Larysa Butko, Candidate of Philology (Ph.D.), Associate Professor, Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities, Culture and Art, Kremenchuk Mykhailo Ostrohradskyi National University. Kremenchuk, Ukraine.
ORCID 0000-0002-8817-3381, Scopus 57220198139
Svitlana Fedorenko, Candidate of Historical Sciences (Ph.D.), Associate Professor, Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities, Culture and Art, Kremenchuk Mykhailo Ostrohradskyi National University. Kremenchuk, Ukraine.
ORCID 0009-0000-2763-8280, Scopus 57220194022

Illustration in Ukrainian Children's Books: National Tradition and European Visual Practices

Abstract:
The relevance of the study is determined by the increasing role of visual culture in the context of digitalization and the growing influence of visual media on children's perception, imagination, and identity formation. In contemporary humanities, there is a clear need to reconsider illustration not merely as a decorative supplement but as a meaningful cultural phenomenon within children's literature. The research problem lies in the insufficient systematization of children's book illustration as a carrier of national cultural codes, particularly within Ukrainian book graphics. Existing studies often address illustration fragmentarily, without integrating historical, semiotic, cultural, and comparative perspectives into a unified analytical framework. The novelty of the study consists in the interdisciplinary conceptualization of illustration in Ukrainian children's books as an independent artistic and communicative system. The study introduces a comparative model that reveals the interaction between national traditions and European visual practices while emphasizing the cultural specificity of Ukrainian illustration. The subject of the study is the artistic, stylistic, semiotic, and cultural features of illustration in Ukrainian children's books in relation to European visual trends. The object of the study is illustration in children's books as a component of book graphics and visual communication. The study aims to identify and systematize the artistic, stylistic, and cultural principles of illustration as a form of national visual code. The methodological framework includes analytical, comparative, historical-chronological, systemic, art-historical, semiotic, and cultural approaches. The study draws upon the scholarly works of V. Zaitseva, A. Buihasheva, H. Novik, P. Zemtsova, P. Nodelman, M. Nikolajeva, and other researchers in the fields of book studies, illustration theory, and visual culture. The study examines the historical foundations of Ukrainian book graphics, analyzes contemporary illustrative practices, and compares Ukrainian and European approaches to children's book illustration. Special attention is given to stylistic diversity, the interaction of traditional and digital techniques, age-related design principles, and the role of illustration in visual communication. The results demonstrate that contemporary Ukrainian illustration integrates national artistic traditions with innovative visual strategies, preserving the high cultural and aesthetic value of the children's book. The authors conclude that illustration functions as a significant factor in shaping children's visual perception and national identity, positioning Ukrainian book graphics as an independent and culturally meaningful phenomenon within the European and global artistic context.

Keywords: children's book, illustration, book graphics, Ukrainian illustration, visual communication, national identity, book design.

Introduction

Illustration is an integral component of a children's book, shaping not only the aesthetic image of a work but also influencing the child reader in the processes of perception, imagination development, and identity formation. The artistic design of children's books functions as a medium for transmitting a nation's cultural and visual codes, while simultaneously representing the continuity of artistic traditions and the individual stylistic explorations of contemporary artists.

Ukrainian book graphics have deep historical and artistic roots that have developed under the influence of both local traditions and European cultural processes. Research into the evolution of Ukrainian book graphics emphasizes a continuous synthesis of national and international artistic experience, which has resulted in the formation of a distinctive visual language of the book in Ukraine. This synthesis is evident across the fields of design, graphic art, and traditional narrative means (*Zaitseva & Buihasheva, 2021*).

This phenomenon is particularly evident in children's books, where illustrative visual solutions are closely connected with cultural codes, folk motifs, and linguistic forms, allowing the child not only to read the text but also to visually "experience" a national fairy tale or tradition.

Scholarly studies of contemporary Ukrainian book graphics demonstrate that since the 2000s there has been a significant increase in attention to professional design and illustration in children's publications, largely due to the activity of Ukrainian illustrators and the development of the publishing industry. A thorough analysis of the work of specialists in this field makes it possible to identify new stylistic approaches, compositional solutions, and artistic means that influence the formation of the visual environment of the children's book as an independent work of art (*Novik & Zemtsova, 2021*).

This indicates an urgent need for a systematic examination of illustration not merely as a decorative element, but as a fully-fledged component of book art that operates in close interaction with the text, cultural codes, and national identity.

Despite the existence of individual publications on the graphic features of children's book illustration, there is still a lack of comprehensive scholarly research that considers illustration specifically within the context of Ukrainian book graphics as a form of national artistic code. In this regard, it is necessary to systematize the historical and artistic origins of Ukrainian book illustration; the stylistic and compositional principles of children's illustration; the interaction between text and image within a national cultural context; and contemporary trends in the development of book graphics in Ukraine.

Such study will contribute to the theoretical understanding of the role of illustration in shaping the Ukrainian children's book as an artistic phenomenon and will also serve as a foundation for further art-historical and practical developments in book design.

