IDR 2025 Conference Proceedings Vol.04
ISSN 3021 – 694X, eISSN 3021 - 6958
idresearch.uom.lk

Explore Grid Systems and the Application of It in Children's Picture Books for Visual Literacy

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Abstract **—** Grid systems have long been central to visual communication design, serving as the foundation for structure, clarity, and coherence in composition. Their systematic application has shaped art, architecture, and publishing across centuries. Within the field of children's literature, grid systems play an equally critical yet often understated role. In picture books, grids create harmony between illustrations and text, helping children visually navigate narratives while promoting cognitive and aesthetic engagement. This research explores the theoretical and practical significance of grid systems in enhancing visual literacy through children's picture books. By situating grid design within the pedagogical and creative contexts of early childhood education, the study demonstrates how structured visual frameworks can elevate storytelling, comprehension, and interpretive skills. As visual media become increasingly prevalent in modern learning, the importance of cultivating visual literacy through thoughtful design grows ever more urgent (Müller-Brockmann, 1981; Nikolajeva, 2013). The project therefore holds relevance not only to designers and educators but also to researchers interested in literacy development and communication design.

The aim of this project is to examine the relationship between grid systems and visual literacy within the design of children's picture books, emphasizing how visual structure aids meaning-making. Literature indicates that children engage with visuals before they can read text, relying on image-based cues to construct understanding (Avgerinou & Ericson, 1997; Nodelman, 1988). Picture books thus function as early literacy tools that bridge visual and textual learning. A well-constructed grid helps guide children's attention through compositions, providing both rhythm and narrative flow (Bang, 2016). As Tschichold (1991) and Vignelli (2010) argue, the moral function of design lies in balancing form and clarity, a principle equally vital when designing for young readers. The study situates this investigation within a growing body of work that recognizes design not merely as decoration, but as a literacy-building tool—one capable of shaping cognitive and interpretive capacities in children. By grounding its objectives in both design theory and educational psychology, this research offers insight into how formal visual systems can foster active engagement and meaning construction in early learning.

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DOI: *https://doi.org/10.31705/IDR.2025.23*

Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative approach that combines theoretical exploration, visual analysis, and field observation. Seven Sri Lankan picture books, developed through the National Consortium of Children's Books (NCCB) and published in 2024, were examined as case studies. Each sample represented distinct uses of compositional grids—ranging from column and modular structures to golden ratio and rule-of-thirds applications. The research design included three key phases: (1) literature review on grid theory and visual literacy; (2) case study analysis of layout structures and visual organization; and (3) observational and interview-based study on children's responses to the books. Data were analyzed for recurring visual patterns, reader interactions, and narrative coherence. The methodology ensured that both designer intent and reader perception were assessed, revealing how structural systems directly influenced comprehension and engagement. By triangulating design analysis with behavioral observations, the study established an evidence-based understanding of grid efficacy in fostering visual literacy.

The findings highlight a clear relationship between structured design and reader engagement. Books that employed identifiable grid systems demonstrated higher levels of visual comprehension and reader focus. For example, in *Seenuge Sanda Gamana*, the illustrator's use of the rule of thirds positioned the protagonist and moon at dynamic focal intersections, creating visual tension and emotional resonance. Similarly, in *Shaun Thamai Niyamuwa*, the golden ratio was used to emphasize the narrative climax, directing the reader's eye naturally toward the story's resolution. Observations revealed that children responded positively to layouts with balanced spacing, defined margins, and consistent rhythm—factors that improved handling, sequencing, and emotional engagement. Conversely, books lacking visible grid discipline appeared more chaotic and required greater cognitive effort for navigation. These insights affirm the grid's pedagogical power in shaping attention, memory, and interpretation—three core dimensions of visual literacy development. The integration of typographic consistency, color balance, and spatial proportion was also found to reinforce comprehension and emotional connection to narrative events (Salisbury & Styles, 2012).

The study highlights how digital analysis can serve as a bridge between design research and heritage studies. Translating a two-dimensional model to a three-dimensional context required addressing issues of scale, curvature, and perspective. Using proportional ratios rather than fixed measurements allowed reliable comparison despite differences in mask size. This image-based method enables researchers to study fragile artifacts without direct contact, supporting both preservation and analytical understanding. It demonstrates that digital measurement approaches, when appropriately adjusted, can provide new insights into the visual language of traditional craftsmanship.

In conclusion, this research underscores that grid systems are far more than mechanical tools of alignment—they are intellectual frameworks that cultivate literacy, cognition, and creativity. Through disciplined use of structure, designers of children's picture books can create immersive, meaningful, and pedagogically sound experiences. The study contributes to design education by redefining the role of the grid as both a creative and cognitive device, offering a methodology that bridges aesthetic theory with child-centered literacy outcomes. It provides actionable insights for authors, illustrators, and educators seeking to integrate visual literacy principles into early reading materials. By demonstrating how structured design fosters cognitive clarity without limiting artistic expression, this project extends

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the discourse on how graphic design can meaningfully contribute to education and social development in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: *Grid Systems; Visual Literacy; Visual Information*

Figure 1

Using golden ratio in Shaun Thamai Niyamuwa

a *b*

Figure 2

Using rule of thirds to place the main elements in Seenuge Sanda Gamana

a *b*

Acknowledgment

This manuscript is based on the author's undergraduate dissertation completed under the supervision of Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama at the Department of Integrated Design, University of Moratuwa. The author sincerely thanks her for her guidance, and the writers and illustrators of the NCCB and the NCCB's generous collaboration.

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