

# **A STUDY ON THE VIEWS OF MOTHERS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN ABOUT CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

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**Abstract.** This study was conducted to examine the views of mothers of preschool children about children's books. It was conducted on 512 mothers with male and female children who were attending public and private preschools located in the center of Edirne and affiliated with the Ministry of Education. Data were collected with a "Questionnaire Form" developed by the researchers. It comprised two parts. The first one included questions about children and their family members, while the second one included questions about mothers' views on children's books. Data were entered into SPSS 11.0 and analyzed through percentages. The results showed that 96% of the mothers in the sample bought books for their children at least several times every month, and that 61% preferred to buy illustrated storybooks, 20% preferred tales, 3% preferred magazines, and 16% preferred to buy more than one type of book. It was also found that 89% of the mothers read books for their children at least several times every month, and that 69% made their children browse the illustrations and answer questions about the book, asked

them to summarize the contents or explained unknown words after reading.

*Keywords:* parents, children's books, preschool education, reading habit, illustrated books

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## **Introduction**

Children are affected by many stimuli starting from birth throughout their development. Books as a stimulus play an important role in all stages of children's lives. In the preschool period when children's linguistic, perceptual, motor, social and emotional development is fastest, books affect all of children's developmental areas positively. In addition, they prepare children for life, and contribute to their listening and reading skills (Hansen & Zambo, 2005).

Family members are partly responsible for introducing children to reading and instilling in them a love for books. In order for parents to choose the right books for children, they need to know their children's developmental level and the characteristics of books suggested for children at that level (Yörükoğlu, 1997). For instance, books written for preschool children aged 3-6 should be durable. In addition, books for preschool children should have many illustrations, drawings and not much print (Gönen, 1995). A previous study found that illustrated books affect 4-5 year old children's linguistic development positively (Gönen, 1988). As children are generally known to have more interest in imaginary tales and story-books about daily life (Öncül, 1989), books of this nature may be preferred to attract children's interest.

Children usually meet books for the first time with their parents' help. Parents with a reading habit read for them, buy books for them, take them to bookshops, and talk to them about the books they read. Likewise, it is equally important for parents to read in the presence of their children and thus set a positive model (Gönen & Devrimci, 1993). Other important factors in

encouraging children to read include parents' interest in books and the presence of a book collection at home. Likewise, having reading materials at home such as magazines also motivates children to read (Keleş, 2006). At the same time, appealing to children's emotions, informing them through listening, and making them evaluate the information gained by seeing are also important factors. The achievement of these relies on the awareness levels of parents and the views of mothers about using children's books. Therefore, this study aims to examine the views of mothers of preschool children about children's books.

### **Material and method**

As the study aims to examine the views of mothers of preschool children about children's books, it is a descriptive survey type study.

It includes the mothers of children attending public and private preschools located in the center of Edirne and affiliated with the Ministry of Education. A total of 512 volunteering mothers were studied.

A literature survey was conducted about the data collection tools and a two-part questionnaire form was developed by the researchers. The first part contained questions about preschoolers and their family members, while the second one included questions about mothers' views on children's books.

#### *Data analysis*

Data were entered into SPSS 11.0 and analyzed by using percentages.

### **Findings and discussion**

Of the mothers who participated in the study, 52.0% had daughters, 48.0% had sons, 52.0% had children aged 5, and 48.0% had children aged 6. As for the mothers, 24.6% were aged 30 and below, 43.2% were aged between 31-40, and 32.2% were aged 41 and above. In addition, 24.7% were

elementary school graduates, 37.6% were high school graduates and 37.7% were university graduates.

First impressions about valuing reading are formed in the family environment and children can develop a love for books and reading habits by following others who read in this environment (Dökmen, 2004). Therefore, the first point of investigation in the present study was whether parents read books or other materials, and whether this was observed by their children. It was found that the majority of children (86%) observed their parents while reading books or other materials. It was previously found (Gönen et al., 2004) that a difference existed between upper and lower socioeconomic levels regarding reading, and that upper socioeconomic families modeled reading more often for their children.

In the present study, we found that the parents of 88% of the preschool children read for them. This finding shows that parents were aware of the importance of books in child development. Similarly, Tezel Şahin et al. (2008) also concluded that 99% of mothers read books for their children. In a different study, it was ascertained that upper socioeconomic level families bought and read more books than lower socioeconomic families (Natsiopoulou et al., 2006).

In this study, the home environment of children was also examined, and parents were asked whether a book collection existed at home or in their children's bedrooms. Mothers' responses showed that 56% of children had a book collection at home or in their bedrooms. Accordingly, it can be said that these parents were aware of the importance of establishing a reading environment in instilling a love of reading in their children. A previous study also showed that 85.1% of children had a book collection at home (Gönen et al., 2004). In contrast, another study found that 73,2% of children did not have a book collection at home (Tuğrul, 2002). It is believed that the educational status and income level of the family may have caused this.

Being introduced to books at an early age is important if children are to love books and become good readers in the future. Therefore, the parents who participated in the study were asked to specify the time when they first bought and read books for their children. Nine percent said they did so when their children was 0-1 year old, 44% when their children were 2-3 years old, and 47% when they were 4-5 years old. Thus, all families had introduced their children to books in the preschool period. Coşkun Ögeyik & Ahmetoğlu (2008) found that the age when families introduced their children to books had a positive effect on the reading frequency of fifth and eighth graders.

