Contemporary Illustrations for Children's Books:
Stylistic features and artistic images

Ilustrações Contemporâneas para Livros Infantis:
Características estilísticas e imagens artísticas

Zijing WU[1]

Yingying WANG[2]

ABSTRACT: The study examined current techniques and stylistic trends in children's literature illustration. It analyzed contemporary approaches, combining innovative and traditional methods, digital technologies, and interactive elements to uncover key stylistic features. The research explored storylines, artistic images, and themes tailored for modern audiences, emphasizing how these techniques influence children's perception of artistic works. The findings highlight the role of illustrations in fostering aesthetic taste, cognitive skills, and emotional intelligence. They underscore the impact of the interaction between text and images on children's emotional and cognitive development. Contemporary illustrators employ a mix of traditional and innovative methods to create expressive, vivid, and detailed visuals that engage young readers. Digital technologies and interactive elements enhance illustrations, making them captivating and imaginative. These approaches support creativity, promote positive attitudes toward reading, and make books visually appealing and meaningful. The research underscores the importance of using current artistic approaches to create visually appealing and meaningful children's books.

KEYWORDS: Publication Design, Young Readers, Visual Narrative, Graphic Elements, Creative Interpretation

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[1] Zijing Wu is a PhD, Researcher at the School of Art and Design, Guilin University of Electronic Technology, Guangxi, People's Republic of China. Research interests: graphic design, innovative illustration techniques in children's literature, and traditional illustration methods in contemporary books. Email: zwu2100@gmail.com.

[2] Yingying Wang is a Master, Researcher at the School of Art and Design, Guilin University of Electronic Technology, Guangxi, People's Republic of China. Scientific interests: visual storytelling, the role of interactive elements in books, the impact of illustration on children's emotional development

RESUMO: O estudo examinou técnicas atuais e tendências estilísticas na ilustração da literatura infantil. Ele analisou abordagens contemporâneas, combinando métodos inovadores e tradicionais, tecnologias digitais e elementos interativos para descobrir características estilísticas importantes. A pesquisa explorou histórias, imagens artísticas e temas adaptados para públicos modernos, enfatizando como essas técnicas influenciam a percepção das crianças sobre obras artísticas. As descobertas destacam o papel das ilustrações no fomento do gosto estético, habilidades cognitivas e inteligência emocional. Elas ressaltam o impacto da interação entre texto e imagens no desenvolvimento emocional e cognitivo das crianças. Ilustradores contemporâneos empregam uma mistura de métodos tradicionais e inovadores para criar visuais expressivos, vívidos e detalhados que envolvam jovens leitores. Tecnologias digitais e elementos interativos aprimoram as ilustrações, tornando-as cativantes e imaginativas. Essas abordagens apoiam a criatividade, promovem atitudes positivas em relação à leitura e tornam os livros visualmente atraentes e significativos. A pesquisa ressalta a importância de usar abordagens artísticas atuais para criar livros infantis visualmente atraentes e significativos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Design de Publicação, Jovens Leitores, Narrativa Visual, Elementos Gráficos, Interpretação Criativa

1. Introduction

The contemporary visual world of children's literature is rapidly evolving under the influence of new technologies and sociocultural changes. Researching stylistic and artistic innovations in the field of illustration not only reveals current trends but also determines their potential to improve children's education and cultural development. The 21st century has brought significant changes to the visual world of children's literature, reflecting the evolution of social norms, technological advancements, and educational goals. Studying these processes requires a comprehensive analysis, considering stylistic details and artistic images in illustrated children's books. Children's literature not only preserves stories but also serves as a canvas for visual narratives that enrich readers' experiences and inspire their imaginations. Unlike fine art, which is typically oriented towards creating unique and valuable works for exhibitions, illustration is developed with consideration for its mechanical reproduction and wide distribution. This characteristic raises several questions related to the material nature of illustrations. It also opens up a wide range of important aspects for research, such as the choice of media for creating illustrations, the technology of their reproduction, and the ways of presenting and demonstrating these works in various contexts.

