

What's on the shelf? A subject-based collection analysis of children's books in Ankara Public Libraries

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ABSTRACT

Children have certain fundamental rights, including access to health, education, and social services. One of the social services provided to children is access to libraries specifically designed for them. Libraries are available to all children without cost and provide equal opportunities to use their resources. Therefore, it is essential to examine the qualities and content of the resources that libraries provide for children. This research aims to examine preschool picture books in the children's sections of children's libraries and local public libraries in Ankara according to their types. This descriptive study design, the study utilizes document analysis. In the children's sections of six children's libraries in Ankara, 6,031 picture books aimed at preschoolers constitute the sample group. The study showed that Modern Fantasy and Realistic Fiction comprised 84.53% of the 6,031 children's books examined, while the remaining 15.47% fell into nine other categories. Children must get to know and interact with a variety of literature. Therefore, it is recommended that children's libraries diversify the types of children's books. Existing studies indicate a lack of research on suitable preschool book types available in public libraries. Understanding book categories is particularly important for librarians to effectively guide children and families using libraries. Consequently, subsequent research should design descriptive and intervention studies, while fostering collaboration among educators, librarians, and scholars to enhance library accessibility and inclusiveness.

KEYWORDS: Children's libraries; Children's library collection; Children's picture books; Children's picture book types

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1. Introduction

Every child grows and develops in accordance with their culture, environment, family structure, developmental pace, personality, and character. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that all children, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, national and cultural background, language, social status, or personal abilities, have the right to free and equitable access to materials that support their full development. Similarly, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasizes the right of every individual to education and the obligation of states to ensure equal access despite differences (United Nations, 1948). Based on these international agreements, it is acknowledged that all children are born with equal rights and should benefit from

state-provided equitable services that support their well-being, including health, safety, education, and social services. Libraries, as part of social services, are inclusive environments designed to support children's development. According to the Regulation on Public and Children's Libraries (1982), children's sections and, when necessary, separate children's libraries are established within public libraries to support the intellectual and emotional development of children up to the age of 16 and to encourage voluntary learning aligned with national values.

In the literature on children's libraries, Cengiz (2006) highlights that these libraries provide the most effective environment for introducing young individuals to literary works. Children's libraries play a crucial role in education by fostering reading habits and nurturing a lifelong love of reading (Kınalı, 1955; Yılmaz, 2008). According to Yılmaz (2000), individuals who develop habits of reading and library use tend to have richer, healthier, and stronger personalities. Engaging with libraries and reading supports both the individual and social development of children. Libraries share the power of literature and books with children, which not only stimulates their imagination but also makes the knowledge gained more lasting by connecting it to their lives (Conner, 1990). Based on this literature, it can be concluded that children's libraries are among the most suitable spaces for introducing children to books, reading culture, and education. Therefore, the quality and content of a library's collection serve as important indicators of the extent to which children benefit from the library.

The final report of the Children's Libraries Workshop held in 2018 highlighted that library facilities and collections should support the holistic development of children (General Directorate of Libraries and Publications [KYGM], 2018). The types of books children are exposed to, through which they develop a reading culture, are especially important. Library collections contribute not only to children's language development but also to their social and cognitive growth. According to the Children's Libraries Service Principles, materials and activities in children's libraries should cover a broad and diverse range (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2003). This diversity is essential to uphold the principle of equal opportunity within the social context. The books children first encounter in their environment play a significant role in shaping their overall development. Additionally, literature is recognized as a valuable tool for resolving internal conflicts, facilitating socialization, and fostering creative thinking (Gönen, 1984). Therefore, careful selection of children's literature for library collections is crucial.

1.1. Early Language Development and Children's Books

Language development progresses rapidly, especially between birth and age three, and the literature frequently emphasizes the importance of introducing children to books during this period to support their language growth (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014; Neuman & Wright, 2019). Numerous studies have demonstrated a strong relationship between the vocabulary used by adults interacting with children and the children's language development (Bus & Van IJzendoorn, 1995; DeBaryshe, 1993; Hoff, 2018; Logan, Justice, & Piasta, 2019; Mol et al., 2008; Neuman & Wright, 2019; Payne et al., 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1988). In particular, the shared reading experiences between parents or teachers and children are highlighted as critical factors in new vocabulary acquisition and, consequently, the development of language skills (Dickinson et al., 2019; Raikes et al., 2006; Seçim & Gönen, 2022; Seçim & Gönen, 2026; Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993; Toub et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2014). Moreover, reading picture books with children fosters print awareness, playing an essential role in early literacy development (Zucker et al., 2009). Research addressing the influence of socioeconomic status underlines the necessity of access to quality books for all children. Therefore, public libraries represent a crucial resource for early access to books (Clark Hunt, 2020).

