CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter outlines the previous studies and literature review that provides the theoretical foundation for the study. The primary analytical framework is Genette's narratology, which is used to examine how narrative perspective and storytelling techniques construct empathy and childhood vulnerability. Hoffman's Theory of Empathy is employed to clarify the concept of empathy as represented in the narratives, and Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development serves as a developmental benchmark for discussing the relationship between the narrative, emotional complexity, and the intended 7+ readership.

2.1 Previous Studies

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a literature review is a critical preliminary step in designing a study. It helps determine whether a topic is worth investigating and provides insight into how the researcher can narrow the scope to essential areas of inquiry. Beyond establishing relevance, the literature review situates the research within broader scholarly discussions and highlights methodological considerations. In this study, five prior works are examined, focusing on children's literature, empathy, adult mediation, narrative perspective, and developmental approaches to young readers. These studies provide the academic foundation for clarifying the present work's contribution and positioning.

The first previous study is "Discovering the Child's Voice in Intergenerational Comics," by Philip Smith (2022). This study examined how children's voices were constructed and mediated in intergenerational comic narratives by analyzing *Axe Cop* (2009-2017) and *Les Cahiers d'Esther* (2016).

Smith argued that these texts revealed a persistent tension between child expression and adult control. He stated that although the stories originated from children's experiences or imaginative play, adult collaborators inevitably shaped the narratives through editing, visual rendering, and narrative framing, resulting in what he described as a "narrative wrestling match" between child and adult perspectives. Smith's study is relevant to the present study because it similarly foregrounds adult mediation in texts addressed to children, in line with Nodelman's concept of the hidden adult. However, Smith focused on questions of authorship and collaborative production in comics rather than on narrative structure, focalization, or age designation. Unlike Smith's study, the present study examines how Genette's categories of tense, mood, and voice, along with broader storytelling techniques, construct empathy and childhood vulnerability in relation to the cognitive developmental stage of its intended 7+ readership.

The second previous study is "Hidden Adult in Okky Madasari's Children's Book *Mata di Tanah Melus*" by Ahmad, Susanto, and Shah (2022). This study investigated Okky Madasari's first children's novel, *Mata di Tanah Melus*, which combines an adventure story with strong social criticism. Using a descriptive analysis and close reading approach, the researchers applied Perry Nodelman's concept of the Hidden Adult to examine how adult perspectives permeate the narrative. They found that the novel's complex diction and ideological content made it difficult for child readers to fully engage, revealing the dominance of adult mediation in a text marketed for children. The study concluded that Madasari's children's novel reflected the same ideological concerns present in her adult works,

thereby supporting Nodelman's claim that children's literature is never free from adult voices. While Ahmad et al.'s study highlighted adult mediation, it focused primarily on ideological critique and linguistic complexity. In contrast, the present study extends this discussion by analyzing Clara Ng's *Bagai Bumi Berhenti Berputar*, with particular attention to how empathy is narratively constructed and how adult framing influences the portrayal of childhood vulnerability for a readership aged 7+.

The third previous study is *"Tema gelap dalam kumpulan cerita bergambar Bagai Bumi Berhenti Berputar karya Clara Ng"* by Anak Agung Salvira Gayatri (2024). This study examined *Bagai Bumi Berhenti Berputar* as a collection of illustrated stories featuring dark, emotionally charged themes. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study explored how these themes are portrayed through child characters who confront complex emotional challenges. Gayatri found that adult figures consistently support the child protagonists through explanations, comfort, and guidance, helping them adapt to their circumstances. The study concluded that despite their exposure to distressing experiences, the child characters are portrayed as brave, adaptable, resilient, and compassionate. While Gayatri's study identified the dark themes in Ng's work, it focuses primarily on thematic content and the ways child characters respond to difficult experiences. In contrast, the present study shifts attention to how these experiences are narratively constructed through Genette's categories of tense, mood, and voice to construct empathy and childhood vulnerability in relation to the cognitive developmental stage of the intended 7+ readership.

The fourth previous study is *"Diskursus Perceraian Orang Tua dalam Novel Anak Indonesia dan Implikasinya terhadap Kompetensi Sosial Emosional Anak"* by Wahda Rahma Laila and Ari Ambarwati (2025a). This study investigated how Indonesian children's and young adult literature represented the experience of parental divorce and its influence on children's socio-emotional development. Using a qualitative content analysis approach based on Miles and Huberman's model, the study analyzed three Indonesian works: *Seruni* by Almas Sufeeya, *Another Sorry* by Fahrul Khakim, and Clara Ng's collection *Bagai Bumi Berhenti Berputar*. The findings revealed that parental divorce is portrayed as a major emotional and relational challenge that affects children's ability to manage emotions, maintain interpersonal relationships, and cope with loss and sadness. While *Seruni* emphasizes impulsive emotional responses and *Another Sorry* explores sibling dynamics, *Bagai Bumi Berhenti Berputar* presents a more compassionate and supportive portrayal, showing parental affection as a stabilizing force for children's emotional well-being. This study linked these portrayals to CASEL's five domains of social-emotional competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Although Laila and Ambarwati's study contributes valuable insights into the moral and psychological implications of divorce in children's literature, its focus remains largely thematic and developmental. In contrast, the present study examines how narrative techniques themselves construct empathy and questions whether the emotional and psychological complexity in *Bagai Bumi Berhenti Berputar* aligns with the developmental readiness of its 7+ target readership.

The fifth previous study is *"Literary Therapy and Child Mental-Health Advocacy in Clara Ng's Stories"* by Laila and Ambarwati (2025b). This study examined Clara Ng's *Bagai Bumi Berhenti Berputar* as a form of literary advocacy for children experiencing mental health issues. Using a descriptive qualitative method and empathetic narrative reading, the researchers examined the emotional conflicts and inner dynamics of the child characters, the symbolism and coping mechanisms presented in the stories, and the role of character relationships and storytelling structure in constructing emotional advocacy. The study found that the stories validate children's emotions, provide an emotional safe space through symbols, dialogue, and imagination, and strengthen children's agency in dealing with traumatic experiences. Although this study examines the same collection and the same five stories as the present study, it focuses on the therapeutic and advocacy function of the literary text. Its use of empathetic narrative reading also approaches empathy in terms of the readers' emotional involvement with the characters. In contrast, the present study examines empathy as represented between characters and uses Hoffman to interpret their empathic responses. Furthermore, rather than treating storytelling structure primarily as part of the stories' advocacy function, the present study systematically applies Genette's narratological categories of Tense, Mood, and Voice to examine how narrative techniques construct empathy and childhood vulnerability. The present study also incorporates Piaget's cognitive development theory as a benchmark for discussing the cognitive demands and accessibility of these narrative constructions for the intended 7+ readership.

