Value of Children's Literature and Students' Opinions Regarding Their Favourite Books*

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Abstract

In this study, children's literature was defined according to a review of the related literature. The value and positive effects of children's literature on children were discussed and opinions of 2nd grade elementary school students' regarding their most and least favourite books were investigated. Participants consisted of 15 students enrolled in elementary school near the city centre of Ankara, Turkey. The research data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with participating students as well as students' book scoring forms used to rate 25 books provided to them. First, students' scoring forms were reviewed and analysed to determine their choices. Next, interviews were conducted with students regarding the reasons for their book selections. Data obtained from the student interviews were evaluated through content analysis. Finally, according to the students' responses, the characteristics that made up their most and least favourite books were explained for the educators and parents. Students frequently mentioned internal features, especially the characters and plot of the story, as the primary reasons for determining their most and least favourite storybooks. Also, it was shown in the findings that having characters that were animals, good-hearted, and/or funny as well as having action and adventure within the stories made the storybooks the children's most favourite. Whereas not having action, being boring, and/or having unsolved problems within the stories as well as being short or having unknown words and expressions made the storybooks the children's least favourite.

Keywords: Children's Literature, Storybooks, Children's Choices

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of children's literature emerged in the first half of the 20th century, and nowadays, children's literature has become accepted as an important tool for supporting language development and creativity among preschool and primary school students. Children's literature can be defined as good-quality trade books varying from prose and poetry to fiction and nonfiction, which are written for children from the ages of birth to adolescence as well as prepared according to the developmental characteristics of children within each age group (Şimşek & Yakar, 2014). The value of children's literature for young children is both personal and academic. Some of the personal values children's literature includes are providing joy to children, increasing their imagination and creativity, and allowing them to have vicarious experiences. While it can be argued that the academic value of children's literature comes from increasing students reading and writing skills as well as informing them about content area knowledge. Thus, children's books are perceived as educational materials where information and knowledge can be presented to them from a wide range of topics both personal and academic.

It was indicated in the related literature that bringing children together with qualified children's books at an early age has positive effects on them in a variety of different areas. For example, according to İpek Yükselen and Bencik Kangal (2011), children's literature can even help children to learn colours. Also, children's literature can be especially helpful in early childhood education for teaching concepts. Additionally, children's interaction with literature is essential since books contribute to children's language development as well as addresses their literary needs (Dursunoğlu, 2007; Galda & Cullinan, 2003; Hayran & Beydoğan, 2017). Adults who share books with children allow students to see books as print models and learn about the style and content of various genres. Importantly, children can use their experiences of seeing and talking about these samples of children's literature while they are composing their own written texts. Furthermore, the written language awareness of children who interact with books, and their language development in general, are supported as well as their creativity can increase (Galda & Cullinan, 2003; McNair, 2011; Uzuner Yurt, 2014).

Through children's literature, children can learn the correct and appropriate use of adjectives, pronouns, plurals, and positive or negative expressions. Thus, by increasing their vocabulary it aids students in more easily expressing their feelings and thoughts. For example, children's literature helps children to see appropriate examples of sentence structure as well as internalize correct sentence patterns (Dayıoğlu, 2000). For this reason, finding exemplary children's books without grammar and/or punctuation errors is extremely important, for example, students can internalize false use of language, spelling or punctuation mistakes. Also, children's literature can help to improve children's thinking skills, allow them to make comparisons between the stories they read, direct them to classify subjects, characters, and objects as well as allow them to conduct guessing and cause-and-effect relationships. Importantly, reading books increases students' writing skills (Galda & Cullinan, 2003; McNair, 2011), and children's literature can also improve children's reasoning and problem-solving skills (Şimşek & Yakar, 2014). Retelling stories, such as talking about problem situations and events, characters' behaviours, their decisions, motivations, and dialogues, can allow students to work on determining cause and effect relationships. They can also compare various plots, characters, and messages in different stories. Furthermore, children's literature can improve children's listening skills as well as contribute to the shaping of their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, which can aid them in getting to know themselves better (Işıtan & Gönen, 2007). Through literary works, children also learn about abstract concepts such as kindness, sharing, love, and being helpful, which eventually contribute to the development of their personalities (Uzuner Yurt, 2014). Students are also provided the opportunity to have vicarious experiences through children's literature. Through books children can feel the joy of going to a summer camp, participating in a competition, traveling the world, and so forth. Additionally, through the characters in various stories, children can learn about important values and desired personal traits.

According to Koss (2015), through children's literature, children receive cultural messages, values of the society they live in, and information regarding the world. Children interact with books about different countries and have the opportunity to recognise individuals different from themselves as well as others' cultures and societies. Children's storybooks have the unique feature of being a map that shows the child where he/she is and how he/she can experience different places. In other words, children can increase their awareness while reading books about other cultures, for example, they may gain information about discrimination explained within a book even though they have not experienced this for themselves (Kelli, 2018; Taylor, 2003). Harits and Chudy (2017), reiterate this function of children's literature by stating that children's literature can be mirror to children in terms of showing them who they are as well as clarifying their feelings, goals, and ideas. In addition, they can also be windows in which children learn about others' feelings, customs, and experiences. Thus, realistic stories and novels encourage children to interact with the characters as well as help them to understand how the characters solve similar problems within their daily lives.

