

The Relationship of Aesthetic Value in Children's Magazine and Reading's Interest

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Abstract

Statistics indicated that Malaysians are still far away to be classified as a "reading society" with less than 3 hours per week spent for reading. Government and non-governmental organisations are still debating and implementing reading campaigns, initiatives and efforts aimed at promoting and cultivating reading interest among society especially children. With several debates among experts on this subject, one key component contributing to reading interest is the aesthetic values of the publication. According to a survey of the literature, aesthetic values can be classified as visual or sensory experience. The aesthetic value is crucial in the production of children's magazines since it is viewed as a factor in attracting children's reading attention. Hence this study aims to identify the aesthetic values in children's magazine, to identify reading interest, and to determine the relationship of both variables. The quantitative method and purposive sampling technique were used in this study. The data were taken from questionnaire that has been distributed to pre-school teachers from Tabika Kemas Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. In summary, the results indicated that the aesthetic value of storytelling showed a high relationship with interest in reading ($r = 0.701$, $\text{sig} = 0.00$) compared to genre ($r = 0.493$, $\text{sig} = 0.00$) and design ($r = 0.484$, $\text{sig} = 0.00$).

Keywords: Aesthetic Value, Reading, Reading Interest, Children, Children's Magazine.

Introduction

Ministry of Education aims to make Malaysia as a reading nation by 2030 to help the government achieve its goal of ensuring a clear educational direction for the country (Abas, 2018; Ismail et al., 2021). However, statistics by World Culture Score Index indicated that reading culture in Malaysia is limited to less than three hours per week (Junus, 2021).

The reading culture in Malaysian society, particularly among the younger generation, is extremely concerning and it indirectly reflects the publishing industry's gloomy future (Zakaria, 2013; Ismail et al., 2021). This statement is also supported by Zainury (2020),

indicating that Malaysians' reading culture remains moderate although online book sales increased during the Movement Control Order (MCO), this does not necessarily mean an increase in reading culture.

Many people remain to less interested in reading and consider it as a dull activity (Ismail et al., 2021). When it comes to reading habits, it is well established that reading interest or motivation must be fostered at a young age (Ismail et al., 2021). However, it appears to be difficult nowadays to cultivate children's interest or motivation in reading, as they view it as a tedious activity with no requirement for them to read (Muhamad, et al., 2019).

According to an interim study conducted by the National Library of Malaysia (PNM) in 2014, the magazine is the most popular reading material among Malaysians (PNM, 2014). The combination of images and information features may propel the magazine to the top of readers' reading lists regardless of their age (Ismail et al., 2021).

Referring to the statistics above, readers might find popular or commercial publications are more interesting than scholarly publications (Ismail et al., 2021). In fact, there are publishers who publish children's magazines, which are classified as comic books or educational magazines, but have specific characteristics that pique children's interest in reading (Mustafa & Sanussi, 2012).

Although children's books and magazines published in Malaysia have always found a place among readers due to their beauty or aesthetics, which later contributes to the linguistic aspect, but as reading material to stimulate children's interest in reading and pleasure are still not comparable to books published by publishers from other countries (Sallehan, 2010).

Numerous factors contributed to the community's lack of reading interest. As a result, it is critical for all parties to take the lead in fostering an interest in reading among all segments of society, including children. Among the critical components of efforts to foster children's interest in reading is the quality of the publication itself (Mustafa & Sanussi, 2012). Furthermore, colourful magazine pages and attractive illustrations can lull children into complacency when they read (Mustafa & Sanussi, 2012). This can pique their interest in reading. Additionally, Arumugam and Md Ali (2019) argue that if children's publications lack aesthetic value, children will abandon reading in favour of other forms of entertainment.

Literature Review

Aesthetic Value

Aesthetics, which derives from the Greek word for 'sensation' or 'perception,' is a discipline of philosophy concerned with the nature of beauty, whether natural or artistic, and the nature of art, whether beautiful or not (Ismail et al., 2021; Arumugam & Ali, 2019). The term aesthetics derives from the Greek word 'Aestheticos' or 'Aisthesis', and in the academic context, aesthetics refers to a branch of philosophy known as 'The Science of Beauty' (Ismail et al., 2021; Ayob & Jusilin, 2016).

In everyday life, the term 'aesthetics' is frequently used and refer to a wide variety of items, including buildings, paintings, objects, and arts in a variety of contexts. However, depending on one's suitability and history, the term can have a wide range of interpretations. Typically,

the object's visual appearance is related with a common application of 'aesthetics'. A visually pleasing object is associated with a positive aesthetic experience. However, the term is interpreted narrowly (Ismail et al., 2021).