Overall, this topic is urgent for contemporary humanities scholarship, as it integrates aesthetic, cultural, and social dimensions that define the place of Ukrainian book graphics within the global cultural space and in the process of educating the young reader (*Zaitseva & Buihasheva, 2021*).

The novelty of this study lies in its systematic conceptualization of illustration in Ukrainian children's books as a bearer of national visual and cultural codes rather than as a purely auxiliary or decorative element. Unlike earlier studies that examine children's book illustration primarily within isolated art-historical, pedagogical, or design-oriented frameworks, this research integrates historical-artistic, semiotic, cultural, and comparative perspectives into a unified analytical model.

The study advances the field by positioning illustration as an active agent in the formation of national identity and cultural memory within childhood visual experience.

A distinctive contribution of the research is its focus on Ukrainian book graphics as a coherent visual tradition shaped through continuous dialogue with European artistic practices, rather than as a peripheral or derivative phenomenon. The article introduces a comparative framework that reveals both shared European tendencies and specifically Ukrainian stylistic, symbolic, and compositional features.

Furthermore, the study expands existing scholarship by addressing contemporary illustrative practices in the context of digital transformation while demonstrating the sustained relevance of traditional artistic techniques. The research also offers a refined interpretation of illustration as a component of visual communication that interacts dynamically with text, typography, format, and materiality.

Another novel aspect is the systematic analysis of age-related design principles and regulatory standards as integral factors shaping illustrative solutions. By synthesizing theoretical analysis with concrete visual practices, the study bridges the gap between abstract cultural theory and applied book design. Overall, the research fills a significant gap in Ukrainian and international scholarship by providing a comprehensive, interdisciplinary understanding of children's book illustration as an independent artistic and cultural phenomenon.

The subject of the research is the artistic, stylistic, semiotic, and cultural characteristics of illustration in Ukrainian children's books in their interaction with European visual practices.

The object of the research is illustration in children's books as a component of book graphics and visual communication.

The study aims to identify and systematize the artistic, stylistic, and cultural principles of illustration in Ukrainian children's books as a form of national visual code within the broader European artistic context.

The objectives of the study are:
- analyze the historical and artistic foundations of Ukrainian book graphics in children's literature;
- examine contemporary illustrative practices in Ukrainian children's books;
- identify key stylistic, compositional, and semiotic features of illustration;
- compare Ukrainian and European approaches to children's book illustration;
- determine the role of illustration in the formation of children's visual perception and national identity;
- systematize age-related and regulatory design principles influencing illustrative solutions.

The results of the study are intended for scholars in the fields of art history, cultural studies, book studies, and visual communication; for illustrators, graphic designers, and publishers working with children's literature; for educators and students specializing in design and the humanities; and for professionals involved in the preservation and development of national cultural heritage within contemporary visual culture.

Methods

The analytical method involves the decomposition of the object of study—the illustration of a children's book—into its constituent elements, including stylistic features, compositional solutions, execution techniques, interaction with the text, and cultural symbols. Synthesis, in turn, makes it possible to integrate these elements into a holistic understanding of illustration as a complex system. In this study, this method is applied to generalize heterogeneous data on

Ukrainian and European book graphics and to formulate comprehensive conclusions regarding their development.

The inductive method is used to move from the analysis of specific illustrative examples by individual Ukrainian and European artists to the identification of general trends in contemporary children's book design. Conversely, the deductive method enables the verification of general theoretical propositions—such as the role of illustration, the influence of the reader's age, and national visual codes—through their examination in concrete visual material. Comparative analysis is employed to juxtapose Ukrainian and European practices of children's book illustration and to identify both shared and distinctive features in stylistic approaches, materials, and design strategies. Within the framework of the study, this method allows for the delineation of the specificity of Ukrainian book graphics within a broader European cultural context.

The historical-chronological method involves examining illustration in children's books within the dynamics of historical development. In this research, it is used to analyze the historical and artistic foundations of Ukrainian book graphics and to trace the evolution of artistic approaches from traditional forms to contemporary design solutions.

The systems approach makes it possible to consider the children's book as an integrated artistic object in which illustration, text, typography, format, and materials are closely interconnected. Within the study, this method ensures an understanding of illustration as a component of the overall system of visual communication.

Art-historical analysis focuses on the examination of the artistic form of illustrations, including style, visual language, composition, color schemes, techniques, and materials. In this study, art-historical analysis is applied to explore the work of Ukrainian illustrators and to identify the characteristic features of contemporary Ukrainian book graphics.

Compositional analysis concentrates on the study of the compositional organization of illustrations, the placement of images and text on the spread, and the balance of visual accents. In this research, it is used to analyze layout practices in children's publications and to determine patterns dependent on the reader's age group.

The semiotic approach enables the interpretation of illustration as a system of signs and symbols. Within the scope of the study, this method is applied to analyze national, cultural, and folkloric codes embedded in the visual imagery of Ukrainian children's books, as well as to elucidate their influence on the formation of a child's identity.

Cultural analysis allows illustration to be examined within the context of sociocultural processes, traditions, and values. In this research, it is used to conceptualize the children's book as a carrier of cultural memory and a means of transmitting national artistic heritage.

