

Children's books with aquatic characters: Content analysis of environmental and value education themes¹

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Abstract

Children's books offer important developmental support for children. Illustrated children's books play an important role in the formation of permanent and effective learning in children by supporting information about environments, situations and assets that are difficult or impossible to access with visual elements. This study examines the topics of aquatic creatures in preschool and primary school books. In 2024, we conducted the study using document review, a qualitative research model. The sample comprises illustrated children's books in a public library and two public kindergartens in Burdur province. The researcher developed a form to collect the data. The researcher scanned a total of 5300 books. The criteria list guided the examination of books on freshwater and marine organisms among the scanned ones. The necessary information was recorded manually and using a computer. The data were analyzed by the content analysis method. According to the findings, 25 books dealt with aquatic creatures. The analyzed books are for children ages 3-6 and 7-12. Seventeen of the books were published in Turkey and eight in other countries. The books were published between 2006 and 2023. The books' main characters and side characters that are analyzed are mostly aquatic creatures. In a small number of books, child characters were also included. The book's characters are fish, crab, octopus, snail, starfish, oyster, whale. The books deal with the environment, values education, the way of living things, and daily life relations. The messages given by the books are related to raising awareness about the environment, the living spaces of other living things, the way of life of these living things, their needs, cooperation, communication, etc. within the framework of the subject they deal with. The findings demonstrate that children's books encompass a diverse range of living organisms. However, it is important for sustainable life that these publications increase, environmental awareness increases, and that children respect nature and the living space of other living things in nature.



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1 Introduction

Children's literature is a special product that nourishes the child's emotional and intellectual world, supports the acquisition of developmental skills and has an important effect on positive personality development. Books, the most significant product of children's literature, consistently enjoy a high level of popularity. Illustrated children's books are used especially in teaching the values targeted to be acquired in preschool and primary school and critical issues of vital importance. Environmental education, one of the most important issues of our day, effectively utilizes children's books. Illustrated children's books provide valuable information to the child and also support emotional development.

In literature (Tür and Turla, 1999), children's literature is defined as oral and written works that are carefully produced especially for children, have high-level artistic qualities, meet children's needs, and appeal to their dreams, emotions and thoughts. Children's literature can offer rich content as a moral and value education tool. This content can mostly be accessed in storybooks. Since children's books are written with the child's eyes and understanding, they convey a simple and easy message to young readers. For example, from the child's perspective, the childhood of a culture or group is reflected with optimism, hope, and excitement (Huck, Kiefer, Hepler, and Hickman, 2004; Jackman, 2005; Riley, 2006).

Children begin to engage with books from their first year of life. Illustrated children's books play an important role in the formation of permanent and effective learning in children by supporting information about environments, situations, and beings that are difficult or impossible to reach with visual elements. These books introduce children to literary elements such as stories, characters and role playing, giving them a love of books and a sense of aesthetics. Books read in preschool and primary school allow children to encounter many words not often used in daily life (Mol, Bus, deJong, & Smeets, 2008).

For a children's book to be "good," it must activate the child's emotional and intellectual world (Roxburg, Zolotow, L'Engle, & Kruse, 1982). Picture story books that are appropriate for children's developmental levels and have supportive content and formal features provide a multi-faceted learning opportunity. The development of the basic ideas and opinions in the book by emphasizing them in action and the main orientations constitute the "theme" (Oğuzkan, 2013). There must be a theme in the story, and the theme must answer a question or reinforce the child's knowledge. Themes can cover topics such as family, friendship, and independence. According to Gönen (2000), Sawyer (2009), and Wisniewski (1996), the subject and theme of the books presented to children strongly influence their enjoyment. The subject is crucial to the book's theme.

The subject can be defined as the sequence of events that occur in a story in a determined order through the characters' actions (Alsudairi, 2000; Lukens, 2007). The subject's functioning provides the transmission of the theme in a story. The subjects chosen for children's books should stimulate critical thinking and foster awareness of significant issues. They should also help children gain positive attitudes and behaviors (Oğuzkan, 2000; Tuncer, 2000).

Studies on environmental education in early childhood (Gill, 2014; Boggs, Wilson et. al., 2016; Baldwin and Wilson, 2020-2020a; Rosenbow and Patti, 2014) emphasize environmental education while addressing the benefits of natural and outdoor environments for children. Rosenbow and Patti (2014) identify the integration of early childhood and environmental education in a nature-based program as a powerful approach that addresses children's developmental needs and their

innate connection with the natural world. Baldwin and Wilson (2020; 2020a) determined that environmental education and scientific thinking skills were supported in their studies with preschool children on the themes of “rain” and “melting ice.”

