

Examining the Preschool Teachers' Use of Different Approaches In Children's Literature

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the purposes of preschool teachers in reading for children, the practices they use to give children the habit of reading, the materials they keep in their reading corners, the techniques they use, the themes they prefer in the books they read for children, and the activities they conduct using story books which are important during this period of childhood. The study was based on the survey model, and its data were collected by the Evaluation of Different Approaches in Children's Literature Form designed by the researchers. The results showed that preschool teachers did not use any innovative and creative practices when identifying their purposes for reading for children, giving them the habit of reading, establishing a reading corner, using different storytelling techniques, choosing themes for children's books, and using different techniques before, during and after reading.

1. Introduction

Early childhood is a significant period in which children should be supported in cognitive, language, motor, mental, social and emotional areas as a whole. As to Eliason and Jenkins (2003), people working in the field of early childhood education should have knowledge about the situations that make children, who have a great potential developmentally, use this potential at the highest level and provide children with quality activities in this respect. Cullinan and Galda (1994) point out that children's literature enables children to discover and shape their lives. Kisefer and et al. (2007) state that literature encourages children's imagination and also it ensures that children consider their experiences and opinions about life in a different and new way. Fairy tales, stories, legends, picture story books, novels, poetry, biographies, puzzles, memoirs, travel writings, books about nature and science, reference books are among the primary children's literature books which are used in early childhood period and have a significant contribution in children's development (Maltepe,2009). According to Norton (1999), activities supported with these developmentally appropriate works of literature have an important role in increasing their interest in literature, gaining love for books and the habit of reading (cited. Sever, 2003). Teachers' interests, attitudes and approaches about literature play an effective role in realizing this function. Bamberger (1990) indicates that teacher has a considerable effect in the first years of school in terms of being an example and a model. It affects the reading development that a child has a teacher who loves reading during this period when the child models the teacher. Srinivasan (1998) states that family can have an effect on the child's reading to a certain extent; however, the teacher has broader opportunities in this issue and adds that teacher's main contribution is seen in choosing attractive and appropriate books for the child (cited Yılmaz, 2000). Teacher's approaching the activity plans and book reading times more creatively and in a critical manner can add a more different aspect in activities. Various activities can be planned before and after reading picture story books. By asking such questions as "How can I integrate children into the process?" "How can I discover what children think about the book read and their way of associating it with their later experiences?" and seeking answers to these, teachers understand that books read simply and without purpose are insufficient in reaching the real aims of education (Machado, 2003, cited Veziroğlu, M.). When considered from this aspect, teachers' approaching picture story books in a more aware manner as it should be in all activities offered to children in early childhood education centers, diversify the previous and post-activities and include some creative practices in these activities gain even more importance.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine preschool teachers' practices intended to children's literature. For this purpose, answers for the following questions were searched. For what purposes do preschool teachers read books to children? What kind of activities do they do in order to gain children the love for books and the reading habit? What kinds of books are there in the book centers of kindergartens in primary schools and private preschools? What themes are mostly chosen by preschool teachers while selecting the books? What kind of creative activities do preschool teachers perform before, during and after reading the picture story books?

3. Method

3.1 The Population and Sample Group of the Study

The sample group of the study is composed of 111 preschool teachers working in independent preschools of the Ministry of National Education and private preschools.

3.2 Data Gathering Instrument

In this study conducted with survey model, in order to determine preschool teachers' level of using different approaches in children's literature, "Different Approaches in Children's Literature Assessment Form" was used. 1 expert from the field, 2 preschool teachers were asked about their opinions and the form was found to be valid. Alpha reliability coefficient was .84.

4. Findings and Comment

In this section of the research, findings on preschool teachers' level of using different approaches in children's literature were given.

Table 1
Findings on Demographic Information

			Institution			Total
			Kindergarte n	Private Prescho ol	Independent Preschool	
Experience	0-5 years	f	25	18	14	57
		%	22,5%	16,2%	12,7%	51,4%
	6-11 years	f	7	15	7	29
		%	6,3%	13,5%	6,3%	26,1%
Total	12 and above	f	11	14	0	25
		%	9,9%	12,6%	0%	22,5%
		f	43	47	21	111
		%	38,7%	42,3%	19,0%	100,0%

38.7 % of the preschool teachers in the research sample are working in kindergartens, 42.3% in private preschools, 19 % in independent preschools. Demographic data about teachers' experience is as follows: 51.4% have an experience of 0 to 5 years, 26,1% have an experience of 6 to 11 years, 22,5 % have an experience of 12 years and above.

