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*Research Article*

# Illustrated Storybooks for Preschool Children Published in Turkey Between 1980-2013: A Study Based on Preschool Education Reforms

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the distribution of topics featured in illustrated storybooks that address preschool children. The sample of the current study included a total of 1,050 illustrated storybooks published in Turkish between 1980 and 2013. Books for pre-school children that incorporated the components of setting, attempt, and consequence were selected using the convenience sampling technique. The trends observed in children's books were examined from an educational perspective. Preschool curriculum reforms in Turkey were utilized in interpreting the trends observed in children's books. The results demonstrated that there had been a general increase in all topics between 1980 and 2013. Over the years, topics targeted in children's books have shifted from general, individual, and social topics to special topics due to educational reforms. Particularly in recent years, societal trends and the concepts and values parents wish their children to learn have resulted in a demand for and an increase in the number of books that target difficult topics and that teach values, character education, social skills training, morals, and religious topics. The number of books treating religious topics, character education, and moral education are estimated to continue to increase.

## Keywords

Preschool education • Illustrated storybooks • Children's literature • Themes of children's books

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Reading is one of mankind's most important cognitive activities. Interest in reading starts in childhood and develops with encouragement from adults who are close to the child (Lin, 2012). In general, picture books contain artistic images and topics dealing with life, education, emotions, imagination, creativity, and culture (Lin, 2012). A picture book is characterized by its narration of a story through the use of visual descriptions and words in equal proportions (Lynch-Brown, 1993).

Children's literature is an educational tool (Puurtinen, 1998). Children's books support the development of children's literacy skills and help them develop an understanding about the world and social norms. Children's books have a didactic structure, either explicit or implicit, the goal of which is to benefit the child. Children's books primarily help children to build reading skills and also aid them in comprehending what they have read (Puurtinen, 1998).

The purpose of this study was to examine the distribution of topics featured in illustrated storybooks that address preschool children in Turkey. The trends observed in children's books in Turkey have been examined from an educational perspective that includes preschool curriculum reforms in Turkey.

### **A Brief History of Children's Literature in Turkey**

The matter of preparing books for children first became a subject of discussion between 1839 and 1876 during the Ottoman Era of Reforms (Öztürk Çelik, 1998). Prior to that, as in the rest of the world, there had been an abundance of rhymes, fairytales, legends, and epics. Also at this time, the humor of the Nasreddin Hodja stories appeared as an oral literature (Öztürk Çelik, 1998).

The language and narration in books about children, *Hayriyye* and *Lütfiyye*, which had been published before the 19th century in Turkey, were not at a level that children could understand (Öztürk Çelik, 1998; Sinar, 2006). The Era of Reforms saw the beginning of the translation of children's classics from around the world into Turkish. A concentration of diverse works in this domain was seen, however, in the era of the Second Constitutional Monarchy (1908-1923), while the real period of activity started with the acceptance of the new Turkish alphabet in 1928 in the Era of the Republic. The 1928-1935 period saw an onslaught of primers and reading books (Çıkla, 2005; Öztürk Çelik, 1998).

After the 1930s, well-known Turkish poets and writers began to compose works for children. This trend increased even more in the 1950s. The competitions initiated by the Turkish Language Association, the Ministry of Culture, and Doğan Kardeş Publications, as well as the children's literature contests organized in many fields between 1973-1974 by Arkın Publishers, invigorated the children's literary scene. It

is a fact, however, that there has still yet to be an adequate number of quality books for preschool children. The *Ayşegül* series of books, known in Belgium as *Martine* and as *Debbie* in the US, were translated in 1967 and continue to be known as the first example of an illustrated storybook published in Turkey (Öztürk Çelik, 1998).

The first native illustrated storybook for preschoolers in Turkey, *Kirpi Masalı* (The Porcupine's Story) was written by the writer and illustrator, Can Göknil, in 1974 (Çıkla, 2005; Öztürk Çelik, 1998). Later in 1979, the artist and author, Serpil Ural, published an illustrated storybook by the name of *Top Tavşan* (Ball Rabbit). With UNESCO's pronouncement of World Children's Day in 1979, publishing and activities in this area expanded with various publishing houses focusing on children's books. This has led to a greater number and a more enriched quality of published books (Öztürk Çelik, 1998; Sinar, 2006). Ultimately, preschool children's literature in Turkish has improved in both quality and quantity over the last 30 years, and the scientific research carried out on the subject of children's literature has begun to increase (Öztürk Çelik, 1998; Sinar, 2006).