Previous studies have examined children's literature, empathy, adult

mediation, emotional difficulty, and children's socio-emotional development. Among the five studies reviewed in this study, none specifically applies Genette's narratological categories of Tense, Mood, and Voice to analyze the construction of empathy and childhood vulnerability in this collection in relation to its intended 7+ readership. Existing studies on this collection have primarily focused on mental health advocacy, dark themes, psychosocial issues, moral resolution, or socio-emotional competence, rather than on how narrative order, duration, frequency, focalization, narrative voice, and storytelling techniques construct and organize the representation of children's vulnerability. This study fills that gap by combining Genette's Narratology, Hoffman's Theory of Empathy, and Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development to analyze the relationship between narrative form, emotional complexity, and the intended 7+ readership.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Narratology

In Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), originally published in French as *Discours du récit* in 1972, narrative theory, or narratology, is developed through a systematic analysis of narrative discourse. In this work, Genette develops narrative analysis by distinguishing among three analytical levels: story, narrative, and narrating. First, *histoire* (story) refers to the sequence of events or actions being recounted. Second, *récit* (narrative) refers to the discourse or textual form through which those events are told. Third, *narration* (narrating) refers to the act of producing a narrative, including the position, timing, and conditions under which it is told. Genette explains that narrative analysis

concerns the relationships among narrative and story, narrative and narrating, and, insofar as these relations are inscribed within the narrative discourse, story and narrating (p. 29).

These distinctions are crucial for the present study because they show that narrative meaning does not arise solely from events themselves, but also from how those events are arranged, mediated, and delivered through narrative discourse. In children's literature, this distinction is especially significant because a child-centered perspective does not automatically guarantee that the narrative voice is free from adult mediation.

To operationalize this relational model, Genette presents three major categories of narrative structure: Tense, Mood, and Voice. Within the domain of Tense (*Temps*), the framework explores three core sub-categories that govern temporal relationships: Order, Duration, and Frequency. Order refers to the relationship between the chronological sequence of events in a story and how they are presented in the narrative. It can rearrange events to create effects of suspense, reveal information, or provide retrospection. This produces what he calls anachronies, or temporal distortions, including analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (anticipation or flash-forward). Yet order also encompasses narratives that follow a strict chronology. In this present study, this category helps examine how the temporal arrangement supports narrative clarity and ease of understanding, particularly in relation to the intended 7+ readership.

Duration concerns the ratio between story time and narrative time. Genette explains that the textual space allocated to an event does not necessarily correspond

to the length of time that event occupies in the story. For example, a single moment may be expanded through detailed narration, while years may be summarized in a few lines. He identifies four techniques here: pause, where the narrative discourse continues while story time is suspended; scene, where story time and narrative time are roughly equivalent (such as during dialogue); summary, where a long span of story time is compressed into a few lines; ellipsis, where story time is omitted entirely. Duration thus shows how narrative emphasis is distributed among various events.

Frequency addresses the relationship between how often an event occurs in the story and how often it is recounted. Genette distinguishes three main patterns: singulative narration, where a single event is told once; repetitive narration, where a single event is narrated more than once or with different emphases; and iterative narration, where recurring events are narrated only once in a generalized form. Frequency highlights the role of repetition and variation in shaping narrative emphasis. The manner in which an event is repeated, varied, or generalized can strengthen, weaken, or broaden its emotional significance.

The second macro-category, Mood (*Mode*), concerns the regulation of narrative information, particularly regarding distance and perspective. In the present study, this category is operationalized through focalization. Genette explains that narrative can provide more or less information and regulate it according to a particular character's knowledge. This leads to the concept of focalization, which distinguishes between internal focalization (where narration is restricted to a character’s perception), external focalization (where narration is

limited to external observation without access to thoughts), and zero focalization (where the narrator's knowledge is not restricted to the knowledge of a particular character).

The final macro-category, Voice (*Voix*), refers to the narrating instance: who speaks, from what position, and with what relationship to the story. Genette distinguishes between heterodiegetic narration, in which the narrator is absent from the story world, and homodiegetic narration, in which the narrator is a character within it. A homodiegetic narrator can be further classified as autodiegetic when the narrator is also the protagonist of the story. Furthermore, voice addresses the narrative level, distinguishing between extradiegetic (the level of the act of narrating itself), intradiegetic (the level of the story events that constitute the first-degree narrative), and metadiegetic (the secondary or embedded narratives). Voice, therefore, addresses the question not of perception, but of narration: who tells the story and how narrative authority is established. This category is crucial for identifying how adult mediation might be embedded within a child-centered narrative perspective, as it reveals the tension between the representation of a child's experience and the underlying adult-constructed discourse.

2.2.2 Hidden Adult in Children's Literature

Children's literature is a literary form that reflects not only children's imagination but also the educational, moral, and emotional expectations imposed by adults. In an interview conducted by Zhang (2022), Hunt argues that "very often texts for children are driven by a nostalgia for childhood and may have very little interest for actual child readers." The most straightforward definition is "texts

designed for children" at a given time and place, rather than one based on fixed forms or themes. Because forms and subjects vary greatly, the defining feature of most children's books is the inherent power imbalance between adult creators and their intended young readers. Historically, until recent shifts like digital self-publishing, children rarely produced material for other children. Thus, adult authors and publishers typically shape and guide young readers' interpretations of these texts (p. 5).

This argument indeed captures the paradox of children's literature. It claims to speak for children, yet is almost always about children from an adult's viewpoint. Hunt's point of nostalgia accurately captures this contradiction, in which many works of children's literature prioritize adult fantasies over children's realities. Consider J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), originally framed as an adult work titled *The Little White Bird* (1902). In *Peter Pan,* Fallanti (2018) argues that Peter's refusal to grow up originates not in children's real wishes but in Barrie's personal sorrow over his brother's death in childhood. This deeply affected his family, particularly his mother, who remained scarred by the grief (p. 8). Jacqueline Rose in *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1993) also argues that "instead of asking what children want, or need, from literature, this book has asked what it is that adults, through literature, want or demand of the child" (p.137).

This adult investment in children's literature is also reflected in the concept of "kidult" readership. As Ambarwati (2025) explains, "kidult" is a compound word combining 'kids' and "adult." In children's literature, this concept refers to literary

works that appeal to both children and adults. The “kidult” trend and crossover readers—adults who intentionally seek out books aimed at children and young adults—are drawn to these works because of their nostalgic, entertaining, and intellectually challenging content. (pp. 34-35). This concept is relevant to the present study because it shows that children’s literature may operate within a dual readership: it is formally addressed to children, yet it may also contain emotional, aesthetic, and conceptual layers that attract adult readers.