Table 2
The Distribution of Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers' Purposes of Reading Books to Children

Purposes for reading books	F	%
Entertaining and relaxing children	8	7,2
Supporting the curriculum	55	49,5
Gaining children the love for books and literature	17	15,3
Contributing in children's cognitive development	29	26,1
Supporting children's social and emotional development	23	20,7
Meeting children's needs and interests	16	14,4
Supporting children's language development	33	29,7
Gaining children the reading habit	28	25,2
Since children wants it	14	12,6
All of them	41	36,9

A majority of the preschool teachers participating in the research (49,5%) states that they read books to the children in order to support the curriculum while the ratio of the ones reading in order to entertain and relax the children is only 7.2%. This shows that teachers regard reading books to children as a requirement of education and ignore the entertaining and relaxing side of books. However, according to Hunt (1999), books are works of art which are for some people tools for spending good time and for some people tools for supporting literacy skills, improving

imagination, developing social skills, helping deal with problems or offering the opportunity to discuss several issues and which are read as a little part of the adult culture and which take over lots of functions.

Table 3
The Distribution of Activities Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers Do for Gaining the Reading Habit

Activities	F	%
Exhibiting books, taking to book fairs, making them buy books	11	9,9
Directing them to bookstores	21	18,9
Taking them to school libraries	22	19,8
Taking them to public libraries and children’s libraries	9	8,1
Setting up a classroom library together with the children	85	76,6
Suggesting book reading activities with parents at home	78	70,3
Rewarding children’s positive behaviors towards book	63	56,8
Ensuring book exchange from home and other classrooms	68	61,3
Doing “Book Day” practices	38	34,2
Forming a “Book Club”	3	2,7
Noting down how many children read how many books in a week together with the children and rewarding the first child.	12	10,8

As seen in majority of preschool

Table 3, a the teachers

state that they include such activities as “setting up a classroom library together with children” and “suggesting book reading activities at home to parents” in order to gain children reading habit. It is noteworthy that activities with regards to libraries which should play an effective role in developing book reading habit in children are very few. Only 19.8 % of the students state that they take children to school library while the ratio of the ones stating that they take children to public libraries or children’s libraries is only 8.1%.

Reading and the habit of making use of libraries are important factors particularly in cognitive, social, emotional and personality development of children. Yılmaz (2002) states that the main role in gaining children the habit of reading and using libraries is particularly teachers’ role in societies where parent awareness is low. It will help popularize reading and making use of libraries socially as it should be that teachers realize these roles. Findings of this research demonstrate that libraries which play a major role in gaining children the reading habit aren’t used as much as it should be. This can be a result of either the fact that there are libraries at schools of the teachers do not put enough emphasis or because of libraries’ lack of effective work on this issue.

When other studies regarding teachers’ activities performed for the purposes of gaining reading habit were examined, it was seen that they are insufficient in performing activities as book day, book club, and book exchange.

Table 4
The Distribution of Variety of Books in Book Corners at Early Childhood Education Centers

Materials	Kindergarten		Private Preschools		Independent Preschools		Total	
	f	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
Picture Story Books	40	36	46	41,4	20	18	106	95,4
Comics	7	6,3	12	10,8	5	4,5	24	21,6
Magazines	20	18	39	35,1	15	13,5	74	66,6
Children Newspaper	2	1,8	2	1,8	2	1,8	6	5,4
Encyclopedia	1	,9	3	2,7	2	1,8	6	5,4
Fairy Tales	34	30,6	38	34,2	17	15,3	89	80,1
Dictionary	1	,9	4	3,6	0	,0	5	4,5
Poems	11	9,9	15	13,5	4	3,6	30	27
Fables	3	2,7	11	9,9	6	5,4	20	18
Biographies	0	,0	0	,0	2	1,8	2	1,8

When the distribution of the variety of books in the book centers at early childhood centers is examined, it is seen that picture story books are the first with a ratio of 95,4%, fairy tales are the second with a ratio of 80,1%, magazines are the third with a ratio of 66,6%. It is seen that examples of biographies are not sufficiently represented in book corners. Fables, which are not suggested to be used during early childhood period, are represented in the book corners with a ratio of 18%. Stating that introducing children different kinds of literature works appropriate to

children’s age and development during early childhood period provides that they gain the love for books and reading habit and relates closely to their development and education, Gönen and Balat (2002) emphasize that different kinds of works of literature should be used at this period.

