

DREAMING HIGH THROUGH EDUCATION: THEME ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL VALUES IDENTIFIED IN 'LASKAR PELANGI'

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Received: 29th of November 2023, Accepted: 18th of December 2023, Published: 28th of December 2023

Abstract

The present study aimed at identifying the college students' perceptions toward the main characters depicted in Andrea Hiratas' novel entitled 'Laskar Pelangi'. Qualitative method was used to describe the students' verbal perceptions toward the above-mentioned novel. Eight respondents were assigned to read the novel for two weeks, and further interviewed in semi-structured manner. The findings indicated that there were some important values, which could probably contribute to the main characters' success, such as being grateful, religious, and motivated. Furthermore, it was also found that the success experienced by the main characters were not only an inner-driven matter. In fact, the other externally driven factors might have significantly contributed to their success, such as parents and teachers' contributions, which should have been described more in the novel. Given with the current gloomy economic situation, the students' attempts to accomplish their goals are perceived more difficult to be materialized as numerous intertwined factors might hamper the students' expensive dream.

Keywords: Dreaming high, pedagogical, educational values, theme analysis

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi persepsi mahasiswa terhadap tokoh-tokoh utama yang digambarkan dalam novel *Laskar Pelangi* karya Andrea Hiratas. Metode kualitatif digunakan untuk mendeskripsikan persepsi verbal mahasiswa terhadap novel tersebut. Delapan responden ditugaskan untuk membaca novel tersebut selama dua minggu, dan selanjutnya diwawancarai secara semi-terstruktur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada beberapa nilai penting yang mungkin dapat berkontribusi pada kesuksesan karakter utama, seperti bersyukur, religius, dan motivasi. Selain itu, ditemukan juga bahwa kesuksesan yang dialami oleh para tokoh utama tidak hanya didorong dari dalam diri mereka sendiri. Faktanya, faktor eksternal lainnya mungkin memiliki kontribusi yang signifikan terhadap kesuksesan mereka, seperti kontribusi orang tua dan guru, yang seharusnya lebih banyak digambarkan dalam novel ini. Dengan situasi ekonomi yang suram saat ini, upaya para siswa untuk mencapai cita-cita mereka dirasa lebih sulit untuk diwujudkan karena banyak faktor yang saling terkait yang dapat menghambat mimpi mahal para siswa.

Kata Kunci: Bermimpi tinggi, pedagogis, nilai-nilai pendidikan, analisis tema

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INTRODUCTION

Pursuing higher education is still an insurmountable challenge for most people in developing country. In Indonesian context, there are only very few students who manage to pursue their expensive dream by acquiring higher education diploma. In contrast to 47 % students in OECD countries, there are only 19 % of the whole Indonesian students who manage to accomplish higher education diploma (See OECD, 2023 February 27). The more worrying data from BPS (<https://statistik.data.kemdikbud.go.id/>) indicated that there were approximately 440.516 elementary school children who had to leave their elementary education for various

reasons in Indonesia. The saddening data indicated that accomplishing nice dream like 'Ikal and his other friends' in the story of Rainbow troops, is not very easy (Hirata, 2009).

Admittedly, there are various factors affecting the success of the students in the current adopted education system. Specifically, scholars perceive that there are numerous factors contributing to the students' success such as parents, parenting style, characteristics of the students, level of internet effectiveness, teachers effectiveness, motivation, and students career path (See e.g., Briones et al. 2021). The novel entitled 'Laskar Pelangi' or internationally known as 'Rainbow Troops' depicting the struggles of the children in a poor society in Belitong is therefore a both thought provoking literary work as well as a contemplative means to think of the Indonesian education system.

The story, which mostly tells about the distressing lives of the school children in a poor region, can provide an impetus to anyone concerned with education to search more possibilities to resolve the persisting education gap this beloved country (Rusli, 2022 February 21). Amid the scarcity of educationally-led literary works, 'Laskar Pelangi' has driven the people to be aware of the importance of education for their future lives. In fact, education is not only an aspect, which improves the quality of human life, but also constitutes the very basic of human rights (Sanabria, 2021).

