

EVALUATING INDONESIAN HERO STORIES FEATURED IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract

This study delves into elementary school teachers' evaluation of children's books featuring Indonesian national heroes. Despite the significant roles of historical figures picturebooks, research on how teachers incorporate it as useful resources in teaching is limited. In fact, the availability of quality historical fiction picturebooks that portray stories of national heroes in Indonesia is also scarce. Through snowballing technique, 25 teachers voluntarily participated. Through an online questionnaire, they were asked to provide their opinion about three Indonesian hero storybooks, which include (1) *Aku Kartini* [I am Kartini], (2) *Wahidin Soedirohoesodo Sang Dokter Bangsa* [Wahidin Soedirohoesodo the Doctor of The Nation], and (3) *Menyusuri Tempat Tinggal Srikandi Aceh Cut Nyak Meutia* [Strolling the Residence of an Acehnese Heroine Cut Nyak Meutia]. The participants were asked to examine aspects like text complexity, plot, illustration, moral values, and pedagogical strategies for classroom implementation. The data were analyzed qualitatively to describe the teachers' evaluation on the quality of the books. The findings emphasize the significance of continuous teachers' professional development, especially in book selection and utilization. The consensus surrounding Book #1 "Aku Kartini" suggests its potential as a valuable resource for teaching national heroes, as well as a model of quality historical fiction picturebook. We argue that adult's evaluation, particularly teachers, in selecting books for children to read, play a pivotal role both in the children and in the practice of teaching.

Keywords: children's literature, evaluation, literacy, teacher's professional development

Introduction

Every culture tells its children tales of legendary and local heroes. For generations, parents or educators have used stories about the lives of their heroes to



infuse positive traits and characters into children's belief systems, particularly in the educational context (Treacher, 2020). Short (2018) mentions that recent trend in children's literature is the increase of picturebooks associated with themes on kindness, tolerance, and acceptance of difference, as well as characters who have courageous acts, determination, and defiance. The genre in children's literature with such themes is called historical fiction (Short & Cueto, 2023). Although small in number, studies about hero stories in children's literature have been growing. Some related studies have demonstrated that informing children about heroes has an impact on their knowledge and identity construction (Preisfreund, 2008; Spanothymiou et al., 2015; Tucker, 2006). Others have also examined that hero stories are effective in educating children to manage stressful situations at home and school, as well as to understand the larger social system in which they reside (Brown et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2011).

As a case in point, Sheehan and Riddle (2022) investigated how international students from Confucian heritage cultures navigate their experiences in western educational systems like Australia through Campbell's narrative of the hero's journey. They found that the students perceived the narratives as models that represented their varied beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions of support in different contexts during their schooling in Australia. It is in line with Allison and Goethals (2016)'s study mentioning that hero stories have an epistemic function in which they teach children information and wisdom. They also serve an energizing function that inspires and promotes personal growth. Anthony dan Baneck (2020) added that hero stories also have a pedagogical function that consists of important components for the academic program, such as inspiration, bravery, perseverance, and service.

On that account, we argue in this study that how hero stories are represented in children's literature and how they are being told in any languages are pivotal for teaching and learning. Through hero stories, students might have the chance to experience what knowledge and talents look like in actual practice, as well as the ability to develop and practice the skills under the guidance of a committed teacher (Gunderman & Sinsabaugh, 2013; Wijaya et al., 2023). However, a little is known how teachers perceive the role of hero stories and heroism in children's literature toward which students can strive. We are interested in filling this gap by examining teachers' evaluation on Indonesian hero stories currently featured in children's books.

Indonesia has a large number of heroes that originated from its diverse cultures and geographical areas. The government has codified and bureaucratized the term "National Hero" for more than 60 years in order to push campaigns on the significance of heroes, their traits, and their services to the state (Fogg, 2019). The government decides the inclusion criteria. Then such campaigns are massively integrated in the curriculum at the primary and secondary level of education (Pramono et al., 2021). Therefore, it is worthwhile to gain a thorough understanding of the types of hero stories that belong in children's books as well as how those stories are presented, especially from the viewpoint of teachers.

This study might serve as the basis in developing quality children's books about hero stories. Most often, the writing and illustration of hero stories in Indonesia follows similar plot, comes to predictable conclusions, and demands morality from a single point of view. As a result, these accounts of Indonesia's national heroes have transformed them into fantastical, unrealistic characters, which

may make it difficult for students to make connection during a reading process. Additionally, the stories frequently feature violent acts that place less emphasis on harmony and peace (Parlindungan et al., 2023). Support for this notion is linked to Hinton-Johnson (2005) thought-provoking question in exploring culturally diverse literature for children, do young readers need happy endings?