Illustrations in children's books must meet many requirements and fulfil numerous functions that extend far beyond mere visual appeal (Shashkina et al., 2025; Efremov, 2025). Their purpose is to serve as a tool that helps children understand the world around them, acquire important moral and

ethical values, and develop intellectual and emotional abilities. Creating such illustrations is impossible without considering the psychological characteristics of children's development at different ages. Visual images are expected to be clear and accessible to children (Kyrychok et al., 2024; 2023). At the same time, it is important to provide enough space for imagination and independent interpretation of the artwork. The task of book illustrations is to support the text, enriching it with new content that may not be directly expressed in words but deepens the reader's engagement with the story (Kongyratbay, 2021a). E. Wulandari and Y.P.M.S.A. Daryanto (2022) note that illustrations can serve as an effective educational medium, contributing not only to entertainment but also to learning, which is especially important in the educational context of the 21st century.

It is crucial for book illustrations to consider inclusivity and promote the representation of diversity in the world. Inclusivity encompasses the portrayal of various cultures, ethnic groups, social situations, and behavioural models (Kongyratbay, 2021b). Such an approach helps children understand and accept differences between themselves and people around them, developing empathy and tolerance, which is particularly important in the context of globalisation and increasing cultural diversity. Research by T. Szasz et al. (2022) demonstrates that book illustrations can be a significant means of representing diversity in race, gender, and age, contributing to the formation of an inclusive worldview in children. A review of literature on contemporary illustrations in children's books reveals that a significant portion of research is dedicated to the impact of illustrations on shaping children's identity and emotional development. For instance, H. Mert and Z. Kuş (2023) investigated how illustrations in natural science textbooks influence the construction of Turkish children's identities. J. Wu (2022) examined emotion-based book design, using "Children of the Stars" as a case study. Y. Song (2021) drew attention to contemporary social and humanities research related to art, design, and education. E. Arizpe et al. (2023) explored new contexts and approaches to illustrated books, while D. Danaei et al. (2020) and S. Doyle et al. (2018) compared comprehension in children reading printed books and those with arg. The aforementioned studies highlight the need for further analysis of the impact of various illustration styles on child development and identity, as well as a deeper understanding of the role of illustrations in children's literature.

A key aspect is the ability of illustrations to stimulate children's imagination and develop their creative abilities, which can be achieved through the use of various artistic techniques, including collage, watercolour, digital illustration, animation, and others. The use of different styles and techniques not only attracts children's attention but also develops their sense of beauty, harmony, and composition. In particular, illustrations can stimulate children to create their own works of art, inspiring them to self-express. M. Romadhona and S.C.R.E.C. Aileena (2021), and S. Doyle et al. (2018) emphasise that interactive illustrated books, including pop-up books, play a significant role in developing healthy life skills in children aged 7-8.

One of the primary challenges facing researchers of 21st century children's book illustrations is defining the role of illustrations in shaping readers' worldviews and aesthetic preferences. While a significant body of research has analysed various aspects of illustrations in children's books, there remain several significant gaps that require further scholarly investigation. In particular, there is a lack of research into the impact of contemporary illustrations on the formation of gender stereotypes and national identity in children, as well as a gap in the analysis of how diverse stylistic approaches to illustration can influence the emotional and intellectual development of children of different ages and cultural backgrounds.

This research aimed to identify and systematise contemporary stylistic approaches to illustrating children's books.

2. Materials and methods

A study of the techniques and stylistic trends of contemporary children's book illustration was conducted in several stages, each contributing to the examination of key aspects of illustrative art. The study of techniques and stylistic trends of contemporary children's book illustration was conducted through a phased approach involving several key steps for in-depth analysis of various aspects of the art of illustration. The initial stage involved a thorough collection and study of a variety of illustration samples from children's books published between 2010 and 2020. To obtain a complete picture of book design trends, examples were selected that reflect both traditional and innovative techniques, the use of interactive elements, and various illustration styles. Each illustration was examined for its stylistic features, including compositional solutions, colour palettes, textural effects, and execution techniques. Particular attention was paid to how these techniques influence the emotional perception of illustrations, shaping the reader's mood and reinforcing the text's content. Specifically, methods of visually capturing attention and emphasising the emotional component of the text through the choice of colour schemes and forms were examined. Techniques of working with texture were also analysed, including the impact of different materials on creating a particular atmosphere in the book.

The books selected for this study were carefully chosen to represent a diverse range of artistic techniques, narrative approaches, and cultural perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of contemporary children's book illustration. "The Tortoise & the Hare" (2013) by J. Pinkney was included for its exemplary use of traditional illustration methods, offering insight into the ongoing relevance of classical techniques in children's literature. In contrast, "Marta's Gift" (Nascioli, 2016) by I. Sulima was selected for its innovative combination of traditional and digital techniques, highlighting the integration of modern technologies in book design. "Journey" (2013) by A. Becker was chosen

for its unique approach to the interaction between text and illustration, demonstrating how illustrations can expand and enhance the narrative. "Rescue & Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship" (Kensky and Downes, 2021) by S. Magoon and the Chinese classical literature collection (Xie et al., 2023) were included to explore the emotional and cultural impact of illustrations, showing how they engage readers from different backgrounds and influence their perception of the text.

