



Promoting Young Children’s Right to Participate in the Classroom through Picture Books

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Abstract

Practices to promote the right of children to participate in the classroom can benefit from picture books that encourage children to be involved in different settings that reflect the qualities of participation. This study aims to examine the effects of the processes planned regarding children’s right to participation with picture books on preschoolers’ perceptions of their right to participate in the classroom. The study employed a pretest–posttest design, a quasi-experimental research design with a control group. A random sampling method was employed to determine the study sample. The sample consisted of a total of 42 children (21 in the experimental group and 21 in the control group), attending classes of 5-year-olds in a public kindergarten affiliated with the Directorate of National Education in a province located in the Inner Aegean region of Turkey. A “Personal Information Form” and the “Participation Right Scale in Preschool Classes” developed by Koran (2017) and Şalli İdare (2018) were used as data collection tools. Twice a week during eight weeks, the researcher conducted activities with children in the experimental group, which were prepared with picture books and integrated with classroom activities. As the data obtained in the study show a normal distribution, a two-factor ANOVA test was performed with measurements repeated in one factor, and the t test for the dependent groups and intergroup comparisons. After the experimental study, it was determined that the children in the experimental group started to participate more in classroom activities and decision-making processes, whereas there was no change in the involvement of the children in the control group. Based on this result, to promote preschoolers’ right to participate in the classroom, teachers should place more emphasis on processes that are designed to use quality children’s books and that the use of such books is integrated with classroom activities.

Keywords Participation · Participation Right · Picture Book · Young Children

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1 Introduction

Picture books, which support children cognitively, personally and socially, and offer rich stimuli for their social, cultural and aesthetic development, are one of the most natural resources that can be used to ensure children's participation. Picture books support the cognitive and personal development of preschool children and their social development, a process in which they acquire the behavior and value forms of the society they belong to (Gander & Gardiner, 2007). Therefore, picture books should be prepared in order to develop children's rights and responsibilities and develop their democratic values through the messages and characters they contain.

Although it is stated that children's participation is an important issue in early childhood education today (Clark & Moss, 2010), it is seen that the research and practices on this issue are based on a broad theoretical framework (Correia et al., 2023). Participation is the process of sharing the decisions that concern the individual's own life and the society in which they live (Akyüz, 2016). Participation has different dimensions such as being listened to and expressing opinions (Weckström et al., 2021a). The right to participate is expressed as the involvement of children in the decision-making process on matters that affect them (Alderson, 2008). The right to participation enables children to make decisions according to their evolving capacities and thus to become members of society (Quennerstedt, 2010). Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) states that young children also have the right to freely express their views and that their views should be given due consideration in accordance with the children's age and maturity level. Lundy (2007) identified a total of four stages for the exercise of Article 12 (the right to participation) of the Convention. The first stage, "space" refers to the ability of children to express their views in a safe and inclusive environment, the second stage, "voice" mentions the support given to children to express their views, the third stage, "audience" underscores that their views should be heard, and the last stage, "influence" involves explaining the reasons for the decision-making process to children. General Comment No. 12 published by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2009) underlines the importance of consulting children at the local and national levels on all aspects of education policy and ensuring child participation in educational settings. The European Commission (2014) identifies child participation as one of the fundamental principles of high-quality early childhood education settings.

Participation in early childhood education settings is defined as children being able to express their own opinions (Pascal & Bertram, 2009), taking part in decision-making processes (Church & Bateman, 2019; Venninen & Leinonen, 2013) and the active involvement of children in classroom activities and academic tasks that will positively affect their learning process (Baker et al., 2008). In many studies teachers' views and understandings about participation are examined in local stages and linkages (Akyol & Erdem, 2021; Correia et al., 2020; Hännikäinen & Rasku-Puttonen, 2010; Koran & Avci, 2017; Turnšek, 2016). In addition, it was

