

## Educational Aspirations and Social Development in the Novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* (1965) by Mohd. Aris Bahnan

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### Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the educational aspirations and social development in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* (1965) by Mohd. Aris Bahnan. The novel revolves around the perseverance of an orphaned and impoverished boy in realizing his dream of becoming a medical doctor in the 1960s. This study outlines three objectives to be achieved. First, to identify the depiction of a child character striving to achieve educational and social development aspirations in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* by Mohd. Aris Bahnan. Second, to analyze the actions taken to achieve educational and social development aspirations by the child character in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* by Mohd. Aris Bahnan. Third, to synthesize the relationship between external changes outside the text and the educational and social development aspirations found in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* by Mohd. Aris Bahnan. This study utilizes the Genetic Structuralism Theory to achieve these three objectives. The study's findings reveal that the child character in the novel, Aziman, works diligently with the determination to become a medical doctor, thus escaping the grip of poverty. To achieve this goal, the character of Aziman fully takes advantage of the government's educational and

social development plans in line with the advancements made after Malaysia gained its independence.

**Keywords:** Novel, Educational Aspirations, Social Development Aspirations, Children, Youth.

### Introduction

In the context of human relationships with social systems and their environment, Mas (2013) explains that literary works often depict the presence of quality characters who are aspirational and capable of absorbing the pressures surrounding their lives (p. 17). These characters are said to have the mental and physical strength to explain their resilience in achieving their life goals. Moreover, in the context of a character's presence in the story, the work also showcases the human values that should be cultivated. According to Ahmad (2013), such values can be highlighted because human life is inherently complex and full of secrets (p. 31). Therefore, this diversity is raised to showcase the dynamic nature of the characters in the story and, with all their abilities, their effort to achieve their life goals. At the same time, the developed characters also uphold values that have become ingrained in their lives. This, in turn, demonstrates that literary works are not removed from addressing human life issues as found in the real world.

Preliminary readings indicate that the aspirations of human characters to achieve certain life goals are also discussed in young adult literature, as seen in previous studies both domestically and internationally. These studies generally appear in the form of proceedings, journals, or scholarly research. Among them, Lower (2016), in a paper titled *The 'Necessary Wilderness': Liminal Settings for Adolescent Emotional Growth in Four Novels by David Almond* discusses environmental challenges in David Almond's novels. This study found that the adolescent characters in the novels being examined have aspirations to embrace the challenges of nature, turning this into a meaningful experience. At the same time, the adolescent characters develop the perception that the ease of modern living has made them complacent. Furthermore, Collins (2015), in a paper titled *Writing the Past to Right the Future: The Cure for Dreaming* found that Olivia, the adolescent female character in the novel *The Cure for Dreaming* (2014), by Cat Winters, aspires to change her future and overcome the pessimistic perceptions of men towards women's abilities in Portland, USA, in 1900s. With courage and perseverance, Olivia is able to express her views to those around her, showing that women have abilities on par with men and thus can explore their future with confidence.

In the domestic context, studies touching on the aspirations of adolescents include those conducted by Bakar & Affendi (2016), in a journal titled 'Unsur Konflik dalam Novel Remaja Terpilih' (*Elements of Conflict in Selected Young Adult Novels*). This study discusses the aspirations of adolescent characters in the selected novels to escape their respective conflicts. These conflicts mostly involve family, peers, and personal matters. Despite being young, the adolescent characters are portrayed with positive and progressive attitudes, enabling them to take actions that align with their aspirations. Moreover, a master's thesis in literature by Hanafiah, titled 'Novel-novel Zailiani Taslim: Analisis Kehendak Remaja' (*The Novels of Zailiani Taslim: An Analysis of Adolescents' Needs*), discusses the reasons, actions, and consequences of actions taken by adolescent characters in Zailiani Taslim's novels to achieve their desires. This study found that the adolescent characters have clear reasons for pursuing their goals, which are mostly related to achieving economic prosperity, thus helping their families lead better lives.

In conclusion, the aforementioned studies highlight that adolescent characters in literature generally have the mental and physical capabilities to fulfill their desires. However, these characters are also reinforced with cognitive abilities aimed at understanding the constraints in their environment, allowing them to work toward achieving those desires.

### **Scope of Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to examine and discuss the educational and social development aspirations raised in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* (1965), by Mohd. Aris Bahnan. In line with this aim, this study will employ two methods: close reading and textual analysis. The close reading method will be utilized to explain the use of language and symbols in the work being studied. In this regard, the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* presents the story of an orphan named Aziman, who strives to succeed in his education and, in turn, escape the clutches of poverty. To achieve this goal, the character of Aziman must overcome numerous obstacles shaped by societal conditions in the 1960s. Next, the textual analysis method will be employed to examine and further explain the aspirations of society at that time. To elaborate on the social, economic, and political conditions of the era, this study will utilize the sociological literary theory of Genetic Structuralism by Lucien Goldmann.

#### *Genetic Structuralism Theory by Lucien Goldmann*

The Genetic Structuralism Theory was developed on the premise by Goldmann (1973), that literary works are created without sidelining sociological and historical influences. Goldmann believes that there is a complementary relationship between these two influences. He argues that sociology is only considered accurate when linked to relevant historical information related to the production of a literary work, and similarly, historical studies should take into account sociological information from a given time (pp. 109–110). Based on this premise, Goldmann contends that the study of society requires a method that integrates both sociology and history. Furthermore, he suggests that these same influences justify transformations in various forms during certain times and eras. In this regard, understanding all forms of transformation, as found in literary works, is said to be capable of providing insight into societal attitudes and tendencies during a particular period. Accordingly, Goldmann explains that sociological literature is holistic. In other words, nothing in a literary work arises in isolation but is linked to other relevant aspects of society.

