

Aesthetic Considerations of Space and Reading Culture: A Qualitative Analysis of the Redesign of Literacy Environments on Student Learning Motivation

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Abstract

The cultivation of a robust literacy culture in secondary education is frequently hindered by stagnant, uninspiring physical environments that fail to spark student interest. This study analyses how the aesthetic redecoration of literacy spaces influences students reading motivation and learning engagement at State Junior High School 1 Galesong Selatan. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the Research was conducted over four months, utilizing participatory observation, in-depth interviews with 30 purposively selected students and educators, and extensive documentation to capture participants lived experiences within a transformed aesthetic ecosystem. The results demonstrate that the strategic integration of visual arts including thematic murals, ergonomic furniture arrangements, and the application of color psychology successfully transitioned the literacy room from a sterile facility into an "aesthetic sanctuary." Findings reveal a profound transformation in students' perceptions and behaviors, characterized by a natural inclination toward increased visit frequency, prolonged engagement with reading materials, and heightened institutional pride. The discussion highlights that aesthetics serve as a silent pedagogical agent, lowering affective filters and rebranding reading as a creative social activity rather than a rigid obligation. This study concludes that "Aesthetic Pedagogy" offers an innovative framework for educational reform, emphasizing that physical space is a dynamic participant in the learning process.

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Introduction

The development of a robust literacy culture constitutes a fundamental pillar of modern educational systems, serving as a prerequisite for enhancing cognitive competence and civic engagement in the 21st century. Literacy is no longer perceived merely as a technical ability to decode text but as a multifaceted process involving emotional, social, and contextual engagement that shapes an individual's behavior (Putri et al., 2023). In the formal education landscape, particularly in junior high schools, the school environment serves as a secondary ecosystem that shapes literacy acquisition beyond the family sphere (Hwang et al., 2020). Ideally, a school should provide a stimulating atmosphere where students feel an intrinsic drive to explore information and engage deeply with various literary forms. Recent literature emphasizes that the physical and psychological dimensions of the learning environment must coexist to support national literacy movements, ensuring that students do not merely read by obligation but by genuine interest (Rusniasa et al., 2021).

The aesthetic dimension of the learning environment is increasingly recognized as a vital catalyst for student engagement. A well-designed educational space incorporating ergonomic furniture and visually appealing elements significantly contributes to students' academic focus (Zainuddin et al., 2007). Beyond mere decoration, the integration of art in educational facilities serves as a pedagogical tool that shapes students' psychological states. This synergy is essential for maintaining a high-quality learning culture, especially in the digital era, when students are increasingly distracted by screen-based entertainment (Emka, 2025; Kadir et al., 2022; Wicaksono et al., 2025).

However, a significant discrepancy remains between the ideal literacy environment and the reality observed in many Indonesian public schools, including State Junior High School 1 Galesong Selatan. Despite national mandates, many reading facilities continue to feature monotonous designs and rigid layouts, contributing to a persistent decline in student reading motivation (Permatasari et al., 2024). The main Research problem lies in the failure of conventional school management to recognize that the physical transformation of a space is as critical as the provision of book collections (Rofi et al., 2025). Critically, this "sensory gap" stems from a lack of understanding regarding how the physical environment mediates the psychological connection between the learner and the learning material.

The transition from identifying low literacy to proposing aesthetic redecoration requires a rigorous analytical framework rather than purely advocacy-based solutions. This study engages with the theory of Place Attachment, which posits that the emotional bond between an individual and a specific setting significantly influences their behavior and commitment within that space (Sari et al., 2024). When a literacy room lacks aesthetic resonance, students fail to develop an attachment to the library, viewing it as a foreign or purely functional zone. Furthermore, the principles of Biophilic Design which integrate natural patterns, colors, and light into human environments suggest that aesthetic interventions like murals and organic spatial arrangements can reduce stress and enhance cognitive performance by satisfying the innate human need to connect with nature. By applying these theories, aesthetic redecoration is analyzed not merely as a cosmetic fix but as a strategic reconstruction of the emotional bond between the student and the space (Pasyah et al., 2025; Pattaufi et al., 2025).

