Validity of a Checklist for the Design, Content, and Instructional Qualities of Children's Books

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop a checklist whose validity has been tested in assessing children's books. Participants consisted of university students who had taken a course in children's literature. They were selected through convenience sampling and randomly assigned into experimental and control groups. Participants in the experimental group were exposed to quality books based on the criteria of appropriateness for children which were developed by Çer and Şahin (2016, Appendix-A), whereas those in the control group were exposed to non-quality children's books. Both groups learned how to use a checklist in order to assess the books. The experimental group's evaluation of the design, contents, and instructional qualities of the books was significantly higher than that of the students in the control group for all dimensions. Thus, it is possible to assess children's books through this checklist whose validity has been proven. Moreover, this checklist can be of benefit to centres for children's literature when assessing books produced in various cultures and societies. Further research may extend the validity of this checklist in different contexts, such as when assessing books for children of various ages and developmental stages.

Keywords: Children's books, design, content, instructional qualities, checklist, validity.

Introduction

The principle of the appropriateness for children means taking into account the attention, needs, and language universe of children and being able to match them to the books they read (Sever, 2008). There needs to be a relationship between these books and children in terms of needs, language, meaning, points of view, and levels (Dilidüzgün, 2004; Dwyer & Neuman, 2008; Hearne & Stevenson, 1999; Nikolajeva, 2014; Stoodt, Amspaugh, & Hunt, 1996). Thus, by appropriateness for children, we imply that the design, contents, and instructional qualities of children's books should be appropriate for their developmental stages as well as the expected literary criteria, and that the sensitivity of an artist be reflected in these qualities (Çer, 2016a, 2016b). Books that are visual and/or verbal, but are not appropriate for the nature of children and their verbal, cognitive, personal, and emotional stages of development, do not reflect their way of understanding things, and do not meet their needs or attract their attention can act as obstacles between children and their understanding of books beginning from the early stages of life. This may result in children being unwilling to engage with books. It is important that the reality of the human experience and life be reflected in books in which the developmental stages of children are respected. Children must not have difficulty understanding while they are performing sensory, cognitive, and behavioural activities (Trim, 2004). To put this more simply, there is a direct relationship between children and their levels of understanding books; therefore, books appropriate for children must prioritize the principle of the child's reality. The fundamental qualities that should be considered when choosing books for children, rather than for adults, are their emotions, ways of understanding, and the way they live.

The more the works of children's literature prioritize the nature of children, their way of looking at life, their universe of language and meaning, and their needs and interests, the more appropriate they will be for children. Children must be the subjects in books appropriate for children. These books must highlight their curiosity, their readiness to explore, their sincerity and dynamism, their active nature, their creativity and imagination, and how they distance themselves from taking advice or orders from others (Engel, 2011; Hyson, 2004; Murray, 2012; Perry, 2001; Sharp, 2004; Trionfi & Reese, 2009; Vygotsky, 2004; Woolf & Belloli, 2005). They also need to express their world, their thoughts and feelings, their joys and fears, and their worries in a way that they can understand. They must meet the literary expectations of books for children. Helping children to develop literary awareness can be achieved by providing them with the responsibility of imagination and creative thinking, creating meaning together through covert messages, and helping them develop the use of their mother tongue (Göktürk, 1997; Sever, 2008). Moreover, this will also make it possible for children to grasp the reality of humanity and life through literature (Aslan, 2008). Finally, an awareness of what is good and proper must be strengthened by presenting to children an imaginative life in which an artist is involved. The primary objective of children's books is to raise an awareness of humanity, life, and nature from an artist's point of view (Aslan, 2014; Banks, 1997; Comber, 2001; Harste, 2003; Lewison, Seeley-Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). The artist must has a number of responsibilities: they must place children into an imaginative adventure with themes created by colour, lines, and

words by giving priority to aesthetic concerns. They must help them develop an aesthetic taste of what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, and right and wrong in such a way that their senses of sight, hearing, and touch can be enhanced. They must have an influence on children by bringing out their creativity. They must develop their awareness of beauty through books. They must instill in them the responsibility of imagination and creative thinking in a sensory and intuitive way rather than simply conveying information or teaching. They must also prepare books appropriate to children's developmental levels. Research indicates that centres that present awards for children's books do not assess these books with a measurement instrument its validity and reliability of which have been tested.

