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What Books do Young Girls and Boys Prefer to Read in the Initial Stage of Formal Reading Instruction?

¿Qué libros prefieren leer niñas y niños en la etapa inicial de la enseñanza formal de la lectura?

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Abstract

Narrative texts are usually chosen rather than informational texts to promote language in the initial stages of schooling. This is based on the idea that children prefer narrative texts and that they are more appropriate for their age. However, some studies have shown that children not only understand informational texts, but also prefer them. This study examined the book preferences of a group of early readers at two times: kindergarten (N = 395) and first grade (N = 302). In order to test their preferences, each child was asked to review two narrative and two informational books, choose one, and justify their choice. In kindergarten, children preferred informational books significantly more than narrative books. At both times, a significant relationship between gender and book choice was found: boys chose informational texts significantly more than girls. The reasons given by children for choosing a book are not based on the type of text, but rather on the content, theme, and visual aspects, among others. These results are discussed in relation to the book options that are provided to children for their reading activities and the relevance of offering an array of different texts in the initial stages of reading.

Keywords: book preference, gender, informational, narrative, early-readers

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Resumen

Los textos narrativos suelen ser escogidos por sobre los informativos para promover el lenguaje en las etapas iniciales de la escolaridad, con base en la creencia de que las/os niñas/os prefieren y comprenden mejor este tipo de textos. Sin embargo, la evidencia que fundamenta este principio es controvertida. Este estudio examinó la preferencia por libros de un grupo de niñas/os en dos momentos: kindergarten (N = 395) y primero básico (N = 302). Se le pidió a cada niño/a que revisara dos libros narrativos y dos informativos y que escogiera uno, justificando su elección. En kindergarten, las/os niños/as prefirieron significativamente más los libros informativos por sobre los narrativos. En kindergarten y en primero básico, se encontró una relación entre género y preferencia: los niños escogían libros informativos en mayor medida que las niñas. Las razones dadas por los escolares para escoger un libro no aludían al tipo de texto, sino al contenido, conexión con la propia experiencia, finalidad de la lectura, entre otros. Estos resultados se discuten en relación con el repertorio de libros ofrecidos a los/as niños/as para sus lecturas y la importancia del uso de textos variados en géneros discursivos y temáticas, desde las etapas de iniciación a la lectura.

Palabras claves: preferencia por libros; género de las/os niñas/os; informativos; narrativos; lectura inicial

What Books do Young Girls and Boys Prefer to Read in the Initial Stage of Formal Reading Instruction?

Reading, especially reading comprehension, is a key skill, not only in the academic world, but also for people to perform competently in the adult world (Cain, 2010). Reading and comprehension of what is read are abilities that originate in oral language (Catts, Fey, Zhang, & Tomblin, 1999) and which begin to develop early in interactions with others and with written materials (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Language interactions involving children can occur in a variety of situations, such as recalling past events, conversations, watching television programs, and sharing stories, either orally or using books (Skarakis-Doyle & Dempsey, 2008). Narrative texts and materials are predominantly used in these reading interactions (Duke, 2000; Reutzel, Smith, & Fawson, 2005). These types of texts have been preferred because there is a belief that informational books can be too difficult for children who are starting school (Palmer & Stewart, 2003) and also because it is thought that children prefer narrative books rather than other types of texts (Mohr, 2003). There are at least two important consequences or difficulties that result from this. The first is that children may be less familiar with informational books, which are a very common type of text in school (Venezky, 1995), and the second is that children could be faced by reading repertoires that are not that diverse and which may not respond to all interests (Duke, 2003).

It is very important to have a diversity of books in the classroom that can cater to children's interests, in order to promote and maintain their motivation to read, which is directly linked to the devotion of more time to independent reading and also to better development of reading skills (Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, & Shapiro, 2007; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999). Previous studies on the reading preferences of students have produced conflicting results, but they consistently demonstrate that informational books are of interest to children who are beginning to read (Mohr, 2003, 2006). In this regard, gender differences have also been studied to find out whether boys and girls tend to prefer one type of book over another, generally under the assumption that boys prefer informational books and girls prefer narrative books (Chapman et al., 1999).

