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Middle schoolers' book selection and reasons for discontinuing reading

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In this qualitative research we employed the case study method to identify the factors that affect Turkish fifth to eight graders' selection of books to read and the reasons that cause them to stop reading the books they have selected. To identify those factors and reasons, data were collected from a total of 32 participating students who were selected using stratified purposive sampling. A group was formed for each grade. Each grade group included 8 students who borrowed books from public libraries and voluntarily participated in the study. The participants were interviewed using open-ended questions. Interviews revealed that in selecting books to read, the students considered theme, genre, and structural features such as title, cover design, author, publisher, and recommendations made by peers, teachers, and family members as criteria. The students also stated that the events and themes in the books, language features, font size, insufficient time to read, and the library's requirement to return a book in 15 days were the reasons to give up reading a selected book.

Keywords: factors that affect book selection; reading habit; reading motivation; reasons for discontinuing reading a book

Introduction

Reading is an activity that individuals of all ages do for different reasons such as “information, restoration, inspiration, and enjoyment” (Hiebert, 2009:xii). Acquiring the reading habit is especially important for students as it enables them to develop metacognitive strategies that help them become good comprehenders in their courses (Brown, 1980; Pressley, 1998), develop communication skills necessary for social life and recognize good character traits as human beings (Karatay, 2018b; Narvaez, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2004). Therefore, improving students' reading skills is among the main goals of educators.

Reading habits as an area of investigation has attracted the attention of researchers and educators. Families, schools, and libraries play an important role in people's acquisition and development of the reading habit (Ateş, Çetinkaya & Yıldırım, 2012; Clark, 2010; Oriogu, 2015; Wicks, 1995; Yılmaz, 2004; Zickuhr, Rainie, Purcell, Madden & Brenner, 2012). Numerous studies have been conducted on the reading habits of individuals at different age levels (Aksaçoğlu & Yılmaz, 2007; Clark & Foster, 2005; Hopper, 2005; Loh, Sun & Majid, 2020; Majid & Tan, 2007; Mohr, 2006; Ogunrombi & Adio, 1995; Oriogu, 2015; Rimensberger, 2014; Sangkaeo, 1999; Shen, 2006; Summers, 2013; Tella & Akande, 2007; Wicks, 1995; Zickuhr et al., 2012). Students' reading habits and interests in reading have also been investigated (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Doiron, 2003; Harris, 2008; Moss & Hendershot, 2002; Schraw, Flowerday & Reisetter, 1998). Among those, the studies that focus on the reading habits of school children describe the genres that students prefer, the books they enjoy reading and their daily and weekly reading frequency and duration (Aksoy, 2014; Balcı, 2009; Bouknight, 2016; Devrimci, 1993; Dökmen, 1990; Hanedar, 2011; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang & Meyer, 2012; Mete, 2012; Odabaş, Odabaş & Polat, 2008; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014; Suna, 2006; Tanju, 2010).

Gender and its role in shaping students' reading habits and preferences have also been investigated. Vostrovsky (1899) found differences between boys and girls aged 9 to 19 in terms of their preferences and the selection of books to read: girls mostly preferred books that reflected the characters' inner worlds and boys liked adventure books. In his study on the reading habits and book choices of children aged 13 to 15, Wicks (1995) found that almost all children enjoyed reading fiction. He also found that children preferred to read the blurbs on book covers, paid attention to genres, authors, and preferred to read books in the humour, fantasy, and horror genres. The results of that study also show that the majority of boys did reading only before going to sleep whereas girls did reading at different times.

Another factor that affects the reading habit is age. Karatay (2018b) reports that students aged 7 to 12 read books with family, nature, and animal themes, and chose to read books in the adventure, humour, travel, and fantasy genres. He states that there appeared to be no difference between boys and girls in terms of the themes and genres in the books they read. He adds that students aged 12 to 15 from both genders continued to read books in those four genres; girls also chose to read books with love as theme, and boys preferred books with history, heroism, and suspense as themes.

