

Children's Book Collection In Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia Library: A Critical Analysis From A Children's Literature Perspective

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Abstract

Academic libraries serving teacher education carry a dual mandate: supplying current readers while training future selectors of children's books. This study asks whether a collection can appear balanced by broad category yet remain narrow on the dimensions that matter most for that second mandate. This research evaluated 60 books suitable for upper elementary readers (grades 4 to 6) from Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia's library collection of 257 children's titles, using a children's literature framework to analyze genre, theme, character, setting, and illustration. The collection is weighted toward nonfiction (38.3%) and away from traditional literature (1.7%), and its single traditional literature title is a German rather than an Indonesian folktale, meaning Indonesian oral tradition is effectively absent from a category meant to carry it. Character representation shows a similar asymmetry: adult and religious figures are nearly absent (1.7% and 3.3%), and the only explicitly gender marked character category is Princess (6.7%), with no equivalent male-marked category. Illustration quality varies sharply by publication origin: locally published titles show 28.6% good-quality illustrations against 71.4% poor, compared to 97.8% good among internationally published titles, a gap that makes quality filtering and support for domestic publishing genuinely conflicting acquisition goals rather than complementary ones. These patterns indicate that genre and format count alone are insufficient evaluation criteria for teacher-education library collections; cultural specificity, authority modeling, gender symmetry, and publication-origin parity require explicit tracking. This study offers a replicable method for surfacing such imbalances and provides baseline evidence for collection development in Indonesian academic libraries.

Keywords : *children's book, children's literature, library, University*

Introduction

Children's literature contributes significantly to children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Cognitively, exposure to children's books broadens vocabulary and supports critical and imaginative thinking, especially when children relate new concepts to prior experiences (Araújo & Sousa, 2022; Johnson, 2003). Socially, children's books introduce moral values and the concept of diversity, helping children understand characters from different backgrounds and cultures. (Kanwal, 2024; Roop Kanwal, 2024). Emotionally, narrative engagement provides space for children to recognize and manage their feelings through characters facing conflicts relevant to their lives. (Kumschick et al., 2014). However, these developmental functions depend on the types of books available to the child, making them a primary concern for the institution responsible for managing them.

This issue is very relevant for libraries that serve teacher education programs. Unlike public libraries, which serve children primarily as direct readers, academic

libraries in institutions such as the University of Education Indonesia carry out a dual function, namely supporting prospective teacher students as current users, as well as forming a literary repertoire that they will later bring with them when choosing books for their own students (Alamsyah et al., 2024). In other words, the composition of the collection has consequences that go beyond the library space itself, to the classrooms that will be occupied by the graduates.

The development of collections in academic libraries is generally guided by the principle of compatibility between collections and the institution's mission (Johnson, 2004). In the context of teacher education, this principle requires that the collection explain to prospective teacher students the range of genres, themes, and representational diversity they need to support effective literacy learning in the future, including traditional literature such as folklore and myth that function to convey cultural values across generations (Zipes, 2006). Charity advocacy work, such as *the Naidoo White Paper* (Naidoo, 2014) for *the Association for Library Service to Children*, has emphasized the importance of diversity in children's library collections and programs. However, such works are normative, rather than empirical audits of the contents of a particular library collection, thus creating a methodological vacuum relevant to the purpose of this study.

In this study, evaluating the collection "from a children's literary perspective" means assessing it based on three well-established evaluative dimensions in the study of children's literature, which are operationalized into five categories of analysis. First, related to the quality of narrative and illustration, which concerns whether the illustration is coherent with the story, supports understanding, and meets professional technical standards (Nikolajeva, 2014; Sipe, 2017), operationalized as a literacy quality category. Second, moral and characterological depth concerns whether books shape characters through values such as empathy, courage, and cooperation, while avoiding reductive stereotypes (Monoyiou & Symeonidou, 2016), as personified in the categories of themes and characters. Third, representational diversity concerns whether the characters, settings, and themes cover a wide enough range of backgrounds so that children from various contexts can find themselves represented, not invisible. (Koss, 2015; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1998), operationalized through categories of characters, settings, and genres, given that the balance of genres, for example, the presence of traditional literature alongside fiction and nonfiction, determines whether children truly encounter culturally rooted narrative forms. Critical literacy events argue that such a systematic analysis of content is necessary precisely because not all available children's books automatically meet these standards (Boutte, 2002); Quality cannot be assumed just from the presence of books on the shelf.

