

Rethinking Developmentally Appropriate Concept in Indonesian Picture Bible Story Book

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ABSTRACT

In Christian education, inheriting faith values to children since a young age was a pivotal responsibility for parents, the church, and Christian education institutions. According to a previous study, inheriting these values was applied through the tradition of reading illustrated Bible together with parents. In this study, illustrated Bible was not the Bible. It was illustrated literature that contained Bible stories. Using the perspective of *Developmentally-Appropriate*, the researchers elaborated how illustrated Bible in the marketplace had or had not used the developmentally appropriate concept for young children. This research would be a reference to design illustrated Bible for young children, in the form of printed book or application, and a reference for parents and educators to choose an illustrated children Bible which was appropriate for a child's age, and for publishers to give age label for children Bible products.

Keywords: Children Bible, illustrated Bible, *developmentally appropriate*

INTRODUCTION

Christian values have the nature of being inherited from parents, families, and the church to children since a young age. Cox (2001) quoted that since ancient times, the Israelis have done this value inheritance intensively and continuously, as written in Deuteronomy 6 (Ulangan 6, Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia; Cox, 2001). According to Shaw (2015), as an introductory media of Christian values, illustrated Bible story books are the first and most effective tool for young children. Shaw said, "Children's illustrated Bible story books are frequently an individual's first introduction to the Bible, and the impressions they create often endure into adulthood" (2015, p. 471). In his study, Short (2015) indicated that illustrated Bible story book is a medium to pass down religious norms and moral values of a Christian community, including families, which has the purpose of giving impacts to the next generation. In this study, illustrated Bible is not *the* Bible; it is an illustrated literature with the content of Bible stories (Shaw, 2013, par. 1).

Although illustrated Bible media has been perceived as effective to introduce Christian faith, research has indicated that the interest to read the Bible is still poor, even in countries with the highest literacy rates such as England (Cox, 2001, p. 41). In Indonesia, the poor Bible reading interest is due to a number of factors. First, it is not only the interest to read the Bible that is

poor, the interest to read any books in Indonesia is also considered poor. A survey from UNESCO revealed that the reading interest in Indonesia was ranked 60 out of 61 countries (Minat Baca Indonesia, 2016). Second, the price of books in Indonesia is generally high, relatively (Harga buku mahal, 2016). According to the field observations done by the researchers in various parenting seminars, in online bookstores, such as www.momentum.or.id, www.immanuelbookstore.co.id, and in Gramedia bookstore, the price of illustrated Bible story books are ranging between Rp. 65.000 to Rp. 200.000. Third, lower-priced illustrated Bible story books frequently do not meet the needed criteria for young children, reviewed from the aspects of the books' packaging and material, such as paper that is easily torn (not hardboard), material that is too thick and heavy, and illustration that is too abstract for young children. On the other hand, illustrated Bible story books with special material for infants and toddlers cannot accommodate each and every important Bible story that young children have to hear. Another factor is that illustrated Bible story books are not age appropriate. In the field research, the researchers came across questions and comments from toddler readers about the illustrations in the illustrated Bible story books, such as: "Why is Adam naked?" or "The lions are so scary," or "Poor Goliath. He is hurt and bloody because David beat him" (Pre-observation, *Bethlehem Childcare*, September 2016-January 2017; Sekolah

Minggu Balita GBI Shine, June 2016-January 2017). Older students (older than 5 years old) might have the potential to understand abstract illustrations, but that is not the case with younger children.

Short (2015) stated that the memories and values from stories in *Children's First Bible* will last until they grow into adulthood. According to Short, this is an evidence that Bible for children is a very important material to be studied. In a previous study, Sthicele and Pyper (2012 in Short, 2015) showed 17 researches on children Bible from various point of views. This research indicated that the illustrations and stories in children's Bible complemented each other, but they could also be contradictive among themselves. Apart from that, the themes in children's Bible needed to be investigated further whether they reinforced, or weakened, Christian faith values. For very young children, the experience of reading Bible stories with their parents is a lesson in paying attention and developing vocabularies (Farrant & Zubrick, 2013, h.281).

