

## Examination of Parents' Selection of Children Books

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The research was conducted to determine whether the education and income status of the parents made a difference in the selection of books. The study group of the research consisted of 151 parents who had children aged 3-6 years. These children attended independent public preschools in the city centre of Istanbul, which were selected by a random sampling method. Data were collected in two steps. First, a "General Information Form" was delivered to collect generic information on the parents. Then, Saçkesen's (2008) "Children's Book Selection Criteria Scale" was utilised to determine the consideration of parents for choosing a book for their children. The research is a causal-comparative study that aims to determine the causes or consequences of differences between groups. A Two-Way ANOVA was performed in the 3x3 model, as there were three categorical independent variables belonging to income level, three categorical independent variables belonging to education level, and a dependent variable in the continuous variable structure in the study. The findings indicate no significant difference between the book choice criteria of parents according to the income level when the education levels of the parents are not taken into consideration. However, when the income levels are not taken into consideration, a significant difference was found between the education level scores of parents for their book selection criteria. After a significant interaction between the income and education levels was found, simple effect analyses for the subgroups reveal significant differences between the secondary school-high school graduation levels of the parents in the low-income group and the secondary school-university graduation levels of the parents in the middle-income group. Focusing on parents with lower education and income levels can be a good starting point to increase parents' awareness of book selection.

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**Keywords:** Parent, preschool, book selection

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### INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, 250 million children under the age of five (%43) do not fulfil their developmental potential because of lacking adequate cognitive stimulation in early childhood. To maximize their developmental potential, children should be supported with different stimulants (Knauer, Jakiela, Ozier, Aboud, & Fernald, 2020). Children's books are one of the most effective stimulants in instilling the habit of reading in children from early years (Dwyer & Neuman 2008). Children's books have increasingly played a crucial role in children's lives and early education. That is why children's books have a considerable place in the present and future lives of children (Saracho & Spodek 2010). Yet, for books to have a significant impact on children's lives, they must be chosen carefully and the selection criteria must be well defined. For example, the Children's Books Committee reviews nearly 3,000 books to select the 600 best books for children published that year (Cohen 1998). Not being able to set the criteria well or choose the right book is identified as the source of poor literacy achievement and low motivation (Reuter 2007; Wortham 2005).

Choosing the right book depends on the age, developmental level, interests and needs of the child. These considerations are critical for the establishment of a positive bond between the child and the book, which helps the child to develop a love of books and to become a qualified reader in the future. Studies indicate that choosing books with appropriate features stimulates children's interest and motivation to be literate (Dwyer & Neuman 2008). For this reason, children should be introduced to books suitable for their age, developmental level and interests at an early stage. However, the abundance of features such as theme, subject and illustration, which are the main variables of the books, necessitates a careful selection (Bayraktar & Demiriz 2017; Bus et al. 1995; Yazıcı 2020). The level of carefulness in book selection by parents determines whether children can benefit from the wealth of books available, which underlines the importance of choosing quality books (Neuman & Wright 2007).

Quality books are valuable for their contribution to children's cognitive and emotional development, as well as to their language and literacy acquisition. Reading books to children by their parents increases children's interest in reading, gives them real-life information and raises awareness about the relationship between letters and sounds. They gain skills such as classification, comparison, organising cognitive processes, observation, critical thinking and problem-solving, which are also effective in children's development of personality, value and imagination (Hunt 2005; Sword 1987). Reading books helps children learn story structures and literary traditions (Saracho & Spodek 2010; Natsiopoulou et al. 2006). Exposing children to

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books that contain how other individuals in their lives cope with daily problems and what they think leads them to better understand themselves (Sword 1987). It offers children the opportunity to explore the lives and experiences of individuals and places that are different from them, as well as to probe the characteristics of their own identities and shape their developing character (Baldwin 2018; Larkin-Lieffers 2000). In this respect, reading activities that will take place with books that have been chosen correctly from the early period support the development of a strong personality of children (Yükselen, Yumuş, & Işık, 2016).

