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The Application of Manual-Digital Mixed Media Techniques in the Design of Picture Books for Children

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ABSTRACT

Picture storybooks play an important role in supporting children's literacy because they combine text, illustrations, colors, characters, and storylines in an engaging manner. However, the dominance of digital illustrations can create a uniform visual appearance and diminish the presence of natural textures typically found in manual artwork. This research aims to explain the application of manual-digital mixed media techniques in the design of a children's picture storybook entitled Bubu si Kelinci Imut. The research employs a design method with a qualitative descriptive approach conducted through three stages: pre-production, production, and post-production. The pre-production stage includes the development of story concepts, narratives, mood boards, character designs, media selection, and storyboards. The production stage involves creating sketches and applying manual coloring techniques using watercolor on watercolor paper, after which the illustrations are scanned at a resolution of 300 dpi and digitally processed using Procreate. The post-production stage includes the preparation of typography, cover design, layouts, page numbering, and book mockups using Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop. The design results demonstrate that the manual-digital mixed media technique can produce illustrated storybooks with natural visual textures, more expressive colors, organized layouts, and print-ready finishes. This approach provides an alternative method for children's book design by combining the tactile qualities of traditional media with the flexibility and efficiency of digital technology.

INTRODUCTION

Picture storybooks are an effective medium for delivering visual narratives and supporting children's literacy development by integrating writing, images, colors, characters, and storylines in an engaging manner (Allen et al., 2024; CAFEROĞLU, 2026; Elmiana & Shen, 2025; Pratama, 2025). Children's understanding of stories comes not only from text but also from their ability to interpret images, character expressions, and the harmony between visual elements and narratives. Through captivating illustrations, children's interest in reading can increase because images help them explore the story before they are able to fully comprehend the written text (Rusanti et al., 2025). This reinforces the argument that children are naturally more attracted to visual elements than written text, making images an initial gateway to comprehension (Lemong et al., 2023). Therefore, the visual components of storybooks play a role that precedes textual understanding because illustrations can convey atmosphere, conflict, character traits, and moral messages more quickly and effectively for children.

The process of creating illustrations has undergone significant development alongside advances in digital technology within the field of visual communication design. Previously, illustrators relied heavily on traditional manual techniques, such as pencils, ink, watercolors,

crayons, and collages; however, illustration workflows have increasingly shifted toward the use of digital devices, including drawing tablets, laptops, and design software. This transformation has occurred because digital technology provides greater convenience in sketching, coloring, revising, arranging compositions, and finalizing artworks. In visual communication design, digital transformation encourages the adoption of advanced design software and digital workflows that are more efficient, creative, and aligned with contemporary industry demands (Saputri, 2024). Several recent illustration practices demonstrate that visualization processes increasingly utilize applications such as Procreate, Adobe Illustrator, ibisPaint X, and Clip Studio Paint for creating digital sketches, applying colors, adding details, and developing final designs (Deanti et al., 2025; Sabila & Camelia, 2023; Susilo & Anggapuspa, 2024). Therefore, the children's book illustration industry today tends to be dominated by digital tools because they accelerate production processes, facilitate visual editing, and allow artworks to be adapted for both print and digital publications.

Despite providing high levels of efficiency, digital illustration trends have also introduced several challenges, including uniform visual styles, overly sterile appearances, and the loss of natural textures associated with manual artwork. In children's storybook design, this visual issue is particularly significant because children require not only accurate images but also visual stimulation that is expressive, warm, sensory-responsive, and capable of creating emotional connections with story content. Recent studies confirm that picture storybooks remain prominent educational media due to their effectiveness in supporting children's cognitive, social, emotional, literacy, and numeracy development (Khansa, 2025; Sara et al., 2025). However, technically polished digital illustrations alone are insufficient. To maintain children's attention, illustrations should include distinctive characters, rich textures, cheerful visual elements, and unique appearances. Therefore, a design approach is needed that integrates the practicality of digital technology with the warmth of manual aesthetics.

