



Features of Islamic Children's Books by Young Authors: A Case Study of Books Published in Indonesia

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Abstract—Children's literature in Indonesia has unique characteristics reflecting its culture, values and social condition. This study aims to investigate how Indonesian Islamic children's books written by young authors fulfill the standard features of children's literature. The data of this study are selected ten children's books published by two national Islamic publishers in Indonesia. Deploying content analysis, the data are analyzed exploring their literary fulfilments of children's literature features. The results reveal that Islamic books written by young authors fit the requirements to be categorized as children's literature. Moreover, such books has also promoted Islamic teaching by providing the nuance of Islamic practice in children's daily life.

Keywords: *children's books; Islam; young authors; Indonesia*

I. INTRODUCTION

The gate to flourishing of print media and books in Indonesia has been opened since reformasi era in 1998. Books once banned, for example those that expressed ideas that ran counter to President Soeharto's ideology, can be easily found in the market. Concomitantly, there has been a concerted effort to improve children's reading habits and promote reading generally by establishing moving libraries and reading clubs. The Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education, as well as non-governmental organizations, and book lovers generally, have committed to and supported these efforts. Further signs of the flourishing print industry are book fairs which, since 2000, have been held annually in big cities around Indonesia. At these events, most of the stalls feature children's books. At the same time, Islamic book fairs are also held regularly by the Islamic publishers and attract much attention. [1]), researching this trend, noted that in the last two decades Islamic publishers in particular have significantly developed, with more variety in their range, and better distribution providing easier access to such specialist publications. A development of specific interest to this research is emergence of Islamic children's story books whose authors are creative and imaginative child writers.

Children's literature writers are not only adults, children have also been good at making stories with varied themes. If we go to a bookstore, we will find special shelves displaying children's literature in the form of novels, short stories, or illustrated stories with various titles. Reading is written, read, and enjoyed by children, adding to the diversity of the literary world. adds to the diversity of the literary world. KKP was the very first published books written by young author, in December 2003. The author who first carried the KKP series is Izzati at the age of 8 years. The presence of KKP written by these children's authors is a means for them to express their feelings, ideas, opinions, and life experiences through language. the author's life experiences through language. In contrast to people, children have their own "own" style and language. As a result, children's books written by children are different from children's books written by adults. adults. This is a special attraction for the author to dive deeper, especially in terms of exploring the narrative structure and genre of KKP children's literature. and children's literature genre of KKP. Some publishers, such as Lintang by Indiva and Dar! Mizan, have even published novels written by children. Lintang by Indiva named them little writers of indonesia *Penulis cilik Indonesia* (henceforth PECI) while Dar! Mizan named the work as the littler have works *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya* (henceforth KKP).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. What makes children's literature

Children's literature in Indonesia is an important part of the national literary tradition that has a long and rich history. Children's literature plays an important role in shaping character and introducing children to cultural values and literacy. Indonesian children's literature combines elements of local culture with educational moral messages. Therefore, it is important to understand the characteristics and requirements of children's literature in Indonesia in order to produce quality works in this genre. Children's literature according to [2] is a work of literature that makes children the center of the story. The content of children's literature is in the form of children's experiences and knowledge that can be reached and understood by children. Children's literature can tell stories about anything, even things that adults think is absurd, such as stories about animals that can talk and behave like humans [3]. [4] argues that children's literature can be defined as literary works that appeal to the interests, needs and preferences of children readers, and appeal to children's hearts. Children's literature is generally delivered in an interesting format, for example, storybooks full of interesting pictures, some are square, apple-shaped. Children's literature can also refer to literature written for and about children ages 0-13 years [5]

Children's literature in Indonesia has specific characteristics and requirements, reflecting local culture and values. Children's literature plays an important role in developing children's reading interest and character. Therefore, writers and publishers must understand these characteristics in order to produce quality works in this genre. With a deep understanding of the characteristics and requirements of children's literature in Indonesia, we can continue to enrich and expand literary works that captivate children. The characteristics embrace the followings:

- 1 Appropriateness to the Age of the Reader: Children's literature in Indonesia should be appropriate to the age of the target reader. Books for preschoolers will differ in style and language when compared to books for children who can already read well [6][7]
- 2 Traceability: Children's literature in Indonesia should be easily accessible to young readers. This means that works should be available in libraries, bookstores, and in formats that are easily accessible to parents and teachers. [8]
- 3 Good quality illustrations: Children's literature books in Indonesia often come with illustrations that support the story. The illustrations should be of high quality and appealing to children. [12]
- 4 Appropriate language: One of the main characteristics of children's literature is the use of language that is appropriate to the understanding and age of the target readers [8][9]. According [10] in his book "Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books," the language in children's literature should support children's understanding and invite them to interact with the text. "The use of language in children's literature should support children's understanding and excite their imagination".
- 5 Relevant characters and conflicts: Children's literature often presents characters that children can identify with and conflicts that are relevant to their lives [11][12]. [13], in "The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction," argues that characters and conflicts in children's literature should not be too complex or present problems that are too difficult for young readers to understand. "Characters and conflicts in children's literature should be close to children's experience and understanding".
- 6 Positive moral messages: Children's literature often contains positive moral messages, such as the values of friendship, honesty, and cooperation [8][14]. [15], in "Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions," explains the importance of children's literature in shaping children's ethical and moral

understanding. "Children's literature can help shape children's moral understanding through stories that promote positive values".

C. The Position of Children's Authors of children's literature

The existence of KPK has brought a fresh spirit to Indonesian children's literature. However, the definition of children's literature as literary works read by children under the supervision and direction of adults, and the authors must be adults [7], raises questions about the status of KPK (written by children) as a form of children's literature. However, Irina's (2014) suggests that children's writers can be recognized as writers of children's literature. This is apparent when Irina raises questions about the validity of the term "children's literature," given that the majority of authors are adults. However, very few works of children's literature are written by children and young people [9]. Discussions about the essence of children's literature have until now grown deeply in the literary tradition.

In general, children's literature is known as literary works that explore the world of children by involving children's characters in the story. A sharp polarization has emerged between supporters and opponents. The definers believe that the essence of children's literature can be sought and formulated. On the other hand, naysayers argue that precisely defining children's literature is difficult because any proposed criteria can be qualified by examples of existing writing [16]. Despite the debate on definitions, the consensus is that the main issue in children's literature is the relationship between children and adults. This issue can be compared to colonization, where writers often regard child readers as beings who need education to become fully human. [17] argues that describing children as owners of children's literature is a mistake because the term implies that children own and control texts that are generally written, published, and sometimes read by adults. This issue is also relevant in the world of children's literature in Indonesia. [7] in her article entitled "Literature and Children:

In the process of writing children's literature, adults often impose their views on children. This is done to bring children into a version of civilization that is regulated and determined by adults. Looking at this aspect, the presence of KPK is a positive development. We should appreciate the honesty of the writers in sharing stories from their perspective with readers who are young, like the writers themselves. They are present as full children, as children's writers, and furthermore as children's literature. This situation opens up opportunities to not only read and understand what is often perceived as a child's world "made up" by adults through their childhood memories [10] We need to acknowledge that there are literary elements that are not always well-structured and logical in the KPK series. However, this can be explained by the child writers' limited understanding of literary elements. A different perspective may see this dimension as a way to reinforce the image of the "real" world that they construct according to their images and understanding of their environment. The following analysis will discuss the emotional narrative strategies used in the KPK series. To address the issue of ownership of children's literature as outlined above, the next section will compare children's literature written by adult authors.