Although this evaluative framework is well established, the two study groups still discuss it separately. The study of children's literature has developed and applied these quality criteria, especially to certain national literary titles, genres, or traditions (Hunt, 1999; Nodelman, 2008), rather than through a systematic audit of the contents of the institution's collections in aggregate. On the other hand, the study of library and information science has examined the role of libraries in supporting literacy and access to collections (Apendi, 2020; Mahendra et al., 2024; Venkatesha, 2024), but rarely do they apply quality criteria specific to children's literature, rather than just accessibility or circulation metrics, to more accurately evaluate the content of a collection. Neither of these two traditions, individually, results in what teacher education libraries need: an audit of existing collections based on specific criteria of the quality of children's literature. This gap is more consequential outside the context of Western publishing, where the

relationship between locally and internationally published children's books, as well as the differences in quality between them, remains largely undocumented.

This gap occurs concretely at UPI. As a leading teacher education institution, the UPI library has around 257 children's books spanning genres from folklore to contemporary fiction, intended to support the training of prospective teachers and literacy research. The extent to which this collection, in practice, achieves the balance of genre, the range of themes, the diversity of characters, and the quality of illustrations deemed necessary by the study of children's literature has not been systematically studied.

This study fills this gap by critically analyzing the UPI Library's children's book collection using the framework of five categories, operationalized above: genre, theme, character, setting, and illustration quality. This study answers five research questions: (1) how to distribute children's book genres in UPI library collections for elementary school upper-class readers; (2) what themes are represented, and which are underrepresented, (3) what types of characters dominate, and how diverse the representations of characters are; (4) what is the most common background, and how does this affect children's exposure to cultural diversity; and (5) how the quality of the illustrations compares between the titles of local and international publications in the collection. The findings of this study provide empirical data to support collection development decisions at UPI and offer an evaluation framework that can be replicated by other academic libraries serving teacher education programs in Indonesia and in similar contexts.

Method

This study employed qualitative descriptive content analysis to examine 60 children's books selected from the UPI Library's Collection of approximately 257 titles. Books were selected through purposive sampling based on two inclusion criteria: classification at the Fluent Reading level according to Indonesia's Center for Curriculum and Books leveling system (2018, updated 2019), design for readers aged 10 to 12, and physical availability at the time of data collection. All 60 books that met both criteria were included, constituting the complete corpus of Fluent Reading-level books physically available at the time of data collection. Each book was analyzed across five categories, namely genre, theme, character, setting, and illustration quality, using a standardized data collection instrument developed from an established children's literature (Nikolajeva, 2014; Sipe, 2017). Frequency distribution and visual summaries were used as descriptive aids to identify patterns and gaps in the collection, subordinate to narrative interpretation rather than statistical inference, consistent with qualitative content analysis practice (Mayring, 2014). Illustration quality was assessed holistically against technical criteria including image clarity, color quality, printing standards, and visual-narrative coherence, with books classified as either Good Quality or Poor Quality; to mitigate single-rater bias, explicit observational criteria were established prior to analysis, each book was reviewed at least twice in separate sessions, and assessment rationale was documented throughout; however, the absence of inter-rater verification remains a reliability limitation acknowledge in this study.

Results

The analysis of 60 children's books in the UPI library's Fluent Reading level collection addressed five research questions concerning genre distribution, thematic coverage, character representation, setting diversity, and illustration quality.