In the second stage, the interaction between text and image was examined. Specifically, the study analysed methods of supplementing and expanding the narrative of a literary work through illustrations, creating a cohesive visual-textual composition that contributes to a better understanding and memorisation of the text by children. An important aspect was also the study of the role of illustrations in the formation of visual literacy and the development of imagination in a child audience, which made it possible not only to identify key stylistic trends but also to understand which artistic techniques have the greatest impact on readers. The analysis also included an examination of the interaction between different forms of media, such as digital and traditional illustrations, and their impact on children's perception of the text.

In the third stage of the study, the impact of contemporary illustrations on the child audience was examined. Data was collected on which artistic elements most captured readers' attention. The range of emotions evoked, and their influence on text perception, were investigated. An analysis was conducted of strategies for engaging children in reading books, and the significance of visual literacy for young readers was substantiated. Important aspects of the study also included differences in the perception of illustrations in different cultural and social contexts, which made it possible to identify how social and cultural factors influence the choice of illustrations and their perception. Particular attention was paid to how new technologies and digital formats transform traditional approaches to illustration and the creation of children's books. The interaction between traditional and contemporary forms of illustration, and their impact on learning and development processes in children, were also considered. Additionally, the impact of interactive and multimedia elements, such as augmented reality (AR) or 3D illustrations, was analysed.

3. Results

The artistic value of contemporary book illustrations and the nature of their impact on the audience are determined by a range of factors, including techniques, stylistic choices, and the content of the visual narrative. Modernity significantly changes children's needs for artistic and informational content in books, especially in the context of constant technological progress. Children are increasingly interested in interacting with dynamic and interactive illustrations, filled with bright and unconventional images. The diversification of styles and approaches to creating book illustrations reflects the expanding range of aesthetic preferences of contemporary children. Digital technologies play a

significant role in this process. The content of illustrated content, in turn, is influenced by globalisation processes and the ever-growing need to highlight certain social issues.

3.1. Techniques and materials in the design of contemporary children's books

The evolution of book illustration has been significantly influenced by advancements in image reproduction technologies. As H.T. Nguyễn (2020) notes, the advent of woodcuts, engravings, and etchings enabled artists to create images with a high level of detail and texture. Lithography, introduced in the 18th century, expanded the possibilities for illustration, allowing for the use of a full spectrum of colours and significantly enriching the visual perception of works. However, a true breakthrough in illustration occurred with the invention of halftone screens in the 19th century, which enabled the reproduction of painterly and realistic images. Subsequent technological breakthroughs expanded artists' capabilities in applying a variety of artistic techniques, including watercolour, gouache, oil paints, and digital tools. Modern printing and photographic technologies, capable of reproducing the finest details and nuances in works, allow illustrators to fully realise their creative ideas.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in traditional illustration techniques within children's literature (Zhanysbayeva et al., 2021). Despite significant advancements in digital technologies that enable the creation of high-quality, detailed images, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in traditional illustration techniques for children's books. Traditional methods, such as watercolour, gouache, oil paint, coloured pencils, and pastels, continue to be relevant. These techniques offer a unique texture and depth that is often difficult to replicate digitally. For instance, watercolour paintings possess a natural transparency and lightness, while the richness and density of oil paints captivate children's attention and effectively sustain their interest. The use of gouache, pastels, ink, and coloured pencils provides unique visual effects, adding realism and depth to illustrations (Stadnik, 2024).

