

THE AESTHETIC VALUE OF CHILDREN'S MAGAZINE TOWARDS READING INTEREST AMONG CHILDREN

Siti Nasarah Binti Ismail
Masliya Binti Yahya
Siti Nur Fadzilah Binti Abdullah
Faridah Hanem Binti Ab Rashid
Nur Alyani Binti Mohd Shukri

ABSTRACT

The introduction of reading campaigns and programs by government and NGOs toward cultivating reading motivation or reading interest is still in debates and ongoing. However, statistic has shown that Malaysian still could not be categorized as "reading society" yet. With many arguments among scholars regarding this issue, one of the significant factors contributed to the reading interest is pertaining to the publication aesthetic values. Literature review has indicated that the aesthetic values divided into a form of visual appearance or sensation of experience. However, the visual appearance will lead to the experience. Therefore, this concept paper focused on aesthetic value in a publication visual appearance, to be specific children's magazine. The aesthetic value of children's magazine usually associated with the beauty of the publication itself such as the design, genre, and narration/storytelling. Thus, the main objectives of this concept paper are first, to identify the aesthetic values in children's magazine; and secondly to identify the reading interest factors. The literature reviews in this concept paper are based on library research. Methodology that will be used is quantitative through the distribution of questionnaire to Tabika KEMAS pre-school teachers in Negeri Sembilan. The findings from this research will be beneficial to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and the Malaysian publishing industry.

Key words: *aesthetic value, reading interest, children, magazine, children's magazine.*

INTRODUCTION

As to support the government's objective to ensure that the country's education direction has a clear line, the Ministry of Education aims to make Malaysia a reading nation by 2030. Statistics indicated that India is the country that spends the most time reading, which is more than 10 hours a week. Followed by Thailand and China which average read for 8 to 9 hours a week. However, Malaysia is not included in the NOP World Culture Score Index list, or rather indicate that reading culture in Malaysia is not more than 3 hours a week (World, 2015).

Based on the interim study of the reading habits among Malaysians 2014 by the National Library of Malaysia (PNM) has shown that the first choice of reading material among Malaysian is magazine (62.8 percent); and followed by the newspaper (61.2 percent); scientific books (54.8 percent); novels and fiction (47 percent); online material (46.4 percent); non-fiction books (29.9 percent); comics (25.3 percent) and journals (19.9 percent) (PNM, 2014).

The influence of pictures as well as the information features may make the magazine becoming top choice of reading regardless of readers' age. However, many people still lack interest in reading and consider reading to be a boring activity. Indications from the above statistics show that popular/commercial publications are more interesting to readers than scholarly publications. Along with this fact, there are publishers who publish children's magazines which are divided into two types which are comic magazines and educational magazines (Siti Ezaleila Mustafa & Shahrul Nazmi Sanussi, 2012). But both have their own characteristics to attract reading interest among children.

The culture of reading among Malaysian society especially new generation is very worrying and indirectly reflects to the gloomy future of publishing (Zulkarnain Zakaria, 2013). This statement is also supported in an article published by Sinar entitled Reading Practices Are Still Moderate written by Mohd Azlim Zainury (2020), which indicated, reading culture among Malaysians is still at a moderate level. Meanwhile, the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kota Buku Corporation (PKB), Mutalib Uthman in the same article stated that there was an increase in online book sales during the Movement Control Order (MCO) but it does not mean an increase in reading culture also occurred (Mohd Azlim Zainury, 2020).

When discussing matters regarding reading habit, it is well known that the reading interest must be nurtured at a young age. However, nowadays it seems difficult in cultivating reading interest among children as they consider it is a bore activity and no requirement for them to read (Siti Normala Muhamad et al., 2019). Although children's books and magazines have always found a place among readers because of the beauty or aesthetics of the reading material which contributes to the linguistic aspect, nevertheless, most books and magazines published by publishers in Malaysia as reading material to sharpen the interest in reading and gaining pleasure among children is still not comparable to books published by publishers from abroad (Sallehan, 2010).

Various factors contributed to the lack of reading interest in the community. Therefore, it is important for all parties to take the initiative in nurturing the interest in reading in every group of society, including children. Among the important elements in efforts to cultivate reading interest among children is the quality of a publication itself (Siti Ezaleila Mustafa & Shahrul Nazmi Sanussi, 2012). In fact, colorful magazine pages together with attractive illustrations can make children complacent when reading (Siti

Ezaleila Mustafa & Shahrul Nazmi Sanussi, 2012). At the same time this can foster an interest in reading in them. Also supported by Arumugam and Rohaya Md Ali (2019), if children's publications do not have aesthetic value, it will make children tend not to read as there are various other pleasures from various types of entertainment available.

