

## **Storybook Reading Strategies of Preschool Teachers in the USA and Turkey**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined storybook reading strategies of preschool teachers in the USA and Turkey. Two teachers were observed during 30 reading activities in each country. The reading strategies used by the teachers were coded according to material and strategies. The findings indicate that both preschool teachers spent between five and ten minutes for per day and they used mostly normal (%86.6; %73.3) sized books. On the other hand, the teacher in the USA used four times more technology (CD, videotape, film) than the teacher in Turkey. Also, the teacher in the Turkey did not use any costume or factual material. Furthermore, both teachers used more questions and discussion about books. Looking at their other strategies, the teacher in Turkey did not emphasize the print of the book and drama strategies, and teacher in the USA did not use writing or drawing strategies. This finding shows that teachers need to improve their use of different materials and strategies because they used very little different materials and strategies for engaging children's in reading skills. This article introduces the use of reading strategies by the preschool teachers in both countries, and it emphasizes the findings from observation of reading activities. The findings of this study show how the teachers in both countries used reading strategies and what the different strategies were in each country.

**Keyword:** Storybook, reading strategies, reading and writing skills, reading materials, preschool.

### **Introduction**

The general aim of this study was to create awareness about the importance of book reading strategies for improving the literacy skills of children. Book reading activities are powerful educational strategies for providing reading enjoyment to children and for actively engaging in their reading skills (Griffith et al, 2008). Also, storybook reading provides many opportunities for children, and there is a powerful relationship between storybook reading and emergent literacy skills (Simon, 2003; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004; Morrow, 2007; Otto, 2008). Therefore, storybook reading activity should be a daily activity and it should be planned meticulously (Otto, 2008) so that children's books contribute to thinking, imagining, defining, and expressing ideas by children (Wiseman, 2011; Machado, 2003).

Teachers can use some reading strategies to engage, motivate, and be sensitive to children's needs (Zucker, Ward, and Justice, 2009). Thus, using reading strategies as an active activity such as, the use drama and questions by teachers is very crucial in preschool. Teachers can provide

opportunities for attracting attention of children with strategies and they can enable better comprehension stories by children (Otto, 2008).

This study examined which strategies preschool teachers use during their storybook reading and how much time teachers spend in reading activities in both countries. This study sought to provide a stronger essential for better understanding how much time teachers spend for reading activity and which reading strategies teachers use in the both countries. This study can also shed light for teachers about why reading strategies are important for engaging children, and which reading strategies need to use by the teachers.

### **Storybook Reading Materials**

Before reading a book, teachers should consider children's ages and children's interests (McGee & Richgels, 2004) for books differ, such as alphabet books, informational books, and folktales, and these books can promote children's language and literacy development in different ways (Simon, 2003; Griffith et al, 2008). Also, children's books provide new knowledge and concepts, and they help children learn social skills and values (Eliaison & Jenksin, 2003).

Big books which is large format print texts and pictures are used for interactive read alouds, like talking about pictures of story and discussing the story ideas (Kerry & Mason, 1994), and they are highly visible to read to entire class by teachers in the reading story activity (Colville-Hall & O'Connor, 2006). These books have large words, so children isolate words easily. Teachers with big books need to use the same techniques for interactive read alouds (McGee & Richgels, 2004).

This study examined which material teachers use as a strategy, such as different sized books or cards, using puppets related to book, technology like CDs, factual materials, and costumes. Using different materials, such as puppets or stuffed animals, are strategies for attracting to the story the attention of children (Soderman & Farrell, 2008; Schwindt & Tegeler, 2010).

### **Storybook Reading Strategies**

Between the teacher and the child, quality for conversation is embedded within storybook reading activities (Neuman, 1996). For background information, sometimes teachers talk to explain elements of the story to help children understand the story (Schwindt & Tegeler, 2010). Teachers respond to children's attention with analytic talking so that they can model for children thinking, predicting, and inferencing. Teachers should engage children in dialogue about the storybook as a strategy, such as completing, recall, open-ended, and distancing questions, such as when, where, what, which, and who (Griffith et al, 2008, McCarier, Pinnel, and Fountas, 2000).