Table 1 Genre Distribution of Children's Books in the UPI Library Collection (n=60)

Genre	n	%
Nonfiction	23	38.3
Realism	22	36.7
Fantasy	14	23.3
Traditional Literature	1	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Nonfiction and realism together dominate the collection, accounting for 75.0% of titles. Fantasy accounts for 23.3%, while Traditional Literature (encompassing folklore, legends, and myths) is represented by a single title (*Cerita Rakyat Jerman*), which accounts for 1.7% of the collection. This near absence is notable given that traditional literature is recognized in children's literature scholarship as a primary vehicle for transmitting cultural values and local wisdom across generations (Sipe, 2017).

The 60 books contained 33 distinct raw theme labels, which were consolidated into seven thematic clusters for analysis. Table 2 presents the distribution.

Table 2. Thematic Clusters in the UPI Library Collection (n=60)

Thematic Cluster	n	%
Science, Nature & Geography	24	40.0
Character & Moral Values	10	16.7
Friendship	10	16.7
Travel, History & Culture	5	8.3
Family	4	6.7
Animal Love & Nature Conservation	4	6.7
Religion	3	5.0
Total	60	100.0

Science, nature, and geography constitute the largest cluster (40.0%), encompassing natural science, geography, mathematics, natural disasters, and anthropology. Character, Moral Values, and Friendship are each represented in 10 books (16.7%). Travel, History, and Culture account for 5 books (8.3%), while Family and Animal Love and Nature Conservation each appear in 4 books (6.7%). Religion is present in 3 books (5.0%). Several thematic areas are absent from the collection. Social justice, disability, and identity (themes identified in children's literature scholarship as central to developing empathy and inclusive worldviews in upper elementary readers) are not represented in any of the 60 books. Indonesian folklore and local cultural themes appear in only 2 books specifically addressing Indonesian cultural content, representing a gap with direct implications for pre-service teachers who will need to draw on culturally relevant materials in future literacy instruction.

Table 3. Main Character Types in the UPI Library Collection (n=60)

Character Type	n	%
Child	24	40.0
None (nonfiction informational)	16	26.7
Animal	12	20.0
Princess	4	6.7
Religious Figure	2	3.3
Human (non-child, non-princess)	1	1.7

Character Type	n	%
Other	1	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Child protagonists are the most frequent character type (40.0%), consistent with developmental expectations for this age range. Animal characters constitute 20.0% of titles, primarily within the Fantasy genre. Sixteen books (26.7%) contain no identifiable narrative character, as these are nonfiction informational texts that present factual content without protagonists. Princess characters appear in 4 books (6.7%), all of which feature themes of courage and wisdom.

The effective pool of character-based narrative is therefore 44 books rather than 60. Within this pool, character representation is limited in two significant ways. First, no characters with disabilities, non-normative family structures, or explicit ethnic diversity markers are present in the collection. Second, the dominance of child and animal protagonists, while age-appropriate, leaves little room for characters who could serve as culturally specific role models relevant to Indonesian children's lived contexts.

Table 4 presents the distribution of settings across the 60 books, organized into three frequency categories.

Table 4. Setting Distribution in the UPI Library Collection (n=60)

Setting Category	n	%
Natural Environments*	12	20.0
School & Educational	11	18.3
Home & Domestic	10	16.7
Fantasy & Fictional	8	13.3
Unspecified/Absent	7	11.7
Western & European Settings	5	8.3
Indonesian Settings	2	3.3
Middle Eastern Settings	2	3.3
Village & Rural	2	3.3
Other/Transit	1	1.7
Total	60	100.0

*Natural Environments includes forests (n=4), Marine & Water settings including sea, island, and swamp (n=3), Extreme/Remote settings including desert, grassland, and Antarctica (n=3), and Farm & Rural (n=2).

