stimuli. Studies on brain development in these years, which are of critical importance in terms of holistic development, especially cognitive, language and social-emotional development, indicate that the development between the ages of 0-3 is faster compared to the following periods. It is emphasized that the environment also has a great influence on this development (Berk, 2013; Gözün Kahraman et al., 2016; Gülzarı, 2009; Santrock, 2021; Santrock, 2011; Shonkoff, 2003). Especially in these years, with the rapid increase of neurons, synapses and dendrites, it is important to support perceptual and sensory development through early experiences. These experiences, encountered in the first years of life, enable children's skills such as to think, touch, act, feel, express, make sense, etc. as the basis for their lifelong development (Bencik Kangal, 2021; Santrock, 2021). In other words, the positive-negative experiences encountered in the first years have a great effect on the connections in the brain (Akdağ, 2015); form the basis for lifelong learning (Lillard, 2013); It is important to have a qualified early period, to make a good start in life and to prevent any problems that may occur in the future (Elliott, 2006; Meraki & Yıldız Bıçakçı, 2015). Children who are ready to learn from birth realize this learning through the experiences they have gained under the influence of the environment and stimuli, and their development is directly affected by this (MEB, 2013). In order to ensure that children learn naturally, it is important to bring them face to face with qualified cognitive stimuli, interactive linguistic processes and social-emotional experiences (Karayel, 2019), at this point, they meet with children's literature works prepared in accordance with their developmental characteristics, and especially their accumulation of emotions and thoughts can be mobilized. It forms the basis for the development of students and supporting their conceptual development (Russell, 2017; Şen, 2011). In this context, it would be useful to refer to children's books, which are among the leading works of children's literature.

Through children's books, which are expressed as tools that create opportunities to support children's cognitive, linguistic, personality and social development in the process from early childhood to adolescence (Sever, 2013, p. 72), children begin to perceive, make sense of and recognize their environment and then the world. With the books prepared for children based on "child reality and relevance to the child" (Dilidüzgün, 2006), the purpose of the meeting activities of children who are in the effort of curiosity, discovery and learning, is to gain a love of books, reading habits and culture, to make them sensitive to their environment, to provide visual and linguistic opportunities. It provides an opportunity to think, dream, question, recognize the environment they live in, and find appropriate solutions to the problems they encounter (Ural, 2021). Therefore, enabling children to interact with illustrated children's books that will appeal to their interests and curiosity from an early age is accepted as a matter that

will support them to see reading as a fun activity and to develop positive attitudes towards reading.

Reading habits and culture are first gained in the family and home environment of the child, and in this period, the supportive and active role of the family is decisive in the relations of children with picture books. The reading-writing interests and perceptions of children, who are introduced to quality books at an early age through their parents, also vary significantly (Bayraktar & Ersoy, 2018), while babies who are introduced to books that are illustrated in harmony with their content and worth reading (Bassa, 2021) at 4-8 months, objects and it is stated that they started to be interested in pictures earlier (Bayraktar, 2019). Reading habits and culture are first gained in the family and home environment of the child, and in this period, the supportive and active role of the family is decisive in the relations of children with picture books. The interests and perceptions of children, who are introduced to quality books at an early age through their parents, also vary significantly (Bayraktar & Ersoy, 2018), while babies who are introduced to books that are illustrated in harmony with their content and worth reading (Bassa, 2021) at 4-8 months, objects and it is stated that they started to be interested in pictures earlier (Bayraktar, 2019). Studies have emphasized that babies are interested in books, look at pictures and react to what is read after the 4th month (Beyazova, 2006; Machado, 2003; Soderman et al., 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Therefore, it is of great importance that children encounter quality children's books at the age of 0-3, when they begin to perceive the outside world, the words of their mother tongue, the meanings of these words, their relations with each other, their grammatical structures, and they are trying to communicate by forming sentences, and that these publications are selected and presented by their parents in an appropriate way (Gönen et al., 2015; Epspinosa & Burns, 2003; Ersoy & Bayraktar, 2018; Gönen, 2017; Sever, 2017). Families who introduce their children to quality children's books that support their development from an early age enable them not only to catch the clues about their mother tongue and to love their mother tongue, but also to exist as active individuals participating in life (Beaty & Pratt, 2003). Thus, the child, who is introduced to picture books in the early period, encounters the two-dimensional picture of a three-dimensional object, can establish a relationship between the pictures and what is read by adults, and can learn by himself thanks to qualified illustrations in the absence of adults (Bassa, 2021; Nalinci, 2018), can continue his reading success in the following periods. Studies on this subject indicate that meeting with books in the early period is directly related to success in school and reading (Epspinosa & Burns, 2003; Rankin, 2016; Santora, 2013; Wortham, 2005). At this point, it is also important to give a brief information about the internal-external structure of children's picture books.

The internal and external structure features of children's picture books vary according to the age, interests, needs and developmental characteristics of the children. The internal structure features of the book are known as content features and consist of theme, subject, characters, language-style and plan titles. External structure features are specified as physical

features and include subheadings of size, weight, page structure, paper, cover, binding, text, page layout (layout) and illustration (Erol et al., 2021; Karayel, 2019; Taşcı, 2019). At this point, it is important for parents to choose books that are suitable for their children's developmental levels, interests and needs, taking into account their internal-external structure. A qualified children's book should have a cover that can attract the attention of the child with its picture and name, reflecting its content, a binding structure that makes it durable, and formal features that provide ease of use in terms of paper type, letters used, punctuation marks, line spacing, and print quality. In addition, it should have carefully prepared content features in terms of language, narration, plan, subject, theme and heroes (Albers, 2008; McNair & Hoover, 2021). Topics that interest children should be presented in accordance with their developmental level; it should be illustrated by an artist who can imagine their world, and most importantly, the book should completely entertain children (Valijonovna, 2022).