The graphic-analytical method is based on the examination of actual design solutions in contemporary children's publications from the perspectives of functionality, ergonomics, and aesthetics. In the study, it is applied to assess the compliance of illustrative design with age-related, psychological, and regulatory requirements for children's books.

The typological approach enables the classification of illustrations according to type (full-page, half-page, spot illustrations, initials), style, and function. In this research, this method is used to systematize visual design practices in children's books and to identify their role within the overall structure of the publication.

Literature Review

In Ukrainian academic discourse, issues of graphic art and illustration are traditionally associated with the study of national artistic traditions, the history of the book, and the development of design (*Butko at al., 2024*; *Fedorenko at al., 2023*; *Fedorenko at al., 2025a*; *Fedorenko*

at al., 2025b). Comprehensive historical and art-historical studies of Ukrainian book graphics are presented in works devoted to the evolution of illustration from manuscript books and Baroque engraving to contemporary design practices. Such studies emphasize the synthesis of folk ornamentation, icon-painting traditions, and European artistic influences as the foundation for the formation of the visual language of the Ukrainian book.

The contemporary state of Ukrainian book illustration, particularly in children's publications, has been actively analyzed in scholarly articles since the early 21st century. A significant contribution to the study of modern illustration was made by H.V. Novik and P.O. Zemtsova, who examine illustration as an integral component of book design and emphasize the growing role of professional artistic execution in Ukrainian publishing since the 2000s. The authors highlight the diversity of stylistic approaches and the combination of traditional and digital techniques in the work of Ukrainian illustrators (*Novik & Zemtsova, 2021*).

Important for this research are the studies by V. Zaitseva and A. Buihasheva, in which children's book illustration is considered within the context of cultural memory, national identity, and the European artistic space. These works emphasize that Ukrainian book graphics develop through constant dialogue with European trends while simultaneously preserving distinctive national visual codes (*Zaitseva & Buihasheva, 2021*).

In international scholarly tradition, research on children's book illustration has a long and systematic history. One of the seminal works in this field is Perry Nodelman's *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books*, in which illustration is viewed as an equal narrative element that generates meaning through interaction with the text (*Nodelman, 1988*). The author emphasizes that it is precisely in children's books that the relationship between word and image is fundamentally inseparable.

Further development of this issue is presented in the works of Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, particularly in *How Picturebooks Work*, which analyzes the semiotic nature of illustration and its role in the cognitive and emotional development of the child (*Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001*). The researchers interpret illustration as a system of signs that conveys cultural, social, and ideological meanings.

The cultural context of children's books is examined in detail in the works of David Lewis, who emphasizes that illustration reflects not only the author's intent but also the values of the society in which the book is produced (*Lewis, 2001*). This approach is particularly important for the analysis of national codes in the visual language of children's publications.

European studies also focus on the impact of digital technologies on contemporary illustration. Research devoted to 21st-century children's book design highlights a tendency toward the integration of traditional artistic techniques with digital tools, which does not diminish but rather transforms classical stylistic practices (*Salisbury & Styles, 2012*).

The analysis of Ukrainian and international scholarly sources demonstrates that the problem of children's book illustration is most often addressed fragmentarily—within individual disciplines or national contexts. At the same time, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies that would integrate historical-artistic, semiotic, cultural, and design approaches specifically to Ukrainian children's book graphics.

Thus, the present study fits logically into the contemporary academic discourse while simultaneously addressing an existing research gap by offering a systematic analysis of illustration as a carrier of national cultural codes and an important factor in the formation of children's visual culture within a European context.

Results

Contemporary Trends in Children's Book Design in Ukraine

In recent years, modern digital technologies have significantly transformed the publishing industry. It is worth noting that this process has also had a negative impact on publishing, as an increasing number of people prefer electronic or audiobooks to printed editions. However, it is equally important to acknowledge that digital art introduces new and unconventional means of expression into the book. As a result, the printed book acquires new qualities and roles, becoming an object of collecting and a work of art. For this reason, the contemporary children's book requires non-standard design solutions and innovative ideas that help illustrators, artists, and designers create a "high-quality, holistic image that contributes to the development of the narrative and establishes the overall mood of the book" (*Maniukhina & Shulska, 2016*).

The widespread use of computer graphics in Ukraine as a standard tool for illustrators are also worth noting. The application of graphic editors and specialized devices, such as graphic tablets, is successfully combined with traditional materials, including various types of paint and graphite pencils. Through this synthesis, the visual design presented to the reader is characterized by vivid, saturated colors (*Yefimova, 2015*).

It is important to emphasize that stylistic trends in contemporary Ukrainian illustration are extremely diverse. The classical illustrative style—relatively realistic and highly detailed—is represented by the works of Vladyslav Yerko, Andrii and Olha Duhinykh, Kost Lavro, Kateryna Shtanko, and Oleh Petrenko-Zanevskyi. Minimalist and stylized illustrations, influenced by contemporary European trends, are exemplified by the works of Anna Sarvira, Polina Doroshenko, and Yevheniia Hapchynska (*Figure 1*; *Figure 2*).