The factors that positively and negatively contribute to the development of the reading habit are clear from the available literature. Among the negative factors, low income emerges as the primary factor that hinders students from developing the reading habit as their economic status plays an important role in their access to

books and the development of the reading habit. Ogunrombi and Adio (1995) found that low family income, which forced students to work to earn money, and illiterate parents were the main factors that prevented students from developing the reading habit. They also reported that as the students did not have the economic means to access and read different genres of books such as novels, stories, and poetry, they only had course books to read.

This finding is supported by other studies that show that socio-economic factors affect the development of the reading habit (McKool, 2007; Oguz, Yıldız & Hayirsever, 2009; Osunrinade, 2018; Şahin, 2009; Schramm & White, 1949). Other factors that negatively affect the development of the reading habit are playing computer games and watching television (Aksaçoğlu & Yılmaz, 2007; Igbokwe, Obidike & Ezeji, 2012; Majid & Tan, 2007; Mokhtari, Reichard & Gardner, 2009; Neuman, 1988).

The features of the books that the students choose to read are among the positive factors that help them develop the reading habit. Hopper (2005), on the reading behaviour and book choices of students aged 11 to 15, found that students' prior knowledge about a book or its author, the book's appearance, and recommendations about a book were factors that maintained their interest in reading. The results of that study also show that movies or digital media advertisements about the kinds of books that students liked to read and books that were favoured and read by their peers guided book choices and contributed to the development of reading habits. Mohr (2006) also identified the factors that positively affected the book choices by first graders, namely, theme, text features, book genre, and students' social connections. The author also reported that text type, pictures, front cover, title, difficulty level, and social values were factors that influenced students' selecting of books to read.

The available literature shows that genre and theme are factors that positively affect the development of the reading habit, and these factors reinforce the reading habit and contribute to its becoming robust. Majid and Tan (2007) determined that the most preferred genres by students in the fourth to sixth grade were stories, comics, and magazines. In their study, theme emerged as another factor that positively affected book selection; students mostly preferred books with adventure, mystery, crime, and humour as themes. The students also stated that they did reading to achieve higher grades on tests and exams, improve their language skills, learn new information, relax, and do homework and projects.

The sources that students used to obtain books and their effects on the students' reading habits are other areas of investigation; Tella and Akande (2007) report that sixth and seventh graders

obtained books mostly from libraries, teachers, families, and peers. Children also choose public libraries and bookstores when selecting other kinds of reading materials (Majid & Tan, 2007). Vostrovsky (1899) found that children viewed libraries mainly as sources of storybooks and borrowed scholarly books to do homework assignments. Some recent studies such as Özden (2017) also report that students perceive libraries not only as sources of books but also as environments to establish and foster friendships.

The studies that focus on the reading habits of school children describe the genres they choose to read, the books they enjoy reading and their daily and weekly reading frequency and duration (Aksoy, 2014; Balcı, 2009; Bouknight, 2016; Devrimci, 1993; Dökmen, 1990; Hanedar, 2011; McKenna et al., 2012; Mete, 2012; Odabaş et al., 2008; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014; Suna, 2006; Tanju, 2010). Although students' reading habits have been investigated in many studies, no studies have been done about the books that middle school students choose and the reasons why they gave up reading those books.

Theoretical Framework

Several theories are relevant for the scope of this research. The first focuses on book selection by children and the second dwells on readers' responses to the books they read. Children's choosing their own reading materials is discussed in Olson's theory of child development (Kragler & Nolley, 1996). W Olson (1959:402) states that children are "self-seeking, self-selecting, self-pacing organisms." Allowing children to choose reading materials themselves motivates them to read, allowing them to gain an interest in reading and develop reading habits (Harms & Lettow, 1986; Moeller & Moeller, 2007). When someone else chooses the books for children, the books often do not appeal to their interests (Arizpe & Styles, 2011). Yokota (2011) states that the books that children choose to read differ from those chosen for them by adults. However, adults with enough knowledge of children's preferences help children choose books that appeal to them. Therefore, students need the help of teachers who are knowledgeable about their areas of interest when choosing books (Wise, 2007).