The production of illustrated children's books for the 0-3 age group is a relatively new area in Turkey. In a study by Gönen, Uludağ, Fındık Tanrıbuyurdu, and Tüfekçi (2014), an increase in the number of books was shown to have been produced in recent years for this age group. This may be explained by the fact that bookstores now make more recent books available. Other reasons for the increase may be the presence of more conscious families and instructors, and the fact that publishers offer more books for sale in response to an increase in demand. The original language of 54.1% of these books was Turkish, and 49% were translations from English into Turkish. Despite this increase, the number of first printings of illustrated books in Turkey is about 2,000 while this figure is at least 5,000 in Western countries (Kozikoğlu, 2013).

In the last 40 years, the number of books published yearly in Turkey has been in the vicinity of 6,000. In 1965, however, the number of different books was 5,700. This figure had not reached a significant level as of 1991. Meanwhile, the numbers of books printed fell from 5,000 to below 2,000. The number of books published in 1992 was 6,150, and the number of newspapers and periodicals was 2,910. If the average number of printed copies is to be accepted as 2,000, the total number of books produced amounts to 12,300,000, which means that there was less than one book for every three individuals. The types of books published at the beginning of the new millennia can be seen as almost the same as in 1982 (6,190 books), and the number of copies printed has shown a rapid decline. This situation correlates with reading habits. The habit of reading is at a very low level in Turkey. Within the framework of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), among 35 countries, Turkey was found in 28th place (Literate Turkey Preliminary Information Report, 2003), and in 86th among 173 countries (Kozikoğlu, 2013). Forty percent of the

population has never gone to a library in their lifetime, and the percentage of people who have gone to a library at least once in their lives is only 31% ([Literate Turkey Preliminary Information Report, 2003](#)).

When looking at developments in illustrated books for preschool children in Turkey, one can see that there was progress after the 1990s. Because of the economic crisis in the 1970s, illustrated storybooks did not make much headway, but activity increased in this genre in later years. Although the content of these books was favorable, the same thing, however, could not be said for their physical appearance ([Ergöl, 2008](#)). In a study by [Erdoğan \(1999\)](#), a review of 286 books published in Turkey between 1996 and 1998 was performed, and the production of children's books in Turkey was reported to exhibit a high number of physical shortcomings and inadequacies. The political events that took place in Turkey in the 1980s had a negative effect on children's books because of societal pressures and prohibitions.

There has been an increase in the number of reference books and literary books for children and young people over the last 10 years (1995-2005). The number of native authors of children's books and books for young people steadily increased in the years 1980-2005, and the illustrations in children's book began to display much better examples than works written before 1985. Between 1995 and 2005, there had been an increase in popular European-based cultural publications (books and magazines). From 2000-2005, an annual average of 1,600 to 2,400 different varieties of native and foreign publications for children and young people had been published. In the last 15 years, 60-75% of published works have been translations. The books published for children in Turkey most commonly target ages between 8 and 10. The percentage of native publications for children and young people within the general total for the 1990-2005 period was within the range of 25-40% ([Literate Turkey Preliminary Information Report, 2006](#)).

There are a total of 73 million people living in Turkey, and this figure has been increasing by 1.5 million every year. There are a total of 15 million students enrolled in the country's elementary, middle, and high school groups ([Kozikoğlu, 2013](#)). Out of this population, 88.8% are literate while 17.2% do not know how to read and write. The reading activities pursued in school force a dependency on textbooks, and very little time is devoted to extracurricular reading activities ([Literate Turkey Preliminary Information Report, 2006](#)).

In the last 10 years, a significant increase has been witnessed in the number and quality of children's books. Rates of publishing children's books are steadily rising. Not only are works from Turkish authors being printed, but so are high-quality translations. The world's best, most famous books have taken their places on bookstore shelves. The number of children's books was 431 in 2007, whereas in 2011 this figure had

grown to 6,319. The number of printed books has risen from 3.1 million to 8.5 million (Kozikoğlu, 2013). In developed countries, however, the situation is different. In 1970 in the United States, children's books occupied the shelves of many school libraries and bookstores. As of the 21st century, 14,000 children's books are now being published every year (Tunnell & Jacobs, 2013). Even today, many more books are being published in the West. The number of books in the United States is more than 100 million, and this figure is also close to 100 million in the United Kingdom.

### **Preschool Education Reforms**

When viewed from an historical standpoint (1952-2013), in the preschool education programs implemented in Turkey, the first Kindergarten Program and Guidelines, published in 1952, can be seen as a temporary course program for kindergarten teachers. This program, however, only contained an outline of activities required for teachers in preschool educational institutions, and only topics such as how to carry out these activities were addressed (Sapsağlam, 2013). In 1989, the Preschool Education Program was published, which contained the aims of the curriculum. The program consisted of a list of 30 units of sample activities. Accordingly, teachers based their unit (unit headings) and daily planning on the framework programs drawn up by the Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (Ministry of National Education), and they put together and prepared these on the basis of the goals and target behaviors as set forth by the Ministry. In 1994, the pre-school program was divided into kindergarten and nursery school programs. The nursery school program was devoted to 0- to 36-month olds, and its focus was on these children's cognitive, lingual, socio-emotional, self-care, and physical development. The kindergarten program was a framework program that had been drawn up to support every aspect of the development of children between the ages of 36 and 72 months (Gelişli & Yazıcı, 2012). The main objective of the program was to ensure that children reached the determined goals and target behaviors. Various subjects had been set down as a basis to meet these goals and attain the target behaviors foreseen in the program. The new pre-school education program was revised in 2002, ending the "teaching of subjects" and instead placing a focus on teaching goals and behaviors. This program addressed children between the ages of 36 and 72 months (Sağsağlam, 2013).