Children's books are works that contain elements appealing to children's interests and imagination and consist of both text and illustrations (Cianciolo, 1997). Picture books positively influence preschool children's motivation and interest in reading, while also significantly contributing to the development of early literacy skills (Adams, 1990; Lonigan, 1994; Wells, 1985). Introducing children to the enjoyable aspects of books is among the most important ways to provide a positive start in life. Picture books nurture children's curiosity and imagination, support the development of new ideas, and encourage diverse perspectives on the world, thereby fostering cognitive, social, and language development. Early access to books is essential for children to broaden their horizons, deepen their understanding, and enhance their social awareness (Gönen & Veziroğlu, 2015). Additionally, books serve as a means of transmitting knowledge beyond the constraints of time and space. Considering that every piece of information within a book contributes to shaping the child's identity, book selection should be carefully aligned with the child's needs and developmental stage to enhance engagement. Introducing books during infancy can contribute multidimensionally to a child's development. Recognizing the types of children's books suitable for the 0–6 age group is vital to matching children with books appropriate to their developmental characteristics (Ural, 2015). Picture books used at an early age not only cultivate a love of reading but also support learning. For this reason, the quality of books children read in early childhood is of great importance (Çakmak & Yılmaz, 2009; Hakkoymaz & Tanju Aslışen, 2022). The principle of child appropriateness, which ensures access to quality works, is defined by Şirin (1994) as the suitability of books to children's growth and developmental periods, psychological state, vocabulary, concept knowledge, and level of comprehension. Therefore, selecting the right book at the right time is fundamental. Knowing which types of books to introduce according to a child's developmental characteristics helps maintain their interest in reading.

A review of the related literature reveals that picture books in early childhood are categorized and classified according to age groups, physical and content features, and literary genres. Within this framework, picture books in the present study have been examined under eleven subcategories, as identified in previous research (Cianciolo, 1997; Gönen, 1984; Hillman, 1995; Kiefer et al., 1998; Temple et al., 1998; Ural, 2015).

1.1.1. Poetry Books

Historically, poetry in children's literature has been employed to impart moral lessons, encourage desired behaviors, and provide educational guidance. Poetry serves to raise children's awareness of the harmony created by words and to demonstrate alternative ways of expressing their thoughts. It also functions as a medium to convey targeted learning outcomes through a distinctive literary form (Tanju, 2015).

1.1.2. Board Books for Infants

Board books are designed simply, visually engaging, and produced from durable materials specifically for children aged 0 to 2 years. These books are structured to withstand rough handling and are safe if mouthed by infants (Kiefer et al., 1998). Typically made from cloth or washable materials, they pose no health risks when placed in the mouth. The pages are thick, sometimes as sturdy as cardboard, preventing physical damage by the child. Furthermore, they lack small detachable parts that could present choking hazards, thus ensuring the child's safety.

1.1.3. Interactive Books

Interactive books require children's verbal or physical participation during reading activities. Features such as flaps, doors, or movable figures on the pages engage children actively in the reading and

exploration process. These characteristics make interactive books particularly appealing and promote children's involvement in literacy experiences (Kiefer et al., 1998).

1.1.4. Toy Books

Toy books are an important category in early childhood for introducing infants to books. These books resemble toys, often with thick cardboard pages, cut-out shapes, and tactile elements such as feathers or fabric, supporting fine motor development and sensory engagement. Some toy books include sound buttons that enhance auditory awareness (Ural, 2015). Cloth and bath books are especially significant for infants unfamiliar with book handling, as they foster book awareness without risk of damage. Bath books, made from waterproof materials, facilitate book interaction during bathing routines. Through exposure to images of animals, vehicles, and actions, toy books contribute substantially to language development (Yükselen, 2015).

