



## Transformation of Children's Literature in the 21st Century: From Paper Book to Multimedia Experience

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Research Article

#### Received:

2 October 2025

#### Revised:

20 November 2025

#### Accepted:

15 December 2025

#### Published online:

25 December 2025

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DOI: [10.5281/](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19546839)

[zenodo.19546839](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19546839)

### ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the transformation processes in the field of children's literature in the 21st century in the context of the intensification of digitalization and the formation of a multimedia-integrated reading environment. It is established that the key vector of transformation is the transition from linear, materially fixed text organization to hypertextual, nonlinear and multimodal architectonics, which form variable ways of reading, which leads to a change in the ways of perception and reading of text by children. It is proven that the integration of digital technologies into the structure of children's literature determines the expansion of its functional and target purpose, ensuring the intensification of didactic, communicative and therapeutic-compensatory potential. It has been established that multimedia and interactive formats contribute to increasing the level of reading motivation, activating cognitive activity, developing speech competencies, critical thinking and forming the ability to productively interpret narrative structures. The change in the role of the child in the reading process has been clarified: from passive perception of the finished text to active interaction with it, where the child acts not only as a reader, but as an active participant in the interpretation and partial formation of content, which contributes to the development of independence, creative thinking and involvement in reading. The dual nature of the influence of the digital environment on the processes of perception and processing of information has been revealed: on the one hand, it expands access to literature, enhances intercultural interaction and ensures individualization of learning, and on the other hand, fragmentation of attention, a decrease in the ability to deep analytical reading and a deterioration in the holistic understanding of the text are observed. It has been proven that excessive use of multimedia elements, especially when they are not consistent with the content, leads to an overload of attention, which reduces the efficiency of information assimilation and the formation of reading skills. It is proven that the paper book retains a leading role in the formation of deep reading, analytical thinking and long-term memory, acting as a basic means of developing holistic cognitive and interpretative skills. It was found that the effectiveness of digital formats is variable and is determined by the level of cognitive coherence of multimedia elements with the narrative structure, age characteristics of readers and the quality of pedagogical support. The systematization of transformational parameters allowed us to identify key trends in the development of children's literature, in particular: digitalization of the literary environment, multimodal convergence of the text, hypertextualization of the reading space, interactivization of receptive practices, personalization of the narrative and institutionalization of digital educational technologies.

### KEYWORDS

*children's literature, digitalization, multimodal convergence, hypertextualization.*

## Introduction

**M**odern children's literature is undergoing significant transformations under the influence of digital media, mobile technologies and globalization processes, which form new conditions for a child's interaction with text and visual content, where these changes largely determine children's reading motivation, directing it towards interactive, visually dynamic forms of information presentation. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the integration of multimedia resources into the distance learning process, which has increased the accessibility of educational content, but at the same time has posed new challenges for the formation of deep reading competencies, such as analytical comprehension of text, critical thinking and concentration of attention.

Since digital reading is characterized by a high level of multimodality, hypertext structure and information load, which complicates cognitive processing of the material, an excessive number of interactive elements, hyperlinks and multimedia stimuli can lead to fragmentation of attention, a decrease in the effectiveness of analytical reading, etc. At the same time, digital formats open up new opportunities for individualization of learning, development of creativity and intercultural communication, which determines the ambivalent nature of their impact on the children's audience.

Despite the recognized educational, cognitive and developmental value of digital resources, in modern literary and pedagogical practice there is a lack of comprehensive research on the interaction of traditional and digital formats in the formation of reading competencies. In particular, this justifies the relevance of conducting a comprehensive study of the transformation of children's literature in the 21st century as a process that combines traditional and digital forms, capable of simultaneously ensuring the development of cognitive, creative, emotional and social competencies, the formation of critical thinking and the adaptation of children to the conditions of the multimedia cultural environment.