Asking questions about story helps for children comprehend the story events and questions can keep to children within story (Schwindt & Tegeler, 2010). Open-ended questions especially provide children with explanations, and they can use more word responses (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). Asking questions about the book encourages children to learn and to comprehend (Morrow & Gambrell, 2004; Rainweiler, 2004). In this way, children learn to talk about words, stories, and other features of the text from effective reading strategies (Pentimonti & Justice, 2010).

After reading a book, children's thinking about the book is elicited such as, "Which part of the book is your favorite?" Comparison opportunities are presented between the experiences of the child and the events of the book. Children are provided opportunities to relate their own lives to the book, such as, "Did you meet such a situation?" or "If you did, what did you do in this case?" (Morrow & Gambrell, 2004; Rainweiler, 2004). Therefore, preschool teachers can develop the oral language of children, and they can build language usage into book reading experiences (Justice et

al., 2010; Shagoury, 2009; Griffith, Beach, Ruan, and Dunn, 2008; Wortham, 2006, McCarier, Pinnel, and Fountas, 2000). We observed whether talking and asking questions by preschool teachers during storybook reading had a positive impact on children.

Wals and Blewt (2006) claimed that asking questions during storybook reading improves children's vocabulary skills, and children can learn more than just new words with questions. Therefore, interactive reading means children participate, and it is more effective than passive book reading where children do not participate. Interactive reading provides for improving vocabulary, story comprehension, and concept development (Mcgee & Schickedanz, 2007). For instance, when a teacher reads a book about an orchard, children can focus and learn more unfamiliar words about that context. Teachers can describe theme words conversation or in discussions during the reading activities. Also, they can provide many opportunities with multiple reading strategies for effectively understanding vocabulary meaning by children (Wasik, 2010). This study shows spending time and using strategies for storybook reading in both countries. Thus, this study can prompt awareness about reading strategies for teachers.

Furthermore, Mol, Bus, and Jong (2009) conducted an experimental study with 2,049 children and they researched the effects of reading activities before, during, and after interactively reading a book to children (Justice et al., 2010; Justice & Ezell 2000, 2002). They showed that interactive reading is effective not only for oral language skills but also for writing awareness. Before children can read themselves, they begin to gain experience with listening to books read to them, which then helps their written language (Shagoury, 2009; Griffith et al, 2008). When teachers facilitate children making connections between the writing code and the story by using print referencing, such as asking questions or pointing, they attract children's attention to print. In this way, for children to focus largely on print, they develop print knowledge (Justice et al., 2010; Justice & Ezell, 2000, 2002; Zucker et al., 2009). Therefore, we researched teachers' emphasis of print as a strategy during storybook reading.

Children's reading skills improve with using drama in areas such as fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Children can think aloud in drama activities and thinking skills are crucial for reading (Adomat, 2009). Children can develop their oral language skills, listening skills, and speaking skills. Drama activities provide opportunities for children to have deep understanding of a story, such as its characters and the story's events. Good readers must understand story elements and using words (Adomat, 2005). Dramatization of the story, such as dramatization of characters, also affects improving the language of children (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). Furthermore, the dramatization speech of teachers can keep children's interest in the story (Schwindt & Tegeler, 2010). Therefore, drama is an important strategy in reading activities. This study examined the use of drama in reading activity by the teachers.

Children use similar ways for learning reading and writing because there are strong relationships between reading skills and writing skills. When children learn phonics they can begin to decode print, and they can create their writing samples, so children are encouraged to read and write together (Morrow, 2007). Teachers can plan to draw and to write related stories in order to support children's literacy (Soderman & Farrell, 2008). We coded whether teachers use drawing or writing about books. Teachers can support children's reading and writing skills together. Also, they can prompt better understanding of a story by children because children can think of what happened before their writing.