There have been studies attempting to identify the educationally value-laden novel. However, the attempt to identify the educational values in Indonesian context is still scarce. In fact, identifying the student's struggles in accomplishing their dream will not only provide a positive drive to those fighting for a better life but also arouse the people's awareness on the importance of education for the people's life. In sum, identifying the students' factors in acquiring their education can possibly invigorate those who struggle to pursue such an expensive dream.

The current research's objectives are to find out the perceptions of participants toward the possible educational values beneath the novel and to identify how they perceive toward the main characters' success in contrast to the current educational situation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of education in improving human's life

Education as one of the most important aspects of human's life. Education can be defined as the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, provoke or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills or sensibilities as well as any learning that results from the effort (Cremin as cited in Chazan, 2022, p. 16). Education becomes the powerful tool that allows the

people to access more chances than others. In a competitive world, education constitutes a means for anyone to surpass others. For instance, the ones, who have more knowledge, can possibly benefit for more access leading to their ultimate accomplishment. Specifically, education is also necessary to create peaceful and prosperous world, as well as improving potential employability and tolerance (United Nations, n.d.).

Personally, education constitutes an essential part of human capital development, which not only improves the productivity and growth, but also contributes to a fair income distribution in a country (Retno, 2013; Heckman & Mosso, 2014; Sabur, Khusaeni, & Ramdani, 2021, p. 174). Specifically, Damon et al. (2016, p. 13) confirms that education can probably increase workers' productivity, which contribute to their incomes, security, and prosperity (Lochner, 2011; Hanushek, & Woessmann, 2015). In sum, Wesley Null (2007, p.232 as cited in Aprianti, 2022, p. 57) confirms that "Education does not mean teaching people to know that they do not know but to teach the people to behave as they do not behave".

Disparity in education among developing countries

Education is one of the assets that can improve the quality of humans' life (Harahap, Maipita, & Rahmadana, 2020; Setyadi, 2022). However, education is not a separate entity, in fact, there are many factors affecting someone's education. Scholars perceive that poverty belongs to one of the significant factors that affect educational inequality. Poverty has also contributed a considerable impact on the demand for school and enrollment in school, so that the level of educational attainment for the poor will be low. While most of the children in developed countries enjoy the privilege in attending their education freely, many children in developing countries have to struggle to accomplish their dream to acquire better education (Bing, 2008; Akmal, & Pritchett, 2021).

In Indonesian context, for instance, there is an apparently wide gap between those living in big cities and remote areas. While some children in big cities can rely on the public schools to acquire their basic education, the children in remote areas of Indonesia have to struggle hard to gain proper education (Setyadi, 2022).

Literary works illuminating values of education

It should be admitted that literary work, educational values, or educationally related values are closely intertwined. Specifically, Cairney (2011, p. 117) suggests that literature has played an important role in the shaping of human existence for centuries. A story provides a means not only to understand the human condition but also to re-create ourselves. More specifically, Bruner (as cited in Cairney, 2011, p. 117) postulates that there are two modes of thought, the paradigmatic and narrative, which are perceived to be critical to help humans view

reality. Firstly, a well-formed argument (the paradigmatic) and a well-told story (narrative) can both be used to convince others of something. The paradigmatic seeks to convince of truth through logical argument, while the narrative seeks to enrich life, and to communicate timeless truths about the human condition through fictional experiences that are nonetheless reflective of the reality of life. Each provides a distinctive way of ordering experience and of constructing reality. In sum, people will generally learn best when both modes are used (Cairney, 2011, p. 117).

Novels illuminating the importance of education

There are some novels, which are identified to contain some educational values and are researched by some scholars. Sembiring and Pakpahan (2021) analyzed the novel entitled ‘5 CM’ written by Donny Dhigantoro. They analyzed the character education in the novel. Using qualitative as a means for identifying the source more naturally, they found some educational values, such as religious, hard work, love to read, being friendly, being communicative, social care and love the homeland.

Secondly, the research conducted by Sanabria (2021). She identified the educational value in the novel ‘I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban’. Despite the pressure that the main character faced, Malala continuously struggles to continue her education. Her action has not only increased the Pakistanis’ awareness of the important role of education but also to highlight the issue of those underprivileged in acquiring better life through education. Lastly, Febriana, Thahar, and Ermanto (2014) identified that there were some values identified in the novels, such as the educational values indicated with the main character’s sincerity, being religious, and faithful, being persistent or hardworking, being nationalistic, being communicative and independent.