## Literature Review

**B**ased on the analysis of recent research on the transformation of children's literature, it is established that modern approaches integrate pedagogy, literary studies and digital technologies, focusing on the development of children's cognitive, emotional and social competencies through multimedia narratives. For example, Lesnik-Oberstein K. (1998) examines the foundations of children's literature and its role in shaping ideas about childhood, emphasizing the importance of the text as a tool for socio-cultural development. Pulimeno M., Piscitelli P., Colazzo S. (2020) demonstrate the impact of children's books on the global development and well-being of children, in particular through the integration of literary and pedagogical practices. Oehler J. (2006; 2013) emphasizes digital storytelling as an innovative tool for the development of literacy, creativity and learning, indicating the importance of multimedia resources for the interactive learning process. Christ T. et al. (2019) investigate the relationship between reader characteristics, features of multimodal applications, and text comprehension outcomes in preschool children, emphasizing the role of personalization and interactivity.

Bass A. G., Takaks Z. K., Kegel S. A. (2015) analyze the advantages and limitations of electronic storybooks for the formation of initial literacy, revealing the impact of digital tools on the development of vocabulary and reading skills. Kuchirkova N. (2013; 2018) investigates the active participation of children in the process of reading interactive applications, emphasizing the importance of behavioral and social aspects of interaction with digital stories. Kelly E. S., Kinney K. (2017) and Zipke M. (2017) show that interactive storytelling platforms contribute to more effective word acquisition and better understanding of the plot compared to traditional formats. In the framework of pedagogical practice, the results of research by Isbell R. et al. (2004) are also important, confirming the positive impact of storytelling and reading on the development of oral speech and text comprehension in young children.

Thus, modern research demonstrates the integrated function of digital and multimedia formats in the development of children's cognitive, emotional and social competence. This justifies the need for

further research into the role of digital and multimedia book formats as a tool for the formation of reading and learning competencies in the 21st century.

## Problem Statement

The aim of the article is to study the transformation of children's literature in the 21st century, in particular the transition from paper books to multimedia formats, to analyze the impact of digital resources on children's cognitive, receptive and communicative practices, to determine the effectiveness of content acquisition in traditional and digital formats, as well as to clarify the role of interactivity, multimodality and personalization on the development of autonomy, creativity and active participation of the child in the narrative process.

## Methods and Materials

The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary studies, pedagogical science, and digital technology analysis. To examine the transformation of children's literature, a comprehensive theoretical analysis was conducted, involving the systematization of current scientific discourse and digitalization concepts. This allowed for the identification of key evolutionary vectors in the transition from traditional paper-based formats to integrated multimedia experiences, specifically drawing on the foundational research of established scholars in the field.

The core of the research methodology involves a comparative-typological analysis, which was utilized to contrast paper books with digital resources across several dimensions, including structural organization, cognitive perception mechanisms, and the functional role of the text. Through the application of abstraction and generalization, the study classifies modern digital platforms—such as interactive gaming environments and multimodal web-books—and models the shifting communicative status of the child from a passive recipient to an active narrative subject. This methodological framework provides a conceptual basis for evaluating the cognitive and educational effects of the digital literary environment in the 21st century.

## Results and Discussion

Children's literature is traditionally defined as a set of works of art for children aimed at learning, education and entertainment (Bettelheim, 1991; Lesnik-Oberstein, 1998; Steadman & Palmer, 1997). The emergence of a separate genre is associated with the formation of the concept of childhood in the 18th century, which laid the foundation for the systematic use of literary texts in education and socialization (Nikolajeva, 1995; Zipes, 1996)

Modern children's literature encompasses a variety of forms: fairy tales, fables, illustrated books, comics, animation and digital resources, which ensure wide accessibility and interactivity (Ohler, 2006; Pulimeno et al., 2020). Multimedia formats combine traditional text with audiovisual and interactive elements, which significantly increases the pedagogical potential of literature, contributing to motivation and deeper involvement of children in the learning process (Isbell et al., 2004; Ohler, 2013).

The didactic effect of children's literature is manifested in the development of language competencies, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Regular use of fairy tales and feuilletons contributes to the mastery of grammatical structures, vocabulary and oral and written skills, reducing anxiety in learning (Brown, 2000; Reynolds et al., 2000). Multimedia approaches, dramatization and role-playing games based on fairy tales improve concentration and assimilation of material, creating hybrid models of learning in a dynamic digital environment (Forgan, 2002).