Quality books read to children in the early period support children's skills such as naming and associating newly learned concepts, in addition to providing emotional and physical intimacy between the child and the parent. Thus, the child enjoys being with someone he/she loves and gains new experiences in his/her life with the different possibilities provided by the books (Kiefer 2004; Pekdoğan 2017; Saracho & Spodek 2010). In this regard, the conscious efforts of parents toward children's reading contribute significantly to children's understanding of reading as a fun activity and to acquire the habit of reading books in the future (Biçici 2006; Güzelyurt & Saraç 2018). The habit of reading books at an early age is gained by choosing the right book and being a good model. The important thing here is to choose the book that suits the children's interests and maturity level. Books should be works that they enjoy reading to themselves, which will make them want to read again and again, meet children's interests and spiritual needs, support positive self-development, help them be aware and understand their own emotions, control their emotional states, provide an environment for children to gain cultural values, support the development of literacy skills, provide creative thinking and problem-solving skills, enable real-life experiences and a love for books (Bayraktar & Demiriz 2017; Morrow 2007; Saracho & Spodek 2010; Sawyer 2009). While the acquisition of all these knowledge and skills may be possible by choosing the right book, it is quite likely that the acquisition of the knowledge and skills will be negatively affected if the right book is not chosen.

Considering the characteristics of the books and their effects on children, it may be quite difficult for parents to choose the appropriate book for children among thousands of books. Moreover, today, many seemingly interesting books do not have high literary and educational value and they are not suitable in terms of content and form for young children (Bayraktar & Demiriz 2017). Parents can buy quality books by considering several basic features mentioned in the previous paragraph that should be found in children's books (Pekdoğan 2017; Saçkesen 2008). It may be essential that parents have a level of awareness on how to choose children's books, how to use them, and how children's books should be, to eliminate the deficiencies that may arise in this regard. In addition, it is necessary to investigate what criteria parents consider when buying books for their children, to prevent mistakes in the selection of children's books, raise awareness, and increase the quality of formal and content features in purchased children's books.

As can be seen above, parents' choice of books and early reading practices for children is critical. However, since knowing these alone is not enough, it is necessary to go one step further and determine what variables are likely to affect parents' book selection, as parents have different demographics, such as levels of education and income. At this point, it is decisive to determine the possible effects of these characteristics of the parents on the selection of books. Another point to consider is that parents are the decision-makers and determinants on behalf of the children. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to determine whether the education and income levels of parents, who decide on behalf of the child, make a difference in the choice of books. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought.

1. Do parents' different income levels have a significant effect on their "Children's Book Selection Criteria Scale" scores?
2. Do parents' different education levels have a significant effect on their "Children's Book Selection Criteria Scale" scores?
3. Does the interaction of education and income levels have a significant effect on their "Children's Book Selection Criteria Scale" scores?

## METHOD

### Participants

The study group consisted of 151 parents with children between the ages of 3-6. The children attended three public preschools, which were determined by a random sampling method, in the city centre of Istanbul. 225 parents were invited to the study. 151 parents voluntarily accepted to participate in the study. Parents who did not want to participate in the research indicated an intense work tempo and not finding enough time as their reasons. No fees were paid to the participants. Participants were informed about the study, which continued with all the parents who accepted the terms.

### Materials and Design

The 'Children's Book Selection Criteria Scale', (CBSCS), developed by Saçkesen (2008), was utilised to determine what parents consider when choosing a book for their children. The scale, which consists of 3 factors and 21 items, is in a 5-point Likert type and is scored from 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree=1, Totally Agree=5). In her analysis, Saçkesen (2008) found KMO, which is an indicator for sample adequacy, as .72, Bartlett's test of sphericity, which tests the general importance of all correlations in the correlation matrix, as significant ( $p < .01$ ), and the reliability coefficient of the whole scale as ( $\alpha = .67$ ). Saçkesen (2008) states that the scale is valid and reliable, based on the analysis results and expert opinions during the scale development phase. For this particular study, the reliability analysis of the scale was performed on the data collected from 151 parents, too, and it was found that the reliability was close to the original version ( $\alpha = .60$ ).