As a result, it was shown through the related literature that children's literature improves children's imagination and creativity; supports students' language development; enriches their vocabulary and raises awareness regarding a variety of topics. Besides these features, children can also gather information about themselves, their daily experiences and problems, the people and things around them, and even societies and traditions from very distant places. In other words, through literary books children can experience situations and feelings that they do not have, can see the places they cannot see, and can meet people they do not know and experience in their daily lives. Although children's literature does not have a direct role as a tutor for children, through its subject matter and messages, it provides an undisputed influence for sensing universal values such as empathy, love, and respect as well as being hardworking and helpful. Additionally, children's literature can improve children's imagination and creativity, supports the language development of students, enriches vocabulary, and creates awareness regarding the topics and presentation of literary products. Thus, through children's literature young readers can experience the situations and feelings of people who they do not know and have not met in their daily lives.

Research on Children's Literature

When the related literature in the field of children's literature was examined, it was recognized that past research is primarily focused on the emotions of characters in children's books (Alper & Deretarla Gül, 2011), characters' clothing (Çınar, 2011), ratio of the male and female characters and traditional and untraditional roles of characters within the books (Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Oskamp, Kaufman, & Wolterbeek, 1996; Sever & Aslan, 2011), stereotypes of characters' occupations (Çatalcalı Soyer, 2009), materials used by male and female characters and their actions (Bayraktar, Kürkçü Metinnam, & Metinnam, 2013; Crabb & Marciano, 2011) places the characters appeared (Oskamp, Kaufman, & Wolterbeek, 1996), effects of quality books on children (Hayran & Beydoğan, 2017), and children's attitudes towards books (Harkrader & Moore, 1997).

In the process of learning to read and write as well as developing the habit of reading and writing, the use of children's literature can be valuable in facilitating the learning process. In this context, picture storybooks can also be extremely effective teaching materials because they are normally affordable and easy to find as well as it is important that children have experiences listening to and reading stories from an early age. However, there are some points that should be taken into consideration in order for storybooks to be used effectively. As a result, the characteristics of effective children's literature have been investigated in a variety of studies (Çakmak Güleç & Geçgel, 2006; Güleryüz, 2006; Karatay, 2014; Oğuzkan, 2000; Sever, 2013). Importantly, the characteristics of effective children's literature are that they should be suitable for the life, emotion, and thinking worlds of children. According to Sever (2013), there should be no logical mistakes in the books; gender discrimination and/or stereotypes should not be included; a supervisory and oppressive understanding should not be approved in the narration of the events; political and religious suggestions should not be

made; and there should be no messages that prevent the child from dreaming. According to Çakmak Güleç and Geçgel (2006), for a book to be selected for children it should have,

> *"a simple but well-planned subject, a slight surprise element in its subject, lots of direct conversations in it, repetitions, rhymes and phrases that children can memorize quickly, colourful and thoughtful language, cases from events that children know, simple but satisfying content, and characters that children can easily recognize" (p. 35).*

Educators and researchers also provide important points to be considered when preparing and selecting children's storybooks and place them under the titles of internal structure and external structure of children's literature products (Güleryüz, 2006; Karatay, 2014; Oğuzkan, 2000; Sever, 2013). For example, the internal structure features of storybooks prepared and/or selected for children should be determined by the topic, character, environment, theme, message, and language and expression. While the external structural features of storybooks prepared and/or selected for children should be determined by the dimensions, covers, bindings, paper quality, page layout, and pictures. In a study that examined the internal and external features of 100 children's books prepared for primary school children, Gönen, Katrancı, Uygun and Uçuş (2011), state that there is not a lot of variety in the sizes of children's books, the use of bindings and covers is not strong, and the choice of subjects are limited. Additionally, in some books no message is provided to the children through the story and/or characters as well as there are grammatical errors. They emphasise that the messages provided through the books are primarily in the form of moral advice and/or are related to social rules, however, the rate of visuals in the examined children's books is found to be quite high.

Harkrader and Moore (1997), investigate students' attitudes towards books and in their study, fourth graders state that they like reading fictional literature more than nonfiction. Also, boys prefer the main characters to be male, while girls prefer the main characters to be female. The female students queried, mention that they like reading about friendship, fairy tales, animal stories, mystery, adjustment, and historical fiction. While the boys on the other hand state that they do not like reading about fairy tales and friendship, but instead prefer to read about adventure and folk tales. Thus, it can be seen that girls and boys can have different attitudes towards the genres of books they prefer. Additionally, students can also have different interests in terms of having male or female characters as the main character of the story. For this reason, it could be said that investigating the reasons for students' opinions, attitudes, and motivations for choosing and/or reading specific book themes, genres or characters needs to be given more attention and importance.