To address these visual needs, one relevant approach is the mixed media technique. This technique is a visual design process that integrates various materials and methods into a single artwork, including pencils, watercolors, collages, paper textures, photography, and digital manipulation. In children's book illustration design, mixed media combines elements such as watercolor, pencil textures, paper textures, and digital processing techniques, including scanning, color adjustment, image manipulation (retouching), and layout arrangement within a unified composition. This strategy offers advantages by preserving the tactile, organic, and spontaneous qualities of hand-drawn elements while utilizing the accuracy, speed, and practicality of digital tools.

Several previous studies have examined children's storybook design from various perspectives. For example, Sara et al. (2025) developed gardening-themed storybooks to support toddler development, while Khansa (2025) created storybooks aimed at improving letter and number recognition among children aged 5–6 years. In the digital field, Pasaka et al. (2022) designed storybook-based educational games to deliver moral messages, while Wulandari et al. (2024) examined children's book design trends that continue to adapt to readers' characteristics. However, these studies generally focus on story themes, educational media, visual styles, or the final outcomes of picture storybooks. Limited research specifically discusses the workflow and technical application of manual-digital mixed media techniques

within a single children's picture book design project, including manual media exploration, digitization of visual assets, illustration processing, and book layout preparation.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive documentation of the manual-digital mixed media workflow within a single children's picture book design project, beginning with manual sketching and watercolor application, followed by scanning and digitization, digital refinement using Procreate, and final layout and mockup preparation using Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize story themes, educational outcomes, or visual styles, this research provides a detailed technical approach demonstrating how manual and digital techniques can be systematically integrated to produce a print-ready children's book while maintaining the natural texture and warmth of watercolor and benefiting from the flexibility and precision of digital editing.

Based on this background, this research focuses on the application of manual-digital mixed media techniques in designing children's picture storybooks. The research problem is formulated as follows: how is the process of applying manual-digital mixed media techniques in the design of children's picture storybooks? The purpose of this research is to explain the design process of picture storybooks using manual-digital mixed media techniques, including manual visual exploration, scanning or digitization, digital processing, coloring, page composition, and final book design. Furthermore, this study aims to demonstrate that the combination of manual and digital techniques can serve as an alternative approach for creating children's book illustrations with rich textures, production flexibility, and strong visual appeal.

This research provides both academic and practical contributions. Academically, it enriches the literature on illustration and visual communication design by presenting a replicable case study of mixed media application in children's book design and providing a reference for future studies on hybrid illustration techniques. Practically, it offers illustrators, designers, and students a structured workflow for combining manual and digital methods to produce children's books that are visually rich, expressive, and efficient. Additionally, the resulting picture storybook can function as an engaging educational medium that supports children's literacy and character development through moral values related to self-confidence, courage, and friendship.

METHOD

This research used a design method with a qualitative descriptive approach. This method was selected because the research focused on the process of designing children's picture storybooks using manual-digital mixed media techniques. A qualitative approach was appropriate for explaining the design process, from concept development to the visualization of the final design outcomes (Khansa, 2025).

The pre-production stage involved preparing the story concept, narrative, mood board, character design, media selection, and storyboard. At this stage, the researchers also determined which visual elements would be created manually and which would be developed digitally.

The production stage represented the main application of the mixed media technique. The process began with creating manual illustrations using watercolor on watercolor paper. After completion, the illustrations were scanned at a resolution of 300 dpi to preserve the watercolor textures and details during digital processing. The scanned illustrations were then

processed using Procreate for color enhancement, detail refinement, and integration of illustration elements.

The post-production stage focused on finalizing the illustrated storybook design, including the development of the front and back covers, content page layouts, text placement, typographic arrangement, margin adjustments, and book mockup creation as a simulation of the final product.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of this study is in the form of a children's picture book design made using manual-digital mixed media techniques. The design process is carried out through three stages, namely pre-production, production, and post-production. In designing a picture storybook, stages such as concepts, sketches, *storyboards*, color selection, and finalization of illustrations are important because they help to unify the story with the visual appearance (Nurdilah & Purba, 2024).

