

CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENCE AND ADULTS' ROLES IN ENID BLYTON'S *THE SIX BAD BOYS*, *THE NAUGHTIEST GIRL AGAIN*, AND *NAUGHTY AMELIA JANE*

Zidnie Ilma
Yogyakarta State University
ilmazidnie@gmail.com

Abstract

This is a study of Enid Blyton's *The Six Bad Boys*, *The Naughtiest Girl Again*, and *Naughty Amelia Jane*. It aims to examine the kinds of children's independence when they find problems, to explain adults' roles in giving responses toward children's problems, and to analyze the author's ways to reflect children's independence in characterization. Theories on children's literature and psychological child development are used to facilitate the objectives of the research.

A qualitative research method was employed to conduct the research. The data sources were taken from Blyton's *The Six Bad Boys* (2012), *The Naughtiest Girl Again* (1993), and *Naughty Amelia Jane* (1989). The data are sentences regarding the kinds of children's independence and adults' roles found from the novels. The novels were read and reread carefully to gain the reliable data. To analyze the data, taking notes and making categorizations were conducted. The validity and credibility of the findings were tested through triangulation procedure.

The findings of the research are as follows: (1) the kinds of children's independence are divided into three categorizations: cognitive, social, and psychological independence. Cognitive independence has three sub-points: initiating actions, giving suggestions, and defending opinions. Social independence has three sub-categories, including expressing thankfulness, asking for apology, and providing help. Psychological independence contains three divisions: defining self-happiness, being courageous, and controlling the emotion; (2) adults' roles are described through their actions as reminders, partners in discussions, and supporters; and (3) the author reflects children's independence in characterization through four ways: by actions, speech, other's comments, and author's comments.

Keywords: children's independence, adults' roles, children's literature, hidden adults, Enid Blyton.

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to learn about life. One of which is by literature. Life is reflected through it. It contains many things inside the stories

related to the culture, habits, or customs found in the setting of the stories. This setting is managed based on the era when the author wrote the stories. Thus, human could be dragged

into another world that is probably yet to come in the real life. Sometimes this real experience might take long time to come so literature is the right means to collect the fragments of life (Harrison, 1981:253). Harrison also stated that literature is not the substitution for life. It is because life has its own living side that could be very much different than which is found in literature. However, literature could help human learn through certain truths reflected from life.

Children's literature is literature written for and/or by children and adults to give pleasure and understanding. The readers can get pleasure and understanding without always having to directly feel the experience by reading the literature (Lukens, 1999:9).

How readers define pleasure and understanding is very broad because each reader may have different perspective. The more they get drowned in the ocean of words, the wider pleasure and understanding they can achieve because the blanks in the stories can be slowly filled up.

Rosemary Johnston in Lucy Rollin (2005:119) gives her definition about children's literature as the one having the ability to show children's world. It gives its own benefit for children because it has its own ability to closely and personally speak to them (Guttery, 1941:208).

Adults need to introduce complex children's stories to young readers. Even when they cannot read yet, adults might still do it by storytelling. Teaching children new things is important but adults should realize that showing is a better way to make children learn about things rather than telling or even dictating them what to do (Lewis on Nodelman, 2008:214). Showing things will make children learn by themselves.

Children have the same need to know the kinds of life phenomena by reading more books, like adults, but they have different portion (Lukens,1999:9). If adults have the need to read complex stories, so do children. The difference is the lighter packaging for children so they can absorb something from the story

confidently. The confidence will grow naturally in every child when they can have the opportunities to think about alternative solutions on their own. Confidence is the result of judgments connected with one's feeling. Children start to judge themselves based on their abilities and competencies in doing a certain activity (Berk, 2013: 461).

Learning about children's independence in literature is important because children will learn from the characters' ups and downs while adults learn how to build trust for children. This study examines children's independence and adults' roles in Enid Blyton's *The Six Bad Boys*, *The Naughtiest Girl Again*, and *Naughty Amelia Jane*.

This research has three objectives: (1) to examine the kinds of children's independence when they find problems and the ways out, (2) to explain adults' roles in giving responses toward children's problems, and (3) to analyze the ways children's independence revealed.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method. It is conducted based on social problems to understand the phenomenon in social life (Creswell, 2009:4). The qualitative research is conducted because it enables the researcher to create in-depth interpretation upon the social phenomena (Snape in Ritchie, 2003:3). Therefore, in making the result, numerical processes cannot be done because the data were concluded from the researcher's interpretation.

