

Reflecting Inclusivity: Disability Narratives in Indonesian Children's Literature

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ABSTRACT

Disability representation often perpetuates harmful stigmatization and stereotyping. This study examines disability narratives in the Indonesian children's book *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda* (Collection of Special Children's Stories: I Am Different) by Erna Fitri and Ratih Soe. Given the complexity and diversity of disabled persons' experiences, this study cannot provide a comprehensive account of all representational forms. This research employs a mixed descriptive-qualitative and quantitative methodology using reading and note-taking techniques. The quantitative approach identified various disability narrative forms within the children's book, while grouping and analysis yielded 63 data points. These data were analyzed through Mitchell and Snyder's narrative prosthesis theory. While narrative prosthesis theory has primarily been applied within Western adult literary studies, extending this theoretical framework to Indonesian children's literature represents a significant scholarly innovation, offering critical insights into disability's narrative construction and representation within localized cultural and literary contexts. Analysis reveals that disability frequently serves as a characterization tool, symbol, object of perspective, and plot device. The findings show that existing narratives emphasize physical and mental differences, potentially limiting understanding of people with disabilities as complete individuals. Additionally, character complexity is often overlooked when disability functions as a plot mechanism. This study advocates for more inclusive approaches to disability representation in children's literature to prevent reinforcing stereotypes and stigma against people with disabilities.

Keywords: *children's literature; disability; inclusivity; Indonesian children's book; narrative prosthesis*

INTRODUCTION

Children's books, with their accessible delivery style and easily digestible language, serve as effective tools for instilling values of kindness and empathy (Mahpudoh, 2024). Diversity represents one frequently explored theme, including bodily diversity such as disability. Disability representations in children's books tend to be explicit and direct, allowing children to easily grasp the values writers

wish to convey. Unlike adolescent literature, which often explores disability issues within complex social or psychological contexts, children's books present simpler narratives focused on child-relevant aspects (Astuti et al., 2024). Consequently, children's books possess significant potential to shape children's perceptions of disabled people, ultimately influencing their future perspectives.

Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda (Collection of Special Children's Stories: I Am Different) (2018) by Erna Fitri and Ratih Soe exemplifies children's literature addressing disability themes. This book offers diverse disability representations, providing a comprehensive picture of how disability can be integrated into children's narratives. Since these stories contain moral and educational messages relevant to disability issues, they can enhance understanding and empathy toward disabled people. The book potentially reveals how these stories either support or challenge existing social norms around disability, building inclusivity or simply presenting disabled people's experiences. Therefore, this book serves as a valuable starting point for further discussion on disability narratives in Indonesian children's literature.

Society typically frames disability as a burden and problem requiring resolution. This perception stems from viewing aspects that differentiate disabled individuals from others as deficiencies requiring assistance. Normal body standards have become societal norms, resulting in negative stigma and stereotypes about disability as burdensome due to differences and inability to see, walk, hear, speak, and so forth. This inadequacy perception ultimately drives people with disabilities to prove themselves and even aspire to normalcy. However, disability constitutes part of diversity and self-identity, not abnormality (Harisantoso, 2023; Kohli & Atencio, 2023). All negative views toward disability can cause psychological distress including inferiority, self-rejection, and limited developmental potential (Ardilla & Wardani, 2021; Dayanti & Legowo, 2021). Thus, when a person with disability is labeled as "different," "abnormal," or "deficient," this can produce numerous adverse consequences for both the individual and society as a whole.

Research into disability has encompassed several areas, including inclusive education and disability rights (Anidi & Anlianna, 2022; Baroroh & Rukiyati, 2022; Mozes et al., 2020), psychology and disabled children's development (Fadhilla et al., 2023; Fahraini & Liyanti, 2018; Putra, 2022), and moral education within children's literature (Damayanti, 2020; Lintang & Latifah, 2024). Additionally, the representation of disability in children's literature has emerged as a major research focus (Apriliya et al., 2018; Demidova & Corro, 2023; Hartenstein

et al., 2023; Roshini & Rajasekaran, 2022; Sugiarto, 2020). These studies enhance our understanding of how disability is perceived, experienced, and portrayed across various social and cultural contexts, particularly in young readers' literature.