This study is therefore intended to investigate children's preferences for narrative or informational books in the initial stage of formal learning to read, as well as examining whether there are differences according to gender and exploring the reasons or justifications for their preferences.

Initial reading and tests used to promote it

Shared reading is one of the most frequently used activities to promote language and reading in the early stages of learning, with the choice of appropriate books for such activity being of central importance (Kotaman & Tekin, 2017). For these interactions, the books used most commonly are narrative, that is, stories or tales characterized by a familiar structure that includes characters, a setting, problem, and resolution (Shapiro & Hudson, 1991).

Although the use of narrative books is highly important for language development, in recent years the significance of comprehending informational texts has also been emphasized (Kotaman & Tekin, 2017). There are various definitions of this type of texts, but there is consensus that the core of an informational book is that it conveys information about the natural and social world, generally directed from an expert to someone who is more novice in the subject, and that the text also has particular linguistic characteristics (Duke, 2003). They particularly include books that contain more specific and sophisticated vocabulary, generic common nouns instead of proper nouns (for example: "the dolphins" instead of "Julian the dolphin"), and they mainly use the present tense (Yopp & Yopp, 2012). They also have diverse textual structures, such as: descriptions, comparison-contrast, cause-effect, among others (Meyer & Poon, 2001). Thus, in order to understand books of this type it is important to be familiar with their characteristics, since it has been reported that knowledge of certain types of texts and discursive genres is not automatically transferred to others (Duke, 2000).

Using informational texts in the early stages of reading is important for several reasons. First, it fosters knowledge of the world through acquisition of information (Culatta, 2010), which is key to reading comprehension and learning (Cervetti & Wright, 2020). Second, it allows access to a specific and generally more sophisticated type of vocabulary (Leung, 2008). In addition to this, there is also a link with children's motivation, since informational books can satisfy their curiosity about the facts of the natural and social world (Caswell & Duke 1998; Duke, 2003). Meanwhile, engaged reading, which is generated by the reader's interest in what is read, is related to greater independent reading and better performance (Williams, 2008).

Although the importance of informational texts has been widely documented, they still have a limited presence in classrooms at the early grades. For example, Pentimonti, Zucker, and Justice (2011) studied what types of books were used for shared reading in preschool classrooms. They found that, of the total number of reading activities, 85.6% were carried out with narrative texts, while only 5.4% were conducted with informational texts. Similar findings were also reported by Yopp and Yopp (2006) in elementary level classrooms. Duke (2000) observed first-grade classrooms to study the extent to which children are exposed to this type of texts. Her findings show that an average of only 3.6 minutes per day is spent on activities involving informational texts, with some classrooms spending 0 minutes on this type of activity. At the same time, she also found that, in classroom libraries, narrative books (more than 60% of the available books) predominate over informational texts (which account for 8.2% of the available books). It is therefore reaffirmed that there is little availability of informational books and that they are used infrequently during the school day.

In the case of Chile, as far as we know, there are no studies on the types of books used at these levels of education. As a reference for the presence of informational/narrative texts, we examined the titles of the digital school library that the Chilean Ministry of Education made available to students. The list of books for children from prekindergarten to second grade included 706 titles, of which 481, or 68%, were stories, while there was no specific description of the type of discursive genre for the remaining 32%, but only references to the subject matter, such as astronomy or botany, for example (see https://bdescolar.mineduc.cl/).

The literature on the topic has established two main reasons why not enough informational texts are included in the early years of schooling in spite of the benefits this could provide to children. The first reason is based on the belief that these texts are too difficult for schoolchildren in the initial stages of reading, specifically because they contain more complex vocabulary and less familiar structures (Duke, 2000; Palmer & Stewart, 2003). This idea has been refuted with evidence that children at the early levels of education can understand informational texts (Culatta, 2010; Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, & Pollini, 2009; Williams et al., 2013) even at a similar level to their understanding of narrative texts (Author, 2017).

The second reason is based on the belief that children prefer narrative books rather than informational ones (Duke, 2000; Moss & McDonald, 2004), since some authors claim that narrative texts present less difficulty and are more accessible to children in the early stages of learning and therefore produce greater enjoyment (Egan, 1993). On this point, there is mixed and limited evidence in the case of children in the initial stages of reading, but it does consistently show that they appreciate informational texts (Mohr, 2003; Williams, 2008).