Murillo (2019) argued that young readers, just like adults are critical readers who bring ideas and experiences to the books they read, as well as multiple interpretations to the story meanings. Therefore, they should have access to books and opportunities to explore endings that satisfy the themes in the books itself, either the endings necessarily happy or tragic. Hunt (1991) also highlights that sometimes adult's evaluation whether a children's book has value or not may oversimplify the notion of children are active readers.

Thus, our inquiry in this study was informed by the view that adult's evaluation of quality children's books shapes their practice in making decisions on how to engage children with the literatures (Pope & Round, 2015; Short & Cueto, 2023). Adults might either provide opportunities for young readers to actively share their connections and engage in discussions or cause hesitance in constructing compelled interpretations (Rosenblatt, 1978). As consumers of published children's books, teachers need to make decisions on which books and how to use them in their classrooms that might be significant for children's lives and learning (Short, 2018).

In this study, we examined the elementary school teachers' evaluation on children's books about Indonesian national heroes that have been circulating in Indonesia. We considered the genre is historical fiction in which the books portrayed actual historical figures and the stories set in real historical events (Short & Cueto, 2023). In particular, we asked the teachers' opinion about the plot, language, length of the text, illustration, moral values, and possibility of using the texts in the classroom. This inquiry was informed by Serafini (2014) who mentions that analyzing historical fiction should consider both the narrative and design elements.

We used two books published by The Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (IMoECRT) and one book published by Litara Foundation. Our reason in selecting these books was to compare the quality of story and design elements from the two publishers. Litara Foundation is an independent non-government organization that focuses on developing the love of reading in Indonesian children through publishing quality children's books. Their books have been widely recognized in Indonesia and have been endorsed by the IMoECRT. The book we used for this study is *Aku Kartini* [I am Kartini] (Satriati, 2019). On the other hand, IMoECRT conducts annual children's book writing competition in which the winners receive incentives and publication. The two books by IMoECRT were the winner of 2018 competition. The two books were *Wahidin Soedirohoesodo Sang Dokter Bangsa* [Wahidin Soedirohoesodo The Doctor of The Nation] (Harari, 2018) and *Menyusuri Tempat Tinggal Srikandi Aceh Cut Nyak Meutia* [Strolling the Residence of the an Acehnese Heroine Cut Nyak Meutia] (Ismail, 2018).

We argue that close analysis of hero story books from these two publishers might serve as a basis for understanding the different approaches to storytelling and illustration in Indonesian children's literature. This study uncovers how differing

priorities manifest in the content and design of the stories, and what this means for the overall impact on young readers. Overall, this study contributes to a broader discussion on the role of children’s literature in shaping cultural identity and literacy in Indonesia.

Method

This study was part of a multiyear research project in 2022 and 2023 in developing children’s picturebooks about Indonesian hero stories. We used a descriptive qualitative approach to explain teachers’ evaluation about Indonesian hero stories in children’s book. As many as 25 Indonesian elementary school teachers participated in this study. They were recruited through a snowballing technique based on our access and growing collaboration with some teachers across Indonesia. Their participation in this study was voluntary. The participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire that we developed. Distribution of the participants is seen in Table 1.

The questionnaire consisted items related to their opinions about both the narrative and design elements of the books. Before completing the questionnaire, they were first required to read three Indonesian hero story books for elementary students; including (1) *Aku Kartini* [I am Kartini] (Satriati, 2019) published by Litara Foundation, (2) *Wahidin Soedirohoesodo Sang Dokter Bangsa* [Wahidin Soedirohoesodo The Doctor of The Nation] (Harari, 2018) published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, and (3) *Menyusuri Tempat Tinggal Srikandi Aceh Cut Nyak Meutia* [Strolling the Residence of the Acehnese Heroine Cut Nyak Meutia] (Ismail, 2018).

Table 1. Distribution of participants

N		25
Gender	Male	6
	Female	19
Regions	Aceh	10
	Yogyakarta	6
	Kalimantan	3
	Jakarta	3
Grade	Surabaya	3
	4th	10
	5th	7
	6th	8

The target readers of those books were claimed as for grade 4-6 of elementary school students. After that, the teacher participants were required to give their opinion qualitatively about: (1) the text complexity, (2) the plot of the story, (3) the illustration, (4) the moral values, and (5) the pedagogical strategy. The gathered data were analyzed qualitatively, including coding the data, grouping them into themes, and reporting the results.