In the first years of life, parents, who are primarily responsible for their care and development, have important duties for children to meet with picture books, to make a fun start to the lifelong learning process, to establish the ground for establishing the reading culture-habit and to gain a love of books (Kocabaş, 1999; Martinez & Roser, 2008). 1985; Pellegrini and Galda, 2003; Samur and Farmer, 2019). First of all, parents need to know the subjects they are interested in in the different growth processes of their children and choose the appropriate works. In addition, it is another important issue for their children to choose books with appropriate internal-external structure in line with their age, developmental level, interests and needs in order to enable them to establish a positive bond with books (Anderson, 2013; Çer, 2014; Sever, 2008). The parents' preference of picture books with appropriate criteria, which are printed materials that children between the ages of 0-3 will interact with for the first time, will be a meaningful start to the lifelong learning process. Knowing the competencies of parents (Öztürk Samur & Çiftçi, 2019), which is important in introducing babies to books with different tactile features from the age of six months, and in addition, the selection of books with appropriate internal-external structure features and presenting them to their children is considered as the most important first step of the child-book meeting. In the literature review, a limited number of studies were found on the criteria for parents to prefer children's picture books, and it was determined that these studies were mostly aimed at children aged 3-6, mothers and preschool teachers (Bartan, 2018; Kalaycıoğlu, 2012; Karayel, 2019; Novovic & Popovic, 2019; Öztürk et al., 2019). Therefore, in this study, it is aimed to examine the criteria of preference of children's picture books, which are one of the most important tools that contribute to the strengthening of parent-child communication, by parents with 0-3 year-old children, which are not found in the literature.

METHODS

Design of the Study

This research was designed according to a case study, one of the qualitative research designs, in order to reveal the competencies of parents with children aged 0-3 regarding the design, content and educational features of children's picture books. Case studies are a research method that provides in-depth study and comparison when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Patton, 2018; Yin, 2017). At the same time, the case study is a research method that studies a current phenomenon within its own real-life framework and allows to examine in depth a phenomenon or event that cannot be controlled by the researcher (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this research, in accordance with the case study, a systematic way was followed, including the stages of collecting data about a situation, analyzing and interpreting these data. Thus, it is aimed to report the data obtained during the research process in a clear and understandable way. Table 1 includes the demographic information of the parents included in the study.

Table 1.

Demographic Information of Parents Included in the Study

Demographic Information		F	%
Gender	Female	40	57,97
	Male	29	42,03
	Total	69	100
Education Level	Highschool	3	4,35
	University	49	71,01
	Post-grad	17	24,64
	Total	69	100,00
Profession	Academician	7	10,14
	Teacher	40	57,97
	Housewife	7	10,14
	Doctor	1	1,45
	Architect	1	1,45
	Officer	2	2,90
	Engineer	2	2,90
	Student	5	7,25
	Child Development Expert	2	2,90
	Dentist	1	1,45
	Biologist	1	1,45
	Total	69	100,00
	Number of Children	1	39
2		21	30,43
3		9	13,04
Total		69	100,00

The study group of the research consisted of 69 parents, 40 of whom were mothers and 29 were fathers. The parents whose opinions were taken were determined by the convenient case sampling, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, and this sample was preferred because it is fast and practical (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Patton (2018) recommends that researchers use pseudonyms by changing the names of the participants in order to protect the identities of the people participating in the research. Accordingly, a coding system such as A1, B1 (Mother 1, Father 1) A2, B2 (Mother 2, Father 2) was used to protect the identities of the parents included in the study.

Data Collection Instrument

In this study, the data were obtained by using a semi-structured interview form consisting of 14 open-ended questions prepared by the researchers as a result of the literature review. Semi-structured interview is an interview method in which new questions can be asked according to the topics predetermined by the researcher or during the interview (Güler et al., 2015). In the research, first of all, a semi-structured interview form was drafted in order to determine the views of parents on children's picture books, opinions were received from 2 academicians and 1 assessment and evaluation expert, who are experts in the field of Turkish education, and necessary arrangements were made in the draft form in line with expert opinions. Afterwards, pilot interviews were conducted in order to determine the clarity of the questions in the draft interview form, and the expressions causing expression errors were corrected, and the form was given its final form after the pilot interviews.

Data Collection Procedure and Data Collection

Before starting the research, the permission numbered E-97105791-050.01.01-7549 was obtained from Hasan Kalyoncu University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee on 23.12.2021, and the data collection process was carried out between 14-27 March 2022 with the voluntary participation of parents with 0-3 children. In this process, firstly, the participants were briefed about the purpose of the research, and the principle of voluntariness and confidentiality was emphasized. Then, the data were collected by the first researcher through face-to-face interviews with the parents, with each interview taking an average of 15 minutes. In the interviews, with the permission of the participants, both audio recordings were used and parents were asked to fill in semi-structured interview forms which were prepared after an intense literature review. Similar studies and data collection instruments were analyzed and the interview questions were prepared accordingly. In this way, the data whose writing was forgotten were reached by converting the audio recordings into written text.