In sum, teachers can use multiple materials and strategies for children to improve their reading and writing skills. In this study, we wanted to see which strategy teachers prefer to use and

how many strategies they use at what rate in their reading activity. This study can provide an aspect for the diversity that is important to study in different countries.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the research was to show the uses of book reading strategies in reading activities by preschool teachers in the USA and Turkey. Also, this research showed the amount of time teachers spend on reading activities. Reading book strategies and the time spent were compared between preschool teachers in the USA and Turkey. Under this aim the research questions were:

- How much time do teachers spend for reading activity in both countries?
- Which strategies do teachers use in the reading book activities in the USA and Turkey?

### **Importance of the Study**

Book reading is a preferred preschool activity. Teachers read aloud or tell stories with effective strategies for children to develop literacy (Simon, 2003; McGee & Richgels, 2004). This study emphasizes the importance of reading strategies in preschool, and it displays which strategies are used by preschool teachers in reading activities in both countries. Zucker et al. (2013) examined shared reading features and frequencies of teachers in preschool. They found that the frequency and features of shared reading with extra-textual conversation developed children's language and literacy longitudinally, so adult reading strategies are a good predictor children's reading skills in their other classes.

Teachers should plan some guidelines strategies, such as gestures, actions, customs, or prompts. Also, teachers can engage preschool children by carefully observing children's responses (Otto, 2008). This study was conducted in two countries, the USA and Turkey. These countries have different education systems and cultures, but reading strategies have an important place in both education programs for children to improve literacy skills. This study revealed the preferred strategies and time spent by teachers in both countries. In this way, we can understand which strategy uses more time and which strategy uses little time despite the importance of the strategy in both countries. Due to this study, teachers can see which reading strategies they can use more and why reading strategies need to be used.

### **Methods & Data**

In this study, the storybook reading strategies of two teachers were observed, one teacher from the USA and one teacher from Turkey, in two preschool classrooms. We observed 30 reading book activities over two months. This study used a coding system about using reading strategies. We designed the coding system to understand which strategies teachers prefer in reading activities. Teachers made reading activities freely, like choosing the story, its materials, etc. Also, we exhibited how much time teachers spend in story reading activities.

### **Participants**

This study was conducted in two preschool classrooms and three and four-year-experienced two classroom teachers, located in Kirikkale in Turkey and in East Lansing, MI, in the USA, participated. Each teacher was observed during 15 reading activities, so this study totally examined 30 storybook reading activities. In these observations, we used a coding system to exhibit using reading strategies during the storybook reading activities.

### **Coding System and Data Analysis**

This study used two coding systems. First, the teachers' reading activities were coded in terms of using materials as a strategy by the teacher:

- (1) Use different size book or cards (like big, illustrated card )
- (2) Use puppet related to book
- (3) Use technology (CD, videotapes, films)
- (4) Use factual materials
- (5) Use costume
- (6) Other

Also teacher's reading activities were coded in terms of reading strategies. We classified strategies according to five main categories. This is the coding system:

- (Q) Use questions
  - Before activity (1)
  - Inside activity (2)
  - After activity (3)
- (T) Talk about books
- (P) Emphasize print of books
  - Showing title of books (1)
  - Telling of authors of books (2)
  - Pointing with finger to reading direction (left to right) (3)
  - Pointing with finger to reading direction (from up to down) (4)
- (D) Use drama
  - Teacher dramatizes speech (1) (like changing sound for character, simulating object's sound)
  - Teacher dramatizes role (2)
  - Have children dramatize a role from book (3)
- (W) Use writing or drawing (Have children write or draw related to the book)
  - Draw a picture of loved part of the book (1)
  - Draw a picture of cover page of the book (2)

First, we coded teachers' reading strategies, and then we revealed the use strategy number. Any coding differences were arranged by coders, and we calculated the percent of how many minutes were spent for reading activity and which strategy the teacher used.

### **Results**

This study investigated using storybook strategies in both countries: using materials, using strategies, spending time, and differences between the two countries. Results (in tables 1-4 and figures 1-6 below) emphasize the importance of reading strategies and which strategies the teacher uses in storybook reading activities.

In the USA, generally reading activity was between 5-10 minutes. Just one activity was done between 15-20 minutes.

