



Depictions of Refugees in Children's Picturebooks in Turkey

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Abstract

The United Nations' announcements of a rise in the number of refugees have led to questions on how refugees are portrayed in children's picturebooks. Works that introduce children, at a young age, to the concept that there are other societies and cultures besides the one in which they currently reside have the potential to broaden their worldview and provide them with new insights. To further understand this, the current study focused on analyzing picturebooks ($n = 15$) of children in Turkey, as the country hosts the largest number of refugees in the world. The portrayal of refugees, the discourses regarding refugees, and the cycles pointing to refugees are discussed through inductive content analysis. The results showed that refugees were portrayed as victims, homeless and helpless, and as people struggling to survive. The most dominant discourse about refugees is that they are longing for a family. In the refugee cycle in books, the migration itself constitutes the broadest stage. The results are presented for discussion in terms of educational and political implications.

Keywords Children's literature · Immigration and refugees · Picturebooks

Introduction

The number of people who have been uprooted from their homes because of war, persecution, or other forms of oppression has reached unprecedented levels worldwide; meanwhile Turkey now hosts the highest number of refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2022). The country hosts approximately 3.7 million registered Syrian refugees as well as 327,418 people of other nationalities (General Directorate of Migration Management 2021). According to the latest data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (2021), the refugee population in Hatay is more than 25% of the local Turkish population. Moreover, with births and new arrivals, this number is increasing by approximately 1000 people per day (Kirişçi et al., 2018). These numbers demonstrate that there are a substantial number of refugee children in Turkey. The basic

needs of these children have been met through both Turkey's internal resources and external resources such as UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, WFP, and UNFP (GDMM, 2016). Similar resources have also come into play at the point of providing free education. However, according to Taşkın and Erdemli (2018), there are two main problems in the education of refugee students in Turkey, namely language and culture.

Communication breakdown and adaptation problems are the two largest looming classroom issues, although research is now being conducted on how to solve those (Darragh & Kelley, 2022). Children who live in a society that is not reflective of their own culture and do not speak the same language as the locals are also exposed to more severe bullying (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). In order to prevent this, there is a need to help young children develop empathy skills and learn respect for differences (Wee et al., 2022). Children's picturebooks can act as effective pedagogical tools in this process (Wanless & Crawford, 2016).

Refugee-themed books for children refer to many different places and situations historically and geographically, reflect individual lives, and convey the refugee experience. With refugee-themed children's books, children can begin to understand the fears and anxieties that others their age have been forced to deal with (Hope, 2008). These books provide them with a new awareness of refugees and migration (Bulut, 2018), which is crucial considering that refugee

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and non-refugee children spend time playing together in the same classrooms (Darragh & Kelley, 2022).

Dissanayake Mudiyansele (2016) stated that children's books exist not in a vacuum, but in a world of prevalent social issues, and so the insights they can provide can simultaneously help to improve children's empathy skills. For this reason, publishers of material that appeal to younger audiences should not ignore these topics. However, in Turkey, refugees have certainly been underrepresented in children's books on migration. This is why we have tried to present a perspective on the approach toward refugees in children's picturebooks in Turkey. In this respect, the importance of depictions in children's picturebooks is discussed in the study, and then the issue of migration and refugees in children's books is clarified.

Literature Review

Children's Picturebooks and Depictions

While children's picturebooks appeal to readers of all ages (Ciecierski & Bintz, 2015), they are considered one of the most important tools supporting the learning process of the youngest members of society. One of the means of accomplishing this is through the visual elements contained within the pages of these texts (Pesco & Gagné, 2017). Thus, this may make it possible for children's books to convey cultural messages and values about society as well (Aerila & Rönkkö, 2015). Books help children break stereotypes and expand their cultural perspectives (Horst & Houston-Price, 2015) because they operate as sociocultural tools with the potential to reflect and shape a given society (Sharma & Christ, 2017). The literacy development of children can also benefit from such resources. These resources can also help children broaden their understanding and clarify different situations in their lives, recognize and deal with emotions, and become more empathetic (Aerila & Rönkkö, 2015).

Children's empathy skills can be especially enriched with books containing different characters and complex themes (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Moreover, picturebooks create a context for promoting global citizenship (Newstreet et al., 2019). The realistic presentation of this context is provided through strong descriptions.

The main character of the book is introduced through descriptive language and imagery, as is the place where he or she lives. Sometimes these depictions are designed so masterfully that readers almost feel as if they have seen the character and experienced the event themselves. In fact, effective depictions are at the core of the market success of picturebooks success. The extent of this impact also depends on the vividness and meticulousness of picturebook depictions. Descriptions in children's literature are valuable from an aesthetic and pedagogical point of view as

well (Pitiri, 2007). According to Sharma and Christ (2017), certain representations used in children's picturebooks allow the realization of targeted topics. For this reason, focusing on how texts and pictures are selected and how they relate to the world, increases the quality of these resources (Paris & Alim, 2017). In refugee-themed books, it is possible to introduce the main character in a realistic way and demonstrate their interaction with the world through instructive descriptions. For this reason, the focus of the study is on these depictions in children's books.