Natural Environments constitute the largest category (12 books, 20.0%), encompassing forest, marine, extreme remote, and farm settings, a distribution consistent with the collection's dominance of nonfiction and science-themed titles. School and Educational settings are the second most frequent (11 books, 18.3%), followed by Home and Domestic settings (10 books, 16.7%). Fantasy and Fictional settings account for 8 books (13.3%), while 7 books (11.7%) contain no identifiable setting, primarily nonfiction texts presenting abstract or universal content. Culturally specific settings reveal a significant imbalance. Western and European settings appear in 5 books (8.3%), while Indonesian settings appear in only 2 books (3.3%), specifically Indonesian Countryside and Iconic Places in Indonesia. Middle Eastern settings account for an additional 2 books (3.3%). Children reading from this collection therefore encounter Western or European cultural contexts at a rate 2.5 times higher than Indonesian ones, despite the collection being housed in an Indonesian teacher education institution. The near-absence of

Indonesian cultural settings limits the collection's capacity to expose pre-service teachers to locally grounded narratives they will need when selecting culturally relevant materials for their future students. Table 5 presents illustration quality ratings disaggregated by publication origin.

Table 5. Illustration Quality by Publication Origin (n=60)

Publication Origin	n	Good Quality	Poor Quality
Local Indonesian	14	4 (28.6%)	10 (71.4%)
International	46	45 (97.8%)	1 (2.2%)
Total	60	49 (81.7%)	11 (18.3%)

Overall, 49 books (81.7%) received Good Quality ratings, and 11 (18.3%) received Poor Quality ratings. However, disaggregation by publication origin reveals a substantial disparity. Among the 14 locally published Indonesian titles, 10 (71.4%) received Poor Quality ratings, primarily due to technical limitations in image clarity, color reproduction, and weak visual-narrative coherence. Among the 46 internationally published titles, 45 (97.8%) received Good Quality ratings; the single Poor Quality international title is a Korean-authored book (*Potret Terbagus di Dunia*).

Discussion

This study reveals three findings relevant to library and information science scholarship on collection development in teacher education settings. First, the collection shows a genre distribution weighted heavily toward nonfiction and away from traditional literature, in a context where national curriculum policy explicitly requires literacy instruction to build both critical reasoning and creativity. Second, it documents a substantial and well evidenced quality gap between locally published and internationally published illustrations. Third, it shows that character, setting, and thematic representation in the collection is narrower than what future teachers are likely to need across the range of pedagogical situations they will face.

The collection is dominated by nonfiction (38.3%), followed by realism (36.7%) and fantasy (23.3%), while traditional literature is nearly absent (1.7%). If genre representation were proportionally balanced across these four coded categories, each would sit near 25%. Traditional literature instead sits at less than a fifteenth of that baseline. This internal deviation, not an external policy standard, is the comparison point for calling the distribution imbalanced. Folklore, myth, and legend are the primary vehicles through which children's literature transmits cultural values and historical continuity (Zipes, 2006), and a collection this weighted toward nonfiction serves the acquisition of factual and scientific literacy but does comparatively little to build the imaginative and narrative competencies that Permendikdasmen No. 13/2025's profil lulusan framework (Pasal 17) (*Permendikdasmen-No-13-Tahun-2025*, 2025) lists as required outcomes, including penalaran kritis (critical reasoning) and kreativitas (creativity). This policy reference should be read as context for why the imbalance matters going forward, not as evidence that the collection failed a standard it predates; most titles in this collection were acquired before the regulation existed. For a library serving a teacher education institution, the imbalance matters beyond current readership: preservice teachers who are not themselves exposed to a genre balanced collection during training have correspondingly less opportunity to build fluency in selecting and using traditional literature, fantasy, and fiction in their future classrooms (Koss, 2015; Nikolajeva, 2014).