Pre-Production

In the pre-production stage, the results obtained are in the form of story concepts, narratives, *mood* boards, character design, media selection, and *storyboards*. This stage is important because picture storybooks not only contain text, but also require visual elements such as colors, characters, narrative, and visual effects that support the content of the story. (Kharismatuzzahra & Daniar, 2024)

1. Story and Narrative Concept

The picture storybook Bubu the Cute Rabbit is designed with a left-page format containing narrative text and the right page containing illustrations so that the relationship between the story and the picture looks clearer, more interesting, and makes it easier for children to understand the content of the reading. The story focuses on themes of self-acceptance, courage, friendship, and self-confidence through the main character of Bubu, a rabbit cub who is cheerful, cute, and loved by his family, but feels inferior because he has a different physical shape from the other rabbits. The storyline is arranged in a simple and sequential manner, starting from the introduction of the character of Bubu, the emergence of conflict when Bubu gets ridicule from his friends, to the presence of Rion, a brave lioness, as a supporting figure who defends Bubu and helps Bubu understand that differences are not a shortcoming. At the end of the story, Bubu begins to accept himself and realizes that every creature has a uniqueness that deserves to be grateful. The narrative in this book uses simple, communicative, and easy-to-understand language for children, then visualized through illustrations that are adapted to the atmosphere of each page, ranging from cheerful, sad, tense, to warm and happy return. Through the combination of narratives and illustrations, this book is expected to help children understand the moral message about the importance of self-confidence, self-acceptance, not being easily influenced by negative words, and appreciating differences in daily life. (Berliani and Main, 2025; Purnawarman & Resmisari , 2025)

2. Moodboard



Figure 1. Moodboard
Source: Compiled by the researcher from visual references collected via Pinterest (2024)

Moodboards are made as a visual reference in designing picture storybooks that contain a collection of visual references such as colors, textures, character shapes, illustration styles, and story atmospheres that are used to maintain the consistency of the design appearance. *The moodboard* is used as a guide before getting into the sketching, character design, and final illustration stages. In this design, (Febrian et al., 2025) *moodboard* references are searched through *the Pinterest* application.

3. Character Design



Figure 2. Bubu and Rion Character Design
Source: Author's illustration (2024)

The character design is made based on the story concept and *mood board* that has been prepared. The Bubu figure is designed as a small rabbit with a round body, long ears, big eyes, and a cheerful expression to display a cute, soft, and friendly impression for children. Meanwhile, the character of Rion is designed as a lioness cub with a round face, adult lion-like hair/mane, warm brown color, and a confident expression. The character shapes are made simple and expressive so that they are easily recognizable and in accordance with the style of children's picture books. In designing children's illustration books, character shapes, colors, and expressions need to be made attractive and in accordance with the characteristics of children's readers. (Wulandari et al., 2024)

4. Media selection

The medium used in designing the illustration is *640 gsm or 300 lb A5 watercolor paper with* landscape orientation. In the watercolor illustration process, the selection of *watercolor paper* is important because the type of surface and thickness of the paper can affect the color strokes as well as the texture of the illustration. (Styoudin & Backpacks, 2024)

5. *Storyboard*

A storyboard is an initial visual design that contains the sequence of scenes in the story. *Storyboards* are used to help determine the plot of the page, the composition of the images, the position of the text, the characters' expressions, and the atmosphere of each scene before the final illustration is created. In picture storybook design, *storyboards* are important because they can give an overview of how the story will be presented visually. In this design, (Kharismatuzzahra & Daniar, 2024) *the storyboard* is digitally drawn using the *Procreate application* to make the process of revising, setting the composition, and adjusting the page easier.