The second theory is Rosenblatt's (1978) reader-response theory, which emphasises the relationship between the reader and the text and focuses on the role of the reader's experiences in constructing meaning. According to Rosenblatt (2016), readers' personal interests, wishes, and experiences are important in creating meaning. The reader-response theory is, thus, predominantly reader-oriented (Woodruff & Griffin, 2017). According to Rosenblatt (2016), readers respond to texts in two ways. Davis (1992) describes them as

stances “that the reader takes while reading” (p. 74). Rosenblatt (1978:27) explains that a reader adopts one of these two stances and performs activities in relation to the text s/he is reading. The first one is efferent reading, which refers to the reader’s taking the information given in a text. In this type of reading, “the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain as residue after the reading – the information to be acquired, the logical solutions to a problem, and the actions to be carried out” (Rosenblatt, 1978:23). The second direction that a reader may follow is aesthetic reading in which the reader’s primary concern is “the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him” (Rosenblatt, 1978:25). Rosenblatt (2016) states in the preface of her book that these two stances are not opposites but are parts of a continuum of possible transactions a person may make with a text. According to different purposes, readings of the same text may fall at different points on the efferent-aesthetic continuum. Thus, Rosenblatt (2013) characterises reading as a process that starts with making a choice to select a text that is believed to satisfy the reader’s expectations, goals, and emotions. She adds that the choices made by the reader affect the reading process either positively or negatively. Social, cultural, and economic environment, the structural features of the book, its content, its author, and the previous experiences of the reader may also be influential in book selection. Factors such as the title, which gives an idea about a book, the author, the length of the book, language use, availability of a summary, and the book’s genre also play a significant role in children’s book selection (Reuter, 2007). The socio-cultural environment may also be effective in book selection (Reuter, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2016). Teachers can help their students if they become aware of and realize the students’ needs and concerns and how the students shape their choices. This teacher knowledge may be beneficial in terms of ensuring that the students select the right books, which will result in improving their reading habits (Rosenblatt, 2016). Therefore, teachers’ investigating the factors that affect children’s book selections, the reasons for their giving up reading the chosen books, and becoming informed about them may contribute to their understanding of the reader’s behaviour in aesthetic reading and improve their students’ reading habits by guiding them in the selection of books.

Many researchers also theorise that when it comes to independent reading, low motivation may be due to the inability to choose the right book (Krashen, 2004; Moeller & Moeller, 2007). In various studies, physical features that affect book selection have also been discussed (Kragler & Nolley, 1996; Moss & Hendershot, 2002; Reuter,

2007; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000). In addition, some studies have shown that readers’ age and gender may also affect book selection (Boraks, Hoffman & Bauer, 1997; Reuter, 2007; Simpson, 1996). While these studies show that book selection is a complex process affected by many factors, they also point out the importance of the reader’s interests, experiences, and expectations as well as the features of the book (Rosenblatt, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

In light of W Olson’s (1959) and Rosenblatt’s (1978) theories, we aimed to obtain the perspectives of students on the positive and negative factors affecting the development of their reading habits. Having knowledge on these issues may help teachers, parents, and librarians guide the development of the students’ reading habits in a more informed way.

Research Method and Design

This study was qualitative by design and we employed the case study method as it is used to understand and describe an individual, group, or culture (Akar, 2016; Büyüköztürk, Kiliç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2016; Karasar, 2012; Olson, K 2016; Tümkü, 2000). Semi-structured interviews were conducted, using eight questions prepared by us and formulated based on the studies outlined in the literature review and theoretical framework sections. Six of those questions were for reasons on book selection and two were on discontinuing reading. Data were collected from fifth to eighth graders who used public libraries to determine the factors that affected their book selection and the reasons that caused them to give up reading those books. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as technique as it allows researchers to get both fixed-option answers and in-depth information on an area of interest (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The interviews were conducted over a period of 8 weeks.