The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA, 2016) is given by a jury determined by the Swedish Arts Council. The jury shall possess a broad expertise in the fields of international literature for children and young adults, as well as contributions to promoting reading and the rights of children. This award is for books of the highest artistic quality and in the deeply humanistic spirit associated with Astrid Lindgren. As this award considers children's literature from around the world, the criteria must be more open.

Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC, 2016) for awards such as the Batchelder, Belpré, Caldecott, Geisel, Newbery, and Sibert awards, the criteria for verbal texts are as follows: interpretation of the theme or concept and clear, accurate, and stimulating presentation of facts, concepts, and ideas; presentation of information with accuracy, clarity, and organization; development of a plot; delineation of characters and setting; appropriateness of style of presentation for subject and for intended audience; excellence of presentation for an intended child audience; excellent, engaging, and distinctive use of language and visual presentation; appropriate organization and documentation; supportive features (index, table of contents, maps, timelines, etc.); and respectful and of interest to children. For visual texts, there are items such as excellence of execution in the artistic technique employed; appropriateness of style of illustration to the story, theme or concept; delineation of plot, theme, characters, setting mood, or information through the pictures; positive and authentic portrayal of Latino culture; and excellence of presentation for an intended child audience. The assessment of children's books for an award is conducted by a committee that consists of a team of experts in the field. Thus, this meets the criteria about the validity of experts, but does not address the validity of the measurement. In addition, such factors as age and developmental stages for children do not seem to have been prioritized.

The Jane Addams Children's Book Award (CAPA, 2016) is given based on such variables as solving problems courageously and non-violently; overcoming prejudice; breaking cycles of fear; approaching life with self-confidence and strength; understanding human needs with compassion; broadening one's outlook to appreciate a variety of cultures; and accepting responsibility for the future of all people. These variables have to do with skills like advanced thinking, coping with fear, structuring self-confidence, meeting needs and interests, and taking responsibility. This indicates that the design, contents, and instructional qualities of a book are ignored or are not included in the assessment process.

The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA, 2016) gives out two awards: firstly, the CBCA Picture Book of the Year awards. As a general guideline, the judges may consider the relative success of a picture book in balancing and harmonising the following elements: artistic style and graphic excellence (including typography and its suitability for the implied readership); effective use of media and technique; colour, line, shape, texture; relationship between illustration and text; consistency of style, characterisation, information, and setting; clarity, appropriateness, and aesthetic appeal of illustrations; and quality of book design, production, printing, and binding. Secondly, the Eve Pownall Award for Information Books considers such criteria as the style of language and presentation; graphic excellence; clarity, appropriateness, and aesthetic appeal of illustrations; integration of text, graphics, and illustrations to engage interest and enhance understanding; overall design of the book to facilitate the presentation of information; and accuracy with regard to the current state of knowledge. The CBCA assesses books by using the most comprehensive set of criteria. However, it has been found out that the criteria are not appropriate for assessing children's books despite the fact that they are described in a detailed way.

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP, 2016) gives out the Carnegie and Kate Greenway Children's Books Awards. First of all, they have certain criteria about the style of books: Is the style or styles appropriate to the subject and theme? How successfully has the author created mood, and how appropriate is it to the theme? Do dialogue and narrative work effectively together? How effective is the author's use of literary techniques and conventions? How effective is the author's use of language in conveying setting, atmosphere, characters, action, etc.? Is rhyming or rhythm used, and is their use accomplished and imaginative? Where factual information is presented, is this accurate and clear? Furthermore, they have certain criteria about the plot: Is it well-constructed? Does the author appear in control of the plot, making definite and positive decisions about the direction events take and the conclusions they reach? Do events happen, not necessarily logically, but acceptably within the limits set by the theme? Is the final resolution of the plot credible in relation to the rest of the book? Finally, they have certain criteria about the characters: Are the characters believable and convincing? Are they well-rounded, and do they develop during the course of the book? Do they interact with each other convincingly? Are the characters' behaviours and patterns of speech consistent with their known background and