Using manual techniques allows illustrators to experiment with various styles and approaches, helping to create images that are impossible to accurately reproduce using digital techniques (Velyka and Birillo, 2024). Such a creative approach to illustration fosters the development of aesthetic taste in readers. Familiarity with works created using watercolour, gouache, and other graphic materials is highly likely to inspire a child to try their hand at art. Thus, hand-drawn illustrations can stimulate a reader's artistic expression, contributing to the development of children's imagination and creativity. 21st century trends in book design continue to emphasise the relevance of traditional methods, indicating their indispensable role in the development of children's literature. For example, the illustrator of "The Tortoise & the Hare", J. Pinkney, worked with watercolour to create realistic images of characters and landscapes, giving his work a sense of softness and vibrant energy (Figure 1).
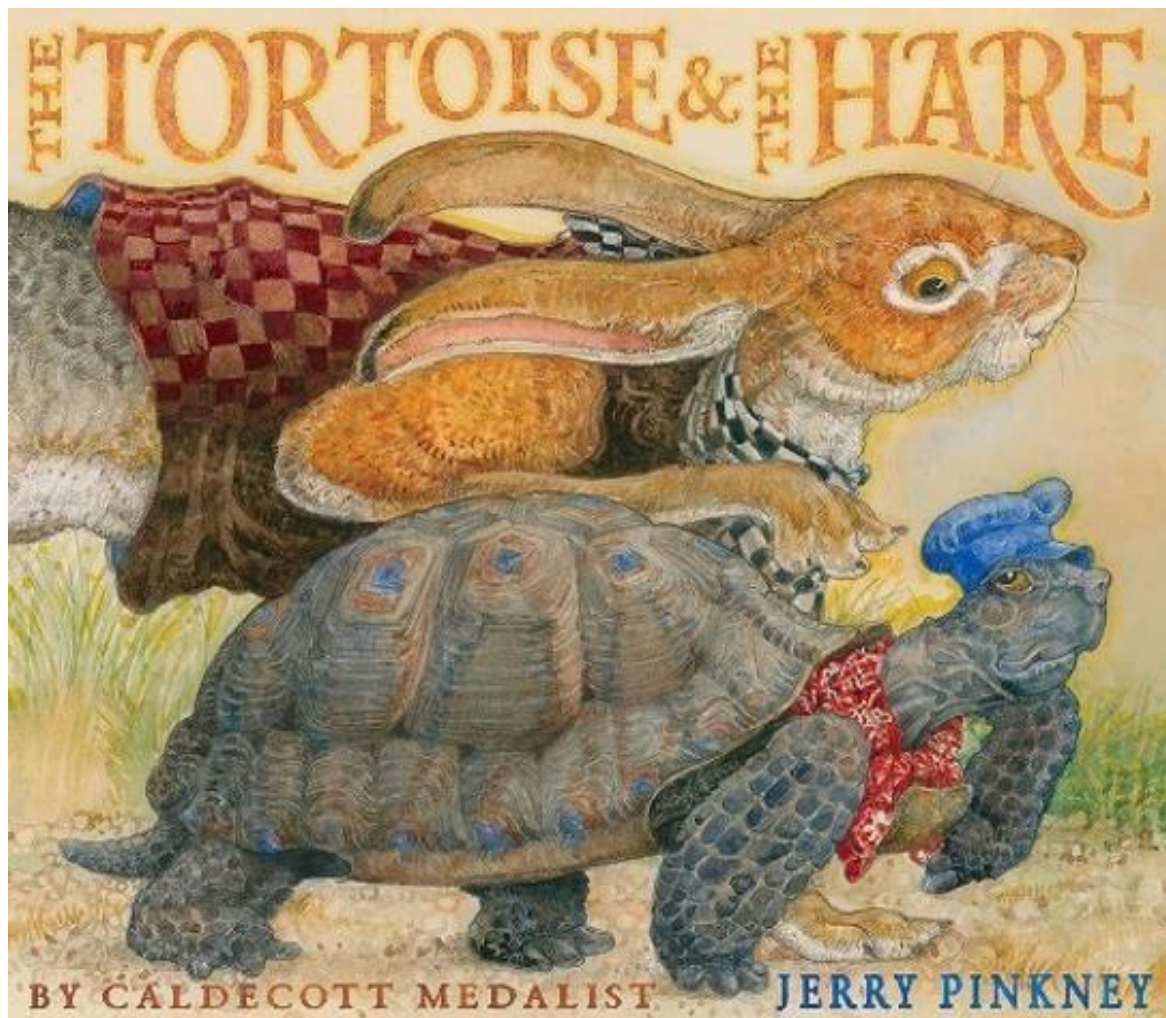
Figure 1. "The Tortoise & the Hare", J. Pinkney (Source: J. Pinkney (2013))

In the contemporary landscape of book design, digital tools have become an integral part of the illustration creation process for children's literature. These tools offer new possibilities for the visual interpretation of narratives and experimentation with a variety of styles and techniques. Programs such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Procreate are widely used. Designed for drawing, editing, and photo manipulation, these applications facilitate the creation of complex, multicomponent, and detailed compositions. Contemporary artists are increasingly turning to digital tools due to their convenience and speed, which are difficult to achieve using traditional techniques. There are numerous examples of digital graphics in contemporary book illustration, including the work of I. Sulima (Figure 2).