An analysis of these artists' works reveals a wide variety of styles and materials employed by illustrators and demonstrates that there is no single dominant style or artistic technique in Ukrainian illustration.

A clear example of this diversity can be found in the fairy-tale illustrations of V. Yerko: they are highly detailed and meticulously rendered, yet no element within the composition appears accidental (*Novik & Zemtsova, 2021*).

As early as 2014, Romana Romanyshyn—a Ukrainian illustrator whose book received the Opera Prima Award at the Bologna Children's Book Fair—remarked in an interview with The Old Lion Publishing House that, unfortunately, many contemporary Ukrainian publishers were guided primarily by the desire to maintain their market position. According to the illustrator, bookstore shelves were often filled with publications whose low-quality design was compensated by overly bright, eye-catching imagery, while their stylistic solutions differed little from the well-known Disney aesthetic. Romanyshyn emphasized that this issue stemmed not from a lack of artists, but rather from a lack of courage and originality on the part of publishers.

Illustrator Andrii Lesiv also notes that "book illustration has very broad boundaries and today is not limited to a bright picture featuring a prince and a princess." Both Romanyshyn and Lesiv agree that the contemporary children's book should demonstrate "absolute freedom—in themes, in illustrations, and in materials". According to Romanyshyn, "today a children's book may look nothing like a book at all". When asked what a children's book might resemble instead, the illustrator responded: "a sculpture, a kinetic artifact, an art book" (*The art of children's books…, 2014*).

Romanyshyn's statements are confirmed by the publication *PtakhAbetka*, illustrated by Iryna Panarina and published by the well-known Ukrainian publishing house Ranok in 2019. The originality and appeal of this edition lie in the technique used to create its illustrations: rather than being produced with traditional materials such as watercolor or colored pencils, or

developed using contemporary digital software, the illustrations were created using embroidery floss threads (*Figure 3*).

Another compelling example supporting Romanyshyn's views is the edition of *Forest Song* by Lesia Ukrainka, illustrated by Polina Doroshenko. This publication stands out due to Doroshenko's distinctive authorial approach and technique. The illustrator works in mixed media, combining appliqué techniques with colored pencils, paints, and liners (*Figure 4*).

Doroshenko consistently employs mixed techniques and seeks a unique artistic approach for each new project. Her most renowned illustrated edition is *Forest Song* by Lesia Ukrainka, published by Osnovy Publishing House and included in *The White Ravens 2014* international catalogue of children's books. For the same publisher, Polina Doroshenko has recently illustrated *Fedir's Fables*.

Features of Children's Book Design in Europe

In addition to studying the Ukrainian market, it is important to understand European trends as well. The European children's book market is remarkably large and diverse; therefore, it is necessary to identify the key tendencies and trends in the visual design of children's books in order to determine the direction and development vector of the proposed project.

In recent years, modern digital technologies have significantly changed the situation in both the Ukrainian and European markets. The development and implementation of digital platforms and technologies have had a substantial impact on the possibilities of children's books. This has led to progress not only in the content of literary works but also in their formats on the market. It is important to note that the popularity of printed books has been maintained despite these changes: printed editions still occupy a larger share of the market than electronic books. However, with the advancement of digital technologies, e-books have begun to gain popularity due to their accessibility on devices such as tablets and smartphones. The appeal of electronic books is increasing not only because of interactive components such as audio and animation, but also due to their portability, which allows readers to enjoy texts without the need for optimal lighting conditions. Nevertheless, printed books have not lost their relevance, which confirms their timeless nature and their strong connection with the traditional reading experience (*Children Picture Book Market..., 2023*).

The convenience of modern technologies has been acknowledged not only by readers but also by designers and illustrators. Not only have the media for storytelling changed, but so have the methods of creating illustrations. The use of computer software has become widespread due to its practicality; but traditional styles have by no means disappeared from the pages of children's literature. The softness and rich textures of traditional techniques remain highly valued. Many illustrators strive to recreate these textures using digital tools, thus combining the convenience of computer-based work with the uniqueness and organic qualities of strokes, spots, and textures inherent in traditional materials (*International Trends…, 2023*).

In terms of style, it is important to note that children's book design in Europe, much like in Ukraine, is not confined to a single clearly defined style with strict limitations regarding materials or color palettes. However, one of the most widespread approaches can be identified as the so-called "cartoon style". This style is characterized by exaggerated features that depart from realistic representation. In fact, it encompasses a wide range of variations, as the degree of exaggeration can be relatively subtle or highly pronounced. This style is most commonly used in books intended for younger audiences (*Figure 5*; *Figure 6*).

A notable example of this style can be found in the works of German illustrator Ira Sluyterman van Langeweyde. Her style can be described as "cute" or "naïve" (*Figure 7*).

Despite the apparent simplicity of van Langeweyde's style, her illustrations are rich in details that engage the reader. They successfully combine the lightness and airiness of watercolor textures with simplicity, expressive forms, and a soft yet vivid color palette. The visual world carefully created by the illustrator on paper using watercolors and colored pencils harmoniously conveys innocence, charm, and the playfulness of childhood, while also evoking a sense of wonder in the viewer (*The 9 most…, 2024*).