The therapeutic potential of children's literature is confirmed by its ability to help children cope with emotional difficulties, develop empathy and social skills, and promote self-knowledge and self-regulation (Bettelheim, 1991; Charon & Eric, 2017). Digital formats expand the possibilities of bibliotherapy, providing interactive engagement and personalized support, which is especially

important for the prevention of stress, bullying, and risky behavior (Babarro Vélez & Lacalle Prieto, 2018; Pulimeno et al., 2020; Rudnytsky & Charon, 2008).

The transition from paper publications to multimedia experiences allows children's literature to maintain educational and therapeutic functions while increasing interactivity, accessibility, and pedagogical effectiveness. This transformation stimulates the development of moral, cognitive, and social competencies, ensures deeper knowledge acquisition, and shapes the modern reading experience of 21st-century children (Isbell et al., 2004; Pulimeno et al., 2020; Zipes, 2013).

It is worth noting that in the 21st century, children's literature is undergoing a significant transformation due to the development of electronic narrative forms, which provide a transition from the traditional paper book to a multimedia-integrated reading experience (Chen et al., 2003). The typology of digital resources includes interactive gaming environments, CD-ROM products, web-based books, platforms for collaborative story creation, etc. Interactive environments are characterized by a nonlinear structure, a high level of user control and elements of gamification, which changes the traditional reading process into an interactive experience. CD-ROM formats combine text with audiovisual components, contributing to the development of basic reading and visual skills (Unsworth, 2003). Web-based books function in three modifications: linear, multimodal and hypermedia, the latter providing a synthesis of text, images, audio and video, forming a full-fledged multimedia experience (Chen et al., 2003).

It should be noted that digital forms of children's literature and electronic libraries are becoming widespread, which significantly transforms traditional models of reading and learning. Digital libraries, such as the International Children's Digital Library, create a global reading environment with open access to multilingual texts, stimulating search activity, hypertext navigation and intercultural communication (Houston, 2011). Modern digital platforms, in particular Storyjumper and MakeBeliefsComix, provide the opportunity for children to actively construct their own narratives by integrating textual, visual and creative components, which leads to a change in the role of the child from a passive recipient to an active subject of literary communication.

Digital resources combine text with illustrations, graphics, sound and video, creating multi-level content and ensuring deeper involvement of children in plot structures (Houston, 2011). Interactivity, non-linearity and the use of hyperlinks and social networks open up new opportunities for learning and intercultural communication.

The use of digital technologies in reading instruction has been studied for a long time (Reinking et al., 1998), but in the 21st century, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, their use has expanded significantly. Current research confirms that digital tools contribute to the development of basic reading skills, including text comprehension, writing, and speaking (Alvermann et al., 1999; Houston, 2011).

Teachers note that technology stimulates students' motivation and independent work, and interactive elements increase the level of children's involvement in learning (Graham et al., 1991; Olson et al., 1997). In addition, digital tools provide a cost-effective alternative to individual support, allowing more children to receive additional support (Roth & Beck, 1987).

At the same time, digital technologies cannot completely replace pedagogical experience. Their effectiveness depends on the competence of the teacher, the organization of the educational process, and the choice of appropriate software adapted to the age and individual needs of children. Therefore, the transformation of children's literature into digital form creates new opportunities for the development of literacy, but requires reasonable pedagogical support and control of learning effects (Houston, 2011; Olson et al., 1997).

The digitization of children's literature forms a multimedia paradigm in which the text becomes part of a polycode environment, and the reader changes perception strategies from linear to hypertextual. The integration of traditional and digital formats determines a new quality of literary experience and transforms the cognitive and interpretive practices of the children's audience (Chen et al., 2003; Houston, 2011).

