

PREFERENCE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLCHILDREN IN ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations are essential components of each storybook and primary school textbook as they offer children much fuller and deeper understanding of the meaning. Pictures appeal to children's imagination and arouse interest in reading texts and stories. However, adults often perpetuate stereotype images, supply texts with old-fashioned drawing or place illustrations of nowadays popular artists while children's choices are different. Anyway, there are few recent researches on children's picture preference and the authors investigate different age groups. Most of the studies are rather old, inconclusive and random; besides, they have hardly controlled variable, different operational definitions and unclear reporting. The conclusions on children's picture preferences are often contradictory. Thus, the current problem remains unsolved, the data are obsolete, and there is no research provided within Ukrainian context.

This paper attempts to explore the previous studies, examine Ukrainian primary schoolchildren's picture choice, and suggest further investigation of the problem. The findings corroborated the assumption that realism of color, style, shape or proportion is a determined factor, and that boys and girls choose different images. Additionally, our research doubted that primary schoolchildren prefer colored illustrations to black and white. The assumptions were proved of by the participants: significant differences in boys' and girls' selection of the pictures were discovered, some black and white drawings were ranked much higher than the colored pictures, highly realistic illustrations were most preferable. Also, 429 primary schoolchildren aged from six to ten, showed interest in eventful pictures within all sex and age groups. The paper suggests the criteria for selecting images for children's books.

Key words: *preference in pictures, realism in illustrations, preference in colour.*

Illustrations attract and hold child's attention [15], offer a child a fuller understanding of the meaning and contribute to his/her overall development. Since the recognition of illustration importance, numerous books with many pictures were published [11]. Earlier researchers reacted to this tendency: some studies concerned the types of pictures [3; 5; 10; 12] or picture books [2; 6] children prefer while others summarized previous papers [1; 7; 11]. In examining illustration and picture books, some points of interest emerged. Young children choose large pictures [1; 5; 9] and books with over 25 percent of picture [2]. Malter [7] is the only researcher to investigate the pictures varied in style. Color illustrations are preferred to black and white [8; 14], but the results on realism of the subject were unclear [8; 13]. Meanwhile, the choices adult made for children were substantially unlike the choices children made for themselves [11], and the authors of children books perpetuated stereotype images.

Researches help little to clarify the problem, as some studies reported little details to be conclusive, others were loosely controlled. Researches focused on different age groups, and sometimes involved a little number of participants. Some papers were done with picture books but the results indicate story interest, not pictures, can be a crucial item here. As research – much of which is very old – is obscure, and children nowadays are different, there is an urgent need of reliable present-day data. The inspirations for the current research came from informal observations of primary schoolchildren choosing realism in pictures and story. Our goal in the study is to investigate our observations systematically and to define the reasons for children preferring certain images.

Taking into account that children's choice of pictures can be influenced by a number of factors we decided to examine the criteria mentioned by previous researchers first, then to determine variables for a present study, and finally to select illustrations for our research. Investigators developed visuals based on: 1) picture's color, size, shape and proportion, complexity, style, and attractiveness; 2) subject of the illustration, scenery and details; 3) influence of the plot; and 4) influence of adults.

The subject of the illustration can be an important issue (children can be more interested in animals or children, school objects or toys, etc.) and only one category is to be selected. For example, it can be domestic animals or pets. Meanwhile, the size criteria can be neglected as the images in recent studies were selected of the same size.

Determination of picture color characteristic in previous studies showed that there can be different aspects: usage of bright colors, realistic colors, certain shades or tints, and also certain colors can be predominant. These color values can be a strong orientation for primary schoolchildren, thus we included them into the present research.

It is noteworthy that storybook characters can have a strong story plots behind them and children like different heroes. Thus, we avoided images which were taken from famous storybook or animated films. Attractive illustrations and characters is the factor that can hardly be measured as it is a very subjective. Thus, we changed it for 'sweetness'. Having analyzed the criteria we concentrate on the following characteristics: 1) peculiarities of the subject (color, shape, proportion, style, complexity, details and sweetness); 2) peculiarities of scenery (plot of the picture, details of the scenery and what the character reminds).