1.1.5. Concept Books

Concept books aim to support the development of cognitive understanding by introducing basic concepts such as colors, shapes, numbers, seasons, distance, and time. These books typically feature simple illustrations and single words to promote skills like sequencing and matching (Ural, 2015). Conceptual development in children progresses from concrete to abstract, with children beginning to acquire concepts between ages one and two and further advancing this ability around age four. Attention to the attributes of objects and events is crucial in concept formation (Üstün & Akman, 2003). Concept books assist children in building a conceptual framework based on their surroundings.

1.1.6. Wordless Books (Silent Books)

Also known as wordless books, wordless books consist primarily of illustrations with little or no text (Hillman, 1995). The author conveys a narrative through images, inviting children to interpret the story independently. These books introduce children to various themes and successfully engage their curiosity, encouraging emergent reading skills even before they can read text (Lukens, 1999).

1.1.7. Folk Tales and Religiously Themed Books

These books typically feature narratives where good triumphs over evil, often incorporating humor and moral lessons. Through these stories, children gain insight into the history, beliefs, and lifestyles of their own and other cultural groups. Didactic in nature, these books frequently include heroic tales that captivate children's attention (Kiefer et al., 1998).

1.1.8. Modern Fantasy Books

The fantasy genre includes books in which at least one element, whether character, setting, or event, is impossible in real life. Fantasy books enrich children's imagination and remove mental barriers, fostering limitless creativity. By presenting unreal scenarios, they also capture children's attention effectively, encouraging them to think beyond reality (Kiefer et al., 1998).

1.1.9. Realistic Fiction Books

Realistic fiction excludes extraordinary or unreal events, characters, and situations. Instead, it depicts plausible life experiences such as shopping, hospital visits, vacations, divorce, school anxiety, or toilet training. These books help children gain insight into situations they may not have encountered firsthand, supporting adaptation to daily life and normalizing challenging experiences by showing them within a narrative context (Kiefer et al., 1998).

1.1.10. Biographical Books

Biographies written for children portray the lives and achievements of renowned figures in literature, art, politics, and other fields. These works aim to provide role models, inspire courage, and instill

patriotism by showcasing individuals who have contributed significantly to society and the world. Such narratives can stimulate children's imagination and help them form personal aspirations at an appropriate developmental stage (Tanju, 2015).

1.1.11. Multicultural and International Books

These books introduce children to both micro and macro cultural perspectives, fostering understanding of their own culture as well as others. Often published in multiple languages, they provide children with exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural features. Multicultural books positively contribute to emergent literacy skills, particularly print awareness, understanding the form, function, and directionality of writing (Justice & Ezell, 2001). By observing different alphabets and writing systems, children recognize that writing varies across languages, enhancing their cultural and literacy awareness (Kiefer et al., 1998).

A review of the relevant literature reveals that studies on preschool picture books predominantly focus on aspects such as content characteristics, illustration techniques, and physical features (Gönen et al., 2011; Gönen et al., 2016; Turan & Ulutaş, 2016; Yıldız et al., 2016), educational qualities (Yazıcı et al., 2018), and readability (Çeçen & Aydemir, 2011). However, only a limited number of these studies include samples drawn from public libraries (Çapçı & Durmuşoğlu, 2020; Sarı, 2019). In contrast, recent years have seen an increase in the number of studies related to children's libraries.

Although there is a scarcity of research specifically examining the genres of picture books for children, studies addressing children's books often mention book genres. For example, in Yükselen et al., (2016) explored preschool educators' criteria for book selection, genres such as biography, fairy tale, poetry, science education, and story were identified. The study found that teachers tended to read stories and fairy tale books more frequently in their classrooms among the options provided. Similarly, Turan and Ulutaş (2016) investigated the characteristics of picture storybooks in preschool institutions and teachers' usage of these books. Their study classified book types in book centers as picture storybooks, fairy tales, concept books, coloring books, comics, reference books, theater books, and others (e.g., magazines, brochures, catalogs), with picture storybooks being the most prevalent. Notably, the range of book genres represented in these studies remains limited. Additionally, Hakkoymaz (2022) analyzed 30 picture books affecting children's epistemological development by types of information presented, concluding that scientific knowledge was the most common, whereas religious and philosophical knowledge appeared the least.