Migration and Refugees in Children's Literature

We are living in an age in which children's literature should not be evaluated through rose-tinted glasses. Hahn et al. (2015) point out that the power of literature should be used in order to raise awareness, so that children are better able to empathize with society, share the problems of others, and not be silent on suffering. Refugees not only have to deal with the consequences of geographical change but also with the emotional turmoil of conditions that oscillate between hope and despair (Crawford et al., 2019). Children's literature has an important function in resolving this emotional confusion.

Crawford and Roberts (2018) described children's literature as a beacon of hope in dark and challenging times. Children's books on refugees help to strengthen the conversation, promote diversity and equality, and instill compassion and respect for the rights of others (Libnoch & Ridley, 2020). As a matter of fact, the number of children's books on refugees has been on the rise in the catalogs of publishers around the world, which generates awareness of the different contexts of forced migration and the challenges faced by these children and their families (Dudek, 2018; Hope, 2018; Vassiloudi, 2019; Ward & Warren, 2020). One of the many difficulties that refugee children experience is that they are forced to live in a society of a different race or culture (Hahn et al., 2015). In this respect, children's literature has enormous potential to help children develop positive racial identities (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Books that represent all groups and are culturally unique are important for teaching students to resist racist practices. Correct information about minority groups can be given to students belonging to the dominant culture, which provides protection from distorted information regarding children belonging to minorities (Morgan & Forest, 2016).

Pauker et al. (2016) stated that children aged 4–11 begin to form racial stereotypes, and that racial awareness increases with age. Children's ideas regarding their own race and the races of others are shaped in early childhood when the issue of race is directly addressed, completely ignored, or actively suppressed in the classroom (Dermaun-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). This paves the way for children's literature

to act as a catalyst by helping to cultivate positive attitudes toward human differences beginning in the early childhood years (Ostrosky et al., 2015). Children can develop empathy when reading books that deal with the causes of migration, emotional displacement, and the school or home realities of immigrants (Sotirovska & Kelley, 2020). At the same time, books can avoid addressing false or misleading messages on immigration or the refugee experience (Tomsic & Zbaracki, 2022). It can also form the basis for developing positive attitudes in this regard (Moebius, 2018). For this reason, Ward and Warren (2020) argue that it is important to incorporate refugee stories at an early age. Children's literature on refugees can teach kids to embrace students with similar life experiences (Hope, 2018). In short, books on migration and refugees are considered pivotal for younger age groups.

Present Study

According to the 1951 Geneva Convention accepted by UNHCR, a refugee is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” Clearly, the ongoing refugee crisis has serious effects on societies and individuals. It is necessary not only for refugee children, but also for the children of the host society to understand this situation properly and to be able to empathize. This is why including refugees in children's books is so relevant to modern education (Ward & Warren, 2020). At the same time, the subject of refugees, which is discussed in children's literature, should be handled with an approach that encourages respect for differences, equality, sharing, solidarity, and trust (Herrera, 2012; Hope, 2017; Newstreet et al., 2019). Thus, may make it possible to prevent future marginalization and discrimination.

Understanding the needs of refugee children begins with acknowledging who they are and the situation they have come from. Children's literature can play a softening role by confronting the child—even if he or she is not a refugee—with this realistic and realistic and painful look at life. However, in this process, it is very important to investigate the depictions of refugees in children's books. Because, according to Resnick (2017), when we do not try to understand those who are different from us, we fear them and our minds may exaggerate the threats coming from them. Darragh and Kelley (2022) emphasize the importance of developing empathy, interest, and understanding in getting out of this state of fear and suggest avoiding negative depictions in children's books. Consequently, this study aims to conduct a critical analysis of children's books with the theme of migration and refugees, which appeal to young age groups. The following questions guided the investigation:

1. How are refugees represented in children's picture-books?
2. What are the dominant discourses toward refugees in children's picturebooks?
3. What are the basic cycles that point to the refugee in children's picturebooks?

Method

Inductive content analysis was used in this study, because it gave exploratory grounds for investigating the depictions of refugees in children's picturebooks. The main purpose of inductive content analysis is to elicit findings from raw data without being dependent on the established themes or methodologies (Vears & Gillam, 2022).

The refugee issue embodies power inequality and distribution among different groups; and this is even evident in children's picture-books, where multiple perspectives are questioned by focusing on socio-political issues and taking critical theories into account (Sun, 2021). However, critical literacy in children's books, which is an important part of social sciences, is handled with a different approach.

In inductive content analysis, text and images become subject to the interpretation of analysts (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Critical race theory has been adopted as the theoretical framework for this context because it deals with the misperception of perceived racial differences by indigenous identity (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). With this theory, (1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (2) the challenge to the dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the interdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano, 1998) were emphasized. Another reason for adopting this theory for the study is that the refugee depictions seem to have ideological bases. Strekalova-Hughes (2019) highlights the fact that representations of social groups in children's literature are not randomly generated. Therefore, based on the notion that the depictions are based on an ideology, the research was conducted through the lens of critical race theory.