In the first part of the interview the children's samples were gathered from a private language Greenly Education Centre. The interview comprised 28 children (17 girls and 11 boys) aged from six to ten. Standard commercial illustrations were used for this study. Images were gathered from the website *Illustrators.ru* where modern Russian and Ukrainian illustrators uploaded some pictures in their resumes. As there were many images of cats and this animal is favored by children, we exploited such images in the research materials. Taking into account the fact that pictures should be of different styles we selected 24 images of cats. 18 pictures were colored and 6 pictures were black and white (see Figure 1). Picture T was chosen purposefully because it resembled the most popular drawing from our previous study.



Figure 1. Illustrations in the study

The research study aimed at presenting two pictures at a time and asking children to choose the one they liked more. Having calculated the number of such presentations – children would have to make 310 choices – we decided to have two studies. Thus, in the first study we supposed to find out the top 10 pictures. Having grouped black and white pictures together and other 18 pictures in other three groups, we calculated that all together children had to make 60 choices.

A special Power Point file was designed for this study. The pictures were arranged so that when the program was opened two different pictures would appear on opposite sides. The duration of the interviews with six-year-old children were 20-25 minutes and with other age groups it was 15-18 minutes. The study employed filling in the sample with a small group of children (max 10 at a time). The interview took place at school after the lessons.

The whole procedure was conducted by the author and was monitored by a class teacher. The instructions were given in the mother tongue (Russian or Ukrainian) and were the same: 'Choose one of two pictures which you like more. Write on your paper 1 if you like the first picture or on paper 2 if you like the second'. Each choice was defined as 1 point and each picture had an equal number of exposures, thus each illustration could get maximum 5 points from one child. Additionally, we took field note as children sometimes could comment on their choice.

The results of the first study revealed the following data: picture A (76 points), picture B (85 points), picture C (46 points), picture D (79 points), picture E (65 points), picture F (68 points), picture G (71 points),

picture H (37 points), picture I (85 points), picture J (49 points), picture K (91 points), picture L (75 points), picture M (95 points), picture N (68 points), picture P (82 points), picture Q (49 points), picture R (66 points), picture S (59 points), picture T (99 points), picture U (58 points), picture V (49 points), picture W (57 points), picture X (91 points), picture Y (52 points). The findings suggested more preferable pictures in each group. Thus, pictures A, B and D were more popular in the first group, pictures I and K in the second, M and P in the third while pictures T and X in the last. The least preferable were pictures C, H, Q and V.

We reviewed the images according to the criteria and found that the children's choice was guided by realism in color, form and proportion as well as possible story plot. For example, pictures C, H, Q, and V had a weak plot and the characters were drawn with unnatural body shapes of colors, thus these images were less popular than pictures E, F, J, N, R, S, U, W, and Y. The most preferable pictures in each group mostly had a possible story plot and they were more realistic in color and animal proportion. It is noteworthy that the children avoided choosing fat cats.

After the first part of the interview the data suggested top 9 pictures: picture T – 99 points, picture M – 95 points, picture K and X – 91 points, picture B and I – 85 points, picture P – 82 points, picture D – 79 points, picture A – 76 points.

Experiencing difficulties with choosing the tenth picture as the difference in points for other pictures was very small: picture L – 75 points, picture G – 71 points, picture F and N – 68 points, picture R – 66 points, picture E – 65 points, we exploited field notes as children sometimes made comments on the characters. The most preferable was picture L as it suggested a rebellious cat and children often asked the examiner about the object in its mouth. Thus, this illustration was included into the second study.