Aesthetic has three dimensions: aesthetic as a general term for beauty, aesthetic as an art philosophy, and aesthetic as a theory of sensuous awareness and experiences (Tinmannsvik & Bjelland, 2009). This study places a greater emphasis on the aesthetics of beauty and the philosophy of art (Ismail et al., 2021). The aesthetic component of beauty theory can be defined as what people find appealing, enjoyable, and stimulating (Tinmannsvik & Bjelland, 2009).

Aesthetic value or beauty is extremely important in a literary work, in accordance with the widely held belief that literature reflects the skillful use of words (Arumugam & Md Ali, 2019). Throughout history, literature has emphasised the value or element of beauty. As the foundation that transcends a literary work, beauty possesses an allure that compels the reader to adore it (Ali, 2014). Furthermore, Arumugam & Ali (2019) state that aesthetic value is one of the numerous factors that influence the creation of literary works and children's books.

The term "aesthetics" is frequently referred to two distinct approaches: the desire to analyse the elements of beauty found in things or images (formalistic characteristics) and the expression of feelings or emotions evoked by the experience of beauty through art appreciation (Ayob & Jusilin, 2016). Similarly, Widodo and Sasrawati (2009) separate aesthetic value toward the reader into two categories: emotional value (impact on feelings and experiences) and mental intelligence value (understanding). Acceptance of these two aesthetic ideals, on the other hand, is dependent on the reader, as each reader will encounter unique experiences (Ismail et al., 2021).

In the meantime, according to Ezan and Lagier (2009), visual beauty is the most essential component in children's aesthetic value assessment, considering the child's involvement, age, and gender. As a result, this is viewed as a component that will impact children's diverse reading interests when it comes to a children's magazine (Ismail et al., 2021).

Children's Magazine and Aesthetic Value

Children's magazines are viewed as one of the educational tools for instilling knowledge in children as early as feasible (Ismail et al., 2021). There was numerous research has been conducted to establish and validate magazines as an educational tool or medium (Harding, 2004). Thus, aesthetic value is critical in the production of children's magazines since it is viewed as a factor in attracting children's reading attention (Ismail et al., 2021). Ezan and Lagier (2009) shown unambiguously in their investigation that aesthetic values are vulnerable to children.

Publishers for children's magazine are constantly on the lookout for the best aesthetic values to pique children's interest in reading (Ismail et al., 2021). According to Sisruwan and Barnes (2008), the enjoyment factor is a significant determinant for children's magazine readers. Literary texts must be intriguing and engaging for children, motivating them constantly with their surprising and dynamic behaviour and piqueing the reader's attention in the central

'what happens next' question (Stakic, 2014). Magazines are not required reading, although they are an alternative. As such, it must be delivered in an engaging, innovative, and inspiring manner (Zulkarnain, 2013).

Author, work, genre, content, composition, scene, character, narrative, language, medium, and reader are all aesthetic characteristics in children's literature (Arumugam & Md Ali, 2019). The diversity in the scope and content of children's literature aims to assist children in locating concepts, truths, and comprehending accepted social practises, as well as to provide emotional fulfilment that contributes to children's overall and mature growth (Osiobe, Osiobe & Okoh, 2007).

Additionally, there are studies that demonstrate the value of visual aspects in children's books, and most children enjoy narrative books with illustrations, about animals, or even with sound words (Jug & Vilar, 2015). For pre-school children, short stories featuring animals, flowers, dwarfs, and other brightly coloured objects are appropriate (Stakic, 2014). According to Jug and Vilar (2015), children prefer picture books in terms of content.

Reading Interest

Reading is a complex thing, not just reciting written texts, but involves visual activities such as translating written symbols into spoken words and thinking processes to recognize and understand the meaning of words (Budiarti & Haryanto, 2016).

The main purpose of reading is to seek and obtain information including content and understand the meaning of reading (Budiarti & Haryanto, 2016). Reading is a complex skill, complicated and includes a series of other skills, namely the recognition of letters and punctuation marks, the correlation of letters with punctuation marks. These elements can be in the form of words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and books (Budiarti & Haryanto, 2016).

In the meanwhile, 'interest' can be described as a natural preference, inclination, or desire for something that should not be induced or contrived (Zulkarnain, 2013). Reading interest is a psychological trait associated with reading activities that result in a sense of comfort and ease (Ade & Tri, 2014).