Despite this growing body of work, no previous research has specifically examined the portrayal of disability in *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda*. This presents a research gap in understanding how this particular book contributes to or challenges existing narratives about disability in children's literature, especially within the Indonesian context. Moreover, few studies critically examine disability's deeper narrative functions—how it structures plot, shapes character arcs, or serves symbolic purposes. Narrative prosthesis offers a unique lens here by shifting focus from content to function. Analyzing disability narratives in this children's book is therefore essential for understanding the purpose and impact of inclusive storytelling in Indonesian children's literature.

This study aims to analyze how narratives in literary works communicate disability experiences rather than merely advancing plot. The main focus examines disability narratives in *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda* by Erna Fitri and Ratih Soe. The study will analyze how these narratives shape perceptions of disability as part of human diversity, with the ultimate goal of fostering a more inclusive society. The results are expected to provide insights into how children's literature can build inclusivity and transform perspectives on disability.

According to Widinarsih (2019) and Sholeh (2015), disabilities can be categorized as either physical or non-physical. Physical disabilities include deafness, speech impairment, and blindness, while non-physical disabilities encompass autism, hyperactivity, and slow learning. Beyond these categories exist disabilities that include multiple types. These are known as multiple disabilities and include deaf-speech, deaf-speech-autistic combinations, and disabled-visually impaired-learning disabled combinations, among others (Pujiastuti & Retnosari, 2023).

The depiction of disability is also reflected in literary narratives as a representation of life. Such narratives, which often highlight challenges faced by disabled individuals, can empower people to challenge these perceptions and create more inclusive

and positive narratives. In this context, narratives portray disability not only as an obstacle but also as a shapeable and acceptable identity within a broader social framework. As a literary construction, narrative plays an important role in conveying messages through a series of creative events. As Nurgiyantoro (2018) explains, narrative is a literary construction that presents a series of events creatively to convey specific messages. This involves word selection, language style, and specialized story structure to achieve communicative and aesthetic goals. Keraf (in Jayantini et al., 2022) revealed that narratives can reflect actions or deeds, which may be conveyed either expositively or suggestively. An expository narrative aims to provide readers with clear and explicit understanding of occurring events. In contrast, a suggestive narrative presents pictures of events and insights in ways that open room for interpretation, making them implicit.

In *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (2000), Mitchell and Snyder offer a critical analysis of how disability is represented in culture and narrative. They argue that disability is not merely a physical condition but also a social construct frequently employed as a narrative device to advance plot, develop characters, or convey themes. This phenomenon, termed “narrative prosthesis,” demonstrates that while disability often serves as a supporting element in narratives, it is rarely given space to exist as an independent experience. Mitchell and Snyder critique the negative stereotypes often associated with disability depictions, such as those relating to incapacity, dependency, or strangeness. They highlight the tendency to use disability as a symbol of abstract concepts such as suffering or imperfection, and how authentic experiences of disabled people are often ignored by mainstream media. They assert that narratives are frequently controlled by dominant groups, which reinforces discrimination and inequality. Nevertheless, Mitchell and Snyder recognize the potential of narratives as tools for people with disabilities to challenge stereotypes and build more positive identities.

Through narrative prosthesis theory, Mitchell and Snyder developed a framework that analyzes how narratives function as symbolic “prosthetics” for individuals with disabilities. In this context, prosthetics refer not only to physical aids but also to symbolic tools that enable individuals to understand

and communicate their experiences (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000). The authors emphasize that disability is a social construct influenced by various factors rather than simply a medical condition. Narratives serve as important media through which people with disabilities can give meaning to their experiences, challenge stigma, and develop a sense of self. The reciprocal relationship between disability and narrative demonstrates how disability influences the way a person tells a story, while narrative shapes how individuals understand and live with disability. This theory highlights narrative’s potential as an empowering space that allows disability experiences to be presented in more authentic, humanist ways.

This study applies narrative prosthesis theory to analyze disability narratives in children’s literature. The research uses the Indonesian children’s book *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda*, written by Erna Fitriani and Ratih Soe, as its data source. Published in 2018 by Elex Media Komputindo, the book consists of sixteen short stories totaling 104 pages. This story collection was selected as a data source for two main reasons. First, this children’s book presents stories from the perspectives of people with various disabilities, making it a comprehensive information source that helps readers (especially children) recognize and understand different types of disability. Second, since it is intended for children, the narrative is conveyed in accessible language.