The researchers initiated a study to reveal the application of developmentally appropriate concept in illustrated Bible story books for young children in Indonesia. Although there was a need of Bible for children, the researchers believed that there should be an approach to reveal whether the existing literatures have met the need of developmentally appropriate concept, so a more effective education model to nurture the Christian faith of young children can be initiated.

LITERATURE AND THEORY

In 2009, in a quantitative study, Jeynes revealed the fact that Bible literacy in children influences their academic performance in school. This study was done to 140 random respondents ranging between grade seven to grade twelve in several Christian schools. This study was based on the assumption of previous researches that religiosity and religion values have an influence on academic performance in school and student-behavior. The study done by Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Jeynes, 2002 (in Jeynes, 2009) suggested that students' religious commitment positively influences their academic achievement in school. Jeynes' study in 2009 incorporated the concepts of race and gender to see the relationship between Bible literacy and children's academic achievement. Unfortunately the study did not specifically discuss the result from the race and gender factors.

An old document from Hollander (1986) studied the question: *Children Bible or The Bible for Children?* This question led the readers to an understanding that

the Bible should also be translated into a language understood by children. In his short paper, Hollander gave some suggestions on how to increase Bible literacy for children. First, taking children's reading experience and adult's supervision into consideration, Hollander assumed that if we believe that children should read the Bible since a young age, we have to provide the time to guide the children and give them the opportunity to have a readable translated version of the Bible. Hollander suggested that the appropriate age to start reading the Bible is 8-12 years old. Second, Hollander suggested some selected materials. It is good to have a Bible for children which accommodates the content of the whole Bible, but it is better to select children-friendly content. The third suggestion is the translation method. Hollander mentioned that "such translation is still far from being what is sometimes called a "paraphrase". There should not be any hint of additions to the text that breathe a particular ideological or theological spirit. And passages should not be adapted in order to make them more exciting than they really are, or be left out because they do not fit in with the translator's ideas" (1986, p. 242). The fourth suggestion is to pay attention to age groups. The translation of Bible for children should keep the children's age groups in mind. That is why there should be a difference in each level of age group. For example, 8-12 year old children do not need a rigid language. They need translation to help them experience imagining being inside the context of what they read. The fifth suggestion is the availability of illustration. Illustration in Bible for children functions as a reinforcement of the main theme. Illustration can be located separately, but it has to be integrated with the text. These ideas from Hollander are very crucial to develop Bible for children under 5 years old.

Sjolander (1981) had previously written some crucial points on why children should read a complete Bible. First, children over the age of 10 years are mature enough to make a connection between their lives and the experiences in the Bible stories. Second, when children know that there is a complete Bible, it motivates them to read. Third, the presence of Bible study group for teenagers helps them to interact with stories in the Bible, completely. Fourth, possessing a complete Bible cultivates a habit of devotion time. Fifth, children develop memories through the sequence of events in the Bible so they need a sequential and complete Bible. Sixth, they have to understand the commands, rules, and the content of the Bible in their heart so they can share them with others.

A study about the Bible and the response of its readers by Pike (2003) described how children relating to Bible stories reinforce their experiences dealing with

Christian values. Bible stories become an important part in the life journey of a child. They respond because the stories are relevant with their lives. Pike said, "While such stories are an important part of childhood and should not be neglected, reading biblical texts as 'stimulus' may be the best way of connecting the text with 'the stuff of our own lives' which is an important move for the reader to make" (Pike, 2003, p. 45). Pike suggested that for children, the Bible be a stimulus to express their relevant personal experiences, instead of looking at the Bible as a history. Pike added, "Knowing a text is a poem or a letter may not help children to hear God speak. Their literacy may have improved but their spiritual literacy may not" (p. 45). Therefore, Bible for children should pay attention to their spiritual literacy as well.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is Qualitative Content Analysis, which is often called as the particular method of Communication Science. However, as media and technology have developed, the use of the method has been expanded into diverse disciplines (Prajarto, 2010). Prajarto (2010) stated that a content analysis research is trustworthy to reveal several things, such as: describing the content of media, comparing content between a couple of media channels, testing hypothesis of a message's characteristic, laying a foundation for researches on the effects of media. Pickering (2004) wrote that qualitative content analysis method is developed because quantitative content analysis method cannot thoroughly and deeply answer research questions, since even one word can have certain meanings depending on the text. For this study, qualitative content analysis was used to reveal the answer of the question how, which is to describe how techniques of developmentally appropriate concept are presented.

The Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis of this study is pictorial Bible books. They are storybooks that contain Bible stories from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Researchers searched and selected pictorial Bible for Children literature from various publishers. The selection criteria were:

1. The literature contains the Old and New Testaments. This represents the structure of the Bible which consists of the Old and New Testaments
2. The illustrated Bible literature contains images on each page and text

3. Literature published in Indonesia in Indonesian, can be in the form of translation, or Bilingual
4. The area of literature observed are verbal content (writing) and non-verbal (illustration/ visualization) as well as structure and organization (message arrangement and packaging)
5. Literature is intended for children aged 0-8 years (Early Childhood)

There were 10 literatures obtained based on field observations based on the criteria that have been prepared by researchers, through online bookstores and bookstore visits. However, after the feasibility test was carried out according to the literature retrieval procedure, there were 10 books examined in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

By means of data collection using a research matrix, the researchers classified the emerging themes from the data. Some themes that indicated the developmentally appropriate concept in 10 literatures were chosen. A number of the outstanding themes in this study were: the literature profile (age labelling, original or translated work, the material of the book), the involvement of the children's all learning areas, and the interactivity). These themes were reflected from the text form and the chosen visualization, the learning method variation—including games, the involvement of children's experience—including daily relationship and motivation in the literature content.

The Profiles of the Literature for Young Children

Khorat, Shamil, and Heibal (2013) stated that reading is a promising context for children's language development. Language development is needed as a tool to share values from Bible stories with the children. Parents who read the same stories from the same book repeatedly actually help children to understand the values in the book. That is why materials that are suitable, appropriate for children at certain age groups, and that last long should be a priority.

From the field observations, generally, the researchers found some categories of binding materials for children literatures, such as: soft book, hard board book, hard cover book, and soft cover book. Soft book is a book of which materials are made of fabrics and vinyl handle, suitable for infants' grip. Fabric material, which is soft and flexible to grab, helps the sensory motor skill in infants' development phase. In the age of four months old until one year old, infants learn to lay on their stomach, reach out for things, open and

close their fingers, move their limbs, straighten their back when hold, grasp rattles, move their head, clap their hands, chew on things (Neaum, 2016).

Hard board book has the cover and the pages made from hardboard. This book is suitable for 1-2 year old children. They can hold things and transfer them from one hand to the other, open and close the pages. However, they need a thick material that is not easily torn. Hard cover book has the cover from hardboard, but the pages are of thinner papers. This type of material is suitable for children in the age of 3-5 years old. They have already developed their fine motor skill to be able to open and close thinner pages. Neaum (2016) stated that this age group learns how to solve simple problems, including how to open pages of a book without tearing them. The last category is soft cover book, which has the cover and the pages made of a relatively thin papers, instead of hardboard. Children older than 5 years old are in the right age group to have this kind of book.

Based on the observations on these ten literatures, the researchers found three categories of the binding material used: hardboard book, hard cover book, and soft cover book. Some hardboard books were: *Alkitab Kecil Cerita Alkitab Bergambar 2*, *Alkitab Kecil Cerita Tentang Binatang*; The hard cover books were: *105 Cerita Alkitab Anak Kecil* (Read with Me Bible: A Story Bible for Children), *101 Cerita Alkitab Balita* (101 Bible Stories for Toddler), *Candle Alkitab untuk Balita*, *Cuplikan Berwarna Cerita-cerita Alkitab*, *The Classic Edition A Child's Garden of Bible Stories (Taman Alkitab Anak)*, *Bible Stories with Little Angels*, *Kubaca Alkitab Tiap Hari*; and the only soft cover book was *360 Story Bible*. These ten literatures were designed having more than 20 pages, which made them relatively heavy for young children to hold by themselves. Based on the observations, the majority of the binding material was hard cover book. Although three out of the ten literatures specifically mentioned that the readers were supposed to be children under five years old, but none of the three used fabric or soft book material. Therefore, these ten literatures should have been addressed to children more than 2 years old with supervision from the parents, who hold and read the book for them. But it needs to be noticed that the big and thick size of the books means that parents have to pay attention to their safety. Parents have to make sure of the way they sit so the book does not fall onto their children when reading together.