Choosing books as qualified model learning materials is important for children's development and learning, because students are affected by the content and quality of the books they read (Rudden & Nedeff, 1998). For example, in Hayran and Beydoğan (2017), in comparison to the students in the control group who read books they wanted to read, the students in the experimental group read qualified children's books selected by the researchers and are found in the end to be more successful at providing examples, making comparisons, developing conclusions, interpreting text, summarizing, and providing explanations and classification.

In other research, students' literature preferences were heavily investigated (Akrofi, Janisch, Button, & Liu, 2010; Beach, 2015; Harkrader & Moore, 1997; Haynes & Richgels, 1992; Kauffman, 2005; Kragler, 2000; McNair, 2011; Mendoza, 1983; Mohr, 2006; Williams, 2008). For example, Kauffman (2005), investigates which story elements 3rd grade students find important for determining whether they like or dislike a story. Students read the summaries of nine stories and are asked to write a reflection about whether they like or dislike the stories including their reasons behind their choices. Then, the students' responses are coded under five categories such as plot, character, theme, setting, and other. It is shown in the results that students use different story elements for deciding whether they like or dislike a story. For instance, characters and themes are the two most popular categories they mention regarding the stories they like. On the other hand, students mostly mention plot as the reason for not liking a story. It is also recognized that the stories most liked by students focus on friendship

and appreciation. In another study, Beach (2015), investigates children's and librarians' opinions regarding more than five thousand children's books and find that their favourites differ. For example, children mainly choose books about home and childhood experiences as well as prefer enjoyable plots and books about sports. Whereas librarians prefer plots related to school subjects and other important global issues.

Unfortunately, there is a limited amount of research regarding Turkish students' storybook preferences. Examples of research on this topic are Altunkaynak (2018), who examines 28 primary school students' opinions regarding children's storybooks, and finds that students prefer to have superheroes, cartoon characters, young characters, and famous people in the books they read. In addition, the students state they want characters in the books to be intelligent, curious, strong, good, hardworking, and cheerful. Also, they do not want to read about bad, stingy, and arrogant characters. The topics they prefer to be covered in the books they read from most to least are friendship, family, adventure, science fiction, religious subjects, love of animals, and nature consciousness. Ateş, Çetinkaya and Yıldırım (2012) examine what teachers, 4th and 5th grade students, and the students' parents pay attention to when choosing books. The researchers determine that teachers and parents pay attention to similar criteria, while students' priorities are different from the other groups. For example, the four most important criteria for teachers and parents are suitability according to the age and group level, the subject matter, students' interests, and the language of expression. Parents emphasise the features of being educative and instructive as a fifth item, whereas teachers focus instead on the physical properties of the books. The five criteria that students find important are the text size, cover, pictures, physical characteristics of the book such as being solid, attractive, not having many pages as well as being suitable for their age level and interests. As a result, these findings highlight the importance of investigating children's opinions regarding what they focus on when determining their favourite books.

Children's literature can not only be used to teach students how to read and write but can also help to increase their language, emotional, and cognitive skills. As previously stated students can learn about global values and become more skilful at problem solving as well as thinking critically and creatively. The elementary school years are an especially important time for younger students to gain strong reading habits as well as develop positive attitudes towards reading both inside and outside of school. For this reason, knowing students preferences when selecting books is important for educators because it is critical to encourage their students to interact with books so that the students' can develop a habit and love of reading. According to students' preferences for books, foreign literature often provides desirable characteristics that meet the students' interests regarding children's literature. However, which features children pay attention to when determining their favourite books has not been thoroughly investigated in Turkey. Thus, the purpose of this current study was to investigate how students determine their most and least favourite storybooks as well as which characteristics they pay attention to when selecting storybooks. Furthermore, it was also considered that having knowledge about the types of literature children are interested in reading can assist teachers and parents in making informed decisions about which books they should purchase and/or obtain for their children to read. Aa a result, the research questions being investigated in this study are provided in the following:

1. Which features do students like most about books?

2. Which features do students like least about books?

3. What are the characteristics of children's favourite books?

4. Which book was chosen as the best children's book?

METHODOLOGY

The current study was qualitative in nature and carried out using a descriptive scanning model. The study data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews as well as book scoring forms completed by the students. The data were also analysed utilising the content analysis method. Similar to Karasar (2006), throughout this current study, attempts were made to reveal the students' perceptions as well as the events observed in a realistic and holistic manner without manipulating the students' natural learning environment.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 15 students (six girls and nine boys) studying in the 2nd grade of a primary school near the city centre of Ankara, Turkey. In this study both purposive and convenience sampling methods (Creswell & Clark, 2017) were employed. In convenience sampling the researcher chooses to work with a nearby and easy-to-access group of people. Thus, convenience sampling provides both practicality and speed to researchers (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Additionally, these students were purposefully chosen because the teacher of the classroom was praised by the school principal as well as other teachers for effectively utilising children's literature within her daily curriculum. Furthermore, both the participating classroom teacher and school principal were interviewed, and as a result, valuable information was gained that the reading levels of her students' were higher than the grade-level benchmarks. Additionally, the teacher was head of her university's "Literature Society" student-organisation during her undergraduate education. During the time of this study, she also had bookshelves in both her home and school classroom which were rich in various types of books. The students in her classroom had their own libraries at home as well as were knowledgeable and familiar with picture storybooks. Additionally, the school had a big library in which students could find and access several book samples as well as participate in educational activities such as interactive reading, role playing, and drama. Importantly, the classroom teacher volunteering to participate in this study and the students having knowledge of and opportunities to interact with children's literature were all taken into consideration when determining to carry out the current research in this particular classroom.