Given to the above importance, it is certainly important to find the novel, which can possibly offer not only the fictitious experience but also contains certain positive values, which can be adopted by common people, particularly which is related to education. Amid the scarcity of educational novel published in Indonesia and the tendency of the lower motivation to read (See e.g., OECD, 2019), the existence of Andrea Hirata’s novel deserves appreciation. The novel, which describes the struggle of the ten elementary school students in reaching their education, deserves the praise.

Up to now, there have been numerous studies aimed at analyzing Andrea Hirata’s novel. The novel written in 2005 received international accolade as it was perceived as the genuine novel indicating the struggle of those coming from the utter poor families to accomplish their expensive dream. The novel also portrays the willingness of the two teachers, who whole-

heartedly served their students amid the limited facilities in their school (See Beerman, 2013 February 18). The novel is translated into English by Angie Kilbane, and is read by millions of readers worldwide (Hirata, 2009). The novel, which was used as the primary sources of data to elicit the findings, was the one written in English (Hirata, 2009).

METHOD

Design of the study

The study was a qualitative as it aimed to naturally describe the students' perceptions toward the novel written by Andrea Hirata (Bengtsson, 2016, p.1). It also aimed at identifying some relevant important values beneath the novel, which can probably trigger the potential success of the main characters. With such elaboration, the use of qualitative was deemed suitable as it can portray more pictures depicting the above conditions. Since the instrument used in the present study is a semi-structured interview, the data analysis in this section refers to the oral responses elicited from the interview, thus belongs to thematic analysis.

The researchers conducted a thematic analysis offered by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). They defined that thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire, & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3352). The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This is much more than simply summarizing the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it (Maguire, & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3353).

Participants

The participants recruited in the study, were those who already completed the assignment on reading English novel. The participants were recruited voluntarily based on their previously reading materials read by them. The choice of the convenient sampling was based on the consideration that this research was not a compulsory project for the students. With the absence of compulsion, the researchers expected that the participants recruited could provide more objective and more critical information to the researchers.

In order to accomplish the above purpose, the researchers offered the chance for interview only to those who have completed reading the novel for one semester. The students' understanding toward the novel was considered important as it could help them provide more objective views on their description of the above novel. Of the thirty five students offered to participate in the study, there were eight who accepted the offer. The followings are the data of the participants who were recruited for the present study.

Table 1. Profile Summary of Participants in Semester III

Participants			
Pseudonyms	Semester	Hobby and Interest	Jobs/Occupation
A	III	Reading novel	Part time teacher
B	III	Reading novel	Jobless
C	III	Reading novel	Worker
D	III	Reading novel	Part time teacher
E	III	Reading novel	Worker
F	III	Reading novel	Jobless
G	III	Reading novel	Worker
H	III	Travelling	Jobless

Steps of the Study

There were some steps that the researchers used in conducting the research. Firstly, the researchers read the novel, which they found from the novel of Andrea Hirata. The researchers discussed the characters, and the potential important themes identified in the novel. The researchers identified some important themes considered relevant to the research questions. After that, the researchers generate initial codes, by searching the themes. The first step is reviewing themes, defining them and finally the researchers write the summary as the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The followings are the excerpt taken from the interviews. The excerpts were translated into English. During the interview, the participants were interviewed using their own languages. However, since they are the English students, they sometimes responded in both Indonesian and English.

Table 2. The participants' perceptions on the values beneath the novel

Participants	Verbal responses	Themes
A	I think the main character is lucky to have dedicated teachers like them. To be honest, as a part-time teacher in a city, I might have been unable to work in such remote area like that.	Exemplary action indicated by the teacher was an important trigger for the students' accomplishments.
B	Basically, the main character has a good attitude and motivation to learn. For instance, the novel describes that the main character is willing to study diligently despite the fact that he lives in a very difficult situation as well as limited learning facilities, which support his activities at school.	Having good attitudes and being motivated was important trigger for the main character's success.
C	He is not an outstanding child. In fact, Lintang his friend is much cleverer than him. So, I think it is a matter of luck and certainly because he is grateful enough to see the reality, which is in fact, might have disappointed other children. Miraculously, he sees this as a challenge and even makes him more motivated to learn.	The success is mainly driven by his being grateful to face reality.