This research employs mixed qualitative and quantitative methods with reading and note-taking techniques for data gathering. Qualitative descriptive techniques were used to analyze data sources comprising words, phrases, and sentences that indicated forms of disability narratives. Data analysis began with in-depth reading of the story collection to identify themes, characters, and dialogue relevant to Mitchell and Snyder’s narrative prosthesis theory. First, words, phrases, and sentences illustrating characters’ disability experiences were coded. These were then categorized based on disability narrative forms, such as disability being used as a symbol, characterization tool, plot device, or viewpoint. The researchers then selected two to three samples from each predetermined narrative category.

Quantitative techniques were used to determine how frequently various forms of disability narratives appeared. The collected data were gathered in a table and manually calculated. Once analysis was

completed, the data were arranged in a table showing classification of different disability narrative forms. The final table was presented as Table 1. Finally, the researchers analyzed how the narrative was used to describe the characters' lives.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Through narratives, individuals with disabilities can give meaning to their experiences, challenge stigma, and shape self-identity. This study aims to understand how disability narratives are constructed in literary works. The analysis revealed that the children's book *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda* contains several forms of disability narrative: disability as a characterization tool, disability as a symbol, disability as object of view, and disability as a plot device, which are presented in Table 1 below.

The collected data have been analyzed by exploring disability narratives and the portrayal of characters with disabilities in the book. Analysis of the stories revealed that the authors portrayed disability in four ways: (1) as a characterization tool to mark characters as "other" or "different"; (2) as a symbol of resistance against social norms or oppressive systems; (3) as an object of view and curiosity for other characters; and (4) as a plot device to show characters with disabilities overcoming problems in unique ways. These findings demonstrate that the narrative incorporates diverse perspectives on disability, encompassing both individual experiences and the social interactions they encounter.

From the 63 data points in Table 1, the most common form of disability narrative found in the children's book was the use of disability as a characterization tool. These results suggest that disability narratives in children's books tend to

emphasize disability characterization, portraying individuals with disabilities as "different." However, this characterization can reduce the complexity of the disability experience and limit opportunities for more inclusive and realistic narratives.

Disability Narratives as Characterization Tool

Disability serves as a characterization tool, showing how characters use their physical condition as a marker of striking difference from others, considered a burden, to a source of strength. From the 63 data points analyzed, 27 show that characters with disabilities are narrated as markers of difference, as in the following quote:

- 1) *Ah, Itap menyadari perbedaanku. Acrondoplasia, pernah dengar kata itu? Sejak lahir aku menderita Acrondoplasia, sehingga tubuhku jauh lebih pendek dari teman-temanku. Tangan dan kakiku juga pendek. Iya aku kerdil, padahal kedua orangtua dan kakakku tumbuh normal.*

(Fitriani & Soe, 2018: 6)

Ah, Itap noticed my difference. Achondroplasia, ever heard of it? I was born with achondroplasia, so my body was much shorter than my friends. My hands and feet are also short. Yes, I'm a dwarf, even though my parents and siblings grew up normally.

- 2) *Sejak lahir aku berbeda dengan teman-temanku. Ada kelainan saraf gerak tangan, sehingga aku tidak bisa mengontrol gerakan tanganku. Untuk melipat tangan saja, tanganku membentur benda apa saja yang ada di dekatku, termasuk teman-teman.*

(Fitriani & Soe, 2018: 54)

Table 1. Forms of Disability Narratives in *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda*

Disability Narrative	Narration Context	Frequency
Disability as a characterization tool	Showing signs of disability such as speech impairment, hearing impairment, autism, or paralysis.	31
Disability as a symbol	Disability is portrayed as a symbol of difference and limitation	16
Disability as object of view	Becoming the object of curious stares and pity	9
Disability as a plot device	Triggers conflict, resolves conflict and creates tension in the story.	7
Total		63

I was born different from my friends. I had a nerve disorder, so I couldn't control my hand movements. Just to fold my hands, my hands would hit any object near me, including my friends.

- 3) *Dari sejak dulu ibu telah memberitahuku. "Tota, kamu anak yang spesial. Orang lain punya 21 kromosom, tapi kamu punya 22 kromosom. Kromosom tambahan hanya diberikan untuk anak-anak down syndrome."*

(Fitriani & Soe, 2018: 68)

My mother has been telling me for a long time: "Tota, you are a special child. Other people have 21 chromosomes, but you have 22. The extra chromosome is only given to children with Down syndrome."