Another representative of this style is Isabella Mazzanti. An illustrator of Italian-Polish origin, she also prefers traditional materials such as watercolor and colored pencils for the realization of her projects. Although Mazzanti creates comics for teenagers and adults, her portfolio also includes children's books. Her illustrations for *The Fairy Garden* by Giorgia Bacthorn attract readers with their bright colors and charming style. Examples of Mazzanti's works can be seen in the Appendix (*Figure 8*). Her illustrations are vivid and rich, characterized by a simplified style yet filled with engaging details for close observation. In each work, the viewer is struck by the thoughtful combination of colors that highlight all essential elements. No object in the illustration appears accidental, nor do its color or scale.

The widespread popularity of this style among illustrators is further evidenced by the works of French illustrator Julie Mellan. Like van Langeweyde and Mazzanti, Mellan uses watercolor to create exceptionally soft and delicate illustrations, often featuring charming animal characters as protagonists. Her watercolor illustrations are characterized by a bright and saturated color palette that remains gentle and pleasing to the viewer. Mellan's works, which can be seen in the Appendix (*Figure 9*), impress with the softness and fluidity of the depicted forms.

Like the aforementioned illustrators, Mellan works exclusively with traditional materials, particularly watercolor. In response to a question from a social media user about whether she had experimented with digital drawing, Mellan stated that she had not, although she plans to purchase an iPad Pro to develop color tests for her illustrations. The illustrator explained her strong commitment to traditional techniques by her deep affection for watercolor and her limited proficiency in digital drawing. "It seems interesting, but in my view, it will never replace real paper", Mellan wrote on her Instagram profile in response to the question.

After analyzing these works and styles, it can be confidently stated that despite the widespread use and popularity of computer software among illustrators, traditional materials for creating remarkable illustrations filled with engaging, humorous, and charming details will never be forgotten or abandoned. Watercolors, colored pencils, pastels, gouache, and tempera remain highly valued among illustrators and will not lose their relevance due to the softness of their colors and the originality of their textures. Therefore, it can be concluded that traditional styles and materials have not receded into the background and continue to be in demand and actively used by European illustrators (*International Trends…, 2023*).

Key Practices in the Visual Design of Children's Books

For adult readers, illustrations serve as a pleasant supplementary key to the text. In children's books, but illustrations constitute the primary source of information, while the text primarily functions to explain the depicted content.

Additionally, a pattern in children's book preferences has been observed: "children tend to prefer books in which illustrations occupy more than twenty-five percent of the space." (*Samiya, 2021*) This preference arises not only because most children find it easier to understand a so-called "graphic" code—i.e., illustrations—than the "verbal" code of the story text itself, but also because studies have shown that large, bright illustrations effectively attract and hold the attention of young readers.

It is also important to consider the target age group when developing the visual design of a book. This is partly due to specific regulations in Ukraine regarding the formatting of children's publications. The size of the main text is particularly crucial. For the first age group—children under 6 years old, of early school age—the main text should be set at 14 pt or larger. For the second age group, the main text should also be at least 14 pt, while for children in grades three to four, it should be 12 pt or larger.

There are also restrictions regarding the number of hyphenations per page. In addition, the printing of the main text must adhere to specific standards: the use of colored inks for the main text is prohibited, and the number of text columns per page should not exceed two.

Reverse or "inverted" fonts are also prohibited in children's publications (*Figure 10*). Light-colored text on a dark background is allowed only in areas intended for scanning, such as menus in computer programs. It is worth noting, but that reading white or very light text on a dark background can cause eye strain. The difficulty arises because light-colored letters are often spaced closely together, and reflected light can scatter across adjacent words and letters, complicating word and letter recognition and thereby reducing overall readability. In contrast, dark text absorbs surrounding light, making it easier to distinguish individual words and letters (*The problem…, 2023*).

Another key aspect in designing visual content for young children is the accurate depiction of the text. Realistic, expressive illustrations should faithfully convey the author's narrative. Images created by the illustrator should not distort or misrepresent the real world.

There are also specific rules regarding hyphenation. For the first age group, the number of hyphenations per page should not exceed four; for the second age group, no more than eight. Recommended illustration coverage is at least 50% for children under 6 years and at least 35% for children under 10 years. Paper quality is also essential: optimal whiteness and opacity facilitate text perception for children.

Requirements for visual design are guided not only by psychology and pedagogy, which study how children perceive the world, but also by children themselves. Surveys indicate that children expect illustrations to be "primarily beautiful, bright, cheerful, kind, and clear, with characters that seem alive." (*Ohar, 2002*)

Detail is critical in creating "alive" images. E. Ohar notes: "Individual objects in the visual design of a children's storybook must correspond 'down to the smallest detail' with their verbal descriptions. Young viewers take the artist's imagined world seriously and verify its authenticity." (*Ohar, 2002*) Research further shows that detailed illustrations provide more cues about the story, and children enjoy finding these details, which serve as "keys" to understanding the narrative. Sparse illustrations on a full-page spread fail to provide sufficient cues, and less detailed images hold children's attention less effectively (*The Importance…, 2018*).