The spread of mobile devices, e-books and multimedia platforms leads to a transition from paper publications to interactive multimedia formats, which are characterized by hypertextuality,

multimodality and a high level of accessibility. Digital resources provide unprecedented access to content at any time and place, economic and environmental feasibility, and also stimulate the development of new models of consumption of children's literature. At the same time, they can reduce the depth of reading, complicate spatial navigation and cognitive processing of information, which affects the understanding and memorization of the text. A paper book, on the contrary, maintains a structured and sensory-rich interaction, activating emotional-cognitive processes and supporting the formation of reading competence (Sayu, 2023).

Digitalization is also transforming the reading preferences of children, who increasingly choose audiovisual and interactive leisure formats. This requires the adaptation of children's books to the conditions of multimedia culture and the integration of visual, audio and interactive components (Purba, 2021). At the same time, the spread of digital resources poses challenges regarding the quality of content and compliance with copyright, which stimulates the innovative activity of authors and publishers. The optimal strategy for the development of children's literature in the digital age is a balance between traditional and multimedia formats. The combination of paper books with digital resources allows you to preserve the cognitive and cultural advantages of traditional reading, while increasing the level of engagement and interactivity, which contributes to the development of children's cognitive, emotional and social competencies (Rahmawati, 2022).

Experimental data show that traditional text materials provide higher efficiency of understanding and memorization compared to interactive multimedia formats. At the same time, digitalization changes not only the format of the book, but also the cognitive mechanisms of its perception. Excessive use of multimedia resources at an early age is associated with a decrease in reading skills, memory impairment and limitations in the socio-communicative development of children. A paper book retains cultural and educational value, provides structured interaction with the text and activates emotional-cognitive processes that contribute to the formation of deep reading (Sayu, 2023).

The effectiveness of digital books is largely determined by the consistency of multimedia and interactive elements with the main narrative. Under the condition of cognitive congruence, such elements enhance understanding of the content, while their inconsistency with the plot leads to an overload of attention and a decrease in the results of vocabulary acquisition and thinking development [Bus et al., 2015; Christ et al., 2019; Kahneman, 1973].

An important factor in the transformation of digital children's literature is the personalization of content. The possibility of adapting the plot or the child's active participation in its formation increases the level of autonomy, motivation and involvement, changing the role of the reader to an active participant in narrative interaction (Aliagas & Margallo, 2017; Kucirkova et al., 2013; Kucirkova, 2018).

Studies also confirm that well-designed digital books can positively influence the development of cognitive, language, and socio-emotional skills, as well as partially compensate for the educational difficulties of children, in particular those in groups at risk of low academic performance (Kelley & Kinney, 2017; Zipke, 2017).

The results of the study emphasize the need for an integrated approach: a combination of paper and digital formats, which allows preserving the cognitive advantages of traditional reading and simultaneously using the innovative potential of the multimedia environment. In this context, digital literacy is a key factor in children's adaptation to the modern information space and the transformation of children's literature as a socio-cultural phenomenon (Rahmawati, 2022; Sayu, 2023).

The analysis of the comparative characteristics presented in Table 1. allows us to state the presence of systemic changes in the functioning of children's literature in the context of digitalization. The transformation of the format-structural organization of the text from a linear, materially fixed form to hypertextual and multimodal models has been revealed, which leads to the modification of reading strategies and receptive practices. In the cognitive dimension, a shift from deep analytical reading to predominantly fragmentary and visual-dynamic perception has been recorded, which is accompanied by risks of a decrease in the level of concentration of attention and the quality of understanding of the text. At the same time, a change in the communicative-receptive status of the child has been established - from the position of a recipient to an active subject of narrative

interaction, which contributes to the development of autonomy and creativity. Functional analysis indicates the expansion of the didactic potential of children's literature through the integration of interactive and personalized educational practices. At the same time, the effectiveness of content acquisition in a digital environment is variable and is determined by the level of cognitive coherence of multimedia components with the narrative structure.