However, adult attraction to children’s literature does not automatically mean that a text is inappropriate for children. Rather, it shows that the relationship between intended child readers and actual adult readers is complex. Piaget's discussion of symbolic play also supports this point by challenging the romanticized image of the child who longs to remain small. In *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (1980), he posits that children actively aspire toward adult competence and autonomy; far from wishing to remain in a state of infancy, children aspire to the privileges of the adult world (p. 175). In symbolic play, this desire may appear through actions such as altering or dismantling dolls, including removing a doll’s head. Rather than expressing a wish to remain infantile, such play symbolically expresses the child’s attempt to master, transform, or negotiate with figures of authority in the imagination. This supports the argument that adult nostalgia for eternal childhood does not necessarily reflect children's actual movement toward independence.

Taken together, these perspectives compel us to rethink children’s literature as a form shaped by both child readership and adult mediation. The issue is not

simply whether children's literature matches its designated age audience, but how adult fantasies, nostalgia, and interpretive frameworks may complicate the relationship between textual content and children's developmental realities. This tendency to prioritize adult fantasies over the lived reality of children in such works risks misinterpreting young readers' experiences, interests, and emotional concerns, leading to disengagement and diminished developmental relevance. Nodelman (2008), in *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, conceptualizes this problem through the idea of the "Hidden Adult," arguing that, "the double implied reader of children's literature emerges from adult authors' need to speak from their adult experience, indeed, their inability to avoid doing so, for any effort to speak in a manner understandable to their child audience will be filtered through adult ideas of what it means to be childlike. As a result, the narrator most characteristically implied in texts of children's literature is someone much like the actual author: an adult, and more specifically, an adult speaking to children." (p. 210).

Jan Marten Ivo Klaver's *Introduction: The Hidden Adult in Children's Literature (2021), published in Lingua: Rivista di lingue e culture moderne*, revisits Perry Nodelman's concept of the Hidden Adult. He emphasizes that children's literature is rarely authored or produced by children themselves, but is instead written, marketed, and purchased by adults based on their assumptions about what children should read. He highlights how adult perspectives are embedded even in texts that adopt child narrators, where moral, cultural, and ideological content remains distinctly adult in origin. Klaver cited historical examples like Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1863) to show that stories that appear to be child-

centered often have hidden agendas for adult readers, be it moral instruction, nostalgia, or ideological critique.

In her book *Melampaui Sastra Anak* (2025), Ambarwati argued that children's literature challenges the dichotomy between the worlds of children and adults, while acknowledging that these boundaries are often artificial and limiting. In the stories presented, children's literature can serve as a mirror for adult readers to reflect on their emotional and spiritual states, helping them re-access a long-lost imaginative realm (p. 28). This view is relevant to the present study because *Bagai Bumi Berhenti Berputar* is labeled for young readers. Yet its representation of childhood vulnerability, family conflict, and emotional complexity also opens a space for reflection.

Ismail (2023) ultimately contends that children's literature is a genre that is both powerful and profoundly contested, influenced by adult ideology and commercial interests in addition to its intended child audience. This perspective is supported by Hunt (2004), as cited in Rusmana et al. (2022), who explains that children's literature, as part of world literature, cannot be separated from the purpose of spreading values or ideologies of certain groups. Hunt further points out that books aimed at children are inherently embedded in ideological structures; thus, the history of reading stories for children is also ideologically constructed.

While these texts can nurture imagination, empathy, and social development, they also risk transmitting stereotypes, biases, and inappropriate themes such as violence, sexuality, or political agendas. Ismail highlights the dual nature of children's books: they can serve as constructive tools for cultural appreciation and

emotional growth, but they may also impose hazardous influences when manipulated by writers, publishers, or societal institutions. He stresses that adults, whether as authors, educators, or gatekeepers, bear a heavy responsibility in filtering and mediating children's texts, since the genre is never neutral but always embedded in cultural, moral, and ideological frameworks.

Thus, publishers play a key role in enabling the publication of these books, regardless of standards for quality, value, or content, or of their effects on children. Therefore, the study of children's literature must also consider its dual audience: child readers and the adults who select, purchase, and interpret these books.

2.2.3 Narrative in Children's Literature

Narrative in children's literature functions simultaneously as imaginative play and as a carefully mediated pedagogical encounter. Historically, narratives in children's literature have evolved from didactic, adult-driven forms to more inclusive, experiential structures. In *Through the Eyes of a Child: Introduction to Children's Literature*, Norton et al. (2003) document this through the "Milestones in Multicultural Literature" timelines, which show how African American narratives progressed from 1852's Uncle Tom's Cabin, a book-form publication that exposed slavery's horrors, to 1977's Newbery-winning Roll of Thunder, *Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor, which uses realistic family plots to address racism through a child's eyes (p. 2).

Native American stories also traveled, from Elias Boudinot's 1823 *Poor Sarah* (a fictionalized story of conversion, arguably the first Native American fiction) to Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House*, which combines oral traditions with

episodic stories of cultural resilience and received the National Book Award in 2001 (p. 3). Since the 1500s, when Aztec and Mayan folklore was documented for Europeans, Latino stories have achieved milestones, including the 1953 Newbery Medal for Ann Nolan Clark's *Secret of the Andes*, which married cultural heritage and adventure plots (p. 3). These timelines illustrate how narratives have increasingly incorporated diverse voices, adapting plots to promote cultural empathy while keeping accessibility for children.

A central element of narrative in children's literature is point of view, because it determines how closely readers are positioned to a character's inner world. The authors emphasize that point of view strongly influences children's emotional engagement with a story, as it determines what readers are allowed to know, feel, and interpret. Third-person limited narration is often favored in children's texts because it restricts the narrative to a single character's perceptions and thoughts, allowing young readers to follow events in a focused and coherent way. First-person narration creates intimacy by enabling direct access to the narrator's thoughts and feelings, while omniscient narration can create distance when it introduces knowledge beyond the child character's understanding. Norton et al. further note that consistency of point of view is essential for believability in children's literature, particularly in fantasy, where sudden shifts can undermine immersion and confuse readers (p. 93).

Plot structure in children's narratives is intentionally concise and action-driven to align with young readers' attention spans and cognitive development. The authors describe plot as the sequence of actions that must be clear, logically

connected, and appropriate to children's developmental levels. They emphasize that internal consistency is crucial, particularly in fantasy, where sudden shifts in logic or character behavior can break immersion and confuse readers (p. 273). In historical fiction, for example, Norton et al. note that credible plots emerge from historically grounded time periods, with conflicts reflecting the values and pressures of the era, whether interpersonal, societal, or internal (p. 413). In fantasy, plot consistency is equally vital: when an author establishes a logical internal framework and develops characters' actions consistently within it, the story achieves the kind of internal coherence necessary for reader immersion (p. 273).

Complementing this, Sutherland (1997, as cited in Norton et al., 2003, p. 159) offers evaluative criteria for picture books, stating: *"A story should be brief and straightforward if it is for young children; it should contain few concepts and none that are beyond comprehension… it should be written in a direct and simple style; and it should have illustrations that complement the text and are not in conflict with it."* This reinforces the importance of brevity, clarity, and visual support in plot construction for early readers.