environment? Do they act consistently in character throughout the book? How effectively are the characters revealed through narration, dialogue, action, inner dialogue, and the thoughts, reactions, and responses of others? It is important that books are assessed in accordance with the answers to these questions. On the other hand, it seems that these questions do not cover the design and instructional qualities of the books assessed. Therefore, they just focus on the style, plot, and characters in awarding books.

The Children's and Youth Literature Practice and Research Center (CYLPRC, 2016) gives out the Ankara University Awards. The criteria focus on the appropriateness of the language for the language universe of children, how well the book reflects the use of the Turkish language, the literary uniqueness of the plot and its appropriateness for the child's level, if the plot contributes to improving the imaginative and creative thinking skills of children, the effects of the elements of curiosity in the plot on the child's willingness to read, the appropriateness of the set of events in the plot for the child's reality, how the setting contributes to the living culture of the child audience, the quality of the heroes/heroines with which children can identify, how well the plot is structured (e.g. exaggerated curiosity, coincidence, or emotionality would weaken the plot), and the appropriateness of the book for children as a whole. However, a book for children does not consist of the content only. An assessment is incomplete without considering the design and instructional qualities.

The Gülten Dayıoğlu Children's and Youth Literature Foundation (GDCYF, 2016) gives out the Gülten Dayıoğlu Awards through a jury that looks at three variables. Firstly, they award books regardless of ideology, gender, race, or religion. They give priority to books that aim to create secular and modern people; are entwined with universal values and principles that make us human, in particular love and free thought; give young people energy and hope to live a happy life; and cover national culture and values. Lastly, the correct use of Turkish language is another factor in assessing books. All these are the sorts of criteria related to what a child should be like. The foundation has yet to specify a set of criteria for the design, content, and instructional qualities of books to be assessed.

The International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY, 2016) gives out Hans Christian Andersen Awards on which a committee of eligible experts votes. Works are judged on literary and artistic merits. Judges look for exceptional aesthetic qualities in writing or illustration, including treatment of plot, character, style, structure, or language and for a portrayal of universal themes with lasting human virtues. The same board also organizes another award called the Water Stones Children's Laureate for which it assigns jury members. The criteria are as follows: exceptional talent in writing or illustration; contribution to creating the next generation of readers, writers, and illustrators; excellence developed through an eagerness to explore and experiment with ideas, genres, and the possibilities of their craft; substantial publishing record; significant profile in the industry and amongst their peers; interest in raising the profile of books for children, and for their writers and illustrators. In general, such elements as style, plot, character, language, and structure are prioritized; however, what really matters is that all the developmental characteristics of children should be reflected in these variables.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2016) gives out the Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction for Children. They invite fiction for children that has the potential to transform children's lives; fiction that invites compassion, imagination, and wonder; fiction that connects children to their own humanity and offers them a rich experience with the power to influence their lives; fiction that stretches children's thinking, feelings, and imagination; and exemplary literary quality of text and illustrations. Although this council prioritizes the developmental stages of children, it does not specify the criteria of assessment for children's books.

The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA, 2016) gives out the Michael L. Printz Award through a committee of jury members. Even though they tend to keep away from very rigid criteria, they seek eligibility and originality by looking at variables such as story, voice, style, setting, accuracy, characters, theme, illustrations, and design. The rationale behind the award is literary excellence. However, the concept of "excellence" does not seem to -defined, and steps must be taken to provide a thorough definition, including providing criteria for such excellence.

