CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the era of rapid technological advancement, literacy remains a fundamental skill that significantly impacts the quality of human resources within a nation. Despite improvements in access to education, reading habits and comprehension levels among students in Indonesia continue to present serious challenges. Literacy is not merely about the ability to read texts, but also encompasses the capacity to understand, interpret, and critically evaluate information. It plays a crucial role in shaping students' cognitive and emotional development. However, various studies have shown that literacy rates in Indonesia remain alarmingly low, indicating the urgent need for educational strategies that promote reading interest and comprehension skills among young learners. The results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 study, released simultaneously in 2019, placed Indonesia as one of the countries with low science literacy rankings, which ranked 80th out of 85 countries. In addition, Indeks Aktivitas Literasi Membaca (Alibaca) released by the Centre for Policy Research, Ministry of Education and Culture in 2019, stated that the National Alibaca Index was only 37.32% or fell into the low category. The index consists of four dimensions: skills, access, alternatives and culture. (Solihin, Utama, Pratiwi, & Novirina, 2019).

A literacy index survey published by Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) in March 2016 ranked Indonesia 60th out of 61 surveyed countries. The study, which assessed reading proficiency scores among children under 18, revealed that Indonesian children's reading comprehension skills were significantly low, as cited from ccsu.edu. According to Rusti (2023), several factors contribute to low reading proficiency, including low reading interest, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, family relationships, the influence of mobile phones and television, and the lack of effective reading instruction models implemented by teachers. These factors collectively hinder the development of reading habits and comprehension

skills among students. Reading interest refers to an individual's intrinsic inclination toward reading activities. Reading itself is a language-based skill aimed at comprehending ideas, concepts, and emotions conveyed within a text. Throughout this process, individuals engage in cognitive activities to deeply understand these ideas and concepts, a process commonly referred to as divergent thinking (Irhandayaningsih, 2019).

The use of engaging and visually supported reading materials becomes essential to support the development of these cognitive and comprehension skills, especially in young learners. Picture storybooks combine reading texts with unique illustrations that capture children's attention, enhancing the effectiveness of message delivery. The visual elements support comprehension and engagement, making it easier for young readers to absorb the information presented in the text. Typically, picture storybooks feature narratives that reflect aspects of everyday life familiar to children, helping them connect with the content on a deeper level (Amril & Pransiska, 2021). These books influence reading interest (Apriliani & Radia, 2020), and instil character values (Amril & Pransiska, 2021).

By adapting a storybook approach that combines illustrations and narration, this storybook will utilise English adapted to the language proficiency level of elementary school students, specifically at the A2 level of the CEFR. At this level, learners can understand basic expressions and participate in simple communication on familiar topics (European Council, 2001). This storybook will facilitate English language learning through engaging narratives and visual elements using sentence structures that are easy for primary school students at the A2 level to understand.

Therefore, the target of this research is children who are learning English. By using a storybook approach with simple and easy-to-understand language, this research aims to help students develop English comprehension, expand vocabulary, and improve reading comprehension skills. This book will add to the enthusiasm of reading and present interesting illustrations. It will be added with interesting games such as word search, crossword, spot and count, fill in the blanks, and jumbled words. According to research conducted by Yunitasari, Santoso, and Sapto (2019), the implementation of crossword and word games in classes has a positive

impact on students compared to students who do not engage in such activities. These word games contribute to the development and enhancement of vocabulary mastery among students, aligning with the required vocabulary proficiency indicators.

In the same way, storybooks can also be a medium to teach social intelligence to children. According to Muzzamil, Fatimah, and Hasanah (2021), social development is a process in which an individual forms a social self (one's identity within society) to acquire the ability to behave according to the norms and values of their social environment. On the other hand, emotional development refers to the change's individuals experience with various intense emotions, such as hatred, fear, anger, love, joy, and sadness. A child's socio-emotional development comprises two distinct yet inseparable aspects. In other words, discussing emotional development inevitably involves social development and vice versa. Social behaviour is closely related to emotional behaviour, although each follows a different pattern.

Given the close relationship between social and emotional development, fostering these aspects from an early age becomes crucial for supporting various forms of intelligence, particularly those that involve social interaction. One of the essential intelligences to be developed in Early Childhood Education is interpersonal intelligence. Unlike intellectual intelligence, interpersonal intelligence focuses on interactions and relationships with others. Interpersonal intelligence refers to the ability to interpret social cues and signals, engage in both verbal and non-verbal communication, and appropriately adjust communication styles (Oviyanti, 2017). Generally, individuals with strong interpersonal intelligence are more commonly found among extroverts, who tend to be more sensitive to the emotions and feelings of others. They typically excel in teamwork and collaboration compared to others (Baharun, et al., 2021). Interpersonal intelligence should ideally be nurtured from an early age, as early childhood is a critical period for developing social and emotional skills (Nurunnisa, 2017). It is not an innate ability but rather a form of intelligence that can be cultivated through a child's social environment (Winaya, 2019).