Figure 2. "Marta's Gift", I. Sulima (Source: B.M. Nascioli (2016))

Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages, so most contemporary illustrators choose to combine traditional and digital techniques to maximise their benefits and minimise their drawbacks. Disadvantages of hand-drawn illustrations include limited editing capabilities and potential difficulties in reproducing quality and colours in print (Zhang and Chubotina, 2024). Meanwhile, digital works by different artists sometimes look similar due to the use of a standardised set of templates, brushes, textures, and automated functions in graphic editors.

The most relevant approach to contemporary children's book illustration is the combination of traditional and digital techniques. This approach expands the possibilities for experimenting with forms, colour palettes, textures, composition, and styles, as well as contributes to increasing the uniqueness and recognisability of works. The combination of hand-drawn illustrations with digital techniques should also include the trend towards three-dimensional books. Since the 2010s, three dimensional illustrated graphic products have become increasingly common (Bulduk, 2017). Pop-up books have been a long-standing trend in children's book illustration, characterised by their expressiveness and effective visual communication with the reader (Haryanto and Karyono, 2021).

There are also tunnel books, a concept that emerged as an alternative approach to three-dimensional book design, including pop-up books. In tunnel books, scenes are revealed in layers, and their content and form are created with the content of the fairy tale in mind, with illustrations remaining the main elements (Bulduk, 2017). At present, tunnel books have not gained widespread popularity among publishers and consumers of children's literature. Their application could serve educational purposes aimed at developing children's creativity and spatial thinking.

In recent years, children's books incorporating AR technology have become increasingly popular. Particularly noteworthy are books designed to teach preschoolers the alphabet. For instance, the "AR Alphabet Book", released in 2013, has received positive reviews for enhancing the alphabet learning process. The "AR Alphabet" app was developed using ARToolkit software (Karaata and Yılmaz, 2023). Consequently, book design is evolving rapidly through the integration of innovative graphic techniques, including three-dimensional illustrations, pop-up books, and AR. These technical solutions attract children with their interactive nature and aesthetically pleasing visual narratives. Contemporary trends in book illustration underscore the importance of visual communication with the reader and demonstrate a growing interest in creating effective educational and entertainment products for young audiences.

3.2.   Contemporary stylistic trends in children's book illustration

One of the most prevalent styles in book illustration in the 21st century is realism, as a wide range of digital and graphic materials allows artists to increase the level of detail and quality of their depictions. In children's books, the manifestations of realism differ somewhat from its specific applications in other areas of visual art. It is not photorealistic, but it depicts objects as they are in real life, which distinguishes it from the playful grotesque styles of depiction that are increasingly common in children's literature. Realistic illustrations in children's books can be both simple and highly detailed. Some children's books are illustrated with actual photographs, but this approach is not widely adopted at present. Some artists specialise in a more realistic style. They sometimes combine it with other styles, creating their own unique signature. The following examples show how stylised realism combines authenticity and artistic skill. A good example of stylised realism in children's book illustrations is the work of A. Becker (Figure 3). The illustrator has meticulously crafted the elements of an imaginary world, making the fantasy locations seem real. The palette of natural colours, adherence to the rules of perspective and proportion in depicting landscapes bring the fairy tale plot to life. In this way, the artist accurately conveys the atmosphere of the plot and its content, immersing the reader deep into the world of the book.

Figure 3. "Journey", A. Becker (Source: A. Becker (2013))

Another current approach to visualising text is the wimmelbook style. Originating from Germany, this style is characterised by detailed, drawn scenes where objects, characters, and their activities are the focus. A defining feature of the wimmelbook style is not a focus on a single scene, but rather a collection of different storylines within a single composition (Lytvyn et al., 2018). Stories that unfold simultaneously on one page allow readers to wander from corner to corner of the image, developing children's attention and interest in reading. Filling the space with dense detail captivates readers, stimulating them to learn new things. This style can be considered a playful experiment in book illustration, conducted to immerse readers in the plot and idea of the work.