Because of the many differences in practice between the pre-school education program and other elementary school programs, another revision was made in terms of purpose, structure, and approach; in 2006, a new pre-school program was implemented. This program sought to support 36- to 72-month old children in their psycho-motor, socio-emotional, lingual, and cognitive development; to teach them self-care skills; and to prepare them for elementary school (Gelişli & Yazıcı, 2012). The pre-school curriculum was last revised in 2013. To make a short summary of the

pre-school education programs in Turkey, one can say that the underlying philosophy of the programs has shifted from teacher-centered to learner-centered, and they have become more aligned with the constructivist philosophy (Koçyiğit, 2014).

Education of young children continues to be one of the most important priorities of educational policies in Turkey. Despite applications focused on this area and the improvements that have been made, enrollment in preschool education has not reached the targeted level. In 2012, Turkey's educational system was revised. The new system became based on a system of "4+4+4." In other words, the stages of education have been designed to consist of four years of elementary school, four years of middle school, and four years of high school. The five years of elementary school that had existed previously were combined with the three-year middle school program and called primary education. The duration of high school remained at four years. In the new 4+4+4 system, pre-school education was not made compulsory; this, in conjunction with the confusion about which age children should start primary school, has had a negative effect on pre-school enrollment. In the 2013-2014 school year, enrollment in pre-school education was 28% among the 3-5 age group and 37.9% among the 4-5 age group. The enrollment rate in pre-school among the 5-year-old group is estimated to have been 59.6%. While the enrollment rate for 5-year-old preschoolers was 48% in the 2012-2013 school year, an 11.6% increase was seen in the 2013-2014 school year. Nevertheless, the inequality among provinces in terms of the percentage of pre-school enrollment remains stable (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, 2013).

When preschool education became more widespread in Turkey and national education programs became devised for pre-school children, efforts channeled in this direction influenced the quality of educational materials for children. Until 1952, preschool educational activities had been formulated under guidelines, but after this time, they began to be included in a prepared program. It is worth noting that the preschool education programs were later revised in 1989, 1994, 2002, 2006, and lastly in 2013 (Gelişli & Yazıcı, 2012; Ministry of National Education, 2006, 2013; Sapsağlam, 2013). All developments related to preschool education have influenced the production of books and educational materials for children within this age group. Although the subjects of books targeting preschool children have been examined in various studies, previous research has only encompassed limited periods of time and very few books (Erdoğan, 1999; Körükçü, 2012; Uzmen, 1993; Üzel, 2007; Veziroğlu & Gönen, 2012). The current study aims to address the limitation of previous studies by examining a large number of illustrated story books published over a wider span of time in Turkey. The distribution of subjects targeted in children's books has been interpreted based on the shifts observed in Turkish Preschool Education Programs.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive study is to examine the topical distribution of illustrated storybooks for preschool children published in Turkey between 1980 and 2013, and to interpret the trend observed in the topics of illustrated storybooks based on preschool educational reforms.

## Method

### Sample of the Study

The sample of this study consisted of 1,050 illustrated storybooks published in Turkish between 1980 and 2013. Books for pre-school children that incorporated the components of setting, attempt, and consequence were selected using the convenience sampling technique. Of the books obtained from a total of 98 publishing houses, 763 had Turkish authors and 287 were written by foreign authors; 634 were part of a set and the rest were stand-alone books; 683 addressed children aged 3-6, 40 were written for the 2-6 age group, 15 were for children 3-4 years of age, and 312 were for the 4-7 age group. A large majority of the books ( $n = 953$ ) were 1st editions, 59 were 2nd editions, 29 were 3rd editions, four were 4th editions, three were 6th editions, and two were 5th editions. Twenty of the books were printed between 1980 and 1988, 92 between 1989 and 1993, 135 between 1994 and 2001, 53 between 2002 and 2005, and 750 between 2006 and 2013.

