

Principles in selecting children books in primary schools: North Cyprus case

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ABSTRACT

Turkish language went into effect along with the arrival of the Ottomans to the Island in 1571. Since then the Turkish Cypriots have been using Turkish in expressing their customs and traditions and activities. Currently 400.000 people Turkish people on the Island speak, write and broadcast in Turkish. Soon after adapting the use of Latin alphabet by Atatürk in Turkey, the Turkish Cypriots began to use the new alphabet as their official language. At present, besides the Atatürk Teacher Academy, training primary education teachers, there are eight universities in North Cyprus. In all these institutions there are Turkish Language and Literature, Turkish Teaching departments and Turkish Preparatory Schools for overseas students. In this respect, our aim is to determine the primary school teachers' (ATA graduates) criterion principles in selecting children's books. The subject question will be dealt with in four sections. The first section includes introduction, under which the problem, aims, significance, numerical data, limitations, and definitions are dealt with. The second section discusses methodology, research model and stages through examples, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Findings and interpretation will be presented in the third section. The summary, discussion and suggestions will be the scope of the fourth section.

Keywords: Children Books, Turkish Education, Primary Education, Traditional Literature, North Cyprus

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1. Introduction

Education is one of the most effective means in adapting human values, developing thinking skills, production, and behavioral changes. One of the dominant factors shaping the future of the people is education. Either or deliberately education influences every individual. One of the most important functions of education is that it promotes language development. The level of socialization is also associated with language development (Şahin, 2010, p. 1448). Through education, States tend to raise the type of citizens and the qualified human power they need. By the beginning of the 21st century, it can be observed that all nations in the world have understood the importance of education and they invest more money on this issue. However, it is clear that the underdeveloped and developing countries do not yet have sufficient allowance for education. Human beings and education receive the biggest investment. The factors that direct communities are the results of a 20-30-year education, which begins at primary schools as the starting point. Primary schools provide education to children between 7-12 age ranges to develop them in every aspect.

When one recalls his/her own childhood and judges other children objectively and unemotionally, he/she can understand that children are not little angels, but are individuals like adults. Every individual, at every age range, has both good and bad instincts. Parents and educational institutions spend great effort to shape them positively, develop their instincts in the correct way and put an end to their negative inclinations. As a matter of fact, this is the aim of civilization and during this process; the teacher has the greatest role. The teacher is a model for the students to help them think freely and bring about their abilities. Starting at primary education levels, reading habits develop school children's intellectual skills and helps them become critical and questioning individuals. In order to achieve such aims, utmost care should be given when selecting course books. Giving a habit of reading means that the individual is loved and motivated to read (Saracaloğlu, Karasakaloğlu ve Aslantürk, 2010, p. 459).

One has to be experienced in selecting and buying books. At this point culture, which is developed proportionally by reading a lot. Every book read contributes a lot to lessening the rate of our following book-selection. In this respect, teachers should encourage their learners to form a habit of reading a lot. Then, they will be able to distinguish between a good and a bad book as well as a good writer and a bad writer in time. We are living in a globalized world with developed information and technology and in order to adapt these developments, we need well-educated individuals through schooling them. To gain positive values, to harmonize the environment and lifestyle for each individual and makes it easier to shape it (Öner ve Yeşilyaprak, 2006, p. 560). Besides developing themselves to catch up with the information age, teachers need to benefit from other developments. They have to master different culture, which is possible by reading a lot.

Parents have a crucial role in forming reading habits. The task belongs not only to the state, but also to families (Aşıcı, 2005). No doubt, expecting a child to form the habit with parents who do not provide any books will be too optimistic. Therefore, parents who argue saying, "my child does not like reading" should firstly question themselves. Do they spare time to read? What kind of books or magazines do they bring home? How much time do they spend to talk about and discuss what they read? A child learns by observing and experiencing. So long as reading is not done and the child is in front of TV all day with parents who do not spare time to read, it is not wise and sufficient to force the child to read.