**Table 1.** Distribution of mothers' views about their frequency of buying children's books

Frequency of book buying	N	%
Fewer than 3 times/week	354	69.0
Fewer than 3 times/month	140	27.0
Never; my child borrows from friends, siblings or relatives	18	4.0
Total	512	100.0

Table 1 shows that 69% of families bought books for their children fewer than three times per week, 27% fewer than three times per month, and 4% never did so because their children used books borrowed from friends, siblings or relatives. In general, families' book buying behaviors showed that the majority of the families in the study (96%) bought books at least several times a month. Children are first introduced to books by their parents. Being familiarized with books at an early age is an important factor in getting to love them. In a previous study investigating the frequency of parents' book buying, it was found that the majority of parents bought books for their children every one to three months (Tezel Şahin et al., 2008).

Another important activity that parents need to consider to make their children read more is to provide books at the right level for them. In this study, the parents were asked if they consulted anyone when choosing books

for their children. Their responses showed that the majority of families (88%) did not receive any consultation while 22% did. It was also found in this study that while choosing books for their children, 61% of the parents chose illustrated story books, 20% chose tales, 3% chose magazines, and 16% combined more than one genre. Tuğrul (2002) found in a different study that parents preferred illustrated books for their preschool children and educational books for their elementary school children. It is stated that preschool children are generally more interested in imaginary tales and story books based on daily life (Öncül, 1989). Therefore, choosing these types of books for them contributes to children's developmental areas. The physical features of children's books are also important in the preschool period. As these children are not literate yet, the visual elements of the books they read are important. It is therefore essential that books aimed at these children include many illustrations. The results of the present study showed that mothers took this into account when choosing books for their children.

**Table 2.** Distribution of mother's views about their frequency of reading for their children

Reading Frequency	N	%
Everyday	132	25.8
Several times/week	320	62.5
Less than twice/month	52	10.2
Never	8	1.5
Total	512	100.0

Table 2 shows that parents generally read several times a week for their children (62.5%), and those who read everyday constituted almost one fourth of the sample (26%). This revealed that one in every four families read for their children every day. In general, the majority of the parents who participated in this study (89%) read for their children at least several times a week.

In a study by Çakmak & Yılmaz (2009) was also found that the majority of parents (88%) read for their children at least several times a week. It can therefore be concluded that parents are aware of the importance of books in child development and they consequently read for their children. In the present study, 34% of parents stated that they made their children browse the illustrations in a book after reading for them and asked them questions, 22% stated that they made their children summarize the book, and 13% stated that they explained unknown words, while 31% stated that they did not engage in any special activities. It can be seen that the majority of families (69%) made their children go through the illustrations and answer questions about the book, asked them to summarize its contents, and explained unknown words. As reading for preschool children supports their development areas and encourages them to read, it is important that the contents of books are explained to children in a detailed way and at the right level for them. It is, however, believed that the family's sociocultural level is an important factor in doing so. A previous study revealed that middle socioeconomic level mothers gave more positive feedback and used more yes/no questions than their lower socioeconomic counterparts when reading for their preschool children (Rodriquez et al., 2009).

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

In this study which aimed to investigate the views of mothers of preschool children about children's books, it was found that 86% of the children observed their parents while reading books or other materials, 56% had a book collection at home or in their bedroom, and 88% were read to by their parents.

Nine percent of the parents who participated in this study first bought books and read for their children when they were 0-1, 44% when they were 2-3 years old, and 47% when they were 4-5 years old.

Of the participants, 69% bought fewer than 3 books weekly for their children, 27% bought fewer than 3 books monthly, and 4% never bought books as they borrowed from friends, siblings or relatives.

It was also found that 88% of parents did not receive any guidance when choosing books for their children and 22% did. In addition, 61% of the parents were found to buy illustrated story books, 20% tales, 3% magazines, and 16% more than one type of book.

Parents generally read for their children several times a week (62.5%), and approximately one fourth of the participants (26%) read regularly every day.

It was also shown that 34% of the parents who participated in the study made their children look at the illustrations in the book and asked them questions after reading. Twenty-two percent asked them to summarize the book, 13% explained unknown words and 31% did not engage in any special activity.

The following recommendations may be made in light of these findings:

Educational seminars about children's books may be organized for mothers who have a major role in child development and education. Mothers and families should be made more aware of the importance of children having their own book collections at home. Better cooperation may be established between publishers and writers in order to have higher quality and more economic books for preschool children. Families with preschool children should be encouraged to visit libraries, book exhibitions and fairs with their children. Library staff should be chosen from among people with knowledge of child development and books, and special library sections should be organized with books appropriate to the age, development level, and interests of preschool children (i.e., areas with low and open shelves, cushions, puppets and stuffed toys). Children attending preschools may be regularly taken to libraries, book exhibitions, fairs, and book signing events, and writers may be



invited to visit preschools. Parent-child reading programs may be organized at preschools and participation of families may be encouraged.

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