### Data Collection Instrument

The researcher used a book review form to collect and record the data for the study. This form was created after the researcher had examined previous studies (Bilgin, 2011; Erdoğan, 1999; Gönen, Katrancı, Uygun, & Uçuş, 2011; Kutlu, 2011; Uzmen, 1993; Üzel, 2007). The form consisted of two parts. The first part contained bibliographical information about the books. In the first part, bibliographical details about the books listed the name of the book, author of the book, illustrator of the book, publisher of the book, year of publication, edition, age group, the number of pages, and a short summary. The second part contained items that reflected the subject categories of the book. Initially the books were recorded based on eight predetermined categories. These categories were determined using other studies. Content analysis was used to examine and determine the new categories. Two new categories (religious topics and special subjects) were created in the process of analysis. After this, the sub-topics of special subjects were created. A total of 10 subject headings were used to code the study data, and six categories were used for the sub-topics. These headings were as follows:

- Friendship/environment: Stories about friendship, children and their friends, neighbor relations, and so on.

- Self: Stories about a child (main character), his/her emotions, and related topics.
- Family: Stories about family relationships, children and their family members, and the like.
- Adventure: Stories about the adventures of a child (main character).
- Social topics: Stories about social and cultural topics, social and community rules, and similar things.
- Travel: Stories about seeing places, traveling, and other similar topics.
- Nature awareness and love for animals: Stories about the importance and wonders of nature, characteristics of animals, care for animals, and so forth.
- Health: Stories about being healthy, health foods, the human body, bones, teeth, and such.
- Religious topics: Stories about Islamic topics.
- Special subjects: Books that were categorized under the heading of special subjects were grouped into six sub-categories. (a) difficult subjects, (b) teaching values, (c) character building, (d) social skills training, (e) moral education, and (f) character building through religion.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The books that constituted the data for the research were obtained from children's libraries, retail bookstores, and preschool libraries. The researcher selected illustrated story books that had been published between 1980 and 2013 which consisted of three basic story elements (setting, attempt, consequence). After recording the bibliographical details of the books (name, publisher, year of publication, edition, author, illustrator, etc.), each book was read once to determine its subject, then a short summary of the book was recorded in the book review form. In the second part, tool content analysis was used to examine the subject theme. Initially the books were recorded based on the eight predetermined categories. The two new categories, religious topics and special subjects, were created during the process of analysis. If a book had a special topic, the researcher then wrote its sub-topic theme, creating new categories in the process of analysis. A sample of the book-coding system has been given in the appendix.

Descriptive statistics were calculated using statistical analysis software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19. To ensure reliability of coding, 250 books from the study sample were analyzed by an expert separate from the researcher. The percentage of consistency between the two coders was 0.98, indicating high inter-rater reliability.

The books comprising the sample were printed within the 1980-2013 period. This period was divided into 5 groups. The grouping by years corresponds with the preschool education program was adopted and reformed in Turkey (1989, 1994, 2002, and 2006 programs). Accordingly, the groups were labeled as: (a) 1980-1988; (b) 1989-1993, (c) 1994-2001, (d) 2002-2005, and (e) 2006-2013, and the distribution of subjects in each group was examined and compared.

## Results

The study aimed to examine the topics of illustrated storybooks for preschool children published in Turkey between 1980 and 2013 to determine the trends in the choice of topics over this period.

Subjects	<i>f</i>	%
Friendship	222	21.1
Self	110	10.5
Family	89	8.5
Adventure	19	1.8
Social	31	3.0
Travel	10	1.0
Nature	104	9.9
Health	45	4.3
Special	358	34.1
Religion	62	5.9
Total	1050	100.0

The topical distribution of books comprising the sample can be seen in Table 1. The table shows that special topics were the topics most commonly addressed (34.1%). This category was followed by the topics of friendship (21.1%), self (10.5%), nature (9.9%), family (8.5%), religion (5.9%), health (4.3%), social situations (3.0%), adventure (1.8%) and travel (1.0%).

The topical distribution of books is presented in Figure 1. An increase in all topics can be seen in the figure over the period 1980-2013. During this period, the lack of books addressing travel, health, or special topics is also observed. Of the books published between 1989 and 1993, the topics of family ( $n = 8$ ) and friendship ( $n = 6$ ) displayed the greatest number of books, whereas the other subjects only had a few, with no books to be found on religious topics ( $n = 0$ ). The books published between 1994 and 2001 were mostly on the topics of friendship ( $n = 50$ ), self ( $n = 25$ ), and family ( $n = 21$ ). There were no books on religious topics or travel ( $n = 0$ ), with very few to be found for the other topics. Books published between 2002 and 2005 comprised 5.0% of the sample ( $n = 53$ ). During these years, nature was found to be the most popular