Data Analysis

Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained from the research. By coding on the written texts converted from the audio recordings and the semi-structured interview forms filled by the parents; The data were subjected to content analysis. Content analysis is an objective and systematic methodology used to examine social reality, capable of extracting meanings and interpretations from various materials such as concepts, texts, verbal

or written documents, based on predetermined criteria, transforming quantitative data into qualitative information, deciphering indirect messages from written content and various methods. It is a multifunctional and constantly evolving research technique that aims to extract information and meaning from content types (Metin and Ünal, 2022). The collected data were coded by the researchers based on the opinions of the parents; The codes obtained were brought together under common themes and presented in figures. In addition, in order to contribute to the validity of the research findings, appropriate examples from the statements of the participants were determined and direct quotations were included.

Credibility and Transferability

Qualitative research is based on credibility, reliability, confirmability and transferability criteria; Trustworthiness is used instead of validity and reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018), and one or more of these criteria should be specified (Creswell, 2003). In this research, credibility and transferability were taken into consideration. Credibility is related to the internal validity of the research and the compatibility of the findings with reality (Meriam & Tisdell, 2005). In order to ensure the credibility of the study, the biases of the researchers were reduced and their impartiality was ensured during the data collection. Participant confirmation; It is very important in that it gives participants an active role in confirming the authenticity and accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2003). After the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and semi-structured interview forms, they were checked after the confirmation of the participants. In order to strengthen the transferability of the study results to other studies, the data collection tool and the participants are described in detail (Sharts-Hopko, 2002). In addition, direct quotations are frequently included in order to understand the researched situation more clearly. The findings and results of the research were tried to be explained in detail; Thus, it is foreseen that the questions that arise in the minds of researchers who will conduct similar research will be answered. In addition to all these, expert opinions were taken both in the preparation of the interview questions and in the analysis of the data, and necessary arrangements were made.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained from the research conducted to examine the level of knowledge about the criteria that parents with 0-3 year-old children consider when choosing children's picture books will be presented in figures.

In Table 2, parents' answers to questions such as "what kind of features should be in quality children's books?" are included.

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the views of the parents participating in the study on the features that should be found in the children's picture book are grouped under three themes: suitable for the child, external structure and internal structure features. Accordingly, in the theme of being suitable for the child, suitability for his age (f=9) is at the forefront, this is being educational (f=6), physically suitable for the child (f=6), appealing to the

sense of interest and curiosity (f=6) and creating a positive impression on the child (f=6) follow the opinions at the same rate.

Table 2.

Parents' Views on the Features That Should Be Included in a Children's Picture Book

Relevance to the child		Internal Structure		External Structure	
Codes	F	Codes	F	Codes	F
Should be relevant to the age of child	9	should have vibrant colors	11	There should be less text	8
Should be educative	6	drawings should be realistic	8	The illustration should be compatible with the story.	7
Should create a positive impression	6	should be large and with lots of pictures.	7	Language and expression should be simple	5
Should be physically appropriate for the child	6	should be simple and interesting	5	should develop imagination	4
should appeal to curiosity and interest of the child	6	should have thick and durable pages	4		
Should be interactive	2				

**In cases where the answers given by the parents did not fall into a single category, all of the answers were coded and a parent's answer was included in more than one category. Therefore, numerical values are more or less than the number of parents participating in the study.*

In terms of exterior features, having vivid colors (f=11) constitutes the broadest answer, and it is emphasized that the drawings are realistic (f=8) and they are large and have plenty of pictures (f=7). When we look at the internal structure features, having little writing (f=8) takes the first place, followed by the compatibility of the illustration with the story (f=7), the plain language and expression (f=5) and the development of the imagination (f=4). Examples of parents' statements on this issue are given below:

"The colors should be vivid and clear, the text should be less, the images should be more, the size should be large, the pages should be thick." (A6)

"The colors should be vibrant, similar to the toys or materials at home (smart cubes, puzzle toys, toy cars or dolls should be things that the child in everyone's house can connect with), for the younger age group, the text should be few and many pictures" (A9)

"The pictures should be suitable for my child's age level, the colors should be vibrant, and the images should not be too far from the truth." (B2)

In Table 3, the parents' responses to questions such as "What are the points you consider when choosing picture books for your children?" are included.

Table 3.

*Views of Parents on the Issues They Consider While Preferring Picture Books for Their Children**

External Structure		Internal Structure		Relevance to the child	
Codes	F	Codes	F	Codes	F
Have a lot of pictures	14	Content	8	Relevant to the age	9
To be durable	9	Language and expression	6	Relevant to the development	3
To the colors	6	Be educative	6		
To the publisher	5	Appropriate to the culture	3	Other	
To the author	3	Subject	2	Content-illustration relevance	10
To the point of the text	3			Price	4
To the cover	3			Be interactive	2
To be simple	2				
To the name	1				

Table 3 presents the findings regarding the issues parents consider when choosing picture books for their children. In the theme of external structure, having a lot of pictures (f=14) takes the first place, followed by durable (f=9) and colorful (f=6), under this theme, the title of the book (f=1) takes the last place. Parents express two codes in terms of relevance to the child, they emphasize the suitability for the child's age (f=9) and development (f=3). When we look at the internal structure features, the content of the book (f=8) is in the first place, followed by the suitability of language and expression (f=6) and being instructive (f=6) at the same rate. When the other aspects taken into consideration by the parents in choosing the picture book are examined, it is seen that the content-picture compatibility (f=10) has a high rate, followed by the price (f=4) and interactivity (f=2) opinions. Examples of parents' statements on this subject are given below:

"I pay attention to features such as having materials that I think will attract my child's attention, what is being told, how it is explained, and whether the drawings are neat." (B4)

"The pictures are interesting and there are too many; Children should be able to tell the story by themselves when they look at the pictures." (A23)

"First of all, I take into account the interests of the child. If there is a behavior that I want to teach the child, I buy a book for it. I pay attention to the fact that the book is not too complicated in terms of both pictures and writings, that is, to be simple. I pay attention to the quality of the paper. I prefer books where we can talk and interact with the child about their pictures." (A21)

The views of the parents on the frequency of buying children's picture books are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

Parents' Views on the Frequency of Buying Children's Picture Books

Codes	F
Borrow from the library	3
Never	3
Rarely	4
3-4 times a year	5
as often as my child wants	2
Frequently	8
Once-twice a week	10
Once-five times a month	34

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that the number of parents ($f=34$) who state that they buy books once or five times a month is high, followed by parents who say they buy books once or twice a week ($f=10$) and very often ($f=8$). It is noteworthy that there were parents who stated that they borrowed from the library ($f=3$) in the study group, and that there were even parents who stated that they did not buy any children's books ($f=3$) until the research was conducted. It was also stated that four parents in the study group did not want to answer the question.

Parents' responses to "Do you pay attention to the publisher information when choosing a children's picture book?" were examined, and it was found that the parents ($f=14$) who stated that they did not consider the publisher information were much less than the parents ($f=55$) who stated that they paid attention to this issue. The opinions of parents about the publishing house information they pay attention to when choosing a children's picture book are given in Table 5.

Table 5.

*Parents' Views on Publisher Information When Preferring Children's Illustrated Books**

Codes	F
Qualified content	10
Quality printing	6
Illustration quality	4
Ideology-free	4
Meticulous editing	2

When the opinions of the parents about the publishing house information they consider when choosing a children's picture book are examined, quality content ($f=10$) takes the first place, followed by quality printing ($f=6$). It is seen that the views of quality illustration ($f=4$) and

ideological distance (f=4) are expressed with similar intensity; The expression of careful editing (f=2), which is in the last place, draws attention. Examples of parents' statements on this subject are given below:

"I think that the books published by some publishers are better in terms of paper quality, print quality and storytelling." (A54)

"I pay attention to the publishing house when choosing a picture book. Because I think that good publishing houses are more careful and attentive, I think it is necessary to pay attention to the visuals and information that will enter a tiny brain." (B6)

"I pay attention because I think that some publishers print more children's books and the paper quality is better. However, I also receive publications that I do not know." (A3)

Parents' answers given to "Do you pay attention to the author's information when choosing a children's picture book?" were examined, and it was found that the parents (f=19) who stated that they did not consider the author's knowledge were less than the parents (f=45) who stated that they paid attention to this issue, and there were also the parents (f=5) who stated that they partially took it into account. Table 6 shows the opinions of parents regarding the author information they pay attention to when choosing a children's picture book.

Table 6.

*Parents' Views on Author Information when Preferring Children's Illustrated Books**

Codes	F
Efficiency of the author	9
Authors specializing in child development	4
character traits of the author	4
Expression of the author	3
Background of the author	2
Author's point of view	2

When the opinions of the parents regarding the author's information, which they consider when choosing a children's picture book, are examined, the author's competence (f=9) comes first, followed by child development expertise (f=4) and character traits (f=4). It is seen that the CV (f=2) and the author's point of view (f=2) are expressed with similar intensity, while the expression of the author (f=3) draws attention. Examples of parents' statements on this subject are given below:

"I usually pay attention, because understanding children's language is not for everyone." (B3)

"Yes, I will pay attention. It will be better if he is experienced in this field and has received training in the field." (A8)

"Of course, the author of the book is the most important element of the book. While reading the books to my daughter, I always tell the author to translate if there is someone who illustrates it. I'll have the back and front cover inspected." (A23)

Table 7 presents the parents' views on the physical characteristics they consider when choosing a children's picture book.

Table 7.

*Parents' Views on Physical Characteristics When Preferring Children's Picture Books**

Binding		Illustration		Size	
Code	F	Code	F	Code	F
Should be durable	19	Images should be in the foreground	13	It should be big enough for the child to carry.	18
Should be good quality paper	9	Should have vibrant colors	8	Design	
Should be a cardboard cover	5	Pictures should be big	3	Code	F
				Should be interesting	8
				Should appeal to different senses	8

The physical features of children's picture books are divided into themes as binding, illustration, size and design features, and parents' views are given in Table 7. Accordingly, being durable in binding contact (f=19) ranks first, followed by quality paper (f=9) and cardboard cover (f=5). In the illustration theme, it is emphasized that the pictures are in the foreground (f=13), have vivid colors (f=8) and large (f=3); In the dimension theme, it is stated that it should be large enough for the child to carry (f=18). Being remarkable (f=8) and appealing to different senses (f=8) are stated as the views included in the design theme. Examples of parents' statements on this subject are given below:

"The outer cover should be strong, attract the attention of the child, and be in a suitable size for the age level." (B7)

"It should be a large size, not easily worn paper print, it should be less written and more illustrated. 3D books are also positive in terms of attracting the attention of children." (A4)

"I pay attention to the selection of large, non-tearable pages (cardboard, etc.), stitched so that the page does not come apart when folded in the middle." (B3)

"The book page should be small. Considering the age group, the text should be small or absent, the pictures should be clear and clear, the picture quality, the coloring should be nice." (A6)

In Table 8, parents' views on the front and back cover information they consider when choosing a children's picture book are given.