A review of the literature indicates that there is no existing study examining the types of preschool picture books available in public libraries. Preschool picture books serve as important tools for supporting children's diverse developmental domains. Considering the impact of early exposure to books from infancy on later stages of development, it is essential to determine which book types are appropriate for specific age groups and to classify these types properly in public libraries to facilitate accessibility for children and their families. For instance, infant books may be suitable during the first months and years; toy and interactive books can enhance children's engagement with books; concept books aid vocabulary acquisition; wordless books foster creativity; poetry books raise awareness of literary genres; modern fantasy and folk tales develop imagination; realistic fiction and biographies help children relate to real life and provide role models; and multicultural books offer opportunities to explore diverse cultures. Therefore, it is necessary to first identify the distribution of these book types in public library collections serving preschool children.

This study is significant in that it examines the entirety of accessible preschool collections in six children's libraries located in Ankara. The findings will provide valuable insights not only for specialists in early childhood education but also for librarians. Children's libraries represent a

multidisciplinary field that requires collaboration between librarians and early childhood experts (Yılmaz, 2009). Accordingly, this study aims to serve as a guide for librarians, early childhood professionals, and families with preschool children regarding the collections of children's libraries in Ankara.

The subcategories of preschool picture books examined in this study were determined by reviewing various sources (Cianciolo, 1997; Gönen, 1984; Hillman, 1995; Kiefer et al., 1998; Ural, 2015) and consolidated into eleven categories by the researchers: Poetry Books, Infant Books, Interactive Books, Toy Books, Concept Books, Wordless Books, Folk Tales and Religious Books, Modern Fantasy Books, Realistic Fiction Books, Biographies, and Multicultural Books. Knowledge of these categories is particularly important for librarians to provide effective guidance to children and families utilizing the library. It is expected that this study will contribute to librarians' and early childhood educators' understanding of book genres and promote enrichment of children's sections in libraries based on these characteristics.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. Which preschool picture book genres are included in the children's book collections of Adnan Ötügen Provincial Public Library, Ali Dayı Children's Library, and the district public libraries of Altındağ, Mamak, Sincan, and Cebeci?
2. How is the distribution of preschool picture book genres characterized within the children's book collections of these libraries?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed descriptive research design and utilized a document analysis method grounded in qualitative research tradition. Documents are defined as written or visual materials that exist prior to and during the research process (Patton, 1987). Document analysis involves the systematic examination of written materials relevant to the phenomena under investigation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Documents are frequently used in qualitative research to complement and strengthen data, as they provide critical sources for tracking changes and developments over time (Bowen, 2009). Moreover, documents alone can constitute a complete data set for a study; the output derived from their analysis are sufficient to reveal the targeted phenomena (Bailey, 1994).

One of the primary reasons for employing documents in research is their positioning as actors that reflect social interactions and ways of life within a specific context. Considering their role in social life and action, documents are recognized as social products and, therefore, receive considerable attention in social research. Document analysis offers several advantages, such as low financial cost, the ability to collect extensive and detailed data, the potential for constructing retrospective narratives, ease of access, and the possibility to perform comparisons across countries, regions, and time periods. However, it also presents challenges, including difficulties in targeting specific content, potential lack of representativeness, unsuitability for examining individual attitudes, and limitations related to usability and access (Davie & Wyatt, 2022).

Bailey (1994) advocates that document analysis can be conducted through four steps: sampling, category formation, determining the unit of analysis, and quantification of data. In line with this, the first step (sampling) is detailed under the data set section, while the subsequent steps are explained within the data analysis section.

2.2. Data Set

The data set of this study consisted of 6,031 preschool picture books located in the children's sections of six public libraries in Ankara. Given the difficulty of accessing all relevant documents related to a research topic, researchers conducting document analysis typically establish a sample based on the available data (Bailey, 1994). Accordingly, criterion sampling, a purposive sampling method, was employed to form the data set (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The first criterion was that the books must target children aged 0 to 6 years, and the second criterion was that they had to be printed with children's books. Thus, non-printed materials aimed at this age group, as well as printed materials intended for children older than six, were excluded.