Production

The results obtained at this stage are in the form of manual illustrations using pencils and watercolors on *watercolor paper*. Illustration sketches are made based on *the storyboard* that has been compiled in the previous stage. Watercolor techniques were chosen because they can produce soft colors, natural textures, and visual impressions that are close to the child's world. After the manual illustration is completed, the work is scanned using *a scanner* with a resolution of 300 dpi, and then the illustration is digitally processed using *Procreate*.

1. Sketch



Figure 3. Sketch
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

Sketch illustrations are made manually using pencils on *watercolor* paper based on a pre-arranged storyboard. The sketching process also becomes a space for form exploration as illustrators can try out a variety of possible lines, poses, and expressions before the image is locked for the coloring stage. In designing children's illustrations, simple, expressive, and easily recognizable character shapes are important to help children visually understand the characters and the atmosphere of the story (Wulandari et al., 2024).

2. Manual Coloring

In manual coloring, the illustrations that have been sketched are colored using *Sakura Koi Watercolor* on *watercolor* paper. Coloring is done by combining *wet on wet* and *dry on wet techniques* so that the illustration has a firm, spontaneous, and more vivid color character. Watercolor techniques such as *wet on wet* and *wet on dry* can produce different visual effects, ranging from soft gradations, color distribution, to more controlled stroke details, making them suitable for building texture variations in manual illustrations. The colors used refer to the (Nurramadhani, 2022) *color palette* in *the moodboard*, which are striking, bright, and warm colors so that the illustration looks cheerful and in accordance with the child's visual world. The choice of bright colors is important in children's book illustrations because it can stimulate

a sense of fun, build a cheerful atmosphere, and help children be more interested in following the story (Sutawijaya, 2024).



Figure 4. Manual Coloring Results
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

Once the manual illustration is complete, the next step is to scan the work using a *Brother DCPT426W printer* with a resolution of 300 dpi to preserve the details and texture of watercolors, use full color mode, and save the *scanned* results in PNG or TIFF format to keep the visual quality high before proceeding to digital processing in the design app.

3. Digital Coloring

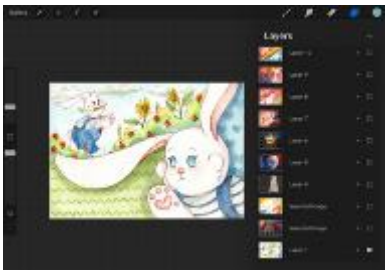


Figure 5. Digital Coloring Process Using *Procreate*
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

In the digital coloring stage, the *results of the manual illustration scan* are processed using *the Procreate* application as an advanced process to improve the visual appearance. The manual coloring that has been created is maintained, then strengthened by adding color, emphasizing colors, tidying up details, and providing visual effects such as shadows, highlights, textures, and lighting to make the illustration look more lively. This process is in line with the digital illustration stages which include basic coloring, shading, lighting, *finishing*, and adding texture as a visual finish. (Sabila & Camelia, 2023)



Figure 6. Digital Coloring Results
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

At this stage, illustrations are also made for the text page using three main colors that are adjusted to the illustration page, so that the appearance of the book has color unity and visual consistency.

Post-production

Post-production, the illustrations that have gone through the digital coloring process are then compiled into the final design of the picture storybook. This process includes the preparation of *the front and back* covers, **the arrangement of** *the layout of the content pages*, the *selection of fonts***,** the positioning of the text, the adjustment of margins, and the preparation of *a mockup of the book as an overview of the final product.*

1. Typographers

The typography aspect of this illustrated storybook uses two different types *of fonts*, namely *Fredoka* for the title and *Poppins* for the narrative text.

Title



Figure 7. *Fredoka Fountain*
Source: Google Fonts

Fredoka font was chosen for the title because the shape of the letters is round, thick, simple, and playful, so that it is able to give the impression of cheerfulness, friendliness, and in accordance with the characters of children's illustrated storybooks. The choice *of font* is also in line with research that explains that children's illustration books tend to use (Wulandari et al., 2024) *fonts* that are easy to read, simple, not rigid, and *playful* to support readability while attracting children's attention.