All of the picturebooks were read several times by the researchers. The purpose of the first reading was to extrapolate a general knowledge of the books, and the subsequent readings were to uncover the appropriate themes. We aimed to reveal how refugees are portrayed in children's picturebooks, the nature of the discourses are surrounding these depictions of refugees, and the ways in which the cycle of the refugee was constructed in the books. Information about how the books were selected is provided below.

Data Collection

For the purposes of this study, we utilized children's picture-books geared for children between the ages of 3 to 8 years, which were written in Turkish or translated into Turkish. However, children's picturebooks for this age group are few in number in Turkey, as this is still an emerging field. Therefore, only a limited number of books were incorporated into the study.

A purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of the books (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). For this, the keywords “migration” and “refugee” were used. In order to identify children's books categorized by these themes, a search was launched on Amazon via Google, as well as “D&R” and “kitapyurdu”, which are local Turkish websites. These searches can be performed by any researcher or parent without requiring access to the university library or catalog. In the first search made in this way, 46 books were uncovered. These books were evaluated in terms of compliance with the determined criteria, which were as follows: (1) primarily containing a text directly related to refugees, (2) target audience between the ages of 3–8 and (3) currently being printed and distributed. The characters of non-human beings (e.g., things, animals, etc.) were also included in the selected books. In addition, we did not limit the search to any particular historical period or publisher. Therefore, both translated and untranslated books were included in the study. Finally, from the original selections, 15 books were selected to be analyzed. Once all the researchers agreed on the books, the analysis process began.

Data Analysis

We analyzed using the inductive content analysis guidelines provided by Vears and Gillam (2022). Codes were generated based upon themes detected from the 15 books, which were each read separately by the authors of this study. Each author identified their own themes by reading all the books at least twice. Then, the authors came together and compared their codes and themes. The process of combining and rearranging the appropriate themes continued until all the authors reached a relative consensus on the themes. Finally, in the last stage, the themes related to the study were revealed, and the detailed findings were presented.

In qualitative research, it is important to address the background of the researchers, as the beliefs and assumptions of the researcher influence the interpretation of the data. All the authors of this study were experienced in carrying out studies on book analysis. The first three authors of this article have all previously conducted research related to critical content analysis. Therefore, we focused on the portrayal of refugees in children's picturebooks in Turkey.

Findings

The aim of this study was uncover how refugees are portrayed in children's picturebooks, what the discourses are regarding refugees, and how the cycle of the refugee process is constructed. The book information included in the analysis is given in Table 1.

Almost half ($n = 7$) of the books examined within the scope of the study were related to war or violence (Table 1). Looking at the statistical rates, the refugees who migrated to Turkey in the last nine years have been of Afghan, Syrian, Pakistani, Iraqi, Palestinian, and Iranian origin (OECD, 2020). The highest rate belongs to Syrian migrants (IOM, 2020). Syria borders Turkey to the south, and it is reported that the main reason for migration is the ongoing Syrian civil war. In addition, most of the books in Table 1 are translations ($n = 11$). For this reason, the experiences of the authors who translated from the source language to Turkish were also discussed. While that's a couple of the translators had little experience in the children's books ($n = 2$), others were more familiar ($n = 44$ books).

Each of the picturebook authors who wrote in their native language had previously worked in the field of children's literature. The publication and distribution of the works in Turkey cover the years 2012–2020. The main characters in the books were usually human ($n = 12$). Although there is a balanced distribution of the gender of the main character ($n_{\text{female}} = 4$ and $n_{\text{male}} = 4$), gender is not explicitly stated in some works ($n = 6$). The analysis determined that the most common reason for migration is the war ($n = 8$). However, the reason for migration is not specified in some books ($n = 5$). In the book *Öteki Aslanlar (The Other Lions)*, Gökçe (2020), the cause of migration is a great fire, and in the book *Welcome* (Barroux, 2016), the cause of migration is breaking ice.

The family compositions in the books were also included in the analysis. While no family references are presented in five works, there is a single-parent or extended family structure in three works, and a dual-parent structure in four. In the book *The Journey* (Sanna, 2016), which offers a dual-parent family structure, the father dies in the war. In *Karton Kutu (Cardboard Box)*, Çirişoğlu Çotur, (2018), both the mother and father were lost in the war, and in the book *The Day War Came* (Davies, 2020), only the main character survived the war. In the majority of the books, the narrator is the main character ($n = 10$). This tends to be the way that the characters describe the migration process and their experiences. In the remaining books, the events are narrated by an outsider who observes what the refugees are going through.