**Table 1***Spending Time for Storybook Reading Activity in the USA*

<b>Between 5-10 min.</b>	<b>Between 10-15 min.</b>	<b>Between 15-20 min.</b>
<b>10 activities (66.6%)</b>	4 activities (26.6%)	1 activity (6.6%)

In Turkey, spending time showed very similar results with the results in the USA. Teachers spent more time between 5-10 minutes.

**Table 2***Spending Time for Storybook Reading Activity in Turkey*

<b>Between 5-10 min.</b>	<b>Between 10-15 min.</b>	<b>Between 15-20 min.</b>
9 activities (60%)	5 activities (33.3%)	1 activity (6.6%)

Looking at using material strategies in the USA, the teachers used frequently normal size books (86.6%). A second important result was that four reading activities were used with a CD (26.6%) as a technology. A related table follows.

**Table 3***Using Materials during the Storybook Activities in the USA*

<b>Normal Size Book</b>	<b>Different size book or cards</b>	<b>Puppet</b>	<b>Technology (CD, videotaped, film)</b>	<b>Factual Material</b>	<b>Custom</b>
13 (86.6%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)	4 (26.6%)	1 (6.6%)	1 (6.6%)

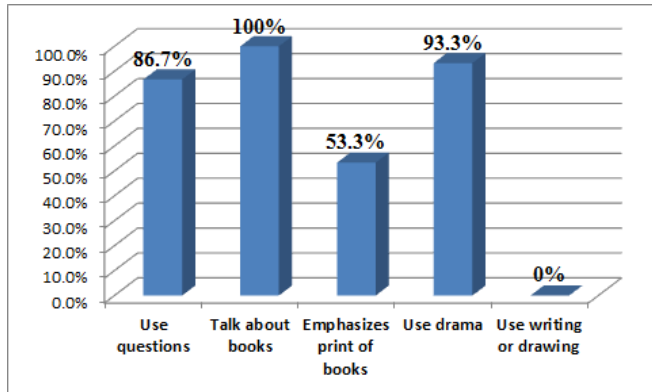
In Turkey, the teacher usually used a normal size book (86.6%), like another teacher. However, the teacher in the USA used a normal size book four times (26.6%), while the teacher in Turkey used technology just one time. Also, she did not use any factual material and customs.

**Table 4***Using Materials during the Storybook Activities in Turkey*

<b>Normal Size Book</b>	<b>Different size book or cards</b>	<b>Puppet</b>	<b>Technology (CD, videotaped, film)</b>	<b>Factual Material</b>	<b>Custom</b>
11 (73.3%)	4 (26.6%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The results of using material strategies showed that the teacher used a high percent normal size books in both countries. Another significant result was that in the USA the teacher used technology more than the teacher in Turkey. Also she used factual material like animal toys and custom like coat or hat one times.

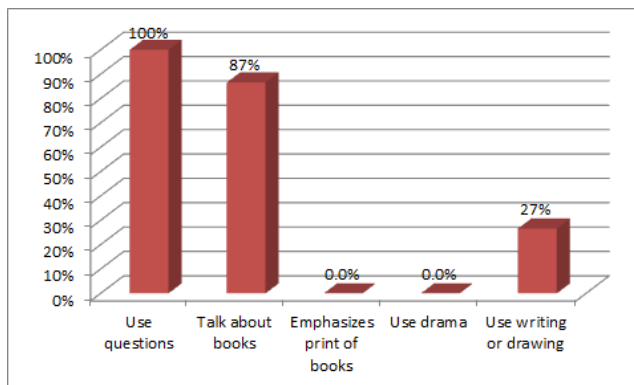
Other strategies were used in different rates, such as questions, talking, emphasizing print, dramatizing, writing, drawing.