Studies analyzing the implementation of studies on environmental education indicate that useful results have been obtained. Analysis of studies examining environments that provide nature experiences to young children (Rosenbow and Patti, 2014), grouped them under natural outdoor play areas, nature kindergartens and forest kindergartens, holistic development of children with nature, and book review. As a result, it was emphasized that bringing young children together with nature provides opportunities for holistic child development and the emergence of ecological identity and makes them realize its benefits. Gill (2014) states in his literature review that the benefits of children spending time in nature are proven to promote healthy development and positive attitudes and values towards the environment.

Illustrated children’s books present the story to meet the readers' needs with their short story, abundant visuals, and verbal text, while also using drawing, description, and motivation. Their heroes are usually children, animals, or toys (Ersoy & Bayraktar, 2017). Using an animal or an inanimate object to describe the subjects is called anthropomorphism (Burke, 2004: 207). In her study, Dunn (2011) evaluated the role and importance of anthropomorphic animals in children’s literature by examining 120 titles and the ten most common animals in children’s books.

Children's literature frequently features animals as characters in stories. From fables and fairy tales to contemporary children’s literature, animals are used to help children acquire desired behaviors. The frequent characterization of animals in children’s literature is based on the argument that children can easily identify with them and that attributing negative emotions, behaviors, and adjectives to animals is more accurate or harmless than describing these negativities through a human being (Bolongaro 2009; Burke, 2004).

Through these characters, it is aimed to establish a love of animals and nature in the child, and to make efforts towards animals commensurate with his/her age so that he/she acquires the values of the culture he/she is in. Each book character embodies the spirit (zeitgeist) and cultural identity of the era they inhabit (Williams, 2014). Bolongaro (2009) emphasizes that another important point is “how to move from animal representation to representation of the animal problem.”

Children who read books with animal characters empathize with animals (Trupe, 2006; Uğurlu, 2013). The main purpose is to help children become individuals with desired behaviors such as being selfless, helpful, respectful, loyal, etc. (Oğuzkan, 2013; Yılmaz, 2016). Dunn (2011) states that talking animals are common in children’s literature and that these characters exhibit various levels of anthropomorphism, such as talking, thinking, wearing clothes, and riding bicycles like humans. Stories with animal characters that have human characteristics teach children basic human concepts and values.

In other countries, studies conducted with children’s books are within the framework of values (Dunn, 2011) and environmental education (Larsson, 2012; Holm, 2012; Zynda, (2007). One study (Denkova, 2011) examined environmental and values education. A study on environmental education at an early age (Ray et al., 2015), a series of children’s books created to protect water resources, and a curriculum training study for teachers produced another children’s book series. Another study examines children’s books discussing climate change (Boggs, Wilson et. al., 2016).

Studies on children's books related to our study topic have been conducted in Türkiye. cleanliness (Erdal, 2008), peace (Sagsoz, 2018), values (Kazanci Gul, 2018), basic concepts (Bay, 2020), a

review of preschool children's picture books on the subject of environment (Güzelyurt and Özkan 2019), within the framework of values education in the preschool period, a view of animal characters in books from the perspective of environmental education (Peker and Ahi, 2019) within the framework of environmental education. Yazici Okuyan and Gedikoglu (2012) discuss environmental awareness and consciousness in the primary school period, while Comardolu, Ültay, and Dönmez Usta (2021) analyze studies on environmental education in primary schools. Aslan (2015) discusses environmental pollution in children's books for primary and secondary schools, while Celik (2016) examines Atatürk and republic values within the framework of values education.

Studies conducted in Turkey on children's books with animal characters are Yıldırım and Dinç (2017)'s examination of the 20 best-selling books for the 7-14 age group in terms of form and content features and Peker and Ahi (2019)'s look at animal characters in early childhood books from an environmental education perspective. Almost all of the characters in these two books are land-based creatures.

Despite the existing research, there has been no attempt to examine books for preschool and primary school children, focusing on the themes and topics covered in children's books, especially those that feature freshwater and marine creatures as story characters. This study focuses on which freshwater and marine creatures are featured as characters in picture books for preschool and primary school children, what educational purposes they serve, and the content of the themes and topics in the books.

Research Questions

1. Which preschool and primary school children's books have freshwater and marine creatures as story characters?
2. Which creatures whose habitat is freshwater and marine are story characters in preschool and elementary school children's books?
3. What are the themes and values of preschool and primary children's books whose story characters are freshwater and marine creatures?
4. What are the subjects of preschool and primary school children's books whose story characters are freshwater and marine creatures?
5. In which educational context are creatures living in freshwater and marine life included in preschool and primary school story books?

2 Method

2.1 Research model

We conducted the study in August-September 2024 using document review, one of the qualitative research models. In qualitative research, documents are information sources that can be used as effective data sources of existing records, documents, and books (Karasar, 2012; Merriam, 2023; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). You can use document analysis independently or to enhance the validity of your research. The targeted data can be reached with the determined criteria list in documents that are important. The targeted data can be reached with the determined criteria list. The criterion sampling (Patton, 2018) method was also used in this research. The important criteria here are that the characters in the scanned books are creatures whose habitat is freshwater and sea and are aimed at preschool and primary school.