Findings and Discussion

This study seeks to answer a question of how elementary school teachers perceive Indonesian hero stories featured in children’s literature. We present our findings based on aspects of the analysis, including text complexity, story plot,

illustration, moral values, and pedagogical strategy. Then we discuss the findings in relation with previous research on similar topics and we suggest some implications for research and practice.

Text complexity

In our research, we found that text complexity, a critical consideration in selecting books for children, played a pivotal role in determining the suitability of books for elementary school students in grades 4-6. We asked 25 teacher participants whether the length of the texts was suitable for these students (see Figure 1). For Book #1, titled “I am Kartini,” all teacher participants unanimously agreed that the length of the texts was suitable for grade 4-6 readers. They emphasized that the sentences on every page were at the instructional level, striking a balance between complexity and ease. Among its 17 pages, only two contained more than three sentences, with the majority of sentences was using simple structure.

However, when we turned our attention to Book #2, “Wahidin Soedirohoesodo the Doctor of The Nation,” a division emerged. Out of the 25 participants, 15 agreed that the book’s length was appropriate for grade 4-6 readers. Nevertheless, 10 participants expressed disagreement, citing concerns about text length, complex sentence structures, and the absence of adequate illustrations to aid student comprehension. Similar findings arose in Book #3, “Strolling the Residence of an Acehese Heroine Cut Nyak Meutia.” In this case, 16 participants mentioned that the book was not suitable for grade 4-6 readers due to excessively long texts.

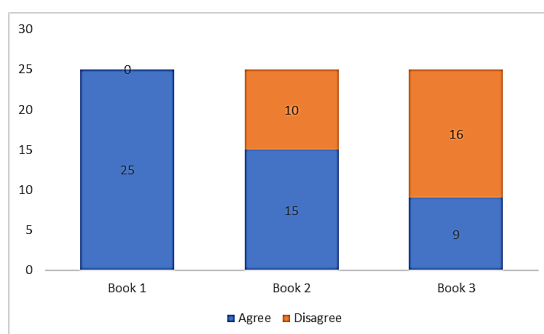


Figure 1. Evaluation on text complexity

Our finding aligns with the arguments made by Short and Cueto (2023) regarding the importance of evaluating text complexity when selecting books for children. Text complexity encompasses two major dimensions: readability and conceptual difficulty. Readability pertains to the estimation of text difficulty based on vocabulary and sentence structure, while conceptual difficulty concerns the complexity of ideas and their presentation. Our findings underscore the significance of assessing these dimensions in order to ensure that books are appropriately tailored to the diverse reading levels of children, even within the same age or grade group.

Additionally, Sierschynski, Louie and Pughe (2014) argue that often teachers make the assumption that children’s books with heavy themes, such as history, war, or family conflict, inherently contain more complex texts. However, they contend that this assumption is insufficient without a closer examination of text complexity. Teachers can effectively evaluate a book’s text complexity through a dual analysis

approach, combining textual and visual assessments. Textual analysis involves scrutinizing the language usage, vocabulary, and syntax within the book. Meanwhile, visual analysis focuses on the design elements and illustrations, considering factors like color tone, graphic style, angles, and page orientation (single or spread). Kelly and Kachorsky (2022) further mention that children talk in response to picturebooks comprehension might also be a determinant of how complex a picturebook is. This comprehensive evaluation ensures a more accurate understanding of a book's suitability for a particular age or reading level.

The above statement might not fit the findings in Montag (2019) study on differences of text complexity found in picturebooks and children's directed speech. Through a corpus analysis of 100 children's picturebooks, she found that picturebooks contain primarily passive sentences and relative clauses that are typically distinct from child-directed speech. The asymmetries between written and spoken language might challenge young readers to attend to comprehension. However, she indicates that because picturebooks contain a considerably higher number of unusual and complicated sentence forms, they may be a significant factor in explaining individual disparities in early language abilities.

Story plot

Short and Cueto (2023) emphasized that children in grades 4-6 are generally ready for more complex story plots that incorporate conflicts to generate excitement and suspense. They argue that conflicts in children's books play a pivotal role in engaging young readers in the narrative. In line with this perspective, we sought the participants' opinions on whether the plot of the texts in our study was interesting for grade 4-6 readers (See figure 2).