Participants	Verbal responses	Themes
D	I think he is a grateful boy, and religious. Indeed he is smart enough, but I think it needs a miracle to make him as successful as now. In fact, his cleverer friend is not as lucky as him. As a religious person, I believe that when you are grateful then God will probably add more reward to his creatures.	The success is driven by being grateful and religious.
E	I think there should be more elaboration or whatever, that makes the readers believe and understand the process of his success. But I believe that he was the one who was very grateful, he was grateful with all the things he had and continuously pushed himself to work hard. So, being grateful and motivated is closely related.	Being grateful and motivated is the key for his success.
F	How can a child coming from remote village, and was educated in a small and broken school managed to go to prestigious university? I think there should be more highlight on this matter, for instance, how could Ikal go to junior high school or senior high school? I think Andrea Hirata should tell the readers more in the novel. However, being grateful and being religious are important parts of his success. Of course, his motivation affects his life as well.	Three important points are identified, such as being grateful, religious and motivated.
G	He is blessed with the qualities that most students don't have. In fact, in this poor or difficult situation, he could easily give up hope. It is difficult to find many boys like him in this current educational situation. So, I believe that being grateful is important. Having gratitude will help to boost your confidence and motivation stronger, thus making you able to struggle even harder.	The main character is perceived to be blessed with his character to be grateful so that he can possibly face the reality confidently.
H	I have read almost every part of the book. I think the success the main character got was actually more complex than what was described in the novel. However, I think I can find that being grateful, being motivated, and being religious is important in this novel.	The main character's success is perceived to be more complex than it is narrated. However, some important points such as being grateful, religious, and motivated are important.

Table 3. The participants' perceptions on the main character's success in contrast to the current education situation

Participants	Verbal responses	Themes
A	I think there are more challenges that the ones might face at the moment, especially when the child has financial limitation. As we know that studying at school regardless of being a public school student, he or she might have to spend the money.	Current learning situation presents more challenges, particularly to those having limited sufficient financial sources.
B	We know that it is God that makes anyone succeed and not only the teacher or parents. However, in the current situation, we know that economic situation is not very good and more complicated factors seem to create more hurdles to both learners and parents.	Current situation, which is gloomy affects the learning process.
C	I think it is difficult to be successful like him in this current education situation. As we know that studying at school, whether it is a private or not will cost a lot. There are many things to pay, so it is almost impossible that a simple person like the main character will be successful let alone to get scholarship abroad.	Accomplishing success like the main character is difficult at this time as the life is getting more difficult.

D	As an ordinary person, I believe that it is only a miracle that allows someone to earn a degree overseas. Besides, there are more people at this time who struggle even harder to accomplish their dreams. I think it is getting more difficult to be successful at the moment, especially since there are more people who compete for the smaller chances and the current education system, that is, in my mind, not very good.	Accomplishing like the main character at the moment is more difficult as there are more people who compete for the smaller chances and the perceived more complicated educational system.
E	I think the chance to be successful at this time is more difficult as we have to face the increasing prices of basic commodities. So, an ordinary child will usually have difficulties to fulfill his needs let alone to go to school. I don't know how can the main character go to school and go to university of Indonesia, it is not explained in the novel.	Accomplishing the success in the current situation is more difficult compared with the situation when the main character was studying.
F	I think education at the moment costs a lot more than the people can afford to pay. We must admit that even in public schools we must spend the money so the chances for the poor or the less privileged at this time is more difficult.	Current education system poses more difficult challenges for the students, particularly to the poor or the less privileged.
G	I think the education system at the moment is corrupt. Everything should be paid. Even though you study at public school you still need to spend the money. Unfortunately, it is not known how Ikal's parents work and make money. And how much they can support Ikal's education. I heard he went to university of Indonesia. How could he stay there, was it free? Or were the parents able to provide him enough support ...I think it is still difficult to understand. I like the story about success or happy end one actually, but I am not that sure when it comes to the real life.	It is impossible to be like Ikal at this time as the current education system is corrupt.
H	I think is possible to be successful like him, but certainly not all can be like that. There must be very few people who can be like him. I think I just can call him lucky as there are many who might have even studied abroad for their own money but finally end up in failure. In contrast to the current education, I think current education poses more difficult barriers to the learners, particularly to those living under the poverty lines.	Current education poses more difficult barriers to the learners.