There is a growing trend towards simplified, linear illustrations. These drawings look like simple sketches, lacking in colour and detail. Instead, they are characterised by simple shapes, a predominantly black-and-white palette, and a simplification of the forms being depicted. Such illustrations are characterised by sharp, dynamic or stable static lines, minimal details, and sometimes the use of chromatic colours, but in a limited range. In this way, the mood and visual narrative of the work are presented more playfully and dynamically. This style is designed for both restless, capricious children and those who are inclined from an early age to a meticulous analysis of their surroundings and a comprehensive curiosity. A characteristic feature of this style is the grotesque depiction of characters, with their features being exaggerated.

Among contemporary illustration trends, the popularity of styles commonly found in cartoons and anime should also be noted. Cinematic images inspire illustrators to experiment with the artistic expression of emotions and character movement. There is a growing trend towards the use of muted tones, high contrast, and a conscious choice of shapes and colours. The vintage style is also gaining popularity in book design. When used by a professional, the aforementioned styles guarantee the creation of visually appealing images that are easily perceived by children and meet contemporary aesthetic preferences. Contemporary children's book illustration represents a multifaceted and dynamic realm, where each style and technique hold its own significance depending on the book's purpose and cultural context. From traditional to modern approaches, from realism to abstraction, the diversity of illustrative styles allows for the creation of books that are not only interesting to a child audience but also contribute to their development and creative thinking.

4. The conceptual content of artistic images in contemporary book illustration and their impact on children's consciousness

Globalisation has had a significant impact on the storylines, characters, and physical characteristics in children's literature. This process has opened up access to a variety of cultural resources. The issue of diversity and individuality within any given group of people has become increasingly relevant. Familiarity with those who are different from oneself is always the basis for creative ideas, as is self-awareness through recognising one's own differences from those around them.

A study of the visual-narrative characteristics of classical Chinese poetry books shows how cultural and aesthetic traditions influence the depiction of characters and plots (Xie et al., 2023). In particular, the author analyses the graphic elements of illustrations for a children's collection of ancient Chinese poetry. The works use a style reminiscent of a modernised version of traditional Chinese painting. The graphic elements in illustrations for ancient Chinese poetry are effectively used to reinforce patriotic sentiments and national consciousness among the child audience. The visualisation of national symbols and traditional motifs also contributes to the formation of understanding and respect for cultural heritage in the younger generation (Figure 4).
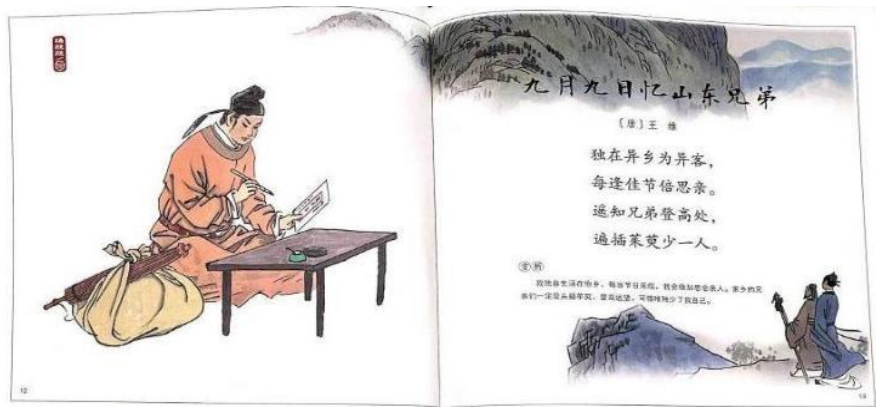
Figure 4. The illustrations in the children's collection of ancient Chinese poetry highlight traditional cultural elements
(Source: J. Xie et al. (2023))

Children's illustrations that positively depict characters with diverse abilities and characteristics emphasise that every person is valuable and worthy of respect. In this way, readers develop empathy, compassion, tolerance, and respect for one another, fostering a society where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential and be accepted for who they are. The illustrations in "Rescue & Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship" are predominantly in bright and warm tones, conveying a sense of hope and optimism despite the challenges faced by the protagonist (Figure 5).