We found that 24 participants agree that Book #1 was interesting and one thought otherwise. Those who agree mentioned that the plot of book "I am Kartini" was clear and easy for children to follow since it used first person point of view. While reading this book, children might position and experience themselves as Kartini. For Book #2, 13 participants agree that it was interesting and 12 disagree. Those who agree thought that book "Wahidin Soedirohoesodo the Doctor of The Nation" was written and structured in descriptive style. However, the text was long which might make children get bored. For Book #3, 14 participants agree and 11 participants disagree. Those who agree said that book "Strolling the Residence of an Acehese Heroine Cut Nyak Meutia" was interesting for children because it was written in descriptive. Although it might be too complex, the story contained some twists that would make children keep reading.

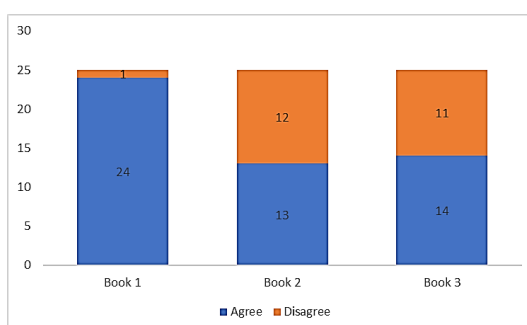


Figure 2. Evaluation on the plot of the story

Interestingly, the teachers in our study observed that both Book #2 and Book #3 were written in a descriptive style, which they felt did not effectively build conflicts within the narratives. This observation aligns with Short and Cueto's (2023) assertion that children in these grade levels typically benefit from stories that introduce conflicts to create excitement and suspense, a quality that Book #1 seemed to achieve more successfully.

Similar notion has been theorized in previous studies. For instance, Malinen, Laine-Frigren and Kaarninen (2022) investigated how the emotional experiences of families reunited after the World War II depicted in a Finnish children's novel written in 1947 by Aili Kottinen (1906–1969), entitled *Inkeri Palasi Ruotsista* (eventually translated into English in 1961 as *Kirsti Comes Home*). They concluded that the complex story plots in the novel can be a culturally meaningful tool for children and adults to reflect on their personal experience.

Thus, plot plays a pivotal role for children in which they can construct multiple meanings, truths, and realities deriving from unique linguistic and experiential repertoires (Chambert-Loir & Reid, 2002). Adult's evaluation of meaning or how the story is plotted does not necessarily the single universal meaning or truth. In reference to children as active readers (Rosenblatt, 1978), what children bring to the text and how meaning is constructed throughout the plot should be considered meaningful by adults (Pope & Round, 2015).

Illustration

In our study, we also sought to understand the participants' opinions regarding the illustrations within the books and whether they found them interesting and supportive of comprehension for children in grades 4-6 (See Figure 3). For Book #1, "I am Kartini," all 25 participants agreed that the illustrations were not only interesting but also highly beneficial for grade 4-6 students. They highlighted the fact that the illustrations played a crucial role in enhancing comprehension, as they complemented the text by providing visual cues and helping young readers connect with the narrative. One participant remarked, "The illustrations in 'I am Kartini' were not only captivating but also instrumental in helping students grasp the storyline. They beautifully conveyed Kartini's experiences and emotions, making the book truly engaging." See Figure 4 for the illustration.

In contrast, in Book #2, "Wahidin Soedirohoesodo the Doctor of The Nation," opinions were more divided. Ten participants agreed that the illustrations were interesting and supportive, while 15 participants held a differing viewpoint. Those who found the illustrations appealing mentioned that they added depth to the descriptive style of the book. One teacher participant explained, "The illustrations in 'Wahidin Soedirohoesodo' were artistically done and provided visual context for the text, which was essential for understanding the historical subject matter."

Conversely, the 15 participants who disagreed expressed concerns about the illustrations. They felt that the book's lengthy text overshadowed the visual elements that made it challenging for young readers to fully engage with the content, even some illustrations are in differing page orientations. One teacher noted, "While the illustrations in 'Wahidin Soedirohoesodo' were interesting, they often felt overshadowed by the extensive text. This made it difficult for students to connect with the visuals and fully grasp the narrative. And sometimes students need to turn

their book to look at the illustration because it was landscape-oriented while the text was in portrait page orientation.” See Figure 5 for the illustration.