III. METHOD

This research deploys a qualitative content analysis method. Content analysis refers to a technique used to categorize written or spoken material into similar categories [18]. Content analysis is considered effective for evaluating various types of communication materials including printed media such as articles, books, or manual [12]. The data for this research are 10 books written by young authors and published by two Islamic publishers in Indonesia. The books were selected based on the following justifications:

- (1) The books are written by children aged 10-12 years. This is because children in this age already have developed language skills which can be seen from their ability to express ideas into words. Thus, the literary works they write have been well presented, so that the depiction of events, plot arrangement, character depiction, and setting is also appropriate.
- (2) The books are published by publishers which consistently publish children's books by children's female authors for the period of last ten years 2010-2020.
- (3) The books are in the form of a novel. This could confirm the complete narrative structure of the stories.
- (4) The books are nationally distributed. This reinforces the readership validity, considering the availability of the books for larger scope of readers.
- (5) The literary genre of the children's books children is contemporary realist fiction. This is because this genre depicts the real life of the characters who are most similar to everyday life. The characters displayed are ordinary people, complete with life's problems. The story setting is a place known to readers such as schools, homes, parks, and other places close to children's lives. In addition, the events that occur are also common events in everyday life.

Those books are analyzed exploring the features referring to the characteristics of children's literature features to answer the question of the study whether or not Indonesian Islamic children's books written by young authors fulfill the standard features of children's literature.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The ten children's books published by two national Islamic publishers in Indonesia have presented the characteristics which fit the requirements of children's literature, which are of the followings:

1. Appropriateness to the age of the reader
The books are in the form of novel and address children aged 6-12 years old. This means the books are appropriate to the age of the target readers.
2. Traceability
The books are prevalently available in bookstores, either offline or online), and libraries. In addition, the format of the books uses children's books format in terms of the material and the layout design.
3. Good quality illustrations
Since the books are in the forms of novels, the illustration is not quite frequently provided. However, when presented, the illustration is appropriated with the visual presentation for children.
4. Appropriate language
The language used in the books is simple and clear, and support children's understanding of the book content. The stories are presented in short and simple sentences rather than the long and complex ones. In addition, the sentences rarely contain metaphoric expressions.
5. Relevant characters and conflicts
The books present relevant characters and conflicts to children. Since the novels selected are realist novel, meaning that the stories present slices of children's life in their daily basis, the characters in the novels mostly embrace people interacting with them at home, their family, and at school, their teachers and schoolmates. Some books present additional characters such as neighbors or relatives.
Further, the conflict in the stories are the kinds of young age conflicts such as the need to get teacher's attention more than friends, the need to be the most in groups, misunderstanding or miscommunication in the friendship and so on, all of which are solved in the resolution of the stories.
6. Positive moral messages
The books contain positive moral messages which include the values of obeying parents, friendship, honesty, hardworking and cooperation. Additionally, Islamic teachings and moral understanding are also promoted in the stories.

Islamic Children's Literature refers to a body of literary works that incorporate imaginative and fictional elements related to Muslim children, encompassing their cultures, civilizations, beliefs, and practices. The utilization and development of Islamic Children's Literature, particularly tailored for elementary and secondary school students, hold significant importance in addressing various challenges pertaining to the identity of Muslim youth. These challenges include combating racism, rectifying misrepresentations, addressing underrepresentation, and dispelling stereotypes associated with Muslim characters within general literature and educational materials. Additionally, it aims to counter the portrayal of Islam as a monolithic entity and combat Islamophobia.

In recent years, the landscape of children's literature has undergone a transformative shift, marked by a growing emphasis on narratives that embrace diversity and inclusivity, catering to the unique needs and interests of young readers. A noteworthy aspect of this evolution is the emergence of Islamic children's books written by young authors themselves. These literary works not only exemplify the expanding spectrum of children's literature but also signify a profound movement within the realm of Islamic literature. This paper explores the distinctive characteristics that define Islamic children's books authored by children and examines their contributions to Islamic education, representation, and cultural understanding.

Islamic children's literature plays a pivotal role in nurturing young minds by imparting values, ethics, and teachings that are integral to Islamic faith and culture. Many of the authors of these books are young writers themselves who aspire to instil a profound sense of spiritual connection and an understanding of Islamic principles from an early age. As [12] rightly argue, "Islamic children's literature offers a unique avenue for conveying religious teachings, moral values, and cultural heritage to the younger generation." The landscape of children's literature has witnessed a transformative shift in recent years, with an increasing emphasis on diverse and inclusive narratives that cater to the unique needs and interests of young readers. One notable facet of this evolution is the emergence of Islamic children's books authored by children themselves. These books not only reflect the

expanding spectrum of children's literature but also signify a profound movement within the Islamic literary domain.