2.2. Sample

The sample consists of a public library in the city center of Burdur (3500 books) and two state

kindergartens in the district of Bucak (1800 books) with 5300 illustrated children’s books. Since no library in the Bucak district can conduct the research, the public library in Burdur city center was included in the study. As a result of the scan, 25 books suitable for the research were reached. The examined books include 17 for children aged 3–6 and 8 for children aged 7–12. Turkey wrote and published 17 books, while other countries published 8 of them. The books, with print runs ranging from 1 to 27, were published between 2006 and 2023. Table 1 presents the examined books and publishing house information.

Table 1 Books with story characters, freshwater and marine creatures, age group and publication information

Order No	Book No	Book Name	Age Group	Page Count	Year of Publication	Edition No	Publisher Name
1.	1	Curious Fish	3-6	6	2022	1	Little Drop
2.	2	Underwater Treasure	3-6	27	2020	1	Matarı Child
3.	3	Istanbul’s Fish	3-6	43	2020	1	Tohum
4.	7	Jealous Frog	3-6	16	2008	1	Ya-pa
5.	11	Little Frog	3-6	31	2010	1	Timaş Child
6.	13	Clean Sea	3-6	16	2023	1	365 Days
7.	14	Little Starfish	3-6	16	2021	1	Timaş Child
8.	15	Crab that can’t fit In Its Shell	3-6	24	2019	11	Masal Perest
9.	18	Shiny Fish	3-6	16	2012	4	Akvaryum
10.	19	The little penguin is Afraid of Water	3-6	24	2022	1	Türkiye İş Bankası (Translation)
11.	21	Red Cheeks Are Looking for Its Sun	3-6	33	2020	1	Uçan At
12.	22	Narwallar Love Cheese Crackers	3-6	23	2023	2	Türkiye İş Bankası (Translation)
13.	23	Happy Hippo	3-6	30	2007	27	Türkiye İş Bankası (Translation)
14.	25	Sharing a Shell	3-6	29	2016	9	Türkiye İş Bankası (Translation)
15.	5	Whales and Dolphins	4 +	29	2021	4	Almidilli (Translation)
16.	16	Pengo learns to be organized.	5-6	16	2014	1	Timaş Child
17.	24	Polar Bear Whose House Melted	6	24	2021	3	Masal Perest
18.	8	Little Oyster	6-9	14	2007	2	Tudem Publishing
19.	20	Let’s Play Hide and Seek	6-9	16	2017	1	Damla (Translation)
20.	4	Red Fish	7-8	63	2009	1	Atlas
21.	6	Under the Sea	7-8	31	2006	1	Tübitak P.B.K. (Translation)
22.	17	Long tail is swift.	7-8	28	2016	5	Beyaz Balina
23.	10	The Most Valuable Treasure	8-12	16	2012	1	Koza Kitap
24.	12	Guest from the Sea	8-12	12	2013	3	Edam
25.	9	Ilayda and the Mysterious Algae	9 +	24	2016	1	Lal Kitap (Translation)

Table 1 shows the information about the 25 books examined. Eight books written in other countries were translated into Turkish and published. Four of these publications were published as a cultural service of a private bank (Türkiye İş Bankası), one was published by a state scientific research institution (TÜBİTAK), and the other three were published by private publishing houses operating following their purposes. The three most printed books are “Happy Hippo” (27th edition), Crab That Can’t Fit in Its Shell (11th edition), and Sharing a Shell (9th edition). The second of the books was a local publication, the first was a foreign publication, and the third was a translation.

2.2. Data collection tool

The researcher created the data collection tool through a literature review, edited it based on expert opinion, and then reviewed it using a pilot application. The form consists of the book's imprint information and semi-structured criteria related to the research topic. Table 2 presents the list of criteria used in the research.

Table 2 Data collection tool

Criterion No	Book Review Criteria	Criterion No	Book Review Criteria
1.	Book No	13.	The main character of the story
2.	Book Name	14.	Minor characters of the story
3.	Age Group	15.	Main character's message
4.	Page Count	16.	Minor characters' message
5.	Author's Name	17.	Where the book's plot takes place
6.	Illustrator's Name	18.	Story flow
7.	First Publishing Year	19.	Subject of the book
8.	The number of prints	20.	Theme of the book
9.	Publishing House Name	21.	Value/education in the book
10.	Publication Year	22.	Total number of scanned books
11.	School/Institution Where Worked	23.	Researcher's Name Surname
12.	Scan Dates		

2.3. Data collection and analysis

During the research process, we obtained data using the document analysis method, which includes the processes of accessing, understanding and analyzing documents (Meriam, 2009, 2013; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). The researchers recorded the necessary information manually and using computers.