The concept of narrative prosthesis, as developed by scholars like David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, refers to the way disability is used in literature and storytelling as a structural device to signify difference, often serving as a symbol or marker of otherness. This device shapes characters' identities and social positioning by foregrounding their physical or genetic conditions as central to their self-conception and how others perceive them. In the three excerpts, disability functions beyond a mere physical or biological fact; it becomes a defining axis of identity for the characters, shaping their self-awareness and social interactions. The characters are acutely conscious of their differences, which leads to an internalization of "otherness"—a sense of being fundamentally distinct from the normative social body.

One character's achondroplasia in Data (1) exemplifies a visible bodily difference that is immediately legible to others. His short stature and limb proportions mark him as visibly "other," positioning his body as a site where personal identity and social difference intersect. The narrative highlights how his physical condition sets him apart within his family and peer group, emphasizing the social consequences of bodily difference. This aligns with narrative prosthesis by using visible disability as a shorthand for otherness, which shapes how the character understands himself and is understood by others.

The neuromuscular disorder in Data (2) shifts

focus from visible difference to functional impairment. The character's inability to control hand movements affects not only his bodily autonomy but also his social participation. The narrative reveals how disability influences his interaction with the environment and people around him, reinforcing the idea that disability shapes identity through lived experience and social engagement. This functional aspect of disability as a narrative prosthetic emphasizes how differences are enacted and experienced in everyday life, not just seen.

Additionally, one character's Down syndrome in Data (3) introduces a genetic difference, adding a biological dimension to the narrative of otherness. The presence of an extra chromosome serves as a scientific marker of difference, but the narrative also frames it through familial discourse, where Tota's mother calls him "special." This framing simultaneously acknowledges societal perceptions of deviance from the norm and attempts to revalue that difference positively. Here, disability as narrative prosthesis connects biological difference with cultural and social meanings, highlighting how identity is constructed at the intersection of biology and social narrative.

Each character's awareness of their disability leads to self-reflective storytelling, where disability is not just an external label but a core part of their self-concept. This internalization is a key feature of narrative prosthesis: the disability becomes a lens through which the character interprets their experiences and relationships. In works that use disability as a characterization tool, disability tends to be the only aspect that defines the character (Verdino, 2020; Wicaksono et al., 2021). This condition makes disability the main focal point of the character's identity, neglecting other facets of their personality. As a result, characters with disabilities can become trapped in a single narrative dimension that only highlights their physical or mental differences, which can overshadow their overall life experience.

The implication of such disability depictions is that when disability is used as a characterization tool, narrative focus often centers on the physical or genetic differences of characters, making disability the main feature that defines their identity. As seen in the analyzed data, conditions such as achondroplasia, neuromuscular disorders, and Down syndrome are used to clarify the character's difference from societal norms. This approach creates the impression that

disability is the only important aspect of the character, potentially ignoring other personality aspects that could enrich characterization (Wickenden, 2023). From a narrative prosthesis perspective, this leads to use disability as a tool to highlight “deviation” from the norm, so that characters with disabilities can be reduced to symbols of difference, which can reinforce stereotypes and reduce the complexity of their life experiences (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000; Murmahyati, 2017). Consequently, narratives tend to fail in portraying the broader human dimension, narrowing the representation of disabled characters in literature.

Disability Narratives as Symbol

Disability can be used as a symbol to represent various abstract concepts, such as suffering, limitation, and resistance. There are 16 narratives of disability as a symbol used by the authors to describe disability, as illustrated in the following data:

- 4) *Esok hari, aku mewakili kelas sebagai peserta lomba pidato antar kelas. Wali kelas mendukungku, tapi banyak teman yang meragukan kemampuanku.*

(Fitrini & Soe, 2018: 16)

Tomorrow, I’m representing my class in an inter-class speech competition. The homeroom teacher supports me, but many friends doubt my ability.

- 5) *“Tidak usah minta maaf. Ini memang tidak biasa, tapi aku bisa membalik buku dan menulis dengan kakiku,” jelasku.*

(Fitrini & Soe, 2018: 64)

“No need to apologize. It’s unusual, but I can flip books and write with my feet,” I explained.

- 6) *Kakiku hanya satu dan aku giat berlatih. Aku bisa berjalan cepat dengan kruk, walau sesekali terjatuh juga.*

(Fitrini & Soe, 2018: 84)

I only have one leg and I’m practicing hard. I can walk fast with crutches, although I fall occasionally.