The refugee cycle is reflected in three different ways in these books: (a) Happiness—migration—uncertainty,

Table 1 Analyzed book information

Publication Year*	Title	Original Language	Translator's Experience/Award information	Author	Illustrator	Character	Gender	Reason	Family composition	Narrator
2012	<i>Tarik ve Beyaz Karga (Tarik and the White Crow)</i>	Turkish	Work in native language	The Polar Star Collective	Sadi Güran	Human	Male	War	Extended family	Third person
2016	<i>Welcome</i>	English	17 works of translation	Barroux	Barroux	Animal	Unknown	Natural disasters	No reference to family	Main character
2016	<i>The Journey</i>	English	10 works of translation	Francesca Sanna	Francesca Sanna	Human	Unknown	War	Dual-parent family	Main character
2017	<i>Stepping Stones- A Refugee Family's Journey</i>	English	7 works of translation	Margriet Ruurs	Nizar Ali Badr	Human (Animal-tion)	Female	War	Extended family	Main character
2017	<i>My Name is not Refugee</i>	English	3 works of translation	Kate Milner	Kate Milner	Human	Male	Not expressly stated	Single-parent	Main character
2017	<i>Op De Vlucht (Away from Home (Refugee))</i>	Dutch	2 works of translation	Pimm Van Hest	Aron Dijkstra	Human	Female	War	No reference to family	Main character
2018	<i>Karton Kutu (Cardboard box)</i>	Turkish	Winner of 44 national awards	Merve Çirişoğlu Çotur	Merve Çirişoğlu Çotur	Human	Male	War	Dual-parent family	Main character
2018	<i>The Boy in the Boat</i>	English	First author's native language / World awards finalist	Sevde Tuba Okçu- Maya Mizuno- Vanne Hemels- Golden Sweet	Golden Sweet	Human	Male	Not expressly stated	No reference to family	Third person
2019	<i>The Suitcase</i>	English	72 works of translation	Chris Naylor- Ballesteros	Chris Naylor- Ballesteros	Animal	Unknown	Not expressly stated	No reference to family	Third person
2020	<i>Öteki Aslanlar (The Other Lions)</i>	Turkish	Work in native language	Gökçe Gökçeer	Hüseyin Sönmezay	Animal	Unknown	Natural disasters	Dual-parent family	Third person
2020	<i>The Day War Came</i>	English	8 works of translation	Nicola Davies	Rebecca Cobb	Human	Female	War	Dual-parent family	Main character
2020	<i>Dönme Dolap (Ferris Wheel)</i>	Turkish	Work in native language	Tülin Kozikoğlu	Hüseyin Sönmezay	Human	Male and female	Not expressly stated	Single-parent	Third person

Table 1 (continued)

Publication Year*	Title	Original Language	Translator's Experience/Award information	Author	Illustrator	Character	Gender	Reason	Family composition	Narrator
2020	<i>Como Meter Una Ballena En Una Maleta (How to Put a Whale in a Suitcase)</i>	Spanish	16 works of translation	Raül Nieto Guridi	Raül Nieto Guridi	Human	Unknown	Not expressly stated	No reference to family	Main character
2020	<i>Galiba Hişirdiyorum (I Think I'm Rustling)</i>	Turkish	Work in native language	Sema Aslan	Cansu Dinç	Human	Female	War	Extended family	Main character
2020	<i>Story Boat</i>	English	6 works of translation	Kyo Maclear	Rashin Kheiriyeh	Human	Unknown	War	Single-parent	Main character

* Studies are given in chronological order

(b) Happiness—migration—happy ending, and (c) Migration—uncertainty.

In the books *The Journey* (Sanna, 2016), *My Name is not Refugee* (Milner, 2017), and *Karton Kutu (Cardboard Box, Çirişoğlu Çotur, 2018)*, the pre-migration life of the main characters are described as an ordinary family life. The main characters and their families, who had a happy family life before the migration, are forced to leave their place of residence due to war or other reasons, which causes them to start a long migration journey. However, the books do not fully explain what happened as a result of migration. Although the expressions used in the books for the future give hope, it is not clear whether they actually find a home at the end of the migration. The ending sentence in these books is generally akin to: “I believe we will continue our story under this sky. New friends will accompany us” (Çirişoğlu Çotur, 2018, p. 39).

In the book *Stepping Stones- A Refugee Family's Journey* (Ruurs and Ali Badr 2017), *Öteki Aslanlar (The Other Lions, Gökçe 2020)*, *The Day War Came* (Davies, 2020), *Op De Vlucht (Away from Home- Refugee, Hest, 2017)*, *Tarik and Beyaz Karga (Tarik and the White Crow, The Polar Star Collective, 2012)*, *The Suitcase* (Naylor-Ballesteros, 2019), *The Boy in the Boat* (Okçu et al., 2018), *Welcome* (Barroux, 2016), *Galiba Hişirdiyorum (I Think I'm Rustling, Aslan, 2020)*, and *Story Boat* (Maclear, 2020) there is a cycle that starts with a joyful family life and ends happily. At the beginning of the cycle, a positive family picture is drawn. In the book *The Day War Came*, the story begins as follows: “The day the war started, there were flowers in front of our window and my father was singing a lullaby to put my brother to sleep” (Davies, 2020, p. 2). Then, suddenly, something starts to change and the main characters migrate with the family or by themselves. Usually on foot and sometimes by boat, they eventually reach a home where they can be safe. In these books that conclude with a happy ending, the last sentences usually follow this type of pattern: “This is the story of little Ahmet. It is the most difficult of journeys. But with the support of the children of the world, Ahmet is now happy and safe” (Okçu et al., 2018, p. 44).