The Developmentally Appropriate Principles in the Text

A study done by Carta (1994) revealed that since the beginning of the concept development, the application

has been very contextual and personal. In this study, the researchers found a couple themes that intensively refer to developmentally appropriate principles, namely: the involvement of the children's all learning areas and the interactivity. Young children need stimulations for all development areas: motor, cognitive, social-emotional, and language. The four categories of young children, which are: 0-1 years old, 2-3 years old, 4-5 years old, and 6-7 years old all need different stimulations according to their age group's need. Quoting Vengopal, developmentally appropriate "...echoed traditional child-centered values, reinforced by Piagetian theory, emphasizing respect for universal stages of development, young children's natural play, exploration- and activity-based learning, along with the guiding and supportive role of the skilled practitioner" (2015, p. 127). After examining using the arranged research matrix, the researchers classified the ten literatures into three categories of developmentally appropriate: (1) appropriate; (2) partially appropriate; and (3) not identified.

In the first category, "appropriate," some books mention the age group of the readers or implicitly refer to a certain reader group. The first one is the book entitled "*Alkitab Kecil Cerita Alkitab Bergambar 2*" with hardboard material, making it easier for children under five years old open each page of the book. This book is designated for children starting from two years old, who are able to open and close hardboard pages. The pictures in each story clearly depict the story and are easy to understand. The topic "*Selamat Datang, Bayi Yesus!*" (Welcome Baby Jesus!) illustrating Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus in a manger. Although the book does not mention page nor bibliography so it is not easy for the readers to find the pages to read, this is not a problem because for two-year-old children, the focus is on textual exploration and sensory-motor development. The illustration and text in the book help develop the active learning of children who read it, particularly for 2-5 year old children, who are capable to open pages of a book well, and are able to run. Short sentences consisting of three to four words help children to understand and digest the story.

From the point of view of interactivity and relationship, some activity instructions in the book train children to develop memories. This can be observed in the part of the book "*Allah Menciptakan Semua*" (God Created All), which has an instruction "Close your eyes and feel that all is dark." This helps children to imagine something simple. Moreover, the story of "*Petrus Menceritakan Kabar baik*" (Peter Tells Good News) also has an instruction, "Count the members of your family." In the theme of

interaction and relationship, this book contains sentences that encourage children to learn interacting with others, for instance, on a page about Jesus visiting Mary and Martha, where we can find the sentence: "... *katakan halo untuk teman-teman Yesus*" (say hello to Jesus' friends). Discussing the theme of interactivity, this book also teaches children to learn to imitate some animal voices, as we can see on the page about "*Daniel dan Singa-singa*" (Daniel and the Lions), where there is an instruction "Can you roar like a lion?" and also "Mew like a cat." This type of activities triggers children to always remember that a lion is an animal like a cat, but with a big body, and they can also remember the voice of a cat. Besides, there is also an instruction "Mention the colors of Joseph's robe," in which children from two years old can learn and be familiar with color vocabulary. Children under five years old are in the age group that has the ability to express each of their feelings. This book also teaches children to be able to express love towards others, as seen on the page about "*Jubah baru Yusuf*" (Joseph's New Robe), where we can find an instruction "Hug your father and mother."

Other literatures that demonstrate the appropriateness with the principles of developmentally appropriate are "Bible Stories with Little Angels" and "360 Story Bible." These books are suitable for six year old children because they involve all age-appropriate developmental aspects. The stories contain sentences which encourage children to develop various emotional responses, and to behave appropriately in various social situations. For 6-8 year old children, developmental aspects cover cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. In the book "*Alkitab Kecil Cerita Tentang Binatang*," all pages with sentences always contain an activity instruction. In addition to that, different colors between the text of the story and the instruction make it easier for students to tell them apart.