Recently, drawing on these deficiencies in the literature, a checklist which aims at assessing books by their design, content, and instructional qualities has been developed by Çer (2014, 2016a, 2016b) and based on more objective criteria, this checklist establishes what the design, content, and instructional qualities of children's books should be like. First of all, what is meant by instructional qualities is that such elements as advice and orders, teaching and memorising, fear and anxiety, gender discrimination, ideological discourse, traditional values, rules and prescriptive judgments, singular and never-changing truths, extremely emotional experiences, and violence of a psychological, emotional, or physical nature should not exist in children's books. Instead, there must be elements that allow children to imagine, think freely, make decisions, cope with violence, foster creativity, use initiative, and their emotions are not exploited. If books are written otherwise, they may give children feelings of fear and anxiety, shake them emotionally, cause them to regard violence as positive, lead them to believe in never-changing truths, feel pressure to think and feel a certain way, prevent them from thinking critically and creatively, and make them attribute gender-based stereotypes to men and women (Çer, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). All these have been described in more detail below.

The primary objective of children's books is not to educate children (Erdoğan, 1997). Children do not necessarily have to embrace it. The author produces a raw story and starts to discuss it. The audience arrives at some conclusions (Dilidüzgün, 2003). Children who try to understand and assess what goes on in the story are manipulated by the degree to which the book is instructive and leads to memorisation. If children's books are prepared based on advice and orders, children may be forced to accept what is told without considering it. In other words, they may accept which told without question or may begin to feel that their own thoughts are not worthy. In this respect, advice and orders should not be included in children's books. In no way should children's books make them feel scared or shaken. To put it more simply, these books should not affect them negatively with characters that are scary. Nor should they make children feel anxiety by introducing extremely emotional elements or situations. Works of children's literature should not be shaped by ideological discourse, ethical concerns, or the values of adults. They should not transfer ideas about the behaviour of men and women in a patriarchal culture to children (İpşiroğlu, 1990). They need to adopt an equal approach to men and women while providing children with hints of gender roles. They should resist all kinds of deceit or tricks that help children see the world through rose-coloured glasses. That is, the content must come right from life itself, which is no bed of roses (Dilidüzgün, 2004). They should be able to help children face the difficulties in life and teach them how to cope with them (Aslan, 2008). Therefore, they should not be too protective, but rather help children begin to understand themes in life like death, permanent disability, sickness, divorce, violence, love, liking, and friendship. They should not aim to preserve values and traditions as they are, but should evaluate them through the critical lens of the modern day. Values, judgements, or rules of a distant past should not be carried from generation to generation through children's books. These values should be considered with the contemporary values of our day. This way, the child audience can understand how one should behave in a modern democratic society. Books in which never-changing truths are presented may result in children thinking in a stereotypical way (İpşiroğlu, 1991), they will not trigger critical thinking in children, and do not help children develop multi-faceted thinking, but rather may lead them to believe that the author's viewpoint is correct. So, children may adopt the author's or the artist's way of thinking. Therefore, children's books should teach them to think critically from an early age. If these books are too weak or too exaggerated in terms of curiosity, excitement, or anxiety, then children may lose interest. They may be easily influenced by the emotional instances in the plot. The author may prefer to create too much emotional intensity in order to make the plot more exciting, but this may cause children to be vulnerable to emotional rifts of which they cannot make sense. Children's books must help them to cope with these feelings. Children's books may contain types of emotional, physical, or psychological violence as a result of the fact that they are part of life. Children should be able to learn how to deal with these situations through these books. The fact that there are characters who are unhappy, scared, blamed, despised, or shocked under pressure in the book, and that these characters are able to develop strategies to cope with these types of shocks, may help them to overcome these situations in real life instead of avoiding them.

Secondly, what is meant by the design of children's books is that they draw in children through the fonts, paper quality, dimensions, page layout, cover pages, and visuals. They are all expected to create positive emotional and aesthetic perceptions of books for children. They must be able to see artistic element on the cover, in the other visual elements, or in the book as a whole when they hold it in their hands. Children begin to read the book with these positive perceptions. These qualities are described in more detail below.