Data Collection

The research data were obtained utilising the semi-structured interview technique as well as by the calculating the scores provided from students regarding the 25 children's picture books they were asked to read. First of all, the students were supplied with a scoring form used to rate the 25 books supplied by the researcher. On the scoring form, scores from 0 to 100 were listed next to the name of each book, and the students were asked to rate each book according to a score of 0 to 100. To select books for 2nd grade primary school students, the developmental appropriateness and good quality book features (i.e., engaging, text/illustration connection, language use, rhythmic elements, having strong characters, theme, and ability to evoke emotion) were thoroughly reviewed. In addition to these, similar to the recommendations of Çakmak Güleç and Geçgel (2006), when selecting books, the researcher paid attention to whether the books have a simple but well-planned subject, a surprise element within the subject, lots of dialogue among the characters, and use colourful language. Additionally, during the selection of the 25 children's books, suggestions from both the classroom teacher and an academic working in the field of children's literature were taken into consideration. Furthermore, in this current research, fiction books were chosen for the children's books due to it being highlighted in past research that children prefer fictional books to informational books (Awais & Ameen, 2013; Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, & Shapiro, 2007; Clark & Foster, 2005; Robinson, Larsen, Haupt, & Mohlman, 1997; Williams, 2008).

Among the 25 children's picture books chosen, 21 of the books (84%) were written by Turkish authors, and four of the books (16%) were written by foreign authors. Additionally, 64% of the books were written by female authors, 12% were written by male authors, and 24% had more than

one author. The number of pages in each book ranged from 8 to 30 pages, while the average number of words per sentence varied from an average of five words per sentence in 2 books (8%), six words per sentence in 1 book (4%), seven words per sentence in 11 books (44%), eight words per sentence in 9 books (36%), one book (4%) with an average of nine words per sentence, and eleven words per sentence on average in the last book (4%).

Procedure

To begin, following the process of selecting the appropriate 25 children's picture books, the books were brought to the classroom and briefly introduced to the students. The students were informed that they would each have an opportunity to read all the books independently one-by-one as well as listen to them being read aloud in the classroom by the researcher. Later, they would be asked to determine how much they liked each book and provide a score on the book scoring form from 0 to 100. Each of the books were given to students for them to read silently in the classroom as well as to take home, read it again, and then score it according to the level of how much they liked each book. Finally, the researcher would read aloud one of the 25 books each day for the students in the classroom, and the students were asked to re-check their score for that particular book on their book scoring form. If so desired, the students could change their scores and the scores could be changed up until each book had been read, listened to, and discussed with the researcher.

During the research period which lasted approximately 10 weeks, while the students were reading and scoring the books, the research topic was reviewed in the relevant literature and interview questions were prepared as well as expert opinions were gained regarding aspects of the research. The prepared interview questions were shared with two lecturers working in the field of assessment and evaluation in education, two lecturers working in the field of children's literature, and the classroom teacher whose students were participating in the study. Thus, based on their recommendations, the interview questions were finalised. As a result, the students were asked the following five questions: 1) Of the books you have been given to read, which is your favourite one and why?, 2) What do you think makes a good story?, 3) What do you pay attention to while choosing the books you will buy?, 4) Do you have a favourite book other than the books that have been given to you? If so, what are its features?, and 5) What are the features of the books you dislike?

After all the books were read, listened to, and scored, the book scoring forms were collected from the students and semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 students. Importantly, qualitative interviews can provide researchers an opportunity for interaction, flexibility, and using probing questions, which may ultimately better reveal the subjects experiences and meanings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this current study, the interviews took place in an empty classroom provided by the school principal. The participating students were interviewed individually, and all the interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. During their interviews, the book scoring forms of the students and the books that they had given the highest and lowest scores were placed on the table. The children being interviewed were allowed to view the books, and if needed, review any of the books during the interview process.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, the technique of content analysis was utilised as part of the qualitative research methods. Content analysis is an important research tool because it allows for the systematic interpretation of non-numerical data. Thus, the data obtained from the recordings of face-to-face interviews with participating students were analysed and the frequency (*f*) of their responses were determined. The opinions of participating students were also included within the research analysis findings. Finally, the book scoring forms used by the students to rate the 25 children's picture books on a scale of 0 to 100, were examined and the books were ranked overall according to the most to least favourite books.