Participants

Stratified purposive sampling was used in the formation of the study group as it is preferred in showing, describing, and making comparisons of the characteristics of subgroups of interest (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). The study was conducted with 32 students; 16 (50%) were male (M), and 16 (50%) female (F). The participants were evenly distributed in each of the four grade groups, and each grade group consisted of eight students. The research was conducted having received the approval of the Ministry of National Education Innovation and Educational Technologies General Directorate dated 21 January 2020 and circular number 81576613-10.06.02-

E.1563890 (2020/2). The demographics of the study group are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Study group demographics

Grade	Gender	Age	<i>n</i>
5	5 (M), 3 (F)	11–12	8
6	4 (M), 4 (F)	12–13	8
7	3 (M), 5 (F)	13–14	8
8	4 (M), 4 (F)	14–15	8

Data Collection and Analysis

During the interviews, the students were asked questions to identify the factors that influenced their selection of books to read and to identify the reasons that caused them to give up reading those books. Relevant professional literature was examined to formulate the questions. Initially, 13 open-ended questions were drafted. The questions were reviewed by three field experts. Based on expert opinion, some questions were reworded for clarity. The final number of the interview questions was reduced to 12 after piloting them on a similar group.

The interviews were recorded and content analysis was subsequently conducted. Content analysis is used to study the trends and patterns in documents (Stemler, 2001). Two field experts did the content analysis. The students were identified by a letter and number coding system to conceal their identities as P1, P2, P3 in which P indicates *participant*. The participants were then categorised

in terms of their grades as follows: fifth grade P1 to P8, sixth grade P9 to P16, seventh grade P17 to P24, and eighth grade P25 to P32.

Findings

Students' Reasons for Book Selection

The analysis shows that six factors shaped the students' book selections. In terms of importance, they were *theme, genre, structural features, book author, publisher and recommendations*.

Theme

Theme appeared as the principal factor in book selection and six themes emerged. The findings are displayed in relation to gender and grade level.

Table 2 shows that the most preferred theme selected by both genders was *adventure*. This was followed by *horror* and *detective* themes, each of which was preferred by one student from each gender. *Comedy* was preferred by female students with a low frequency of 2. The least preferred theme by both genders was *mystery* which was preferred by one female student. Three students (two males and one female) stated that they preferred reading books that had any of these five themes. An interesting finding was that female students selected all themes whereas male students did not prefer comedy and mystery; their preferences for horror and detective themes were also significantly low with one selection for each.

Table 2 Theme selection by gender

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender/Themes	Adventure	Horror	Comedy	Mystery	Detective	All themes
Male	12	1	-	-	1	2
Female	10	1	2	1	1	1
Total	22	2	2	1	2	3

In terms of grade levels, the results in Table 3 show that *adventure* was once again the most preferred theme. *Horror* was indicated by only one fifth and one seventh grader. This low frequency was the same for *comedy* for sixth and eighth graders. *Mystery* was preferred by only one sixth

grader. The *detective* theme was the second most preferred theme for seventh graders with a frequency of 2. Finally, three eighth graders reported that they would select books in any of those five themes.

Table 3 Theme selection by grade

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Grade/Themes	Adventure	Horror	Comedy	Mystery	Detective	All themes
5	7	1	-	-	-	-
6	6	-	1	1	-	-
7	5	1	-	-	2	-
8	4	-	1	-	-	3
Total	22	2	2	1	2	3

Table 4 presents the students' preferred book themes and reasons for the preference.

Table 4 Preferred themes and reasons

Themes	Reasons
1) Adventure	1) Fun (10 students) 2) Fluid (6 students) 3) Attractive (5 students)
2) Horror	1) Enjoyable (2 students)
3) Comedy	1) Fun (2 students)
4) Mystery	1) Enjoyable (1 student)
5) Detective	1) Enjoyable (2 students)
6) All themes	Two students

The analysis shows that students generally paid attention to themes when they selected a book. The most preferred theme was *adventure*. This was followed by books with *horror*, *mystery*, *detective* and *comedy* themes. As for the reasons for selecting books with the adventure theme, the students stated that they considered adventure books to be *more fun, interesting, easy to read, and enjoyable*. Variety in terms of themes increased as the grade level increased. Eighth graders expressed interest in horror, comedy, detective, and mystery themes in addition to adventure. In the fifth grade, the interest in the adventure theme was expressed by seven students and the number dropped to six in Grade 6, to five in the Grade 7 and to four in Grade 8. Theme preferences varied as grade and age varied. Students who preferred the comedy theme explained that the theme was enjoyable. Those who preferred the horror theme declared that they enjoyed books with that theme. The analysis shows that students preferred books with the adventure theme more at early ages, but as they aged, their interest shifted towards different themes.