While "Reading Corners" have been widely adopted in Indonesia, many of these initiatives lack a deep understanding of how interior aesthetics influence student psychology. Current efforts often result in temporary interest that fades quickly because the space does not undergo a fundamental aesthetic revaluation. There is an urgent need to fill the gap in qualitative understanding regarding how the redecoration of literacy spaces specifically through the lens of art and design can fundamentally alter students' perceptions. The unknown element remains the specific qualitative response of junior high school students to an environment that integrates local artistic elements to boost their learning motivation (Fitrawansyah et al., 2025; Pramesti & Camellia, 2024; Zainuddin et al., 2007).

Filling this gap is essential because the current pedagogical discourse often treats "space" as a neutral container rather than an active participant in the learning process. By focusing on redecoration as a qualitative intervention, this Research aims to demonstrate that modest physical changes can yield significant pedagogical shifts. This approach is particularly relevant for schools in coastal regions where local wisdom can be harnessed to create a unique and inclusive literacy ecosystem. Understanding the "how" and "why" behind the success of aesthetic interventions will provide school administrators with a cost-effective yet impactful model for educational reform (Kadir, 2019; Kadir et al., 2024).

The primary objective of this Research is to analyze how the aesthetic redecoration of the literacy room influences students' reading culture and learning motivation at State Junior High School 1 Galesong Selatan. The novelty of this study lies in its qualitative-descriptive approach to "aesthetic intervention" as a primary driver of literacy, moving beyond the quantitative models commonly found in the existing literature (Pratiwi et al., 2025). The Research urgency is high, given the national priority to improve literacy scores through creative and locally relevant strategies. By integrating global theories of Place Attachment and Biophilic Design with local artistic practices, this work serves as a foundational framework for future Research on "Aesthetic Pedagogy," offering a blueprint for fostering a generation of motivated lifelong learners.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a phenomenological orientation to examine how spatial aesthetics influence students' reading culture at State Junior High School 1 Galesong Selatan, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The research site was purposively selected due to the prior underutilization of its literacy space, which was attributed to limited visual appeal and functional comfort. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling and consisted of 30 students who regularly used the literacy room, the school principal, and teachers responsible for literacy activities. Data were collected using participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, including photographs, design sketches, and attendance records, to capture both behavioral changes and subjective experiences before and after the redecoration. The aesthetic intervention followed a creative design cycle planning, implementation, and evaluation while operationalizing Monroe Beardsley's aesthetic principles of unity, complexity, and intensity through coherent color schemes, varied visual and material textures, and strategically placed focal elements supported by optimized lighting. Throughout

the research process, reflexivity was maintained to mitigate potential bias arising from the researchers' dual role as designers and observers, using reflective journals and peer debriefing. Data analysis followed the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with themes focusing on aesthetic perception, comfort, and motivational change. Research validity was strengthened through methodological triangulation, while ethical considerations were ensured through informed consent, confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw at any stage.

Results and Discussion

Results

The primary data from the four-month field study at State Junior High School 1 Galesong Selatan provide a detailed account of the spatial and behavioral transformations resulting from the aesthetic intervention. The results are presented based on the direct evidence gathered through participatory observation, interview transcripts, and archival documentation of the literacy room's physical evolution.

Spatial Transformation: From Sterile to Aesthetic Sanctuary

The physical history of the literacy room began as a "sterile" environment, characterized by monochrome white walls with peeling paint, rigid wooden shelving units, and a lack of focal points. Observations noted that this atmosphere projected a formal, almost intimidating aura that discouraged informal student presence. Following the redecoration, the space underwent a profound visual shift.



Figure 1. Visualization of the Literacy Space at State Junior High School 1 Galesong

Figure 1 illustrates the "Before" and "After" conditions, highlighting the transition to an "aesthetic sanctuary". The "After" condition features thematic murals depicting local coastal motifs, a harmonized color palette of warm blues and earth tones, and the introduction of ergonomic "reading nooks" that replace the previous rigid seating.