Quality and strong paper must be used in all aspects of the creation of children's books. Paper must not be transparent enough to see what is on the other pages. It must not impede perception through things such as opaqueness, thinness, brightness, coating, or poor quality paper pulp. Also, the paper should allow the visuals to make the characters and the relationships among characters clear. The book cover is the most important variable of all the other design elements. The cover page design of the book and the visual effects of the cover picture will increase a child's willingness to read or look at the book. It will also lead children to read the other pages. So, the book cover plays an important part in the interaction between children and books. The binding of the book must also be effective. The visual attractiveness and the aesthetics of the book depend on its binding, which must keep the book together for a long time. No matter how attractive the book is, if it is torn apart easily or its pages come off immediately, children may lose interest in the book. Fonts must be appropriate to a child's age. In order for them to recognize letters in words, how font and letter size affect readability must be taken into account. As children of different ages have different interests, needs, and points of view, the dimensions of these books must differ as well. This variety is necessary to help them maintain interest in the book. The content of a page will also necessitate different dimensions. The main constituents of page layout are the harmony between pictures, texts, and margins. The visual richness of a page can be thought of as another important variable in the child–book interaction. Therefore, the cover pages of a book and the other pages need to have qualities that foster a willingness in children to read and look at a book. The first element that draws children to a book is the visual world and the main reason for children to love books is their visual value. Pictures in children's books have many important functions: in particular, they make the meaning of the book complete and clear by complementing the text; and they are aesthetic stimulants that explicate, extend, or sometimes add to the meaning. In short, children

communicate visually with the book through pictures.

Finally**,** what is meant by the content is to make sure that children be sensitive to life, humankind, nature, and language by way of the plots, characters, messages, and use of language in children's books. That is, children should know people, feel the beauty of life, understand how others feel, value nature, and approach animals and plants with love because of the content of books. However, the type of books whose characters are non-quality, whose plots are not appropriate for the children's developmental levels, and whose messages are not understood well will likely keep children from reading. Therefore, if the objective is to make children active participants in a culture, the characters, plot, message, and use of language in books must be appropriate for children. All these qualities are described in more detail below.

Children identify with the heroes and heroines in their books. They make children think that they are part of the plot and use their imagination to feel closer to the book (Oktay, 1994). Characters must also undergo a plausible change between the beginning and end of the book. It goes without saying that it is important to children that the heroes and heroines should be able to find solutions to their problems and overcome difficulties encountered. Works of children's literature must be commensurate with the ages and areas of interest of children, and they must draw in and excite them. They must make them curious about what is going on. They must learn true information, have their feelings fostered, and their ability to understand humour must be developed. Therefore, the plot must be exempt from ideology, prejudices, and superstitions. Themes like love for humanity, the country, and animals, integrity, and helping others are some fundamental values for children. On the other hand, themes harmful for children or considered taboo (illness, love, liking, sexuality, being disabled, death, family conflicts, raising environmental awareness, the effects of working life on children, and so on) must be included in books as they are present in real life. Children's books must be clear, plain, and fluent. The language used should cultivate their love for language and enrich their vocabulary. It would be better to stay away from pretending, exaggeration, or causing confusion. The narrative should help children understand the content easily, and enhance their taste for reading (Yurttaş, 1997). The message, in general, should be about humanity, life, and nature. To put it more simply, these books should communicate a love for humanity, life, and nature. In the fiction of his own subjective world, the artist should contribute to creating an awareness of human feelings and thoughts such as love, happiness, longing, hope, willingness, grief, friendship, or togetherness.

A general look at the institutions awarding children's books in the world indicates that they usually appoint a committee consisting of jury members with expertise in children's literature. However, there is still a need for criteria whose validity and reliability have been ensured in assessing books for awards. A checklist based on objective criteria and developed by Çer (2014, 2016a, 2016b) will make it possible for a committee to engage in criterion-based as well as comprehensive assessments that take all aspects of children's books into account. So, an assessment based only on the content, while omitting consideration of the design and instructional qualities of children's books, should be abolished.