Table 8.*Parents' Views on Front-Back Cover Information When Preferring Children's Picture Books**

Codes	F
Name of the book	27
Publisher	26
Illustration	19
Name of the author	18
Age group	14
Information about the subject	11
Main idea of the story	5
Name of the illustrator	3
Date of publication	2
Background information about the author	1

The views of the parents regarding the front and back cover information they consider when choosing a children's picture book are given in Table 8. Accordingly, the title of the book (f=27) and the publisher (f=26) are expressed in the first place and at a similar rate as the criteria taken into account by the parents. The fact that the front cover is illustrated (f=19) and the author's information (f=18) follow other criteria. specified in details. The message given by the story (f=5), the name of the illustrator (f=3), the date of publication (f=2) and a brief information about the author (f=1) are also emphasized by the parents as the details that should be on the cover of the illustrated storybook. Examples of parents' statements on this subject are given below:

"I make sure it has a catchy name." (A12)

"I make sure that there is a striking picture that introduces or summarizes the subject of the book, the title of the book, the name of the illustrator, publishing house and the author." (A5)

"Having a publisher and a writer; I make sure you have a good visual." (B4)

"It is very important to have a little information about what value the author wants to give and the size of the picture that fits with the book" (B8)

The opinions of the parents about the illustration features they consider when choosing a children's picture book are given in Table 9.

Illustration features of children's picture books are divided into themes as reality, relevance to the child, colors, picture-text harmony and drawing features, and parents' views are given in Table 9. Accordingly, being remarkable (f=19) is in the first place in the reality theme, followed by being realistic (f=6) and understandable (f=5). Being suitable for the age and development of the child (f=8), developing his/her imagination (f=6) and being an educator-teacher (f=3) are emphasized as parental views in the theme of being suitable for the child. In the illustration theme, it is mentioned that the pictures are vivid and bright (f=13); In the theme of picture-text harmony, it is stated that it should be descriptive of the subject (f=18) and reflect

the characters (f=5). The plain (f=7) and aesthetic (f=4) of the paintings are emphasized as the views included in the drawing theme.

Table 9.

*Parents' Views on Illustration Features Considered When Preferring Children's Picture Books**

Authenticity		Relevance to child		Colors		Picture-text harmony		Illustration	
Codes	F	Codes	F	Codes	F	Codes	F	Codes	F
Interesting	9	Suitable for child's age and development	8	Vivid and bright pictures	13	Expressive enough	8	Simple	7
Authentic	6	Improves imagination	6			Reflects the characters	5	Aesthetic	4
Understandable	5	Educative	3						

Examples of parents' statements on this subject are given below:

"It is lively and bright, the pictures are big, it reflects the plot well" (A60)

"I make sure it is realistic and eye-catching." (A32)

"If vivid colors, stories that will encourage his imagination and creativity are chosen, the child's perspective on life will expand." (B5)

"Pictures should be plain and their lines should not be too clear. Pictures that are left unfinished or sometimes pictures that we cannot understand can become much more meaningful for children." (A1)

In Table 10, there are opinions of the parents regarding the content features they consider when choosing a children's picture book.

Table 10.

*Parents' Views on Content Characteristics When Preferring Children's Illustrated Books**

Relevance to child			Subject		Theme		Language and expression		
Codes	F		Codes	F	Codes	F	Codes	F	
Appropriate to child's age and development	18		Educative	16	Teach values	9	Understandable	9	
Involve positive feelings and thoughts	5		Fun	5	Improve imagination	3	Attractive	3	
Improve sense of humor	2		Related to real-life	4	Involve issues	2	Give the child pleasure for reading	1	

When choosing a children's picture book, the content features that parents consider are thematically related to the child, subject, theme, language and expression, and the views on this subject are given in Table 10. Accordingly, being suitable for the age and development of the child (f=18), providing positive feelings and thoughts (f=5), and developing a sense of humor (f=2) are among the findings included in the theme of relativity to the child. Within the scope of the theme, it is emphasized that it teaches universal values (f=9), develops imagination (f=3) and includes cultural elements; It is stated that it should be understandable (f=9), attractive (f=3) in terms of language and expression, and should provide reading pleasure (f=1). It is expressed as the opinions included in the subject theme that it is educational-instructive (f=16) and entertaining (f=5), and its association with daily life (f=4). Examples of parents' statements on this subject are given below:

"There should be books that support my child developmentally." (A4)

"I make sure it is fun, simple and educational." (A7)

"The language should be simple and understandable. Long sentences should not be included, and I think that negative situations such as death and theft should not be included in the books at this age, but should be given very carefully." (B2)

"There must be content that assimilates universal value judgments. It should encourage questioning. Teaching should not come forward with the mission of giving advice." (B5)

The views of the parents on the subject and theme features that they consider when choosing a children's picture book are given in Table 11.

Table 11.