Given the importance of reading activities in the initial stages of education, it is of great importance to know what types of books children of these ages prefer, particularly considering that this interest could result in greater motivation for reading, which, in turn, contributes to healthier development of this ability.

Preferences for narrative or informational texts

Barnes and Bloom (2014) highlight the fact that it is usually adults (parents, educators, or teachers) who choose the reading material made available to children, especially when they are in the early stages of reading. However, adults do not necessarily have accurate judgment of children's interests. For example, Beach (2015) analyzed the book preferences of schoolchildren and adults, finding only a 4.36% overlap in their choices, indicating that the books chosen by adults for children's reading are not consistent with those chosen by children.

The possibility of choice is an important issue in fostering motivation to read (Hudson & Williams, 2015). Therefore, being aware of the reading preferences of students is particularly relevant. The literature on children's reading preferences has shown mixed results regarding their predilection for narrative or informational texts. For example, when studying the books that students from first to sixth grade checked out from the library, Doiron (2003) found that fictional texts—including narrative texts—predominated over informational texts—considered to be non-fiction. Barnes and Bloom (2014) show that children have a preference for stories with people, which make references to mental states and include more characters, versus stories with inanimate objects with more references to actions and fewer characters. The authors conclude that young children have a curiosity about the minds of others, which drives and explains their preference for fictional texts. It should be noted that, in both studies, the objective was not to compare or examine children's preference for one type of text or another, but rather to describe reading actions in the former case and to explore elements of social cognition in the latter.

From a different perspective, there is a group of studies that directly investigates preferences for types of texts. Chapman and colleagues (2007) studied the preferences of a group of first graders using two tasks in which the children had to choose between narrative and informational texts. The results showed that, in a task involved a forced choice, they chose narrative texts more often than informational texts (68% versus 32%).

Mohr (2003, 2006), who also conducted a study to explore the text preferences of first-grade schoolchildren, made different findings. She presented children with a series of nine picture books of different types (informational, poetry, short stories, biography, among others) from which they had to choose one. Of the 190 participants, 84% chose a non-fiction book, most commonly an informational text (46% of the choices). Using similar tasks, Kraemer, McCabe, and Sinatra (2012) also found that first graders had a preference for informational texts over narrative texts, which was replicated in kindergarten-level children (4-5 years) in the findings of Kotaman and Tekin (2017).

In turn, Williams (2008) asked a group of students between 8 and 12 years of age to select 15 books from those exhibited at a book fair. The texts most frequently chosen were sagas and those related to the media (e.g., books linked to a television program).

In summary, some studies show that children have a greater preference for narratives and, surprisingly, there is also a preference for informational texts even among first graders and children in kindergarten. In this paper we investigate children's preferences in this key period of learning to read.

Preferences and children's gender

Most of the papers cited above also study the relationship between preference for texts and children's gender. In this respect, it has been suggested that there are certain stereotypes about what type of books are more appropriate for boys or girls (Chapman et al., 2007; McGeown, 2015), which would exert a certain limitation on the type of books that children choose or are exposed to. Yopp and Yopp (2006) studied the types of books read to children at home and at school and in both settings they found that there was little exposure to informational texts and, in addition, significantly more informational books were read to boys than to girls at home. The authors outline two possible interpretations of these findings: on the one hand, it may be that adults follow the suggested stereotypes and, on the other, it could be that boys prefer informational texts and that this influences the parents' choice of books.

With regard to this last point, a number of studies have investigated the reading preferences of school-age children and report divergent results. For example, Doiron (2003) found that boys and girls preferred fiction texts, but there was a difference in the degree of preference: girls chose 3 times more fictional (narrative) texts over informational books, while boys chose 1.3 times more narrative texts over informational ones. However, Chapman et al. (2007) found no differences between girls and boys in their choice of informational and narrative books.

In the case of Mohr's studies (2003, 2006), although both boys and girls preferred non-fiction books (including informational books), the percentage varied significantly according to gender, with boys' preference for this type of book being more marked than that of girls. Williams (2008) reports a preference of both genders for series books. When comparing narrative and informational texts, she found a small difference between boys and girls, which was not significant, with boys choosing more fiction books and girls more non-fiction books.