In collecting and analyzing the data, the content analysis was employed. According to Neuendorf (2002:10), content analysis enabled the summary, instead of detail report, of the messages implied in the data and it relied on the research method. However, the context of the collected data cannot limit content analysis. It helped identify the data to be more valid because there was inference making process. Inference can be

resulted from understanding the content and context of the data.

The interpreted data were analyzed to find certain findings related to the research objectives about the kinds of children's independence, adults' roles, and ways to reveal children's independence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research findings are split into three points related to research objectives: the kinds of children's independence, the roles of adults, and the revelation of children's independence. To reveal the kinds of children's independence in Blyton's novels being studied, the researcher groups the result into three classifications. Next, there are three roles of adults revealed from the data. The last finding is to reveal four ways children's independence identification.

Child characters are often portrayed weak and less-knowing. Since they are very young, they are perceived as too dependent. That is why adults characters tend to dictate what they need to do. Behind the

childish and less-knowing characteristics of child characters, which sound very childlike, there is a hidden mature side that encourages them to be independent. This is the invisible nonchildlikeness many adults do not realize about.

1. The Kinds of Children's Independence

a. Cognitive Independence

This hidden nonchildlikeness enables them to possess cognitive, social, and psychological independence. They are able to initiate actions, give suggestions, and defend their opinions even though they are misbehavior sometimes.

"I'm not on anybody's side," said Tom, staring miserably at his mother. "**Why can't we all get on together?** I don't mind this house being little. I think it's nice. And I like the school and the children there—especially the Mackenzies. I don't know why you turn your nose up at them. They're clever and—" (Blyton, 2012:32)

Tom's mother always complains everyday about the new house which is smaller than the previous one. She feels ashamed with

her old friends because she thinks the house looks uglier. She always blames her husband because of losing his previous job that was better. Tom, *The Six Bad Boys*'s main character, always tries to calm her but his mother always assumes him not to be on her side. He detests having the taking-side thing thus he suggests her to get on together with the family.

b. Social Independence

It is true that children cannot be totally independent in doing things most adults can do. They have social interaction with people around them. They express their gratitude for other's generosity, they ask for apology when they have mistaken, and they help others in need.

"There you are," said Mr. Lewis, shutting the piano. "After the storm, the calm. Now go off to bed, and sleep well."

"Thank you, Mr. Lewis," said Elizabeth gratefully. "I do feel better now. I was all hot and bothered about something, but now I feel happier. Good night!" (Blyton, 1993:38)

The datum above shows a child character's ability to show gratitude.

Elizabeth, *The Naughtiest Girl Again*'s main child character, feels uneasy after she meets Robert, her naughty schoolmate. When she is in such situation, she prefers playing the piano so she can feel better. Surprisingly, one of her teachers, Mr. Lewis, sees her playing the piano in an angry note. He gives compliment for Elizabeth's good play. She feels better after playing the piano and thanks him for giving her a wise statement such as „after the storm, the calm.“

c. Psychological Independence

Child characters who are psychologically independent are able to deal with their emotion. They are still unstable so they could show the happy and angry feeling almost at the same time. The emotional feeling might appear in wide ranges of feeling. From the three novels used in this research, the psychological independence actions emerge in three classifications: to define self-happiness, to be courageous, and to control the emotion.

In *Naughty Amelia Jane*, its main character, Amelia Jane, is

portrayed as a mischievous child. However, she has the ability to control her emotion as shown below.

Amelia Jane took her shoes off. **She saw how the clown had polished them underneath, and she went very red.** She knew quite well **she could not grumble if people were unkind—because she too had been unkind.** (Blyton, 1989: 40)

It is shown that actually Amelia Jane is angry because the clown has played a trick on her. She knows that the one who has polished her shoes is the clown. It makes her slip when she walks or runs. However, she controls her emotional feeling upon the clown. She tries to realize that she gets tricked because she did first. Thus, she feels that she deserves the result or the impact of her mischief.

2. Adults' Roles

Although child characters need to be independent, they still need adult characters' guidance. This guidance should help children explore more things by themselves instead of limiting children by following certain instructions given by adults.