*Parents' Opinions on Topic and Theme Characteristics When Preferring Children's Picture Books**

Relevance to child		Instructional/Informative		Nature Consciousness		Values		Daily life	
<i>Codes</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>F</i>
Improves imagination	5	Educative	10	Tells natural events	5	Religious and ethical subjects	3	About daily life	3
Attractive	5	About scientific subjects	7	Imposes animal love	3	About Atatürk	2	Current topic	2
Suitable for the age of the child	4	Helps solve problems	1	Space and world	2	About good manners	1	Fun	
Improves selfcare skills	4							Codes	F
Suitable for the child's development	3							Being enjoyable	2
Being gripping	2								

In Table 11, parents' views on the subject and theme characteristics they consider when choosing a children's picture book are given, in this context, there are themes of relevance to the child, instructional/informative, nature awareness, values, daily life and entertainment. Accordingly, the child's development of imagination (f=5), attention-grabbing (f=5), supporting self-care skills (f=4), appropriate for his age (f=4) and development (f=3) and immersive (f=2) is expressed as the opinions included in the theme of relativity to the child; In the theme of instructive/informative, the focus is on being an educator-instructor (f=10), including scientific subjects (f=7) and helping to solve the problems encountered (f=1). The fact that it tells about natural events (f=5), instills love for animals (f=3) and has space/earth content (f=2) is among the findings obtained in the theme of nature consciousness. In the values theme, religious and moral issues (f=3) are in the first place, followed by Atatürk (f=2) and etiquette (f=1); being related to daily life (f=3) and dealing with a current topic (f=2) are stated as the views included in the daily life theme. In the entertainment theme, it is emphasized that it should have an entertaining subject (f=2). Examples of parents' statements on this subject are given below:

"I pay attention to the child's age-appropriate subject, to include examples of behavior that can be taught to the child, not to be boring, and to make the subject enjoyable." (A3)

"It should bear traces of life, and start from the events that the child may encounter on a daily basis so that it can be permanent in the child. The theme should be able to achieve its purpose." (A8)

"I pay attention to the features that lead to fun instructing and doing the right thing." (B9)
"Scientific, open-mindedness can cover Atatürk's revolutions, I want it to cover every subject, scientific or space, health, family." (A4)

The views of the parents on the language and expression characteristics they consider when choosing a children's picture book are given in Table 12.

Table 12.

*Parents' Views on Language and Expression Features When Preferring Children's Picture Books**

Simplicity/Fluency		Relevance to child		Expression and style	
Code	F	Code	F	Code	F
Simple and understandable	40	Suitable for the child	4	Correct use of Turkish	3
Fluent	13	Teaches new words	2	Fun expression	1
Short statements	9				
Rhythmical language	3				

The language and expression features of children's picture books are divided into themes such as simplicity/fluency, expression and style, and according to the child, and the views of the parents are given in Table 12. Accordingly, in the theme of simplicity/fluency, the focus is on the sentences being clear/simple (f=40), emphasizing that they should be fluent (f=13), short (f=9) and have a rhythmic language (f=3). Being suitable for the child (f=4) and contributing to the

vocabulary by teaching new words ($f=2$) are expressed as the opinions included in the theme of relevance to the child; The correct use of Turkish ($f=3$) takes the first place in the theme of expression and style, followed by an entertaining expression style ($f=1$). Examples of parents' statements on this subject are given below:

"I make sure that it is simple and fluent, does not contain very long sentences, and the language is natural in translated books." (B10)

"Language and expression should be simple and concepts should be clear. Concepts suitable for children's age and life levels should be used in the narratives. (A24)

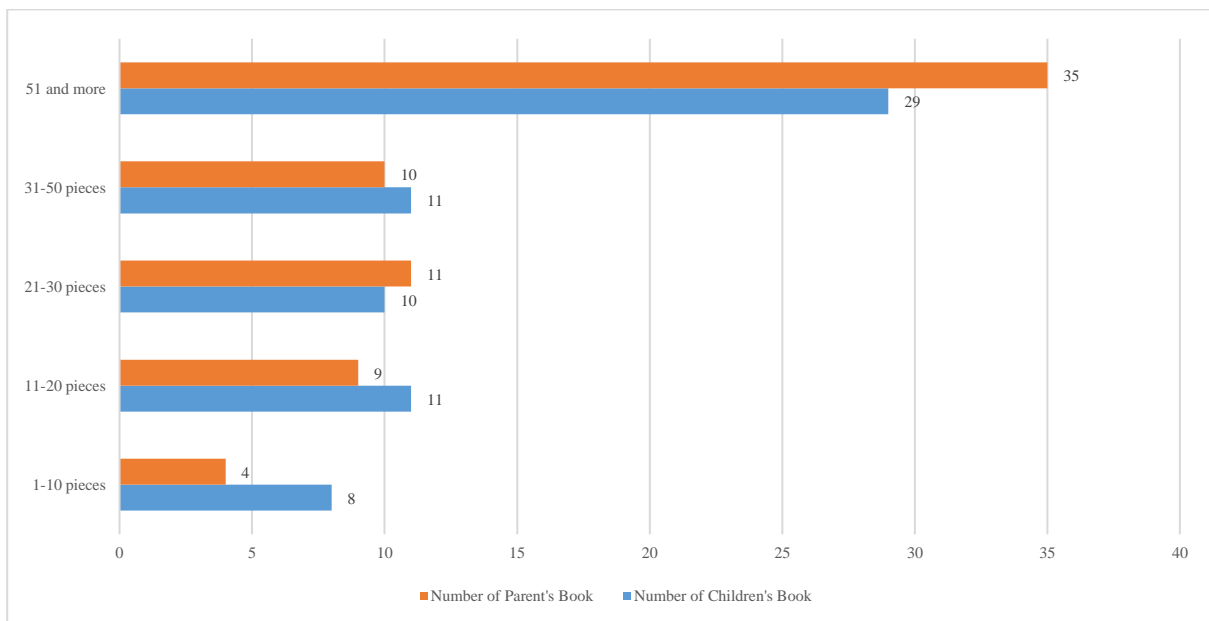
"I make sure it is simple and fluid. I take care not to choose books with complex expressions that children will not understand." (A12)

When the parents' views on their children's preferences when purchasing a children's picture book were examined, it was determined that the majority ($f=45$) of their children bought the book they chose, and some ($f=20$) did not take this preference into account, and only 4 parents answered "partially".