Teaching of social and emotional development in children can be facilitated through storytelling as a medium. According to research by Jazilurrahman, Widat, Tohet, Murniati, and Nafi'ah (2022), there are three stages in implementing a storytelling approach to enhance young children's social skills: preparation, execution, and assessment. As part of the planning process, the selected story theme should focus on children's lives within family and peer environments, which provide ample opportunities to develop social skills and foster an awareness of the importance of teamwork and group living as fundamental aspects of human interaction. During the execution stage, the storyline is structured, and expressions are adjusted accordingly while incorporating social values such as empathy and respect for others. The final stage is assessment, where the development of interpersonal intelligence is evaluated based on specific characteristics, including empathy, prosocial behaviour, and social insight.

According to Helmanita (2018), many translated children's stories circulating in bookstores mostly adopt stories from the West, even if there are translated children's stories translated from Arabic, they mostly tell the stories of prophets, apostles and their companions. In addition, the use of words, phrases and sentences that are difficult for children to understand in translating children's stories is the reason why this research was conducted. Until now, there are still very few children's picture storybooks that are lifted or adapted from classical books, especially books that contain moral values. Most children's storybooks in circulation mostly feature fables, fairy tales, or modern fiction stories that are general, without specifically exploring the wealth of Islamic literature that is full of character education messages. Books such as *Akhlaq lil Banin* contain moral values that are very relevant for the formation of children's character from an early age (Helmanita,2018). This limitation shows that there is a gap that can be filled by innovating the development of children's reading materials that are not only entertaining, but also spiritually and emotionally educational through visual and language approaches that are suitable for children's age.

With an interesting approach coupled with social values, storybooks are a good medium for students to learn. To support good social learning, this book

adapts a book by Sheikh 'Umar bin Ahmad Baraja, which has been widely used in many *pesantren* and madrassas in Indonesia (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2013). Sheikh 'Umar bin Ahmad Baraja has a masterpiece called *Akhlaq lil Banin* or Morality for a Child, in which there are points related to the manners of a child who is also equipped with stories. In this study, the author reflects on the model of moral education through stories in the book *Akhlaq lil Banin* by Sheikh 'Umar bin Ahmad Baraja in his thoughts, along with adjusting the language level to the CEFR A2 standard.

To systematically develop this adapted storybook, the research employs the Research and Development (R&D) method, which includes several stages such as needs analysis, product design, validation, testing, revision, and final implementation. This method ensures the product is well-suited to the target learners' needs both in content and language level. The bilingual combination of English and Indonesian makes the book more interesting for children, making it easier to understand the story. It also serves as a bridge to support language acquisition, especially for young learners who are in the early stages of learning English. By presenting familiar vocabulary and concepts in their native language alongside the target language, children are more likely to develop confidence, improve their vocabulary retention, and enhance their overall reading comprehension. This approach not only facilitates language learning but also fosters a greater appreciation for both languages. Illustrations and vibrant colours typically dominate books for early childhood. The emphasis on visual elements aims to stimulate children's imagination, helping them develop sensitivity and awareness toward their surroundings. (Irhandayaningsih, 2019). Therefore, by making the story simple and fun, children can easily understand the values in a fun way.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study's problem formulation focuses on two key aspects: the development process of the storybook, including its design, content selection, and integration of visual and textual elements, and the alignment of its language with

the CEFR A2 level to ensure clarity and age-appropriate comprehension for young readers. This study seeks to explore the following questions:

1. How is the adaptation process of *Akhlaq lil Banin* to a children's storybook called *Little Hearts' Journey*?

2. How do children at the A2 CEFR level and teachers respond to *Little Hearts' Journey* book?

1.3 Objective of the Study

This research has several aims, including the following:

1 To explain the process for adapting and presenting moral stories from *Akhlaq lil Banin* into a children's storybook.

2 To obtain and analyse the response from children and teachers about *Little Hearts' Journey* book, who evaluate the potential of the storybook as a tool for both language development and moral education.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research has several advantages, which, among others, are theoretical benefits and practical benefits:

1. Theoretical Contribution

a) The study provides a resource that effectively teaches moral values to children, contributing to their character development and ethical understanding.

b) By synchronising with the A2 CEFR level, this storybook helps children improve their language skills in a structured way, enhancing reading, comprehension and vocabulary.

c) This project contributes to the academic field by providing insights into how moral education can be effectively integrated into children's literature. It explores the theoretical frameworks that support the adaptation of traditional moral stories for modern educational purposes.

2. **Practical Contribution**

   a) The storybook serves as a practical educational tool that teachers and parents can use to teach both moral values and language skills. It provides a ready-to-use resource that aligns with the A2 CEFR level, making it accessible and practical for classroom and home use.

   b) The inclusion of engaging illustrations and interactive elements helps to maintain children's interest and motivation. This practical aspect ensures that learning is enjoyable and effective, increasing the likelihood of sustained educational outcomes.

   c) By targeting the A2 CEFR level, the storybook directly contributes to improving children's language skills in a structured and measurable way. This practical outcome supports educators' goals of advancing students' proficiency in the target language.

1.5 Output

The outcomes of this research are *Little Hearts' Journey* book. It is a well-designed bilingual children's storybook adapting moral stories from "*Akhlaq lil Bani*n" for A2 CEFR level learners is specially for elementary school who has international curriculum. This book contains three main stories relevant to character values. To enhance students' understanding and engagement, the book also includes game pages such as crosswords, word searches, and fill-in-the-blanks, with a total of 36 pages.