In only few books, the story begins directly with immigration and ends in uncertainty. In the books *Dönme Dolap (Ferris Wheel, Kozikoğlu, 2020)* and *Como Meter Una Ballena En Una Maleta (How to Put a Whale in a Suitcase, Guridi, 2020)*, the story begins with the main character(s) already in the midst of their migration. At the end of a long journey, there is no home to be reached. In the book *Como Meter Una Ballena En Una Maleta (How to Put a Whale in a Suitcase)*, this process is summarized as: “There are many other people here who do not know where to go with their suitcases. I think all they know is that for now they just have to go” (Guridi, 2020, p. 23). In the book *Dönme Dolap (Ferris Wheel)*, it is stated that “At that time, somewhere in

the world, someone else was leaving by saying ‘Come on’” (Kozikoğlu, 2020, p. 35). This highlights the continuation of the migration process.

The study comprehensively analyzed 15 children’s books, which were determined according to a set of selection criteria. In addition to the cycle discussed above, the depictions of refugees themselves were also discussed.

Refugee Depictions

Victims

In most of the books analyzed ($n = 8$), refugees are depicted as victims. In other books that contain non-war themes, the displaced are also victims (Barroux, 2016; Gökçe 2020). Accordingly, while the main character is living a happy life with his or her family, a war breaks out (or there are various reasons) and the characters are forced to leave their home country. The characters in the books see fleeing as an obligation. For example, in the book *Como Meter Una Ballena En Una Maleta (How to Put a Whale in a Suitcase)* “I can understand him when I look into his eyes. But I have no answer to give him. All I know is that the mobility is justified with the sentences that we have to go and the time has come” (Guridi, 2020, p. 6).

Those who had to migrate in some way are depicted in all the books as victims of the event. In the book *The Day War Came*, the war’s effect on people is expressed as follows: “The war came to the playground, it destroyed our roof, pieces splashed on our teacher’s face, it razed the city to the ground” (Davies, 2020, p. 8). The destructive power of war is often clearly demonstrated. In the book *My Name is not Refugee*, the following question is asked to the reader: “Imagine, can you live in a place where water does not flow from the taps and garbage is never collected?” (Milner, 2017, p. 5). Such phrasing shows the destruction of war and explains the extent of the victimization. In the book *The Suitcase*, the difficulties experienced by people who had to migrate are summed up in the statement: “But now I need some rest. I’ve been on the road for a very long time. I am so tired that I need to get some sleep” (Naylor-Ballesteros, 2019, p. 11). In the book *Stepping Stones- A Refugee Family’s Journey Book*, the victimization is illustrated thusly: “Soon we had less food, it was not enough for all of us. ‘Rama, share your soup with Sami!’ It never occurred to me that my mother, who said this, was also hungry” (Ruurs and Ali Badr 2017, p. 12).

Homeless and Helpless

In addition to the depiction of the refugee as victims in children’s books, they are often also portrayed as homeless and helpless. Housing was pointed out as the biggest problem of

people who migrated due to war, natural disasters, or similar reasons. People who left their homes migrated to survive and to find a safer place. The book *The Journey*, shows that the reasons why people may move to a new place are related to the safety of the destination. It has high mountains. Then, with a sigh, he said “We will go there and live without fear” (Sanna, 2016, p. 12). People who had to leave their homes are depicted as helpless and homeless and, accordingly, tired and unhappy. This is summed up effectively in the book *Op De Vlucht (Away from Home/ Refugee)* “The house where you feel safe is shattered! Or think about it, one day your house suddenly disappeared. There is no kitchen or stairs anymore. You are no longer safe” (Hest, 2017, p. 6).

In each of the books, the refugees identified themselves as homeless with the only goal of seeking a safe place. Migration often begins with an exhausting journey on foot, may include a boat ride, and hopefully ends at a home that offers shelter and security. In the book *The Boy in the Boat* (Okçu et al., 2018), the character Ahmet sails the seas in search of his home. In *Tarik and Beyaz Karga (Tarik and the White Crow, The Polar Star Collective, 2012)*, Tarik and his father sail by boat and look for a place to stay. Similarly, in the book *The Journey* (Sanna, 2016), the family crossing the border seeks a house for themselves.

Those Struggling to Survive

Some of the books (Aslan, 2020; Barroux, 2016; Davies, 2020; Hest, 2017; Naylor-Ballesteros, 2019; Milner, 2017; Okçu et al., 2018) showed explicitly and implicitly that refugees are a part of society. In these works, the main characters know that they are unwanted, but they still struggle to survive and want to continue living in their new home. Their effort is supported by other people living in the places where they have migrated. In the book *The Child in the Boat*, the main character, Ahmet, searches for places to stay in his boat and encounters children like him. The children always told him why he could not stay with them. For example, “I wish you could come... You have a beautiful heart. But when you grow up, people in our country will think that you cause trouble here” (Okçu et al., 2018, p. 29) and “The little girl put the origami crane in her hand aside and answered with a bittersweet voice: ‘It would be great, but people here find you strange, she won’t talk to you because you don’t look like them’” (Okçu et al., 2018, p. 37). However, in the continuation of the book, all the children united and went to full moon mother and acted together for Ahmet.