observed that in some limited number of studies, children's views on participation (Akyol, 2020; Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Öztürk et al., 2023; Şallı İdare, 2018; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001) were analysed. In the study conducted by Sandseter and Seland (2016), the views of 4–6-year-old children on their opportunities to participate and their subjective well-being were analysed. As a result of the research, it was determined that children defined the classrooms in which they freely use and decide on different areas of the classroom and materials as participatory. Another study that examined the perspectives of 3–5 year old children on well-being concluded that play opportunities and children's agency are important indicators of well-being (Fane et al., 2020).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasizes that children should grow up in a healthy and safe environment and identifies four groups of children's rights: the right to survival, the right to development, the right to participation, and the right to protection (Akyüz, 2016). All these rights are necessary for children to grow up as free and independent individuals, to learn about their rights, and to participate in decision-making processes (Karaman Kepenekçi, 2010; Uçuş & Şahin, 2012). Article 29 of UNCRC emphasizes the importance of raising awareness of human rights in education (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). The United Nations (2006) states that human rights education comprises the following three components: knowledge and skills, values and attitudes, and capacity for action. Knowledge and skills involve experiencing and learning about rights in daily life, values and attitudes involve understanding the processes associated with human rights, and capacity for action involves taking action to defend and maintain human rights. International political initiatives have highlighted the importance of children's rights education for the promotion and practice of children's rights (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016). In addition, it has been stated that children's rights education is one of the most effective ways for children to learn about their rights and to respect the rights of others (Akyüz, 2016). Furthermore, children's rights education is considered necessary for children to exercise their rights and to raise awareness about children's rights (Males & Stricevic, 2001). Te One (2011) notes that for children's rights education to be effective, the right of children's right to participate should be practiced in the classroom.

Children's rights education encompasses processes involving human relations such as participation, influence, and language development. It is important that children's rights education includes content that enables children to become aware of their own rights and the rights of others and provides them with the opportunity to exercise their rights (Tellgren, 2019). The studies revealed that children's rights education has a positive effect on the knowledge and awareness of primary (Covell & Howe, 1999; Kaymak Özmen et al., 2012; Torun & Duran, 2014; Uçuş, 2013) and secondary school students (Goldberg, 2008; Ulubey, 2015; Üstündağ, 1997) about children's rights. The findings revealed that creative drama-based children's rights education positively affected primary school students' knowledge levels about children's rights and their behavioral development (Topçu, 2019). In a study (Washington, 2010) conducted to examine the impact of a children's rights education program designed for preschool children and their parents, it was found that children and parents gained awareness about children's rights through the program. As children

acquire social skills in the preschool period by participating in group activities, cooperating with peers, and expressing their views publicly, early childhood education settings have a key role in helping children develop democratic attitudes and behaviors (Ersoy, 2011; Hopkins, 2012). Raising awareness about children's rights in preschoolers is important for them to see the relationship between their rights, interests, and needs and to become active citizens in the future (Sadıkoğlu & Topsakal, 2017). To promote participation both as a right and as a fundamental requirement of democracy, children should be provided with the opportunity to be involved in decision-making in early childhood education (Yaşar, 2008).

Some regulations about the participation of children have also been performed by the Ministry of Education in Turkey (Beyazova et al., 2016). The MoNE's 2019–2023 Strategic Plan (MoNE, 2019) and Turkey's 2023–2028 Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan (The Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2023) include regulations and participatory mechanisms for children's participation in decision-making processes in schools (Öztürk et al., 2023). In Preschool Education and Elementary Education Standards it is aimed to determine children's participation in schools and to ascertain that each school cares about the children's participation right (Kılıç & Öztürk, 2018). These standards are important but they have not been effectively carried out and could be developed in terms of the right to participate (Beyazova et al., 2015). The Preschool Education Program of Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (2013), which is being implemented in Turkey was developed to support all areas of development of children. The program is emphasized that opportunities should be provided for children to plan, implement, question, research and discuss. The program emphasizes that children should also be given the freedom to choose activity in the learning environment and the material to play (MoNE, 2013).

Educators should organize participatory practices, daily routines, and activities to support children's right to participate (Venninen et al., 2012). Children should be provided with educational opportunities enabling them to translate their rights into attitudes and behaviors (Bulut Pedük, 2015). In-class participatory practices should be carried out, and activities and materials appropriate for children's development levels should be designed (Covell et al., 2010). Participatory methods, including discussions, case studies, and problem-solving activities, are effective at ensuring the active participation of children (Yeşil & Aydın, 2007). Techniques such as collaborative teaching and Q&A sessions, as well as educational drama and field trips, can also be used to promote child participation (Çelik, 2017).

Although the importance of the right to participation in early childhood education is emphasised, there is a need for different perspectives and research, especially in terms of the practice of participation (Bae, 2009; Kirby, 2020). In the literature, it is seen that the positive effects of some different participation-based programs on children of different ages are studied. The study by Albornoz-Manyoma et al. (2021) concluded that 'Ágora Infantil' participation-based democratic program had a positive impact on children's political participation levels for two years. Kaye-Tzadok and Katz (2021) concluded that courses that deal with developmentally-based child participation positively affect social work students' views on participation. Çelik (2017) prepared Child Participation Education Program based on children's right to

participate and found that Child Participation Education Program had an effect on self-regulation skills of children in the age group of 60–72 months.