The students stated that, in selecting books to read, they expected a theme to have the features given in Table 5.

Table 5 Theme features that students considered

Theme features
1) personally interesting (2 students)
2) supported with visuals (2 students)
3) arousing interest (2 students)
4) informative and exciting (2 students)
5) related to real life (1 student)

The analysis shows that the students preferred books that were personally appealing, aroused interest, were informative and exciting, and included real-life themes supported by visuals which made the plot more explicit. They did not prefer books with ambiguous themes.

Genre

Another principal factor for the selection of books was *genre*. The students preferred three genres. Table 6 shows that *novel* was the most preferred

genre by both genders. *Story* was second. *Memoir* was selected by only one male student and no such preference was reported by female students. A total of three students (two males and one female) reported that they would select any book in any of these three genres.

Table 6 Genre selection by gender

Gender/Genre	1	2	3	4
	Story	Novel	Memoir	All genres
Male	6	8	-	2
Female	4	10	1	1
Total	10	18	1	3

As seen in Table 7, *novel* was the most preferred genre by students in all grades. *Story* was second, followed by *memoir* selected by one student only. A total of three students (one sixth grader and two eighth graders) stated that they would read any book in any of those genres.

Table 7 Genre selection by grade

Grade/Genre	1	2	3	4
	Story	Novel	Memoir	All genres
5	3	4	1	-
6	4	3	-	1
7	1	7	-	-
8	2	4	-	2
Total	10	18	1	3

The students' genre preferences and reasons for selection are provided in Table 8.

Table 8 Genres preferred and reasons

Genre	Reasons
1) Novel	1) Narrates events better and is interesting (4 students) 2) Eventful and realistic (6 students) 3) Exciting (6 students)
2) Story	1) Easier to understand and fun (7 students) 2) Eventful and didactic (3 students) 3) Shorter and takes less time to finish reading (2 students)
3) Memoir	1) Realistic and interesting (2 students)
4) All genres	Three students

The analysis reveals that the students mostly considered the genres and that *novel* and *story* were the most preferred genres. The analysis also shows that fifth and sixth graders' preference rates of stories and novels were almost the same. In Grades 7 and 8, *novel* which is more voluminous than *story*, was the preferred genre. Fifth and sixth graders preferred stories as they considered them to be more understandable, more logical, more fun, shorter, and didactic. Seventh and eighth graders stated that *novel* was their preferred genre and explained that it was more explanatory, informative, realistic, and attractive.

Structural features

The students paid attention to the internal and external structural features of books when they selected them: they considered *pictures*, *colours*, *information on the book spine*, *cover design*, *font size*, and *title* when they selected books. In terms of priority, the students considered *title*, *cover*, *theme*, *pictures*, and *colours* respectively. They stated that titles helped them understand the content and that they wanted the title to be eye-catching, exciting, and intriguing. Most of the students expressed that they attached importance to the colours on the cover, the pictures, the blurb on the back cover, and the covers being new. They also stated that the books should not be too long in order for them to finish the books within the loan period imposed by libraries. In addition, some students remarked that they did not want to read just one very long story and that they instead wanted several short stories that were independent of each other. Based on these findings, it may be said that reading long stories appeared to be tedious for children because it required a longer period of time and more effort. It may also be concluded that the students considered reading short stories of three to four page more fun than long stories.

Another feature that the students considered was *pictures*. The majority of the students did not want the number of pictures to be too few or too many. Fifth to eighth graders stated that too many pictures in a book meant that the book was written for young children, and that they considered a book boring when there were very few pictures in it.

The students also considered *font type* and *size* as important. They stated that, for a book to be read with ease, the typeface should neither be too small nor too big and that an average typeface size should be used. Fifth and sixth graders also mentioned that they preferred books printed in coloured fonts; seventh and eighth graders did not express such a preference. These findings show that adult reader characteristics begin to appear at around Grade 7.