The 'General Information Form' was utilised to determine the education and income levels of the parents. In this form, education levels were categorised and coded as Secondary School, High School and University (SECONDARY=1, HIGH SCHOOL=2, UNIV=3); income levels were categorised and coded as Low Income Level (LIL), Middle Income Level (MIL) and High Income Level (HIL) (LIL=1 MIL=2, HIL=3). The minimum wage was taken into account in the classification of parents' socio-economic status. The information forms were filled in by the parents, who were the decision-makers about the books to be purchased for the children.

This research is a causal-comparative study as it aims to determine the causes or consequences of differences between human groups. The relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is generally unproven and at the suggestion level (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This is because education and income levels are the independent variables of this study, and the aim is to group the participants and determine the possible reasons for the differences among the groups by their CBSCS scores, the dependent variable of the study.

In this regard, first, the accuracy of the data and the missing data were checked. No missing data was found and the data from the scale and the form were found to have been entered correctly into the computer. Then, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was carried out by considering the subgroups, to test the distribution of the data. After determining that the data had a normal distribution, a Two-Way ANOVA in the 3x3 model was decided to be performed, since there were 3 categorical independent variables belonging to both income and education levels, and a continuous dependent variable. The Two-Way ANOVA is an efficient way to see interactions between factors and remove some of the random variability.

### Procedure

After creating the data collection tools for the research, the researchers reached the schools in the scope and informed the willing parents, stating that the data would be used for a scientific study, the parent was the decision-maker of the book choices, the study was on a voluntary basis, and they could freely leave the research if they wanted to.

Parents who were willing to participate in the study were asked to fill in the data collection tools sincerely, by the decision-maker parent of book choices for the children in the family. The forms were distributed to the parents, which took about three weeks to be fully completed. During the data collection process, the genders and the names of the parents and children were not requested. Both the scale and the form were coded with a random number to identify that they belonged to the same person. The obtained data were digitized, transferred to the electronic environment and analysed.

**RESULTS**

The data were analysed to determine the extent to which the parents complied with the criteria for book selection and which demographic variables were associated with these decisions. First, a descriptive analysis of the data was performed (Table 1). Then, to decide on the test technique to be used in the analysis, with the help of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S test), the distribution of CBSCS scores was tested at the level of groups formed in each sub-category of the independent variables. It was seen that the assumption of normal distribution was met in all groups. According to these results, a Two-way ANOVA was performed since the two independent variables of the study had a categorical structure and the dependent variable had a continuous data structure. The assumption of equal variances, which is a significant assumption of the Two-way ANOVA was not rejected according to the Levene’s Test results ( $F(7,143) = 1.307, p = .251$ ). In addition, the independence of observations was met at the intragroup and intergroup levels.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of CBSCS mean scores across subgroups

Factor		Valid (N)	Mean	S.D
Education Level	Secondary School	18	3.688	0.3538
	High School	41	3.990	0.4020
	University	92	3.923	0.2758
Income Level	Low	25	3.876	0.4246
	Middle	34	3.868	0.3986
	High	92	3.940	0.2761

In the study, Type IV was preferred for Sum of Square in two-way ANOVA analyses, as Type IV analysis differs from Type III in patterns with missing cells and when therapy combinations are not possible. The absence or difference of this combination information means that the response model parameters must be limited. Type IV Sum of Square has a balancing feature, as well (Gardiner & Gettinby 1998).

A two-way ANOVA test was conducted to understand whether different income levels of parents would cause a difference in their CBSCS scores, which is the first question of the study. When the results of the analysis were examined for main effects, low, middle or high income levels found not to cause a significant difference on CBSCS scores ( $F(2, 143) = .319, p = .728, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .004$ ) (Table 2).

Another question of the study is whether the different educational levels of the parents cause a significant difference in the CBSCS scores. When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that there is a significant difference between the CBSCS scores of parents with three different education levels ( $F(2, 143) = 5.978, p = .003, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .077$ ), which suggests a medium effect (Warner, 2013).

A multiple comparison Tukey test was performed to find the source of the difference between the CBSCS scores of parents at different educational levels. This multiple comparison test compares the groups formed at the education level without considering the income level variable. The results showed that high school and university levels differed significantly from secondary school ( $p < .05$ ) and there was no significant difference between university and high school ( $p > .05$ ). The Two-way ANOVA analysis in Table 2 also revealed a significant interaction between parental education level and income level ( $F(3, 143) = 2.765, p = .044, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .055$ ).