The level of detail should also correspond to the target age group. Younger children benefit from simpler forms and brighter colors, whereas older children respond better to more detailed illustrations with complex character silhouettes and richer color schemes (*How to Design…, 2021*).

Realism is another critical factor. Illustrations help children understand the story before they are fully able to read independently (*Samiya, 2021*). They are indispensable for children learning to read or with reading difficulties, as they aid in visualizing the narrative. Illustrations also allow children to imagine objects or beings they have never encountered, including mythological or fantastical creatures such as dragons or mermaids (*Picture Books…, 2016*).

For this reason, researching the real world and the subjects to be depicted is essential. Realistic representation helps make the illustrated objects appear authentic to readers and allows

illustrators to identify distinguishing features, making characters, landscapes, and objects more recognizable and understandable (*How to Design…, 2021*).

The layout of text and illustrations is equally important. Practical placement of text alongside images is as vital as the book's aesthetic quality. A book's design should be visually appealing while facilitating easy reading and comprehension (*Bondarenko & Halchynska, 2021*).

There are rules regarding the allocation of space for text and illustrations. Layout decisions also depend on the age of the intended readers. For children aged 3 to 5, illustrations dominate the page, as early readers are either unable or only beginning to read independently. Full-spread, detailed, and colorful illustrations help convey the story, with text occupying roughly one-quarter of the spread (*Figure 11*).

As readers grow older, illustrations play a less central role. For children aged 6 to 10, books generally feature full-page illustrations. These remain colorful and detailed, often depicting multiple characters (*Figure 12*). Half-page illustrations are also common: while maintaining detail in foreground elements and characters, the background is simplified due to the smaller format.

Another type is the "spot" or "inline" illustration, usually occupying up to a quarter of a page, surrounded by text on three or four sides. These illustrations are simpler, with limited detail and color, often black, dark blue, or green, and serve primarily to enliven the text (*Figure 13*).

Initial letters, or "drop caps", are another feature. A drop cap is a large, decorative letter at the beginning of a paragraph, chapter, or section, often occupying multiple lines and adorned with ornamental patterns or small compositions (*Figure 14*). Drop caps are used to highlight and decorate text and are frequently red, though blue or green may also be used, often in uppercase or Gothic-style fonts.

A key trend in children's book design is the balance of text and illustration on a spread. The younger the intended reader, the larger, more detailed, and more prominent the illustrations, and the smaller the amount of text. As the reader's age increases, the illustrations simplify, shrink, and play a smaller role.

Another important consideration is the distance between text and illustration, which must not be less than 6 millimeters. Illustrations must be free of defects that could hinder perception, such as color inconsistencies, misaligned images, mirrored elements, unblended paints, or insufficient contrast.

From the analysis conducted in the first section, we can conclude that the rise of digital technologies has a significant impact on publishing - both positive and negative. Contemporary Ukrainian illustrators are not limited to traditional techniques and materials, such as paints and colored pencils, nor to digital software; they employ a wide range of techniques and unconventional materials for illustration design. Despite the growing popularity of digital tools, the use of traditional materials in Europe remains strong. Key principles in designing children's book illustrations include determining the target age group, selecting the appropriate size and type of illustration, choosing font size and drawing style, and prohibiting the use of inverted fonts.

Discussion

The results obtained in this study are highly relevant for contemporary humanities scholarship due to their interdisciplinary nature and integrative analytical framework.

First, the study contributes to art history by expanding the understanding of children's book illustration as an independent artistic phenomenon rather than a subordinate visual supplement to the text. By systematizing stylistic, compositional, and semiotic characteristics of Ukrainian illustration, the study enriches scholarly discourse on national schools of book graphics.

Second, the findings are significant for cultural studies, as they demonstrate how illustration functions as a mechanism for transmitting cultural memory and national identity to younger generations. This perspective aligns with current debates on visual culture, identity formation, and the role of childhood media in shaping collective values.

Third, the comparative analysis of Ukrainian and European practices provides a valuable contribution to transnational studies of visual culture, highlighting both convergence processes and the preservation of distinctive national visual codes. Such results are particularly relevant in the context of globalization, where local traditions risk being obscured by dominant international aesthetics.

Fourth, the study's emphasis on the interaction between traditional artistic techniques and digital technologies responds directly to current scholarly interest in the transformation of artistic practices in the digital age. The findings show that digitalization does not eliminate traditional illustration methods but rather reshapes and recontextualizes them.

Fifth, the study has methodological relevance, as it demonstrates the effectiveness of combining art-historical, semiotic, cultural, and design-oriented approaches in the analysis of children's books. This integrated model may serve as a methodological reference for future studies in book design, illustration, and visual communication.

Finally, the results are applicable beyond purely theoretical discussions, offering a scholarly foundation for further applied research in publishing studies, design education, and cultural policy related to children's literature.