*Table 1. Comparative characteristics of the main trends in the transformation of children's literature in the 21st century*

Parameter	Traditional paper book	Multimedia digital experience	Cognitive and pedagogical effects of transformation
<b>Format and structural organization of the text</b>	Materially fixed form of representation; linear navigation; static nature of textual structure	Hypertextual architectonics; nonlinearity; multimodal integration (audio, video, animation components)	Transformation of reading strategies: transition from sequential perception to variable construction of narrative trajectories
<b>Cognitive mechanisms of perception</b>	Focus on deep reading; activation of visual-spatial memory and analytical thinking	Dominance of visual-dynamic perception; fragmented attention; rapid change of stimulus units	The risk of destabilization of attention and reduction of deep understanding; actualization of the need for the formation of digital literacy
<b>Communicative-receptive status of the child</b>	The recipient of the text, oriented towards the interpretation of the completed narrative	Active subject of interaction: co-author, participant, agent of the narrative process	Increasing motivation and engagement; developing autonomy, creativity, and agency
<b>Functional purpose of literature</b>	Implementation of educational, aesthetic and socialization functions	Gamification of learning; interactive therapeutic practices; personalized educational scenarios	Expanding didactic potential, particularly in working with children with special educational needs
<b>Risks and operational limitations</b>	Limited availability; relatively static content	Information overload; variability in content quality; proliferation of illegal resources	The need for pedagogical mediation and control to preserve deep reading competencies
<b>Content learning efficiency</b>	High level of understanding, interpretation and long-term memory	The effectiveness of learning varies depending on the cognitive coherence of multimedia elements with the narrative.	The advantage of cognitively "pure" texts; excessive multimedia content can reduce the quality of assimilation

*Source: Formed by the author based on sources: (Aliagas & Margallo, 2017; Bus et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2003; Kucirkova et al., 2013; Kucirkova, 2018; Purba, 2021; Rahmawati, 2022; Sayu, 2023).*

Thus, the results of the analysis indicate that the transformation processes in the field of children's literature are contradictory in their impact and require targeted pedagogical mediation to ensure the development of deep reading.

The systematization presented in Table 2 allows us to conceptualize the transformation of children's literature in the 21st century as a multidimensional process occurring at the intersection of technological, cognitive and sociocultural changes. It has been established that the key driver of these transformations is digitalization, which causes not only a change in the material carrier of the text, but also a deep restructuring of the methods of its perception, interpretation and use in the educational process. Analysis of the structural elements of Table 2. indicates the presence of interrelated trends, among which the leading ones are multimodalization of literary content, hypertextualization of the reading space and intensification of interactive forms of interaction with the text. These processes are accompanied by the transformation of cognitive-receptive mechanisms, which is manifested in the fragmentation of attention, a decrease in the level of deep understanding and a change in the nature of reading strategies.

At the same time, the ambivalent nature of the influence of the digital environment has been identified: along with the expansion of access to literature, the individualization of learning and the growth of motivational potential, there is a reduction in traditional practices of deep reading and the devaluation of the paper book as a cultural phenomenon, which allows us to define modern transformations not as a linear process of displacement, but as a complex model of functional restructuring of the literary space.

**Table 2. Transformational parameters of children's literature in the 21st century in the paradigm of the transition from a paper book to a multimedia-integrated reading experience**