When institutions are considered; it is seen that there is a greater variety in books at the book centers in the private preschools than in kindergartens and independent preschools. This may be a result of the financial situation of the schools, the attitude of the school administrator or because of the possibility that teachers in private preschools act more conscious in material selection for the book corners.

Table 5
The Distribution of Themes that Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers Prefer While Selecting Publications

Themes	f	%	Themes	f	%	Themes	f	%
Social Life	68	61,3	Science and Nature	76	68,5	Concepts Education	90	81,1
Play and Sports	27	24,3	Fantasy/Surreal	4	3,6	Skills Education	73	65,8
Value Education	22	19,8	Fun/Humor	48	43,2	Adventure	25	22,5
Philosophy	1	0,9	Social Skills	73	65,8	Travel- Review	50	45,0

According to Table 5, preschool teachers mostly prefer publications with the theme of concepts education with a ratio of 81.1 %. On the other hand, the least preferred publications are with the philosophy theme and have .9 % ratio. However, philosophy shouldn’t be considered as a distant concept for children. Children sometimes ask philosophical questions in their daily lives. Therefore, having texts with a philosophical concern in the classroom ensures that children gain the habit of free thinking before becoming an adult (Direk, 1993).

Table 6
The Distribution of Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers’ Preparation before Reading Picture Story Books in terms of the Type of Schools They Work

The Preparation Study	Kindergarten		Private Preschools		Independent Preschools		Total	
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%
Do you read a picture story book before reading it to children?	27	24,3	28	25,2	17	15,4	72	64,9
Do you do activities as reading poems, asking riddles, rhymes, finger plays or shadow puppetry before reading a picture story book?	43	38,7	47	42,3	21	18,9	111	99,9
Do you tell the children who the writer is before reading a picture story book?	5	4,5	5	4,5	9	8,1	19	17,1
Do you tell the children who did the illustrations of the book before reading a picture story book?	4	3,6	5	4,5	6	5,4	15	13,5

When the distribution of preschool and kindergarten teachers’ preparation before reading picture story books in terms of the type of schools they work is examined, it is seen that almost all (99.9%) teachers do activities as reading poems, asking riddles, rhymes, finger plays or shadow puppetry before reading a picture story book while activities as reading the book in advance, giving information about the author and the illustrator of the book are seen to be too few. These findings imply that preschool and kindergarten teachers consider picture story books as a tool whose content is supposed to be read and do not regard them as a whole with their author and illustrator.

Table 7
The Distribution of Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers’ Practices While Reading Picture Story Books in terms of the Type of Schools They Work

Practices	Kindergarten		Private Preschools		Independent Preschools		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Do you hold the picture story book in a way that children can see it easily while you are reading it?	43	38,7	47	42,3	21	18,9	111	99,9
Do you quit reading at a point that is attractive to children and ask questions on that issue?	32	28,8	15	13,5	15	13,5	62	55,8
Do you sometimes stop and ask questions to children while reading a picture story book?	40	36	30	27	18	16,2	88	79,2

Do you sometimes ask children to act out the characters in the books while reading picture story books to them?	34	30,6	28	25,2	18	16,2	80	72
Do you stop and let children ask questions while reading picture story books?	32	28,8	24	21,6	18	16,2	74	66,6
Do you stop and make explanations as you come across with new words while reading picture story books?	43	38,7	44	39,6	18	16,2	105	94,5
Do you sometimes stop reading and talk about the pictures in the book while reading picture story books?	31	27,9	23	20,7	12	10,8	66	59,4

99.9% of the preschool and kindergarten teachers in the scope of the research state that they hold the book in a way that children can easily see while reading it. 94.5% of the teachers state that stop and make explanations as you come across with new words while reading the book, 79.2% of the teachers state that they sometimes stop reading and ask questions to children, 72 % state that they sometimes ask children to act out the characters in the book. These activities that teachers perform while reading the book are not appropriate because of the reasons as children are distracted and the integrity of the book is destroyed.