During the course of the study, the author encountered a number of conceptual, methodological, and practical challenges. One of the primary difficulties was the fragmented nature of existing scholarship on children's book illustration, which is often dispersed across art history, pedagogy, design studies, and cultural theory. This fragmentation required extensive synthesis to construct a coherent analytical framework.

Another challenge involved the limited availability of comprehensive, systematized studies specifically devoted to Ukrainian children's book illustration, particularly those addressing its role as a national visual code. As a result, the research relied on integrating disparate sources and reconstructing broader patterns from case-specific analyses.

The comparative dimension of the study also presented methodological difficulties, as Ukrainian and European illustrative practices are embedded in different cultural, institutional, and publishing contexts. Ensuring analytical balance without reducing national specificity or oversimplifying European diversity required careful methodological calibration.

An additional challenge was related to the dynamic nature of contemporary illustration practices, especially in the context of rapid digital transformation. The constant emergence of new techniques, tools, and hybrid formats complicates attempts to produce stable classifications or typologies.

The analysis of age-related design principles and regulatory requirements posed further difficulties, as such standards vary across national contexts and are subject to ongoing revision. Interpreting these norms within a broader cultural and artistic framework required careful contextualization.

Finally, the inherently visual nature of illustration presented a methodological challenge, as verbal academic analysis must translate visual phenomena into conceptual and terminological structures without reducing their aesthetic complexity. Addressing this issue demanded a careful balance between descriptive precision and theoretical abstraction.

A promising direction for further scholarly research is an in-depth study of illustration in Ukrainian children's books from an interdisciplinary perspective—at the intersection of art

history, perception psychology, pedagogy, and cultural studies. In particular, investigating the influence of visual imagery on the formation of children's value orientations and national self-identity is of high relevance.

Special attention should also be paid to the transformation of traditional artistic tools in digital environments, as well as the study of new formats of children's books—art books, interactive and hybrid editions—where illustration extends beyond the boundaries of the classical page. Systematic research into the work of individual Ukrainian illustrators is also promising for understanding the formation of the contemporary visual canon of children's literature.

Future studies could focus on a comparative analysis of Ukrainian book illustration with leading European schools, which would allow for a clearer delineation of the unique features of national book graphics and define its place in the global artistic landscape.

Overall, the development of this research direction will contribute not only to the theoretical understanding of illustration as a vital component of book art but will also have practical significance for publishers, designers, and illustrators interested in creating high-quality, culturally rooted, and competitive Ukrainian children's books.

Conclusion

The conducted research established that the illustrative design of Ukrainian children's books is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon that integrates artistic-aesthetic, cultural, psychological, and pedagogical dimensions. In children's literature, illustrations perform not merely a decorative function but act as a full-fledged means of visual communication, significantly influencing text perception, imagination development, emotional sensitivity, and the formation of a child's national identity.

It was analyzed that Ukrainian book graphics possess a deep historical and artistic foundation and develop through a continuous dialogue between national traditions and European artistic trends. This synthesis is most prominently manifested in children's literature, through references to folk motifs, symbolism, ornamental structures, while simultaneously embracing experimentation with form, style, and materials.

The study of the contemporary state of illustration in Ukrainian children's publications revealed an increase in the professional level of book design since the 2000s, active use of digital technologies, and at the same time, the preservation and continued relevance of traditional artistic techniques. It was found that contemporary Ukrainian illustrators do not confine themselves to a single stylistic direction but work across a wide spectrum of artistic languages—from meticulously detailed realism to minimalist, conventional, and conceptual solutions.

A comparative analysis of Ukrainian and European practices in children's book illustration allowed us to conclude that, despite globalization and the influence of mass culture, the printed children's book retains its value as a unique artistic object. Illustrations play a particularly important role in this, as their carefully considered composition, color palette, level of detail, and correspondence with the reader's age ensure the integrity of the book's artistic image.

Special attention was given to the practical aspects of illustrative design in children's publications. It was determined that the effectiveness of a visual solution depends on a clear consideration of the reader's age group, adherence to regulatory requirements for font, composition, and illustration, as well as the harmonious integration of text and imagery. It was demonstrated that for younger audiences, illustrations are the dominant source of information, whereas their role gradually transforms from explanatory to supplementary with age.

The purpose of the study—to identify and systematize the artistic, stylistic, and cultural principles of illustration in Ukrainian children's books as a form of national visual code within the European artistic context—has been fully achieved. Through an interdisciplinary methodological framework, the research has demonstrated that illustration in children's literature functions as an independent artistic phenomenon that integrates aesthetic, cultural, semiotic, and communicative dimensions. The study confirms that Ukrainian children's book illustration not only reflects national traditions but also actively participates in their reinterpretation and transmission within contemporary visual culture.

The first research objective, which involved analyzing the historical and artistic foundations of Ukrainian book graphics in children's literature, has been accomplished by tracing the continuity of national illustrative traditions and their interaction with broader European artistic processes. The study established that Ukrainian book graphics developed through a synthesis of folk ornamentation, symbolic imagery, and European stylistic influences, forming a distinctive visual language that remains identifiable in contemporary children's publications.