The objective of this study is to develop a checklist its validity and reliability have been tested while assessing children's books for awards. This study is based on the principles of the appropriateness for children developed by Çer and Şahin (2016) and will be helpful for centres and institutions awarding children's books in the world. Although such institutions do have their own criteria of assessment, the validity and reliability of these criteria have not been tested. This work will assist researchers who are assessing children's books and publishing houses publishing children's books of high quality.

Method
2.1. Participants
The participants of this study selected using convenience sampling and included the voluntarily undergraduate students in the department of Turkish Education from one of the universities in the central Black Sea region of Turkey. They had previously completed a course in children's literature. Students randomly assigned to the either experimental or control groups. The participants consisted of 120 students, each of them equally distributed in experimental and control group. There were 94 (78%) female and 26 male (22%) students in both group. Participants' age ranged from 19 to 29 and the average age of participants was 20.46 (*S.D:* 1.32). The ratio ($\chi^2(1, N=120) = .20, p> .05$) of female to male students and the average age of participants (t (118) = .35, $p >. 05$) in the experimental and control groups were similar.

2.2. Measures
Demographics: Participants asked to give information about their sex and age in a personal information form.
Checklist of quality children's books: This is the checklist of quality children's books developed by Çer and Şahin (2016, Appendix-A). It focuses on the assessment of children's books in terms of the design, content, and instructional qualities. For instructional qualities, books are assessed in terms of advice and orders, teaching and memorising, fear and anxiety, gender discrimination, ideological discourse, traditional values, elements that are too emotional, and violence. However, design-based qualities are related to the physical qualities of a book. In

terms of design, the focus is on assessing the fonts, paper quality, dimensions, page layout, binding, and visuals. Finally, what is meant by the content of a book is the plots, characters, messages, and use of language.

2.3. Procedure and Intervention

Both participants in experimental and control groups were informed that participation was voluntary; they could withdraw at any stage of study and gave informed consent before rating to books. This study involved the same procedures for the experimental and control groups. Firstly, the students in the experimental group were given information about how to use the checklist for assessing the quality of children's books. Next, they were each randomly given a different quality children's book. They were asked to assess the books in term of the design qualities such as the fonts, paper quality, dimensions, page layout, binding, and visuals. They were also given a period of three days to read and assess the books in terms of the content and the instructional qualities. The same procedures were applied to the students in the control group to assess non-quality children's books.

The students in the experimental group were given quality children's books based on the criteria developed by Çer and Şahin (2016, Appendix-A) as well as appropriate for children at the primary school and the secondary school levels in terms of the design, content, and instructional qualities, while those in the control group were given non-quality children's books based on same criteria (Çer & Şahin, 2016). Example books rated in the experimental group were as follows: *Balina ile Mandalina (The Whale and the Tangerine)* by Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca, *Martıya Uçmayı Öğreten Kedi (The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly)* by Luis Sepulveda, *Benjamin Anna'yı Seviyor (Benjamin Loves Anna)* by Peter Hartling, *Bilyeler (The Marbles)* by Behiç Ak, *Uçurtmam Bulut Oldu (My Kite Turned into a Cloud)* by Sevim Ak, *Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği (Long Live the Letter Ç)* by Behiç Ak, and *My Name is Nobody (Benim Adım Hiç kimse)* by Frank Cottrell Boyce. All the quality books of children appropriate for children at the primary school and the secondary school can be found in Çer and Şahin (2016, Appendix-B). On the other hand, students in the control group were asked to assess the following non-quality books in terms of the design, content, and instructional qualities: *Falaka (The Bastinado)* by Ahmet Rasim, *Yalnız Efe (The Lonesome Fighter)* by Ömer Seyfettin, *Mutlu Prens (The Happy Prince)* by Oscar Wilde, *Bir Anlık Gaflet (The Oversight)* by Marzug Halil, *Kurşun Asker (The Lead Soldier)* by Olivier Supiet, *Çocuk Kalbi (The Heart of a Child)* by Edmonda de Amicis, *Değirmenimden Mektuplar (Letters from my Mill)* by Alphonse Daudet, *Kaşağı (The Currycomb)* by Ömer Seyfettin, and *Bağrıyanık Ömer (Omar the Sufferer)* by Mahmut Yesari.