On the other hand, children from parents who read, but do not talk about what they read or discuss or share anything may oppose to reading (Aşıcı, 2004). Children want to share, talk about what is read. Forming reading habits cannot be adapted only by parent involvement, but also teachers have a big role in the process. The school is the only place for children from families who lack reading culture, to form reading habits which can be achieved by teacher encouragement. However, teachers may not have a say in book selection. They are limited by teaching programs, time constraints and similar problems. In spite of all these inconveniences, a teacher, who likes reading, helps his/her students from reading habits. Briefly, as a teacher being a model that reads hi/her students; read them books as a teacher; talking to students about books; to suggest books that will be interested them, etc. (Morrow, 1992) What is important at this point is that the teacher should be well aware of the process, method and should do it consciously, but not

randomly. Working with such a teacher encourages even a student from a family who lack reading culture. Teachers need to be very careful when selecting books. Teachers advocating contemporary teaching styles with multi-directive critical thinking skills, but opposing to authoritative teaching and memorization will not only be able to select the right book, but will also bring about critical approaches to the reading texts in the teaching programs.

A conscious teacher should examine the school library thoroughly; specify the suitable books for children at different ages, which books can be used in class, which recommend new books for them. A teacher should guide students when buying books and provide suggest concrete suggestions. He or she should explain what to be careful about when selecting books by giving them examples in class. A teacher should avoid forcing the children, but interact with them. Otherwise, the children may become uninterested in books. A group of students may come together and form a class library. This will help keep the books clean and form a control unit. Publications for children should include certain characteristics in terms of content and shape. Such publications, approved by several researches and applications, can be recommended for children. Such works are useful, easy to read, and interesting and they reflect the value of work and their effectiveness in terms of teaching.

2. The Importance and Aim of the Research

One of the most important conditions for being a nation that has reached the level of modern civilization is to have a well-educated human power equipped with the desired knowledge and skills. Being able to train the human power with these, qualifications can be achieved by preparing and implementing training programs as a complementary and follow-up chain. At the heart of these activities are the efforts required to gain the ability to read and write.

The aim of elementary school with the teaching of reading and writing is to equip the student with the information that will gain the ability to read and write. In the next step, the aim is to give the ability to understand what he reads and to write what he understands in a regular logic. The individual who knows and understands what he has read will also have the key to learning what he does not know and wonder. In this way, the child will raise himself and become a desirable citizen. It is known that many factors affect the student since the child started school. Among the factors that base the personal development of the child book choosing is coming. This research aim is in terms of measuring the children's achievements in the first reading and guiding in increasing the success of the children.

3. Method

In this study, which aims to measure the reading habits of elementary school students, the screening (description) model was used because it was aimed to reveal the existing situation within its own conditions.

4. Universe and Sampling

The universe of the research is that of the state primary schools' teachers in North Cyprus. There are 96 primary schools and 1122 primary schools' teachers in North Cyprus. Due to time and financial constraints, only 7 primary schools were selected through preparation group sample with only 30 primary school teachers.

5. Data Collection

The data for determining the reading habits of primary schools' teachers were obtained through a questionnaire developed by the researcher. The developed questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part of the questionnaire is about selecting books were collected through literature review and the second part is about the teacher's principles in selecting books for children.

6. The Conceptual Definitions

1. Formal Features

- a. Size: Ideally, there should be conformity between the size and dimensions of children books, because children do not take pleasure in reading the same size books, but books in different size. They should also be convenient to carry. It is easier and important for the children to fix a bookshelf at home with books in the same size and dimensions. 16/23 cm size books are ideal for children.
- b. The quality of paper: The paper used should be quality, strong and dull. In many books and magazines, pictures are unclear particularly when they are color prints and this is because of the weak quality of paper used.
- c. Page arrangement: Pages with normal or more spacing is preferable in publications for children. There should be wide margins at the sides of pages and paragraphs should be short in single columns to make reading easier. Pictures and photographs are crucial in designing the pages of a book or magazine.
- d. Letters: The letters in a text should not be smaller than 12 fonts for the first, second, and third grade students. 10-font letters can be suitable for the fourth and fifth grades.
- e. Writing and punctuation: Writings in publications for children should be totally free from grammatical mistakes and there should definitely be consistency. Punctuation marks should be used correctly.
- f. Pictures: In children's books, pictures should be plain, clear, and relevant to the topic. They should be interesting, enjoyable, and cute. They should be placed at the best side of text or page to form a unity.