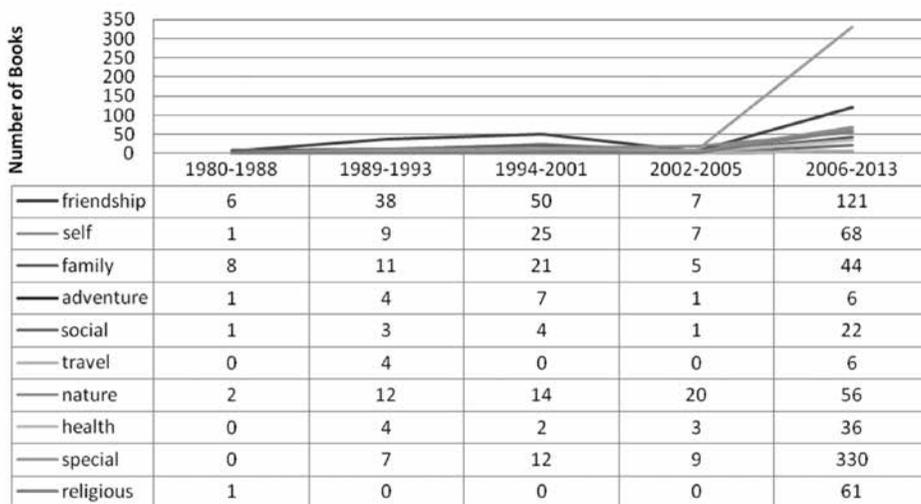


Figure 1. Topical distribution of books that comprised the sample.

topic (n = 20), no books were found for travel or religious topics (n = 0), and only a few were published for the other topics. In the 2006-2013 period, an increase was seen in the numbers of books published in all topics (n = 750). In this period, special topics received the greatest attention (n = 330). This category was followed by the topics of friendship (n = 121), self (n = 68), religion (n = 61), nature (n = 56), family (n = 44), health (n = 36), social (n = 22), adventure (n = 6), and travel (n = 6).

The sub-topical distribution of books published on special topics between 1989 and 2013 is presented in Figure 2. The results demonstrated that the content of the books in

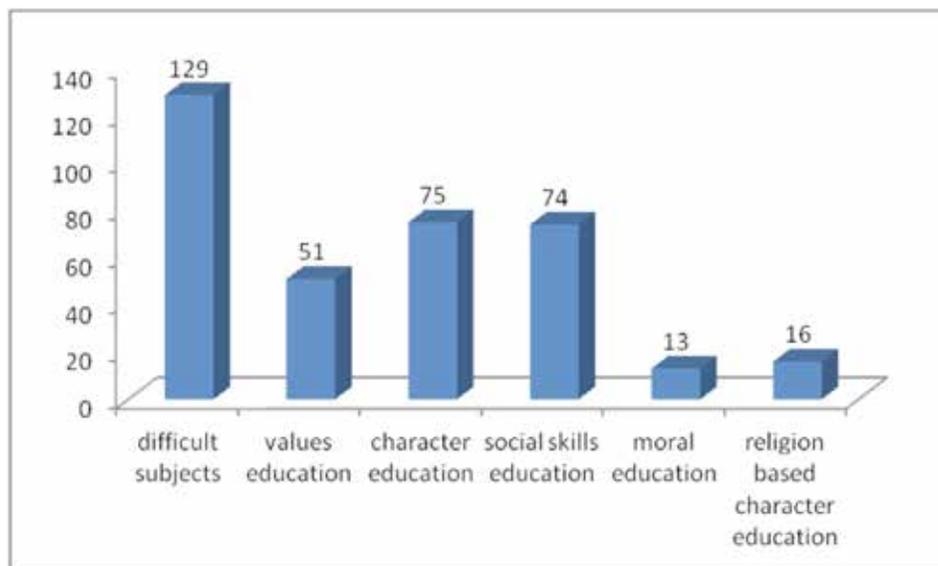


Figure 2. Sub-topical distribution of books published on special topics between 1989 and 2013.

this period focused mostly on special topics (n = 358). Of the books on special topics, the sub-topic of difficult subjects was the most addressed (n = 129). Following this sub-topic were character education (n = 75), social skills training (n = 74), values education (n = 51), religion-based character education (n = 16), and moral education (n = 13).

Table 2  
*Distribution of Special Books by Most Popular Sub-Topic*

Special topics	f	%	f=358 (special books) %
<b>Difficult subjects</b>			<b>n=129</b>
Sibling relations/sibling rivalry	20	1.9	15.5
Fear	25	2.4	19.4
School phobia/school adjustment	14	1.3	10.9
Respect for differences	13	1.2	10.1
<b>Value education</b>			<b>n=51</b>
Love	6	0.6	11.8
Responsibility	6	0.6	11.8
Honesty	6	0.6	11.8
<b>Character education</b>			<b>n=75</b>
Cleanliness	20	1.9	26.7
Solidarity/sharing	19	1.8	25.3
Being happy with one's own characteristics	10	1.0	13.3
<b>Social skills education</b>			<b>n=74</b>
Household rules	22	2.1	29.7
rules to obey in society	16	1.5	21.6
Using courteous words	14	1.3	18.9
<b>Morals education</b>			<b>n=13</b>
Telling lies	7	0.7	53.8
Getting permission	4	0.4	30.8
Obedience	2	0.2	15.4
<b>Religion based character education</b>			<b>n=16</b>
Smiling/being polite	2	0.2	12.5
Visiting the sick	2	0.2	12.5
Honesty	2	0.2	12.5
<b>Total</b>	1050	100.0	