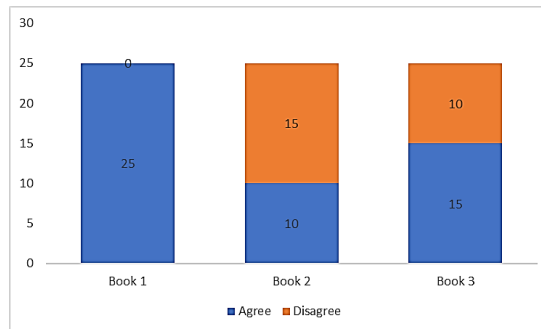


Figure 3. Evaluation on illustration

For Book #3, “Strolling the Residence of an Acehnese Heroine Cut Nyak Meutia,” opinions were once again divided, with 15 participants agreeing and 10 participants disagreeing about the illustrations’ suitability. Those in favor of the illustrations found them intriguing and supportive of comprehension. A teacher participant stated, “The illustrations in ‘Strolling the Residence of Cut Nyak Meutia’ were visually appealing and added an extra layer of engagement to the narrative. They helped students picture the historical setting and characters.” See Figure 6 for the illustration.



Figure 4. Example of illustration in book #1

In contrast, the 10 participants who disagreed believed that the book’s illustrations did not effectively support comprehension. They expressed concerns that the illustrations were insufficient to clarify the complex storyline. One teacher participant shared, “While there were illustrations in ‘Strolling the Residence of Cut Nyak Meutia,’ they didn’t always align with the intricate plot which leaves students somewhat confused about the historical context.” Overall, our findings reveal a diversity of opinions among teacher participants regarding the role of illustrations in enhancing children’s comprehension and interest in these books.

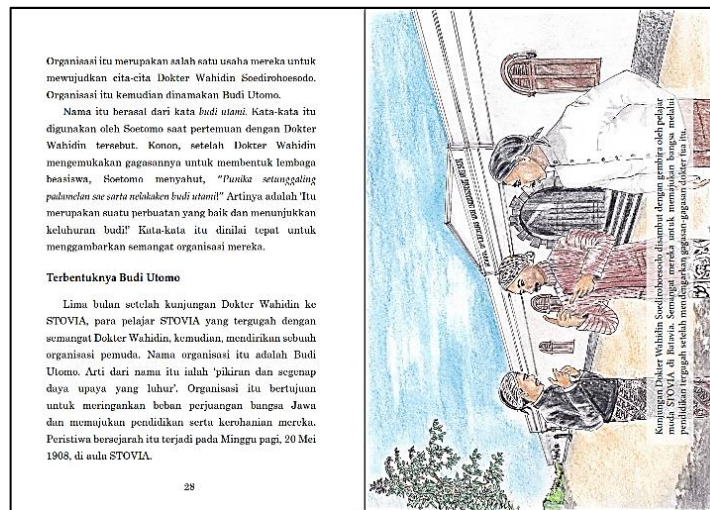


Figure 5. Example of illustration in book #2

Illustration indeed plays a pivotal role in children’s literature. It serves as a crucial component in the overall reading experience. Serafini (2014) emphasizes the significance of illustrations in historical fiction, which is a genre often characterized by the fusion of historical facts with fictionalized elements. In such argument, it becomes paramount to ensure the accuracy of representations in both the text and illustrations that encompass characters, settings, and objects. Accurate and thoughtfully crafted illustrations not only captivate young readers, but also provide them with visual cues that aid in understanding the historical context and enriching their comprehension of the storyline (Johnson et al., 2017). Therefore, the interplay between text and illustrations holds a special place in the realm of children’s literature, especially when historical accuracy is at stake.