1. Content

- a. Theme: The basic thoughts or views, and main inclination of a writer trying to specify is called the Theme. Just as for adults, in works prepared for children, the theme should clearly be stated. A writer should be clear about what to take up in his/her work so as to be able to reflect thought and views. Unclear themes or works open to different interpretation are bound to mislead children and make them indecisive.
- b. Subject: Every opinion, event or case talked or written about is the "subject" (TürçeSözlük, Ankara, 1988). There is a strong connection among thought, events, and cases forming the topic of works written either for children or adults. However, the subject of a piece of work can be specified only after considering it thoroughly. Several real or unreal events experienced or likely to be experienced should develop parallel to the theme. Children cannot benefit from works with weak themes and subjects in terms of arts and education.
- c. The Characters: Individuals experiencing events in novels, tales, plays, and similar literary works are the characters (Türkçe Sözlük, Ankara, 1988). When child readers are at stake, the leading writers should reflect real or at least close to real works. Otherwise, children will not easily believe the characters experiencing hard times.
- d. Planning: This is the tool that provides prior content designs in a discipline. After specifying the theme, topic, and the characters, the writer expresses thoughts, feelings, and life styles in an order. The main idea of a piece of work prepared through a detailed plan can easily be understood and the main characters and events do not disappear in details. The introduction, body, and conclusion sections follow each other. In short, a good plan helps a harmony among events, thoughts, and feelings and influences the reader positively.

- e. Style and Language: Every writer has his/her own writing style in which a thought, an event, and life style is explained according to the writer's perception of literature, level of education, and self-pleasure. Some writers have a fluent, live, and interesting style, some have an artificial, but very careful style and some prefer a plain and careless style.

Primary school teachers should be very strict on the following when deciding on children's books:

1. Children's books should address their level, and the language should be simple with clear concepts.
2. The topics should be interesting, enjoyable, and should entertain and make children think.
3. Presenting the topic should suit scientific data and universal moral ethics. It should introduce people and the environment in a realistic point of view and should help strengthen patriotism, human affection, and the feeling of working together.
4. The priority should be raise experimenting, researching, critical and straight-for-ward individuals.
5. It should contribute to developing self-recognition and self-development (Oğuzkan, 1997, p.322).

If teachers are not strict in selecting books, children cannot form the habit of reading and they do not enjoy the activity. This, in due course, makes learning difficult. It will be beneficial to study both teachers' and parents' consideration of all the principles when selecting books,

7. Findings and Interpretations

The findings obtained through statistical analyses to solve the main and sub-mains and interpretations are presented. Prior to presenting the findings and interpretations, teachers' personal characteristics were dealt with. Following this process, the sub-aims were taken up and interpreted. Distribution of teachers is this: The 19 of the participants were women and 11 were men. In other words, 63% of the teachers are female and 37% are male. 76% of the teachers are from Ataturk Teacher Academy, 20% of the teachers are from University, and 4 % of the teachers are from Post-graduates. 23 % of the teachers have 3-4 years, 17% of the teachers have 5-9 years, 56% of the teachers have 10-20 years, and 4% of the teachers have over 20 years of teaching experience. 54% of the teachers did not participate in in-service training, 13% of the teachers participated 1 or 2, 20 % of the teachers 3 or 4 times, and 13% of the teachers more than 5 times.

a) Findings in Sub-aims and Interpretations

44% of the teachers read books on developing and guarding interest in children, but 56 % do not do so. The participant teachers admitted reading the following books on the subject question. 37 % of the teachers are regular followers of children books, but 63% are not so. 100 % of the participants pointed to the role of the family in forming reading habits. 100 % of the teachers enjoy reading books. 44% of the participant teachers read Adventure books, 4% Horror, 73% Psychology, 40% Political, 7% Love Stories, 33% Children Books, 26% Research, 30% Encyclopedia, 56% Social, 40% World Classics, 7% Experimental, and 10% Philosophy Books. It is observed that 100% of the participant teachers agree on the effect of reading on child development. 54% of the participant teachers have regular reading habits, but 46% do not read regularly. 76% of the participant teachers read children books, but 24% do not do so. 13% of the participant teachers agree that, from the I. Term students onwards, the size of the books used should be bigger, 76% say that the space for pictures should be less, 66% suggest longer paragraphs, 46% are for shorter space between words, 7% recommend bigger fonts, and 20% emphasize more attractive color pictures.

