

Storybook Selection for Primary School Students: Perspectives of Teachers, Parents, and Students¹

İlkokul Düzeyindeki Öğrenciler İçin Hikâye Kitabı Seçimi: Öğretmen, Ebeveyn ve Öğrenci Görüşleri

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ABSTRACT

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design to examine and compare the storybook selection criteria articulated by primary school teachers, parents, and students. Selecting appropriate storybooks plays a significant role in supporting children's literacy, cognitive development, and socio-emotional growth; however, selection practices often reflect differing stakeholder priorities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers, 10 parents, and 10 primary school students and analyzed thematically following Miles and Huberman's analytical framework. The findings revealed six core dimensions shaping storybook selection: bibliographic information, language and style, content, creativity, design, and post-reading activities. While teachers and parents emphasized developmental appropriateness, moral alignment, inclusivity, and instructional value, students prioritized imagination, narrative immersion, visual appeal, and enjoyment. Notable divergences emerged regarding fantastical content and the inclusion of post-reading activities, reflecting broader tensions between educational guidance and intrinsic reading motivation. By foregrounding multiple stakeholder perspectives, the study conceptualizes storybook selection as a multidimensional and socially negotiated practice rather than a purely technical decision. The findings provide practical implications for educators, parents, publishers, and curriculum developers seeking to balance pedagogical objectives with children's imaginative engagement and reading motivation.

Key Words: Storybook selection; reading habit; primary school students; teacher, parent, and student perspectives

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, ilkököl öğretmenleri, ebeveynler ve öğrenciler tarafından dile getirilen hikâye kitabı seçim ölçütlerini incelemek ve karşılaştırmak amacıyla nitel betimleyici araştırma deseni ile yürütülmüştür. Uygun hikâye kitaplarının seçimi çocukların okuryazarlık, bilişsel ve sosyo-duygusal gelişimlerinin desteklenmesinde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Fakat kitap seçme süreçleri çoğu zaman farklı paydaşların önceliklerini yansıtmaktadır. Veriler 10 öğretmen, 10 ebeveyn ve 10 ilkököl öğrencisi ile gerçekleştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve Miles ve Huberman'ın analiz çerçevesi doğrultusunda tematik olarak çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular hikâye kitabı seçimini şekillendiren altı temel boyutu ortaya koymuştur. Bibliyografik özellikler, dil ve üslup, içerik, yaratıcılık, tasarım ve okuma sonrası etkinlikler altı temel boyutu oluşturmaktadır. Öğretmenler ve ebeveynler gelişimsel uygunluk, ahlaki uyum, kapsayıcılık ve öğretimsel değeri öncelerken; öğrenciler hayal gücü, anlatı içine dalma, görsel çekicilik ve keyif unsurunu vurgulamıştır. Özellikle fantastik içerik ve okuma sonrası etkinlikler konusunda belirgin farklılıklar ortaya çıkmıştır. Çalışma, hikâye kitabı seçimini teknik bir karar sürecinden ziyade çok boyutlu ve toplumsal olarak müzakere edilen bir pratik olarak kavramsallaştırmakta ve eğitimciler, ebeveynler, yayınevleri ile program geliştiriciler için çeşitli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. **Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hikâye kitabı seçimi; okuma alışkanlığı, ilkököl öğrencileri; öğretmen, ebeveyn ve öğrenci görüşleri

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1. INTRODUCTION

Storybooks play a fundamental role in early childhood education by fostering cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development. Research indicates that exposure to storybooks from an early age enhances vocabulary acquisition, phonological awareness, and narrative comprehension, which are critical for literacy development (Mol & Bus, 2011). Through engaging narratives and illustrations, children develop an understanding of language structures and storytelling conventions, facilitating their ability to communicate effectively (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002).

Beyond language skills, storybooks contribute to socio-emotional learning by introducing children to diverse perspectives, emotions, and moral lessons. Studies suggest that children who engage with literature develop higher levels of empathy and emotional intelligence, as they learn to identify with characters and navigate complex social situations (Nikolajeva, 2013). Additionally, shared reading experiences between caregivers and children strengthen relational bonds and promote a positive attitude toward reading (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995). From a cognitive perspective, engaging with narrative structures enhances children's memory, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking abilities by encouraging them to predict outcomes, analyze characters' motivations, and draw inferences (Paris & Paris, 2003). Through identification with characters and immersion in diverse narratives, children gain a deeper understanding of human emotions and moral reasoning, which are crucial for social interactions (Aram, Fine, & Ziv, 2013).

Given these benefits, the careful selection of storybooks is crucial in shaping a child's early educational experiences. By choosing developmentally appropriate and engaging texts, educators and caregivers can support children's cognitive growth, emotional well-being, and lifelong reading habits.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Significance of Choosing the Right Storybooks

Selecting appropriate storybooks for young children is crucial, as it directly influences their cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development. High-quality storybooks with rich vocabulary and complex sentence structures support language acquisition and literacy skills, providing children with exposure to diverse linguistic patterns and concepts (Mol & Bus, 2011). Furthermore, age-appropriate narratives that align with children's cognitive abilities enhance comprehension, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, fostering deeper engagement with the text (Paris & Paris, 2003). From an emotional and social perspective, well-chosen books introduce children to diverse characters, cultures, and moral dilemmas, promoting empathy, social awareness, and emotional regulation (Nikolajeva, 2013). In contrast, poorly selected books—those with overly simplistic language, inappropriate themes, or lack of cultural representation—may limit children's learning experiences and fail to stimulate curiosity and imagination (Arizpe & Styles, 2016). Thus, educators and caregivers must carefully evaluate storybooks based on their linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional relevance to ensure meaningful and enriching reading experiences for young learners.