Character representation and narrative voice in children's literature influence how readers emotionally engage with a story. According to Norton et al., a believable and enjoyable story requires main characters who feel lifelike and who develop meaningfully over the course of the narrative (p. 82). Characterization is often cited as one of the most powerful literary elements, requiring protagonists who are multidimensional rather than wholly good or bad and who change as they confront and overcome problems. Norton et al. cited Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little*

House books, in which Laura is portrayed as honest and courageous yet capable of jealousy, fear, and anger, making her both realistic and relatable. Such complexity allows children to view characters as friends they can trust, thereby creating emotional connections.

Norton et al. claim that the credibility of a character is based on the ability of a writer to disclose the whole character's nature, including the strengths and weaknesses. They frame this through two guiding questions: how an author develops a memorable character, and how an author reveals the many sides of that character while showing believable change as they mature (p. 82). An author can create a three-dimensional character by adding physical description, conversations, thoughts, others' opinions, and actions (p. 83). These methods make characters seem real and lively, so that young readers can relate to them as if they were alive.

Norton et al. further note that children are strongly drawn to humor, exaggeration, ridiculous situations, and tongue-twisting language. They explain that stories that appeal to children's sense of humor typically include repetition, wordplay, and clever, original figures of speech. Characters are frequently developed through striking descriptions of appearance, features, or actions, which help sustain readers' interest and comprehension (p. 290). This is evident, for example, in Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach*, in which the protagonist, James Trotter, encounters a series of fantastical and exaggerated situations after meeting seven talking insects inside a magically enlarged peach.

They also warn against condescension in writing and stress that authors should construct characters through dialogue, actions, and descriptions that sound

authentic to children to prevent comprehension difficulties (p. 414). They further note that authenticity is particularly significant when narratives relate to cultural or historical contexts. Citing Sipe (1997), they explains that one of the central concerns in writing historical fiction for children is achieving authenticity, particularly in representing experiences, settings, and perspectives in ways that feel credible to young readers: *"The issue that receives the most attention from authors of historical fiction is how to write authentically"* (p. 246). This emphasis on authenticity in writing stories for children requires authors to choose their words carefully, be accurate in describing everyday routines, be faithful to the facts, and ensure that readers perceive the characters, setting, and situation as realistic. Some authors draw on their own experience or on people they know, while others draw on sources beyond their personal knowledge. In such cases, these narratives risk being less authentic and more distant from child readers because they are written from an adult perspective; therefore, they must be grounded in research and credible sources rather than personal views.

In discussing multicultural representation, Norton et al. note that children's literature should avoid stereotypical representations in favor of authentic depictions of diverse cultural experiences. They argue that stories should offer an accurate and respectful portrayal of people and their cultural and historical contributions, particularly when representing marginalized groups (p. 95). This is the case in Ezra Jack Keats's *The Snowy Day* (1962), which shows an African American child taking part in ordinary childhood activities, such as playing in the snow. The narrative does not rely on explicit cultural explanation or moral instruction; instead,

it normalizes diversity through lived experience. They further raise the question of whether a story's setting is authentic across past, present, or future, whether children can recognize it as urban, rural, or fantasy, and whether factual or historical details are accurate (p. 461). In doing so, the reading activity should be followed by a discussion that allows interaction between children and adults.

Within discussions of children's literature, Perry Nodelman, in *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (2008), emphasizes that children's texts are continually mediated by adult consciousness. He observes that *"what texts of children's literature might be understood to sublimate or keep present but leave unsaid is a variety of forms of knowledge—sexual, cultural, historical—theoretically only available to and only understandable by adults"* (p. 206). Building on Peter Brooks' suggestion in the same book as well, Nodelman states that adult authors may consciously or unconsciously repress material. He argues that what is sublimated for the imagined child reader is often fully present for the adult author, who deliberately chooses to leave it unsaid. In this sense, the "unconscious" of children's literature is in fact the adult consciousness that renders its childlikeness meaningful.

New studies have built on Nodelman's foundational claim, expanding on the dominance of adults in children's literature with the concept of Aetonormativity. In their study, *The Mighty Child, Aetonormativity and Cinema: A Critical Reading of the Movie Soul*, Devika and Sreena (2023) show that adult-child power relations are entrenched not only in literature but also in visual media. Using schema theory and cognitive scripts, they show that adult perspectives often shape interpretive

strategies, yet these can also be subverted to highlight child agency. Their findings reinforce Nodelman's assertion that children's literature is never free from adult mediation and extend the discussion to interdisciplinary contexts, including psychology and film.

The distinction between general narrative theory and narrative in children's literature emerges not from direct theoretical opposition, but from differences in analytical focus. Narratology, as articulated by Génette, examines how narrative structures function as formal systems, without reference to audience or developmental context. In contrast, Norton et al.'s discussion of narrative in children's literature foregrounds how young readers experience stories. In this framework, accessibility is closely tied to characterization and point of view. The character through whose perspective a story is told must be believable for readers to suspend disbelief, and even in fantasy narratives, characters must remain internally coherent and accessible to readers (p. 273).

2.2.4 Empathy Development in Children

Martin L. Hoffman's *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (2000) complements Genette's narratological tools, particularly in looking at how narrative structure interacts with readers' emotional development. Hoffman describes empathy as *"an affective response more appropriate to another's situation than to one's own"* (p. 4) and claims that it motivates prosocial morality. His account connects affective arousal mechanisms with cognitive development, distinguishing between involuntary, preverbal modes of arousal and higher-order, mediated perspective-taking (p. 29). Hoffman describes empathic

maturation as a series of overlapping stages: undifferentiated affect gradually becomes differentiated, other-focused concern. He doesn't present these stages as labels, but as a narrative, though scholars have adopted shorthand names to clarify the progressions. The following summarizes Hoffman's developmental stages (pp. 63-92), with adapted stage names for the purpose of clarity:

- Stage 1 (Global empathy): At this stage, the infant responds to another's distress as if it were their own. For example, a baby will cry upon hearing another baby cry. There is no distinction yet between self and others; the response is automatic emotional contagion.
- Stage 2 (Egocentric empathy): The child begins to recognize that distress originates outside themselves, but still reacts as though it were happening to them. They may engage in self-soothing behaviors, such as thumb-sucking, when witnessing another person's sadness.
- Stage 3 (Empathy for another's feelings): Children attempt to comfort others, but often do so by projecting their own preferences, offering toys or actions that soothe themselves, rather than what the distressed person truly needs.
- Stage 4 (Empathy for another's life condition): Empathy becomes more accurate and non-egocentric. Children can understand others' feelings as distinct from their own and respond in ways tailored to the specific situation. This stage also allows empathy to extend to broader, long-term suffering and social conditions, such as poverty or illness. Hoffman's fuller account further elaborates this into a fifth and more mature stage, termed "empathy

for another experience beyond the immediate situation", where concern extends to chronic life circumstances, abstract vulnerabilities, or institutional injustices affecting wider groups. The present study follows a common four-stage simplification found in secondary literature, in which this fifth stage is treated as the fullest expression of Stage 4 rather than a separate stage.