Picture books can also be used for preschoolers to learn the concepts related to democracy and gain awareness of their own rights (Karaman Kepenekçi & Aslan, 2011; Todres & Higinbotham, 2013). In this regard, picture books are very important in that they spark children's curiosity about life, raise their awareness of social and cultural values, and enrich their perspectives on various social situations (Johnston, 2006; Morrow, 2007; Santora, 2013). Furthermore, picture books are an important tool in improving children's social relationships and prosocial behaviors (Yang et al., 2014; Zhang & Zeng, 2016). The literature review showed that the studies conducted to determine the inclusion of children's rights in books designed for preschoolers (Karaman Kepenekçi & Aslan, 2011; Yıldız, 2017) and primary school children (Karaman Kepenekçi, 2010; Türkyılmaz & Kuş, 2014) addressed the right to participate only in a very limited way. Also, to date, few studies (Akyol, 2019; Avcı et al., 2011; Gündoğdu Ayar, 2018) have been conducted that investigate children's right to participate in picture books only. Also, some studies (Akgül Alak & Alabay, 2017; Sildir, 2016) concluded that educational materials and storybooks designed for preschoolers put very little emphasis on the learning outcome of "*protects the rights of him/herself and others,*" which is one of the outcomes specified in the Ministry of National Education Preschool Education Program (MoNE) (2013). Practices aimed at promoting children's right to participate can benefit from picture books that address the right to participate in different settings and reflect the qualities of different forms of participation. Gündoğdu Ayar (2018) claimed that teachers' and parents' reading books about child participation in an interactive manner with children would affect children's development positively. Also few studies reported that activities with books about children's rights have a positive effect on raising awareness of child rights in preschoolers (Şenol & Akyol, 2017) and primary school children (Hareket, 2018). In the meta-analysis study of Murano et al (2020) examining the effects of social-emotional learning interventions on preschool children, it is seen that the studies on children's picture books are limited.

Practices carried out by adults are also important for the effective implementation of the right to participate in all environments. In practices to support children's right to participate, picture books that include right to participate in different environments and reflect the qualities of participation can be used. The right to participate, which is one of the important rights of children, should be included in picture children's books that enable children to identify with the characters in the story. Taking these as a starting point, there has emerged a need for a study to implement an application designed with picture books about child participation. It is considered that processes that are designed by using quality children's books and are integrated with classroom activities have a key role in developing in children an awareness of their right to participate. Hence, this study aimed to make a significant contribution to the relevant literature.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the processes planned with picture books with content about children's participation rights on preschoolers' perceptions of the right to participate in the classroom. For this purpose, answers were sought for the following questions:

Is there a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the children in the experimental group in the perceptions of the right to participate in the classroom?

Is there a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the children in the control group in the perceptions of the right to participate in the classroom?

Is there a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the children in the experimental and control groups in the perceptions of the right to participate in the classroom?

2 Method

2.1 Research Design

The study employed the pretest–posttest design, a quasi-experimental research design, with a control group. According to this design, measurements about the dependent variable are performed on the participants before and after the experimental study (Karasar, 2010).

The dependent variable in the research's experimental design is the preschoolers' perceptions of the right to participate in the classroom. The independent variable is activities with picture books. The following hypotheses were tested in this research:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the pre-test results of the experimental and control groups.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results of the experimental group in favour of the post-test.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference between the post-test results of the experimental group and the control group in favour of the experimental group.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results of the control group in favour of the post-test.

The study was carried out over six months. The data were gathered at two stages, before and after the activities with picture books, (pretest and posttest) in October–January in the 2021–2022 academic years. The sessions of the research were given in the Table 1.