The children's samples were gathered from five randomly selected schools in the capital of Ukraine. It included 429 samples (215 boys and 214 girls) from 5 different schools: school No. 135, school No. 200, lyceum No. 51, Children art school and a private language school *Greenly*. There were 78 children aged 10 (43 boys and 35 girls); 96 children aged 9 (43 boys and 53 girls); 103 children aged 8 (55 boys and 48 girls); 114 children aged 7 (58 boys and 56 girls) and 38 children aged 6 (16 boys and 22 girls). The samples from the language school *Greenly* were presented by the same 28 children and 11 students which did not take part in the first study.

In the main part of the interview, there were used 10 pictures and another Power Point file was designed for the second study. The pictures were arranged so that when the program was opened, two different pictures would appear on the opposite sides, and the children had to make 60 choices. The procedure of the second study was the same as in the first one. Primary schoolchildren viewed a Power Point presentation with two different pictures appearing and filled the templates with 1 or 2. The duration was the same. The instructions did not vary; the investigator and the teacher avoided commenting on the images. All interviews were conducted in children's mother tongues (Ukrainian or Russian) as the majority of schoolchildren come from Russian-speaking families.

The results of the research on children's picture preference indicated top 6 pictures chosen by primary schoolchildren aged from six to ten: picture T (2763 points / 14.85%), picture I (2555 points / 13.62%), picture K (2246 points / 12.34%); picture L (2229 points / 11.85%), picture M (1969 points / 10.47%), and picture X (1889 points / 10.08%). As picture T was ranked first and got far more points (2763 points / 14.85%) than the other images the main hypothesis of our research has been proved. Table 1 displays the main interview's results for both genders and different age groups.

Table 1

Results of the interview (in points)

Age	Gender	Pictures									
		A	B	D	I	K	L	M	P	T	X
10	Boys	122	136	166	302	206	249	224	88	276	161
	Girls	77	140	120	214	223	153	133	90	242	182
9	Boys	125	131	180	285	183	270	211	100	280	168
	Girls	119	205	181	314	317	233	230	94	389	303
8	Boys	130	184	230	364	282	326	303	135	327	194
	Girls	80	219	196	251	288	216	211	83	355	261
7	Boys	145	190	277	359	283	335	304	136	362	216
	Girls	121	216	235	324	337	291	247	79	374	296
6	Boys	41	45	68	107	77	112	78	29	105	57
	Girls	48	78	110	112	112	138	97	29	150	116

It should be noted that pictures T, M, K, X and I were also ranked high in the first part of the interview, however the places of pictures M, K, X and I in the top 6 had rather changed. Pictures M and K became less popular while picture I and picture L got much more points than before. Pictures A, D and P seemed to be the least popular among the primary schoolchildren aged from 6 to 10. In addition, certain gender and age difference can also be observed, as schoolchildren ranked the pictures slightly differently.

The gender differences were more obvious. Boys aged 10, 9 and 8 demonstrated the pattern of choosing picture I, T, L, M and K as the top five images: boys aged 10 – picture I (302 points / 15.61%), picture T (276 points / 14.26%), picture L (249 points / 12.87%), picture M (224 points / 11.58%) and picture K (206 points / 10.65%); boys aged 9 – picture I (285 points / 14.73%), picture T (280 points / 14.47%), picture L (270 points / 13.95%), picture M (211 points / 10.90%) and picture K (183 points / 9.46%); and boys aged 8 – picture I (364

points / 14.71%), picture T (327 points / 13.21%), picture L (326 points / 13.17%), picture M (303 points / 12.24%) and picture K (282 points / 11.39%). For younger boys the pattern of choices changed as the top three illustrations were ranked the other way: boys aged 7 preferred picture T (362 points / 13.87%), picture I (359 points / 13.75%), picture L (335 points / 12.84%), picture M (304 points / 11.65%), picture K (283 points / 10.84%) while boys aged 6 – picture L (112 points / 15.56%), picture I (107 points / 14.86%), picture T (105 points / 14.58%), picture M (78 points / 10.83%), picture K (77 points / 10.69%). Thus, picture T was usually ranked second and sometimes first or third, however picture I was the most preferable.