2.2. Challenges in Selection

Choosing appropriate storybooks for young children presents several challenges, as it requires balancing linguistic complexity, cognitive suitability, and cultural relevance. One of the primary difficulties is ensuring that the language level aligns with the child's developmental stage while still promoting language growth; overly simplistic texts may fail to challenge young readers, whereas excessively complex language can lead to frustration and disengagement (Mol & Bus, 2011). Additionally, selecting books that foster cognitive development requires attention to narrative structure and thematic depth, as stories with well-developed plots and relatable characters enhance comprehension and critical thinking (Paris & Paris, 2003). Another challenge involves the cultural and social representation in storybooks; educators and caregivers must be mindful of selecting diverse and inclusive literature that reflects various backgrounds and experiences, as a lack of representation can limit children's worldview and self-identity formation (Arizpe & Styles, 2016). Moreover, the commercial publishing industry often prioritizes market trends over educational value, making it

difficult to discern high-quality literature from mass-produced content (Jackson, 2023). Given these complexities, selecting the most effective and developmentally appropriate storybooks requires careful consideration of multiple factors to ensure meaningful and enriching reading experiences for young learners.

2.3. The Storybook Selection Criteria

The selection of appropriate storybooks for primary school children is a crucial factor in fostering literacy development, cognitive skills, and socio-emotional growth. Research suggests that the quality of children's literature directly influences language acquisition, reading motivation, and comprehension skills (Mol & Bus, 2011). Parents, teachers, and children themselves each play a role in book selection, and their criteria often vary based on developmental, educational, and cultural considerations (Arizpe & Styles, 2016). This study synthesizes existing literature on the key factors influencing storybook selection, focusing on parental, teacher, and student perspectives.

2.3.1. Parental Criteria In Storybook Selection

Parents play a fundamental role in shaping children's early literacy experiences by selecting books that align with their developmental needs and interests. Yazıcı (2023) emphasizes that, for children's books to have a meaningful impact on children, book selection criteria should be carefully determined by parents. Studies indicate that parents often prioritize books with age-appropriate vocabulary, engaging illustrations, and moral or educational themes (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Furthermore, research highlights that parents prefer books that reinforce family values and cultural identity, as exposure to familiar contexts enhances comprehension and emotional connection (Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 2000). However, commercial trends also influence parental choices, sometimes leading to the selection of books based on popularity rather than educational value (Jackson, 2023).

2.3.2. Teachers' Criteria In Storybook Selection

Educators approach storybook selection with a focus on literacy development, curriculum alignment, and classroom engagement. Research suggests that teachers prioritize books that support phonemic awareness, vocabulary growth, and narrative comprehension (Paris & Paris, 2003). Additionally, culturally inclusive and diverse literature is increasingly emphasized to foster students' appreciation of different perspectives and social backgrounds (Arizpe & Styles, 2016). Studies also indicate that teachers consider the complexity of sentence structures, thematic depth, and opportunities for interactive discussions when selecting storybooks for instructional use (Duke & Carlisle, 2011).

2.3.3. Children's Criteria In Storybook Selection

Children's own preferences in book selection often differ from those of adults, as they tend to prioritize entertainment, visual appeal, and personal interests (McGeown, 2013). Research suggests that children are drawn to books with engaging storylines, humor, and relatable characters (Mar & Oatley, 2008). While adults focus on developmental benefits, children often prefer books that provide enjoyment and emotional resonance, which in turn supports intrinsic motivation for reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Consequently, research advocates for incorporating children's voices into book selection to increase reading engagement and foster a positive reading culture (Cremin et al., 2014).

The selection of storybooks for primary school children involves multiple perspectives, with parents, teachers, and students each valuing different aspects of children's literature. While parents emphasize moral and cultural relevance, teachers focus on educational and linguistic development, and children prioritize enjoyment and engagement. An optimal selection process should integrate these perspectives to ensure that storybooks not only support literacy and cognitive skills but also foster lifelong reading habits. Future research should explore how collaborative selection strategies can enhance reading motivation and literacy outcomes in diverse learning environments.

The selection of appropriate storybooks for primary school children is a critical aspect of early childhood education, as it directly influences language development, cognitive skills, and socio-emotional growth (Mol & Bus, 2011). Given the vast array of children's literature available, educators

and parents often face difficulties in identifying books that are both developmentally suitable and pedagogically valuable (Paris & Paris, 2003). Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on the developmental contributions of children's literature, this study adopts a comparative multi-stakeholder perspective.