2.2 Participants

The population consisted of five-year-old preschoolers attending an independent kindergarten affiliated with the Directorate of National Education in a province located in the Inner Aegean region of Turkey. The study sample was determined by the random sampling method: it consisted of a total of 42 children (21 in the experimental group and 21 in the control group), attending classes of five-year-olds. Additionally, to prevent experimental and control groups from influencing each other, different

Table 1 Study sessions

Study Group	Pretest	Process	Posttest
Experimental group	Participation Right Scale in Preschool Classes-(PRSPC)	Activities conducted with picture books (2 days a week for 8 weeks)	PRSPC PRSPC
Control group	PRSPC	MoNE	

kindergartens were selected for experimental and control group. The experimental and the control group had similar characteristics with measurements used, before the experimental study. The results are described in the Table 2. Of the children in the experimental group, 52.3% were girls, 47.7% were boys, and 71.4% had attended preschool education institutions before, whereas of the children in the control group, 42.8% were girls, 57.2% were boys, and 66.6% had previously attended preschool education institutions.

2.3 Instruments

Data collection instruments were a “personal information form,” developed by the researcher to obtain information about the general demographic characteristics of the children (e.g., gender, number of siblings, birth order, preschool attendance process) and the “Participation Right Scale in Preschool Classes” also developed by the Koran (2017) and Şallı İdare (2018).

Participation Right Scale in Preschool Classes: This scale was developed by Koran (2017) TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) to determine child participation in preschool education institutions.

Table 2 T Test Results of Pre-test Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

PRSPC	Group	N	Mean	s.d	t	p																																																				
Activities sub-dimension	Experimental	21	1	0.71	-1.096	0.279																																																				
	Control	21	1.24	0.70			Play sub-dimension	Experimental	21	0.86	4.3	0.245	0.807	Control	21	0.81	0.57	Sharing sub-dimension	Experimental	21	0.1	0.30	1.451	0.155	Control	21	0	0	Dailyschedule dimension	Experimental	21	1.95	0.92	0.760	0.463	Control	21	2.05	0.97	Classrom rules dimension	Experimental	21	0.43	0.51	0.835	0.409	Control	21	0.57	0.60	Total	Experimental	21	2.38	1.0	0.793	0.391	Control
Play sub-dimension	Experimental	21	0.86	4.3	0.245	0.807																																																				
	Control	21	0.81	0.57			Sharing sub-dimension	Experimental	21	0.1	0.30	1.451	0.155	Control	21	0	0	Dailyschedule dimension	Experimental	21	1.95	0.92	0.760	0.463	Control	21	2.05	0.97	Classrom rules dimension	Experimental	21	0.43	0.51	0.835	0.409	Control	21	0.57	0.60	Total	Experimental	21	2.38	1.0	0.793	0.391	Control	21	2.62	0.92								
Sharing sub-dimension	Experimental	21	0.1	0.30	1.451	0.155																																																				
	Control	21	0	0			Dailyschedule dimension	Experimental	21	1.95	0.92	0.760	0.463	Control	21	2.05	0.97	Classrom rules dimension	Experimental	21	0.43	0.51	0.835	0.409	Control	21	0.57	0.60	Total	Experimental	21	2.38	1.0	0.793	0.391	Control	21	2.62	0.92																			
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	Control	21	2.05	0.97			Classrom rules dimension	Experimental	21	0.43	0.51	0.835	0.409	Control	21	0.57	0.60	Total	Experimental	21	2.38	1.0	0.793	0.391	Control	21	2.62	0.92																														
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	Control	21	0.57	0.60			Total	Experimental	21	2.38	1.0	0.793	0.391	Control	21	2.62	0.92																																									
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	Control	21	2.62	0.92																																																						

The reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.85. (Koran, 2017). The validity and reliability study of the scale in Turkey was conducted by Şallı İdare (2018). The results of the confirmatory factor analyses performed for the validity and reliability of the teacher and child form of the scale in Turkey, revealed that the factor loadings of the items were greater than 0.32 for all dimensions, and the four-factor structure was acceptable. This scale can be applied to both teachers and children. The scale includes teacher and child forms, and both forms contain the same questions. The child form was used in the study. The scale consists of 23 items with two dimensions and seven sub-dimensions. The daily schedule dimension has the following three sub-dimensions: activities, playing and sharing activities in learning centers/outdoors. The determining classroom rules and procedures dimension have the following four sub-dimensions: going out of the classroom, expressing opinion in the classroom, consuming food and beverage in the classroom, and operations. The internal-consistency coefficients calculated for the child form are $\alpha=0.64$ for the activities dimension, $\alpha=0.54$ for the playing and sharing activities in learning centers/outdoors, $\alpha=0.59$ for the sharing activities dimension and $\alpha=0.56$ for the determining classroom rules and procedures dimension found. The confirmatory factor analysis results for the scale showed that the factorial structure had high level of fit values ($\chi^2=296.65$, $df=224$, $p<0.0001$; RMSEA=0.023, 90% CI=0.018–0.028; CFI=0.97; TLI(NNFI)=0.97) (Şallı İdare, 2018).