Another feature that the students considered was the colours used on the cover and the interior of the book. Almost 50% of the students stated that they paid attention to the colours used in the layout of a book. They expressed that when the colours used in the design of books were noticeable, vibrant, and matched each other, it made reading them more enjoyable. The structural features that students considered are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9 Structural features considered in selecting books and reasons

Book features	Reasons
1) Pictures	1) Make the book fun (6 students) 2) Not too many nor too few (7 students) 3) Attract attention at first glance (8 students) 4) Related to plot (3 students)
2) Colours	1) Warm colours (4 students) 2) Vibrant colours (4 students) 3) Attract attention at first glance (3 students) 4) Colourful front cover (5 students)
3) Book spine	1) Information about the book (3 students) 2) Information at first glance (3 students)
4) Cover design	1) Colourful cover design (5 students) 2) Attention getting visuals on cover (5 students) 3) Information on back cover - blurb (4 students) 4) Attention attracting cover (8 students)
5) Font features	1) Legible fonts (3 students) 2) Not too big nor too small font size (2 students) 3) Colourful fonts (2 students) 4) Plain fonts (3 students)
6) Book length	1) Not too long nor too short (9 students) 2) Readable within a 15-day loan period (2 students)
7) Title	1) Content related (2 students) 2) Eye-catching and exciting (7 students) 3) Arousing interest (1 student) 4) First thing to look at (4 students)

Author

Twenty-three students stated that the *author* was not a priority in selection because they either did not consider authors to be important or did not have any knowledge about them. It may thus be deduced that as the students did not have sufficient experience in reading, they did not have an interest in any particular author. On the other hand, eight students stated that as there were authors they knew and liked, they primarily looked for books by those authors. They also considered authors recommended by teachers and their peers. The findings show that the students' familiarity with authors and the recommendations of their teachers

and peers were influential in the selection of books. The students' considerations regarding author are presented in Table 10.

Table 10 Students' consideration of authors and reasons

Preference	Reasons
Author considered	1) author matters (3 students) 2) well-known, popular authors (5 students)
Author not considered	1) having limited knowledge (2 students) 2) author unimportant (21 students)

Publisher

Twenty-one students reported that they did not consider the *publisher* important when selecting books. They explained that they did not pay much attention to publishers because they either did not consider publishers important or did not have sufficient knowledge about them. Only three students stated that they paid attention to publishers because of their teachers' recommendations. Thus, it may be said that either publishers did not matter much to the students or they were not informed about publishers. Some students also did not even know the meaning of the word "publisher." The students' views about publishers are given in Table 11.

Table 11 Students' consideration of publishers and reasons

Preference	Reasons
Publisher considered	1) Publisher important (3 students)
Publisher not considered	1) Publisher unimportant (9 students) 2) Having limited knowledge (8 students) 3) Meaning of the word "publisher" unknown (4 students)

Recommendations made by others

Twenty five students stated that they considered the recommendations made by family members, teachers, and peers when selecting a book. They added that if they, their peers or family members watched a movie based on a book, this would lead to them selecting it. Seven students expressed that they made book selection decisions on their own and did not seek any advice. The findings are presented in Table 12.

Table 12 Recommendations made about book selection

Recommendations/Grade	5	6	7	8
1) Teachers	-	1	2	4
2) Family members	5	3	4	-
3) Peers	-	-	2	4
4) No recommendation	3	4	-	-
Total	8	8	8	8

Students' Reasons to Stop Reading a Book

From the analysis six factors appeared as reasons why students stopped reading the books selected. They were *events and theme, language features, font size, book length, insufficient amount of time resulting from too much homework and the obligation to return the book*. The most important factor was *events and theme* because when they did not appeal to the students, they stopped reading. The students wanted a book to have a clear style and comprehensible language features. They stated that the font size should not be too small and the books should not have too many pages. One of the reasons why students stopped reading was that they sometimes did not have enough time to finish a book as a result of too much homework. They also stated that they were obliged to return those books to the library in 15 days. In other words, loan periods imposed by libraries was one of the reasons why they stopped reading. The students' reasons for giving up on a book are given in Table 13.