In the document analysis process, following the method of Altheide (1996), we first determined the inclusion criteria in the research. The researchers then selected and coded the books according to the most important criteria. They gathered the necessary data from the books they selected, taking into account the basic areas of analysis. Among the books they scanned, the researchers scrutinized those featuring freshwater and marine creatures, based on the criteria list they had created and their own reading. During the data analysis, the researchers read the books multiple times and revisited the notes they had taken, repeatedly referring to the data source. A second researcher also evaluated and verified the collected data. When the two evaluators couldn't reach a consensus, they consulted a third evaluator, an expert in the field of children's literature. The expert in children's literature also reviewed the evaluations that resulted in consensus. The books used as data sources for the research are classified as "text-based documents according to their qualities" by Geray (2006)..

After the data were analyzed step by step, the consensus among the evaluators was calculated as 92% according to the Miles-Huberman formula. The expected consensus in this formula should be at least 80% (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2014). The evaluators and the expert reviewed the data several times and exchanged views. Evaluations with low agreement were clarified.

In the next stage of the research with document analysis, the data collected from the books whose characters live in freshwater and marine life were organized and classified with the help of main themes, categories, and criteria through content analysis (Labuschagne, 2003). In addition, in the content analysis, the information related to the basic questions of the research was converted into text, tabulated and organized into categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

2.4 Ethical issues

Necessary permissions were obtained from relevant institutions and schools to conduct the research. After the permissions were obtained, the scanning of the books began.

3 Findings

This study examined children’s books for preschool and primary school ages according to whether the story characters are freshwater and marine creatures and the educational framework in which the themes and topics they cover are located. As a result of the examination, five main themes were revealed. These are story characters, age group addressed by the books, themes and topics of the books regarding environmental education, themes and topics of the books regarding values education, and the fact that the books were written for the purpose of storytelling and encyclopedic information. The total themes, categories and subcategories resulting from the analysis of the research data are presented in table 3.

Table 3 Total themes, categories and subcategories

Theme	
Children's books with freshwater and marine creatures as book characters	
Categories	
Books for children aged 3-6 with freshwater and marine creatures as story characters imprint information	Books for children aged 7-12 with freshwater and marine creatures as story characters imprint information
Subcategories	Subcategories
Names of books	Names of books
Age group	Age group
Number of pages	Number of pages
Year of publication	Year of publication
Number of editions	Number of editions
Name of publisher	Name of publisher
Categories	
Content information for children's books for ages 3-6 with freshwater and marine creatures as story characters	Content information for children's books for ages 7-12 with freshwater and marine creatures as story characters
Subcategories	Subcategories
Main characters	Main characters
Minor characters	Minor characters
Story locations	Story locations
Theme	Theme
Topic	Topic
Categories	
Educational context of books for children aged 3-6 with freshwater and marine creatures as book characters	Educational context of books for children aged 7-12 with freshwater and marine creatures as book characters
Subcategories	Subcategories
Values education	Values education
Environmental education	Environmental education
Encyclopedic knowledge	Encyclopedic knowledge

Table 3 shows one theme, three categories and fourteen subcategories reached in the research. Information on the creatures, main characters, side characters and the setting where the story takes place in the 17 books examined in the study for the 3-6 age group is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Aquatic creatures, characters and story setting in books for children aged 3-6

Order No	Book No	Book Name	Age Group	Page Count	Main character	Minor character	Story of place
1.	13	Clean Sea	3-6	16	Swordfish	Fish, Octopus, Seahorse, Sea Turtle, Crab, Ray and People	Sea
2.	5	Whales- Dolphins	4 +	29	Whales	Dolphins	Sea
3.	15	The Crab That Can't Fit in Its Shell	3-6	24	Shell Crab Morty	Crabs	Beach
4.	7	The Jealous Frog	3-6	16	Jealous Frog	Cute Frog, Carp Fish	Lake
5.	24	The Polar Bear Whose House Melted	6	24	Polar Bear Yoyo	People	Pole
6.	14	The Little Starfish	3-6	16	Little Starfish Dodi	Starfish Dodi's Friends	Beach
7.	11	The Little Kurbi	3-6	31	Little Frog Kurbi	Fish, Snail, Turtle, Crab, Mother Frog	River
8.	19	The Little Penguin Is	3-6	24	Little Penguin	Little Polar Bear and Penguins	Pole