Table 8

The Distribution of Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers' Practices After Reading Picture Story Books in terms of the Type of Schools They Work

Practices	Kindergarten		Private Preschools		Independent Preschools		Total	
	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	
Do you ask questions about the heroes of the book after reading a picture story book?	39	35,1	44	39,6	21	18,9	104	93,6
Do you ask questions about the setting of the book after reading a picture story book?	40	36	44	39,6	21	18,9	105	94,5
Do you ask questions about the time of the book after reading a picture story book?	29	26,1	42	37,8	20	18	91	81,9
Do you discuss the information in the book with the children using brain storming technique after reading a picture story book?	41	36,9	46	41,4	19	17,1	106	95,4
Do you do oral discussions after reading a picture story book? (Who is a coward, who is mean?)	38	34,2	39	35,1	19	17,1	96	86,4
Do you ask children to list the events in the picture story book after reading it?	38	34,2	47	42,3	20	18	105	94,5
Do you ask the children to act out the events and the characters in the book after reading it?	41	36,9	47	42,3	21	18,9	109	98,1
Do you perform activities where picture story cards are used after reading the picture story book?	34	30,6	38	34,2	12	10,8	84	75,6
Do you discuss with children whether there are similar events in their lives after reading the picture story book?	37	33,3	44	39,6	19	17,1	100	90
Do you make mind maps regarding the issue after reading picture story books?	9	8,1	14	12,6	4	3,6	27	24,3
Do you make graphs regarding picture story after reading picture story books?	7	6,3	7	6,3	2	1,8	16	14,4
Do you arrange a field trip related with the picture story after reading the picture story book?	3	2,7	9	8,1	1	.9	13	11,7
Do you ask children about the characters they like and dislike after reading the picture story book?	42	37,8	36	32,4	19	17,1	97	87,3
Do you dramatize the picture story after reading the picture story book?	39	35,1	46	41,4	20	18	105	94,5
Do you give information about the author's life after reading the picture story book?	10	9	14	12,6	3	2,7	27	24,3
Do you make puppets and masks of the characters after reading the picture story book?	23	20,7	32	28,8	11	9,9	66	39,4
Do you talk about the pictures of the picture story books and ask questions about the colors, pattern, shapes and page order after reading the picture story book?	11	9,9	12	10,8	8	7,2	31	27,9
Do you make children draw the story after reading the picture story book? (illustration)	36	32,4	32	28,8	16	14,4	84	75,6

Do you make children create posters or banners that will promote the book after reading the picture story book?	4	3,6	5	4,5	3	2,7	12	10,8
Do you give children the chance to create their own picture stories after reading the picture story book?	24	21,6	36	32,4	18	16,2	78	70,2
Do you discuss the artistic side of the pictures in the picture story with the children?	1	.9	2	1,8	3	2,7	6	5,4
Do you give children the chance to form the song, poem or rhyme of the picture story after reading the picture story book?	18	16,2	18	16,2	13	11,7	49	44,1
Do you ask riddles or puzzles about the story after reading the picture story book?	34	30,6	27	24,3	19	17,1	80	72
Do you play games with children about the story after reading the picture story book?	28	25,2	17	15,3	75	13,5	60	54
Do you do puzzles about the story after reading the picture story book?	5	4,5	0	,0	2	1,8	7	6,3
Do you play games on computer about the story after reading the picture story book?	3	2,7	6	5,4	0	,0	9	8,1
Do you explain the new words in the picture story after reading the picture story book?	37	33,3	43	38,7	21	18,9	101	90,9
Do you use matching cards about the story you have read after reading it?	12	10,8	12	10,8	6	5,4	30	27
Do you ask questions to children about the events and heroes in the book by using puppets after reading the picture story book?	37	33,3	36	32,4	17	15,3	90	81
Do you give children a chance to form the picture story again with the flannel board after reading the picture story book?	24	21,6	17	15,3	5	4,5	46	41,4
Do you ask children whether they like the book or not after reading the picture story book?	43	38,7	45	40,5	20	18	108	97,2

When Table 8 is examined, it is seen that teachers composing the sample group of the study state activities as asking questions about the heroes of the book (93.6%), asking questions about the setting (94.5%) and the time (81.9%) of the story, discussing the information regarding the subject of the book (95,4%); making the event order of the story (94,5%); acting out the events and the characters in the story (98,1%); dramatizing the story (94,5%), explaining the new words in the story (90,9%) and asking children whether they like or dislike the story (97,2%). However, it is seen that there are too few teachers who make mind maps regarding the subject after reading the book (24,3%), who form a graph (14,4%), who organize a field trip about the subject (11,7%), who talk about the pictures of the story and ask questions about the color, pattern, shape and page order (27,9,%), who make posters and banners to promote the book (10,8%), who discuss the artistic side of the pictures in the book (5,4%), who make puzzles about the book (6,3%) and play computer games on the computer about the story after reading a book.