In these excerpts, disability functions not merely as a

literal physical condition but as a symbol representing broader social and emotional constructs, including social stigma, resilience, and creative adaptation. This symbolic deployment aligns with the concept of narrative prosthesis as theorized by Mitchell and Snyder (2000), wherein disability operates as a narrative device to signify deviation from normative bodily standards while simultaneously embodying resistance to social constraints. The disabled body is often employed in literature as a symbolic device to convey abstract meanings. Because the bodies of persons with disabilities have long been associated with various cultural and moral significances, their appearance in texts tends to carry heavily layered meanings. Such representations also create the impression that abstract ideas—such as suffering, strength, or resistance to social norms—can be physically “seen” and embodied, even though these ideas are inherently intangible.

In Data (4), the character Witri’s experience of participating in a speech competition despite her peers’ doubts symbolizes social stigma and marginalization. The skepticism from friends reflects prevalent societal prejudices that undermine the capabilities of persons with disabilities. Witri’s determination to represent her class serves as a symbol of resistance against social expectations that underestimate and limit disabled individuals, positioning disability as a site of contestation between societal doubt and personal agency.

Data (5) depicts a character confidently asserting her ability to perform everyday tasks using her feet despite the unconventional nature of this adaptation. The statement “I can flip books and write with my feet” transforms disability into a symbol of ingenuity and self-reliance. The rejection of apologies becomes a symbol of repudiation against pity and stereotypes, affirming identity and autonomy. Disability here symbolizes the capacity to redefine normative boundaries through creative adaptation.

In Data (6), the character’s journey of learning to walk with one leg and crutches despite occasional falls embodies disability as a symbol of perseverance and resilience. The repeated efforts to rise after falling signify an enduring spirit to overcome adversity. Disability in this context is framed not as a fixed limitation but as a dynamic process of growth and determination.

Mitchell and Snyder’s theory of narrative

prosthesis elucidates how disability narratives often depend on notions of deviation from normative bodies and abilities to generate meaning. However, as demonstrated by these data, disability functions as a dual symbol—marking both social difference and limitation while simultaneously serving as a locus of resistance, empowerment, and redefinition. These narratives reveal the dialectical relationship between social stigma and personal agency, portraying disability not only as a socially imposed challenge but also as a wellspring of strength.

The implication of disability narratives as symbols lies in their capacity to illustrate individuals' struggles confronting social stigma, demonstrate resilience, and showcase adaptive creativity (Wijayanti & Utami, 2022). By symbolizing disability, these stories highlight physical difference while asserting individuals' abilities to transcend societal limitations. The authors thereby encourage readers to adopt a more inclusive perspective that recognizes disability as an integral component of rich human experience and promotes acknowledgment of the potential and contributions of persons with disabilities across various spheres of life (Khan, 2024; Riaz & Khan, 2023).

Disability Narratives as Object of View

People with disabilities, who are visibly recognizable, cannot be separated from society's gaze. In *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda*, disability as an object of view is narrated as an object of curiosity and pity, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

- 7) *Setiap berada di tengah keramaian, orang-orang memperhatikanku, seolah aku ini barang tontonan. Aku risih.*

(Fitrini & Soe, 2018: 6)

Every time I'm in a crowd, people are watching me, as if I'm a spectacle. I feel uncomfortable.

- 8) *Sebagai murid baru, aku risih ditatap penuh iba hanya karena kakiku lumpuh.*

(Fitrini & Soe, 2018: 32)

As a new student, I was uncomfortable being stared at pityingly just because of my paralyzed legs.

These excerpts from *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa*:

Aku Memang Beda reveal a critical dimension of disability narratives—disability as an object of society's gaze. This perspective emphasizes how people with visible disabilities are often subjected to a form of social scrutiny that objectifies and marginalizes them, shaping their experiences and identities in profound ways.

In Data (7), the character's experience of being watched "as if I am a spectacle" highlights how the visibility of disability often provokes morbid curiosity rather than respectful attention, emphasizing the dehumanizing effect of the gaze through the metaphor of being a "spectacle". This objectification reduces the individual to an object of entertainment or fascination, causing discomfort and alienation as the character is acutely aware of being singled out for their physical difference rather than their identity. Such depiction aligns with Mitchell and Snyder's (2000) concept of disability as a "visual cue" that commands attention without affirming dignity or personhood. The narrative thereby reveals how visibility can paradoxically erase the individual's full humanity, focusing solely on the disability and obscuring the richness of the person behind it.