The near absence of traditional literature (1.7%) deserves separate treatment from the general genre imbalance, because folklore, myth, and legend serve a function neither realism nor fantasy replaces. In Boutte's (2002) framework for examining bias in children's books, this pattern is best described as invisibility: the systematic exclusion of a cultural group's stories from a collection, as distinct from stereotyping or imbalance, which concern how a group is portrayed rather than whether it appears at all. The collection's single traditional literature title is, notably, a German folktale collection rather than an Indonesian one, meaning Indonesian oral tradition specifically is invisible in this category, not merely underrepresented relative to other traditions. This intersects with Indonesia's stated educational commitment to cultural pluralism, reflected in Permendikdasmen No. 13/2025's philosophical foundation, which draws on Ki Hajar Dewantara's principle that education must be rooted in national culture (*"berakar pada budaya bangsa"*). A collection where regional Indonesian folklore is invisible by Boutte's definition offers no material through which pre-service teachers could engage it as a pedagogical resource, despite this being precisely the kind of culturally relevant material multicultural literacy instruction requires (Naidoo, 2014).

The thematic data complicate rather than confirm a simple "moral content is missing" narrative. Science, Nature, and Geography themes dominate (40%), consistent with the nonfiction skew already noted, while Character and Moral Values (16.7%) and Friendship (16.7%) are, in fact, comparably represented, meaning the collection is not thematically silent on moral or character content. What is comparatively thin is thematic diversity beyond these clusters: Travel, History, and Culture (8.3%), Family (6.7%), Animal Love (6.7%), and Religion (5%) each occupy a modest share, suggesting the collection's thematic range is concentrated rather than genuinely narrow. This should be read alongside the genre finding: the same nonfiction and science emphasis that shapes genre distribution appears to shape thematic distribution as well.

Character representation requires more than reporting that children (40%) and animals (20%) dominate as protagonist types, with 26.7% of titles having no specific character (a function of their nonfiction format). Applying Boutte's (2002) bias categories to this distribution sharpens two observations that a simple type count would miss. First, adult and elder figures are nearly absent (Human 1.7%), an instance of invisibility rather than stereotyping, since the concern is not how adults are portrayed but that they scarcely appear at all. The collection's one recurring image of adult authority is embodied by a fantasy grandmother figure ("Wise Grandma Duck") rather than a realistic adult character, meaning intergenerational guidance in this collection is almost entirely fictionalized or invisible rather than modeled through relatable adult figures children might recognize from their own lives. Second, the only character category explicitly gender marked in the data is Princess (6.7%), while no equivalent explicitly gender marked category exists for male characters, an instance of what Boutte terms imbalance, where one group (here, explicitly gendered female characters) is presented through a single narrow category while corresponding male presence is folded into ungendered defaults like "Child" or "Human." A structurally similar pattern, where a character marked as different is accepted only through a narrow set of pathways (as an exceptional "superhero" figure, or only by other similarly marked characters) rather than as an ordinary member of the group, has been documented in studies of disability representation in children's books (Monoyiou & Symeonidou, 2016), though that study's context (disability representation in Greek language picturebooks) differs enough from this collection's coding scheme that the parallel should be read as conceptual rather than as direct empirical support.

This asymmetry is drawn primarily from the coded character data in this study (Table 1), with Boutte's framework used to name the pattern rather than to establish it. On religious representation, Religious Figure characters account for only 3.3% of the collection, and the titles carrying explicit religious content in this sample (for example, *The Best Stories of Quran, Ali Imran*) are drawn from a single religious tradition, despite Indonesia's curriculum framework requiring parallel provision across six officially recognized religions. A collection this thin in religious character representation, concentrated in one tradition, offers limited material for pre-service teachers working in Indonesia's religiously plural classrooms. This observation is based on titles visible in the dataset rather than a systematic recount of all religious content books and should be treated with that limitation in mind.

The illustration quality disparity is the finding best supported by directly comparable data. Overall, 81.7% of books feature good quality illustrations, but locally published titles show only 28.6% good quality illustrations against 71.4% poor, while internationally published titles show 97.8% good against 2.2% poor. This gap, assessed using criteria drawn from Nikolajeva (2014b) and Sipe (2017) on visual narrative coherence, is large enough and specific enough by origin that it should not be read as a general quality concern but as a structural feature of how this collection was built. A collection development policy that filters for illustration quality will disproportionately exclude local titles, while one that does not will concentrate poor illustration quality precisely where first exposure to Indonesian-authored children's literature would otherwise occur. This tension deserves to be named rather than resolved with a general call to raise local standards; the two policy options, quality filtering versus domestic industry support, are genuinely in conflict, not complementary (Henderson et al., 2020).