So, the results on the relationship between children's gender and reading preferences for narrative and informational texts are inconclusive and we will investigate this further in this study.

Reasons to prefer one book over another at early reading levels

Given the importance of reading preferences, it is important to know what aspects schoolchildren consider when choosing a book. Chapman et al. (2007) studied the reasons and justifications given by children for their choices. For boys and girls, the theme of the book was important when making a selection, along with recognition of the book (books that had received awards), the inclusion of specific elements (e.g., it has lots of ladybugs) and attractive visual characteristics. The type of book did not appear among the reasons given by the children to explain their preferences. In Mohr's studies (2003, 2006), the majority of the participating children based their choice on the content/theme of the book, with animals and humor being those most popular. Secondly, they justified their choice by referring to the characteristics of the books, that is, their visible attributes, such as the cover or the illustrations. Very few children (n = 5) mentioned the type of text as a reason for their choice (for example, because it was an informational book). For their part, Kotaman and Tekin (2017) reported that children who had chosen informational texts tended to base their choice on the theme of the book, whereas those who had chosen narrative texts based their preference on the characters.

Given that the type of text rarely appears among the reasons for choosing books, in this study, in addition to investigating the reasons for preferring a text, we will explore the children's knowledge of the type of text of the book chosen.

The study

Being aware of children's preferences can help with offering them a selection of relevant books in accordance with their various interests. This can help to foster their relationship with and motivation towards reading from the early stages of education and thus encourage learning (Baker et al., 2011).

This study examines which books children prefer, and whether there is any relationship between the gender of the participants and their choice, as well as exploring the reasons for their preferences. This study is novel because, in addition to generating national evidence, the topics referred to are studied in the early stages of reading, including a longitudinal component that allows the aforementioned variables to be investigated at a critical moment in learning to read. The research questions and hypotheses are the following:

1. What type of book do children prefer in the early stages of reading? Based on previous findings (Mohr, 2003, 2006), it is expected that children in kindergarten and first grade choose informational books to an equal or greater extent than narrative books.

2. How are children's choices related to their gender? There is expected to be a relationship between gender and preference for certain types of books in kindergarten and first grade. More specifically, it is hypothesized that boys will choose informational texts over narrative ones; however, a specific hypothesis is not proposed in the case of girls.

3. What reasons do the children give for choosing a certain type of book? There is no specific hypothesis for this question, as it is exploratory and descriptive. However, it is expected that the reasons given for their preferences will be different between kindergarten and first-grade children, given the greater exposure to formal reading instruction, which could result in more knowledge about the types of books and their characteristics.

Method

Participants

A total of 395 children of 5 and 6 years of age were recruited from the 13 Chilean schools that participated in the study. All of the children spoke Spanish as their first language and came from kindergarten classrooms—known as the second level of transition—when the study began (188 girls, M = 71.98 months, SD = 3.94 months). One year later, 302 children from the original sample were reassessed. The participating schools were randomly selected from the list of institutions available on the Chilean Ministry of Education website. In the case of Chile, schools have different sources of funding: private, subsidized private, and public, which are linked to the socioeconomic level (Bellei, 2007). In this study, the schools were selected proportionally according to their type of funding, emulating the distribution reported in the capital, Santiago. Thus, in the sample, two schools were private, seven were subsidized private, and four were public (see Table 1).

Table 1
Description of the sample by school type

Source of funding of school	Nº of schools	Time 1 (end of kindergarten)			Time 2 (end of first grade)		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Public	4	55	51	106	36	31	67
Subsidized private	7	139	132	271	109	111	220
Private	2	13	5	18	11	4	15
Total	13	207	188	395	156	146	302

Source: Prepared by the authors.