Table 13 Students' reasons for stopping to read and explanations

Reasons	Explanations
1) Events and themes	1) Uninteresting and not arousing curiosity (6 students) 2) Unappealing events and characters (2 students)
2) Language features	1) Unclear style (4 students) 2) Complex sentence structures (3 students)
3) Font size	1) Too big or too small (3 students)
4) Book length	1) Too many or too few pages (3 students)
5) Insufficient time	1) Too much homework (4 students) 2) Social media and computer games (5 students)
6) Book return policy	1) Returning book to teacher (2 students) 2) Returning book to library in 15 days (2 students)

Discussion and Conclusion

With this study we identified the factors that affected students' selection of books to read and the reasons why they stopped reading them. The results show that theme was an important factor in book selection and that the students preferred themes that were personally appealing, arousing interest, informative, exciting, related to real life, and were supported by visuals to make the plot more explicit. The students preferred *adventure* books as they considered them as fun, easy to read, and attractive. This preference was expressed by both male and female students in all grades. This was followed by horror, comedy, and detective themes as the students considered them enjoyable. The least

preferred theme by both genders was mystery. Only eighth graders stated that they would select books in any of those five themes. The students generally enjoyed reading adventure books; this is in accordance with the finding that almost all children enjoyed reading fiction (Dilidüzgün, 2018; Karatay, 2018a; Sever, 2012; Wicks, 1995). These themes allow students to have new experiences, enrich their already gained experiences, become aware of new places, and learn about different cultures and people. The students also stated that they stopped reading a book when they realised that it had an ambiguous theme. This supports the theories of researchers who argue that children's motivation may decrease when they cannot choose the books to read that are appropriate to their interests and ages (Krashen, 2004; Moeller & Moeller, 2007), and those who point out that book-related features such as theme and topic are effective in children's book selection (Reuter, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2016).

The second factor the students took into consideration was genre. The students preferred books in the novel genre the most because, according to them, the novel genre was eventful, realistic, exciting, interesting, and narrated the events better. The second most preferred genre was story because students found storybooks easier to understand, and, as they were shorter in length and it took less time to read. The students stated that they found storybooks eventful, didactic, and fun. The other preferred genre was memoir as it was considered realistic and interesting. Only some eighth graders expressed that they would select books in any of these three genres. It may be concluded that as the students' reading experiences increased and their age and class levels progressed, theme and genre did not exert much influence on their book selection. While these findings support those of researchers who argue that genre is effective in book selection (Ateş et al., 2012; Reuter, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2016; Wicks, 1995), they also point out that genre preferences can expand as reading experience, age, and grade levels increase.

Structural features were also among the major factors that affected book selection. The students primarily considered the title, cover, and pictures in a book. The title of the book helped them to understand the theme and raised their interest. The students also considered the clear visibility of the title on the book spine important. Clearly printed titles on the book spine made it easy for them to read even from a distance regardless of whether a book was standing vertically or horizontally on a shelf. Book cover and its design were especially important for students who came to the library without a certain book in mind. Those students stated that they paid attention primarily to the cover design. This is in line with Ateş et al. (2012) who report that students initially paid attention to the

cover design of a book and secondarily to its theme and genre. Although the findings support the researchers (Kragler & Nolley, 1996; Moss & Hendershot, 2002; Reuter, 2007; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000) who point out the importance of the structural features of the book in book selection, they emphasise that what attracts children's attention directly at first encounter with a book is its cover, title, and the pictures in the book and they point out that those have a determining effect on children's preferences.

In selecting books to read, fifth and sixth graders stated that the cover design of a book, colours used on the cover and inside, pictures on the cover, the blurb on the back cover and cover being new were the structural features that made a book appealing. As for colours, the use of different colours made books more interesting for fifth and sixth graders. For seventh and eighth graders the colours used in a book's design were no longer considered a priority, and the proportions of the pictures to the text were considered more important. In previous studies on the issue, experts (Dilidüzgün, 2018; Kara, 2012; Karatay, 2018a; Sever, 2012; Wigfield, Gladstone & Turci, 2016) state that pictures in children's books should be related to the theme and plot and bring coherence and cohesion to the page layout. Well-designed books that include these features motivate children, attract their attention, and support their efforts to develop the reading habit (Kara, 2012; Karatay, 2018a; Sever, 2012).