To ensure data diversity, libraries from various districts of Ankara were included: Adnan Ötügen Provincial Public Library, Altındağ District Public Library, Cebeci Public Library, Mamak District Public Library, and Sincan District Public Library. Among these, Ali Dayı Children's Library was the only dedicated children's library included.

2.3. Data Collection Instruments

The data set of this study consisted of 6,031 preschool picture books located in the children's sections of six libraries. Data collection was conducted between July 25 and August 3, 2019. Because libraries are dynamic environments where collections frequently change due to borrowing, returns, or new acquisitions, data collection focuses on books available for access during the study period. Depending on the size of each collection and with permission from library management, data was gathered during and outside regular working hours. The entire data collection process spanned 10 days. The children's collections of Ali Dayı Children's Library, Cebeci Public Library, and Adnan Ötügen Provincial Public Library were examined after regular hours with the required permissions, due to their extensive collections; these three libraries required seven full days of investigation by the researchers. The remaining libraries were each reviewed in one full working day.

In some libraries, preschool picture books were not separately classified within the children's sections, which prolonged the process as researchers had to identify relevant materials among all children's resources. To avoid omissions, the researchers also reviewed sections beyond the designated preschool range, including any books meeting the criteria. Books borrowed during the research period could not be included in the data set. To enhance intercoder reliability, two researchers collaborated throughout data collection, categorizing each book into one of eleven predefined types. The researchers worked concurrently during the coding process, and books coded differently were categorized following a joint review. To establish reliability, the level of agreement between the independent evaluators was calculated using the formula: $\text{Agreement Percentage} = (\text{Number of Agreements} / (\text{Number of Agreements} + \text{Number of Disagreements})) \times 100$. The resulting agreement coefficient was 0.92 (92%), indicating a high level of inter-rater reliability. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), an agreement rate of 80% or higher is considered acceptable for studies involving multiple coders.

2.4. Data Analysis

According to Bailey (1994), the analysis phase involves category creation, defining the unit of analysis, and quantifying the data. Prior to data collection, eleven picture book types were established based on the literature and were used as categories for analysis. The unit of analysis was the content of each book. Data were quantified using frequency counts and percentages. The collected books were first evaluated for their suitability for the preschool age group and then categorized according to their picture book type. The categories were: Poetry Books, Infant Books, Interactive Books, Toy Books,

Concept Books, Wordless Books, Folk Tales and Religious Books, Modern Fantasy Books, Realistic Fiction Books, Biographies, and Multicultural Books.

3. Findings

This section presents the findings organized according to the research questions. The first part addresses the types of books available in the libraries, while the second examines the distribution of these book types within the total collections. Frequency and percentages of the data are presented in tables. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of book types within each library's collection.

Table 1 *Number of books in the researched libraries*

Genre	Adnan Ötügen	Ali Dayı	Altındağ	Cebeci	Mamak	Sincan
Poetry	10	17	5	6	1	1
Infant Books	–	2	1	–	–	1
Interactive	10	21	2	16	5	3
Toy	2	1	2	–	1	–
Concept	43	1	3	34	8	10
Wordless	6	3	3	–	1	1
Folk Tales and Religious	87	140	44	86	4	37
Modern Fantasy	765	701	213	1032	230	213
Realistic Fiction	464	433	125	562	249	111
Biographies	36	36	22	17	4	15
Multicultural	32	22	6	59	3	6
Total	1455	1434	426	1812	506	398

Based on the examinations conducted in the children's section of Adnan Ötügen Public Library, it was observed that picture books are classified according to age groups. Among the 1,455 books categorized under "Preschool" analysis across 11 identified genres revealed that modern fantasy books ($n = 765$) constitute the largest portion. Notably, there was an absence of baby books designed for children aged 0–2 years.

Ali Dayı Children's Library stands out as the only dedicated children's library among those examined. Within the 1,434 books reviewed, samples from all 11 identified genres were present. Modern fantasy books comprised the largest share at 48.88% ($n = 701$). However, the presence of materials suitable for very young children was limited, with only one toy book ($n = 1$), two baby books ($n = 2$), and three wordless books ($n = 3$) found, indicating a lack of diversity in materials for early childhood.