As experience with books was relevant to this study, we also examined the participating classrooms using a subscale of the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) User's Guide (Smith, Brady, & Anastasopoulos, 2008). Eight aspects of the literacy environment of the classroom were tested: separate area, comfortable and attractive, condition and number of books, use of books, variety of topics, varying degrees of difficulty, multiple discourse genres, and diverse representation. Each aspect was assessed on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is exemplary and 1 is deficient. The score obtained in the participating classrooms was 3 or higher in all aspects, except for the first two, that is, the existence of a separate area for books and that it be comfortable and attractive. This is due to the fact that some classrooms had less space and lower quality infrastructure. However, for this study, the most relevant variables on this scale are at a similar level, which is basic or adequate.

Design and materials

The study is descriptive and correlational. It also considers two measurements over time, one at the end of kindergarten and one at the end of first grade. At both points in time, the children completed the preference task and other measurements as part of a broader project that are not related to the questions in this study, so they are not reported. The following is a description of the preference task and the stages for its preparation.

Book preference task

The preparation of the book preference task was based on the studies by Mohr (2003, 2006).

Selection of books. In order to select the books to be used in the preference task, seven[1] experts or specialists of children's literature were asked to create a list of books according to the following instructions: include quality books of different discursive genres that are suitable for kindergarten and first-grade children.

The lists were reviewed by the research team. Books that were present in the Chilean reading program, books by authors that were repeated, and those published before 2014 were excluded in order to produce a novel list of books that were not familiar to the children.

After the review, seven books were selected: two informational, two narrative, two of poetry, and one mixed, which combined narrative and informational elements.

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1. The participants were an early childhood educator with extensive classroom experience, a teacher with a master's degree in writing and literature, a librarian from a municipal children's library, two salespeople from popular bookstores, a doctor of early childhood education, and a trainer of early childhood educators in language courses.

Pilot phase. Three schools were invited to participate in the pilot phase, along with a total of 30 children. After testing the task, three of the seven preselected books were eliminated (two of poetry and the mixed genre book) since they were not chosen by the children at any time and this also meant the task would have a shorter duration. All of the texts had quality illustrations and were of a similar size. The books selected are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Description of the books used in the preference task

Type of book	Title	Author	Description
Informational	Inventario de los mares	Emmanuelle Tchoukriel	Pictures and describes marine animals.
	Esta es la pequeña historia del ferrocarril en Chile	Bárbara Cáceres	Tells the history of railroads in Chile.
Narrative	El monstruo del sueño	María Vago and Anna Laura Cantone	Tells the story of a monster that appears in dreams.
	El perro negro	Levi Pinfold	Tells the story of a black dog that frightens a family.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Preference. In an individual assessment, the examiner presents the child with the four aforementioned books laid out on a table. The child is then asked to look at and examine them and to choose the one he/she likes most, with the examiner recording the choice made. This task does not include reading the books; it is a general review of the texts, considering the stage prior to reading that would influence the choice of one book over another. The same task was used for both measurements (end of kindergarten and end of first grade), based on the studies by Mohr (2003, 2006).

Brief interview. Following the selection, each child was asked about the reasons for his or her choice. The information was elicited with the following questions: Why did you choose this book? What kind of book is it? (if no response: Is it a story/tale or an informational book?).

Procedure

Each school was contacted to participate in a longitudinal study on early reading comprehension that included book preferences, among other assessments. After obtaining authorization from the principal and the consent of the educator, a letter of informed consent was sent to all parents/guardians of kindergarten children (second level of transition). Children whose parents gave their consent were asked for their verbal assent to participate in three individual assessment sessions with a trained examiner, in one of which the text preference task described above was administered. The session lasted approximately 15 minutes.

Results

The results are presented in three sections, in accordance with the research questions. First, we present the findings on the preferences, followed by the relationship between the participants' gender and their preferences, and, finally, the reasons given by the children for their choice. In all of the analyses, the children's data are taken as a whole, since no associations were found between the socioeconomic level of the schools and the reported preference ($x2(2) = 3.98$, $p = .14$).

What type of book do children in the early stages of reading prefer?

The objective of this question is to determine whether the children have a preference for the narrative or informational texts that were presented in kindergarten and first grade. The total frequency with which one text or another was chosen at both times is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Frequencies of preferences by text according to gender at times 1 and 2

Gender	Time 1				Time 2			
	Informational		Narrative		Informational		Narrative	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Boys	140	68.6	64	31.4	88	56.4	68	43.6
Girls	86	45.7	102	54.3	56	38.4	90	61.6
Total	226	57.7	166	42.3	144	47.7	158	52.3

Note: N Time 1 = 392; N Time 2 = 302

Source: Prepared by the authors.