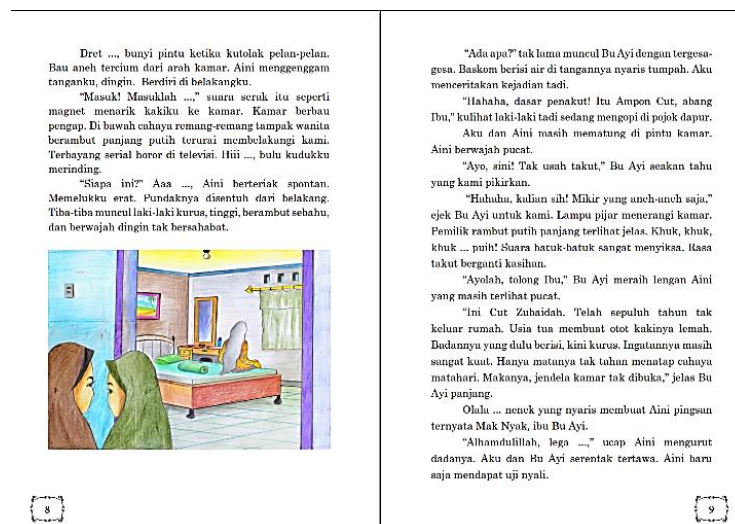


Figure 6. Example of illustration in book #3

Moral value

We also asked the participants about what moral values that they think depicted in the three books. Our inquiry to moral value was based on the framework

of Indonesian *Pancasila* Student Profile. *Pancasila* is the official philosophical foundation of the Indonesian nation. So, this framework refers to the profile or information about a student who is learning about or following the principles of *Pancasila* (Kemdikbud, 2020). The integration of this framework into the curriculum is expected to instill the identity, ideology, and aspirations of the Indonesian nation (Sufyadi et al., 2021).

There are six dimensions of the *Pancasila* Student Profile, as elaborated comprehensively in the Decree of the Head of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency (BSKAP) Number 009/H/KR/2022 concerning the Dimensions, Elements, and Sub-Elements of the *Pancasila* Student Profile in the *Merdeka* Curriculum. These six dimensions include: (1) religiosity, (2) independency, (3) critical thinking, (4) collaboration, (5) creativity, and (6) global diversity. These six dimensions are values that must be possessed by students as part of their citizenship.

The participants were asked to vote on values that they think were depicted in the book. Their votes can be more than one value. The findings showed that approximately 21 participants expressed that Book #1 “*Aku Kartini*” contained mostly independency and creativity values, followed by critical thinking, religiosity, global diversity, and collaboration (See Figure 7). One of the participants, Sarah, a 25-year-old teacher, remarked, “I felt that ‘*Aku Kartini*’ really emphasized the importance of independence and creativity in a person’s life. *Kartini*, the main character, constantly demonstrated the value of pursuing one’s dreams and ideas, which resonated with me personally.’ Sarah’s perspective aligns with the predominant sentiments expressed by the participants in our study, which highlights the prominence of independency and creativity in Book #1.

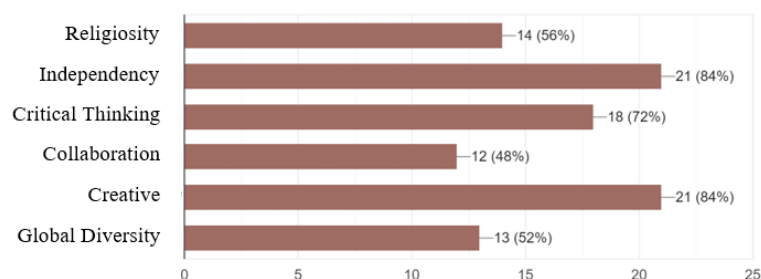


Figure 7. Evaluation on moral values in book #1

Another participant, Lisa also notes that “The book’s complex characters and thought-provoking themes prompt students to analyze, question, and engage deeply with the content, fostering their critical thinking skills.” Lisa’s input underscores the significant role that “*Aku Kartini*” plays in nurturing critical thinking abilities in young readers.

“Unlike “*Aku Kartini*”, in Book #2, we found the participants expressed that the book contained mostly the value of religiosity (21 participants, see Figure 8). It also received more loads on independency (18 participants), collaboration (17 participants), and creativity (15 participants). Critical thinking and global diversity received the least votes in order. In contrast to ‘*Aku Kartini*,’ where critical thinking was highly emphasized, Sarifah, an experienced primary school teacher, shared her

observations on Book #2, stating, “I noticed that Book #2 places a stronger emphasis on religiosity. It often delves into the characters’ spiritual journeys and moral dilemmas, which aligns with my student responses”. While it may not promote critical thinking as prominently as ‘Aku Kartini,’ Book #2 provides a different set of values that are equally important in character development.