<b>Transformation vector</b>	<b>Conceptual-theoretical interpretation</b>	<b>Empirically fixed forms of manifestation</b>	<b>Cognitive-receptive and educational effects</b>
Digitization of the literary environment	Systemic change in the dominant channel of representation and distribution of children's texts from material-fixed to digital-networked	E-books, mobile platforms, online content access services	Modification of reader motivation, reorientation towards fragmented and rapid perception of information
Multimodal text convergence	Integration of verbal, visual, audio and interactive codes within a single semiotic space of a literary product	Interactive books, multimedia educational environments	Increasing engagement levels under conditions of potential reduction of deep semantic processing
Hypertextualization of the reading space	Transition from linear to nonlinear, network-organized text structure with a plurality of reading trajectories	Hyperlinks, interactive navigation mechanisms	Complications of cognitive navigation, reduced integrity of text interpretation
Deconstructing the traditional book model	Declining functional dominance of the paper book as the basic carrier of knowledge	Reduction of systematic reading practices of printed texts	Weakening of mechanisms of concentration, long-term memory and analytical thinking
Cognitive restructuring of reading activity	Transformation of neurocognitive information processing mechanisms in conditions of multimedia overload	Reading in an environment of high information density and stimulus saturation	Fragmentation of attention, reduced level of understanding and depth of interpretation
Institutionalization of digital educational practices	Integration of digital technologies into the structure of the educational process as a system-forming element	Distance learning, digital educational platforms	Limitations in the formation of deep reading competencies under conditions of dominance of screen reading
Democratizing access to literary content	Expanding the accessibility of texts due to the functioning of global digital resources	Digital libraries, open online archives	Formation of new models of reading behavior with increasing fragmentation of perception
Interactivating receptive practices	Transforming reading from a passive process into a form of active interaction with the text	Gamified narrative environments, interactive platforms	Changing the status of the reader to a subject of communicative interaction
Personalization and participatory narrative	Involving the user in modifying and constructing the text	Digital storytelling and collaborative content creation platforms	Increasing the level of autonomy, forming the reader's subjectivity
Globalization of literary communication	Integration of children's literature into the transnational information space	International digital libraries and platforms	Internationalization of the reading environment and intercultural interaction
Transformation of reader preferences	Shifting emphasis from text-centric to audio-visual and interactive forms of content	Video resources, gaming applications, multimedia products	Declining interest in traditional reading as a form of leisure
Destandardization of content quality	Decreased quality control of literary production in the digital environment	Pirated resources, uncontrolled platforms	Degradation of the content and aesthetic characteristics of literature
Educational and didactic transformation	Using digital technologies as a tool for developing linguistic and cognitive competencies	Interactive curricula, digital educational resources	Individualization of learning and increasing motivation under conditions of dependence on pedagogical support
Therapeutic and compensatory potential of literature	The use of literary and multimedia forms as a tool for psychological adaptation	Bibliotherapy, digital narrative practices	Developing emotional intelligence, empathy, and self-regulation
Formation of a hybrid model of reading activity	Synthesis of traditional (printed) and digital formats as an optimal model for the functioning of literature	Combined use of paper and electronic resources	Striking a balance between deep reading and multimedia engagement

Source: Formed by the author based on sources: (Aliagas & Margallo, 2017; Bus et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2003; Kucirkova et al., 2013; Kucirkova, 2018; Purba, 2021; Rahmawati, 2022; Sayu, 2023).

The generalization of the results shows that the most productive strategy for the development of children's literature is the formation of a hybrid model that provides a synergy of the cognitive

advantages of traditional reading and the innovative potential of digital technologies, where this approach creates the prerequisites for preserving deep reading competencies in the conditions of the dominance of the multimedia environment and meets the modern requirements of educational and cultural development.

## Conclusion

As a result of the study, it was established that modern children's literature in the 21st century is undergoing a complex transformation from traditional paper publications to a multimedia-integrated reading experience. It was established that the transition from a traditional paper book to interactive multimedia formats leads to the formation of a new reading experience, in which the text is integrated with audiovisual, gamified and interactive components, providing multimodal perception and variable strategies for constructing narrative trajectories. The study showed that digital resources can increase children's motivation and engagement, promote autonomy, creativity, and subjectivity, as well as provide individualization of the learning process and expand access to literary content. At the same time, excessive use of multimedia formats can lead to fragmentation of attention, reduce the depth of understanding of the text, and limit traditional reading competencies.

The practical significance of the study lies in demonstrating the possibilities of integrating traditional and digital formats of children's literature to form a hybrid reading model. Such a model provides an optimal balance between in-depth analytical perception of paper books and innovative multimedia engagement, promotes the development of the child's cognitive, emotional, and social competencies, and ensures effective adaptation to the modern information environment.

Further research may be aimed at analyzing the specific mechanisms of the influence of interactive and personalized digital resources on the formation of reading skills, cognitive strategies, and socio-emotional development of children of different ages, as well as at developing pedagogically sound methods for integrating multimedia technologies into the educational process.

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