Sub-topical distribution by popularity of special topics books is presented in Table 2. From the sub-topic of difficult subjects, the most popular content was in the category of fear (19.4%), sibling relations/sibling rivalry (15.5%), school phobia/school adjustment (10.9%), and respect for differences (10.1%). In the sub-topic of value education, the values of love, responsibility, and honesty were the most addressed (11.8%). In the sub-topic of character education, the topics of cleanliness (26.7%), solidarity/sharing (25.3%), and being happy with one's own characteristics (13.3%) were the most addressed. In the sub-topic of social skills education, household rules (29.7%), rules to obey in society (21.6%) and using courteous words (18.9%) made up the majority of the content. In the sub-topic of morals education, telling lies received the most attention (53.8%). The other topics that were addressed were

getting permission (30.8%) and obedience (15.4%). Lastly, the sub-topic of religion-based character education mostly included the topics of smiling/being polite, visiting the sick, and honesty, each at 12.5%.

### Discussion

This study was carried out to examine the topics of illustrated storybooks for preschool children published in Turkey between 1980 and 2013 in order to determine the trends in the choice of topics during this period. The trends in the topical distribution of the books were examined based on Turkey's preschool education program reforms. Between 1980 and 2013, a total of four preschool education program reforms (1989, 1994, 2002, 2006) had been implemented, yielding a total of five different periods (Sapsağlam, 2013).

Twenty of the books were printed between 1980 and 1988, which corresponds to the years prior to the implementation of the 1989 program. Very few books that were accessed belonged to these years. The 1980s were a special period in Turkey's history. After 1980, the September regime that overtook Turkey and the Constitution of 1982 gave rise to many economic, political, social, and ideological changes in Turkey (Tarhan, 2012). The closing of bookshops and publishing houses, as well as widespread censorship of books during that period, had a detrimental effect on the development of children's literature (Ergöl, 2008).

The number of books published in the periods of 1989-1993 and 1994-2001 continued to be small. It can be said that there was difficulty accessing books published in these years, and there were few books on the library shelves. According to the [Literate Turkey Preliminary Information Report \(2006\)](#), the 10-year period between 1995 and 2005 witnessed an increase in the number of books, but books in general took 235th place in the list of necessities in Turkey. Looking at international averages, most school children were seen to have had more than 25 books in their homes, whereas only 19% of students had more than 25 books in Turkey. The low demand for books may have led to fewer numbers of books being published. The population of 0-6 year-old children in Turkey is approximately 6 million. When you add the 15 million children in elementary, secondary, and high school levels to this number, you face a total of 21 million children. The reading rate, however, is not as high as it is in Western societies (Kozikoğlu, 2013).

The number of books published between 2002 and 2005 was again not substantial. This could be due to this only being a three-year period. The majority of books were published between 2006 and 2013. The importance placed on preschool education increased after the 1990s; to date, enrollment rates have been steadily rising. Efforts to provide preschool children with quality educational environments and materials have gained momentum (Derman & Başal, 2010). According to Kozikoğlu (2013),

the children's book publishing industry has expanded in the last decade and the number of quality children's books has substantially increased. Many books from both world literature and Turkish authors now occupy bookstore shelves.

A look at the topical distribution of books reviewed from the 2006-2013 period shows that the most popular special topics were: (a) difficult subjects, (b) values education, (c) character education, (d) social skills education, (e) moral education, and (f) religion based character education. Early childhood teachers frequently work with children who have some behavioral and adaptive problems and who experience many psychological problems and stress in their lives. Teachers can utilize children's books written for specific purposes to help young children cope with and handle difficult situations in their classrooms (Prater, 2000; Quzts, Taylor, & Taylor, 2003; Tielsch-Goddard, 2011). Turkish early-childhood educators appear to recognize such books as valuable resources in supporting young children who face difficult life situations, thus the number of published illustrated storybooks on special subjects has increased.

Karatay (2007) said that literature is used in character building and that books are employed for this purpose. This is because the characters in a book teach a child many values (justice, family unity, independence, peace, science, diligence, cooperation, sensitivity, honesty, aesthetics, tolerance, hospitality, freedom, wellness, respect, affection, responsibility, cleanliness, patriotism, benevolence) that are a part of character building. Just as every culture has books that address the values that are a part of expected behavior in society, at the same time these books also carry universal values. Basic values such as love, respect, sensitivity, charity, responsibility, fairness, honesty, and understanding carry great weight in different cultures in terms of building ties of social, political, and economic cooperation. Gonen, Aydos, and Erturk (2012) examined picture books in terms of learning social skills in their study. For this, they evaluated children's picture books published at different publishing houses between 1995 and 2011; they reviewed the books in terms of developing the skills of becoming aware of one's emotions, helping others, defending one's rights, thinking positively about oneself, and self-expression. They noted that children's books in general focused on the same social skills in the same way.