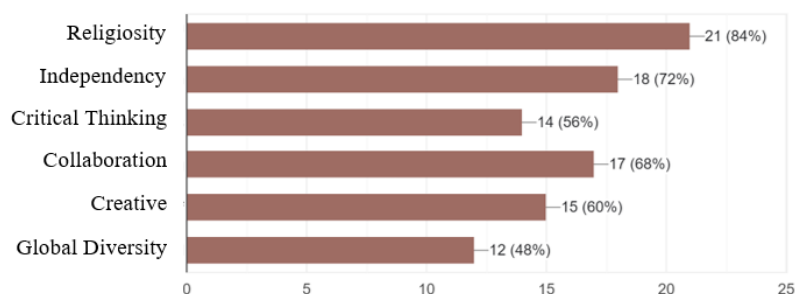


Figure 8. Evaluation on moral values in book #2

Similarly, although critical thinking and global diversity receive fewer mentions in Book #2, Mr. Dedi added, “It offers opportunities for students to explore these aspects. The collaborative nature of the characters’ journeys can foster discussions on diversity, and the moral dilemmas that can serve as thought-provoking scenarios for critical thinking exercises”. The contrasting emphasis on values and themes between “Aku Kartini” and Book #2 in our study highlights the diversity in literary content and its potential impact on readers.

While “Aku Kartini” seems to strongly promote critical thinking, as pointed out by Sarah, it appears that Book #2 takes a different approach by focusing more on religiosity, as noted by Sarifah. This finding resonates with the notion that literature is a dynamic tool for fostering various virtues and encouraging critical thought. The selection of a particular literature can be tailored to specific learning objectives and the cultural or moral values a society or individual seeks to emphasize (Short & Cueto, 2023). Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of selecting literature that aligns with the desired educational outcomes and values while recognizing the richness and flexibility of literature in promoting character development.

Finally, the participants expressed their opinion about *Pancasila* Student Profile depicted in Book #3, with the majority voting creativity (19 participants) as the prominent value (See Figure 9). This finding showcases the adaptability of literature in conveying different sets of values. In the case of Book #3, the emphasis on creativity as the predominant value reflects the potential for literature to inspire imagination and innovation among readers.

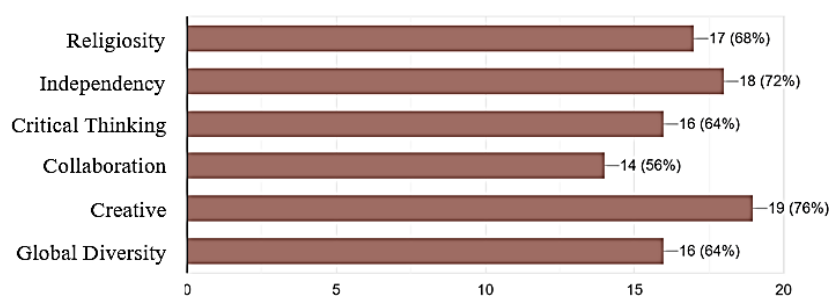


Figure 9. Evaluation on moral values in book #3

Every story has moral values that children can reflect on and learn from. In the case of picturebooks, moral values can sometimes transparent in the texts or within the fusion of text and illustration (Short & Cueto, 2023). Such notion has been demonstrated in previous research. For instance, Burke (2009) investigated how young readers connect to issues of emotions and ecological problems in a place they live in. The participants in this study were asked to respond to their reading of a picturebook about ocean conservation. The findings indicate that when given the opportunity to construct concrete representations of conservation, children form deep emotional bonds with them. These bonds serve as the foundation for relational values that foster conservation-oriented mindsets. It also demonstrates how crucial context is for influencing how these young readers learn and how giving them the chance to study conservation, so they might develop a personal and empathic relationship with nature.

Due to its significant for learning and the eager to instill children's belief system about certain values, adults often choose what books considered with good moral values for children. In a study, Bergman Deitcher, Aram and Adar (2017) interviewed 104 parents about their decision in selecting narrative picturebooks to read with their children. The findings show that beside language and illustration, parents also consider social-emotional content in which they can tap into such issues to build their children's prosocial awareness and behavior.

Pedagogical strategy

The last aspect that we asked the participants regarding their evaluation of Indonesian picture books about hero stories was whether they could use the book for teaching and learning, and what strategy they would incorporate. We found that all 25 participants agree that Book #1 "Aku Kartini" might be engaging for use in the classroom, while there were differing opinions on Book #2 and Book #3.

Sarifah shared her perspective on the usability of Book #2, stating, "I believe that Book #2's focus on religiosity could be a valuable teaching tool, especially in the context of moral education. It offers opportunities for discussions about ethical dilemmas and values, which are crucial for character development." In contrast, Rian expressed his reservations about Book #2, saying, "While Book #2 has its merits, I think it might be more challenging to incorporate into my curriculum due to its specific religious themes. I prefer texts that provide a broader range of discussion topics. The text itself in Book #2 is too long with limited illustrations. This might be challenging for elementary students".