To generate interest in reading, someone must develop the reading habit. Children's reading habits can be nurtured by providing them with easy-to-read books, which may eventually lead to reading enjoyment or reading for pleasure (Maharsi et al., 2019). In addition, early childhood literature is critical for the development of children's creativity and enthusiasm in reading. Children's literature comprises all forms of creative and imaginative writing aimed at promoting reading, enjoyment, and assessment among children (Peng et al., 2008).

Magazines can be viewed as a means of sustaining children's reading interests, and by reading, children will spend their time more constructively (Mustafa & Sanussi, 2012). The importance of reading early in life has an effect and influence on the process of thought, emotion, imagination, and personality development of a reader, particularly a child reader. This is because, at an early age, while still in the developmental period, children are extremely flexible and easily coloured (Peng et al., 2008). Furthermore, reading interest, heightened by

the experiences of values in stories, may contribute to children's character development (Rahmi, 2018).

Cordy (2003) writes that for children aged two to three years, certain magazines are purchased with the intention that these children will digest the content; the purchase is frequently motivated by certain characters, on a more basic level, as toys, and then by the parents' knowledge of their children's interests. This demonstrates that, beginning with children, users or readers will select periodicals that meet their preferences. In this context, parents are viewed as social agents responsible for developing a love of reading in children for them to acquire information from literary works.

The reading culture is pervasive, particularly in western society. One of the primary reasons is that reading curiosity is fostered beginning in childhood. Several studies are undertaken by scholars and foreign bodies on how to foster parents' and preschool teachers' enthusiasm in reading. Indeed, scholarly research has established that children who are exposed to reading at home will be more receptive to receiving instruction in school and will develop an interest in reading. Thus, it is critical for parents to read books to their children daily. (Peng et al., 2008).

Conceptual Framework

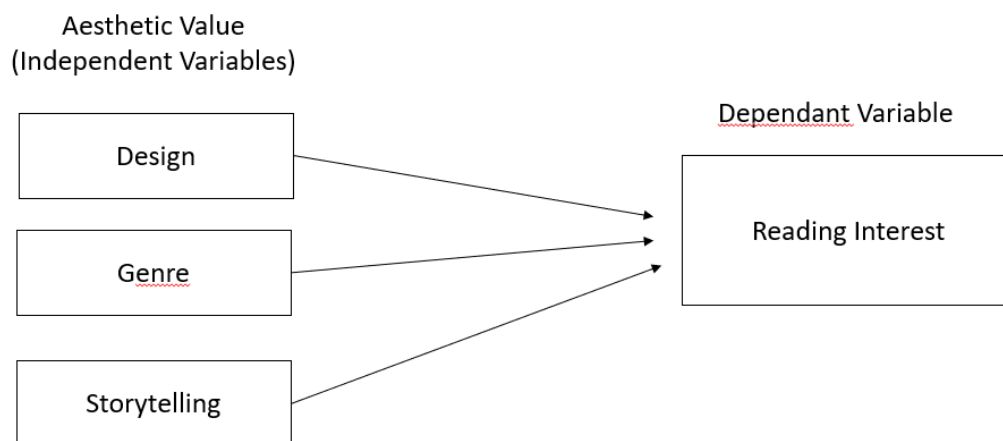


Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of the study. Aesthetic value is a critical feature of research because it gives an overview of the methods that can be used to improve the performance of the book publishing industry, particularly in children's magazines. To construct this model, different models from the literature were used. The figure shows the different linked variables to obtain reading interest. This indicate that aesthetic value is one of the factors that contribute to the reading interest.

Methodology

Research Design

The Quantitative method is used in this study by using a survey method. A self-administered questionnaire has been distributed to obtain data. The questionnaire was structured in 4 points likert scale starting from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree) and in Malay language. While the collection of secondary data was also obtained through the sources of reference books and journal articles. The study population was pre-school teachers of Tabika KEMAS in Negeri Sembilan. There are total of 354 Tabika KEMAS in Negeri Sembilan. Referring

to the sample size determinant table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a total of 214 preschool teachers representing the population of Tabika KEMAS preschool teachers throughout Negeri Sembilan were selected as the sample of this study. Tabika KEMAS were chosen because preschool teachers are directly exposed to preschool children in early education.

The survey consists of 3 main sections. Section A is demographic profile, section B has items on identifying reading interest. While section C has items on identifying the aesthetic values in children's magazine.