Figure 1 provides information on the number of books belonging to parents and their children.

Figure 1.

Information on the Number of Books of the Parents and Their Children



Comparative information on the number of books belonging to parents and their children is shown in Figure 1. Accordingly, it was stated that the children of parents who had 1-10 books of their own ($f=4$) had twice as many children's books as they had ($f=8$). However, it is seen in Figure 1 that the picture books of the parents who have 11-20, 21-30, 31-50 books are also in approximately similar proportions. The remarkable point is that the children ($f=29$) of parents who have more than 51 books ($f=35$) also tend to read and book.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to examine the knowledge levels of parents with children aged 0-3 on the criteria for choosing picture books for children. As a result of the research, the views of parents on the features that should be included in quality children's books and the features they pay attention to when choosing children's books were gathered under three themes: relevance to the child, internal structure and external structure features. When the findings of the study were examined, it was observed that when choosing children's picture books, parents primarily considered their suitability for the age and development of the child, paid attention to a simple and fluent language of expression, vivid colors of the pictures, absence of violence and fear elements, appropriate font size and size of the picture, and detail. It was also observed that they paid attention to the fact that the book was bound with a durable cardboard cover, to use quality paper, to be educational, instructive, entertaining and especially to contain moral values. If children are introduced to quality books in appropriate environments from a very early period, they may ask their parents to buy books in line with their own preferences in the future (Bayraktar & Ersoy, 2018; Gündüz, 2007; Melendez, 2015; Mert, 2016). The findings obtained indicate that parents care about the features that should be found in children's picture books; shows that they are sensitive and careful when choosing books for their children. However, it is another result that parents do not attach importance to supporting creativity and imagination while choosing children's books. As a matter of fact, creative thinking and imagination can progress by showing different accelerations in different time periods of the individual from early childhood to adulthood. However, significant leaps can be recorded in terms of creativity and related behavior patterns, especially in early childhood, when various cognitive, verbal and skill-related features become increasingly independent (Fyle, 1985; Yuvacı & Dağlıoğlu, 2018; Özdağ, 2019). Thus, parents should pay attention to the selection of books that will allow the development of imagination and creativity. At this point, in a study conducted by Tezel, Çiftçi, and Uyanık (2019), it was concluded that when parents buy books for their children, these books should feed children's imagination and creativity, and this criterion, whose importance is not emphasized enough in our study, is more prominent in parents with children between the ages of 4-6. was found to be retained.

In order for the child to be introduced to picture books suitable for their interests, needs and developmental characteristics, physical characteristics should be paid attention to in the literary works that will be presented to them. The cover is the first stimulus to attract the child's interest in the book. For this reason, the design of the cover should give a clear message about the content of the book, the coloring and illustration should be good, the name of the book, the author, the illustrator and the publisher information should be included in a way that does not disturb the integrity of the book, and care should be taken to ensure that the book is made of durable material for its longevity (Bayraktar, 2019, p. p.25). The name of the book and the publishing house were expressed in the first place and at a similar rate as the criteria taken into consideration in the opinions of the parents regarding the front-back cover information. Along

with the book cover, features such as the shape, size, number of pages, binding, font size, picture size and coloring of the book also affect adults' book selection for children. The text, cover, volume, page and writing design of the book should complement each other with the pictures in the book, and the child should be made to feel that a quality book is presented (Erdoğan & Özdemir, 2022). As a result of this study, it was found that the parents' views on physical characteristics when choosing a book were gathered under the category of binding, picture and size, and it was determined that they could choose the appropriate book in terms of the pictures, size and paper structure of the book. At this point, according to the findings obtained from the researches (Bayraktar, 2019; Kıldan & Gümrükcü Bilgici, 2011; Öztürk et al., 2019) examining the issues that mothers with children between the ages of 4-6 pay attention to when buying books for their children. It has been determined that they attach importance to the binding and cover features, which are structural elements, and it has been concluded that durable materials should be used in addition to high quality paper in the books. It can be said that these results in the literature support our study.

In particular, it is stated that picture books have important contributions to the development of children aged zero-six, since painting represents the language for preschool children (Bulut & Kuşdemir, 2013; Güleç & Gönen, 1997; Yükselen, 2019). Through illustrations in children's books, it is ensured that the text is better understood, the child can examine the book without the need for an adult, sometimes the events and characters are expressed without the need for text, and the colors, shapes and lines that will appeal to the child's aesthetic understanding are used effectively (Mercan & Aydoğan, 2020). Illustrations that describe actions such as walking, running, and eating individually in the 0-3 age period also contribute to the child's discovery of his environment and himself (Buldik Türkmen, 2021, p.100). In this study, the illustration features of children's picture books are divided into themes as reality, relevance to the child, colors, picture-text harmony and drawing features, based on parental views. It has been concluded that various features such as picture size, coloring, rich illustrations, and compatibility of texts and illustrations greatly affect the book selection of adults. As a matter of fact, many studies conducted in previous years concluded that illustrations in children's books are an important stimulus for children's language and mental development from infancy, increasing their critical thinking and creativity skills (Morgan, 2013; Tsunemi et al., 2014; Masataka, 2014).