In the book *The Day War Came*, while the main character was walking down a school corridor, all faces turned to him and a teacher exclaimed, “You see, there is no place for you here. You don’t even have a chair to sit on. Come on, get out of here!” (Davies, 2020, p. 20). In the following pages of the book, other children come up with a chair and

note, “We were pushing back the war with every step we took” (Davies, 2020, p. 26). Similarly, in the book *Öteki Aslanlar (The Other Lions)*, the king of the forest, the red-maned lion, clearly states that he does not want the blue-maned lions: “We do not allow foreigners to our forest. We DEFINITELY don’t buy any other color furry ones... So please get out of here!” (Gökçe 2020, p. 12). However, the other inhabitants of the forest opposed this idea and started a resistance against the king of the forest.

In these books, refugees struggle to survive in the face of death and other trying situations connected to war or disaster. In the book *Stepping Stones- A Refugee Family’s Journey*, this is expressed as follows: “The River of people seeking peace, looking for a place where bombs do not fall and people do not die on their way to the grocery store” (Ruurs and Ali Badr 2017, p. 13). Again in the book *Karton Kutu (Cardboard Box, Çirişoğlu Çotur, 2018)*, the mother and father of the main character died in the war and the main character tried to survive by joining the flood of people. In the book *Op De Vlucht (Away from Home/Refugee)*, the main character expressed the reason for his resistance as follows: “All you want is a life that you do not fear, one year, one week. But first just one day! It’s a single day when you do not have to hide, hold your breath, be quiet!” (Hest, 2017, p. 7–8).

Discourse Towards Refugees

The second research question of the study sought to analyze the discourses surrounding refugees in the books that were selected. All of the discourses identified are positive.

We All Share the Same Sky

The books commonly depict refugees sharing what they experience and feel. It is emphasized that refugees have a life story, and families like everyone else before migration. In the book *The Suitcase* (Naylor-Ballesteros, 2019), the main character tries to carry his memories to where he migrated. In the book *The Day War Came*, he says, “We learned about volcanoes in school. We sang a song about how tadpoles turn into frogs and drew colorful pictures of birds” (Davies, 2020, p. 4). While the boy who left his homeland with the outbreak of the war was wandering in another school corridor, the children there were doing similar things: “I looked through the window. Children were learning about volcanoes, singing and drawing colorful birds’ pictures” (Davies, 2020, p. 17). Again, in the book *Stepping Stones- A Refugee Family’s Journey* (Ruurs and Ali Badr 2017), the main character talks about the breakfast prepared by his mother before the war, the play he played with his brother, and the stories told by his father.

After emphasizing that refugees have a life story like everyone else, the books cover the migration process and explain that refugees are sometimes not welcomed in their new homes. However, in this case, a third person (the narrator) steps in and emphasizes that we have equal rights. In the book *Dönme Dolap (Ferris Wheel)*, the daily routine of two children living in different parts of the world is described simultaneously, and at the end of the day, it is understood that one of the children is a refugee. At the end of the book, there is the statement “That’s when everyone realized that they were on the same Ferris Wheel” (Kozikoğlu, 2020, p. 34). The narrator of *Op De Vlucht (Away from Home / Refuge)*, says in the final pages that “In this new country, neither the sky is different nor the sun...” (Hest, 2017, p. 25) and Dr.F.M.Wibaut’s “There is only one country: Earth. There is only one nation: Humanity. There is only one destiny: Love”. Therefore, the theme of “**We All Share the Same Sky**” emerged in this section of the study (Hest, 2017).

Vulnerable From the Outside

Refugees who had to leave their homes were seen as vulnerable in the books, and the discourses were shaped accordingly. Refugees who are struggling to survive and whose sole purpose is to find a new home do not actually pose a threat to the people of the new country. In the book *Galiba Hişirdiyorum (I Think I’m Rustling, Aslan, 2020)*, the main character states that he is alone in the country they have just come from and all he wants is to talk. The main characters of these books are sometimes traveling without their father (Sanna, 2016) and occasionally both the mother and father are absent (Çirişoğlu Çotur, 2018; Davies, 2020). With parents gone, they commonly make an effort to be noticed in the middle of the crowd. In the book *My Name is in the not Refugee*, the main character asserts “We must escape! We have no choice... Mom, I’m scared! Father, I’m afraid” (Milner, 2017, p. 13), giving a stark portrayal of the character’s mood. In the book *Karton Kutu (Cardboard Box, Çirişoğlu Çotur, 2018)*, the main character asks for mercy from those around him. Finally, in the book *Stepping Stones- A Refugee Family’s Journey*, it is understood that prayer is the only chance for those who take a boat trip: “We sailed on waves of hope and prayer. The waves crashing on our little boat scared me. Not everyone was lucky enough to land safely. We prayed for those whose journey ended at sea” (Ruurs and Ali Badr 2017, p. 22).