Afraid of Water							
9.	21	The Red Cheek Is Looking for His Sun	3-6	33	Tiny Turtle Red Cheek	Water Shrimp, Mother, Brother Turtle	Earth-sky
10.	22	The Narwhal Loves Cheese Crackers	3-6	23	Narval/Narcissus	Polar Bear	Sea
11.	18	The Shiny Fish	3-6	16	Shiny Fish	Parlak's friends are three tiny fish, his aunt and a beaded fish.	Sea
12.	16	The Pengo Learns to Be Organized	5-6	16	Penguin	Pengo's friends are four penguins, his teacher and his mother	Pengo's room
13.	2	The Treasure Underwater	3-6	27	Penguin Swish	Panda Lemon, Bear Parik and Rabbit Bozo	Sea
14.	1	The Curious Fish	3-6	6	Curious Fish Pitpit	Mr. Octopus	Sea
15.	23	The Happy Hippo	3-6	30	Hippo	Zebra, Buffalo	Forrest- Lake
16.	25	Sharing a Shell	3-6	29	Crab	Bubble, Brush	Beach
17.	3	The Fish of Istanbul	3-6	43	Dolphin Fish and Arda	All the creatures living in the sea	Sea

According to table 4, the main characters in the books are a fish, a crab, a frog, a turtle, an octopus, a snail, a starfish, an oyster, a whale, a dolphin, a penguin, a polar bear, a hippo, a tiny turtle, narvals/narcissus, and a child. The secondary characters in the books are carp, humans, worm, seagull, sea cucumber fishes jellyfish, shark, oyster, lobster, clown fish, sea turtle and babies, crabs, sea urchin, dolphins, sea horse, starfish, sea turtles, dragons and horses, penguins, whales, divers, eel, goldfish, frogs, algae, octopus, seahorse, snail, little polar bear, water shrimp, panda, bear, rabbit, zebra, buffalo, sea rose, maggot, people and child. A small number of books (four) also include child characters. 13 of the locations where the stories take place are the sea, 4 are fresh water, the others are glaciers, beaches, houses and forests.

The page numbers of story books for preschool age are between 6-16 and 23-33. It is seen that a book that provides encyclopedic information about the characteristics and habitat of marine creatures has 43 pages. The creatures in books for children aged 7-12 whose story characters are freshwater and marine creatures and the places where the stories occur are presented in the table 5.

Table 5 Aquatic creatures, characters and story setting in books for children aged 7-12

Order No	Book No	Book Name	Age Group	Page Count	Main character	Minor character	Place
1	8	Little Oyster	6-9	14	Small Oyster	Fish, Jellyfish	Ocean
2	20	Let's Play Hide and Seek	6-9	16	Squid Bobo	Shark Şaki, Oyster Teri, Lobster Tako	Sea
3	4	Red Fish	7-8	63	Red Fish and Kagan	Kağan's Mother and Father, Clown Fish, Sea Turtle and Babies, Crabs, Sea Urchin	Sea
4	17	Long Tail, Swift	7-8	28	Long Tail Swift	Dolphin, Oyster, Sea Horse, Crabs, Starfish	Sea
5	6	Under the Sea	7-8	31	Dolphins, sharks, jellyfish, sea turtles, dragons and horses, fast fish, penguins, whales, divers		Sea
6	10	The Most Valuable Treasure	8-12	16	Wise Octopus	Joyful fish, Purple fish, Eel	Sea
7	12	Guest from the Sea	8-12	12	Child: Selim	Selim's fisherman grandfather goldfish, sea fish	Sea
8	9	Ilayda and the Mysterious Seaweeds	9 +	24	Child: Ilayda	Red Fish, Frog, Algae	Lake

Table 5 shows information on books for ages 7-12, characters, number of pages, and location where the story takes place. The location of the story in seven of the books is the sea, and in one is the ocean. The number of pages in the books is between 12-16 and 24-31, and a book is 63 pages. Table 6 summarizes the themes and topics of stories in environmental education in children's books for preschool age.



Figure 1 Examples of books for children aged 7-12 that feature aquatic creatures

Table 6 Categories and topics of environmental education covered with aquatic creatures in books for 3-6 years old

Book No	Book Name	Age Group	Main Characters	and	Minor	Place	Theme of the book	Subject
13	Clean Sea	3-6	Swordfish	Orange Fish, Seahorse, Sea Turtle, Crab, Ray and People		Sea	Negative effects of people on the environment- Keeping the environment clean	The bad effects of sea pollution on living things, the cause of pollution, the search for a solution, the decision of people not to leave their waste in the sea.
5	Whales and Dolphins	4 +	Whales	Dolphins		Sea	Identifying the most well-known marine creatures	Encyclopedic information on Whales and Dolphins (physical characteristics, diet, social relationships, etc.)
24	Polar Bear Whose House Melted	6	Polar Bear Yoyo	People		Polar	Environmental education: The effects of climate change on the lives of other living things	Polar bear Yoyo's habitat is affected by human activities and climate change, and people understand this and decide to use water wisely and feed Yoyo.
21	Red Cheeks Seek His Sun	3-6	Tiny Turtle Red Cheek	Water shrimp, Motherbrother Turtle		Earth-Sky	Natural events and planets through the eyes of a child	Narrating the sunset with the moon, planets and children's games, and transferring information about natural events and space
22	Narvalis Love Cheese Crackers	3-6	Narval/ Narcissus	Polar bear		Sea	Introducing a little-known whale species	To introduce the life style and characteristics of the narwhal
2	Underwater Treasure	3-6	Penguin Şuşu	Panda lemon, Bear Parik and Rabbit Bozo		Sea	Interaction of different species on land and sea	Observing known and lesser-known marine creatures in their habitat through the eyes of land creatures and conveying information
3	Istanbul's Fish	3-6	Dolphin Fish and Arda	All living things in the sea		Sea	Environmental disaster: The effects of ship accidents	The negative effects of two ships colliding and polluting the sea on living things, and the child character Arda's agreement with the fishes to clean the sea.