The "partially appropriate" category indicates books that have a tendency to apply some developmentally appropriate principles, but show some disagreement to other areas of the principles. Some literatures, including "*105 Cerita Alkitab Anak Kecil*" (Read with Me Bible: A Story Bible for Children), are categorized here. Taking into account the long verbal text, quotes from the Bible, the diverse variety of illustration, the thickness of the book, and the material used, which is matt paper, the book is suitable for children over 6 years old, who are already capable of reflecting the meaning of the text they read, and who are capable of individually enjoying the text in the book. There are some new vocabularies without any explanation, such as: "His clothes were made of

camel's hair," "The straps of His sandals I am not worthy to untie." Children need to experience the meaning of those vocabularies beforehand. If there is an explanation, in illustration or text, children will have more chance to learn more new things.

In the second literature, "*101 Cerita Alkitab Balita*" (101 Bible Stories for Toddler), the simplicity of the sentences, the big fonts, the clear illustrations which dominate each page (*preschematic stage*) and the number of blank space on each page allow this book to be designated for children under five years old. However, the absence of motor involvement, the lack of interaction, the limited variety of illustration, not to mention that the book is heavy and thick, make this book not really appropriate for the designated age group. The third literature, "*Candle Alkitab untuk Balita*" shows that in the aspect of structure, this book has sentences and illustrations that help children to associate with what they hear and see in the book. From that structure aspect, and also the content, this book can be designated for 2-3 year old children, however when we consider the hard cover material, children need special supervision from adults in the process of reading it.

Some books fall under the third category: "not identified," such as "*Cuplikan Berwarna Cerita-cerita Alkitab*". Although the text can be understood by children over five years old, but the structure and the visualization of this book do not encourage five-year old children to read. There are illustrations on every page, but the colors are bland and not interesting. Six-year old children are interested with drawing and painting, so pictures with bland colors do not catch their interests.

The next literature is "*Kubaca Alkitab Tiap Hari*". Each page of this book has illustration and text, and the colors used are interesting. These features draw children's attention, especially for 7-8 year old children. However, not every picture explains the story, for instance page 304 which only has one small picture that does not explain the story at all. The researchers also found some disproportions between the number of illustrations and text, such as in page 370-371, where there are too many texts and only a limited number of pictures. Another literature in this category is "The Classic Edition a Child's Garden of Bible Stories (*Taman Alkitab Anak*)." The material of this book is easy to be torn and crumpled by children of two-year age because they are capable of open book pages, but not in a delicate way, causing the pages to be torn or crumpled. The pictures on each page are complex—we can see color mixing and gradation. Moreover, the pictures cannot explain the

sentences of the story. For instance, on page 20 there is a picture of Cain with his crops and Abel with his cattle. The sentences are “Cain is a farmer and Abel is a shepherd” and “They put them in the altar and burn them...” The events are not illustrated so it is difficult for children to imagine what happens in the story.

In a previous study, Khorat, Shamil, and Heibal (2013) quoted that an appropriate material for pre-schooler or young children has these characteristics: it consists of approximately 15 pages; the colored illustration is big enough to cover more than half of each page; the text is three to four short sentences, or 40 characters at most; the text is written in dotted fonts (*Nekudot* in Hebrew) so children can associate text with voice. The literatures in this study have displayed the effort to apply developmentally appropriate principles, but each book has been unsuccessful in displaying the seriousness of applying these principles in its layout or content, according to the designated age group.