This qualitative descriptive design aims to systematically identify and comparatively analyze the storybook selection criteria articulated by teachers, parents, and primary school students. By foregrounding the intersections and divergences among these stakeholder groups, the study conceptualizes storybook selection as a multidimensional and socially negotiated practice situated at the intersection of pedagogical priorities, parental values, and children's experiential preferences. In doing so, the study moves beyond single-stakeholder approaches in the literature and provides a comparative framework for understanding how selection criteria are constructed and prioritized across different social actors. Ultimately, a well-curated selection of storybooks can serve as an essential tool in both formal and informal learning environments, contributing to the holistic development of young learners. In this context, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What criteria do parents, teachers, and primary school students consider when selecting storybooks?
2. How do these stakeholder groups construct and prioritize these criteria?
3. In what ways do the criteria converge and diverge across stakeholder groups?

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design. Qualitative description focuses on providing a comprehensive summary of events or experiences, emphasizing direct and rich descriptions while staying close to participants' accounts without extensive theorization (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010; Neergaard et al., 2009). This design was considered appropriate as the study aims to describe and compare stakeholder perspectives on storybook selection criteria rather than to generate theory or examine causal relationships.

3.2. Data Collection Tool

Research data were collected by interview. Interviewing can be described as “a mutual and interactive communication process based on questioning and answering, conducted for a predetermined and serious purpose” (Stewart, 1974). Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview form with primary school students, their parents and teachers. The semi-structured interview was preferred because it provided the researcher with the opportunity to ask additional questions (Glesne, 2010). With this approach, all questions were asked in the same order to all participants in the same way. Thus, the subjective judgments of the researcher were minimized and the comparison and analysis of the data obtained were easier (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The interview form questions used in the research were created using the literature (Al-mizragee, 2022; Ateş, 2023; Karpouza, et al., 2014; Öznur & Sadrazam, 2020). In the development of the interview forms, expert opinion was sought regarding the "content validity" of the interview forms. In line with the suggestions of the experts, the connection of the questions in the forms with the subject, their ordering within a certain logic, and language errors were examined and necessary changes were made. For instance, some questions were revised to improve linguistic clarity and to avoid ambiguous expressions. In addition, similar questions were standardized in structure to enhance coherence across categories. For example, the item “*Is it important that the content does not include characters from minority ethnic groups?*” was revised to “*Is it important that the content represents different cultural or ethnic groups fairly? Why?*” in order to ensure a more neutral and inclusive phrasing. No major structural changes were made to the interview form.

The form consists of two parts. The first part consists of questions about the demographic data of the participants. The second part consists of 28 questions about book selection criteria. At the end of each

interview, the participant was asked to add criteria and suggestions that were not listed in the form. Sample interview questions were given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Sample Interview Questions by Thematic Category

Thematic Category	Sample Question
Bibliographic Information	“Do you pay attention to the title of the book? Why?”
Language and Style	“Do you consider the fluency of the language used in the book important? Please explain.”
Creativity	“Is it important for the book to include supernatural characters or events? Why?”
Content	“Is it important that the content does not show prejudice toward different beliefs? Why?”
Plan and Design	“How would you like the cover, design, and illustrations of the book to be?”
Technology	“Would you prefer the book to include technological features (e.g., QR codes for audio versions)? Why?”
Post-Reading Activities	“Would you like the book to include activities at the end? Why?”

3.3. Study Group

The study group was determined through criterion sampling. Participants were selected based on predefined criteria relevant to the research purpose (Patton, 2002). The inclusion criteria required participants to be (a) primary school students aged between 8 and 11, (b) parents of participating students, and (c) primary school teachers with classroom teaching experience. This strategy ensured that all participants had direct and relevant experience related to storybook selection practices. Within this scope, the study group consisted of 10 primary school students aged between 8 and 11, 10 parents of these students, and 10 primary school teachers working in public primary schools. In total, data were collected from 30 participants. The student participants attended different public primary schools and had prior experience participating in a voluntary reading club. The teachers (n = 10) had between 5 and 15 years of teaching experience. Parents were included in order to reflect the home literacy dimension of storybook selection practices. The reading club was facilitated by the first author; however, the club itself was not treated as the unit of analysis but served only as a recruitment context. Demographic and contextual characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic and Contextual Characteristics of the Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Students	Parents	Teachers
Age Range	8–11	—	—
Gender	6 Female / 4 Male	4 Female / 6 Male	7 Female / 3 Male
School Type	Public	—	Public
Grade Level	3rd–4th Grade	—	—
Teaching Experience	—	—	5–15 years
Affiliation	All attended same reading club	Parents of participating students	Teachers from different public primary schools

3.4. Data Collection Process

Interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis. Under the age of 18, a parental consent form was obtained from the participant students. Voluntary participation form was obtained from parents and teachers. The purpose of the first two questions was to break the ice. Everyone who took part in the interview was ready to share their experiences. The objective and topic of the interview were explained to the participants a day or two before the interview, and they were given time to reflect on their previous experiences and impressions of the issue. Moreover all participants were first informed that their identifiable information would be hidden and the principles of science ethics would be adhered to, and they were reminded that the data to be collected would not be used for other than scientific purposes and that they could stop the interview at any stage of the research if desired. The interview was held with 30 participants. The interview was conducted in a quiet environment away

from the factors that would negatively affect the participant in the reading club saloon. The interview took an average of 20 minutes for each participant. Interview questions were asked to each participant in the same way and in the same order. During the interview, the data were recorded with the consent of the participants. The researcher recorded the information from the interview without making any changes, and a colleague verified the correctness.