Finding

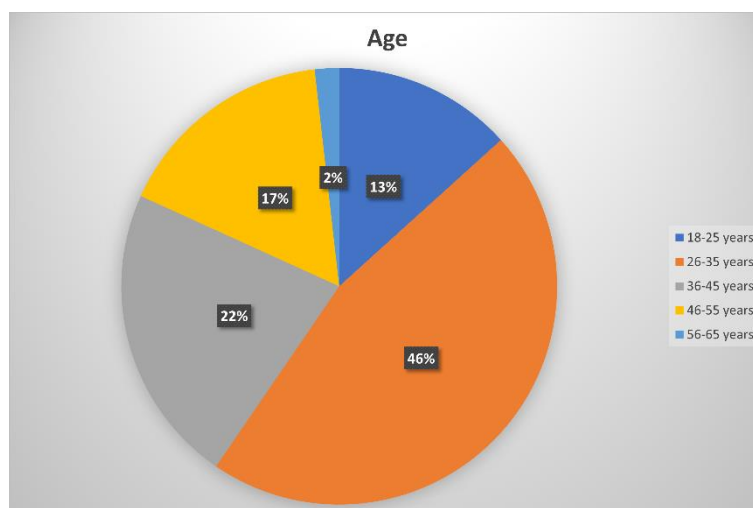
In this section, the researcher will analyze and discuss the findings obtained from the analysis that has been conducted using SPSS version 24 software on 214 pre-school teachers to achieve the objectives of the study. In the previous section, the researcher has listed the objectives of the study that is:

1. Identify the aesthetic value in children's magazines.
3. Identify the reading interest among children.
3. Identify the relationship between aesthetic value and reading interest.

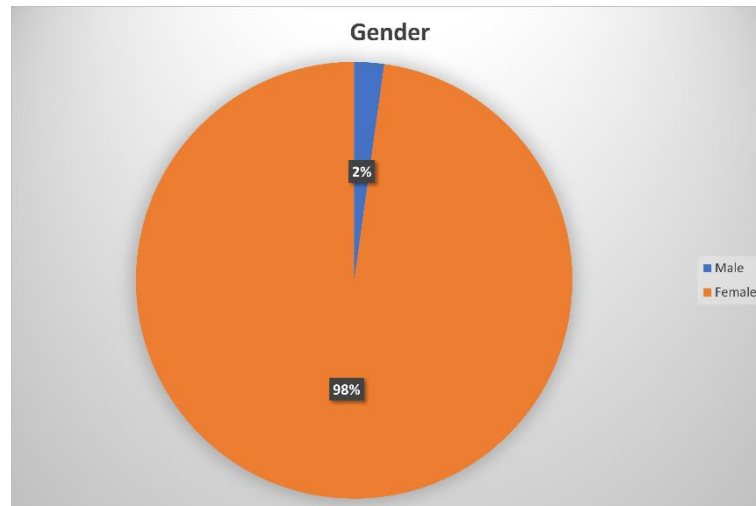
Finding for Demographic Profile

Figures below shows the demographic criteria that are the measure for this study to see the profile of respondents. The demographic criteria considered were age, gender, educational background, and employment experience.

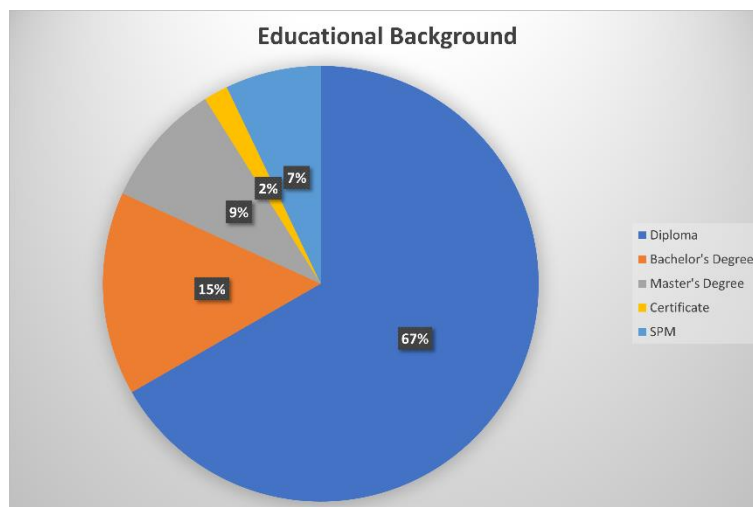
In terms of age, it can be seen clearly in the Figure 2, that the average respondent is in the age group of 26 years to 35 years with frequency, 104 (46%). This is followed by the age range of respondents between 36 years to 45 years with frequency, 50 (22%), 46 years to 55 years with frequency, 37 (17%), 18 years to 25 years with frequency, 30 (13%) and finally 56 years to 65 years with a frequency, 4 (2%).