Altındağ Public Library, the newest among the examined libraries, had 426 books in its children's section that included examples from the 11 genres. Analysis showed that modern fantasy books

accounted for half of the collection (50%, $n = 213$), making it the most represented genre. Baby books were the least represented genre, with only one example identified ($n = 1$).

Cebeci Public Library provided the largest dataset with 1,812 books examined in its children's section. No records were found for baby books, toy books, or wordless books in this collection. Modern fantasy books dominated 56.95% of the total ($n = 1,032$).

At Mamak Public Library's children's section, 506 books were reviewed, and no baby books were found. Realistic fiction books made up the largest proportion at 49.21% ($n = 249$). Single examples of poetry books, toy books, and wordless books were also identified ($n = 1$ for each).

According to data from Sincan Public Library, toy books were absent from the children's section. Modern fantasy was the most prevalent genre, accounting for 53.51% of the books ($n = 213$). Realistic fiction books followed at 27.88% ($n = 111$), with biography books in third place at 3.76% ($n = 15$).

Table 2 presents the total counts and distributions of book genres across the libraries examined. These findings highlight notable differences in genre diversity and age-appropriate materials within the collections.

Table 2 *Number of books in the researched libraries*

Genre	Number of books (n)	Percentage (%)
Poetry	40	0.66
Infant Books	4	0.06
Interactive	57	0.94
Toy	6	0.09
Concept	156	2.58
Wordless	14	0.23
Folk Tales and Religious	398	6.60
Modern Fantasy	3154	52.30
Realistic Fiction	1944	32.23
Biographies	130	2.15
Multicultural	128	2.12
Total	6031	100

The findings of the study indicate that the most prevalent genre across the library collections is modern fantasy, comprising 3,154 books and representing 52.30% of the total collection. This genre is followed by realistic fiction, which accounts for 1,944 books or 32.23% of the collection. Together, these two genres constitute 84.53% of the overall collection, highlighting their dominance within the libraries examined under 11 distinct categories.

Folk tales and religious books rank third in frequency, with 398 titles included in the collections. They are followed by concept books, which make up 2.58% of the collection ($n = 156$), biographical books at 2.15% ($n = 130$), multicultural books at 2.12% ($n = 128$), and interactive books at 0.94% ($n = 57$).

Genres represented by fewer than 50 books across the six libraries studied include poetry books at 0.66% ($n = 40$), wordless books at 0.23% ($n = 14$), toy books at 0.09% ($n = 6$), and baby books at 0.06% ($n = 4$). These findings reflect a significant concentration of the collections in a limited number of genres, while other categories remain minimally represented.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on data obtained from six public libraries in Ankara, a total of 6,031 illustrated children's books classified into 11 genres identified in the literature were examined. The results of the study reveal two primary structural patterns. First, among the six libraries analyzed, the children's sections of Cebeci Public Library, Adnan Ötüken Public Library, and Ali Dayı Children's Library ranked as the top three in terms of the number of children's books, collectively housing 78% of the total collection. The remaining 22% was distributed across the children's sections of the other three libraries. Second, 84.53% of the 6,031 children's books in these libraries fall under only two categories: modern fantasy and realistic fiction, whereas the remaining nine genres constitute merely 15.47% of the collection. These two structural findings frame the detailed discussion presented below.

A clear imbalance in the number of children's books among the libraries is evident. According to data from the Directorate General of Libraries and Publications, Statistics and Data Analysis Department, in 2021, the children's section of Altındağ District Public Library had 2,135 registered members, served 2,679 users, and lent 3,743 materials. Sincan District Public Library's children's section had 3,653 members, served 5,997 users, and lent 4,527 materials. Mamak District Public Library reported 812 members and approximately 1,000 lent materials in 2020. In contrast, libraries with larger collections demonstrated higher usage: Adnan Ötüken Public Library's children's section had 5,845 members, lent 10,343 materials, and served 5,118 users; Ali Dayı Children's Library had 1,626 members, lent approximately 2,384 materials, and served 1,308 users; and Cebeci Public Library's children's section had 715 members, lent 1,222 materials, and served 3,724 users. Considering the impact of the pandemic, these three libraries achieved a notably high reach among users. Following the opening of four new children's libraries in Ankara since 2021, public library statistics reveal a significant growth in user engagement, with annual visitors increasing from 10,356 in 2021 to 59,800 in 2025 (KYGM, 2025).