Discussion

1. The success of the main character is supported by certain values

Based on the participants' perceptions, it could be identified that there were some values, which could probably contribute to the main characters' success in their education process.

a. Being grateful

One of the most important values identified in the novel is being grateful. The act of being grateful was indicated with the main character's positive appreciation when he and his father registered in a poorly funded private school, namely Muhammadiyah School. Scholars perceive that being grateful is one of the important factors allowing the main character to be happy with the school chosen by his father. Peterson and Seligman (2004 as cited in Shabrina et. al., 2020, p. 25) stated that having sufficient gratitude can make individuals think more positively and

have a broad perspective on life, which is a gift. McCullough et al., (2002) stated that grateful individuals tend to feel better physically and psychologically, as well as to report more optimistic feelings about their future.

Wilang (2022, p. 340) corroborates that a less grateful person will probably recognize fewer people, fewer aspects of life, and less grateful experiences. Hypothetically, the one who is grateful will probably recognize teachers, peers, and activities as helpful toward language acquisition, language achievement, or success. Scientifically, Wilang (2022, p. 347) identified that being grateful in foreign language learning context is positively related to the students' positive learning experience.

b. Being religious

Another essential value identified in the novel is being religious. Scholars consider that being religious that is generally supported with someone's belief is important. In fact, being religious constitutes a greater power that governs all human life and an indication of appreciation toward God's role in his or her own life. The feeling of surrender and acceptance is known to help individuals improve their capability in being resilient (Listiyandini 2016 as cited in Shabrina et al., 2020. p. 27).

Many studies indicated that more religious student tend to perform better academic performance. Jeynes (1999 as cited in Herlina, Susilana, & Ihsan, 2020, p. 106) investigated that students with high religiously commitment performed better in many academic measures than those who have less religious commitment.

c. Being motivated to accomplish academic goal

The findings also indicated that most participants perceived that motivation is an important factor affecting the main characters' success (Tohidi, & Jabbari, 2012). Yeung, Lau, and Nie (2011) identified that despite the potential changes in the growing age, motivation has been proven to affect the learners' performance. In sum, most researchers perceived that motivated learners will generally indicate more abilities when facing obstacles and difficulties in order to accomplish learning objectives (See e.g., Diantari, & Tirtayani, 2020, p. 211).

2. The government's education system needs to be overhauled

Despite slightly improving in terms of facilities, the learning and teaching process in Indonesia still faces major hurdles for the learners to move forward. Reports indicate that there are numerous problems affecting Indonesian education and the core issues are corruption practices (Handayani, 2009). Indeed, the problem in acquiring education in Indonesia is not merely a personal factor but also a multiple factor involving numerous stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, headmasters, or policy makers. The success of the children

described and exemplified in 'Rainbow Troops' might be just story if the government and other relevant stakeholders cannot possibly provide education, which is equal, fair, and affordable to the students.

CONCLUSION

The story of 'Rainbow Troops' constitutes both literary work and contemplative medium for those involved in education. In fact, the touching portrayal of those struggling in the novel should not only arouse the awareness of Indonesians toward the importance of education but also a reminder on the fact that the gap in Indonesian education remains unresolved.

Despite the fact that it is someone's responsibility to work and pursue his or her nice dream the corrupt system of education might hamper those who come from unfortunate families. In fact, the system of education indicated in the 45 constitution clearly requires those manage the education system to allow and facilitate the whole citizen to access quality education regardless of their backgrounds.

The study was conducted qualitatively using limited number participants' verbal responses as the sources and research data. Further study might incorporate more respondents having diverse backgrounds, such as teachers, head masters, and possible policy makers in education.

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