The scale items are scored with 2 points as participation is fully took place in the decisions taken by children and adults, 1 point for the decisions made by the children only, and 0 points for an option that does not involve the children. In this study, all application steps determined by Koran (2017) were followed while implementing the scale. Before starting the application, a game was played together to make the child feel more comfortable, and permission was requested from the child for recording. During the application, the researcher and child sat face-to-face at the table, and the scale was introduced to the child at first. While reading the practitioner-scale questions, the child used a seal on the blank fields to mark the scale (Şallı İdare, 2018). The scale was administered to the children twice, before and after the action plans were applied.

2.4 Procedure

Activities designed with picture books and integrated with classroom practices were planned to ensure the active participation of all children. Based on MoNE (2013), learning outcomes and indicators were determined to promote children's participation in classroom activities. Classes such as art, drama, preparation for reading and writing, and mathematics integrated with picture books included activities such as interactive reading, storytelling, story completion, story creation, and story illustration. Throughout the activities, rhymes, finger games, riddles, and dramatizations were also used (MoNE, 2013). Care was taken to include processes in classes aimed at raising awareness in children of their right to participate in the classroom, helping them express their opinions about the schedule and plans in the classroom, and ensuring their involvement in decision-making about activities and routines.

Furthermore, interesting and concrete teaching materials were prepared to ensure the continued participation of children in these classroom processes. The activities were evaluated by three experts according to criteria that included compliance with the established learning outcomes and indicators, adequacy and effectiveness of learning processes, and suitability and adequacy of the teaching materials used. The necessary revisions were made to the activities based on the experts' feedback.

Prior to the experimental process, necessary official permissions were obtained. Both experimental and control groups were administered with *Participation Right Scale in Preschool Classes* as a pretest. While applying the scale, all the established steps (Koran, 2017) were followed, and the researcher played games with the children to make them feel more comfortable. During the application of the scale, the researcher sat opposite the children and introduced the scale. After the pretests were completed, the activities prepared by the researcher were applied to the experimental group two days a week for a total of eight weeks, approximately during a two-month period. Each activity had a duration of 60 min. At the same time, the control group continued their education in line with MoNE, 2013. After all the activities were completed, posttests were applied to both groups in the same environment and under the same conditions.

2.5 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to evaluate the demographic characteristics of the children. Data analysis was applied of the reliability and validity of the Participation Right Scale in Preschool Classes (PRSPC) along with the homogeneity of the variance of both groups according to Levene's test. As a result of the Levene's test, it was concluded that the homogeneity assumption was provided. A two-factor ANOVA test was performed with measurements repeated in one factor, and the the t test for the dependent groups and intergroup comparisons. When the difference between the pre-test and post-test results was significant, the effect size was calculated to calculate the effect (Field, 2013). The eta square correlation coefficient (η^2) takes a value between 0 and 1 (Pallant, 2016). 0.01 is interpreted as a small effect, 0.06 as a medium effect and 0.14 as a large effect (Cohen, 1992). The data gathered were processed using the SPSS 24.0 statistics package. Statistical significance level was set at 0.05 with $p < 0.05$ indicating a statistically significant difference and $p > 0.05$ a statistically insignificant difference (Büyüköztürk et al., 2017).

3 Results

According to Table 2, there is no statistical difference between the pre-test mean scores of the children in the experimental and control groups on the Activities ($t = -1.096$, $p > 0.05$), Play ($t = -0.245$, $p > 0.05$), Sharing ($t = 1.451$, $p > 0.05$) sub-dimensions, Dailyschedule ($t = 0.760$, $p > 0.05$), Classroom rules ($t = 0.835$, $p > 0.05$) dimensions and total ($t = 0.793$, $p > 0.05$) of (PRSPC). Accordingly, it can

be affirmed that, before the experimental study, both groups' participation in classroom was at a similar level.

When Table 3 was examined; the post-test mean scores of the children in the experimental group, from the Activities ($t=-25.7$, $p<0.05$), Play ($t=-11.2$, $p<0.05$), Sharing ($t=-9.9$, $p<0.05$), sub-dimensions Dailyschedule ($t=-10.6$, $p<0.05$), Classroom rules ($t=-14.3$, $p<0.05$) dimensions and total ($t=-23.5$, $p<0.05$) were statistically significantly higher than the pre-test mean scores. It was seen that children's participation increased in the "daily schedule" dimension (in terms of sub-dimensions of activities, play at the learning center/outdoors, and sharing activities) and 'classroom rules' dimension. This results show the positive effects of activities designed with picture books on children's participation in the classroom.