Table 6 shows the story themes and subjects of freshwater and marine creatures in children's books for preschool age. The characters and subjects of story books for ages 7-12 are presented in Table 7.



Figure 2 Sample books on environmental education themes in 3-6 children’s books that include aquatic creatures

Table 7 Aquatic creatures and topics covered in books for children 7-12 years old

Book No	Book Name	Age Group	Main and Minor Charecter	Place	Theme-Value-Nature	Subject	
8	Little Oyster	6 -9	Small Oyster	Jellyfish, Fishes	Ocean	Realizing one's own value	The oyster envies the fish swimming around it because its only movement is opening and closing its mouth. One day, it feels pain and thinks it is sick because sand got stuck in it. The jellyfish tells it that what is inside is a very valuable pearl. The oyster feels valuable and happy.
20	Let's Play Hide and Seek	6 -9	Squid Bobo	Shark Şaki, Oyster Teri, Lobster Tako	Sea	Respect for differences	When Bobo the squid was playing hide and seek with his friends, he was found right away because he was big and splashed ink. When Bobo was not allowed in the game, he painted himself and hid like a rock. When his friends could not see him, they became worried and apologized.
4	Red Fish	7- 8	Red Fish-main character Kağan, His parents, Clown fish, Sea turtle and babies, Crabs, Sea Urchin	Octopus, Squid, Eel and Whale	Sea	Danger-safety in the habitat	Red Fish hits a sea urchin, Sea Horse treats it. Then the whale swallows it. It is very scared, but it jumps out of the whale's mouth onto the beach. Kağan takes it home and looks after it for a while. Then it releases it back into the sea. The red fish is happy.
17	Long Tail, Swift	7- 8	Long Tail, Swift	Dolphin, Oyster, Sea Horse, Crab, Starfish	Sea	Positive perspective, helpfulness	Long tail agile, while cruising in the sea, tells the oyster that its pearl is very beautiful. Finds a solution to the fights of sea horses and crabs. Greets starfish, plays with octopus. Feels happy.
6	Under the Sea	7-8	Dolphins, sharks, jellyfish, sea turtles, dragons and horses, fast fish, penguins, whales, divers		Sea	Every living thing is unique	Lifestyles and characteristics of marine creatures.
10	The Most Valuable Treasure	8-12	Wise Octopus	Joyful Fish, Purple Fish, Eel	Sea	Love of books	The Wise Octopus encourages the fish to find the treasure chest in which he has placed a book. The fish are surprised when they find the book. But they are happy when they read it.
12	Guest from the Sea	8-12	Child Selim	Selim's fisherman grandfather, goldfish, sea fish	Sea	Respect for labor and lifestyle	Selim saves money to buy a goldfish. Then he feeds the sea fish he finds on the shore. When the fish grows too big, he releases it into the sea, which is its habitat.
9	Ilayda and the Mysterious Seaweeds	9 +	Child (Ilayda)	Red Fish, Frog, Algae	Waterfall - Lake	Water nymph and lake life safety	The extraordinary character, the Water Fairy, saves the lake life by cleaning the poisonous algae that spoil the water and the life of living things (frogs, fish).

Table 7 presents the main and supporting characters of books for children aged 7-12, including freshwater and marine creatures, the setting where the story takes place, and the story topics. The

story topics of the books are subcategories such as Realizing one’s own value, Respect for differences, Danger-safety in the habitat, Positive perspective, helpfulness, Every living thing is unique, Love of books, Respect for labor and lifestyle. Table 8 presents story topics that feature creatures living in freshwater and the sea.