When testing the children's preference for texts, we found that kindergarten children significantly prefer informational books over narrative books, $x2(1) = 9.18$, $p = .002$, while in first grade there is no significant difference in the children's preference according to the type of text, $x2(1) = .65$, $p = .42$.

When examining each book presented to the kindergarten children, the difference in preferences was found to be statistically significant, $x2(3) = 65.10$, $p < .001$. Specifically, the book chosen most frequently was *Inventario de los mares* (Inventory of the seas) (n = 165), followed by *El perro negro* (The black dog) (n = 89), then *Esta es la pequeña historia del ferrocarril en Chile* (This is the short history of the railroad in Chile) (n = 77), and, finally, *El monstruo del sueño* (The dream monster) (n = 61). In first grade, when analyzing the differences in preferences of the books, we found a significant difference, $x2(3) = 60.44$, $p < .001$. The book chosen most frequently was also *Inventario de los mares* (n = 113), but the second most popular choice was *El monstruo del sueño* (n = 103), followed by *El perro negro* (n = 55), and, finally *Esta es la pequeña historia del ferrocarril en Chile* (n = 31).

How is the children's choice related to their gender?

The frequency with which narrative and informational texts were chosen according to the children's gender and at both times is shown in Table 2. When exploring the preference for the type of book according to the children's gender, at time 1 we found that there was a significant relationship between gender and preference for informational or narrative texts, $x2(2) = 22.98$, $p < .001$. In terms of odds ratios, the odds of boys choosing an informational book are 2.6 times higher than those of girls when they are in kindergarten.

At time 2, there is also a significant relationship between gender and preference, $x2(2) = 9.85$, $p < .002$. The odds that boys in first grade choose an informational book over a narrative book are 2.08 times higher than those for girls.

When analyzing the preference for each type of book, we found a significant difference according to gender in kindergarten, $x2(3) = 25.78$, $p < ,001$ and in first grade, $x2(3) = 12.79$, $p = .005$. When examining the standardized residuals, we found that the difference between girls and boys in kindergarten occurred with the book *El perro negro*, which was chosen significantly less by boys and more by girls. In first grade, the size of the differences in the choice of each book by boys and girls were similar for each book. More specifically, the book *Inventario de los mares* was chosen more often by boys than by girls, with the opposite reported for the book *El perro negro*. The other two books were chosen more equally by boys and girls in first grade.

What reasons do the children give for choosing a type of book?

In order to examine the reasons that the participating children give to justify their choice of book, we created categories based on the responses of the children and according to the literature, which are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Categories of responses on the reasons for their choice

Category	Description
Don't know/no response	Does not answer the question or states that he/she did not know why he/she chose the book.
Contents/theme	Refers to the theme of the book or general elements of its contents. For example: 'Because it's about animals'.
Purpose	Explains a purpose associated with reading the book chosen. For example: 'To learn'.
Connection	Tells of some element that associates the book chosen with his/her own experience, preferences, or personal situation. For example: 'Because I have a dog too'.
Specific element	Describes some particular element of the book chosen, which does not refer to its general theme. For example: 'Because there's a sea urchin'.
Characteristic of the text	Refers to specific elements of the book's appearance. For example: 'It's new and looks nice' or also makes an inference based on its characteristics: 'It looks interesting'.
Story	The boy/girl begins telling the story or describes the contents of the book.
Vague response	He/she issues a response that cannot be classified in any category due to its breadth. For example: 'I like it because I do'.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

We calculated percentages based on the frequency of each response, which are shown in Table 5. At time 1 and time 2, the content/theme is the most frequent reason given. However, at time 2, the responses are more distributed, with the connection to the child's own experiences and the purpose of the reading also being frequent justifications. At both times, the proportion is very similar with regard to specific elements of the text and text characteristics. The proportion of vague responses decrease significantly between one year and the next.