**Figure 1.** Using strategies in storybook reading activity in the USA

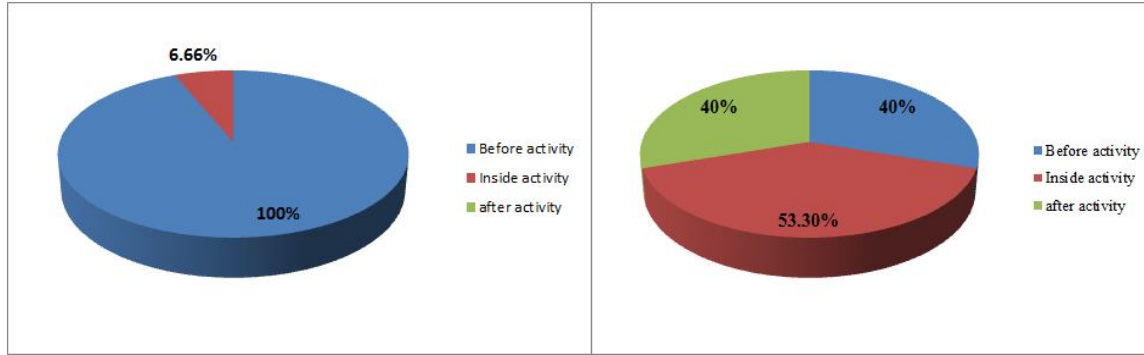
Talking during the reading activity included the story events, the book's pictures, and the language used. These conversations can prompt developing the vocabulary and print knowledge of children (Zucker et al., 2013). Talking about books as a strategy was used more than other strategies. The teacher usually talked about the story, the pictures in the books, children's questions, etc. On the other hand, emphasizing the print of the books was observed at a lower rate than in the storybook activities. We did not observe as a strategy any writing or drawing about the story in the storybook activities in the USA.

In Turkey, the teacher used a highly percentage of questions and talking. However, she did not emphasize the print of books and drama strategies during the reading activities. Another significant result was that in the USA the teacher did not use writing or drawing as strategies in reading a story; however, the teacher in Turkey, used this strategy 27% of the time.



**Figure 2.** Using strategies in storybook reading activity in Turkey

Figure 2 shows that questions were used highly. We also examined when the teacher generally asked questions. Questions were used at different rates before, inside, and after the activity as a strategy.

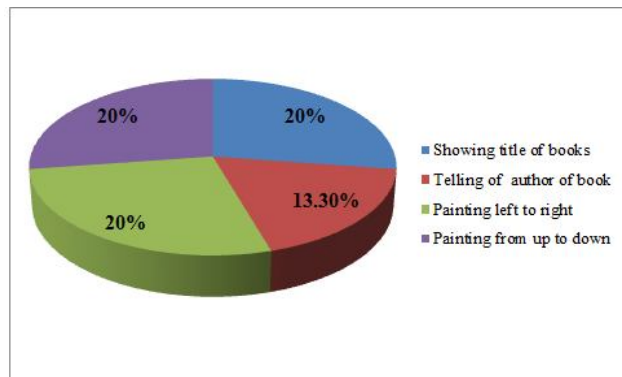


**Figure 3.** Use questions in the USA

**Figure 4.** Use questions in the USA

Inside the activity, the teacher in the USA used more questions. The teacher used the same rate of questions before and after the activity. However, in Turkey the teacher did not use questions after the activity, and just one time she used a question inside the activity. She preferred using questions before the reading activity. Looking at this finding, we can say that the teacher in the USA used questions during all the reading activity time.

Emphasizing the print of books was used differently during the reading activities, such as showing the title of books, telling the author of a book, pointing with overs finger to reading direction, left to right, and pointing to reading direction, from up to down.

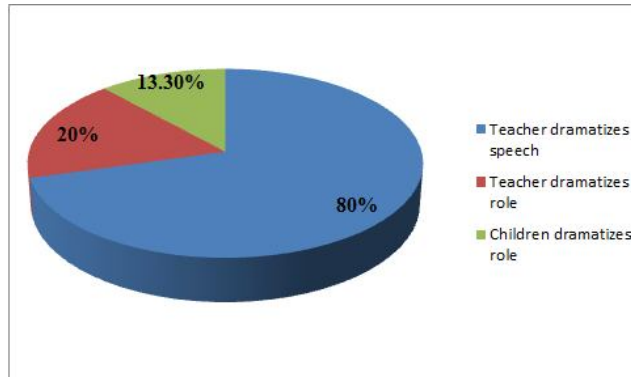


**Figure 5.** Emphasizes print of books in the USA

Emphasis on the print of books is engaging to children for their emergent reading (Dennis, 2010). Figure 5 shows each rate of emphasizing print. Teacher three times used showing the title, painting left to right, and painting from up to down. Telling the author of the book was used only two times as a strategy. Looking at the teacher in Turkey, she did not use any strategy that emphasized the print of books. This finding is a significant difference for both countries.