Table 8 Themes, values and subjects covered with aquatic creatures in books for 3-6 year old children

Book No	Book Name	Age group	Main character	and Minor	Place	Thema-Value	Subject
15	The Crab That Can't Fit in Its Shell	3-6	Crustacean Crab Morti	Crabs	Beach	Efforts to change your life. Sharing-Contentment	A crab that changes its shell loses the first shell it finds, and then shares someone else's shell.
7	The Jealous Frog	3-6	Jealous Frog	Cute Frog, Carp fish	Lake	Seeing one's own benefit by thinking multi-dimensionally and positively.	When the jealous frog wanted to tear the reeds from her friend's house, the carp told her that the reeds would also protect her from the sun and dissuaded her.
14	The Little Starfish	3-6	Little Starfish Dodi	Starfish	Beach	Accepting differences, producing solutions	The reflection of the starfish's different physical characteristics in the game and their subsequent acceptance.
11	The Little Kurbi	3-6	Little Kurbi	Fish, Turtle Crab, Snail,	River	The recognition of their own species by their young. Cooperation	A baby frog who lost his mother in the river finds her with the help of other creatures.
19	The Little Penguin Is Afraid of Water	3-6	Little Penguin	Little Polar Bear and Penguins	Polar	Overcoming fear and supporting others	A penguin overcoming his/her fear of swimming and helping another chick overcome his fear.
18	The Shiny Fish	3-6	Shiny Fish	Parlak's friends are three tiny fish, his aunt and a beaded fish Pengo's friends are four penguins, his teacher and his mother	Sea	Tolerance-Understanding	The Shiny Fish and the Beaded Fish accept the end of the game they played.
16	The Pengo Learns to be Organized	5-6	Penguin		Pengo's room	Being organized	Penguin tidies up her room when she/he can't find her favorite toy in her messy room.
1	The Curious Fish	3-6	Pitpit Curious Fish	Mr. Octopus	Sea	Respect for other people's private space and belongings.	Curious Fish Pit-pit learns that it is not right to rummage through Octopus' treasure chest without permission.
23	The Happy Hippo	3-6	Hippo	Zebra, Buffalo	Forrest and Lake	Self-acceptance and self-love	The hippo's envy of other creatures. Then, when he saves the goat from the crocodile, he becomes proud of the goat's words.
25	Sharing a Shell	3-6	Crab	Sea Rose, Maggot, Seagull, Fish	Beach	Kindness-Sharing, helping each other	While searching for a new shell, the crab encounters other creatures that share its home.



Figure 3 Sample books on values education themes in 3-6 year old children's books that include aquatic creatures.

4 Discussion

The findings of this research show that in preschool and primary school story books, creatures whose habitats are freshwater and marine are included as characters, the themes and subjects of the books cover creatures living in water for environmental education and values education, and lesser-known and widely-known creatures are book characters.

The first finding of this study is that a total of 25 children's books feature freshwater and marine creatures as characters. The main characters and supporting characters of 22 of the examined books are creatures whose habitats are freshwater and marine, and the characters in three books are children, adult humans, and aquatic creatures. Studies (Bedford, 2012; McCrindle and Odendaal, 1994) have determined that animal characters are given significant place in children's books and that these books are very popular among children. The results of the study (Mc Crindle and Odendaal, 1994) determined that 44.5% of preschool books have animal characters at the center of the plot, and the most popular books are realistic fictions with anthropomorphic or fantasy animals as the main characters. In the study by Peker and Ahi (2019), it was seen that in preschool books with animal characters (n= 51), 41 species were mostly land-dwelling creatures, while the fewest were aquatic creatures (frog, hippo, crocodile, turtle, penguin, octopus).

The second finding of the study shows that 17 of the books are for 3-6 year olds in preschool and 8 are for 7-12 year olds in primary school. In the literature review, it is seen that books about these periods have been examined in studies (Erdal, 2008; Dunn, 2011; Holm, 2012).

The findings show that the main and supporting characters in the storybooks are mostly well-known creatures (fish, turtle, penguin, polar bear) and in some, lesser-known creatures (narwal, hippo, squid, oyster, sea horse and dragon, sea urchin). In four books, the "child" is the main character, and in three books, the adult is the supporting character.

In the books, most of the places where the story takes place are the sea, a few are lakes and rivers, fewer are beaches, and the two least are the ocean and the earth and the sky.

The results of the study show that some of the books for ages 3-6 have page numbers between 6-16, some between 23-29, a few between 30-33, and one book has 43 pages. The books for ages 7-12 have page numbers mostly between 12-16, a few between 28-31, and one book has 63 pages. The literature states the page numbers of children's books as 10 to 18 pages (one spread) for ages 2-2.5, and 20 to 36 pages (two spreads) for ages five and above (Tür & Turla, 1999; Ural, 2013).

The results showed that, within the framework of the theme of environmental education, some of

the books for ages 3-6 dealt with the negative effects of human activities and global warming on the lives of marine life as subthemes/categories, some dealt with the species-specific characteristics of marine life as characters, and one book dealt with natural events (sun-moon) and planets through the eyes of a child. The results of the research (Kütük, 2019) determined that the children's books examined in terms of environmental education (n=118) mostly included the theme of biodiversity and nature (n=91). Güzelyurt and Özkan (2019). They examined preschool children's picture books on the subject of environment (n=50) and determined that 10% of the books dealt with water pollution, 8% with environmental pollution, climate change, global warming, and 6% with air pollution and melting glaciers. Trupe (2006) states that picture books for preschool children aim to teach nature and animal love through animal characters and to acquire social, moral and traditional values. "Illustrated children's books for preschool children aim to establish a love of animals and nature through animal characters, and ultimately to help children gain social, moral and traditional values (Trupe, 2006).