The reading club was facilitated by the first author, which provided prolonged engagement with the participants and in-depth familiarity with the reading practices within the group. To minimize potential researcher bias, interview questions were standardized and asked in the same order to all participants. Data coding was conducted independently by both researchers, and expert review was sought during the analysis process.

For ethical considerations and to maintain participant confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts. Each participant was assigned a code reflecting their stakeholder group. Students were labeled S1–S10, parents P1–P10, and teachers T1–T10. These identifiers were used throughout the findings section when presenting direct quotations.

3.5. Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis method developed by Miles and Huberman was used to analyse the gathered data (1994). Three processes of data analysis were proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994): reduction, presentation, drawing conclusions, and verification. Matrices and thematic codes were developed based on participants’ responses across stakeholder groups. First, the data obtained from the interviews were transcribed. Then the data were coded separately by both researchers and the coding was compared for verification. Finally, the coding was reorganized and tabulated in line with expert opinions. Example of the coding process was given in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Example of the Coding Process

Raw Excerpt	Initial Code	Category
“I like books with magic and strange characters because they are more exciting.” (S4)	Preference for fantasy elements	Creativity
“Books should teach children values and help them improve their language skills.” (T3)	Emphasis on educational value	Content
“I prefer books that include activities at the end to check understanding.” (P6)	Importance of post-reading activities	Post-Reading Activities

4. FINDINGS

The criteria used by primary school children, parents, and teachers when selecting storybooks were examined under six categories. These criteria, derived from the interviews, were presented in the tables below.

4.1. Bibliographic Information

Table 4. The Importance of Bibliographic Information When Choosing a Storybook

Category	Code	Teacher	Student	Parent
		f	f	f
Name of the book	Being remarkable	6	10	10
	Informative about the content	10	6	10
	Raising curiosity	7	10	10
Author of the book	Being Important	7	4	6
	Being not important	3	6	4
Type of the book	Being understandable	7	10	10
	Being interesting and adventurous	8	10	10
	Providing values education	2	3	5
Publisher of the book	Being important	7	0	10
	Being not important	3	10	0
Illustrator of the book	Being Important	7	10	10

	Being not important	3	0	0
Age category of the book	Being appropriate	10	10	10

According to Table 4, bibliographic information of the book is important to all participants. Although the rates vary in terms of parents, teachers and children, they were able to meet in some common points. In particular, they mostly agreed on the title, author, illustrator and age-appropriateness of the book.

Participants across all groups—teachers, parents, and students—highlighted the importance of bibliographic information when selecting storybooks. These details included the book’s title, author, illustrator, publisher, and the target age group. Among these, age appropriateness was unanimously emphasized by all participants as a foundational criterion. For example, P3 supported the code “informative about the content” with the statement: *“The title of the book is important to me because it usually provides information about the content.”* Furthermore, T10 reinforced this view by noting, *“For me, the title of the book is important because it should attract the attention of children aged 8–10.”*

Teachers often emphasized the author and publisher, associating these with educational quality and familiarity. Parents similarly valued authorship and publisher reputation but additionally stressed the title’s capacity to spark interest and provide clarity about the book’s content. In contrast, students placed more importance on the attractiveness of the title and illustrations, which they associated with fun and adventure. Among the teacher participants, T5 expressed his/her view on the importance of the book’s genre by stating, *“Yes, I pay attention to it. I believe that purchasing or recommending a book in a genre that children may not like would lead to an unwilling reading process for them.”* Regarding the importance of the author, T6 noted, *“I particularly enjoy reading certain authors. Nevertheless, in order to avoid a one-sided reading experience, I also give a chance to books written by authors I do not know.”*

While the majority of parents and teachers believed that knowing the illustrator adds value to the book, some teachers and students reported that it was not a decisive factor. A few students and parents even stated that the publisher’s identity was irrelevant to their selection process. S7 highlighted the importance of the illustrator, noting, *“The illustrator is very important to me because I enjoy looking at the pictures in the book. The illustrations should be visually appealing and entertaining.”*

This divergence indicates a developmental distinction: adults prioritize credibility and instructional alignment, whereas children respond to visual and imaginative cues that stimulate interest. The shared emphasis on author and age category, however, reflects a convergence across groups regarding the fundamental importance of literary credibility and developmental suitability.

4.2. Language and Style

Table 5. The Importance of The Style and Language Used in The Book When Choosing a Storybook

Category	Code	Teacher f	Student f	Parent f
The style and language	Being fluency and simple	6	10	10
	Being contemporary	5	10	10
	Being interesting and fun	6	10	10
	Being literary	5	0	3

According to Table 5, while all participants wanted the language and style of the book to be fluent, simple, fun and contemporary, the fact that the language of the book was literary was not desired by the students at all.