Figure 5. "Rescue & Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship", S. Magoon (Source: J. Kensky and P. Downes (2021))

In contemporary children's illustrations, visual imagery plays a significant role in promoting individuality and self-identification in children. Vibrant, distinctive, and charismatic characters facilitate self-discovery and foster tolerance among peers, reinforcing positive motivation for self-expression through the aesthetic representation of diverse aspects of personality and cultural experience. The artistic imagery in contemporary children's book illustrations is increasingly created to reflect the diversity of individual characters and inner worlds. The variety of character types in the visual description of book heroes allows children to associate themselves with literary characters, supporting

their process of self-identification and understanding of their own uniqueness. Additionally, the aesthetic aspects of visual imagery are important for maintaining positive motivation for reading in children. Colour, composition, and style of illustration all contribute to creating an atmosphere that facilitates an emotional and psychological connection with characters and their stories. In particular, vibrant and dynamic illustrations can reinforce the adventurous tone of a narrative, while gentle and warm drawings can convey a sense of comfort and family warmth. An important function of visual imagery is also its ability to stimulate children's imagination and creativity. They teach the audience to perceive the world through the prism of diverse images, which broadens their worldview and allows them to develop creative thinking. Illustrations that inspire self-expression and creative activity contribute to the formation of positive self-esteem and self-confidence in children.

5. Discussion

The artistic value and impact of book illustrations on the audience are determined by a whole complex of components that together form a complete visual experience for the reader. This complex includes not only execution techniques but also style, graphic elements, and the content aspect of the visual narrative. Each of these elements plays an important role in creating an aesthetically pleasing and emotionally rich image that is capable of capturing the attention of a young audience. Thanks to rapid and continuous technological progress, there is a growing demand for a new level of interactivity and dynamism in children's book illustrations. This demand is driven by the changing needs of contemporary children, who expect books to provide not only artistic but also informational content that meets their expectations and interests.

The results of the conducted research corroborate the conclusions of B. Basu (2018), who emphasised the importance of visual elements as the foundation for establishing an emotional connection between the illustration and the reader. This connection serves as the basis for perceiving and understanding the text, as well as for forming the child's personal experiences and perceptions. C.-C. Wei and M.-Y. Ma (2020) investigated the factors contributing to the appeal of various formats of illustrated children's books, enhancing the understanding of how design influences children's perception of visual information, which is a significant addition to contemporary comprehension of the role of illustration in children's literature. M. Gal (2024) has underscored the significance of visualism as a philosophical approach that transcends the limits of language, a notion with which it is difficult to disagree. He viewed visual images as a tool capable of bridging the gap between reality and imagination, a crucial aspect of children's illustrations, which are designed not only to accompany the text but also to stimulate readers' imaginations, helping them to form their own images and interpretations. This approach allows for the creation of book illustrations that not only entertain but also develop children's consciousness and creativity. A. Niland (2023) considered book illustrations to be a vital

tool for developing a positive reading identity in children. The results of this study corroborate his findings, as it was demonstrated that illustrations are capable of not only capturing attention but also fostering a sustained interest in reading among children, developing their emotional and cognitive abilities.

In his work, A. Male (2017) examined illustration from both theoretical and contextual perspectives, enabling a deeper understanding of its role in contemporary children's literature. His analysis highlights the significance of a conceptual approach to illustrations, which elucidates how visual elements can interact with text to create a multi-layered experience for readers; this consideration was also taken into account during the present study. S. Pantaleo (2023) investigated how preschool children discussed illustrative techniques in an almost wordless book. His research demonstrated how illustrations can stimulate discussions and facilitate a deeper understanding of the book, even at an early age, providing insights into the impact of imagery on the consciousness of the youngest readership for further research. The research also revealed that a realistic illustration style, particularly when enhanced by modern digital and graphic technologies, is effective in creating educational books. This aligns with the findings of L.S. Marcus (2023), who demonstrated that this style allows for accurate and detailed representations of reality, facilitating better understanding and comprehension in children. Such an approach is especially important in 21st century children's literature, where illustrations should not only support the text but also be an integral part of it, helping children acquire new knowledge and broaden their horizons. This aspect is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary trends in children's literature, where there is an emphasis on integrating education and child development through literary works. Notably, we concur with M.D. Zbaracki (2023), who pointed out that the use of a realistic illustration style in children's books contributes to their popularity among young readers and makes books more accessible and understandable for children of all ages.