2.4. Data Analysis

All statistical analysis performed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 23 computer program. Assumptions of statistical analyses including normality and homogeneity of variance were examined. Firstly, the assumption of normality was controlled with skewness and kurtosis values taking into account of sample size. Homogeneity of variance assumption tested with Levene's test. In some analyses, this assumption was violated. Thus, Welch correction applied to test statistics when encountered this situation (Ho, 2013). A series of independent samples t-test was used to compare the ratings in the control and experimental groups in terms of with respect to the quality and non-quality book scores in terms of the design, content, and instructional qualities. Type I error rate set at α= .05 significance level in all statistical analyses.

Results

Table 1 shows the means and the standard deviations of the students' assessments in the experimental and control groups about the quality and non-quality children's books. A series of independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine if there was a statistically significant difference in the ratings between control and experimental groups with respect to the design, content, and instructional qualities of the children's books. The independent samples t-tests results related to the instructional qualities can be seen in Table 1, the design qualities in Table 2, and the content qualities in Table 3.

Table 1 Results of Independent Samples t-tests of the Instructional Qualities

		N	M	S.D	df	t	p
Teaching	Experimental	60	32.27	3.14	101.85†	43.04	.001*
	Control	60	11.40	2.06			
Advice and orders	Experimental	60	19.25	2.27	118	36.23	.001*
	Control	60	6.70	1.43			
Fear and anxiety	Experimental	60	32.98	3.19	98.15†	46.19	.001*
	Control	60	10.67	1.96			
Ideological discourse	Experimental	60	17.87	2.47	102.15†	28.76	.001*
	Control	60	6.87	1.63			
Gender discrimination	Experimental	60	32.97	3.73	118	39.06	.001*
	Control	60	11.20	2.18			
A world through rose-coloured glasses	Experimental	60	19.23	1.43	118	44.12	.001*
	Control	60	6.72	1.67			
Traditional values	Experimental	60	23.85	1.66	118	61.99	.001*
	Control	60	7.23	1.25			
Extremely emotional elements	Experimental	60	14.63	1.28	118	42.08	.001*
	Control	60	5.02	1.23			
Violence	Experimental	60	12.33	2.29	118	19.12	.001*
	Control	60	5.10	1.83			

Note:p < .001*, † = Welch correction made.

As seen in Table 1, the independent samples t-test results indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between the assessments of the students in the experimental and control groups about the quality and non-quality children's books. The rating scores in the experimental group are higher than those in the control group in all respects.

Table 2 Results of Independent Samples t-tests of the Design Qualities

		N	M	S.D	df	t	p
Cover page	Experimental	60	43.25	2.47	118	70.69	.001*
	Control	60	14.48	1.96			
Paper	Experimental	60	19.23	1.32	118	58.91	.001*
	Control	60	5.63	1.21			
Binding	Experimental	60	9.90	.40	75.92†	45.89	.001*
	Control	60	3.28	1.04			
Fonts	Experimental	60	14.73	1.05	108.50†	40.20	.001*
	Control	60	5.50	1.43			
Dimension	Experimental	60	19.80	.66	85.50†	71.23	.001*
	Control	60	5.97	1.35			
Paper layout	Experimental	60	24.55	1.06	99.78†	63.28	.001*
	Control	60	8.30	1.68			
Pictures	Experimental	60	38.98	1.94	118	76.70	.001*
	Control	60	12.22	1.88			

Note:p < .001*, † = Welch correction made.

As seen in Table 2, the independent samples t-test results showed that the assessments in the experimental group in terms of the design qualities such as the fonts, paper quality, dimensions, page layout, binding, and visuals rated higher than those in the control group.

Table 3 Results of Independent Samples t-tests of the Instructional Qualities

		N	M	S.D	df	t	p
Character	Experimental	60	34.07	1.73	110.38†	62.81	.001*
	Control	60	11.02	2.26			
Plot	Experimental	60	18.98	1.83	118	37.63	.001*
	Control	60	7.00	1.66			
Language and Narrative	Experimental	60	19.43	1.24	118	54.84	.001*
	Control	60	6.33	1.28			
Message	Experimental	60	9.30	1.23	118	31.70	.001*
	Control	60	2.63	1.07			

Note: $p < .001^*$, † = Welch correction made.