Participants demonstrated clear preferences regarding the language and style used in storybooks. Simplicity and fluency were prioritized by all groups, emphasizing the need for easily understandable and engaging texts. Both teachers and parents stressed that simple language enhances reading comprehension and supports the development of language skills, particularly for early readers. Among the parent participants, P6 emphasized the importance of the language used in the book by

stating, *“I pay attention to the language of the book. If the language is not fluent, it may discourage the child’s motivation to read.”* Among the teacher participants, T2 supported the code “Being interesting and fun” by stating, *“For children, the most important thing is enjoyment. A fun language enables learning through enjoyment. This is what I value most.”* Similarly, T9 emphasized the importance of the language used in the book by stating, *“I try to pay attention to it as much as I can. Recommending books that children may find difficult to understand, or that students who dislike looking up words in a dictionary may avoid reading, would only result in the child purchasing the book but not actually reading it.”*

Students consistently valued language that was fun, expressive, and emotionally resonant. Humor, repetition, and relatable dialogue were seen as engaging features. Notably, students showed little interest in literary complexity or archaic vocabulary, instead preferring conversational tone and clarity. Among the student participants, S10 expressed his/her views on this issue by stating, *“I don’t want the language of the book to be too literary. When it is, it becomes difficult to understand and boring. I prefer a book that is simple and fun.”*

Teachers also pointed out the importance of style being age-appropriate and aligned with the learning objectives. Some educators valued books that subtly introduced new vocabulary or used figurative language as a means of enrichment, provided it did not hinder comprehension.

The notion of "contemporary language" emerged across all groups. Parents and teachers supported the use of modern, relevant expressions that mirror children's real-world communication. However, some concerns were expressed by teachers about oversimplification, warning that a balance must be maintained to preserve literary quality. Among the parent participants, P4 supported the code “contemporary language” by stating, *“The language of the book should be contemporary. Present-day Turkish conveys the intended messages more effectively.”*

In conclusion, while fluency and simplicity were commonly accepted social values, students leaned toward emotional and humorous content, whereas adults evaluated language based on developmental and educational criteria. These insights reflect the importance of crafting storybooks that are accessible yet stimulating for diverse reader needs.

4.3. Creativity

Table 6. The Importance of Creativity When Choosing a Storybook

Category	Code	Teacher	Student	Parent
		f	f	f
Creativity	Being original	4	10	10
	Having supernatural elements	0	10	4
	Having real elements	10	3	6
	Having dialogue, monologue	4	10	3
	Having comedy, tragedy	5	7	4

According to Table 6, while all participants recommended that the book should be original in terms of supporting the creativity of the student, should include narrative genres such as dialogue and monologue, and should sometimes contain comedy and sometimes tragic elements, the fact that it contains supernatural elements was not accepted by teachers and parents. However, it was determined that most of the students found it more entertaining to have supernatural events and people.

Creativity emerged as a critical theme, particularly in relation to students’ engagement with storybooks. Children overwhelmingly favored books that contained original plots, imaginative characters, and surprising or humorous elements. Supernatural events, fantasy creatures, and unexpected twists were often cited as features that made a story exciting and memorable. Among the student participants, S1 expressed his/her expectations from a book by stating, *“I don’t like reading books. If a book is boring, I won’t read it at all. That’s why my book needs to be different, fun, and include mystery and ghosts.”*

Teachers acknowledged the importance of creativity but maintained a cautious stance. They favored stories grounded in reality or those that blended imaginative elements with real-life scenarios. From their perspective, books should support critical thinking and emotional awareness without encouraging detachment from reality. Teachers emphasized originality in narrative structure and valued stories that promoted reflective thinking or moral growth. Among the teacher participants, T2 expressed his/her views on book content by stating, *“Interesting topics always attract more attention. Children can lose themselves in a book—they can travel with it. For this reason, interesting, creative, and fantastical books are beneficial. However, they should not be completely detached from real life.”*

Parents’ views were split: while many supported fantasy elements that stimulated imagination, others preferred realistic stories that conveyed clear moral lessons. Several parents noted that highly fantastical stories might confuse younger readers or lead them to develop unrealistic expectations. Among the parent participants, P7 supported the code “having real elements” by stating that children’s books should convey certain moral values and that this can best be achieved through realistic books.

Dialogues, monologues, and shifts in narrative voice were particularly appreciated by students, who saw them as tools that brought characters to life. Parents and teachers, however, emphasized that such techniques must be well-structured to avoid confusion and support comprehension. S1 reinforced the code “having dialogue and monologue” by noting, *“I do not prefer books that rely solely on description. There should be more events and conversations, as this makes the book more engaging and fluent.”*

Overall, the creativity theme highlighted the tension between educational concerns and children’s desire for imaginative exploration. While adults focus on developmental appropriateness and clarity, children value novelty and emotional resonance. Successful storybooks are those that strike a balance—offering imaginative content within a coherent and purposeful narrative framework.

4.4. Content

Table 7. The Importance of Content When Choosing a Storybook

Category	Code	Teacher f	Student f	Parent f
Content	Being convenient for the child	10	10	10
	Being interesting and original	10	10	10
	Fantastic	5	10	5
	Being respectful to different cultures	10	7	10
	Adopting the principle of equality	9	7	10
	Not being prejudiced against different beliefs	10	8	10

According to Table 7, all participants agreed that the content of the book should carry some universal value judgements. In particular, it was emphasised that the content should not only be interesting and original, but should also include values such as equality, non-prejudice and respect for different cultures.

Content was one of the most emphasized dimensions in storybook selection across all participant groups. Teachers, parents, and students alike favored books that were engaging and original, but they differed in their understanding of what made content meaningful or appropriate.