Among three novels being studied, *Naughty Amelia Jane* is the only novel which does not include adult characters in child characters' problems. There is only one adult character, the Nurse. She rarely appears in the novel. She is the one taking care of the nursery and appears in very few scenes. She checks the condition of the nursery only and does nothing to the child characters' problems. In this novel, all the toys are children. However, there is one toy character that is claimed as a more mature toy among all toys in the nursery, the golliwog. He often gives ideas and suggestion to his friends. The initiative to give suggestions has been classified in the point of cognitive independence.

Based on the data found from three Blyton's novels being studied, *The Six Bad Boys*, *The Naughtiest Girl Again*, and *Naughty Amelia Jane*, adult characters can play roles as reminders, partners in discussions, and supporters.

a. As Reminders

The role of adults in the stories could be in the form of giving

reminders to child characters. These reminders appear because the younger characters forget or do not understand yet about what they can do. Below is the datum from *The Six Bad Boys*.

“Lock the back door when you go, and take the key,” his mother said. “I’ve left the things in the larder for your tea. And here are your sandwiches ready for lunch. If you like to be useful when you get home, light the sitting-room fire for me!” (Blyton, 2012:97)

It shows that Bob’s mother tries to remind her son to do several actions before he leaves home, such as to lock the door and bring the key. She reminds him in case her son might forget what he should do before he leaves home.

b. As Partners in Discussions

Discussions are important to help child characters in facing their problems. The discussions will open wider choices and thoughts for these characters. Therefore, they will think deeper and consider more alternatives for their solution. Adult characters in this activity might give children

questions to clarify the problems faced by these children.

The discussion in *The Naughtiest Girl Again* happens between Elizabeth, its main character, and her mother. Elizabeth feels blissful because the new school term will be started very soon. Her mother gives response toward it.

Her mother looked at Elizabeth and laughed. “Elizabeth,” she said, **“do you remember what a fuss you made about going away to school for the first time last term?** Do you remember how you said you would be so naughty and disobedient that you would soon be sent back home again? I’m glad to see you happy this term—looking forward to going back.” (Blyton, 1993:5)

This discussion happens when Elizabeth and her mother prepare Elizabeth’s properties for school. The datum above shows that her mother opens a discussion related to Elizabeth’s high spirit in welcoming the new term. She opens it by reminding her daughter about a serious case last term that made Elizabeth sent back home. She tries to clarify to her

daughter about her behavior last term and what she expects to behave in the new term.

c. As Supporters

The child characters in the stories are often portrayed to be badly-behaved or confused in facing problems. The role of adults is important to help them figure out the problem so they need to be supporters for child characters. Acting as supporters is not by dictating the precise actions the child characters have to do but by giving advices or suggestions. These advices or suggestions are useful to make them realize what lacks from them.

In *Naughty Amelia Jane*, the role of adult character is implicit. The information is from Amelia Jane who said that she feels difficult to be good because she is not a shop-toy that learns good manners (Blyton, 1989:41). Amelia Jane was once a doll in a house so she never learned how to behave kindly. Meanwhile, the toys in the nursery are able to know and understand good manners because they are taught by the Nurse. This

information is not available explicitly through the Nurse's action. However, it is an example of her role as a supporter to make the shop-toys know positive manners.

No matter how children try to be independent in exploring many things, they still need guidance from adults. It is because they still lack of understanding in analyzing deep problems. To give guidance or help to child characters, adult characters can play roles as reminders, partners in discussions, and supporters.

3. Children's Independence Reflected in Characterization

Being independent is one of traits in child characters. There are five ways to reveal independence of child characters: by actions, speech, appearance, other's comment, and author's comment. However, there are only four ways revealed. There are no data found on appearances of child characters which could portray children's independence. Since independence itself is already a characteristic or trait in child characters in the novels being studied,

the next step is to reveal this characteristic.

a. By Actions

Actions are able to reveal independence of child characters. These actions come through the descriptions or orders of actions when they are doing a certain mission. In *The Six Bad Boys*, the revelation of children's independence can be found in Tom's action to deal with a problem. Tom has parents who always nag everyday at home. It makes him dislike the condition at home. He always tries to find a problem solving for him. Thus, he decides to tell lies everytime he wants to get rid of the problem at home (Blyton, 2012:43). The highlight is on his independence to find a problem solving on his own way. Although lying is not really solving a problem, it is Tom's first way to get rid of it.

b. By Speech

Speeches come in the forms of dialogues and monologues. The independence of child characters is able to be revealed through speeches

because they might state actions that were, are, and will be conducted.