Although Hoffman does not assign a rigid numerical age, his stages can be mapped onto Piaget and Inhelder's account of cognitive development in *The Psychology of the Child* (1969/2000). Piaget divided children's cognitive development into four stages:

- Sensorimotor stage (0-2 years), in which cognition is grounded in sensory experience and motor activity, and understanding of the world is constructed through direct interaction rather than mental representation.
- Preoperational stage (about 2-7 years), in which the symbolic or semiotic function begins to develop and includes the use of language, symbolic play, and mental representation. Thinking is still egocentric and not yet controlled by logical operations.
- Concrete operational stage (about 7-11 years), in which children develop logical operations applied to concrete objects and situations, e.g., conservation, classification, decentration, and more accurate perspective-taking.
- Formal operational stage (about 11+ years), in which abstract, hypothetical, and propositional reasoning becomes possible, enabling individuals to think beyond immediate and concrete experiences.

Piaget's stages of cognitive development were initially conceptualized within a universal framework. Researchers have shown that while the sequence of stages is consistent throughout cultures, the timing and manifestation of cognitive abilities differ between educational and social settings. Despite these variations, the applicability of Piaget's model has been demonstrated in diverse cultural settings, including Indonesia. Yuli Yanti et al. (2024), for example, analyzed the implementation of Piaget's theory in Indonesian elementary schools, showing that children's progression through the concrete and formal operational stages aligns with Piaget's model, while also revealing challenges unique to the local educational environment, such as limited teacher training, rigid curricula, and unequal access to resources. While this study is situated in classroom learning, its insights remain relevant for children's literature, since literary texts engage the same developmental capacities of reasoning, imagination, and perspective-taking. Thus, Piaget's framework provides the supporting theoretical lens in this thesis, while Indonesian research provides contextual grounding, ensuring that the analysis is both theoretically rigorous and culturally responsive.

2.2.5 Global Development of Children's Literature

The global evolution of children's literature reflects a gradual transformation in the perception and portrayal of childhood within stories. Early storytelling traditions were not designed specifically for children as a distinct group. As Norton et al. explain, oral narratives in diverse cultures served as collective activities for sharing myths, legends, and folktales across generations, with children joining as listeners rather than targeted readers (pp. 43-44). In this phase, stories addressed

communal, religious, and ethical needs, and narrative control stayed largely in adult hands.

The introduction of early printed books in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries made children's reading more instructional. Influenced by Puritan beliefs, these works focused on moral guidance, compliance, and spiritual training. Texts such as *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* viewed childhood as a preparatory stage for adulthood, in which reading was more a correction of conduct than an ignition of imagination. The stories of this time were openly authoritative and omniscient, leading their readers through the direct application of moral lessons. (pp. 46-47).

Historical accounts of children's literature frequently present a straight, linear progression from didacticism to creativity. However, Hunt, in *Introduction: The world of children's literature studies* (1999), argues that the growth of children's literature has never been ideologically neutral. Hunt proposes that the history of children's literature is invariably constructed from adult cultural ideas about childhood, morality, and social order (pp. 5-6). Children's books have, from their earliest printed forms, been a way for cultures to express what children are to know, believe, and become. Hunt contends that the creation of children's literature as a separate category cannot be detached from wider political, religious, and educational power structures. In many countries, early children's books were driven by overtly didactic agendas, and later developments continued to reflect tensions between control and freedom, imagination and regulation (pp. 16-17). Moreover, Hunt identifies censorship as a recurring phenomenon in the history of children's

literature around the world, indicating the tremendous beliefs that adults have in the formative influence of books on young readers (pp. 16-18).

The great transition came in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the new notions about childhood. John Locke's notion of the child as a blank page acknowledged that young people have particular cognitive and emotional requirements to which literature could respond. This led to the blending of materials that combined enjoyment with education, such as Charles Perrault's *Tales of Mother Goose,* which reworked folktales for children's reading (pp. 47-48).

By the nineteenth century, children's literature had grown rapidly amid industrialization and changing family roles. Childhood was regarded as a valuable life stage, not merely a pathway to maturity. Works such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and Edward Lear's nonsense poetry shifted from moral instruction to creative play, linguistic experimentation, and child-focused enjoyment (pp. 57-58). Norton et al. note that Alice was among the first children's books written "without any lesson or moral," indicating a major shift in purpose (p. 57).

This period also brought realistic and psychologically deep stories. Novels such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* portrayed children as complex individuals confronting social, familial, and ethical issues. Young characters were portrayed as people with fears, hopes, and dilemmas shaped by their worlds, rather than symbols (pp. 59–60). This fostered empathy in narratives. Alongside these changes, children's literature developed informal age groupings. While early texts didn't specify ages, modern

publishing often targets early readers, middle-grade readers, and young adult readers. These categories suggest that story complexity, themes, and emotions should align with developmental levels, although this is not always the case (pp. 60-61).

Norton et al. emphasize that children's literature remains shaped by adults. Grown-ups write, edit, illustrate, and distribute these texts, infusing their cultural views and values. Even stories that prioritize child perspectives remain within adult boundaries of appropriateness (pp. 58–59). This balance between child-centered tales and adult influence defines children's literature worldwide.

This global concern is further reflected in bibliometric analysis conducted by X. -X. Chen and W.-H. Chen (2025). The researchers systematically map the development of children’s literature studies between 2019 and 2024. Drawing on six international journals indexed in the Web of Science and using CiteSpace visualization, their analysis identifies six thematic clusters that dominate current scholarship: trauma experiences, crises, cognitive disabilities, death, and age studies. They also highlight the growing attention to environmental and scientific issues, as well as the anticipated role of artificial intelligence in shaping future research. Methodologically, the study notes a shift from reader-response frameworks toward affect theory and new materialism, which are expected to remain central in academic inquiry. This global overview provides evidence that research on children’s literature continues to evolve in the face of contemporary problems, while keeping its essential concerns of empathy, identity, and adult mediation.

2.2.6 Development of Children's Literature in Indonesia

Children's literature in Indonesia began with the use of fairy tales and folk tales to transmit values and knowledge. Stories such as fairy tales, legends, tales, and myths became the forerunners of children's literature in Indonesia. They were passed down orally from person to person within communities, as part of a culture that transmitted social norms, knowledge of nature, and life experiences.