**Table 2.** Two-way ANOVA Results of parents' CBSCS mean scores

Source	df	MS	F	p	Effect size
Parent Education Level	2	0.61	5.978	.003	.077
Parent Income Level	2	0.033	0.319	.728	.004
Education Level * Income Level	3	0.282	2.765	.044	.055
Error	143	0.102			

Finally, since a significant interaction result was reached according to the results of the analysis, simple effect analyses were performed to find out among which subgroups this interaction occurred. Hence, the parental education level was analysed by taking income groups into account. According to the results, the scores of

secondary school graduate parents in the low-income group (M = 3.68, SD = .33) differed significantly from the scores of high school graduate parents (M = 4.10, SD = .48), while the scores of high school and university graduates, as well as secondary school and university graduates, did not differ significantly ( $p < .05$ ). Moreover, although there was a significant difference between the CBSCS scores of middle school (M = 3.70, SD = .40) and university (M = 4.07, SD = .40) graduate parents in the middle-income group ( $p < .05$ ), there was not a significant difference between middle school and high school graduates as well as high school university graduate parents ( $p > .05$ ). No significant difference was observed in other comparisons of the subgroups (Table 3).

**Table 3.** The effect of subgroups on CBSCS scores

Income	Education (I-J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
Low	Secondary-High School	-.428**	.003
Middle	Secondary-University	-.369*	.022

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Early childhood is a period in which the foundations of the child's development are laid. During this period, children encounter many stimuli and these stimuli affect the holistic development areas of children. In this period, one of the most effective stimulants in supporting children's holistic development areas is children's books. Through books, children begin to perceive different lives and gain different perspectives. In this process, parents are the first to introduce children to the book. Children's books offered by parents to their children are effective on children's perception of books in their future life. (Burgazlı-Osanmaz & Eren 2017). For this reason, parents are primarily effective in choosing books for children in early childhood. The reasons behind parents' choices, how and what they read to their children, book choices and early reading applications are crucial (Dwyer and Neuman 2008; Neuman & Wright 2007). Therefore, the study aims to determine whether the education and income level of parents, who decide on behalf of the child, makes a difference in the selection of books.

The research findings suggest that the education level of the parents was a significant determinant in the selection of books, while the income level did not cause any variability. Additionally, the interaction of education and income levels was found to have a significant effect.

When the findings are examined more closely, a significant difference between the book selection criteria according to the education level of the parents, regardless of the income levels, can be underlined. The secondary school level is the one creating the difference arising from the education level of the parents. The book selection scores of the parents who have high school and university education are higher than the scores of the parents at the secondary school level. In the post hoc comparisons of the subgroups, the scores of the secondary school graduate parents in the low-income group differed significantly from the scores of the high school graduate parents, and no significant difference was found between the scores of high school and university as well as secondary school and university graduates. Moreover, while there was a significant difference between the CBSCS scores of middle school and university graduate parents in the middle-income group, there was no significant difference between the scores of secondary school and high school as well as high school and university graduate parents.

When the literature is examined, it can be seen that the person or persons with whom children communicate the most from the moment they are born are their parents. Parents' education level is a determinant of children's position in macro systems and plays a decisive role in creating the literacy environment. The findings reveal that the education level of the parents is effective in the selection of children's books, which have an important place in shaping literacy skills. The education level of parents, who are the decision-makers and determinants on behalf of children in early childhood, is claimed to have direct and indirect effects on the developmental outcomes of children (Melhuish et al., 2008; Özbek Ayaz 2015; Saçkesen 2008). According to Hunt (2005), the reason might be that the quality of a book is subjective, varying with the expectations of each reader and what he/she produces from it. For this reason, parents should be more careful in choosing children's

books and the books they choose should be suitable for children's interests, as well as their emotional and intellectual development levels (Nurgiyantoro 2005).

In her study, for the selection of books, Saçkesen (2008) determined that there was a significant difference between the physical and content dimensions of the scale according to the education level of the parents. While Biçici (2006) argues that as the education level of mothers increases, they consider more features when choosing a book for their children, while Gündüz Sağlam (2007) indicates is a significant difference between the education levels of the parents of preschool children and their evaluation of children's books.