Another structural feature that affected book selection was font size. The students stated that they did not want books with too big or too small fonts. Large font sizes created the impression that the book was written for young children, and when the font size was too small, legibility became a major problem. This supports studies that suggest that books' physical features play a role in the selection thereof (Kragler & Nolley, 1996; Moss & Hendershot, 2002; Reuter, 2007; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000).

In terms of length, students preferred books that contained neither too many nor too few pages. Reuter (2007) concludes that book length was an important factor in children's book selection and that children looked for reading materials that were of adequate length for themselves. Thick books, in particular, negatively affected their desire to read. The library requirement to return books in 15 days and students having too much homework were other factors that prevented the reading of the selected books in their entirety. The students stated that this requirement put strain on them as they felt pressed for time. Some students stated that, instead of reading long books, they considered reading books that had shorter, interrelated sections or stories because such books would be easier to read and more enjoyable.

As for the significance of the authors, the students expressed that they generally did not consider authors when selecting books. This finding contradicts the theories of researchers who point out the influence of authors on the choice of books (Reuter, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2016). This finding stems from the fact that middle schoolers did not know much about authors and focused more on the inner and outer features of a book rather than its author. Those who took authors into consideration did so when their teachers or someone in their family guided them. Similarly, the students generally did not take publishers into consideration when choosing books. The reason for this behaviour is that they did not know the meaning of the word “publisher.” Those who considered the publisher did so when their teachers guided them in that regard. All these point to the importance of teacher guidance in gaining interest in reading and developing the habit, as pointed out by Rosenblatt (2016).

Recommendations made by others also played a significant role in book selection. The majority of the students stated that they took the recommendations made by family members, teachers, and peers into consideration. Rosenblatt (2016) also emphasises the impact of an individual’s social and cultural environment on their reading preferences. It is known that students who live in social environments in which reading is valued, develop the reading habit and have higher motivation to read (Huang, Capps, Blacklock & Garza, 2014). Students are highly influenced by teachers and peers when choosing books (Kragler & Nolley, 1996) and if they live in a nurturing social environment and are consciously guided by teachers and parents, they acquire the reading habit (Ateş et al., 2012). If they do not live in such an environment, they do not develop an interest in reading and do not develop the reading habit – even if their families and teachers may so desire (Can, Türkyılmaz & Karadeniz, 2010). Finally, the interviews showed that in selecting books to read, having watched a movie based on a book and the book being a part of a book series were also influential factors. These results confirm Rosenblatt’s (1978) theory and point out that personal experiences and interests, desires, and expectations are predominantly effective in children’s book selection.

As for their reasons to stop reading a book, the students stated that they stopped reading primarily due to the themes or events not being interesting. Language features of a book, its length, excessively large or small font sizes, insufficient time, and the 15-day book return policy of libraries were factors that caused the students to stop reading a book. In addition, social media and playing computer games also played a negative role in the development of the reading habit (McGeown,

Duncan, Griffiths & Stothard, 2015). Caution should be exercised at this point as research (Owusu-Acheaw, 2016) shows that the time spent on social media adversely affects students’ reading habits.

The results of this study show that four of the six factors that appeared to have a role in students’ book selection, namely, *theme*, *genre*, *structural features*, and *recommendations* played significant roles. The other two factors – *author* and *publisher* – did not play a decisive role in the process. The recommendations made by family members, teachers, and peers were also influential in students’ book choices. The support and guidance provided by teachers and families were important for the students to be able to choose age and grade-appropriate quality books and to create reading environments – something that should continue until the students are able to select books on their own (Caperna, 2007) and have developed a strong reading habit.

The interviews also showed that six factors caused the students to stop reading a book: *events and theme*, *language features*, *font size*, *book length*, *insufficient time*, and *book return policy*. These factors appeared to hamper the development of the reading habit in students. The first four factors indicate the importance of satisfying expectations as the lack of those may result in the interruption of the reading process (Rosenblatt, 2013). The other two factors, *insufficient time* (a result of too much homework) and *the libraries’ 15-day book return policy* also contributed to students stopping reading the books they had selected.

We trust that the findings of this study will be of practical value to teachers and parents who wish to instil robust and sustainable reading habits in their students and children.

Authors’ Contributions

All authors participated equally in all phases of the research study, data analysis, and writing of the manuscript.

Notes

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