Text

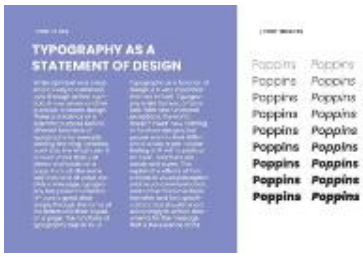


Figure 8. *Font Poppins*
Source: Google Fonts

The choice *of Poppins font* for narrative text is because it has clean, simple, modern, and non-decorative font characters, making it convenient to use for longer reading texts. In children's picture story books, narrative text needs to be easy to read so that children can follow the content of the story without being disturbed by too complicated letters. *Poppins* also includes *a sans serif* font with a neat and balanced shape, so it looks light when combined with brightly colored illustrations. This selection is in line with research that uses sans serif (São Paulo & Patria, 2024) *fonts* for the content of the module because it gives a relaxed and light impression when read, and lists *Poppins* as one of the *fonts* used in typography design.

2. *Book cover*

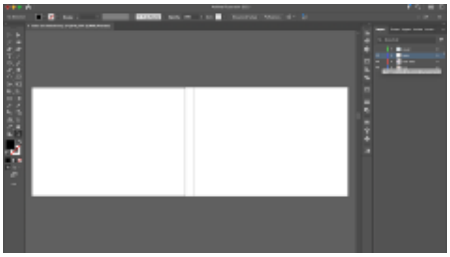


Figure 9. Canvas *Adobe Illustrator*
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

The creation *of* this illustrated storybook cover was done using *Adobe Illustrator* by preparing *a canvas* in three sizes, namely A5 (14.8 × 21 cm) for the front page, A5 (14.8 × 21 cm) for the back page, and 14.8 × 2 cm for the center or spine.



Figure 10. Visual Assets *Cover* Books
Source: Author's illustration (2024)

After the size of the work is determined, the design process continues by compiling *the cover* based on the sketches that have been made before so that the final result remains in accordance with the visual concept of the story. The main asset used on the *cover* is taken from the illustration on page 1, which is to remove the background and leave only the Bubu character

as the main focus of the display. The choice of the main character on the cover is done so that *the cover* can represent the content of the story while strengthening the visual identity of the book.



Figure 11. Manufacturing Process *Cover* Books
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

The light blue background was chosen because it gives a cheerful, soft, and attractive impression to children, in line with the visual character of children's illustration books which generally use bright and fun colors to attract the reader's attention from the beginning Furthermore, (Wulandari et al., 2024). *the cover design* is given an additional watercolor *paper* texture downloaded from the online asset provider's website to reinforce the manual-digital impression and provide a more natural visual feel. This step is in line with the view that the visual elements on the cover, such as the main illustration, color, composition, and texture touches, need to be arranged in an attractive and balanced manner so that *the cover* not only serves as a protector of the book, but also as a visual identity that is able to build the reader's interest in the content of the story. (Prima & Patria, 2024)



Figure 12. Results *Cover* Books
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

3. *Layout*

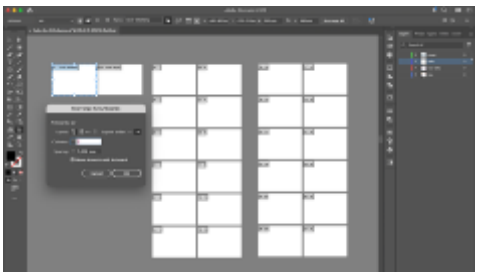


Figure 13. *Layout* Canvas
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

The layout of the picture storybook Bubu the Cute Rabbit is done using *Adobe Illustrator* by creating an A5-sized artboard of 24 pages according to the content of the story that has been prepared beforehand. Each artboard is then arranged automatically using the Rearrange All Artboards feature to make the page arrangement look neat and facilitate the process of arranging the contents of the book.