Table 5
Reasons (in percentages) to choose a book at time 1 and 2

Category	Time 1 (%)	Time 2 (%)
Don't know/no response	2.6	2.1
Contents/theme	37.3	25.3
Purpose	5.9	17.3
Connection	10.5	18.3
Specific element	13.4	13.8
Characteristic of the text	5.4	6.6
Story	1.8	2.1
Vague response	23.1	14.5

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In order to look in more detail at the reasons for the children's choice, we carried out an analysis to test whether there was any relationship between the book chosen and the reason given for choosing it. The results showed that there was a significant relationship in both kindergarten and first grade, $x2(21) = 276.49$, $p < .001$ and $x2(21) = 169.93$, $p < .001$. Most of the children who chose the book *Inventario de los mares* justified their choice by the content of the book. In the case of the book *El monstruo del sueño*, the main reason given referred to a specific element of the story. Wirth regard to the book *Breve historia del ferrocarril en Chile*, the children responded mainly by telling a story or describing the text. Finally, in the case of the book *El perro negro*, the children justified their choice by mentioning some connection with the story or with a specific element.

As we can see in the response categories, the children did not mention the type of text to justify their choices. When asked what type of book it was, 46.3% of the children in kindergarten did not correctly answer the question about whether the text was narrative or informational, while this figure declined to 25% among the first-grade children, a difference that is marginally significant, $x2(1) = 3.80$ $p = .051$. This indicates that the children increase their knowledge of the type of text between kindergarten and first grade.

Discussion

This study analyzed the preferences for narrative or informational books of a sample of children who are beginning formal learning of reading. The main results show that, of the books presented, there is a statistically significant preference for informational texts over narrative ones in kindergarten, while in first grade the preferences for both types of books are balanced. When the gender of the participants is included as a variable, we found a significant relationship between gender and preference, with boys showing a stronger preference for informational books compared with girls. Finally, we can observe that the content or theme of the book is central to the children's justifications of their choices, mainly in kindergarten. In turn, the connection with the child's own experiences and the purpose of reading emerge as relevant themes to justify the choice in first grade. It is relevant that the children do not mention the type of text as a reason to justify their choices, which raises the question of whether the type of text does indeed guide the choice. It was also shown that when children are in kindergarten, they have less knowledge of the type of text they are choosing, but this changes significantly in first grade. These findings and their implications are discussed below.

The first finding is highly relevant, because it shows that informational texts are indeed preferred by children, even more so than narrative texts in kindergarten. This is consistent with what has been reported by Mohr (2003, 2006) and Kotaman and Tekin (2012), who, using a similar methodology, also found a preference for informational texts in first grade and kindergarten, respectively.

One of the main reasons given for the small number of informational books present in early grade classrooms is that children of this age are not interested in this type of books and that they prefer fiction books, especially narrative ones (Duke, 2003). The results of this study support the evidence already reported and suggest that it is important to use informational texts along with narrative texts at the early levels.

The use of diverse texts from the beginning when children learn to read could have an effect on their motivation to read, since the possibility of choice is related to greater engagement with the material read and that, in turn, is linked to a higher frequency of independent reading (Hudson & Williams, 2013).

It should be noted that the role of narrative texts is also very important, as they are chosen slightly more frequently than informational books by the first-grade children. Overall, the results show that both narrative and informational books should be included in the repertoire available to children who are starting to read, if their interests are to be met. The diversity of books can also give children the opportunity to explore different types of texts, topics, and discursive genres, enriching their reading experience and, therefore, their learning (Duke, 2003).

Directly dealing with children's preferences is of no less importance, particularly considering that studies that have investigated the overlap between the books that adults report as interesting to children and which the children directly report as interesting show little agreement (Beach, 2015).

With regard to gender differences, although we can see that boys choose informational texts more often than girls at both times, it should be noted that a significant number of girls also prefer informational texts (45% in kindergarten and 38% in first grade). This is important because there are stereotypes about reading that girls read more and prefer narrative texts, while boys read less and prefer informational texts (McGeown, 2015). The existence of these stereotypes limits the options to explore other types of texts that are not consistent with what is socially expected for boys and girls to read. As reported, these limitations are more determinant in the case of boys (Dutro, 2002). One alternative that could contribute to reducing these stereotypes would be to offer a wide range of books, particularly if this is done from an early age when the beliefs about reading and the gender of children that could affect their reading behavior have not yet become ingrained. Another approach, proposed by McGeown (2015), would be to offer boys more books that respond to their specific interests, given that they are less likely to explore books that are beyond the gender limitations.