Special topics were followed by self, nature, family, religious, health, social topics, adventure, and travel. In a similar study, Körükçü (2012) examined 124 picture books that had been published between 1987 and 2010. Half of these books had been written on subjects related to social life. Üzel (2007) found that the topics of books were mostly stories about familiar people, animal stories, tales of adventure, and historical stories. A recent study reported that cleanliness/hygiene and friendship/companionship were the most popular topics addressed in children's picture books, whereas the least addressed topics were adventures, moral topics, and social rules

(Gönen, Uygun, Erdoğan, & Katrancı, 2012).

The findings of the present study demonstrated that there had been a general increase in all topics between 1980 and 2013. The number of books published between 1980 and 1988 was quite low. During this period, there were no books on travel, health, or special subjects. In another study, Erdoğan (1989) examined children's literature published in Turkey between 1985 and 1987. According to the results of that study, the most commonly addressed topics were religion and moral values. Other popular themes included universal topics such as pain, love, peace, and friendship.

Among the books published between 1989 and 1993, family and friendship were the most popular topics; the number of books on other topics was low, and there were no books on religious topics. Previous studies also reported that a great number of illustrated children's books were published on the topic of family, emphasizing peer and family/friend relations (Işitan & Gönen, 2006; Uzmen, 1993). The Preschool Education Program, implemented in 1989, presented the educational goals that target four- to five-year-old children under four domains: physical and motor development, social and emotional development, mental development, and language development. In an effort to realize these goals, a total of 19 units were formulated for the different age groups. This program was subject focused, and relationships such as family relations and friendships were the subject of the program (Alisinoğlu & Bay, 2007). Under the influence of this program's implementation, the content of children's books appeared to largely focus on social and academic topics during this period.

Books published between 1994 and 2001 were able to mostly be seen on friendship, self, and family issues. There were no books on religious topics nor travel, and very few books on other topics. During this period, the importance of preschool education increased, because of the development of the Preschool Education Program of 1994 (Gelişli & Yazıcı, 2012). This preschool education program differed from the program of 1989. The program of 1994 included separate programs for 0-3, 4-5, and 6-year-old children. Educational goals were changed into targets, and goals were further defined by expansions into several developmental areas including being self-aware, psychomotor skills, self-care skills, emotional development, social skills, cognitive skills, language skills, aesthetics, and creativity. This program also aimed to fulfill its targets and goals with the use of units in schools (Alisinoğlu & Bay, 2007; Düşek & Dönmez, 2012). In this period, the preschool education program was subject focused. Therefore, the main topics in the children's books produced in this period were family, environment, self, and social relations.

During the period 2002-2005, the most popular topic was nature; travel and religious topics were not addressed, and only a few other topics were published. A review of the children's books on nature that were published between 1995 and 2010 indicated that these books generally targeted children six and older (Gonen & Guler, 2011).

Saçkes (2014) reported that very few families had shown a preference for science topics in pre-school classrooms. Gülay and Ekici (2010) suggested that the preschool education program devoted very little space to environmental education. According to the findings of this study and other studies, it would be fair to state that nature and science topics are not popular in Turkey. But during the 2002-2005 period, these topics became popular. This period was only limited to three years. Therefore, the number of books published is also rather limited, so it does not reflect the general situation.

The preschool education program implemented in 2002 was designed to target 36- to 72-months-old children, and it abandoned the subject- or content-focused concept of education. In other words, the units were removed from the program and the achievement of program goals was suggested with learning activities. In contrast to the program of 1994, a total of five developmental areas were included in the program of 2002. These areas included psychomotor, socio-emotional, cognitive and lingual, and self-care skills (Alisinanoğlu & Bay, 2007). The books published in this period covered relatively broader topics, possibly due to the increase in importance placed on preschool education. Again, from 1989 onwards, more space was allotted, albeit not in a pronounced way, to special topics in children's books. The reason for this may be the adoption of a more child-centered program.