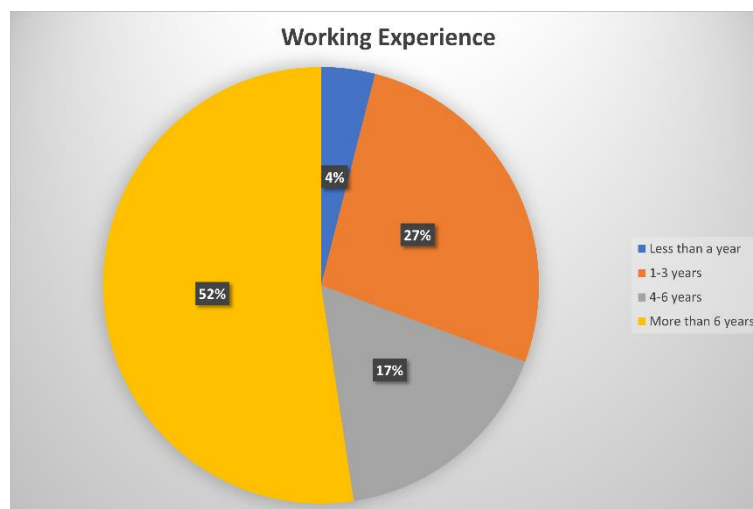
If viewed in the Figure 3, in terms of gender, this can be seen the dominance of female respondents with a frequency of 220 (98%) compared to males of 5 (2%) only.



Meanwhile refer to Figure 4, the educational background showed that the average respondent had a Diploma (n = 150, % = 67), Bachelor's Degree (n = 34, % = 15), Master's Degree (n = 21, % = 9.), SPM (n = 16, % = 7) and finally Certificates (n = 4, % = 2).



In Figure 5, respondents' working experience showed that the respondents involved in this study had more than 6 years of work experience with a frequency of 118 (52%), 1 to 3 years with a frequency of 60 (27%), 4 to 6 years with a frequency of 38 (17%) and finally less than 1 year as many as 9 (4.0%).



Finding for Reading Interest

In this section, the researchers focus on identifying the reading interest in which there are five items arranged according to the mean ranking. The item in the first position is "If given an interesting book, children strive to read" with a mean of 3.27, followed by "Children like to think when reading" with a mean of 3.25, "Children usually like to read reading material that challenging" by a mean of 3.22, "Typically, children learn difficult things through reading" by a mean of 2.95 and finally "When there are interesting activities, children tend to read challenging reading material" by a mean of 2.81. Table 1 describes in more detail the reading motivation

Table 1

Identify reading's motivation

		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Interest	If given an interesting book, children strive to read	225	3.27	.536	1
	Children like to think when reading	225	3.25	.520	2
	Children usually like to read reading material that challenging	225	3.22	.616	3
	Typically, children learn difficult things through reading	225	2.95	.663	4
	When there are interesting activities, children tend to read challenging reading material	225	2.81	.664	5

Finding for Identifying the Aesthetic Values in Children's Magazines

For this section, there are three aesthetic values assessed namely design, genre, and storytelling. According to the analysis that has been done, this shows that design (Mean = 3.453, Std Dev = 0.523) is a very important dimension in the aesthetic value that should be present in children's magazine. This is followed by the aesthetic value of storytelling (Mean = 3.366, Std Dev = 0.522) and finally the genre (Mean = 3.272, Std Dev = 0.541). In detail, can be seen in tables below.

Refer to Table 2.1, the finding shows that, item 'attraction is important for children's magazine' is at the highest (Mean = 3.56, Std Dev = 0.498), followed by item 'children love to look at fun magazines' (Mean = 3.52, Std Dev = 0.543) and item 'beautiful character is an option' (Mean = 3.50, Std Dev = 0.544).

Table 2.1

Aesthetic Values in Children's Magazines (Design)

		Mean	Standard Deviation
Design	Attraction is important for children's magazines	3.56	.498
	Children love to look at fun magazines	3.52	.543
	Beautiful character is an option	3.50	.544
	The varied layout makes children not feel bored	3.47	.500
	A logical character shape becomes an option	3.47	.543
	Total	3.453	0.523

Refer to Table 2.2, the finding shows that, item 'fantasy stories became a children's reading choice' is at the highest (Mean = 3.36, Std Dev = 0.558), followed by item 'animal stories became a children's choice' (Mean = 3.32, Std Dev = 0.511) and item 'stories related to toys have become a favorite of children' (Mean = 3.30, Std Dev = 0.498).