When Table 4 was examined, it was found that there was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the children in the control group in the Activities ($t=-1.1$, $p>0.05$), Play ($t=-252$, $p>.05$), Sharing ($t=-1$, $p>0.05$) sub-dimensions, Dailyschedule ($t=-1$, $p>0.05$), Classroom rules ($t=-1.4$, $p<0.05$) dimensions and total ($t=-346$, $p>0.05$) of the PRSPC. Accordingly, it can be explained that the practices carried out in the classroom could not sufficiently support the participation rights of the children in the control group.

According to Table 5, there was a statistically significant difference in favour of the experimental group between the post-test scores of Activities ($F=501.1$, $p<0.05$), Play ($F=85.6$, $p<0.05$), Sharing ($F=93.7$, $p<0.05$) sub-dimensions, Dailyschedule ($F=87.2$, $p<0.05$), Classroom rules ($F=145.2$, $p<0.05$) dimensions and total ($F=491.8$, $p<0.05$) of the experimental and control groups. According to the effect sizes, Activities ($\eta^2=0.926$), Play ($\eta^2=0.682$), Sharing ($\eta^2=0.701$) sub-dimensions, Dailyschedule ($\eta^2=0.693$), Classroom rules ($\eta^2=0.785$) dimensions and total ($\eta^2=0.925$) have a large effect. According to these findings, the activities integrated with children's books had a positive impact on the experimental group's classroom participation.

Table 3 T Test Results of the Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores of the Experimental Group

PRSPC	Test	N	Mean	s.d	t	p
Activities sub-dimension	Pre-test	21	1	0.71	-25.7	0.0001
	Post-test	21	9.43	1.33		
Play sub-dimension	Pre-test	21	0.86	0.57	-11.2	0.0001
	Post-test	21	3.76	0.94		
Sharing sub-dimension	Pre-test	21	0.1	0.3	-9.9	0.0001
	Post-test	21	2.9	1.18		
Dailyschedule dimension	Pre-test	21	1.95	0.92	-10.6	0.0001
	Post-test	21	16.1	2.23		
Classroom rules dimension	Pre-test	21	0.43	0.51	-14.3	0.0001
	Post-test	21	5.10	1.34		
Total	Pre-test	21	2.38	1.02	-23.5	0.0001
	Post-test	21	21.19	3.16		

Table 4 T Test Results of the Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores of the Control Group

PRSPC	Test	<i>N</i>	Mean	s.d	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Activities sub-dimension	Pre-test	21	1.24	0.7	1.1	0.261
	Post-test	21	1	0.55		
Play sub-dimension	Pre-test	21	0.81	0.68	-0.252	0.803
	Post-test	21	0.86	0.57		
Sharing sub-dimension	Pre-test	21	0	0	-1	0.329
	Post-test	21	0.05	0.22		
Dailyschedule dimension	Pre-test	21	2.05	0.97	-1	0.548
	Post-test	21	1.9	0.62		
Classrom rules dimension	Pre-test	21	0.57	0.6	-1.4	0.171
	Post-test	21	0.81	0.51		
Total	Pre-test	21	2.62	0.92	-0.346	0.733
	Post-test	21	2.71	0.72		

Table 5 A Two Factor-Anova Results of the Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

Scale	Experimental		Control		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared η^2
	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d			
Activities Pre-test	1.0	0.71	1.24	0.7			
Activities Post-test	9.43	1.33	1	0.55	501.1	0.0001	0.926
Play Pre-test	0.86	0.57	0.81	0.68	85.6	0.0001	0.682
Play Post-test	3.76	0.94	0.86	0.57			
Sharing Pre-test	0.1	0.3	0	0	93.7	0.0001	0.701
Sharing Post-test	2.9	1.18	0.05	0.22			
Daily schedule Pre-test	1.95	0.92	2.05	0.97	87.2	0.0001	0.693
Dailyschedule Post-test	16.1	2.23	1.9	0.62			
Classrom rules Pretest	0.43	0.51	0.57	0.6			
Classrom rules Posttest	5.10	1.34	0.81	0.51	145.2	0.0001	0.785
Total-Pretest	2.38	1.02	2.62	0.92			
Total-Posttest	21.19	3.16	2.71	0.72	491.8	0.0001	0.925

4 Discussion

Participation, as one of the requirements of a democratic society, is seen as part of the daily experience of children in preschool education institutions (Melhuus, 2015). It has been stated that children's participation should be promoted to increase the quality of preschool education institutions. Teachers should care about children's views, include child-centered practices in their classes, and devote time to games and activities initiated and decided by children (Moser et al., 2017). Instead of direct instruction or explicit teaching, applications in which, children can interact with their immediate surroundings and gain social

experiences should be designed to promote children's participation (Tellgren, 2019).