The findings show that most of the books examined for 7-12-year olds deal with the themes of environment and values education together. In the books, the sub-themes within the framework of environmental education are recognizing living things in the living space, respecting staying in the living space, protecting the living space, developing good relationships with a positive perspective in the living space. Similarly, in the study of Erdal (2008), in the books that deal with values related to environmental cleanliness, the unconscious and irresponsible pollution of the environment in which people live, the pollution of rivers and forests, and environmental cleanliness are discussed. In their study, Yazıcı Okuyan and Gedikoğlu (2012) determined that in Aytül Akal's children's books for primary and secondary school students (n=64), the environmental problems mostly dealt with were soil, water and air pollution, and the least dealt with were noise. Similarly, Denkova (2011) examined the role of children's books in influencing environmental education and personality. She determined that the way of life of human beings affects all other equal members of the environment, and that technological development, which is thought to improve their lives, pollutes the soil, water and air terribly.

The results of this study show that the subthemes within the framework of the theme of values education are mostly kindness and assistance, some love, less respect - tolerance and acceptance, at least two are self-love - being happy and problem solving, and one is love of reading books. Similarly, Pekdoğan and Korkmaz (2017) determined in their studies that teachers teach the most love and cooperation values to 5-6-year-old children. In Akto's (2020) study on values education in early childhood, the values he addressed are responsibility, respect, kindness and tolerance, love, self-confidence, cooperation - cooperation, honesty and peace.

The findings show that, within the framework of the theme of values education, some of the books for ages 3-6 have values that support personality development as a sub-theme. The books have values such as improving one's life, first trying, then sharing and adapting to conditions, accepting differences, helping each other, overcoming fear, controlling feelings of winning and losing, respecting private space, and loving oneself. In support, Peker and Ahi (2017) determined that all the animal characters (n=41) in the books they examined had "good" characteristics. This determination is important for children to develop positive personality traits. Supporting studies (Trupe, 2006; Uğurlu, 2013; Oğuzkan, 2013) accept that children experience similar emotions to animal characters in storybooks and this feature is used in values education (such as helpfulness, respect, acceptance).

The books also cover natural life, the lifestyle of living beings, their physical, nutritional and sheltering characteristics with encyclopedic information in a way that will create awareness in environmental education. Studies (Aslan, 2015; Larsson, 2012) support our findings. Aslan (2015) also determined that among the 23 children's books she examined, there were only a few books that provided information about the environment. Larsson (2012) examined how children's books convey ecological information and how children become conscious and share information.

The findings show that the characters of living beings whose habitats are sea, fresh water and land are handled interactively in the flow of the story. Research (Bedford, 2012; McCrindle & Odendaal, 1994) results indicate that problem solving is usually addressed in books with animals as the main characters, and the problems are related to people's daily lives or the living spaces of the characters.

4.1 Limitations and future research

This article is limited to children's books available in two kindergartens in Bucak district and in the public library in the city center of Burdur. The scanned books are limited to books for preschool and primary school periods whose characters are aquatic creatures. The books are stories and encyclopedic, and the themes covered are related to values education and environmental education. In future studies, more books can be scanned, the themes/messages of the main and supporting characters can be analyzed. The living spaces of the characters and their interactions with each other can be analyzed. The topics covered in values education can be examined.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine the themes and subjects of preschool and primary school storybooks whose story characters are freshwater and marine animals. The findings of this study support the literature suggesting that children's books whose story characters are animals can be used in an educational context and that this will be effective.

The results of this study are particularly important because they show which preschool and primary school children's books include creatures whose habitats are freshwater and marine, determine which creatures these are, determine in which educational framework the main and side characters play a role in the flow of themes and topics, determine which themes, topics and creatures values education and environmental education are covered with in this educational framework, determine that the books are divided into stories and encyclopedic information transfer, and determine that lesser-known species are included in addition to widely known creatures in the books.

It is important for sustainable life that the number of books in children's literature that feature freshwater and marine creatures as story characters increases, environmental awareness increases, and children respect nature and the habitats of other creatures in nature.

Researchers working on books in which creatures living in freshwater and the sea are featured as characters in different regions will support awareness on this issue.

Teachers will contribute to awareness formation by especially spending time on books whose characters are living in water in values and environmental education, and by transferring information about the characteristics and habitats of these creatures.

The study determined that the books work together with values education and environmental

education. Educators can benefit from these books in a multifaceted way in the educational process.

Conflict of Interest

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