Teachers placed high value on content that aligned with educational objectives, such as promoting empathy, moral reasoning, and respect for diversity. Books that encouraged inclusion and presented different cultural perspectives were favored. Teachers also expressed concern over biased or stereotypical portrayals, emphasizing that content should reflect values of equality and tolerance. Among the teacher participants, T5 expressed his/her views by stating, *“Books should not only entertain children but also guide their behavior and cultural development. They should foster*

empathy. A child who reads a book that promotes social discrimination, racism, or similar attitudes and behaviors may be influenced to display similar behaviors.”

Parents echoed many of the teachers’ views, especially regarding inclusivity and educational messages. However, parents were more likely to prefer books with explicitly stated morals and clear behavioral guidance. Stories that reinforced family values or mirrored real-life situations were seen as more useful in shaping children’s character and emotional development. Among the parent participants, P2 expressed expectations regarding book content by stating, *“I prefer books that teach equality, emphasize that no one is superior to another, promote tolerance and respect, and highlight prejudice-free friendships while clearly conveying these values.”*

Students, on the other hand, prioritized excitement, creativity, and relatability in content. They preferred narratives with humorous, adventurous, or fantastical plots. While moral themes were acknowledged, students were less interested in overtly didactic messages and more attracted to the emotional journey and imaginative possibilities within the story. S4 articulated his/her expectations by noting, *“For me, a book should primarily be entertaining and adventurous. I enjoy adventure. I do not prefer books that continuously attempt to teach moral lessons; instead, I prefer something exciting.”*

A notable point of divergence involved the use of fantasy. While all students expressed interest in fantastical content, some parents and teachers were cautious, fearing that excessive fantasy might hinder children’s grasp of reality. However, when used in moderation and structured within a coherent plot, fantasy was recognized by many as a powerful vehicle for imagination and metaphorical learning.

In sum, while all groups valued original and respectful content, their criteria for “good content” differed. Adults focused on messages and moral clarity, while students valued relatability, excitement, and emotional depth. Effective children’s literature must therefore strike a balance—offering content that both educates and captivates.

4.5. Plan and Design

Table 8. The Importance of Plan and Design When Choosing a Storybook

Category	Code	Teacher f	Student f	Parent f
Plan and design	Being colourful	8	10	6
	Being suitable with the topic	10	10	10
	Being illustrated	10	10	10
	Raising curiosity	10	10	10
	Being technological	7	6	5
	Being remarkable	10	10	5
	Being not exaggerated	3	2	2

According to Table 8, It was emphasised that the design and cover of the book should be appropriate to the content, illustrated, intriguing, remarkable and colourful. However, some participants stated that these features should not be exaggerated. The technological nature of the book was not found appropriate by some participants. It was emphasised that we are already too much into technology and they argued that the book should be read in its natural state by touching the pages.

The visual and structural design of storybooks was emphasized by all participant groups as a factor that significantly impacts children's reading experience. Key elements included illustrations, color schemes, layout, cover appeal, and overall coherence between visual and textual content.

Students were particularly responsive to visual stimuli. They consistently highlighted the importance of colorful pages, expressive illustrations, technological, and an attractive cover. These elements were viewed as central to their initial interest in a book and influenced whether they would choose to read it independently. Visual appeal, in their view, was synonymous with fun and excitement. For example, S8 expressed his/her views on the internal design of books by stating, *“I like illustrated*

books. While reading, I also look at the pictures. Sometimes I imagine things based on the illustrations. That's why the book can have many pictures, and it should also be colorful." Additionally, S2 stated, "The book may also include technological features; for example, I would like it to have a QR code."

Teachers, while acknowledging the motivational role of design, were more concerned with pedagogical alignment. They stressed that illustrations and layout should support comprehension and narrative flow. Books that incorporated visuals in a way that clarified or extended the storyline were preferred. Some teachers warned against overdesign, noting that excessive or irrelevant graphics could distract from the textual content. T10 elaborated on the importance of design by noting, "Illustrations should align with the content of the book, as they support students' comprehension. However, an excessive number of illustrations may distract the reader."

Parents echoed both perspectives. While they appreciated aesthetic quality and its role in capturing a child's attention, they also favored books that were visually balanced and not overly stimulating. Several parents indicated a preference for books where the visual elements complemented the story rather than overshadowing it. P3 emphasized the importance of design elements, noting, "The organization and illustrations of the book are important. The font type, font size, and visual elements should be well-balanced. Excessiveness should be avoided, and a balanced design should be maintained."

All groups valued books with clear typography, age-appropriate text size, and intuitive layout. The age category label and back-cover summaries were also considered useful features for guiding appropriate selection.

Ultimately, design was seen not as a decorative feature but as an integral part of the reading experience. When aligned with the narrative and tailored to the developmental level of the reader, visual and structural design elements were viewed as powerful tools for enhancing engagement, comprehension, and aesthetic appreciation.

4.6. Post-Reading Activities

Table 9. The Importance of Post-Reading Activity When Choosing a Storybook

Category	Code	Teacher f	Student f	Parent f
Post-reading Activity	Being reinforcing	2	3	10
	Promoting creativity	2	4	10
	Assessing understanding	3	4	5
	Being a means of enjoying quality time	1	2	5
	Being no need	2	7	0

According to Table 9, while having reading and comprehension activities at the end of the book was a desirable feature for parents, it was not very desirable for students. At the same time, some teachers found the activities appropriate in terms of facilitating comprehension, supporting creativity and being reinforcing. However, some teachers emphasised that there was no need for such activities.