The study examined innovative solutions that are actively employed in graphic design. Specifically, K. Day (2024) focused on digital children's books, exploring new approaches to illustration within a digital environment. One can agree with his assertion that such an approach expands opportunities for interactivity and new forms of engagement with readers, meeting contemporary market demands and technological advancements. These include three-dimensional illustrations, pop-up books, and AR technology. In the study of B. Bulduk (2017), the implementation of these methods in graphic products was analysed, while this research emphasised book design specifically. Techniques such as pop-ups, three-dimensional illustrations, and AR are being actively integrated into children's book illustrations. The tunnel books mentioned in B. Bulduk's (2017) research have not yet gained popularity in children's literature design; however, it makes sense to explore this technique within the field, thereby expanding possibilities for interactive book content. The AR technology showcased in the book "AR Alphabet Book" highlights how innovative solutions can enhance the learning process

and engage children in interacting with books, a conclusion also drawn in this study. Pop-up books have also been recognised as an effective artistic means of communication, as confirmed by the research of S. Haryanto and T. Karyono (2021), as well as the development of an interactive illustrated pop-up book on healthy living by M. Romadhona and S.C.R.E.C. Aileena (2021). These studies underscore the significance of interactive elements in contemporary children's publications, particularly in the context of education and fostering healthy habits in children.

Furthermore, the research by A. McCuaig (2023) and M.N. Phekani (2023) highlighted the significance of illustrations in enhancing reading motivation and visual literacy, corroborating the impact of innovative techniques on children's engagement with reading and text comprehension. The authors justified the need for further experimentation with book formats, content delivery, and reproduction techniques, a conclusion that aligns with the findings of this study. Illustration in children's books represents a design sphere that carries not only an entertainment function but also an educational and upbringing one (Liu and Kolisnyk, 2024). Illustrations become not merely a supplement to the text but an integral part of it, actively shaping the perception and understanding of information (Nukezhanova et al., 2024). B. Hasirci and D. Hasirci (2021) highlighted the significance of book design and its impact on reading habits. They emphasised that thoughtful illustration design can significantly influence how often and with what interest children engage with books. The aesthetics and functionality of illustrations can stimulate interest in reading, providing not only visual pleasure but also helping children to better immerse themselves in the plot and understand its nuances (Toktagazin et al., 2016). This study also established that this aspect is critically important, as welldesigned books can foster positive reading habits and cultivate a lifelong love of reading. As M. Wagner and D. Prado (2024) noted in their research, there is a need to focus on new directions in book illustration research, particularly their impact on children's cognitive and emotional development, which supports the rationale for further analysis. S.Q. Cabell et al. (2023) emphasised the importance of children's book illustrations as an educational tool, particularly relevant for the development of early reading and writing skills, a point that is certainly worth agreeing with.

The study by P. Venzo (2024) examines the themes, limitations, and provocations associated with diversity in Italian-illustrated children's books, allowing for an analysis of the extent to which diversity is represented in contemporary children's literature. Furthermore, T.E. Wartenberg (2022) highlights the importance of philosophical approaches in children's literature, as manifested through book illustrations that can evoke deep thoughts and emotions in children, a notion also substantiated in this study. In conjunction with the findings of S.Q. Cabell et al. (2023) regarding the educational role of illustrations, this confirms the importance of a comprehensive approach to creating children's literature.

Research into contemporary children's book illustrations is valuable due to their impact on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. They contribute to the formation of cultural identity, social skills, and aesthetic appreciation. Studying these aspects allows for a better understanding of the role of illustrations in children's literature and their influence on shaping future generations.

6. Conclusions

Illustrations in children's books play a key role in developing creativity and emotional intelligence. Recent trends show that combining traditional techniques with innovations like graphic editors, paper engineering, and AR enhances children's perceptions of the world. The study suggests further experimentation with book design, such as integrating tunnel books. The choice of illustration style is vital, with each style serving a specific function based on the book's genre. Realism, enabled by digital tools, works well in educational books, while styles like wimmelbooks and simplified linear illustrations cater to different needs. Interactive, colorable illustrations could also engage young readers.

Based on the research conducted, the concept of a contemporary illustrated children's book can be formulated. Children's interaction with illustrations contributes to their emotional, cognitive, and social development, fostering a positive attitude towards diversity among people, respect for their own and others' cultural traditions, and a sense of individuality. Illustrations play a significant role in shaping children's consciousness, promoting the development of emotional intelligence, imagination, and cognitive abilities, and positively influencing their attitude towards the world around them.

In conclusion, children's book illustrations foster emotional, cognitive, and social development while encouraging respect for diversity and cultural traditions. Future research should explore the impact of new technologies, cultural context, and inclusive book design. Empirical studies are needed to complement these theoretical insights.

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