In the 2006-2013 period, there was an increase in the numbers of books published in all topics. In those years, special topics received the greatest attention, followed by the topics of friendship, self, religion, nature, family, health, social, adventure, and travel. In the 2000s in Turkey, preschool education gained more importance compared to the previous decades, and great progress was recorded in the provision of preschool education (Derman & Başal, 2010). In the 2006 preschool education program, family participation was given more attention, and the concepts of diversity and multiculturalism were included in the program (Düşek & Dönmez, 2012). During the 2006-2013 period, a significant increase in the percentage of books was found on the theme of religion. In fact, a recent study with 1,456 parents of preschool-age children reported that about one-third of families had morals and ethics as their first preference of subjects preferred for teaching in preschool; again, a large majority (55.2%) had cited morals and ethics within their top three choices (Saçkes, 2014). According to the *Literate Turkey Preliminary Information Report (2006)*, during the 1980-2005 period, there had been an increase in the number of books for children and young people on religious topics. In recent years, Turkey has steadily become more conservative, and religious values have gained importance (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009; Çarkoğlu & Toprak, 2006; Tarhan, 2012). Also Erdoğan (1989) generally examined children's literature published between 1985 and 1987 in Turkey, and he found the most commonly addressed topics had been religion and moral values. Literature based on religious themes is typically used to explain religious and moral

issues to children (Okumuşlar, 2006; Peyton & Jalongo, 2008; Zeece, 1998). For this reason, storybooks are seen as an important medium in providing children with religious values. Erdi (2008) reviewed books published in Turkey by Turkish authors that appealed to elementary school children, reviewing books published between 1980 and 1985 and between 2000 and 2005.

The findings of the current study suggest that *special topics* made up the majority of the books' topics. Accordingly, the sub-topic of difficult topics was seen to be the most commonly addressed among these books. Difficult topics have gained importance in the children's literature of today. The number of children's books that cover social and moral topics, and more specific topics such as death and divorce, has increased (Chen, 2012; Davis, 1986; Madsen, 2012). Again, character education, social skills training, values education, and religion-based character education were also among the most addressed sub-topics, as well as was moral education. The 2006 program was a developmental program which adopted a spiral curriculum approach. The concepts of family participation, multiculturalism, and valuing children were given greater importance, and a child-centered philosophy was adopted. This may explain why the books published during this period concentrated on special topics.

Veziroğlu and Gönen (2009) suggested that illustrated children's books published in Turkey have not adequately covered or supported all of the developmental areas that were included in the 2006 preschool program. The social and emotional developmental area was the most covered area in children's books. Books targeting social and emotional development typically included the following concepts: getting to know oneself, becoming aware of one's emotions, controlling one's emotions, motivating oneself, being aware of others' emotions, managing relations with others, showing tolerance, and respecting differences. The findings of the current study suggest that the number of books targeting special topics has increased, possibly due to the implementation of the 2006 preschool education program.

This research was limited to 1,050 illustrated fictional children's books published between 1980 and 2013 that consisted of three basic story elements (setting, attempt, and consequence). The other books for children, such as nonfiction science books, concept books, fairy tales, and so forth were not included in the present study. More studies are needed to examine illustrated picture books in Turkey. Such studies should move beyond basic content analysis and focus on the impact of societal and educational changes and on the quality and quantity of children's books published in Turkey. The findings of this study will, however, add insight to other studies in terms of revealing the different topics that have been treated in illustrated storybooks. The results of this study showed that, due to educational reforms, the subjects treated in books addressing preschool children in Turkey over the years have shifted

from general, individual, and societal topics to special topics. Preschool education programs in Turkey have shifted from the teacher-centered approach to a learning-centered approach. This change in program philosophy has apparently influenced the changes in topics addressed in children's books. In recent years in particular, societal trends and the concepts and values parents wish their children to learn have resulted in a demand for and an increase in the number of books targeting difficult topics that teach values, character education, social skills training, morals, and religious topics. It is estimated that the number of books treating religious topics, character education, and moral education will continue to increase. Furthermore, since more and more importance is being placed on preschool education, the number of children's books in general, whether translated or native to Turkey, will expand in the coming years.

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## Appendix

### *A Sample of the Coding*

#### Book Review Form

##### Part 1

Bibliographical information about the book

**Author:** Yaşar, Şahin

**Illustrator:** Yaşar, Şahin

**Name of the book:** Oyun Bozan Mert, (Mert, the Play-Breaker)

**Year:** 1996.

**Publisher:** Cenk Yayıncılık, Ankara, Turkey

**Edition Number:** 1st edition.

**Number of pages:** 16

**Age group:** 3-6 years

A short summary of the book:

Mert was a boy who tried to disrupt Cenk's playing with his friends. One day, Mert slipped and got injured. But his friends came to visit him in his home. So Mert regretted his previous bad behavior towards his friends.

##### Part 2

The subject heading of the book:

General themes	
1. Friendship/environment	X
2. Self:	
3. Family	
4. Adventure	
5. Social topics	
6. Travel	
7. Nature	
8. Health	
Other themes	
Explain the theme	
9. Religious topics	
10. Special subjects	

If it is a special subject

Special subject subcategories	Explanation
(1) Difficult subjects	
(2) Teaching values	
(3) Character building	
(4) Social skills training	
(5) Moral education	
(6) Character building through religion	