Another result of the study is that the number of books owned by parents and children is proportional to each other. In other words, as the number of books available to parents at home increases, the number of children's own books also increases. Children's interest in reading in the preschool period is also related to the number of books they have and the frequency of their families reading to them (Özbek Ayaz et al., 2016). As a matter of fact, young people who do not like to read state that they cannot acquire this habit in early childhood, that they do not have enough materials (books, magazines, etc.) to be read at home, and that they generally do not chat with family members or friends about books (Arıcı, 2008). Another

important result obtained from this research is that parents mostly give importance to their children's preferences when purchasing children's picture books. Especially in early childhood, children's attitudes towards books are very important for children to develop positive attitudes towards books (Büyükkavas Kuran & Ersözlü, 2009).

Being in environments where books and reading are important and valuable support children's language development and early literacy skills significantly (Arnold, 2003; Bohrer, 2005). When the parents' views on the frequency of buying picture books for children were examined, it was concluded that most of the participants bought books once or five times a month. Studies have shown that the sooner parents buy their children their first books, the sooner they begin to support their receptive and expressive language development. In addition, it has been revealed that the effects of book reading intervention programs on language development from birth to 3 years of age are greater than those of other age groups (Berk, 2013; Mol et al., 2008; Santrock, 2012; Şimşek & Işıkoğlu Erdoğan, 2015). Preferring the books of successful authors in the selection of books, and making the necessary examination when encountering an unknown author or publishing house is a basic need, especially expected from families. When parents' opinions are evaluated; It can be said that parents do not pay attention to issues such as children's book author, publisher, publication year or their knowledge on these issues is limited. In a study conducted by Yükselen, Yumuş and Işık (2016), it is noteworthy that a certain part of preschool teachers do not care about the details of who wrote the book or from which publishing house it was published, while Kıldan and Gümrükçü Bilgici (2011) and Tezel Şahin and Tutkun (2016), it was concluded that the parents of children receiving pre-school education care about the author and publishing house.

Another factor affecting parents' book preference is content features. In the books that contribute to the development of children in many areas, the content-related elements can be listed as "the type of the book, the subject and theme, the characters, the language and the style, the plan (the sequence of the subject and the events)" (Ersoy & Bayraktar, 2015, Demircan, 2006; Gönen et al., 2011; Kocabaş, 2017; Tezel Şahin & Tutkun, 2016). The content features emphasized in the research were determined as language and expression features, theme and subject, similar to the literature, and the theme of relevance to the child was also emphasized. It is of great importance to compare children with books that are suitable for children's interests and needs, nature, language and meaning universe, and reflect the beauty and expression possibilities of Turkish in a qualified way (Sever, 2018, p.8). At this point, the narration should be presented in a way that the target audience can understand (Yalçın & Aytaş, 2017); When choosing words, children's development and age levels should be taken into account (Karatay, 2011). It can be stated that the parents who participated in this study also had views on all these features emphasized in terms of language and expression.

Within the scope of the study, the opinions of the parents regarding the subject and theme characteristics that they consider, are suitable for the age and development of the child, support the imagination, have an educational and entertaining content, nature awareness,

moral and national values, and daily life issues. The child embarks on a cognitive and emotional journey thanks to the themes and characters of the characters covered in the books, and in this way, by recognizing the realities of life and understanding himself in the reflection of these, he receives a kind of life lesson (Tanju Aslışen, 2017). However, most of the parents did not express their opinions about the heroes, which is one of the content features. Heroes in children's books are one of the content elements with important functions. Children tend to be affected by the personality traits, behaviors and actions of the characters in the books. In children's literature, heroes allow children to identify with themselves (Sever, 2007, p.49). Including the stories of beloved heroes can increase the value of the book in the eyes of the child and make the child love reading (Gönen et al., 2014). For this reason, parents should consider that the behaviors of the heroes and the roles they assume are important for the personality development of children when choosing children's books.

As a result of this study, when buying children's books, parents pay particular attention to the appropriateness of children's books to the age and development of the child, the language of expression should be simple and understandable, the presence of vivid colors, the content of the pictures should not include elements of violence and fear, the font size and picture size and the outer cover of the book should be well-bound. It was observed that they took into consideration factors such as paper quality, being educational, instructive and entertaining, supporting imagination and containing value concepts. While the parents participating in the research generally argued that children's books should be educational and instructive, they also stated that they should be qualified in terms of developing children's imagination and appealing to their interests and needs. These findings show that parents care about the features that should be included in children's picture books; It shows that they are sensitive and careful when choosing books for their children. This study was conducted between 14-27 March 2022 with the voluntary participation of 69 parents of 0-3 children. To broaden the scope of the study and make the results more generalizable, it is important to include data from parents in different regions or countries. In this way, a more comprehensive perspective can be obtained by comparing the results of studies conducted on parents in different geographical, cultural and educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, the following suggestions can be offered for families, researchers and educators:

- Families should be made aware of the importance and characteristics of quality books, with examples, in gaining the habit of reading books.
- Collaboration with public authorities, non-governmental organizations and universities can be carried out for the training of children's library staff and teachers in order to guide the family in choosing quality books.

- Explanations on the importance of reading books and the characteristics of quality books can be included in social media and other communication tools.
- Experimental studies can be made possible by basing the selection of children's picture books with the children on activities.

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