Those Longing for a Family, Home, and Restored Normality

It is understood that the general goal of refugees is to find a shelter, and this is true of books represented by both animal and human characters. In those that end happily, the main characters has found a new home and the fight seems to

have been won. However, the home referred to here is not just a place to stay. The characters talk about their longing for a warm atmosphere where they can share their happiness with their families. This discourse on refugee family desire is quite dominant, and is apparent in each of the examined texts. For example, in *The Journey*, characters says, “Maybe one day we will find a new home, just like the birds. A safe home where we can start our story all over again” (Sanna, 2016, p. 39). In *Stepping Stones- A Refugee Family’s Journey*, the family celebrates, “Now we have a new home, a home surrounded by new sounds and smells and friendly and helpful people” (Ruurs and Ali Badr 2017, p. 8). And in *Welcome*, the main character addresses the locals in hopes of finding a new home: “Hello cows! We are looking for a new home for ourselves. I wonder if we can live here” (Barroux, 2016, p. 9). However, the longing for home here a relational connectedness that includes all family members, rather than simply the physical needs.

Discussion

Children’s picturebooks appear as an important tool in understanding the pain experienced by other children and their reactions to world problems (Crawford et al., 2019). This tool can also be used to address refugee issues of humanitarian concern everywhere. This is necessary in terms of sharing the experiences of refugees and teaching values such as empathy, cultural sensitivity, and solidarity to all children. In fact, we can accept this structure as the greatest potential of children’s literature. In order to reveal this potential and use it in an educational sense, it is necessary to critically analysis children’s books. For this reason, we decided to scrutinize the refugee-themed books in this study. However, it should be stressed that few such resources are available in Turkey, the country hosting the highest number of refugees in the world. Therefore, we can consider this as one of the primary limitations of the study.

In most of these children's books, the narrator is the main character. This may contribute to the reflection of experiences from a primary perspective. When the main child character explains the instability and lack of security that emerges with migration, the interaction with the children of the host country can be strengthened (Hope, 2008). And the characters’ presentation of a detailed “before and after” depiction of their lives helps to convey information on different cultures and geographies, which facilitates tolerance and understanding. Of course, this cannot be measured concretely and easily, but the educational aspect of children’s literature can offer great opportunities for educators. Different cultures can be introduced through refugee characters

(Libnoch & Ridley, 2020) and the diversity in Turkey can be addressed in this manner.

In the relevant books, the refugee cycle is discussed in three ways; (a) happiness- migration- uncertainty, (b) happiness- migration- happy ending, and (c) migration- uncertainty. The long walks during migration and the difficulties experienced especially on boat trips are compatible with the idea that refugees should be shown as ordinary people going through hard times (Rutter, 1991). However, the fact that on some journeys refugees do not survive has at times been dramatized. From a critical point of view, it should be noted that refugees sought to overcome all these difficulties, but did not make themselves out to be saints or superheroes. As Agnew and Fox (2001) state, the characters face challenges while leading ordinary lives, and were incapable of responding with courage exceeding that of normal human power. At the same time, in some of the books, the migration ends, and the characters find a happy home. But there are also books in which the happy ending does not take place and the uncertainty continues. In these books, there is no final scene that ends with a clear resolution, instead indicating that the migration will continue, and that it is impossible to ascertain what awaits the main character. This sometimes makes the reader feel like she/he is in a black hole with no end in sight. This puts refugee stories in a different category from fairy tales, where characters regularly live happily ever after.

In the study investigating the depictions of refugees, it was found that they are commonly portrayed as victims, homeless and helpless, and people struggling to survive. These depictions are not exactly unrealistic. In fact, such accurate portrayals might be effective in developing children’s empathy skills and fighting prejudices against the culture of aversion also stated by Amin (2012). However, despite the gloomy picture that emerges with themes of victimization and homeless/helpless, the theme of those who struggle to survive can be interpreted as positive. Because although a realistic picture of life provided in the pages of these books (those longing for a family, homeless and helpless), it is possible for children to be preoccupied with indirect emotions and the psychology of guilt (Niolaeva, 2012). For those struggling to survive, it is often the exclusionary and alienating practices of host peoples that do the most damage. It is remarkable that the main characters were encouraged in this struggle by their parents, who helped instill a degree of hope. This can also contribute to the development of resilience and courage in children to stand up to injustice. Therefore, it is possible to say that an analysis on emerging themes can help to develop an understanding of migrant children’s experiences and needs.

Roberts and Crawford (2008) pointed out that children’s literature has the task of presenting strategies for dealing with the problem in addition to simply presenting information and confronting the issue at hand. People who are

introduced as victims and helpless in the books also show resilience. For people who have to leave their home country for various reasons and migrate to another country, how they are welcomed in their new country is an important issue. For this reason, discourses targeting this phenomenon are in need of a thorough examination. According to Strelakova-Hughes (2019), this issue should be a priority in children's literature because the fleeing of refugees from their home country is often misunderstood. All of the discourses that emerged within the scope of this study are positive and give the message "we are equal with refugees". In fact, the messages in the books proclaim that the world offers equal rights for everyone, that they can be given a place to stay, and that they are harmless because they are already victims. This is because the predominant idea in the books is that refugees are "passive victims" (Van Gorp, 2005) due to the fact that they are defenseless to events unfolding around them. Lamme et al. (2004) underline that one of the biggest reasons for being a refugee is the decision to seek a more prosperous life, but that the new country is not much better than the old one. Hard living conditions, low wages, and exploitation, in particular, are common challenges for refugees. Even if this is not clearly depicted in children's books, the disturbing glances and unrequited wishes of children to be at a normal school show that these facts are partially addressed. It is not clear to what extent these realities should be represented in children's literature. Regardless, presenting the message "you are not alone" after the exposing the trauma faced by refugees can be considered significant.