Islamic children's literature plays an instrumental role in nurturing young minds with values, ethics, and teachings integral to Islamic faith and culture. Authors of these books, most of whom are young writers themselves, aim to instil a deep sense of spiritual connection and understanding of Islamic principles from an early age. [19] aptly point out, "Islamic children's literature offers a unique way to transmit religious teachings, moral values, and cultural heritage to the younger generation." Traditional Islamic children's literature, while immensely valuable, often lacked the direct perspective of children themselves. The emergence of young authors within this genre bridges this gap by presenting Islamic teachings through the lens of their own experiences and interpretations. By employing relatable narratives, characters, and language, these authors ensure that the moral and spiritual messages are conveyed in a way that resonates deeply with their peers. One of the notable features of Indonesian Islamic children's books written by young authors is their representing the realities of Muslim children in Indonesia and the inherent Indonesian cultural background.

[20] asserts, "Representation in Islamic children's literature is not merely about reflecting the diversity of Muslim identities, but also about fostering a sense of belonging and recognition among young readers." Authors belonging to the same age group as their readers have a unique advantage in accurately depicting the experiences and challenges faced by their peers. Their narratives often address contemporary issues, such as identity struggles, multiculturalism, and generational gaps, from an authentic perspective. This portrayal not only validates the experiences of young Muslim readers but also serves as a tool for building empathy and understanding among them.

Islamic children's books written by children's authors often transcend generational boundaries by infusing modern contexts and relatable themes into age-old Islamic teachings. Islam, as a faith, is rooted in tradition, but its application to the lives of contemporary children requires an innovative approach. Young authors achieve this by weaving Islamic values into narratives that mirror the challenges and joys of today's world. For instance, a young author might narrate a story of a Muslim child navigating friendship and peer pressure while adhering to Islamic values. By doing so, these authors make the teachings of Islam accessible and practical, ensuring that children can connect these teachings with their daily lives. This approach aligns with [21] who states that "connecting Islamic teachings to real-life scenarios enhances children's understanding and application of these principles."

Correspondingly, Islamic children's books authored by children exhibit a distinctive attribute of familiarity and approachability. These authors are adept at crafting narratives using language that mirrors the speech patterns and colloquialisms commonly used by their peers. This linguistic resonance engages young readers and sustains their interest, ultimately promoting a positive reading experience. Furthermore, the infusion of multimedia elements, such as illustrations, graphics, and interactive features, enhances the engagement factor. Modern technology allows young authors to experiment with different forms of storytelling, creating a multi-sensory experience that enriches the reader's understanding of Islamic concepts.

While traditional Islamic children's literature holds immense value, it often lacks the direct perspective of children themselves. The emergence of young authors within this genre bridges this gap by presenting Islamic teachings through the lens of their own experiences and interpretations. Through relatable narratives, characters, and language, these authors ensure that moral and spiritual messages are conveyed in a manner that deeply resonates with their peers.

V. CONCLUSION

Children's literature is a literary genre that has specific characteristics and requirements. Based on the view of literary theory, the characteristics of children's literature include appropriate language, relevant characters and conflicts, and positive moral messages. Meanwhile, the requirements of children's literature involve relevance to children's development and the use of illustrations that support the text. Understanding these characteristics and requirements is important for writers, publishers and educators who want to produce quality literature that appeals to young readers. Good children's literature can help shape children's understanding, values and imagination, which is a valuable investment in their literary and cultural future. The presence of children's literature works has been a new phenomenon in the development of Indonesian children's literature. These works have created a new tradition in the writing of children's literature. Children's literature is no longer only written by adults, but also by the children themselves. By being written by children, the description of the child's world will be more original, including the language expressions used. In addition, the child characters in the novel will provide an example to the reader, the child, on how to be an intellectually, morally, and spiritually as a characteristic of a person with character.

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