AESTHETIC VALUE

Aesthetics, which was originally derived from the word 'sensation' or 'perception', is a branch of philosophy that encompasses the nature of beauty, whether natural or artistic and the nature of art, whether beautiful or not (Arumugam & Rohaya Md Ali, 2019). The word aesthetics comes from the Greek word, 'Aestheticos' or referred to as 'Aisthesis' and in the academic context, aesthetics is a field of philosophy study 'The Science of Beauty' (Norhayati Ayob & Jusilin, 2016).

In everyday life the term 'aesthetics' is often used and can be applied to many things such as buildings, paintings, objects, and art in various situations. However, depending on the suitability and background, the interpretation of the word can be quite different. Usually, the visual appearance of the object is associated to a common use of 'aesthetics.' A visually beautiful object is connected to a good aesthetic experience. But the word itself is narrowly understood.

On the other hand, according to Tinmannsvik & Bjelland (2009) in their study, as stated by Alexander von Baumgarten in his publication *Aesthetica* from 1774, there are three dimensions in aesthetic; aesthetic as a general of beauty, aesthetic as a philosophy of art, and aesthetic as a theory of sensual recognition and experiences. This conceptual paper emphasises more to aesthetic of a beauty and philosophy of art. The aesthetic of beauty theory can be understood as what people find attractive, fun and stimulating (Tinmannsvik & Bjelland, 2009).

Aesthetic value or beauty is very dominant in a literary work in line with the general opinion that says literature reflects to the beautiful use of language (Arumugam & Rohaya Md Ali, 2019). Historically, the value or element of beauty is a key feature of literature. As the basis that surpasses a literary work, beauty has an appeal that drives the reader to love it (Abdul Halim Ali, 2014). Also added by Arumugam & Rohaya Md Ali (2019), aesthetic value is one of the many important elements in the production of literary works and children's books.

The concept of aesthetics is commonly associated with two appreciation approach which are the desire to examine the elements of beauty that found in objects or images (formalistic aspects) and the expression of feelings or emotions that arise from the experience of beauty through the appreciation of art (Norhayati Ayob & Jusilin, 2016). Likewise, according to Widodo and Sasrawati (2009), the aesthetic value towards reader is divided into two; the emotional value (effect on feelings and experiences) and and from the value of mental intelligence (understanding). However, the acceptance of these two aesthetic values depends on reader because different readers will face different experiences.

According to Ezan and Lagier (2009) visual beauty is the most important feature in the assessment of aesthetic value by children through consideration of the factors of involvement, age, and gender of the child. Thus, this is seen as a factor that will influence the different reading interests among children towards a children's magazine.

CHILDREN'S MAGAZINE AND AESTHETIC VALUE

Children's magazines are seen as one of the educational mediums to provide knowledge as early as possible to children. There are studies that identify and prove magazines as an educational tool or medium (Harding, 2004). Thus, in the production of children's magazines, aesthetic value is important because the value is seen as factors in attracting reading interest among children. Supported by Ezan and Lagier (2009) in their study, clearly indicated that there was an existence of the sensitive nature of aesthetic values towards children.

Publishers of children's magazines are always looking for the best aesthetic values to create reading pleasure among children. A study by Sisruwan and Barnes (2008) indicated that the fun element is an important factor among younger magazine users. Literary texts must be interesting and engaging for children, motivating them with their unexpected and dynamic activity repeatedly, and stirring the reader's interest in the principal 'what is next' (Stakic, 2014). Magazines are not mandatory reading, but it is an optional reading. Therefore, it needs to be presented in a way that attracts the reader, creatively and inspire (Zulkarnain, 2013).

The aesthetic elements in children literature can be divided into author, work, genre, content, composition, scene, character, character, narrative, language, medium and reader (Arumugam & Rohaya Md Ali, 2019). The diversity to produce children's literature through different scopes and content aims to help children find ideas, truths and understand accepted behaviors in society as well as provide emotional satisfaction that will help children's development as a whole and mature (Osiobe, Osiobe & Okoh, 2007).

In addition, there are studies indicated the importance of visual elements in children's book and usually children like story books with pictures, about animals, or even with sound words (Jug & Vilar, 2015). For pre-school children, short stories with animals' characters, flowers, dwarfs, and the things that colourful, is suitable for them (Stakic, 2014). Supported by Jug and Vilar (2015), from the aspect of content results, children preference is picture books.

READING INTEREST

'Interest' can be defined as the liking, inclination, and desire for something that should not be forced or fabricated and exists naturally (Zulkarnain, 2013). Reading interest is a psychological symptom that related to reading activities which lead to comfort and ease feeling (Nursalina & Budiningsih, 2014). To establish reading interest, someone must make reading as a habit. Reading habit among children can be cultivated by giving them read easy books which later may lead to reading enjoyment or reading for pleasure (Ista Maharsi et al., 2019). Moreover, early childhood literature is an important medium for developing children's imagination and interest in learning through reading. Children's literature encompasses all types of creative and imaginative writing devoted to children's reading, entertainment, and assessment (Peng et al., 2008).