In the book *Pedoman Penelitian Sastra Anak* (2010), it is stated that the history of children's literature in Indonesia has not been researched thoroughly and accurately. No documentation has been found on how children engaged in literature during the Majapahit kingdom in the 13th-16th centuries (p. 9). However, research by Christantiowati (1993, as cited in Sarumpaet, 2010) shows that during the period 1908–1945, children's books were published by missionary publishers, state printing houses, Dutch private publishers, Chinese Peranakan publishers, and indigenous publishers. The themes were primarily concerned with religion, morality, culture, and the translation of world literature, including *The Adventures of Sinbad*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *One Thousand and One Nights*. This indicates that, from the beginning, children's literature in Indonesia was closely linked to education and morality.

After independence, children's literature remained scarce and served primarily as Indonesian-language textbooks, focusing on vocabulary and grammar. The unstable socio-economic situation meant that children's literature did not develop much. It was not until the 1970s that the government, through the *INPRES Book Procurement Project*, encouraged the mass publication of children's books.

This program gave rise to many new authors, although its impact on the quality of children's reading materials remains questionable. (p. 10) With the advent of more advanced printing technology, the publication of children's books in Indonesia has improved, particularly for early childhood, with a focus on picture-book formats. The quantity and quality of children's reading materials have increased, although children still face challenges related to diversity and complexity. Therefore, research on children's literature is important for understanding trends and themes and their impact on the development of the younger generation. (p.12)

The history of children's literature in Indonesia traces a trajectory from moral and religious reading materials to educational texts, and then to more varied and creative literary works. Sumaryanti and Kasanova (2024), in their book *Sastra Anak: Studi Sejarah, Genre, dan Evolusi Naratif*, stated that early children's literature was often dominated by moralistic tales intended to impart moral principles such as patience, kindness, and honesty. These tales were typically straightforward and didactic, with clear moral lessons and characters that functioned as binary depictions of good and evil. However, the subjects in children's literature have become more complex and emotional, addressing topics such as identity, trauma, and interpersonal relationships, as literacy and knowledge of children's emotional and psychological needs have increased (p. 151). This growth has always been linked to the nation's social, political, and economic conditions. Children's literature is not only entertainment but also a means of education, character development, and reflection on the nation's future. Therefore, children's

literature in Indonesia, in its evolution, operates within institutional, educational, and publishing frameworks.

2.2.7 Contemporary Issues in Indonesian Children's Literature

The Indonesian government is working to increase interest in reading through programs implemented in formal education settings. In *Sastra Anak Indonesia* (2021), children's reading activities are integrated into school contexts through initiatives that emphasize literacy development alongside character education. One of the key initiatives discussed by Krissandi is the *Gerakan Literasi Sekolah* (GLS), a national program implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture and regulated through Ministerial Regulation No. 23 of 2015. The program aims to build a culture of reading and writing among students, strengthen literacy skills within school communities, and encourage schools to function as supportive learning environments (pp. 84-85).

Krissandi further explains that the principles of the *Gerakan Literasi Sekolah* (GLS) are aligned with students' developmental stages and characteristics. Literacy activities should employ a balanced range of texts that take into account students' needs, communicative skills, and cultural diversity (pp. 85–86). Thematic learning helps schools to weave children's stories into different topics, instilling moral and social ideals across the curriculum (p. 12). The choice or the development of children's stories should take into account the simple, accessible language, universal life values, and the psychological development of the target audience (p. 13). Storytelling is a continual process that forms character, supported by modeling and habituation within daily educational practice.

Children’s stories should be about children’s feelings and experiences from a child-centered point of view, while also complementing the pedagogical aims that adults set (p. 2). This interplay in the selection and circulation of children’s books in Indonesia is therefore framed by concerns about developmental appropriateness, moral values, and age appropriateness. In this context, Sarumpaet (2010, p. 68, cited in Krissandi) states that the guidance and direction of children's reading come from adults, hence children's stories must have a certain kind of mediation. The main problem in writing children’s literature, she sees, is to put children in the position of the narrative subject rather than the object, by addressing children's needs and valuing their experience and capacity.

These characteristics help to determine what texts are counted as children’s stories. The vast range of children’s books available on the market mirrors the diversity of readers’ developmental stages and needs, making selection matter, especially in the support of character building. This process is mediated by adult figures, especially teachers and parents, who are constantly supervising children's reading. and selecting texts.

At the same time, Krissandi sees a structural problem in Indonesian children's literature, particularly concerning age segmentation. For example, publishers commonly talk about producing literature for early childhood and primary students, such as Mizan's *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya*, but not literature for junior secondary school students (SMP), which tends to be adolescent romance or adult fiction rather than narratives built for this transitional time. Students at the junior secondary level are then faced with a choice between children’s stories that no longer speak to their

daily experience or popular adolescent/adult novels such as *Dilan,* or earlier teen fiction like *Lupus*, whose thematic richness, emotional dynamics, and narrative viewpoint lie beyond their developmental readiness. Krissandi argues that this lack of age-specific literature prevents children's literature from being used effectively for character education at the SMP level, since few stories feature protagonists of the same age or address concerns pertinent to early adolescence (pp. 6–7). This gap highlights the ongoing tension between educational intentions, market availability, and age-appropriate narrative design within the Indonesian context of children's literature.

2.2.8 Age Designation as Pedagogical Framework

Age designation in children's literature refers to the systematic classification of literary texts according to children's developmental stages, particularly in relation to language, cognition, emotion, and social awareness. Globally, this framework is strongly influenced by developmental psychology and educational research, which regard reading ability not merely as a technical skill, but as a complex interaction between linguistic maturity, cognitive readiness, and emotional experience. This framework assesses narrative suitability based on developmental readiness, rather than on publishing or market considerations.

Norton et al., in *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children's Literature* (2003), provide one of the most influential global frameworks for age designation by linking literary forms with children's developmental characteristics. Rather than relying solely on commercial labels such as "early reader" or "middle grade," it emphasizes that age categorization must be grounded in observable

developmental stages of language, comprehension, and narrative processing (pp. 4–6). The framework divides childhood reading development into progressive stages that are widely used internationally:

1. Preschool Stage (Ages 2–5)

   Children at this stage exhibit rapid vocabulary expansion and rely heavily on concrete visual cues. According to Norton et al., children between the ages of two and three can recognize actions depicted in pictures and begin to name objects and body parts. Still, their understanding of narrative remains dependent on repetition and visual scaffolding (p. 4). Between the ages of four and five, children begin forming grammatically correct sentences and show increased curiosity through "why" and "how" questions. Typically suggested literature for this group includes repetitive picture books, rhythmic texts, and highly predictable narrative patterns (pp. 4–5). At this level, age designation is determined not by theme complexity but by linguistic accessibility, visual dependence, and limited narrative scope.