The second objective—to examine contemporary illustrative practices in Ukrainian children's books—was addressed through the analysis of current publishing trends, artistic techniques, and design strategies. The research demonstrated a significant professionalization of illustration since the early 21st century, characterized by stylistic diversity, experimentation with materials, and the active use of both digital and traditional techniques. This analysis confirmed that contemporary Ukrainian illustration resists stylistic uniformity and instead operates within a pluralistic visual paradigm.

The third objective, focused on identifying key stylistic, compositional, and semiotic features of illustration, was fulfilled by examining visual structure, color palettes, levels of detail, and symbolic content. The study showed that illustrations in Ukrainian children's books function as complex semiotic systems that encode cultural meanings, narrative cues, and age-specific perceptual strategies. These features ensure the coherence of the book as an integrated visual-textual artifact.

The fourth objective—to compare Ukrainian and European approaches to children's book illustration—was achieved through a comparative analysis of illustrative styles, materials, and design philosophies. The results revealed both shared tendencies, such as the integration of digital tools and the persistence of traditional media, and distinctive national characteristics rooted in Ukrainian cultural symbolism. This comparison allowed for a clearer positioning of Ukrainian book graphics within the European visual landscape without reducing its cultural specificity.

The fifth objective, which aimed to determine the role of illustration in the formation of children's visual perception and national identity, was addressed by analyzing the pedagogical, psychological, and cultural functions of visual imagery. The study confirmed that illustrations play a central role in shaping children's imaginative experience, emotional engagement, and early cultural identification, particularly in younger age groups where visual perception precedes verbal comprehension.

The sixth objective—to systematize age-related and regulatory design principles influencing illustrative solutions—was successfully resolved through the examination of layout norms, typographic standards, and compositional requirements for different age categories. The research demonstrated that effective illustration design depends on a balanced consideration of aesthetic quality, perceptual psychology, and regulatory constraints, ensuring both artistic integrity and functional readability.

In summary, the conducted research provides a comprehensive and methodologically grounded understanding of illustration in Ukrainian children's books as a culturally significant visual practice. The study not only confirms the achievement of its stated aim and objectives but also establishes a solid foundation for future interdisciplinary research and applied developments in book design, illustration, and cultural heritage studies.

Thus, the illustrative design of Ukrainian children's books emerges as an independent artistic phenomenon that shapes the visual culture of future generations while simultaneously representing national book graphics within the broader European and global context.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Illustration by V. Yerko for H. C. Andersen's book "The Snow Queen"

Figure 2. Illustration by Ye. Hapchynska for Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland"

Figure 3. Illustration by Irena Panarina for "PtakhAbetka"

Figure 4. Illustration of the main female character by Polina Doroshenko for Lesya Ukrainka's "Forest Song"

Figure 5. Illustration by Renan Porto

Figure 6. Illustrations by Isabella Mazzanti for the book "Fairy Garden"

Figure 7. Illustrations by Iryna Sluiterman van Langevelde

Figure 8. Illustrations by Isabella Mazzanti for the book "Fairy Garden"

Figure 9. Illustration by Julie Mellan

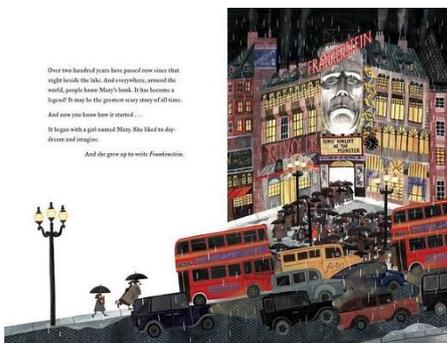Figure 10. Illustration using reversed typography

Figure 11. Example of a full-spread book illustration

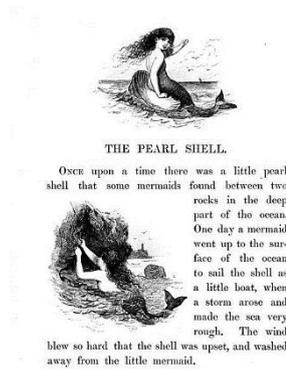Figure 12. Example of a full-page book illustration

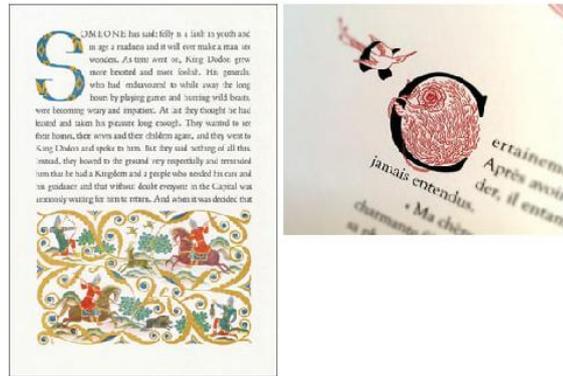Figure 13. Example of a spot illustration used at the beginning and within the text

Figure 14. Example of a decorated initial at the beginning of the text