Opinions regarding post-reading activities varied significantly among the three participant groups. These activities—ranging from comprehension questions and creative tasks to reflective exercises—were generally viewed as tools to reinforce understanding and extend engagement with the story.

Parents were the most supportive of including such activities. They considered them valuable for assessing comprehension, reinforcing learning, and encouraging discussion at home. Many parents felt that these tasks provided a structured way to ensure their child not only read the story but also understood and internalized its message. Among the parent participants, P1 supported the inclusion of post-reading activities by stating, "I find it very reasonable for a book to include an activity at the end. In this way, we can assess whether the child has understood the book."

Teachers offered more nuanced perspectives. While some appreciated the inclusion of post-reading exercises for their potential to stimulate critical thinking and creativity, others argued that such additions could feel overly instructional and detract from the intrinsic enjoyment of reading. They emphasized that any activities included should be optional, flexible, and aligned with the developmental stage of the child. Among the teacher participants, T1 supported the inclusion of post-reading activities by stating, *“I believe that end-of-book activities are beneficial. They foster critical thinking and evaluation skills. They are important for making learning more permanent.”* In contrast, T8 opposed this view, stating, *“I do not prefer activities. I do not want to convey the message that reading is done with grade anxiety. If necessary, I would ask students for different types of feedback after finishing the book.”*

Students, however, were generally less enthusiastic. While a few enjoyed drawing, role-playing, or games related to the book, the majority viewed written questions or assignments as burdensome. Many students expressed a desire for the story to stand on its own without additional tasks, highlighting the importance of preserving reading as an enjoyable and voluntary activity. Among the student participants, S2 expressed his/her opinion by stating, *“I don’t want an activity at the end of the book, especially not question-and-answer activities. This is not homework. Maybe it could be something like a drama activity.”*

The differences in attitudes toward post-reading activities reflect broader tensions between instructional goals and motivational considerations. When designed with care, such activities can deepen engagement and foster interpretive skills. However, if perceived as obligatory or overly academic, they may diminish a child’s enthusiasm for reading. Striking the right balance is essential for integrating post-reading elements into children’s literature in a meaningful way.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted criteria considered by teachers, parents, and students when selecting storybooks for primary school children. The results align with previous literature, emphasizing the significance of bibliographical information such as the book’s title, author, and illustrator in determining its appropriateness for young readers (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Teachers, in particular, demonstrated a preference for familiar authors, reinforcing previous findings that educators tend to rely on established literary figures to ensure the quality and educational value of books (Cremin et al., 2014). However, some teachers also expressed openness to new authors, suggesting a balance between familiarity and innovation in their selection process.

Students and parents, on the other hand, placed strong emphasis on the book’s title, genre, and age-appropriateness, supporting previous research that highlights the role of personal interest in reading engagement (McGeown, 2013). While parents underscored the importance of the publisher as an indicator of quality, students did not share this concern. This divergence suggests that children prioritize content and visual appeal over institutional credibility, which is consistent with studies on children’s reading motivations (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Language and style also emerged as significant factors, with all participants favoring simplicity, fluency, modernity, and an engaging tone. This finding is in accordance with research suggesting that accessible language enhances comprehension and reading motivation (Duke & Carlisle, 2011). Students prefer fluency, simplicity, modernity, and an engaging tone in the language and style of storybooks, while they do not consider the presence of literary elements important. This indicates that students seek content that is clear and entertaining, with less emphasis on literary style. Teachers and parents, on the other hand, place some value on literary elements. All participants agree that storybooks should foster creativity, which aligns with research emphasizing the role of imaginative narratives in cognitive and emotional development (Mar & Oatley, 2008).

Regarding content, participants agreed that books should be interesting, original, inclusive, and free from bias. This finding aligns with studies advocating for culturally responsive literature that promotes equality and respect for diverse perspectives (Jackson, 2023). This divergence can be

further interpreted through motivation theory, particularly the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Gambrell, 2011). While parents' support for post-reading activities reflects an outcome-oriented and comprehension-driven approach, students' resistance suggests a preference for autonomy and enjoyment-based reading experiences. When reading is framed as evaluative or task-oriented, it may shift from an intrinsically motivated activity to an externally regulated one. Teachers' divided perspectives in this study mirror this tension: some view activities as scaffolding tools that deepen engagement, while others fear that structured tasks may undermine reading-for-pleasure principles. This finding extends existing literature by illustrating how post-reading activities are not inherently motivating or demotivating; rather, their impact depends on how they are positioned—either as supportive extensions of narrative exploration or as assessment-driven obligations. However, a notable discrepancy emerged in attitudes toward fantastical elements: while students viewed fantasy as essential for engagement, teachers and parents expressed concerns that it might encourage unrealistic thinking. This tension reflects broader debates in children's literature, where fantasy is often celebrated for its capacity to stimulate imagination yet questioned for its perceived detachment from reality (Nikolajeva, 2013). Beyond a simple preference difference, this tension can be interpreted within the broader theoretical debate between imagination and realism in children's literature. While fantasy is often viewed by adults with caution due to concerns about detachment from reality, literary theorists argue that imaginative narratives function as cognitive and emotional simulations of real-life experiences (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Nikolajeva, 2013). From this perspective, fantasy does not represent escapism but rather a symbolic space in which children rehearse social roles, moral dilemmas, and emotional regulation. The students' strong preference for supernatural and imaginative elements in this study may therefore reflect a developmental need for narrative spaces that expand imaginative capacity, whereas adults' emphasis on realism appears rooted in pedagogical and moral accountability concerns. This finding contributes to the literature by demonstrating that the imagination–realism debate is not merely theoretical but actively negotiated across stakeholder groups in everyday book selection practices.