Elizabeth in *The Naughtiest Girl Again* admits her mistake through a monologue. She tries to defeat her ego from accusing her friend and admitting her own fault. After she has defeated her own ego, she decides to do something to fix her mistake as found below.

“Eileen, would it be all right if Robert played in the match on Saturday instead of me?” asked Elizabeth. “You see, **I’ve discovered that he didn’t do the things I accused him of at the last Meeting—so I think it would be only fair if I let him have the chance of playing this time.**” (Blyton, 1993:126)

Elizabeth and Robert compete to get the position as a player in a lacrosse club. At the beginning, Robert is chosen but then he is expelled because he bullies his friend. His position is given to Elizabeth. As the fact is revealed, it is Elizabeth's mistake who accuses Robert for a misjudgment. Although she wants the position badly, she decides to give her position back to Robert to fix her

mistake to him. She thinks that she needs to uphold fairness so she can forgive herself. Elizabeth's decision shows her independence in solving her problem when she misjudges her friend.

c. By Other's Comment

The comments from other characters are also important to reveal the independent quality of the characters being studied. Their comments might appear in the forms of dialogues or information from the narrator

In *Naughty Amelia Jane*, one of the toys in the nursery, the pink rabbit, gives her statement. The rabbit stated that Amelia is able to unlock the cupboard door if in case all the toys plan to punish her by locking her inside the cupboard (Blyton, 1989:33).

d. By Author's Comment

The author or the narrator is able to play a role to give descriptions or information about the personalities of any characters. In this study, the author gives the information about the independent quality of child characters through her description. In *The Six Bad*

Boys, the author gives her comment about Tom's way to solve problems.

As for Tom, he was like Bob. **When things went wrong he went wrong too, and was silly and rude and showed off. It was his way of trying to forget**, his way of saying to the world, "You're trying to get me down, are you? Well, I'll show you! I'll get you down instead!" (Blyton, 2012:81)

Being silly and rude is Tom's independent way to solve his problems. He starts doing it when he really often finds his parents nag at home. In readers' opinion, it might be unjustifiable but it needs to be respected since it comes from Tom's idea how to solve his problem.

Discussion

The portrayal of child characters' weaknesses, such as weak, dependent, and less-creative, cannot be found in the novels being studied. Child characters in these novels are independent to initiate in doing many actions. Some of the characters love to play tricks which is a natural side of children and is so childlike. However,

the child characters are able to show the nonchildlikeness part. This part makes them go beyond adults' expectation. The novels are not denial upon children's dependence on the need of adult characters' presence. Nonetheless, the novels also insert children's independence in solving problems. This independence is the nonchildlike side of child characters. They are more creative and able to explore more experiences.

Furthermore, adult characters might appear both in visible and invisible presence. Visible presence means that it is clearly stated, identified, and examined. Thus, the readers will easily find which part is coming from adult characters. Besides, the presence can also be more invisible. From the findings of the research, adult characters do not always have to appear in visible form. In *Naughty Amelia Jane*, the adult character is very minor because it is only the Nurse. She only appears few times in the story but she does not give any instructions to the dolls or toys. Her roles in educating the toys are

invisible and cannot be found explicitly in the novel. Her roles are stated through the toys' explanation when they tell Amelia Jane about the nature of the toys in the nursery. The toys tell her that they all know about ethics because they live in the nursery taken care by the Nurse.

Children's independence reflected in characterization has dominant results in actions and speeches. The significance of this revelation is that child characters are able to discover and explore new things based on their own ability. It shows that they are not dictated when they are learning things from their exploration. It is important for all child characters to have independent trait because it allows them to be the way they are. The dominant findings on actions and speeches aim to show that children's independence is strongly performed in these stories. It shows that child characters are really able to conduct many actions based on their initiative and not because they are dictated by adult characters.

CONCLUSIONS

All child characters in the novels being studied are able to perform their independence in terms of cognitive, social, and psychological. They do not only act nobly but also play naughty tricks in different occasions. Although in few cases these child characters' emotion is unstable when they face a problem, they perform positive social relation with other characters. The social life ability within child characters makes them possess complex attitude because they are trying to be independent not only for their own sake but also for other people's sake. This position shows that characters are multi-dimensional.

These novels are able to show that adult characters do not need to dictate child characters what they have to do. Adult characters give their trust to these younger characters so they can explore new things by themselves and solve their own problems. Even if adult characters give advises or suggestions, they appear when they are asked for help. Thus, their presence

does not have much involvement yet significant.

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