Teachers' activities after reading a picture story book were examined in terms of the school they work at and it was seen that teachers working in private schools do a larger number of activities and more different activities than do the ones working in kindergartens and independent preschools.

Finally, within the scope of the research teachers were asked whether they considered themselves sufficient in terms of choosing publications in children's literature and practicing different approaches. 67.6% of the teachers composing the sample group stated that they considered themselves sufficient while 32.4 % stated that they didn't.

Generally speaking, when the findings obtained from the study were examined, a significant problem was found out since preschool and kindergarten teachers consider themselves sufficient in terms of implementing different approaches in children's literature with a great ratio as 67.6% although they are insufficient in performing such activities as identifying the purposes of reading a book to the children, gaining them book reading habit, forming a book center, using different story telling techniques, choosing the children's publications including various themes and practicing different and creative activities before, during and after reading picture story book.

Result And Suggestions

The following results were obtained in this study conducted in order to determine early childhood education teachers' practicing different approaches in children's literature. While teachers do not seem to care enough about the activities performed before reading a book, it was also found out that the activities they do while reading the book also included wrong practices. Besides, no new and creative practices could be seen among the activities performed after reading. It will make this process more effective that teachers know their children, find out their interests and needs and stay in cooperation with the family on this issue and make use of the opportunities of the school at most. When schools are considered, although the ratio of performing different practices in private preschools is low, it is found out that they are in better condition when compared with other types of schools.

Suggestions for preschool and kindergarten teachers to perform different practices in children's literature can be listed as follows: Teachers should plan picture story book reading activities that they will perform in their classrooms considering such principles as choosing books with a good theme, using voice, gestures and mimics, keeping the story short and exciting, repeating it on the following days and integrating them with the activities as music, drama and poems. Moreover, teachers should be aware of children's skills and determine the issues that will attract them, buy the books that will fascinate the children and shouldn't be at a place where s/he wants but at a place the children want. In order to perform a quality picture story book reading activity, teacher should firstly determine their own position by following up the lists of "the best books", reading the articles written about the books, knowing the children's books, making use of the anthologies and going to the libraries. Considering teachers and parents are models directly affecting the child, it is seen that their positive attitude towards literature has a great role in what the child's attitude will be. Parents' activities such as purchasing books, magazines and newspapers both for themselves and for their children, following up the lists of "the best book" or "most recent books", attending book fairs together with their children, making use of the children libraries contribute children's developing a positive attitude towards literature/books and forming their own tastes about literature. On the other hand, teachers can contribute children's developing a positive attitude towards literature or books and form their own taste by similar activities as taking children to book fairs and making them buy books, using the public libraries and children's libraries more effectively, suggesting families that they should spend time with their children on books, rewarding children's positive behaviors towards books and announcing a "Book Day" on which each one of them will bring a book to the classroom, letting children exchange books, magazines etc., using different techniques (picture cards, flannel board, toys, slides, projector, film strip, cassette, mask, shadow puppetry, storytelling by illustrating, cd, e-books) and performing creative activities after book reading. The purpose of teachers' doing picture story book reading activities shouldn't be limited with helping children love reading or supporting the curriculum but it shouldn't be ignored that books can also be read for the children to enjoy and have some rest. Books should also be thought as effective tools including concepts and messages we want to teach children. Book reading activities should be considered as tools through which children can learn not only talents, concepts and social values but also such competencies as creative thinking, critical thinking, developing artistic approach, problem solving, scientific thinking, respect for differences, gaining experience about daily life, developing sense of humor and having information about the past and present and feeling a part of the world. Teacher should select the appropriate picture story book, read it and then take it to the library. The gains a book can provide the child with should be considered and focused and different and creative activities to be performed after reading picture story book should be planned.

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