Regarding Book #3, Dian noted, “The emphasis on creativity in Book #3 makes it a fantastic resource for encouraging imagination and innovation in the classroom. I would certainly incorporate it into my lessons to inspire my students.” However, Sabil another teacher, had a different perspective on Book #3, stating, “I think it might not align with all educational goals. Some teachers may find it challenging to integrate into a structured curriculum.”

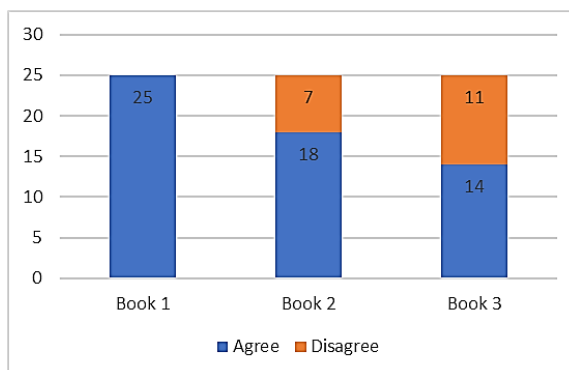


Figure 10. Evaluation on pedagogical strategy

These varying opinions from educators highlight the importance of considering not only the content and values portrayed in picture books, but also their applicability to specific teaching strategies and educational contexts.

Extant studies have demonstrated various teaching strategies used by teacher in facilitating literature reading in the classroom. The consideration of which strategies to be implemented is based on various aspects, such as linguistic repertoires that the students have and language of instruction (Thibeault & Matheson, 2020), their beliefs (Can & Durmaz, 2022), and perceived barriers (Livy et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding these factors is crucial in determining how teachers can effectively engage students in literature reading and create a more enriching learning experience. However, how teachers were trained and exposed to use children’s literature in the classroom also shape their pedagogical strategies and willingness to incorporate diverse literatures (Martin & Spencer, 2020; Rifai et al., 2023). To this end, we argue that not only should we focus on the factors influencing strategy selection, but also on the professional development and support systems that can enhance teachers’ ability to employ these strategies effectively.

Conclusion

Our primary objective in this study was to examine the evaluation of elementary school teachers on children’s books about Indonesian national heroes that have been circulating in Indonesia. We wanted to discover how elementary school teachers perceive the quality of hero stories depicted in children’s literature by closely looking at the complexity of the text, story plot, illustration, moral value, and pedagogical strategy for use in the classroom. We found that the teachers’ opinion around these aspects are varied indicating their personal experience as a teacher and professional development that they have pursued. It seems that there was a consensus among the participants that Book #1 “Alu Kartini” in particular, possess better quality of picturebook with historical fiction genre than the other two.

The findings of this study hold important implications for teaching practices in elementary schools. Firstly, the varied opinions among the teachers in this study indicate the importance of professional development for educators. Teachers with different levels of experience and backgrounds may have diverse perspectives on what makes a quality children's book. Therefore, ongoing professional development programs can help teachers enhance their ability to select and utilize literature effectively in their teaching, ensuring that they choose books that align with their educational objectives.

Furthermore, the consensus among participants regarding the superior quality of "Aku Kartini" suggests that this book may serve as a valuable resource for teaching Indonesian national heroes. Educators can use it as a model for selecting high-quality picturebooks with a historical fiction genre. This finding underscores the potential benefits of creating a curated list of recommended children's books for teachers that facilitates their decision-making process when choosing literature for their classrooms.

This study opens avenues for future research in several areas. First, future research could explore the impact of using high-quality children's books on students' engagement, comprehension, and retention of historical and moral content. Long-term studies could assess whether exposure to such literature positively influences students' character development and understanding of national heroes. Researchers could delve into the development of guidelines or recommendations for teachers to aid them in selecting and integrating children's literature effectively into their curricula. These guidelines could take into account not only the content and quality of books, but also their alignment with specific educational objectives.

Finally, this study offers valuable insights into the evaluation of elementary school teachers regarding children's books about Indonesian national heroes. By considering the implications for teaching and future research outlined above, educators and researchers can contribute to the improvement of literature-based teaching practices and the promotion of meaningful learning experiences for young students.

Acknowledgement

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