Data (8) illustrates another common social response to visible disability: the gaze of pity. The character's discomfort at being "looked at pityingly" due to paralyzed legs reveals how pity—though often well-intentioned—can feel patronizing and alienating. This gaze reduces the person to their disability, eclipsing their personality, abilities, and individuality, and reinforcing perceptions of weakness or helplessness. The narrative powerfully conveys the emotional toll of being seen through such a lens, which can perpetuate social exclusion and marginalization. This dynamic echoes Harisantoso's (2023) observation that the societal gaze is "laden with prejudice, pity, or even judgment," positioning disabled individuals as passive objects rather than active, autonomous subjects.

Together, these narratives illustrate how disability functions as a visual marker that immediately attracts social attention, yet this attention is often problematic, as it reinforces social stigma and isolation by creating distance between the disabled individual and society. The gaze directed at disabled bodies is rarely neutral or empowering; rather, it is laden with emotions and assumptions that marginalize the person, reducing them to objects of observation rather

than participants in equitable social interaction. This dynamic reflects a broader societal tendency to define disability through external perceptions rather than through the nuanced lens of lived experience, thereby perpetuating stereotypes and constraining genuine social inclusion.

The narratives underscore the urgent need to challenge the objectifying gaze by promoting forms of respectful visibility that affirm the full humanity of people with disabilities. Representation should move beyond superficial portrayals, fostering social environments where disabled individuals are recognized as active agents with diverse identities, rather than passive spectacles defined by difference. Additionally, there is a critical need to raise awareness about the emotional and social consequences of pity and curiosity, encouraging more empathetic, informed, and equitable interactions that dismantle prejudice and support genuine inclusion.

The implication of the narrative of disability as an object of gaze is that society's gaze filled with curiosity or pity reinforces the narrative that disability is something that requires special attention or resolution (Asmidar et al., 2023). Such gazes not only reinforce social stigma but also create feelings of alienation and reduce an individual's identity to a mere "object of gaze." This impacts psychological and emotional well-being, increases discrimination, and hinders social integration. Countering this trend requires a more inclusive and humanistic paradigm shift that sees disability as part of human diversity, rather than an element that reinforces stereotypes or stigma (Naudé et al., 2024; Shpigelman et al., 2022).

Disability Narratives as Plot Devices

Kumpulan Cerita Anak: Aku Memang Beda illustrates how disability is employed as a plot device—a narrative tool that drives the story forward by creating tension, triggering conflict, or providing solutions. While this use can effectively engage readers and develop the storyline, it also risks reducing characters with disabilities to mere instruments of plot progression, potentially overlooking their full complexity as individuals.

- 9) *Mereka lari sambil menjulur-julurkan lidah, mengejekku dan menirukan cara bicaraku yang berbeda.*

(Fitriani & Soe, 2018: 43)

They ran away while sticking out their tongues, mocking me and imitating my different way of speaking.

- 10) *"Tolong pindahkan saya ke situ. Kursi roda saya bisa dipakai membawa Bisri pulang. Tolong cepat ya, Pak. Kasihan teman saya kesakitan."*

(Fitriani & Soe, 2018: 34)

"Please move me there. My wheelchair can be used to take Bisri home. Please hurry, sir. My friend is in pain."

- 11) *Aku melihat ke trotoar dan mendadak jantungku berdegup keras. Kakiku serasa kaku. "Ijoon!" teriakku.*

(Fitriani & Soe, 2018: 27)

I looked at the sidewalk and suddenly my heart was beating hard. My legs felt stiff. "Ijoon!" I shouted.

In Data (9), the character's disability becomes a focal point for ridicule and mockery by peers, illustrating how disability can provoke social conflict and deepen feelings of exclusion. The taunts and imitation of the character's speech not only highlight external antagonism but also intensify internal struggles, such as feelings of inferiority and alienation. As a narrative device, disability functions as a catalyst for emotional tension and plot development, aligning with Mitchell and Snyder's concept of narrative prosthesis by marking the character as "different" to generate conflict. However, this depiction risks reducing the character to a victim of bullying, potentially oversimplifying their identity and failing to explore their full humanity beyond the disability.