In terms of the reasons that the children give for choosing a book, content was a central factor, both in kindergarten and first grade, which is consistent with previous studies that show that the content and theme are the main reason for children's choice of books (Mohr, 2006). The connection with personal elements is another important factor in the children's choices, indicating that some of them value the connection that can be established between the reading material and their own experiences, especially in first grade. Mention of specific elements plays a similar role in both measurements, and the importance of the purpose of the reading also appears as a reason to choose a book more frequently in first grade.

It is important to emphasize that there is a relationship between the choice of certain books and the justification the children give. Among these results it is interesting that, although the books *Inventario de los mares* and *El perro negro* have similar contents or themes (linked to animals), the reasons for choosing one or the other were different. The former book was chosen mainly because of its content, while the latter was chosen because of the connection with the child's own experiences. This might suggest that other factors besides theme are

important for the choice, such as, for example, the type of text. That is, although the central theme in both involves animals, the way of presenting the theme, either informing or narrating, may possibly appeal to different interests and preferences of the reader, which could be explored in future research.

It should be noted that the children did not mention the type of text as a factor they consider when selecting a book. In relation to this, the results showed that children in first grade have greater explicit knowledge about the type of text they choose when they are asked directly. It is speculated that greater experience in formal learning of reading may contribute to this knowledge. In turn, knowledge of narrative and informational types of books is not a learning objective included in the curricular guidelines for children in the second level of transition at kindergarten. The guidelines only mention an objective related to listening comprehension of literary and non-literary texts (Ministerio de Educación, 2018). This point is important, since previous studies show that there is a relationship between awareness and knowledge of different text structures (e.g., including narrative texts and various types of informational texts) and reading comprehension (Pyle et al., 2017), which indicates that it could be of relevance to clarify the key elements that organize texts from the early stages of children's reading.

Looking at the results together, we can consider that they have significant educational implications. First, given the children's preference for informational books among those presented to them, equally to or more so than narrative texts, it would be important to broaden the repertoire of books to which children are exposed in school and classroom libraries, as well as in texts used for teaching activities. Familiarization with informational texts may not only meet the reported interest of children, but also produce educational advantages by allowing them to become aware of and understand texts with more diverse structures, which they will find in abundance during elementary education (Moss, 2005).

In a certain manner, and as some authors (Duke, 2003; Yopp & Yopp, 2000) have proposed, being familiar with and understanding informational texts can help children avoid the so-called fourth-grade slump, which refers to sudden difficulties in reading performance observed in children of around 9 years of age (Chall, 1983). This decline has been associated with the change in the type of texts that children are faced with, since the focus would no longer be on learning to read, but on reading to learn, which is represented in the use of a significant number of informational texts from this school level onwards (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Authors such as Cervetti and Wright (2020) have pointed out that there is no before/after in development of reading, but rather that learning to read and reading to learn are and should be reciprocal processes, given that there is no evidence that would call for delaying learning through early reading.

More explicitly, starting to use informational texts at early stages is linked to developing knowledge of the wider world, which is essential for the development of reading comprehension (Barnes, Dennis, & Haefele Kalvaitis, 1996) and learning in different subjects (Cervetti & Wright, 2020).

In short, including a varied repertoire of different types of books with diverse topics in the early stages of reading would not only meet the reported preferences of children, who consider informational texts to be important, but would also constitute support for their future learning.

This study does have certain limitations that are important to point out. These include the lack of information on the practices in the classrooms from which the participating children came, which may be important when it comes to familiarity—or the lack thereof—with certain types of texts. At the same time, authentic informational or narrative texts were included, which had a range of themes, and there was less control in the task, which could have an influence on the preference for certain content to be superimposed on the preference for a specific type of text. These limitations mean there is room to continue exploring the topic of children's reading preferences, which is an issue of great importance to improve the reading experiences they experience at school.

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