60 % of the participant teachers prefer bright paper, 37% say the color of the paper should not be pale, 89% are strict about spelling and punctuation, 30% point to hardcover books, 4% talk about different characters, and 93% stress that pictures should be simple, clear, relevant to the topic. 89 % of the participant teachers stressed that the theme should be clear and comprehensible. 5 % said the theme should include family, homeland, the nature, and joy of life. 7% argued that the theme and subject may not

be connected. 50% pointed out that, besides the child's spiritual characteristics the value of national culture, the community's moral ethics, customs and traditions should be considered. 73% stated that the topics should be interesting and enjoyable. 40 % suggested that, beside course books, there should be epics, and fairy tales. 50% said the main characters should be real or similar to real. 86 % emphasized that books with child main characters are more attractive. 20 % suggested that characters' names should remain the same in translated books. 17% preferred active verbs rather than passive. 37% stated that words in five senses should be used in stories, tales and funny stories. 20% said passive words and words hard to pronounce should not be used. 33% explained that for the I. stage children theirs should be one or two characters. 37% argued that topics in the II. Stage, should make the children think more than entertain them.

80 % of the participant teachers' state that they select at the beginning of the academic year, but 20 % do not. The books are provided by 33% of the teachers themselves, 7% say the students provide the books, 40% provide the books with the students, and 22% say the books are provided from bookshops. The books are kept at reachable places by 75 % of the participant teachers, but 25% keep the books in the classroom library.

As observed in the research, 30% of the participant teachers always explain reading and how to read, 37 % often, and 33% sometimes do so, 30% of the teachers always recommend students to read and examine books, 20 % often, and 50% sometimes do so. 4% of the teachers often organize visits to bookshops, 43% sometimes, and 53% never do so. 17% of the teachers always allocate time for reading and discussion, 23% often, 53% sometimes, and 7 % never do so. 23% of the teachers give oral or written tests to control students' readings, 23% often, 47% sometimes, and 7 % never do so. 4% of the teachers always brings new books and newspaper to class, 20% often, 43% sometimes, and 33% never do so. 43 % of the teachers always recommend students to by books as presents for their friends' birthday, 37% often, and 20% sometimes do so. 10% of the teachers often emphasizes the benefits of reading in class, 50% sometimes, and 40% never do so.

8. The Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the research can be summarize as follows:

A big majority of the teachers state that as moving towards the Stage II, the dimensions of the books should be smaller, paragraphs should be longer and the space allocated for pictures should be less. The space between words should get less and the letter fonts should be smaller. The colors of the pictures should be less attractive. Nearly half of the teachers preferred matt paper in books and should not be pale. A big majority of the teachers suggest utmost care about correct spelling and punctuation. Less than half of the teachers emphasize hardcover books. A big majority of the teachers argue that there should not be different print characters in the books and preferred simple, clear, and topic reflecting pictures in the books. The themes should be clear and comprehensible. More than half of the teachers say that the books should include family, homeland, the nature and joy of life issues. Half of the teachers raise opinion saying that besides children's' spiritual characteristics, national cultural values, ethical rules, and customs and traditions should be considered when selecting topics. A big majority of the teachers say that the theme and topic should be related and the topics should be interesting and entertaining. Less than half of the teachers, besides course books, recommend books with epics and fairy tales. All the teachers argue that children enjoy reading books on action and life styles. Half of the teachers prefer books with real or similar to real main characters in children books. A big majority of the teachers state that children find books with child characters more interesting. A few teachers state that Passive structures should be used less. More than half of the teachers suggest using words of five senses in stories, tales, and in comics. A small number of teachers do not prefer passive words or words hard to pronounce in the books. A small number of teachers suggest books with one or two characters for the Stage I students. A very small number of teachers state that as moving to the Stage II, topics should make the children think more than entertaining and relaxing them.

The success of primary reading is closely related to the mental abilities of the child as well as the environments and conditions suitable for the development of these abilities. The success or failure of the child depends on many factors. As an institution that prepares these conditions, the school has to be a guide in evaluating children's leisure and reading habits. In this context, the opinions and suggestions of our teachers should be taken into consideration. In the light of the findings in this research, it is also strongly recommended that the Ministry of National Education to reorganize in-service training for the teachers to equip them with better information on selecting children books.

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