2. Early Elementary Stage (Ages 6-8)

   In early elementary years, children transition from image-driven comprehension to language-driven comprehension. Norton et al. note that children at this stage significantly expand their vocabularies and begin using compound and conditional sentences (p. 6). They are better able to follow linear plots and understand cause-and-effect relationships. Age designation at this stage is determined by sentence length and structure,

narrative complexity, and the plot's emotional intensity. Books designed for this group often present simple conflicts and clear moral frameworks, ensuring that emotional content does not overwhelm the reader's capacity to process it (p. 6).

3. Middle Elementary Stage (Ages 8-10)

   At this stage, children begin to connect narratives with abstract ideas and generalize concepts from the stories they read. Norton et al. highlight that children start using logical connectors and demonstrate emerging analytical abilities (p. 6). Literature suitable for this age group features more complex plots while still maintaining linear progression and narrative clarity. Age designation here is influenced by the ability to understand internal character motivation, tolerance for emotional tension, and capacity for symbolic thinking. Texts for this group often introduce social problems and moral ambiguity, but usually maintain intense adult mediation or narrative guidance (p. 6).

4. Upper Elementary Stage (Ages 10–12)

   Children in this stage demonstrate a more sophisticated command of language, including the use of subordinate clauses and abstract reasoning. Norton et al. note that children begin to appreciate complex narrative structures and can process moral dilemmas without direct adult explanation (p. 6). The age designation for this level depends on narrative density, psychological depth of characters, and the reader's growing

autonomy in emotional interpretation. Books suitable for this stage emphasize broader character development and less overt moral instruction.

This global framework positions age designation not as a marketing tool, but as a pedagogical and psychological mechanism that structures how children engage with texts. Norton et al. argue that children's literature must align with developmental realities to support healthy emotional and cognitive growth (pp. 3-6). Therefore, the classification system is based on:

1. Language development (vocabulary range, sentence complexity).
2. Cognitive readiness (ability to process abstraction and symbolism).
3. Emotional capacity (tolerance for fear, loss, ambiguity).

These dimensions show that age designation is closely related to children's developmental readiness. Among these dimensions, cognitive readiness is particularly relevant to the present study because the analysis considers how young readers may engage with narrative complexity and adult-mediated explanations. In this context, Piaget's theory provides a developmental reference for understanding children's cognitive capacities.

However, developmental readiness does not necessarily translate into the same age designation across all cultural and educational contexts. Although developmental psychology provides a general reference for understanding children's capacities, publishers and educational systems may adapt age categories according to local expectations, literacy practices, and cultural contexts. Thus, the

developmental logic underlying age designation may be broadly shared, while its specific application may vary across countries.

In the Indonesian context, Sit (2017) discusses Piaget's cognitive developmental stages and identifies children aged 7-11 years as being in the concrete operational stage (p. 140). At this stage, children begin to think logically and classify objects. She further explains Vygotsky's theory of the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* and scaffolding (as cited in Sit, 2017). The ZPD is the difference between the amount of work that a child can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with help (p. 144). This helps children move from their current ability to their potential. This assistance involves modeling, prompting, and simplifying tasks. Children aged 7+ can engage with more complex narratives, including those depicting emotional conflict or social dynamics, when scaffolding and guided interaction support them within their ZPD (p. 147).

The Indonesian context also highlights the importance of sociocultural factors in children's development. Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems*, views child development as shaped by interconnected environments, from the microsystem of family and school to the macrosystem of cultural values (as cited in Sit, 2017). Within this framework, parental involvement and collaborative learning play central roles and align with sociocultural principles of child development.

The implications of this theory, as outlined by Sit (2017, p. 75), suggest that early childhood education in Indonesia should be based on harmonious family conditions, positive school experiences, and social interaction between children and teachers. Additionally, she underscores the significance of parents' involvement and

the development of supportive learning environments, which correspond with the ecological perspective on child development. These developmental and sociocultural perspectives provide a broader context for understanding age designation before considering the specific regulations and publishing practice applied in Indonesia. The use of age designation in Indonesia also depends on national regulations and publishing practices, as discussed in the following section.

2.2.9 Age Designation as Publishing and Industry Practice (IKAPI)

IKAPI (Ikatan Penerbit Indonesia) promotes industry adoption of the Pedoman Perjenjangan Buku (guideline) as the practical standard for labeling books by age and reading level. The guideline, produced by the Pusat Perbukuan under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, responds to national literacy assessments that revealed mismatches between children's reading ability and available books; it therefore frames age designation as a quality-control measure to improve accessibility and learning outcomes. Publishers are encouraged to use clear age bands and metadata so parents, teachers, and librarians can select appropriate materials.

The guideline sets out criteria for staging books that publishers should evaluate during editorial and design processes: language complexity (vocabulary and sentence length), conceptual density (themes and abstractness), structural features (plot complexity, temporal shifts), and paratextual signals (illustration density, font size, and cover age bands). The norms recommend using explicit age bands in imprint metadata and retail feeds, allowing librarians, teachers, parents, and booksellers to identify suitable materials. Commonly used age bands include

0-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-9 years, 10-12 years, and 13+ years; these bands correspond to emergent, transitional, and independent reading stages and align with school-grade expectations in national grading guidance.

Based on Law Number 3 of 2017 concerning the Book System and relevant derivative regulations include Government Regulation Number 75 of 2019 (implementation of the Book Law), Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 22 of 2022 (book quality standards and publishing rules), and Head of Agency Regulation/Technical Decision SK No. 030/P/2022 concerning Book Grading Guidelines (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2022) detailing levels (A–E), with level B further divided into B1, B2, and B3, each with specific symbols, visual identifiers, textual features, and content requirements. These levels serve as scaffolding mechanisms that guide publishers in matching book form and difficulty to readers' approximate reading abilities:

1. Level A: Pembaca Dini (Emergent Reader). Symbolized by a red star and code A, this level targets children encountering books for the first time and requiring intensive scaffolding from an adult or a skilled reader. The primary function of books at this level is to stimulate early cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and social development. The approximate age range is 0-7 years, but this is flexible and depends on individual reading development rather than on chronological age alone. Content is concrete and familiar (self, family environment, daily routines, simple folklore), vocabulary is minimal (typically 5–20 high-frequency words), and sentence structure is minimal (single words,

short phrases, or single simple sentences). Visuals are full-color 2D/3D illustrations that tell the story and support decoding, with no speech or thought balloons. The text placement is consistent and highly legible (sans-serif fonts, at least 24 pt), with strict limits on words per sentence and sentences per page (max 5 words per sentence; 3 sentences per page) and short book length (about 8–24 pages) to support attention and repeated reading.