Girls demonstrated the other pattern of picture preference: girls aged 10, 9 and 7 – picture T (242 points, 389 points and 374 points accordingly), picture K (223 points, 317 points and 337 points accordingly), picture I (214 points, 314 points and 324 points accordingly), picture X (182 points, 303 points and 296 points accordingly) and picture L (153 points, 233 points and 291 points accordingly); girls aged 8 – picture T (355 points / 16.44%), picture K (288 points / 13.33%), picture X (261 points / 12.08%), picture I (251 points / 11.62%) and picture L (216 points / 10.00%); and girls aged 6 – picture T (150 points / 15.15%), picture L (138 points / 13.94%), picture X (116 points / 11.72%), picture K (112 points / 11.31%) and picture I (112 points / 11.31%).

Comparing the data we found some patterns in picture preference. In general, Ukrainian primary schoolboys' choices of illustrations are different from that of girls'; thus, boys ranked pictures L and M higher than pictures K and X while girls demonstrated the opposite for the same images. At the same time, both boys and girls found picture K more of interest than picture X, as well as picture L was also ranked higher than picture M. Thirdly, both genders ranked pictures T and I very high, however girls ranked picture T much higher, while boys preferred picture I just a little more than picture T. Finally, pictures A, B, D and P were ranked low by both genders although picture D was a little more popular among the boys, especially as they grow older.

Certain age difference can also be observed but they are not as vivid as gender preference. It is noteworthy that picture I became more popular as children grow older, picture B was more popular among older girls and picture L became less preferable when primary schoolchildren grow older. Furthermore, black and white drawings (picture T and X) were very highly ranked: picture T was very popular while picture X was found to be more interesting than pictures B, A and P even among the boys.

The finding evidences realistic treatment of illustrations and appear to support Mellinger [8] research results. Meanwhile, it was found that realism of the illustrations can have certain degrees as there can be the images which are realistic in color, realistic in shape or realistic in depicting animal's shapes.

It is noteworthy that realistic colours were chosen over conventionalized: in the first study schoolboys and schoolgirls excluded pictures C, G, H, J, Q, and R which were drawn in crude colors that did not depict natural colour of animal fur. In the second study children also favoured realistic colors more than crude. Therefore, pictures A, B, D were ranked very low while pictures M and I, for example, were more favored.

The data analysis revealed that children prefer realistic shapes and three-dimensional forms, thus this study contrasts Freeman's research [4] and falls in the same category as Welling's [13] and Mellinger's [8]. Six illustrations – among primary 24 pictures – have three-dimensional flat forms and they were ranked low. Only picture D was selected for the second study, meanwhile, it was ranked seventh in the second study and preferred a little more than pictures A, B and P.

According to the last aspect of realism – body shape of the animal – Ukrainian primary schoolchildren seemed to like the picture where animals had realistic proportions of the body and avoided those which looked over-weighted. Likewise, pictures C, H, Q, V, Y (strong disproportions) pictures A, I, N, J (light disproportions) and pictures P, Q, R, U, W (over-weighted characters) were less preferable in the first study. Only pictures A, I and P were ranked higher, however pictures A and P were unpopular in the second study.

Depending on the degree of realism, 24 images fall into four types: 1) unrealistic – pictures C, H, Q, V; 2) realistic in a certain way – pictures A, B, D, G, J, N, P, R, S, U, W, Y; 3) rather realistic – pictures I, K, L, M, X; 4) realistic and very life-like – pictures E, F, T. The data derived from both studies capture the essence of the degrees of realism and the main assumption of our study was proved as realism (where of colour, shape or proportion) took precedence for Ukrainian primary schoolchildren aged from six to ten. It is noteworthy that pictures E, F and I are deviations from the pattern.