When the findings of the study and the literature are examined, for parents, choosing a book requires an awareness of preschool literacy skills as well. It may be argued that the education level of parents is a critical determinant in this awareness. As Rowe et al. (2016) stated in their study, the education level of the parents has a strong relationship with the language skills of the children in general and literacy skills in particular. In other words, parent education is a factor that is consistently relevant to children's early language and literacy skills. On average, children of more educated parents have faster vocabulary development and more vocabulary than less-educated parents. Moreover, while literacy-related feelings are highest among children whose mothers are more educated, literacy-related feelings are lowest among children whose mothers are less educated (Dearing et al. 2004). In short, reading activities implemented with quality children's books have a direct, positive and causal effect on children's literacy skills (Knauer et al., 2020). Indeed, a closer examination of the PIRLS exam data illustrates the strong relationship between the education level of the parents and multiple variables associated to early literacy. In particular, variables such as the number of books at home, early literacy activities, emergent literacy abilities, and the child's engagement to read and write at school are closely related to parents' education levels (Myrberg & Rosén 2009). In this regard, it can be argued that as parents' education levels increase, their literacy skills are higher and they use their awareness of literacy to choose books for their children as well.

The study could not find a significant difference between the book selection criteria according to the income level of the parents. When the literature is examined, Saçkesen (2008) did not find a significant difference between the book selection criteria according to the income levels of the parents' choices. In their study, Çiftçi & Kangallı (2015), especially in the Turkish context, demonstrate that the education levels of the parents are not always parallel with the income level, and even that there is a less increase in the income of the father when his education level increases. From this point of view, it can be argued that the increase in the income level does not always enable the parents to reach the competence of choosing a book for their child. Because the dynamics that increase the income level may not be valid for the education level. On the other hand, reducing educational inequality in a society may not mean that income inequality will also decrease (Yang et al. 2009). While knowing the book selection criteria can be gained through education, it may not be related to the income level. From this point of view, it can be argued that the results of the research are compatible with the education-income level discrepancies in Turkey.

The findings reveal that the parents with a high level of education have a higher level of awareness about the book selection criteria when choosing a book for their children. Hence, when it comes to increasing awareness about book selection, it may be a good starting point to focus on parents with low education levels. The foundational question of a study or a project to be carried out with these parents should be the answer to the question, 'how do I selection the appropriate book for my child?'. When parents do not have an answer to this question, the magnitude of the problem for children and future generations is unpredictable. Because the first factor to be considered in choosing a book is the suitability of the book for a child's emotional, social and cognitive developmental stage (Cohen 1998). Considering the developmental characteristics of children, especially in the pre-school period, it would be quite challenging to compensate for the negative effects the books that cannot be chosen correctly can leave on children later on. That is why it would be appropriate to argue that a wide range of actors, from publishing houses to sales personnel, should be included in this process. It may not always be an accurate predictor to consider parents' income levels while estimating the awareness of book selection criteria. In future studies, it may be suggested to examine whether graduating from different departments at the same education level would cause a difference in awareness of book selection. Furthermore, for book selection, educational kits can be prepared by reaching parents through preschools, and awareness levels of parents can be increased with practical workshops.

The study has several limitations. Due to the nature of the research, the use of the causal comparison design to reveal the effects that have already occurred prevents the generalisation of the obtained results as well as their interpretation as a complete cause-effect relationship. The independent variables arising from the method cannot be manipulated. Moreover, the location where the sample was taken can be seen as an obstacle to the overall generalisation of the data. All these factors can be considered as the main limitations that weaken the internal validity of the study design.

## Declarations

### *Conflict of Interest*

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed by the author with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

### *Ethics Approval*

The questionnaire and methodology for this study was approved by the Human Research Ethics committee of the University of Düzce. We conducted the study in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration in 1975.

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### *Research and Publication Ethics Statement*

The study was approved by the research team's university ethics committee of the Düzce University (Ethics approval number: E-46622718-604.01.01-16766). Hereby, we as the authors consciously assure that for the manuscript the following is fulfilled:

- This material is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.
- The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

### *Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article*

The work has a single author.

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