Last, we coded using drama strategies, such as teacher dramatizes speech, teacher dramatizes role, and children dramatize a role from the book.





**Figure 6.** Use drama in the USA

Dramatizing speech was used more than about four times the use of other strategies. When the teacher read a story, generally she used different sounds for the characters. Also, she showed how objects sound in the storybook, to attract the attention of children. Looking at role dramatization, the teacher used very little (three times) herself. For children's dramatization of the role about the story, the teacher also used very little (two times) as a strategy. But, the teacher in Turkey did not use drama as a strategy in the reading context. This finding is another significant difference.

Last important finding is that while the teacher in Turkey used writing or drawing about a picture of a loved part of the book (26.6%), however, the teacher in the USA did not use any writing or drawing as a strategy. This finding also is another significant difference.

### Discussion

When teachers read a story, they can use some strategies to be effective and to attract the attention of children. In the current study, using strategies was revealed and compared for how much time preschool teachers spent for reading activities and what types of strategies preschool teachers used in their classrooms between the ages of 3 and 5, during storybook reading sessions in the USA and in Turkey. Teacher reading activities were supported as the most important activity by the research. Preschool teachers often made reading activity as a read aloud to their children (Justice et al, 2010; Griffith et al, 2008; Hall & Williams, 2000). Before, during, and after reading activities should be encouraged with strategies for children (Ranweiler, 2004; Wortham, 2006). The findings showed that teachers spent between five and ten minutes for reading activities and teachers' use of strategies differed substantially between the two countries. We discuss these findings in turn.

The teacher in the USA made the reading activity in the large group time. Actually, she specified large group time for 15 minutes, but the teacher spent a maximum of 10 minutes. In Turkey, the teacher can decide how much time spends for reading activities. McKie, Butty, and Green (2012) claimed that not enough time was spent time for book reading, and more time was needed for creating reading opportunities by teachers. Thus, teachers can use more strategies to engage children.

The observations' findings showed that some strategies were used in book reading activities by the teachers such as showing illustrations, using big books, retelling stories, and using props, and they were very effective (Morrow, 2007). In this study, teachers used mostly normal size books (86.6%, 73.3%). Furthermore, the teacher in the USA used technology (26.6%), like CD, and one time she used factual material and customs (6.6%), but the teacher in Turkey just one time used

technology, and she did not use any factual material and customs. In the observations, children displayed more attention and more motivation with using different materials (Soderman & Farrell, 2008; Schwindt & Tegeler, 2010). In conclusion, teachers need to improve using different materials as a strategy for effective instruction.

Looking at the other strategies, in this study the teachers used more talking about the stories (100% and 87 %). Before reading, the teachers did transition activities, such as, puzzles, finger play, rhymes, or songs (Kandir et al., 2010). Teachers also encouraged children with talking about the book, so that children could tell their own experiences (McGee & Richgels, 2004). Dialogic reading prompted active participation, thus children could understand stories and improve their language (Dennis, 2010; Zucker, 2013). Teachers can often use talking about related books during reading activities.

According to the book, teachers can ask questions about the book, by interrupting the story or they can read without interruption (Kandir et al., 2010). Asking questions about a story can help children understand the story, and grow their knowledge and critical thinking. Teachers can also ask questions about the story (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). Questions prompt opportunities for improving children's oral language (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). In this study, teachers used more questions in the reading activities (86.7% and 100%). Using questions can provide a higher level of language because children need to use inference in their answers (Zucker et al., 2010; Zucker et al., 2013). This topic is important for improving teachers' teaching skills (Schwindt & Tegeler, 2010; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Morrow & Gambrell, 2004; Rainweiler, 2004).