Pictures E and F (professionally painted water-colors) were selected rarely. The obtained results can be possibly attributed to Welling's data [13]. He reported that bright colors should not be applied in children books. One explanation for that might be that children feel it is complicated for them to draw this way and they might require complex art skills to draw such real-like painting. Thus, they prefer images which they could possibly draw themselves. As during the interview children never commented on them and we have little support from our field notes. This issue needs further investigation, which might exploit children's comments on each picture and giving the reasons why they choose a certain image.

Conclusions on color preference in this paper contradict previous investigators [1; 3; 8; 9; 14] as we found out that black and white drawings could be preferred to color illustrations. Picture T was ranked first while picture X was preferred more than pictures A, B and P even among boys (girls ranked it forth). It can be explain by a number of reasons. First of all, as white cats are common, children may find it natural to see this pet to be drawn this way. Secondly, it can be due to realistic style and proportions as colour preference is not the only issue for choosing a certain image. Then, Malter [7] suggested the children's preference can change over generations and nowadays children might be overfed with too many colors and need something different from the usual pattern. Additionally, primary schoolchildren possibly need black and white drawings in their book as they like coloring them.

The data also revealed some unexpected trends as picture I was ranked very high: it was the boys' top choice and the girls preferred it right after pictures T and K. Commenting on this result we should indicate that choosing this image for the interview we couldn't expect this illustration to be popular. Taking field notes during the first study we were aware of this character as an ordinary one, however we discovered the resemblance of this image with a game character (Talking Tom) in the second study. Comparing the two characters we found out that the pictures seem rather alike, however they are not the same. Nevertheless children confused them and chose them more often than the others.

These results demonstrate the popularity of computer games and the importance of popular and fashionable characters; and the usage of such characters can be very beneficial while designing storybooks and textbooks for primary school. Meanwhile, children become interested in them for a short time till a new more popular game or animated cartoon appears. With the rapid development of IT technologies it would be difficult to catch up with fashion on computer game characters. It means that old fashioned heroes can be met with a grimace. At the same time in different countries, cities, schools or even classes there can be different fashion on computer characters.

Besides, we concluded that the criterion of story plot behind the picture is highly important. Whipple [14] commented that children prefer events more than still life. Joseph [6] found that meaning and content of the illustration are more crucial than the color of the picture. The result of this research points out that this criterion is essential because in the first study younger schoolchildren ranked pictures C, G, H, J, N, U, and V (weak meaning and content) and pictures P, Q, R, S, W, and Y (rather fragile meaning and content) rather low. Later, in the second study the illustrations with real or life-like meaning and content (pictures I, K, L, M, T, X) were ranked high. Pictures I and K were the most popular.

Other criteria were found of weaker influence. The obtained result failed to support Miller's study [9] which suggested that the images with red predominant were more preferable than those with blue: picture I (blue predominant) and picture T (black and white drawing) were more favoured.

The criterion of complexity of illustration has some influence on children's choices. Previous research [5] has indicated that adults choose more complex pictures than children. In our study they preferred illustrations with fewer details (for example, pictures T, K and I) and avoided naturalistic paintings (pictures E and F).

Differentiations in color tints and shades have been documented in earlier studies [1; 2; 4], mentioning that the children's primary colors changed as they grew older, they favored lighter tints. In the case of colour tints and shade, the results are unclear as children preferred illustrations both with sophisticated and with crude colours. However, children certainly prefer kind and sweet characters more than angry.

The pattern of the study results suggested significant gender difference in illustration preference. A similar finding was reported by Bamberger [2] who suggested the difference between boys' and girls' selection even in the primary grades. Generally, all illustrations fall into three categories according to the gender: male-like (pictures A, C, E, F, G, H, I, L, M, N, P, Q, R, U, W, and Y), feminine-like (pictures B, J, K, S, V, and X), and when the gender cannot be identified (pictures D and T). Boys generally gave evidence of choosing pictures I, L and M whereas the girls' response to these images was weaker. On the other hand, girls preferred pictures K and X while boys showed some interest in picture K and avoided voting for picture X. Additionally, boys voted for pictures A and D more often than girls.