Shifting Student Perceptions and Behaviors

Interview transcripts reveal a significant change in how students define the literacy room. Before the intervention, students frequently described the library as "boring" (*membosankan*) or "narrow" (*sempit*). Post-redecoration, the vocabulary shifted toward "cool" (*keren*), "comfortable" (*nyaman*), and "inspiring" (*menginspirasi*). One student participant

(Student A, Grade 8) stated during an interview: "Previously, I only came here if the teacher forced me. Now, the room feels like a café; I feel proud just being seen here with my friends."

Observation logs corroborated these verbal testimonies. Data from the attendance logs showed a consistent increase in daily visitors, with students often utilizing the room during break times for non-mandatory reading. This activity was nearly non-existent in the "Before" phase. Researchers observed students naturally gravitating toward the mural-decorated walls, often engaging in spontaneous discussions while sitting in the new ergonomic nooks. The space facilitated a shift from "individual isolation" to "communal engagement," with the room's visual beauty catalyzing social interaction around books.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that aesthetic redecoration serves as a potent mediator in the construction of a school's literacy culture. By separating the primary data from theoretical synthesis, it becomes clear that the aesthetic qualities of the room did not merely "trigger" a mechanical response, but rather facilitated a deeper emotional connection between the students and the act of reading.

The Mediation of Space and Motivation

The findings suggest that aesthetics function as a silent pedagogical agent that lowers students' "affective filters". When students like Student A perceive the room as "cool" or "inspiring," the psychological barrier to engaging with academic materials is reduced. This mediation is consistent with the theory of Place Attachment, in which the transformation from a "sterile" facility to an "aesthetic sanctuary" enabled students to develop a sense of belonging. The visual "intensity" of the murals as operationalized through Beardsley's theory provided the necessary sensory engagement to counteract the boredom typically associated with conventional school settings.

Synthesis with Existing Literature

The transition from individual isolation to communal engagement aligns with the Research of (Listyaningrum et al., 2023), who found that room decoration is a vital tool for fostering enthusiasm in early and secondary education. Furthermore, the students' heightened sense of institutional pride and the "café-like" atmosphere described in the interviews align with (Zainuddin et al., 2007) findings on the role of class facilities in increasing motivation. While previous studies often emphasize the quantity of book collections, this Research confirms that the aesthetic quality of the environment mediates students' willingness to access those collections in the first place.

Operational Success of Aesthetic Categories

The success of the "Unity" and "Complexity" categories in the redecoration phase proved essential. The Unity of the coastal-themed murals provided a culturally relevant context that resonated with the Galesong community. Meanwhile, the Complexity of the ergonomic arrangements ensured that the room remained functional for readers of all types from those seeking quiet contemplation to those engaging in collaborative peer discussion. By creating an environment that satisfies both sensory and functional needs, the school has established a sustainable "Aesthetic Pedagogy" that can be replicated in other regional contexts.

Conclusion

The qualitative exploration of the literacy room redecoration at State Junior High School 1 Galesong Selatan demonstrates that spatial aesthetics serve as a critical, foundational catalyst for revitalizing students' reading interest. This study concludes that an intentional integration of visual arts characterized by thematic murals and ergonomic configurations facilitates a profound transformation of the learning environment into an "aesthetic sanctuary. However, the findings also suggest that these aesthetic interventions do not function in isolation; instead, they work in tandem with the availability of quality reading materials and active teacher engagement to foster a sustainable literacy culture. The transition to an aesthetically charged space significantly lowers students' affective filters, making them more receptive to the school's academic resources. Theoretically, this Research contributes to the "Aesthetic Pedagogy" framework by illustrating how physical environments mediate learners' emotional connection to educational goals. Practically, it offers a cost-effective blueprint for school administrators to treat facility management as a strategic pedagogical tool. Moving forward, this study acknowledges that while aesthetics are a primary driver for initial engagement, long-term literacy success remains dependent on a holistic approach that balances physical comfort with intellectual stimulation. Future Research should further examine how these spatial improvements can be integrated with digital literacy tools and community-based programs to ensure an inclusive and resilient educational ecosystem.

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Authors' Note

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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