Potter (2007) expressed that children’s media literacy is supported by some basic principles—starting with learning basic things such as human, forms, colors, and movements, and after that learning language, including recognizing message, voice, and how to produce voice. A more advanced phase of learning narration, developing understanding of difference, fiction, and non-fiction. Bible literature for children should be in motion, adjusting itself to children development by observing how a healthy media literacy concept operates. However, on the level of differentiating fiction and non-fiction, parents have the role to explain that stories in the Bible are real and factual. Parents help children to understand the “reality” in each illustration, sentence, and *onomatopoeia* in the text. For older children, 6-8 years old, the focus of literacy is not merely basic, because they are in the stage of developing critical thinking. Discussion between parents and children is essential in the process of reading Bible story literature in this age group. Therefore, Bible story literatures for children aged 6-8 years old which are complemented with questions and discussion ideas help to improve children’s experiences and motivation to understand the values inside the literatures. Furthermore, the activities also prepare them to embrace the real, complete Bible.

There have not been a great number of studies on Bible for children. A classic study done by Hollander (1986) gave some suggestions on how to increase the readability level of Bible for children. The first suggestion is to consider the reading experience of children and the supervision of adults. Hollander

assumed that if we believe that children should read the Bible since a young age, we have to provide the time to guide the children and give them the opportunity to have a readable translated version of the Bible. A readable translated version in this study means that the version is translated by considering the literature and structure profiles that are understandable by young children. The literatures in this study fall under the category of “appropriate” according to developmentally appropriate principles. The profile and structure of the literature support a certain age group to be able to understand the values included in the Bible stories. For the books in the “partially appropriate” category, there are some parts of the literatures that need to be further developed to make them easier for the designated age group to read. For the books in the “not identified” category, the researchers recommend to redesign the profile and structure of the literatures. Hollander added that children aged 8 years old should be able to read the real Bible, but in an abridged version—paraphrasing with more simple sentences, not in the version of short sentences, like what 2-6 year old children are able to read. Hollander said, “There should not be any hint of additions to the text that breathe a particular ideological or theological spirit. And passages should not be adapted in order to make them more exciting than they really are, or be left out because they do not fit in with the translator’s ideas” (1986, p. 242). For children under five years old, illustration in the Bible has the function to reinforce the main theme. The pictures can be located separately, but have to be integrated with the text. These ideas from Hollander are very important to develop Bible for children under five years old.

Besides profile and structure, another consideration in studying Bible stories for children is how children connect with the story. Pike (2003) described that how children connect with Bible stories reinforces their experiences on Christian values. Stories in the Bible become an important part in a child’s life journey. They respond because the stories are relevant to their lives. Pike said, “While such stories are an important part of childhood and should not be neglected, reading biblical texts as ‘stimulus’ may be the best way of connecting the text with ‘the stuff of our own lives’ which is an important move for the reader to make” (Pike, 2003, p. 45). From Pike’s statement, it can be recommended that illustrated Bible stories for children should be a stimulus to express children’s personal experiences in the present, not merely a tool to learn history or facts of the past. In another word, children Bible should take into account the spiritual literacy of the children.

CONCLUSION

This research has answered the initial question, which was “How has illustrated Bible story books circulated in Indonesian market represented developmentally appropriate concept for young children?” Through the process of data collection using a research matrix, some themes have emerged and have been elaborated. Those themes include: the literature profile (age labeling, original or translated work, size, book material), the involvement of all learning areas of a child, and interactivity. They were reflected in the text and visualization chosen, the learning method variations—including games, the involvement of children’s experiences—including daily relationship, and the presence of motivation in the literature content.

Not all literatures studied have seriously paid attention to the developmentally appropriate concept. Therefore, the researchers classified the description of the concept in the ten literatures studied. The classification includes: appropriate, partially appropriate, and not identified. The biggest number is in the category of partially appropriate, which suggested that the literatures under this category meet some principles from the developmentally appropriate concept, but have negated other principles. Three books were observed to be relatively appropriate with the developmentally appropriate concept, but not all principles were observed. The books in the category “not identified” need to be reassessed in their profile, structure, age group designation, and the storytelling methods.

Although there have not been many studies on children Bible literatures, previous studies have suggested that children’s reading experience be the focus in children’s Bible literacy. If we believe that children should read the Bible since a young age, we have to provide the time to guide the children and give them the opportunity to have a readable translated version of the Bible. Therefore, besides profile, structure, and story content, the experience of interaction and the supervision from adults—parents or teachers—highly support the transfer of Bible story values.

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