FINDINGS

In this current study, children's literature was defined according to a review of related literature, and the positive effects of children's literature on children were presented. Additionally, the opinions of 2nd grade elementary school students' regarding their most and least favourite books were investigated. The students' book scoring forms were analysed to determine which books were rated as their most or least favourite books. Interviews were also conducted with students regarding their book choices and the reasons for their choices. According to the students' responses, the characteristics that made up their most favourite books and their reasons for choosing them were shared with and explained to the educators and parents.

The research findings are presented here according to the order of the four research questions investigated. As a result, the analyses of the students' responses to the first research question regarding the features students liked most about the books, revealed two sub-dimensions which included the internal and external features of the storybooks. Thus, the students' responses regarding what aspects constituted a storybook as their favourite are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Features Students Like the Most About Books

	Features	Criteria	f
Internal features	Characters	Having good characters (personality)	(1B, 3G, 4G, 10B, 14B)
		Having animals as characters	(1B, 4G, 7B, 9G, 11B)
		Having attractive characters	(5B, 9G)
	Plot	Having an interesting plot	(15B)
		Having an adventure	(12B)
		Having mystery	(12B)
		Being funny	(1B)
		Being informative	(7B)
		Being logical	(1B)
		Having surprises	(2G)
		Having a happy ending	(14B)
		Having magical things occur in the book	(13G)
	Message	Having educational messages	(8G, 13G)
External features	Cover	Having a beautiful cover	(9G)
	Illustrations	Having beautiful illustrations	(5B, 9G, 11B)
	Length	Being a long story	(5B, 11B)

As seen in Table 1, students' responses were primarily focused on the internal features of stories including the *characters, plot*, and *message*. While the *cover, illustrations*, and *length* were seen as important external features of storybooks. Importantly, the students' answers yielded that the character and plot of the stories were the main determinants behind their choices of favourite storybooks. For example, 1/3 of the students stated that having animal characters and having characters which were good made the stories as their favourite. Student 1 (Boy) stated that, *"Because the lion is an animal that I love very much… Another characteristic I love (about this book) is the mother lion protects her cubs"*. Student 4 (Girl) expressed she liked a book titled, *Colourful Chicks (Renkli Civcivler)*, and provided her motivation as, *"I want to read about, and I love chicks too"… "I liked that the children grabbed and pulled their grandfather and also they took them when they went to the market and the chicks were colourful"*. Another participant, Student 7 (Boy) stated that he chose the book, *"Little Leo"* as his favourite. His reason was, *"Because I love animals, I love predators, and stuff"*. While Student 9 (Girl) mentioned she liked the book titled, *"A Day in the City"*, and she emphasised that having animal characters made the storybook one of her favourites stating, *"Because there are animals and a very sweet aunt (in the story)"* is why she chose it. Student 3 (Girl) stated that her reason for determining a favourite book depended on the personality traits of the main character. Her favourite book was, *"The Good-hearted Doctor"*, and her reason for choosing this book as her favourite was, *"Because the doctor is kind-hearted, I like kind-hearted doctors very much. The doctor works for patients very much"*. Two students also mentioned that having attractive characters made the stories more favourable.

In terms of plot, the students mentioned the importance of having an interesting plot, an adventure, mystery, surprises, a happy ending, and magical things occurring in the book. In addition to these features, the students also mentioned that they liked the books because they were funny, informative, and logical. Importantly, all of these responses were stated at least once by a variety of students. In terms of message, two girls stated that they liked having educational messages within books. When it comes to the external features of the books, two girls and one boy mentioned having beautiful illustrations, while two other boys liked the length of the stories (as being long), and one girl stated that the book covers were beautiful.

The analyses of students' responses to the second research question regarding the features students liked the least about the books revealed the two sub-dimensions of books affecting their choices including the internal and external features of storybooks. For example, students' responses regarding what constituted a storybook as not being one of their favourites, were primarily focused on *plot, characters*, and the *language and expression* of the story. There was also a response from one student regarding the *illustrations* of the stories as an external feature that effected their choice. The students' responses regarding what features they liked the least about books are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Features Students Like the Least About Books

	Features	Criteria	*f*
Internal features	Plot	Not being adventurous	(1B, 3G, 12B, 14B)
		Creating anxiety	(3G, 4G, 8G, 10B)
		Not being realistic	(2G, 5B, 13G)
		Being boring	(11B, 3G, 13G)
		Written as fairy tales	(2G, 12B)
		Not being entertaining	(13G)
		Having unsolved problems at the end	(11B)
		Having an unexpected ending	(7B)
	Characters	Not having nice characters (personality)	(6B)
		Having male characters	(9G)
	Language and expression	Being too easy to read	(2G)
		Having confusing/unknown words	(2G)
External featu	Illustrations	Not having beautiful illustrations	(5B)