Picture T was girls' top choice within all age groups (1510 points), but boys ranked it second (1350 points). Partially, it was due to high level of realism which both genders value. The other explanation is that picture T appeals to both sexes. Picture I (1417 points) was the most preferable among the boys that can be explained by boy's deeper involvement into playing games.

Next, the study went on defining age difference. This phenomenon was evident in earlier studies: Bamberger [2] pointed that younger children prefer crude primary colors, French [5] suggested that they prefer simple pictures, and Miller [9] pointed that as children grow older they become interested in photographs. In the current study children showed nearly the same pattern within all age groups with a small difference that picture I was less popular among six-year-old children and picture L was ranked higher. The obtained difference can be attributed to the fact that younger children have less access to mobile games.

As final issues of the discussion, we suggest further research as Miller [9] pointed out that the children with higher level of intelligence prefer other images, meanwhile children with more sophisticated art preferences might rank the illustrations differently. It would also be beneficial to get some comments from psychologists before the others interviews as the picture choice can be defined by the reasons unknown for the researchers.

Preference in illustration depends on a number of criteria where the degree of realism whether of colour, shape or proportion is predominant. Secondly, children value the content and meaning while gender factor can also be a crucial item as boys' and girls' selections are different even in the early age.

Moreover, we suggest that adults' intuitive judgment is not reliable concerning children's choice of illustrations. The selection of pictures should be accounted as one factor in designing materials for primary schoolbooks. Thus, the results reported in the study, contribute to those who are in charge of illustrations for children's books – both for school and for outside school reading.

Concluding the results, the most preferable picture should be realistic in shape and proportions, realistic in color (but not too literal). The complexity of the picture and drawing style should be medium. If boys (or girls) are the target group to like the illustrations, the image should have traits of belonging to the same gender.

However, there are many questions to be investigated in further studies to gain a better understanding of children's picture preference. First of all, results can be different if students come from rural parts of the country as, for example, children could be less involved into computer games. Next, national and cultural peculiarities

and background can also influence the data. At the same time it would be beneficial to get comments on selecting certain images from psychologists as well as artists' opinion upon what is a good art circle. Finally, as children's choices change and as every generation is more sophisticated than the previous one, their preference in pictures should be reexamined.

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ПРЕФЕРЕНЦІЇ МОЛОДШИХ ШКОЛЯРІВ В ІЛЮСТРАЦІЯХ

У статті досліджується проблема обрання молодшими школярами ілюстрацій певного виду. Було розглянуто та проаналізовано праці попередніх дослідників і вдосконалено класифікацію критеріїв. Запропоновано критерії для відбору зображень для дитячих книжок і навчальних посібників та проведено опитування школярів. Отримані дані свідчать про те, що реалізм у кольорі, стилі та формі є визначальним фактором для українських дітей молодшого шкільного віку. Було запропоновано можливі напрями подальшого дослідження з урахуванням національних, культурних, соціально-економічних та інтелектуальних особливостей учнів початкових класів.

Ключові слова: *преференція у малюнках, реалізм, чорно-білі ілюстрації, улюблені кольори.*

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ПРЕДПОЧТЕНИЯ МЛАДШИХ ШКОЛЬНИКОВ В ИЛЛЮСТРАЦИЯХ

В статье исследуется выбор младшими школьниками иллюстраций определенного вида. Были рассмотрены и проанализированы работы предыдущих исследователей и усовершенствована классификация критериев. Предложены критерии для выбора изображений для детских книг и учебных пособий и проведен опрос школьников. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что реализм в цвете, стиле и форме является определяющим фактором для украинских учеников начальной школы. Были предложены возможные пути дальнейшего исследования с учетом национальных, культурных, социально-экономических и интеллектуальных особенностей учащихся начальных классов.

Ключевые слова: *перевес в картинках, реализм, черно-белые иллюстрации, предпочтительные цвета.*

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