The study also found strong consensus on the importance of book layout and design. Participants emphasized the need for illustrations and visual appeal, provided they were not overly exaggerated. This supports research indicating that illustrations enhance narrative comprehension and engagement in young readers (Arizpe & Styles, 2016). Additionally, while parents valued post-reading activities as a means of reinforcing comprehension, teachers and students found them unnecessary, as they potentially detract from the enjoyment of reading. This finding aligns with research suggesting that imposed assessments can reduce intrinsic motivation for reading (Gambrell, 2011).

Overall, the findings suggest that book selection should be a balanced process, integrating pedagogical, cultural, and personal engagement factors. While teachers and parents prioritize developmental and educational aspects, students emphasize enjoyment and imagination. Future research could further explore how to reconcile these perspectives to enhance both literacy outcomes and reading motivation in young learners. Importantly, the originality of this study lies in its comparative multi-stakeholder framework. While previous research has examined parental, teacher, or student perspectives separately, this study demonstrates that storybook selection is not a linear decision-making process but a socially negotiated practice shaped by competing developmental, pedagogical, and experiential priorities. By identifying areas of convergence (e.g., age appropriateness, inclusivity) and divergence (e.g., fantasy, post-reading activities), the study provides a conceptual map of how book selection criteria are constructed and contested. This comparative lens contributes to the field by shifting the discussion from “what makes a good children's book” to “for whom and under which priorities a book is considered appropriate.”

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that storybook selection for primary school children is not a neutral or purely technical process but a socially negotiated practice shaped by distinct yet intersecting priorities of

teachers, parents, and students. Rather than merely differing in preferences, these stakeholder groups operate within different conceptual orientations.

Teachers approach storybook selection through a pedagogical accountability lens, prioritizing developmental appropriateness, inclusivity, and instructional alignment. Parents, in contrast, frame book selection within a moral-developmental orientation, emphasizing values transmission, comprehension monitoring, and character formation. Students, however, position storybooks within an experiential and imaginative framework, prioritizing enjoyment, fantasy, emotional resonance, and aesthetic engagement.

The tensions identified in this study—particularly regarding fantastical content and post-reading activities—reflect deeper theoretical contrasts between imagination and realism, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. While adults often emphasize structure, guidance, and educational outcomes, children foreground autonomy, immersion, and narrative pleasure. These differences do not represent incompatibilities but rather complementary dimensions of children’s literature.

Conceptually, the findings suggest that effective storybook selection operates at the intersection of three axes: pedagogical value, moral-social alignment, and experiential engagement. Books that succeed in integrating these dimensions—supporting development without suppressing imagination, and encouraging reflection without undermining enjoyment—are more likely to foster sustainable reading motivation.

Therefore, storybook selection should be understood not simply as choosing “appropriate” texts, but as balancing structured educational intentions with children’s imaginative agency. Recognizing this balance may contribute to more inclusive, motivating, and developmentally responsive reading practices in both home and school environments.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study may contribute to a clearer understanding of the criteria considered in the selection of storybooks for primary school children. In this respect, the results can offer practical insights for children’s book authors by highlighting key issues to consider when writing storybooks, as well as for publishers when making decisions during the publication process. In addition, the study may provide teachers with an opportunity to reflect on and review the criteria valued by parents and students in book selection, thereby supporting more balanced and inclusive decision-making practices.

At the same time, this study has several limitations. First, the research was designed as qualitative descriptive design and conducted with a relatively small number of participants. The results are limited to the perspectives of the participating teachers, parents, and students, and different findings may emerge in other socio-cultural contexts or educational settings. In addition, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews based on participants’ self-reported views. The study was also limited to a specific age group of primary school students, and variables such as school type, regional differences, and socio-economic background were not examined in depth.

In light of these limitations, future research could employ quantitative or mixed-methods designs with larger and more diverse samples to enhance the scope of the findings. Studies including different age groups, school types, and cultural contexts may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the criteria used in storybook selection. Furthermore, experimental or longitudinal research designs could be used to examine the effects of selected storybooks on children’s reading motivation, language development, and socio-emotional skills over time.

Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of scientific research. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. For participants under the age of 18, parental consent was secured prior to data collection. Participants were informed

that their identities would remain confidential and that the data collected would be used solely for scientific purposes. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

Author Contributions

The first author was responsible for data collection, data analysis, and the final review of the manuscript. The second author contributed to the theoretical framework, participated in data analysis, and supported the interpretation of the findings. Both authors contributed to the overall writing process and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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