Beyond library data, demographic characteristics of the districts where these libraries are located were examined. The proportion of children aged 0–14 years, which corresponds to the primary audience of children's libraries, varies across districts: 14.7% ($n = 136,106$) in Çankaya, 22.87% ($n = 90,618$) in Altındağ, 21.76% ($n = 145,686$) in Mamak, and 24.05% ($n = 132,050$) in Sincan. Socioeconomic status also differs significantly: Çankaya predominantly consists of high and middle socioeconomic levels, whereas Altındağ, Mamak, and Sincan are characterized mainly by middle and low socioeconomic levels (Endeksa, 2025). The existing disparities in child population density and socioeconomic status across these districts highlight the importance of expanding early-age library services as a means to promote equal opportunity.

In this context, it is imperative for policymakers and administrators to undertake initiatives aimed at increasing the number of children's books within the collections of the three libraries with higher usage and more extensive collections. Such efforts would contribute to equitable access to library resources and foster early childhood literacy and development across diverse communities.

The development of library collections that adequately support children's developmental levels and interests is anticipated to increase library use among families and children. Supporting this expectation, research examining the relationship between public libraries' expenditures and resources and the usage patterns of children and young adults found that most expenditure and resource variables were significantly associated with library use by these age groups across libraries of all sizes (Joo & Cahill, 2019). In Turkey, the rate at which children are introduced to libraries at an early age remains notably low. For instance, in a study conducted by Cevher (2015) aiming to determine the role of children's sections in public libraries in Ankara in fostering reading habits, only 12.2% (n = 24) of participating children reported attending the library for the first time during their preschool years. With targeted improvements, an increase in early-age library usage is expected in the coming years.

According to data obtained from the Ankara Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (2023), foreigners residing in Ankara with residence permits constitute approximately 1.5% of the total population. Altındağ district hosts the highest concentration of migrants under temporary protection (Savran & Sat, 2019). However, the multicultural book category at Altındağ District Public Library contains only six titles, indicating a pressing need to expand this collection. To ensure equitable access to libraries for all children and to support the development of foreign children, the number of multicultural and international books in libraries should be increased.

Regarding the distribution of book genres, modern fantasy emerges as the most prevalent type in children's libraries, constituting 52% of all books across libraries. This genre is considered significant in fostering children's imagination and creativity, and its abundance in children's libraries is a positive indicator. Prior studies reveal that children predominantly borrow books within the modern fantasy genre. Additionally, messages conveyed in modern fantasy books are clearly understood by children, the reading load is manageable, and these books support children's imaginative faculties (Sabarina et al., 2018). Fantasy books enable children to envision new, different, and alternative life scenarios, permitting them to undertake journeys not possible in real life, which in turn supports their development as more creative and imaginative individuals (Kiefer et al., 1998).

With 1,944 titles, realistic fiction ranks second among the 6,031 books examined. This genre is important in helping children encounter examples related to real life and in developing problem-solving skills. Through realistic fiction, children gain insight into resolving problems they may face in daily life, thus providing them with opportunities to acquire real-life experiences via literature.

Books such as folk tales and religious stories, which help children better understand their culture, rank third in terms of quantity. However, books representing different cultures and available in different languages constitute a relatively low proportion (2.12%). Another notable finding is the scarcity of interactive books designed to strengthen children's engagement with books and enhance their cognitive levels. The high market prices of interactive books limit children's access to them. Therefore, the limited number of interactive books (only 57 among 6,031 books) in libraries highlights the need for an increase in their quantity. Similarly, wordless picture books, which contain only images and support children's expressive language, creativity, and imagination (Lysaker & Miller, 2013), are underrepresented, with only 14 titles found, indicating that their numbers should also be increased.

Statistics generally show that preschool books primarily target children aged 4 to 6 years. The number of books suited for children aged 0 to 3 years, such as toy books, baby books, and concept books, does not exceed 3%, which reduces the inclusivity of library collections. There is a lack of clear data regarding book accessibility for children aged 0 to 3 in Türkiye. The higher cost of books for this age

group and families' potential lack of knowledge about early book access suggest a need for supportive mechanisms, appropriate physical conditions, and dedicated spaces for presenting suitable books in libraries (Veryeri Alaca & Küntay, 2019). In this regard, public libraries serve as crucial service areas for developing book collections and reading environments tailored to children aged 0 to 3.