Figure 14. Process *Layout*
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

In this layout design , odd pages are placed on the left side and even pages on the right side, with the concept of the left page containing narrative text and the right page containing illustrations. Once the artboard arrangement is complete, the narrative text on the odd pages uses a *size 20* Poppins Medium font, with a center margin to provide a comfortable and consistent reading space on each page of text. The page number is consistently placed in the same position on each page of text using *the Fredoka* Bold font size 25, this arrangement is repeated throughout the odd page.

4. Product results

A mockup is a visual representation of a design that displays the final look in a realistic form before it is physically produced, such as an A5 book mockup that illustrates how pages, text, and illustrations appear in print. Mockups help designers and teams evaluate aesthetic, layout, and interface aspects so as to allow for more effective communication of ideas and revisions before the final stages of production. (Haqqi et al., 2024)

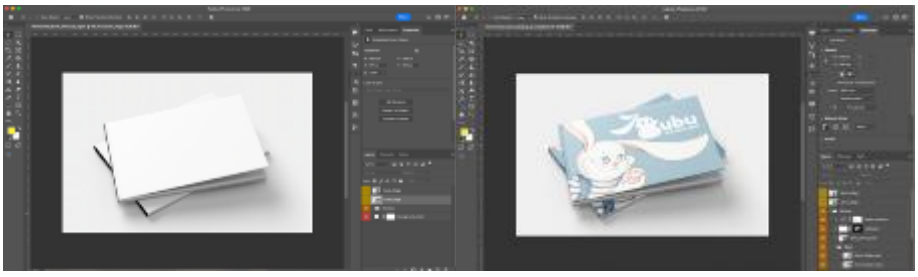


Figure 15. Process *Mockup*
Source: Mockup template downloaded from free online resource; edited by the researcher using Adobe Photoshop (2024)

Mockups can be downloaded from free examples on the internet, such as A5 book mockups, to make design visualization easier. Once *the mockup* is selected, editing is done using *Adobe Photoshop*, by pasting the text page design and pre-made illustrations onto the mockup artboard. This technique makes it easy to organize visually, shows how the book will look as a whole, and gives a professional feel when presented.



Figure 16. Results *Mockup*
Source: Author's documentation (2024)

After the entire design of the picture storybook of Bubu the Cute Rabbit is completed, including narrative text, illustrations, *layout*, and visualization through *mockups*, the design product is considered ready for printing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the design process that was carried out, the application of manual-digital mixed media techniques in the picture storybook Bubu si Kelinci Imut was able to produce visual designs that were attractive, expressive, and aligned with children's characteristics. The design process was conducted through three main stages: pre-production, production, and post-production. The pre-production stage produced story concepts, narratives, mood boards, character designs, media selection, and storyboards as the foundation for visual development. The production stage involved manual sketching and watercolor coloring on watercolor paper, followed by a digitization process through 300 dpi scanning and digital processing using Procreate. Furthermore, the post-production stage included the preparation of typography, book covers, page layouts, and mockups to simulate the final appearance of the product. The combination of manual and digital techniques successfully maintained the natural texture and warm qualities of traditional media while utilizing the flexibility of digital technology for refining colors, details, composition, and page layouts. The final design resulted in an A5 picture storybook consisting of 24 pages with a cover visualized through a mockup and prepared as a potential printed children's reading medium that is engaging, communicative, and conveys moral values related to confidence, courage, friendship, and self-acceptance.

Based on the design process and findings of this study, it is recommended that illustrators and visual communication designers consider applying manual-digital mixed media techniques as an alternative approach to children's book illustration in order to achieve a distinctive visual identity that combines natural textures with digital flexibility. Further experimentation with various traditional media, such as colored pencils, crayons, or acrylic paints, alongside different digital platforms, may expand creative possibilities and visual variations in future projects. Additionally, the resulting picture storybook should undergo readability and appeal testing with the target audience of children aged 4–8 years to evaluate its effectiveness in delivering moral messages and supporting early literacy development. The book is also recommended for further publication in printed or digital formats to reach a broader audience and contribute to children's literacy and character education in Indonesia.

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