As seen in Table 2, the students' responses were primarily focused on the internal features of the stories including the *plot, characters,* and *language and expression*. Additionally, in one instance, *illustration* was listed as a reason and feature for one student's choice of least favourite books. Importantly, the students' answers yielded that *plot, characters*, and the *language and expressions* were the main determinants behind their choices. In terms of plot, four students did not like stories which were not adventurous or created anxiety. For example, student 3 (Girl) stated, *"Because, it is a bit boring for me. I like exciting things"*. Student 1 (Boy) did not like the book titled, *"A Day in the City"*, and his reasons were, *"There were not too many different events and adventures"*. The reason stated by Student 12 (Boy) was, *"It's a little more fairy tale, there is no action"*. In terms of creating anxiety, Student 10 (Boy) reflected that he did not enjoy reading, *"Wind and Rainbow"*. His reason was stated as, *"For example, something is happening, it is raining on the railing, it seems like it is falling, so I don't like it"*. Thus, he alluded to not liking fear and tension. Student 3 (Girl) also added, *"For example, when there are bad things like this, it is beyond action, tension, and horror. I mean I do not like them"*. Similarly, Student 4 (Girl) did not like *"Voracious Crow"*, and her reason was, *"Eventually he swallows someone (a person). I do not like such books"*. Additionally, three students stated that they did not like boring stories. A girl and a boy stated that they did not like fairy tales. Whereas one girl did not prefer reading stories that are not entertaining, and one boy did not like the end of a story because it ended with unsolved problems. Student 11 (Boy) did not enjoy reading the book titled, *"Colourful Chicks"*, and stated that, *"It was a little bad for me, it was boring, in the end*

they can't find a solution for the chicks, it was boring for me", while another boy did not like a story because it ended unexpectedly.

In the third study question, the students' were asked about the features of their favourite books. For example, the students were asked to think about their favourite book and explain the features of that book that constituted it being their favourite book. They were also informed that they could consider books that they have previously read and/or owned at home. The responses provided by the students to this question are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The Features of Students' Favourite Books

	Features	Criteria	*f*
Internal features	Plot	It should be funny	(1B, 5B, 6B, 12B)
		It should be adventurous	(1B, 3G, 12B, 14B)
		It should be realistic	(2G, 6B, 13G)
		It should be entertaining	(5B, 7B)
		It should be imaginative	(2G, 6B)
		It should include magic	(3G, 8G)
		It should be informative	(7B, 14B)
		It should have village settings	(4G)
		It should be interesting	(14B)
		It should have some sorrow in it	(13G)
	Characters	It should have good character development	(3G, 9G, 14B)
	Message	It should have a meaningful message	(8G, 10B, 14B)
	Language and expression	It should not have grammatical mistakes	(10B)
	Cover	It should have an attractive cover	(3G, 9G, 10B, 11B, 15B)
External features	Length	It should be long	(5B, 9G, 11B, 13G)
	Illustrations	It should have bright and attractive illustrations	(9G, 10B, 15B)

As seen in Table 3, students' responses again were focused both on the internal and external features of the storybooks. The most popular category was found to be *plot*. Four boys stated that one of the features of their favourite book was that it was funny. Student 1 (Boy) stated that books should have, *"action and funny stuff"*. While Student 5 (Boy) stated a good book is, *"A long book, a funny book, and a fun book"*. Similarly, Student 12 (Boy) mentioned, *"There must be action in it, there must be something like comedy"*. Additionally, three boys and a girl liked adventure, whereas two girls and a boy preferred a realistic plot. For example, Student 7 (Boy) states, *"There should be entertainment, there should be informational things in it. It gives us a lot of information, like "Little Leo". Like "Little Wolf". They give us a lot of information. For example, "Voracious Crow" gives information so that we should not be voracious"*. Being entertaining and informative was stated twice by two boys, while two girls stated that having magic in books makes them their favourites. For example, a girl and a boy mentioned that their favourite stories were imaginative. While one boy liked interesting stories; a girl liked sad stories, and another girl mentioned she preferred stories which took place in village settings. The students also mentioned *characters, messages*, and *language and expression* as internal categories that they paid attention to when determining their favourite books. In terms of characters, there were three students who stated that books should have good character development. In other words, they would like to learn about their characters' appearances, behaviours, dialogues, and most importantly their motivations in the stories. According to three students, stories should provide a meaningful message. For example, Student 8 (Girl) commented on the book, *"The Rabbit and the Turtle"*, and said she likes that book, *"Because everyone can count on each other's speed, there is losing and there is winning. But that rabbit can sleep. He's always showing off. I mean, he says he can't cross me after all, but the turtle passes him, and he reaches the finish line…. If it were me, I would choose the "Bean Tree". Because of that tiny magical thing… I think it's not right for him to go*

to the top from a tiny bean and get that golden egg laying chicken. It feels like stealing. That's why I choose "The Bean Tree" because it tells you not to steal anything and not take anything without permission". So, for her the important thing was the message provided within the story. Only one boy mentioned that good quality book should not have any grammatical mistakes. Students also listed three external features such as *cover*, *length*, and *illustrations* of the books that they paid attention when determining their favourite book. For example, cover was the most popular category, and 1/3 of the students stated that their favourite books had an attractive cover. Four students stated that books should not be too short, and according to three students books should have bright and attractive illustrations.