2. Level B: Pembaca Awal (Beginning Reader)

- B1: This level is represented by a purple circle and code B1. This level is for children who are beginning to recognize written language but still need significant scaffolding and help from adults during reading activities. Books at this level are systematic, explicit tools for teaching of early reading and the building of comprehension. Suitable for ages approximately 6–8 years, although individual reading ability may vary. Content may include poetry, fiction, and nonfiction that is based on everyday experiences, folklore, simple fantasy, humor, and concrete moral values. Vocabulary is familiar and controlled, usually 25–40 commonly used words, and sentence structures are simple, with short declarative or coordinated sentences. Illustrations are still dominant and help to reinforce meaning. At the same time, text starts to play a more visible role than in Level A. Book formats may be different (picture books, activity books, simple pop-up or flap books). Large sans-serif fonts (approximately 20 pt) with a low sentence and

page density are used in the text presentation to help develop decoding skills.

- B2: Symbolized by a purple circle and code B2. This level is for children who are beginning to recognize written language and require substantial scaffolding and adult support during reading activities. Books at this level are explicit, systematic tools for early teaching of reading and the development of reading comprehension. The approximate age range is 7–9 years, though individual reading ability may vary. The content may be poetry, fiction, and nonfiction based on everyday experience, folklore, simple fantasy, humor, and concrete moral values. Vocabulary is familiar and controlled, usually 50–100 words that are used frequently, and sentence structures are simple, with short declarative or coordinated sentences. Illustrations prevalent and help to reinforce meaning. At the same time, text begins to take a more visible role than in Level A. The book formats can be different (picture books, activity books, simple pop-ups or flap books). To develop decoding skills, the text presentation uses large sans-serif fonts (approximately 18 pt) with a low sentence and page density.
- B3: This level is symbolized by a purple circle and code B3. It is intended for children who are moving from highly scaffolded reading to partial independence in reading. The approximate age range is 8-10 years, but this is flexible depending on reading fluency. Books at this level encourage reading development and an increase in linguistic and

narrative complexity. Content is fiction, nonfiction, and poetry with themes drawn from daily life, imagination, and common social experiences. Vocabulary grows to around 100–200 words of common use, sentence become longer, and simple compound sentences are used more regularly. More of the text page is dedicated to the text but the illustrations continue to provide support and are essential for comprehension. Narrative structure is more sustained and children are able to follow short story arcs over several pages.

3. Level C: Pembaca Semenjana (Intermediate Reader). It is symbolized by a blue circle and the code C. This level requires fluent reading of paragraphs within a single discourse. The approximate age range is 10-13 years. The content is more conceptually complex and includes early chapter books, simple biographies, and expository texts that support logical thinking and independent learning. Vocabulary expands significantly (commonly >300 frequent words), sentence length and paragraph structure diversify (up to 12 words per sentence; 4 paragraphs per page of varied paragraph types), and books may include chapter divisions, reference aids (glossaries, simple indexes), and mixed illustration styles (line art, photos, and infographics). These books are suitable for independent reading, curriculum support, and tasks to develop inference and sustained comprehension.
4. Level D: Pembaca Madya (Advanced Reader). Symbolized by a green triangle and code D, this level targets adolescents as they develop their

disciplinary knowledge and critical reading skills. The age range is 13-15 years old. Texts are on more complex themes and genres (novels, essays, subject-specific nonfiction), contain >600 frequent words, and use different paragraph and discourse structures (narrative, exposition, argumentation). Diagrams, charts, and similar materials, if any, are for analysis or reference only. Formatting and length will be determined by the needs of the content and not by a strict page limit; typographical choices may include serif and decorative fonts suitable for the genre. Pedagogically, D-level books support curriculum objectives, subject learning, and analytical reading strategies.

5. Level E: Pembaca Mahir (Skilled Reader). Denoted by a yellow square and the code E, this level is designed for readers capable of engaging in analytical and critical thinking with texts across genres and disciplines. The approximate age range is 16 years and above. Content includes advanced fiction, canonical literature, specialized nonfiction, comics, dictionaries, encyclopedias, *how-to* books, and texts that require synthesis across sources. Lexical demands are high (commonly >900 frequent words and domain-specific vocabulary), discourse structures are complex (multi-layered argumentation, intertextuality), and books may assume substantial background knowledge. These titles are intended for independent study, critical analysis, and higher-order literacy tasks such as synthesis and evaluation.

The guideline specifies paratextual and typographic indicators, label placement on the front cover, symbol and/color coding, minimum label size, and inclusion in imprint metadata, ensuring the designation is visible at the point of selection and machine-readable in catalogs and retail feeds. Publishers should document the editorial rationale for each label (language complexity, conceptual density, structural features, illustration role) and revise labels when editions or pedagogical evidence change. These criteria aim to establish a systematic alignment between book attributes and developmental competencies to minimize the chance that young readers will encounter texts that are too difficult or thematically inappropriate. Thus, age designation is both editorial and pedagogical; it guides production decisions and assists classroom selection.

The guideline is also through ministerial instruments which, both legally and administratively, has been formalized through ministerial instruments that anchor the practice in national standards for book quality and school procurement. With the regulation issued by the Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan (BSKAP), publishers have a formal basis to follow the guidelines when producing materials for educational contexts and public programs. Meeting these standards is essential for publishers who wish to participate in government procurement, school libraries, and literacy initiatives.

In industry practice, the role of IKAPI is to translate the guidelines into workable publisher norms and to promote consistent labeling across the market. IKAPI guidance and sector workshops recommend advice to members on implementing age designation checks during manuscript review, editorial planning,

and design stages; common outputs include printed age bands on covers, series labels, and metadata fields in catalogs indicating the recommended reader ages or grade levels. These paratextual cues help teachers, librarians, and parents to make quick judgments of suitability when purchasing or selecting a book.

For researchers and educators, IKAPI's age-designation norms provide a useful standardized field for corpus selection and comparative analysis. Using age consistently allows for more reliable sampling of texts by scholars working on narrative complexity, vocabulary level, or representational practices across age categories. At the same time, the norms foreground the importance of assessing not just textual form but also pedagogical fit, how a book will be used in read-alouds, guided reading, or independent reading contexts. Finally, the policy framing of age designation connects publishing practice to national literacy goals. Guidelines and industry norms of IKAPI are intended to improve the comprehension rate and facilitate early reading interventions found in national assessments by reducing the mismatch between reader ability and text difficulty. In this way, the age designation becomes a market signal and a public policy tool that shapes the production, distribution, and reception of children's books in Indonesia.

However, the IKAPI guidelines serve mostly as editorial and instructional guidelines rather than analytical categories for evaluating narrative perspective, thematic depth, or emotional complexity. For this reason, the present study employs the age designation of IKAPI as contextual information for understanding the book 7+ and *BO*/parental guidance labels within Indonesian publishing practice, and not as the main analytical framework. These labels are significant because they identify

the category of the targeted readers and the expected adult mediation associated with *Bagai Bumi Berhenti Berputar*. Therefore, IKAPI is used to contextualize discussions of age suitability, while the main analysis relies on Genette's narratology, Hoffman's theory of empathy, and Piaget's theory of cognitive development.