Magazine can be seen one of the ways to nourish reading interest in children and by reading children will spend times more positively (Siti Ezaleila Mustafa & Shahrul Nazmi Sanussi, 2012). The importance of reading as early as possible has an influence and impact on the process of formation of thoughts, emotions, imagination, and personality of a reader, especially a child reader. This is because at a young age that is when they are in the formative stage, children are very easily bent and colored (Peng et al., 2008). Furthermore, the reading interest especially through the experiences of values in the stories may enhance children's character development (Rahmi, 2018).

Cordy (2003) writes for children aged two to three years, some magazines are purchased with the intention that these children will digest the content where the purchase is often because of certain characters, at a simpler level, as toys and subsequently because of the parents know the interests of their children. This shows that, as early as children, users or readers will choose magazines that have the criteria they like. In this context, parents are seen as social agents who have a role in instilling an interest in reading among children to acquire knowledge through literary outcomes.

Since children's literature is an important teaching aid to shape children's personalities, then parents at home and teachers in preschool become important people to cultivate an interest in reading among children. In addition, the environment, reading space and reading facilities at home and preschool are also important in the effort to create a reading culture for children. (Peng et al., 2008).

The culture of reading is a daily practice especially in western society. One of the main factors is that the interest in reading is nurtured since childhood. Therefore, many studies are conducted by scholars and foreign bodies on how to cultivate the interest in reading by parents and preschool teachers. In fact, it has been proven through scholarly studies that children who are exposed to reading at home will be more willing to receive teaching instruction in school later and children will develop interest in reading. Therefore, it is very necessary for parents to read books to children as a daily routine. (Peng et al., 2008).

Hence, as to cultivate the community's interest in reading especially among children, there is a need to produce quality reading materials that have beauty, variety, uniqueness, and privilege that will lead to a reading without forced or read solely for the sake of work and study (Zulkarnain, 2013). Supported by Ista Maharsi et al (2019) in the study finding, children are interested in books because of the story, the genre, and the popularity.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



The framework above indicates that aesthetic values of children's magazine will be independent variable and reading interest will be dependant variable as the children's motivation or interest to read will be influenced based from the aesthetic values in magazines such as character, layout, narrative, genre, content, language and many more.

METHODOLOGY

The design study to be conducted is Quantitative. A set of structured questionnaires in Malay language will be distributed to obtain study data. While the collection of secondary data will also be obtained through the source method of library and databases research which are reference books, journals and other reading materials. The selected study location is 440 Tabika KEMAS throughout Negeri Sembilan. Refer to the sample size determinant table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a total of 205 preschool teachers representing the population of Tabika Kemas teachers throughout Negeri Sembilan were selected as the sample of this study. Tabika KEMAS Negeri Sembilan is chosen because they fit the criteria of the respondents, which are pre-school teachers who are directly involved with 6-year-old children. Simple random sampling which means that respondents (sample size) are randomly selected will be used. The data to be obtained from the pre -school teacher questionnaire will be analyzed using statistical software package (SPSS) version 27 using descriptive and inferential analysis methods, in line with the objectives of this study.

CONCLUSION

The aesthetic values of children's magazine such as the design, genre, and narrative/storytelling have influenced reading interest among children. In studying the aesthetic value towards reading interest among children, researchers have divided the finding into the aesthetic value, aesthetic value in children's magazines and reading interest. Previous finding indicated positive relationship between the aesthetic value in children's magazine towards reading interest among children. The findings from previous studies

are expected to help the field of publishing magazines or children's books in improving the quality of their publications as well as produce magazines that have a high aesthetic value and can increase reading interest among children. It is in line with the government's call to make reading as a culture. If the reading interest can be cultivated as early as childhood, our country will be able to produce a more knowledgeable and highly intellectual generation which in turn can help the development and economy of the country. The findings also will contribute to the development of broader knowledge related to current issues that occur in the publishing books and scholarly magazines industry in Malaysia.

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Siti Nasarah Binti Ismail
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
Negeri Sembilan Branch, Rembau Campus,
71300 Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia
Email: sitinasarah@uitm.edu.my

Masliya Binti Yahya
Aras Mega Sdn Bhd
No. 18 & 20, Jalan Damai 2,
Taman Desa Damai, Sg Merab,
43000 Kajang, Selangor Darul Ehsan
Email: masliya.yahya@gmail.com

Siti Nur Fadzilah Binti Abdullah
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM),
Negeri Sembilan Branch, Rembau Campus,
71300 Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia
Email: snfadzilah@uitm.edu.my

Faridah Hanem Binti Ab Rashid
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM),
Negeri Sembilan Branch, Rembau Campus,
71300 Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia
Email: fhanem@uitm.edu.my

Nur Alyani Binti Mohd Shukri
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM),
Negeri Sembilan Branch, Rembau Campus,
71300 Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia
Email: nuralyani@uitm.edu.my