As a result of this study conducted to examine the effects of classroom activities planned with picture books involving children's participation rights on preschoolers' perceptions of the right to participate in the classroom, it was determined that there was a positive change in the perceptions of the children in the experimental group of the right to participate in the classroom. The right to participate is not a stable process: it depends on the learning environment and the type of classroom activity (Correia et al., 2019). Therefore, practices aimed at promoting children's rights should use life-centered methods and materials suitable for children and should be prepared according to the learning outcomes specified in the preschool education program and with daily experiences (Bilir Seyhan & Aslan Cansever, 2015; Dinç, 2017; Hotaman, 2010; Yeşil & Aydın, 2007). The findings of the study revealed that the experimental group's posttest mean scores were significantly higher than the control group's posttest mean scores. This research has achieved concrete learning processes by including experience and play-based learning processes in activities planned with picture books. Various teaching materials such as story cards, puppets, and costumes suitable for the developmental levels of children were used, and various instruments such as interactive reading, story completion, story illustration, and dramatization were performed. During some activities, opportunities were created for children to discuss their participation rights in school, family, and various social settings based on the events narrated in the picture books, and voting was carried out with materials such as ballot boxes to help children internalize these situations. It can be concluded that all these practices performed during the study positively affected children's awareness of their right to participate.

As a result of the experimental study conducted in this research, it was determined that the participation of the children in the experimental group increased in the "daily schedule" dimension (in terms of sub-dimensions of activities, including play at the learning center/ outdoors, and sharing activities) and "classroom rules" dimension. As a result of the experimental study conducted in this research, it was determined that the participation of the children in the experimental group increased in the "daily schedule" dimension. This result indicates that children became more involved in decisions about the classroom activities, the teaching materials to be used during the activities, and the learning centers where the activities would be performed (classroom/outdoors). Furthermore, it can be considered that that incorporating common experiences and decision-making processes with children (Weckström et al., 2021a) into the planning of daily routines and classroom activities has a positive impact on this result. In the literature, it is stated that processes in which children are involved in the planning of the programme (Theobald & Kultti, 2012), specific interaction strategies (Houen et al., 2016) and active forms of communication (Alasuutari, 2014; Wall et al., 2019) increase participation.

In the current study, it was observed that children's participation increased in the activities sub-dimension. Similar to these results, other studies have concluded that project-based activities carried out in line with children's interests and initiatives positively affect children's participation (Kokotsaki et al., 2016) and enable children to take an active role in the planning, implementation and evaluation

of activities (Kirby, 2020; Weckström et al., 2021b). Zorbay Varol (2019) determined that children most exercised their right to participate when they expressed their views, played games in the learning centers, and used the teaching materials of their choice. It was also found that in classrooms where the right to participate is promoted, teachers respect children's views, encourage them, act flexibly when implementing activity plans, and offer them various options of activities. In a study on enhancing children's participation in early childhood education through participatory pedagogy, it was found that classrooms where teachers provided opportunities for children to discuss, make suggestions, and make independent initiatives and choices improved children's participation and self-regulation skills (Kangas et al., 2015).

In this study, it was determined that the participation of the children in the experimental group increased in the play and sharing sub-dimensions and in the classroom rules dimension. Breathnach et al. (2017) concluded that teacher-centered planning affected five-year-old children's participation in the classroom and those children enjoyed participating more in the games they chose on the playgrounds they designed. Studies emphasising participation in play activities planned by children and outdoors (Nah & Lee, 2016) were seen. Furthermore, it was stated that the flexibility of the learning environment, the presence of functional materials (Knauf, 2019), and children's active involvement in the organisation of the learning environment (Clement, 2019) positively affect the participation. Similar to this study, narrative activities were found to support children's initiatives and sharing (Merjovaara et al., 2020). In addition, it was emphasised that positive teacher-child interaction and determining the classroom rules together is one of the practices that improve participation (Sairanen et al. 2022; Salminen, 2013).