In the final research question, it was investigated which book was chosen as the most favourite children's book among all of the participating students. Analysis of students' book scoring forms revealed that the book which gained the highest score from the students was **"What Happened in the Forest? (Ormanda Neler Olmuş?)"**. This book consisted of 30 pages and of those there were eight pages which had only illustrations and no text. The story had the total of 65 sentences and the average number of words per sentence was eight words.

The book which gained the lowest score from the students was, "The Wind and the Rainbow (Rüzgar ve Gökkuşağı)". This book consisted of 15 pages and one page included illustrations only and no text. The story had the total of 170 sentences with an average number of words per sentences at seven words.

Table 4. The Physical Features of the Most Liked and the Least Liked Books

Title of the book	The total number of pages	Pages without print	Total number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence
What Happened in the Forest? (Ormanda Neler Olmuş?	30	8	65	8
The Wind and the Rainbow. (Rüzgar ve Gökkuşağı)	15	1	170	7

Therefore, when the physical features of the two books were compared, it was recognised that the students preferred longer books (in terms of page numbers), but also did not want to read too much text per page. In terms of content, in "What Happened in the Forest?" it was revealed that adventure, courage, family and happiness, and power of being together were mentioned, as well as the importance of animal characters being included within the story. Whereas in the book "The Wind and the Rainbow", which the participants liked the least, the events remained abstract to the children and the characters were not familiar people and/or well-intentioned characters. Additionally, the animals that students prefer seeing as main characters within books, in this case, happened to cause the children to dislike this book.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

It was shown in the findings of this current study that the participating students' were most impacted by the characters of the stories when determining their favourite storybooks. In regard to the characters of the stories, students provided 12 responses that were listed under three sub-categories; having attractive characters, animal characters, and seeing characters with good personalities. As educators, we need to remember that students learn values such as truthfulness and benevolence through the characters within children's storybooks. For this reason, it is important to provide books to students that have exemplary characters, which may aid in helping the students' to develop the appropriate personality traits. Similarly, in a study with 3rd and 4th grade students, Erdem (2012), finds that students like characters in children's books which are funny, beautiful, kind-hearted, adventurous,

cute, and brave. In another study that examines the views of 28 primary school students regarding children's books, Altunkaynak (2018), finds that students prefer to see superheroes, cartoon characters, child characters, and famous people in the books they read. Furthermore, the students also stated that they want the characters in books to be intelligent, curious, strong, good, hardworking, and cheerful as well as they do not want to see any bad, stingy, and/or arrogant characters within these books.

In terms of the features that the participating students stated they liked in books, they mostly mentioned adventure, action, and humour. It is also shown in research regarding children's literature that students enjoy reading books which have an interesting plot and include action and adventure. For example, in a study conducted with a total of 348 primary school students, Gökçe (2012), finds that the books students read the most are about adventure, science fiction, humour, detective stories, and are emotional. In another study conducted with primary school students from the 4th and 5th grades, students state that the most important features in books that they read or will read is that they should be fun, adventurous, and exciting (Kartal & Çağlar Özteke, 2012).

Additionally, the participating students in this current study mentioned that the books which they liked the least did not include adventure, were boring, or were written as fairy-tales. It is also shown in related literature that students enjoy reading about adventure and friendships more than fairy-tales. In a study with 4th graders, Haynes and Richgels (1992), find that girls' favourite subjects are family and things about growing up, while boys prefer to read about adventure, space, science, and sports. For elementary school students, it appears that the topics from the most preferred to least preferred in the books they read are friendship, family, adventure, science fiction, religious issues, animal love, and nature consciousness (Altunkaynak, 2018).

When it came to the features of good books in this current study, the participating students mentioned that good quality books should be fun to read as well as should have adventure and humour within the plot. Similarly, Tekşan, Acar and Yiğit (2012), investigate the characteristics of children's books that are most liked by children. It is shown in the results of their interviews with 12 children, that children prefer fantasy books with adventures and that they want books which create curiosity and have a happy ending. Additionally, children prefer extraordinary characters in books who know about everything, and they often want to include the element of fear within books. It is also concluded in this past study that children preferred books with fewer pages. On the contrary, a majority of the students in this current research mentioned not liking the element of fear and/or anxiety within the books that they read and stated preferring books which have more pages.