Immigration status and class are the most common representations in refugee-themed books. Gender emerges in the representation of both migrants and host communities. This is because the main characters in the books are both boys and girls. There are no explicit statements about the race of refugee children, but it is seen that the authors give subtle hints in the names of the children. However, this was not the case in all the books. We believe that the collective migrant experience may be represented in the books where characters are not named in any way and no particular race is represented. According to Mantoya et al. (2014), non-naming distances the position of power from the character. But this is open to criticism. Because, according to Huber et al. (2020), the practice of (de)naming further detracts from a humane portrayal of the migrant experience and creates a social distance between the characters in the book and the reader.

Many refugees are forced to cross the border and some of them sacrifice their lives in attempting to accomplish this. Sea voyages are the most precarious aspect of travel. The boats that refugees board are not meant to carry passengers and are loaded with more people than a boat is meant to carry. Despite the known danger of death, boats are seen as a way of salvation. This can be considered as one of the most

dominant representations of the low socioeconomic class. In terms of critical race theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), it is possible to say that refugee resistance emerged mostly at this point. Of the 15 books analyzed, none include negative discourses on refugees, instead choosing to deal with refugees in a realistic manner. The books are dominated by a clear immigrant advocacy ideology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), which makes them useful for the social integration of refugees and for the sharing of experiences. However, it should be noted that in younger age groups, picturebook choices are mostly made by adults. Hope (2008) reported that adults mostly make choices that reinforce their current perspectives. Therefore, we have concerns regarding how adults who have a negative attitude towards refugees might prepare their children. To address these concerns, it is necessary to discuss educational practices and political implications.

Teachers' use of these works through reading or by animating them through drama in the classroom environment can be quite impressive in terms of refugee experiences. As a matter of fact, in Watts's (2004) study, the limitations and advantages of combining children's literature with drama were discussed, and the contributions to the development of empathy in children were addressed. The relevant books can be introduced to children by their teachers, regardless of parental influence. To accomplish this, it is necessary for the school and the politicians behind this type of campaign to take responsibility. At the time this article was written, with the "Conditional Education Assistance for Refugees" program carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education and UNICEF and various institutions, more than 811,000 children in 81 provinces in Turkey had access to education, and more than 170,000 children in 15 provinces had access to protection services (Hürriyet, 2022). It appears that politicians have made very humane breakthroughs in this regard. The impact of children's picturebooks should also be taken into account in these advances, and the potential contributions of children's books should be considered, especially by international organizations such as UNICEF. In refugee camps, children's books on this theme can be used directly with refugee children. This may be effective in giving the children's awareness and helping them to control their reactions (Hope, 2008).

Finally, as the primary audience of picturebooks consists of children, it is important that this literature presents fictional worlds that integrate different societies, reflect an attitude towards multiculturalism and pluralism, and highlight discourses that reinforce empathy. Children acquire stereotypes and prejudices due to the discourses constituted by their parents, through the discourses they hear and see from other adults, and through the events they witness in society. Moreover, these stereotypes are spread quickly through mass media. Children's perceptions of prejudice

and stereotyped beliefs should be uncovered and exposed in order to help them acquire a more critical perspective. The potential contributions of children's books should be evaluated, as they might support the growth of individuals who do not make false claims or over-generalizations, who have ideas that support the establishment or protection of social order, and who can embrace all people with love.

Conclusion

Children's picturebooks can be effective tools for creating awareness about the refugee crisis among children. The mission of getting to know people different from us, understanding their difficulties, and developing global citizenship is incredibly significant (Herrera, 2012). For these reasons, children's picturebooks published in Turkey, home to a multitude of refugees, are discussed in this study. The examined texts notably approach refugees with respect and exclude negative discourses. As Crawford and Roberts (2018) state, this situation gives hope for the future. Because in any new refugee crisis that may occur in the years to come, many will immediately be able to see the multifaceted relationship between refugees, war, migration, poverty, and despair (Roberts & Crawford, 2019). Thanks to this foresight, it is possible to encounter brave and hopeful stances that offer support to vulnerable children and families.

However, refugees are not wanted by some groups. This brand of hostility can be experienced in classroom settings or by parents in terms of critical literacy (Strekalova-Hughes, 2019). War, oppression, and exclusion must be taken seriously. Although partial representations of refugees are presented in the stories, this is positive and promising in terms of breaking down negative stereotypes. At the time this article was written, social media attacks against refugees were on the rise. We believe that introducing another child's world through picturebooks is positive and has the potential to educate society. Regrettably, unless new political discourses and policies are developed, we might continue to experience these problems together for a long time.

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