Data (10) presents a more active and empowering use of disability as a plot device, where the character's wheelchair becomes a practical tool to assist a friend in pain, demonstrating both initiative and compassion. This shifts the portrayal of disability from a perceived limitation to a source of agency and heroism, actively driving the narrative toward resolution. By requesting assistance and creatively using the wheelchair to solve a problem, the character embodies resourcefulness and emotional strength. This depiction challenges stereotypical portrayals of disabled individuals as passive or helpless, instead

positioning them as active agents who contribute meaningfully to the storyline and influence its outcome.

In Data (11), the character's disability heightens the emotional tension of a critical moment, with physical symptoms like stiff legs and a racing heart vividly conveying anxiety and helplessness. Here, disability functions as a narrative device to amplify suspense and underscore vulnerability during a crisis, demonstrating how it can shape not only social interactions but also internal emotional states. This use adds depth to the narrative by linking physical experience with psychological intensity. However, while effective in building drama, it risks reinforcing negative stereotypes by portraying disability primarily as a source of limitation and fear, rather than exploring its full complexity or potential for resilience.

Mitchell and Snyder's (2000) theory of narrative prosthesis explains how disability in storytelling often marks characters as different, highlighting challenges to be overcome. The excerpts illustrate this dual role: disability creates obstacles and conflicts, emphasizing deviation from "normal" and the struggles that follow, while also serving as a plot enabler, offering opportunities for characters to demonstrate strength, resourcefulness, and compassion. However, relying on disability as a plot device risks flattening characters into symbols or functions rather than fully realized individuals with complex inner lives. In *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda*, disability functions as a versatile narrative device that triggers social and internal conflicts through ridicule and exclusion, enables heroic and compassionate actions that advance the story, and heightens emotional tension by revealing physical and psychological vulnerability. While this strategy effectively drives plot and character dynamics, it reflects the ambivalence of narrative prosthesis—disability as both a marker of difference and a tool for narrative meaning—highlighting the need for a more nuanced approach that balances these plot functions with deeper character development, portraying disabled characters as whole persons with agency beyond their disabilities.

The implication of these depictions is that using disability as a plot device in narratives has the potential to reinforce the view that disability is an important element in shaping conflict and story resolution (Erba, 2024). This can confirm the

stereotype that disability is only seen as an obstacle or a dramatic tool to advance the plot, without regard to the complexities of individuals with disabilities. In the long run, such use can undermine the depiction of disability as a full and diverse identity, making it merely a tool for narrative purposes (Santoso & Sari, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The issue of disability representation in children's literature views a significant challenge in depicting the experiences of individuals with disabilities. The narratives presented in *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda* tend to emphasize the physical and genetic differences of the characters, potentially simplifying the complex experiences of individuals with disabilities and limiting opportunities for more inclusive and realistic narratives. While there are instances where disability is used to illustrate resilience and resistance to stigma, these depictions often risk reducing characters to mere symbols of difference.

The findings of this study confirm that disability narratives not only reflect society's views on disability but also contribute to the formation of stereotypes and stigma that can hinder social integration. However, the disability narratives in the book successfully represent the diversity of disability as an integral part of life's diversity. Through these narratives, the characters represent individuals with limitations that are balanced by certain strengths, illustrating that every human being, including people with disabilities, is unique in their combination of challenges and abilities.

Drawing on the theory of narrative prosthesis, which posits that disability is often used in literature as a device to drive plot or symbolize difference, it becomes clear that *Kumpulan Cerita Anak Istimewa: Aku Memang Beda* both conforms to and challenges this literary tendency. While some narratives risk instrumentalizing disability as a narrative tool or symbol, the collection also offers opportunities to disrupt this pattern by portraying disabled characters as multidimensional individuals whose identities are not solely defined by their impairments. Thus, the book highlights the importance of moving beyond the use of disability as mere narrative prosthesis, advocating instead for stories that foster empathy,

understanding, and genuine inclusion. This approach not only enriches children's literature but also helps dismantle stereotypes and promote a more nuanced and equitable representation of disability in society.

This study is limited by its focus on a single book as the primary data source. The addition of other texts with similar themes in future research has the potential to increase the validity of the findings obtained. Future research is recommended to explore the representation of disability in various genres and forms of media to provide more comprehensive insights into the experiences of individuals with disabilities and support the strengthening of a more inclusive understanding in society.

STATEMENT OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors hereby declare that this article is entirely free from any conflict of interest related to the processes of data collection, analysis, editorial handling, and publication with *Poetika: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*. None of the authors were involved at any stage in the editorial review or decision-making process concerning this manuscript.

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