The setting data show Natural Environments (20%), School (18.3%), and Home (16.7%) as the most common settings, with Fantasy or Fictional settings at 13.3% and 11.7% unspecified. Notably, Western or European settings (8.3%) outnumber explicitly Indonesian settings (3.3%), the same share as Middle Eastern and Village or Rural settings. By Boutte's (2002) framework, this is an invisibility pattern specific to the collection's own national context: Indonesian settings are not merely one category among many but are proportionally scarcer than settings representing a different country's culture, in a collection meant to serve Indonesian teacher education. This runs against the *kewargaan* (citizenship) competence in Permendikdasmen No. 13/2025 and against the broader case that children's literature should help readers locate their own cultural and geographic context within what they read (Hunt, 1999).

Taken together, these findings suggest that collection development evaluation criteria appropriate for public libraries, where the primary audience is current child readers, are insufficient for libraries serving teacher education, where the collection is also training material for future selectors of children's books. This dual function argues for collection development policies that track genre balance, cultural setting representation, and illustration quality parity by publication origin as explicit criteria, not only overall coverage counts (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1998; Nodelman, 2008).

Methodologically, this study's approach, applying children's literature evaluation frameworks to a library science collection assessment task, offers a replicable model for other academic libraries assessing specialized collections. Examining genre, theme, character, setting, and illustration together makes visible imbalances that a purely bibliographic or acquisitions count audit would miss.

This study has the limitations already noted in the Method section: a single-researcher illustration assessment, a single institution at a single point in time, and no

interview data from librarians, teacher educators, or pre-service teachers regarding actual use or acquisition rationale. Comparative studies across Indonesian teacher education libraries, and studies incorporating stakeholder interviews, would test whether the imbalances found here are institution-specific or reflect broader patterns in Indonesian academic library collection development.

Conclusion

This study finds that the UPI Library's children's book collection is shaped by three specific imbalances rather than a general lack of quality or effort. Genre distribution is weighted toward nonfiction (38.3%) and away from traditional literature (1.7%), with the collection's single traditional literature title being a German rather than an Indonesian folktale, meaning Indonesian oral tradition is effectively invisible in this category. Character and setting representation show comparable gaps: adult and religious figures are nearly absent (1.7% and 3.3% respectively), and explicitly Indonesian settings (3.3%) are outnumbered by Western or European settings (8.3%). Illustration quality is not evenly distributed either; locally published titles show only 28.6% good quality illustrations against 71.4% poor, while internationally published titles show 97.8% good against 2.2% poor.

For collection development, three concrete actions follow directly from these patterns. First, prioritize acquisition of Indonesian traditional literature and folklore specifically, not fiction in general, since the current gap is in cultural specificity rather than genre balance alone. Second, treat illustration quality and publication origin as separate acquisition criteria rather than a single filter, so that improving visual quality does not come at the cost of excluding Indonesian-authored titles; this may require direct investment in, or a partnership with, local illustrators rather than acquisition policy alone. Third, track character and setting diversity explicitly during acquisition (adult role models, religious plurality, Indonesian settings) rather than relying on genre and format counts, since this study shows that a collection can appear genre-balanced while remaining narrow on these specific dimensions.

Methodologically, this study demonstrates that children's literature evaluation frameworks (genre, theme, character, setting, illustration) can be applied to library collection assessment to surface imbalances that acquisition counts alone would not reveal. This offers a replicable approach for other academic libraries serving teacher education, particularly in non-Western contexts where children's literature collections have received limited systematic evaluation.

This study's limitations, a single researcher's illustration assessment and a single institution examined at one point in time, mean these findings should be read as baseline evidence for UPI's collection specifically, not as a claim about Indonesian academic libraries generally.

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