Children's early exposure to books in life is closely related to their families' attitudes and the organization of the home environment (Whitehurst et al., 1994). Studies on early literacy development show that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families are at greater risk of falling behind (Ergül et al., 2017). Therefore, making public libraries more functional for children and families is an effective way to bridge this gap. Research incorporating library visits demonstrates that the frequency of such visits is positively associated with early literacy development, particularly vocabulary growth (Sénéchal et al., 1996; Payne et al., 1994), and increases family participation in literacy activities (Xu et al., 2014).

The study conducted by Çakmak and Yılmaz (2009) with preschool children highlights the critical role of family, peer groups, teachers, and the broader environment in creating a reading environment and fostering readiness for reading. Libraries represent the most conducive setting where these elements converge. Early childhood library programs should be designed to benefit not only preschool children but also their families, educators, caregivers, and all stakeholders involved with libraries (Gönen et al., 2015). In programs targeting preschool children, it is essential to consider the appropriateness of books in terms of age and developmental characteristics, as well as their appeal to children's interests. This necessitates familiarity with different genres of children's literature and their appropriate use for specific topics.

4.1. Limitations and Recommendations

Knowledge of book genres and proper classification will enhance the quality of library use by families. It has been demonstrated that illustrations significantly influence the selection of books by preschool children and their families in public libraries. Parents who provided feedback on this matter reported difficulties in choosing appropriate books and noted that bibliographic information was often insufficient to guide their decisions (Svab & Zumer, 2015). Therefore, classifications based on book genres are expected to facilitate families' navigation toward books that align more closely with their children's interests and developmental stages.

One of the main limitations of library studies concerns the books that are borrowed. Due to the lack of separate data entry for preschool books in the library information system, it has not been possible to obtain information regarding the appropriateness of borrowed books for the preschool age group. Therefore, categorizing books that specifically target the preschool period both in libraries and in library systems would help organize the borrowing process more effectively. Additionally, families visiting the library often need guidance on selecting age-appropriate books for their children. To address this, library staff should first be informed about children's books and the age groups they serve and be supported in their professional development through undergraduate education and in-service training. Studies involving librarians are necessary to identify the areas where librarians, children, and families require support within the library environment and to plan necessary interventions accordingly.

According to IFLA (2006), libraries should offer qualified services for babies and children by including not only books but also educational materials such as toys, puzzles, Legos, and various musical instruments that address multiple developmental areas. Research conducted in libraries in Ankara

revealed that the diversity of materials was limited to books. Therefore, libraries should be enriched with a wider variety of materials.

Interdisciplinary collaboration should be increased to foster early childhood book appreciation, support development, and activate the library's capacity to fulfill these goals. It is anticipated that collaboration among educators, librarians, and scholars in relevant fields will enhance the accessibility and inclusiveness of libraries. Future research should design descriptive and intervention studies to investigate early childhood public library usage, given that these spaces offer particularly inclusive access.

This study is limited to six libraries located in Ankara. To obtain a clearer picture of the status of libraries nationwide, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted in different provinces across the country. Since the data presented were collected in 2019, subsequent research will be essential to tracking recent developments in the field of librarianship. Specific 2025 statistical details for public library children's sections were unobtainable.

5. Declarations

5.1. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests, institutional affiliations, or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

5.2. Funding

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5.3. Author contributions (CRediT)

Arif Yılmaz: Conceptualization; Methodology; Validation; Writing—review & editing; Supervision

Ela Sümeyye Seçim: Conceptualization; Methodology; Validation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Resources; Data curation; Writing—original draft; Writing—review & editing; Visualization; Supervision

Selvanur Çapçı: Conceptualization; Methodology; Validation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Resources; Data curation; Writing—original draft; Writing—review & editing; Visualization; Supervision

† These authors contributed equally to this work. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

5.4. Data availability statement

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

5.5. Ethics approval

This study used document analysis only and involved only publicly available data; therefore, formal ethics committee approval was not required.

5.6. Use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools

No generative AI tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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