Furthermore, teachers can understand what children have background on and what they think. Discussions or conversations after reading a book increase the interest of children toward reading (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). Hanane and colleagues (2008) evaluated teachers' reading strategies about discussing texts for unfamiliar words. Research found that when teachers use discussion strategies, children gain more than vocabulary and comprehension skills (Zucker et al., 2009; Hanane et al., 2008; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). In this study, teachers supported children's vocabulary and comprehension story skills by using talking and questions in their reading activities.

Read aloud activities prompt important opportunities for supporting children's emergent literacy skills, such as print forms (Zucker et al., 2009). This study exhibited that teachers in the USA used 53.3 percent emphasis a print of the book; however, the teacher in Turkey did not use any emphasis a print during the reading activities. According to Shanahan and Lonigan (2013), teachers should use some strategies like dialogic reading, word elaboration, and print referencing, in sharing book activities with children. Generally, storybook reading activities are used for discussion or comprehension of the story, but this does not provide opportunities for improving the print skills of children. To increase emergent literacy of children, educators can use print referencing strategies by deliberately highlighting print of books with talking, questioning, and showing (Zucker et al., 2009).

Justice and colleagues (2009) evaluated read aloud activities according to the use of print referencing by preschool teachers. They studied 23 preschool teachers and 106 preschool children. Fourteen teachers used print referencing strategies during the read aloud. When they compared children's print knowledge, they found that children increased that print knowledge by using print referencing. Lovelace and Stewart (2007) found that using print referencing strategies improves children's print concept knowledge. This strategy can be seen as important for children improving

that literacy skills and teachers' professional development (Justice et al., 2010; Justice & Ezell, 2000, 2002; Zucker et al., 2009).

Another strategy, drama about the story allows better understanding of the story's events (Adomat, 2005). Wilhelm (1997) claimed that drama helps children to be good readers for their deep understanding of the story. Wolf (1998) revealed a positive association between drama and literacy, because drama led to more understanding with talking about story. Thus, drama is an effective strategy for children's literacy skills (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Adomat, 2009; Adomat, 2005). In this study, the teacher in the USA used drama 93.3% of the time, but the teacher in Turkey did not use drama as a strategy. This finding is a significant difference between the teachers. While the teacher in USA usually was dramatizing her speech (80%), the children's dramatized role use was very limited (13.3). The findings showed that teachers need to improve their use of this strategy.

There are strong associations between writing development and reading development. A good story consists of three parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end. The main characters of stories have problems, and these problems of the story are solved in the end parts. Children can write several words or letters, draw pictures about the problems (Morrow, 2007). In this study, while the teacher in Turkey used very little (27%) writing about story as a strategy, the teacher in the USA did not use any writing strategy. Brooks-Hodridge (1995) found that when teachers make a writing study about story reading daily, children improve significantly in their reading skills. Therefore, teachers should use writing activities together with story reading in their reading activity.

In conclusion, we revealed that these teachers spend between 5-10 minutes for story reading activities, and they frequently preferred to use normal size books, questions, and talk about books. Looking at the other strategies, the teachers did not use those strategies, or used them very little. However, teachers need to use more strategies for supporting children's literacy skills.

### **Limitation and Future Direction**

This study has several limitations. First, the reading strategies of each teacher included observing 15 reading activities. The teachers detected reading strategies in terms of their curriculum, and they used different strategies in different cycles. These observations were conducted over the summer time and the teachers can not follow typical calendar. Future research needs to identify teachers' reading strategies in the different terms with more observations.

A second limitation is that this study was conducted with two teachers, a very limited size, because during summer time it is not possible to study with more teachers. Data on using reading strategies should be conducted with over more teachers in future research.

Finally, this study examined using reading strategies by the teachers in three and four year old classrooms, and in two countries. Reading strategies should also be researched for different age classrooms and countries for understanding preferring strategies by teachers.

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