In other past research, Clark and Foster (2005), investigate the views of 8000 primary and secondary children in the United Kingdom regarding children's books and find that most children enjoy reading books about adventure, comedy, and horror/ghost stories. Kauffman (2005), analyses which story elements 3rd grade students find important in determining whether they like or dislike a story. Thus, students read the summaries of nine stories and are asked to write a reflection about whether they would like or dislike these stories and to include their reasons for their preferences. The students' responses are coded under five categories such as plot, character, theme, setting, and other. It is shown in the results that students use different story elements to decide whether or not they like or dislike a story. For instance, character and theme are the most popular two categories they mention regarding stories which they like. On the other hand, students mostly mention plot as the reason for not liking a story. It is also recognised that the stories which are most liked by the students, focus on friendship and appreciation.

The second most popular answer provided by students in terms of which features make a book their favourite was that the story is humorous. It is shown in other related research, that having humour in students' storybooks makes the books more favourable, makes learning fun, and reduces anxiety. For instance, in a study conducted with 22 Turkish teachers, it is stated that humour is effective in motivating students to focus on the lesson as well as concretising the knowledge they

learn. Additionally, according to teachers, humour can aid in making a lesson be more out of the ordinary by engaging the students' creativity and the participation through ridiculous actions (Aydın & Kitiş, 2012). While Loomans and Kolberg (2002), also state that humour has an effect of lowering anxiety as well as reducing tension, depression, and stress. Ersanlı (2010), also supports this notion by saying that the presence of humour within texts, positively affects students' motivation regarding the learning process.

Besides the internal features of books previously discussed, participating students in this current study also mentioned a variety of important external features of their favourite books which included having attractive covers, beautiful illustrations, and length of a book. Similarly, in the study by Tekşan, Acar and Yiğit (2012), children want books to include interesting pictures and illustrations on the inside of the book as well as on the book's cover. Having books with interesting pictures and illustrations is important for motivating students when choosing a specific book to read. Furthermore, regarding having well-illustrated books, Brookshire, Scharff and Moses (2002) as well as Strasser and Seplocha (2007), argue that to get children's attention of specific picture books, the pictures and illustrations are as important as the text. Additionally, illustrations are not only necessary for attracting students' attention, but also help children to learn about various subjects and concepts introduced within the books (Strasser & Seplocha, 2007).

Thus, students in this current study reflected on having attractive covers as one of their main criteria in determining their favourite books. Similar findings are observed in other past studies, for example, McNair (2011), investigates the book choices of 10 African American kindergartens through 2nd grade students and their parents', and finds that they primarily pay attention to the titles and book covers when selecting books. While in another study conducted with a total of 348 primary school students, the students state that they are influenced by the book cover as well as by their teachers and friends when selecting a book to read (Gökçe, 2012).

According to Güleryüz (2006), the books chosen for children to read should not be too long. Similarly, Stebler (2014), states that although children in the 6 to 8-years-old age group have already learned to read, their attention span can be finite, so children's attention may wane when they read longer texts. Therefore, in general, the maximum recommended number of pages for young readers is 32 pages on average (Strasser & Seplocha, 2007). However, the students who participated in this current study stated that they preferred to select books which were longer.

Finally, it was determined in the findings of this current research that the book "What Happened in the Forest?" was the most favourite book of the participating students. This was actually an expected result because according to Karatay (2014), love of nature and animals is a highly preferred reading subject among children between the ages of 7 to 9-years-old. Additionally, other reading subjects preferred by this age group are people, extraordinary events, and situations which include travel. Again, this is similar to past research, for example, in Karakuş's (2006) study, it is determined that the most preferred reading subjects of primary school students are adventure, family, and love. Furthermore, Yıldız (2009) finds that primary school students prefer books which include adventure, family, heroism, and humorous subjects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several recommendations that can be provided based on the research findings of this current study as well as the participating students' opinions regarding their favourite books. For example, a majority of the students mentioned that books should have bright and attractive covers. Also, books to be prepared or selected for children should be in accordance with the characteristics of their developmental period. Additionally, the concepts used in books as well as the events and situations described should be appropriate for children's interests and vocabulary. Furthermore, concrete concepts should be included instead of abstract concepts and children's books should have

vivid and colourful pictures. In this current study, the participating students also mentioned that good quality books should have interesting and realistic pictures or illustrations.

Children's literature should have characters that students can relate with or like to read about, such as, children characters and/or animal characters. Also, children's stories should include humour and mystery within the plot. Importantly, humorous elements which develop the children's imagination, questioning, and critical thinking skills should be included. In this current study, the students also mentioned that they do not enjoy reading too much text on each individual page.

Another important recommendation is that teachers and parents play an extremely important role in choosing books which are suitable for children's cognitive and affective development, interest, and curiosity. As a result, teachers and parents should pay attention to students' interests when choosing books for them. Additionally, children's literature has many positive effects and can be a very comprehensive resource for teachers, which puts more importance on the different tasks of educators. Therefore, teachers need to know what makes up quality children's literature, and at the same time, they should consider the interests and development levels of their students when choosing books for them. Furthermore, the teachers' archives should be rich, and they should also keep up with current and newly released books. Thus, in light of the results from this current study, it is also recommended that the authors of children's literature should keep children's views in mind to meet what are ultimately the interests and expectations of their readers.

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