In this study, in the evaluations applied after the exercises designed with picture books about children's right to participate, the views and opinions of the children about the process and about their right to participate were taken. Similar to the results of this research, it was determined that the narrative 'storycrafting' method (Weckström et al., 2021b), which is applied in line with children's interests and initiatives, can be used to support children's participation. Koltz ve Kersten-Parrish (2019) stated that conversations held during class time that use picture books and restorative practice activities could be an appropriate way to support children's social skills. They also emphasized that role-playing the social events narrated in picture books would enable children to learn what behaviors they should exhibit when confronted with new social situations in daily life and help them make better personal and social choices. Xi et al. (2019) examined the effect of play-based reading activities on children's social-emotional skills. The authors concluded that small games centered on stories, role-playing, asking questions to enable children to relate the content of the story to daily life, and classroom discussions positively supported the social-emotional development of children. Consistent with these results, Pekdoğan (2016) concluded that story-based social skills education positively affected five/six-year-old children's social skills. Wild (2022) promoted social justice and created a classroom community that embraced identity, diversity, and action through read-alouds and also through picture books the author promoted social justice in his classroom.

The findings of this study revealed that there was no change in the participation of the children in the control group in classroom activities. It is thought that children's limited involvement in decision-making related to processes such as play, materials, daily schedule in the classroom (Brotherus & Kangas 2018), pre-planning of activities by the teacher (Leinonen et al., 2014), and limited opportunities for children to make choices (Almqvist & Almqvist 2015) affect this result. Zorbay Varol (2019) reported that in preschool classrooms where the right to participate is violated, the type and order of the classroom activities are determined by the teachers and that most of the activities possessed non-participatory properties. Similarly, Pekince ve Avcı (2016) concluded that some activity plans designed by preschool teachers included non-participatory processes. Şallı İdare (2018) claimed that the low level child participation, especially in determining classroom rules, may stem from teachers' controlling teaching styles. Factors such as positive interaction between the teacher and child, caring about children's views, and an emotional bond with children affect children's participation positively (Emilson, 2017; Emilson & Johansson, 2013). Teachers' teaching attitudes and styles, as well as opportunities for children to take independent initiatives and choices affect children's involvement in classroom processes (Lunn Brownlee et al., 2017; Ree & Emilson, 2020). Torun and Duran (2014) concluded that play-based children's rights education and Çarıkcı (2019) children's rights education within the scope of social studies courses increased primary school children's awareness of child rights. She concluded that child rights and democracy education developed children's democratic behaviors and attitudes in preschoolers. Kent Kükürtcü (2019) concluded that children's rights and democracy education applied to kindergarten children improved children's democratic behaviours. Hareket (2018) concluded that children's rights education based on stories about children's rights positively affected primary school children's perception and awareness of their rights and that children enjoyed classroom activities based on these stories. It is seen that all these studies support the findings of this research.

The positive results obtained in this study as a result of using picture books as an effective tool to improve children's understanding of participation in the classroom are expected to make significant contributions to the literature and the practice of democracy. It is, therefore, thought that picture books can be used in activities aimed at promoting preschoolers' participation rights. The limitations of current study can be identified. The small size of the sample, the implementation in a certain amount of time, and not taking the views of teacher. Another limiting factor consists of the one measurement instrument used. The results can be further generalized by increasing the number of books as well as the sample size.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of classroom activities planned with picture books about children's participation rights on preschoolers' perceptions of the right to participate in the classroom. The findings of the study

revealed that experimental group children's participation in classroom activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes, increased. The reason for this positive change may be that classroom activities designed with picture books were interesting and appropriate for children's developmental levels and contained concrete processes to promote children's awareness of their right to participate. Based on these results, high-quality picture books can be used to increase children's awareness of their participation rights in the classroom. Therefore, comprehensive projects can be carried out to design high-quality picture books addressing children's participation in decision-making processes in the classroom. In-service training programs could be organized to increase preschool teachers' level of knowledge and awareness about the effective use of picture books in ensuring child participation. Finally, further research with different designs may examine the effect of different methods and approaches on children's levels of awareness of their participation rights along with the views of teachers' and parents'.

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Declarations

Ethics Approval This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Afyon Kocatepe University.

Informed Consent Researcher obtained written informed consent from all parents of participants.

Conflict of Interest The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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