Table 2.2

Aesthetic Values in Children's Magazines (Genre)

		Mean	Standard Deviation
Genre	Fantasy stories became a children's reading choice	3.36	.558
	Animal stories became a children's reading choice	3.32	.511
	Stories related to toys have become a favorite of children	3.30	.498
	Folklore, fairy tales and myths become children's reading choices	3.27	.528
	Historical fiction books (e.g., the story of the prophet, the story of independence, the history of the country) became the children's choice	3.11	.610

Total	3.272	0.541
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Refer to Table 2.3, the finding shows that, item 'the charm, originality and simple storytelling are more appealing to children to read' is at the highest (Mean = 3.42, Std Dev = 0.494), followed by item 'emotions such as sympathy and child involvement are improved through reading fiction magazines' (Mean = 3.41, Std Dev = 0.494) and item 'the use of simple words in children's magazines has become a top choice for children to read' (Mean = 3.36, Std Dev = 0.489).

Table 2.3

Aesthetic Values in Children's Magazines (Storytelling)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Storytelling The charm, originality and simple storytelling are more appealing to children to read	3.42	.494
Emotions such as sympathy and child involvement are improved through reading fiction magazines	3.41	.494
The use of simple words in children's magazines has become a top choice for children to read	3.36	.489
Reading comprehension depends on the narration of the magazine content	3.36	.591
Children find it easy to feel sympathy through storytelling in magazines	3.36	.489
Total	3.366	0.522

Finding for Identifying the Relationship between Aesthetic Value and Reading Interest

In finding relationships between variables, researchers use Guilford's rules of thumb to assess the strength of those relationships. Referring to Table 3, this indicator is very important to know more and then answer the third objective.

Table 3

Guilford's rules of thumb

Correlation Coefficient	Strength of relationship
< 0.20	negligible relationship
0.21 - 0.40	Low correlation, weak relationship
0.41 - 0.70	Moderate relationship
0.71 - 0.90	High correlation, strong relationship
>0.90	Very strong relationship

Table 4 describes the relationship between the dimensions of aesthetic value with interest in reading. In detail, the aesthetic value of storytelling showed a high relationship with reading interest ($r = 0.701$, $sig = 0.00$) compared to genre ($r = 0.493$, $sig = 0.00$) and design ($r = 0.484$, $sig = 0.00$).

Table 4

The Relationship between Aesthetic Values and Reading Interest

		Reading Interest
Design	Pearson Correlation	.484**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	225
Genre	Pearson Correlation	.493**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	225
Storytelling	Pearson Correlation	.701**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	225

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Discussion and Conclusion

Children's magazine aesthetic values: design, genre, and storytelling are all correlate positively with reading interest. The findings were divided into three categories: aesthetic value in children's magazines, reading interest, and the relationship between aesthetic value and reading interest. Past studies also demonstrated a positive correlation between the aesthetic values of children's magazines and children's reading interest (Ismail et al., 2021).

Given the importance of children's books in shaping children's personalities, parents at home and preschool teachers play a critical role in cultivating a child's enthusiasm in reading. Additionally, the setting, reading space, and reading facilities at home and preschool are also critical in fostering a reading culture in children (Peng et al., 2018).

In summary, to nurture the community's interest in reading, particularly among children, it is necessary to create high-quality reading materials that are beautiful, varied, distinctive, and privileged, resulting in reading that is not compelled or read merely for the sake of work and study (Zulkarnain, 2013). As supported to Maharsi et al (2019), children are drawn to books for their story, genre, and popularity.

Therefore, this study is conducted with the purpose of identifying the aesthetic values in children magazine, hence the finding will be contributed to the publishing industry. Further, the findings of this study also are intended to guide those in the publishing industry, either field of magazine or children's book publishing in increasing the quality of their publications, as well as producing magazines with a high aesthetic value, which then can boost children's reading interest. It is aligned and consistent with the government's aim to cultivate reading culture among society. If reading interest can be fostered as early as childhood, our country may produce a more knowledgeable and intellectual generation, which will benefit the country's development and prosperity. Finally, it is highly recommended that publishing industry take extra efforts in producing beautiful children magazine aesthetically so that it will help in cultivating and creating reading interest among children.

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