As seen in Table 3, the independent samples t-test results showed that the rating scores in the experimental group in terms of the content qualities such as the plots, characters, messages, and use of language were higher than those in the control group.

Discussion

This study investigated the validity of a checklist for quality children's books developed by Çer and Şahin (2016) based on the principles of the appropriateness for children. The results of this study indicated that the assessments of the students in the experimental group who evaluated the quality children's books are significantly different when compared to those of the students in the control groups who were given the non-quality children's books in terms of the design, content, and instructional qualities. In contrast to the process of many centres awarding children's books (ALMA, 2016; ALSC, 2016; CAPA, 2016; CBCA, 2016; CILIP, 2016; CYLPRC, 2016; GDCYF, 2016; IBBY, 2016; NCTE, 2016; YALSA, 2016) around the world, the validity of this tool of measurement has been tested. So, these centres will be able to assess children's books through a valid and comprehensive tool that covers all aspects of the design, content, and instructional qualities of these books. To put it more clearly, it embraces a holistic approach towards children's books. It does not focus on only one quality for assessment, such as instructional qualities. Therefore, this tool of measurement can be of benefit to centres that care about assessing the quality of children's books.

Children's books must be prepared in accordance with the principles of the child's reality and must be appropriate for children from their artistic creation through the processes of printing and publishing (Çer, 2014, 2016a, 2016b). But, it may be quite hard to assess a book from the beginning to the end of these processes. There are also some challenges for these centres when assessing children's books since the concept of a child is understood differently in various communities and cultures in the world (Heywood, 2003; Li-Tsu, 1998; Postman, 1995; Toran, 2012); however: a) all communities wish to create their ideal children by reflecting their own cultures, ideologies, beliefs, understanding of gender, and values in children's books) the way adults think, feel, or behave is incorporated into these books and an image of an adult child is created, c) children are distanced from the realities of life and humanity by presenting a rose-coloured world in the books, and d) publishing houses compete with each other, thus leading to different book designs and prints. Consequently, a tool of measurement cantered on children may assist in determining higher quality books.

Rather than limiting how the panel that awards children's books assesses them, this tool can make it possible for jury members to consider and rank books more effectively. This has some positive consequences for the panel, the artist, and the children's book. The panel can assess the design, content, and instructional qualities of children's books in the best way possible. The artist can create a written or visual text drawing on these criteria. The children's books can create a world in which the child's reality is cared about, children's problems are highlighted, and the realities of life and humanity are adjusted to their developmental stages. This tool of measurement should be used as a universal tool in assessing children's books in such countries where children's literature is considered developed such as Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Japan, and China as well as countries where it is still developing such as the Middle East, the Far East, and Latin America. Apart from centres for children's literature, it can also be useful for parents, teachers, publishing houses, and schools.

The first limitation of this study is that the validity of this checklist has not been tested by categorizing children into age groups. Therefore, further research is required to attain this objective by taking different ages and developmental stages of children into account. Secondly, this study used prospective Turkish language teachers instead of Turkish teachers. Although they have information about children literature, the assessment of teachers may differ. Thirdly, this study only examined the validity of this checklist. Future studies may investigate inter rater reliability of this checklist as well as other validity issues such as content validity based on expert reviews. Lastly, although this checklist is comprehensive in terms of design, content, and instructional qualities, it is also has limitations such as being a time-consuming instrument because of its length. Future studies also develop more brief checklist for this purpose.

Consequently, this study tested the validity a checklist for assessing children's books. Drawing on the

study results obtained, it can be recommended that this checklist may be used by centres for children's literature in diverse communities and cultures. It would be useful to receive feedback on its validity for children's books from various communities and cultures as well as to see how effective it is in assessing a broad array of children's books.

Acknowledgments

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