Regarding the use of the term Genetic Structuralism, Goldmann (1973), explains that elements in a literary work can be investigated “genetically” (i.e., in terms of origin) (pp. 111–112). Thus, the study of a literary work is considered capable of fostering an inclination to examine the factors that support its creation. These elements are observed by considering the emotions, intuition, perception, and reflection of the author, who is a member of a particular society. The author is regarded as being capable of expressing the attitudes and tendencies of society toward events in their surroundings through their literary works. This capacity, among others, involves acceptance of manners, culture, customs, beliefs, visions, and so on, which are embedded in the literary work based on the author's knowledge, experience, feelings, and evaluations. In other words, a connection with the environment is considered capable of stimulating creativity, imagination, intellectuality, integrity, and the author's dynamics, particularly when depicting the life of a society in literary works. Goldmann describes literary works as structures built from factors that surround and influence society during a particular era. These include social, economic, political,

educational, cultural, and other influences, which are woven into the literary work by mirroring the real life of a society. At the same time, these influences also have the ability to reveal a society's world vision.

Based on Goldmann's perspective, it can be said that this sociological literary approach also relies on "mimesis" or imitation, making literary works a social reflection of human life. Therefore, this study holds that an important principle to be applied in this research is that literary works are created with the purpose of explaining a society's vision. This is relevant because the author is considered an authoritative source in explaining the attitudes and tendencies of society at a particular time and era. Accordingly, this study outlines three principles deemed important for explaining educational and social development aspirations in the novel under study. First, literary works express a society's vision based on the changes occurring at a particular time. Second, these changes require proactive actions from the characters, who are members of society portrayed in the literary work. Third, the literary work explains the impact of the actions taken by these societal characters who strive for change. These three principles will be comprehensively applied in discussing the educational and social development aspirations in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim*.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study outlines three objectives to be achieved, as follows:

- i. to identify the portrayal of a child character striving to achieve educational and social development aspirations in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* by Mohd. Aris Bahnan.
- ii. to analyze the actions taken to achieve educational and social development aspirations by the child character in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* by Mohd. Aris Bahnan.
- iii. to synthesize the relationship between external changes outside the text and the educational and social development aspirations found in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* by Mohd. Aris Bahnan.

### **Discussion**

The novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* (AAY) was published by Saudara Sinaran Berhad (Sinaran Bros Berhad) in 1965, under serial number 1165. This novel tells the story of the perseverance of an orphan named Aziman, who faces conflict after conflict in his pursuit of becoming a medical doctor.

In its efforts to present educational and national development aspirations, the novel portrays its protagonist, Aziman, as a character who has faced conflict since his early years. In this context, Aziman is depicted as a Malay school student living in poverty in a village, yet aware that education could be the tool to change his life. Aziman's family's poverty is portrayed as stemming from the tragic misfortune that struck his family when his mother passed away when he was only four years old, and his father followed soon after, having been crushed by a rubber tree. This meant that, at a young age, Aziman became an orphan. Aziman is then depicted as living with his elderly grandmother after being neglected by his other relatives. The novel uses this situation to propel Aziman, who became independent from a young age as his grandmother was often ill and unable to perform heavy labor to support their

livelihood. As a result, the character of Aziman is shown working hard every day, taking on various village tasks like chopping wood and fetching water to buy food and medicine.

To further illustrate the educational and social development aspirations, the novel heightens the conflict by portraying Aziman's need to allocate a portion of his earnings as preparation for attending secondary school. Aziman's focus on earning money is depicted as affecting his time for studying and reviewing lessons. The difficulties in Aziman's life do not stop at having to earn money for food and medicine. His poverty is further emphasized by the fact that his parents left no inheritance for him to rely on. As a result, Aziman and his grandmother are shown living in a small hut, built through the kindness of the village headman on his rubber plantation, where Aziman and his grandmother work as rubber tappers. In the context of rural Malay life during the British colonial period and the early years of independence, rubber tapping was often associated with low-income work that depended heavily on weather conditions. This explains the conflict faced by Aziman and his grandmother, as a portion of their meager income from rubber tapping had to be shared with the landowner, the village headman.

To further emphasize the educational and social development aspirations, the novel portrays Aziman as a diligent and hardworking character, determined to achieve his goal of becoming a medical doctor. To reflect his strong determination, Aziman is depicted as consistently excelling in exams and having no difficulty continuing his education in secondary school. It is important to note that, in the 1960s, Malay primary school students were not automatically promoted to secondary school. They needed to achieve a good level of academic success before being allowed to attend secondary school. Although Aziman easily attained an "A" grade, this achievement was still not enough to fully satisfy him. The novel makes it clear that Aziman did not see Malay secondary school as an option, as he was aware that his chances of becoming a doctor would be limited. In the 1960s, opportunities for university education, particularly in the field of medicine, were more available to students who attended English-language secondary schools. The novel presents a conflict for Aziman, as his rural village in Penang lacked a nearby English secondary school.

Furthermore, the novel reinforces the portrayal of educational and social development aspirations through Aziman's patient and determined character as he strives to overcome his poverty. As mentioned earlier, Aziman is depicted as working hard, taking on various village jobs to support himself and his grandmother. He also attempts to overcome the lack of additional reading materials by borrowing and reading books from his school library. Additionally, he is portrayed as disliking wasting time and money, which is evident when he rejects invitations from the village headman's son (Arshad) to hang out and watch movies in a nearby town. For Aziman, time and money were not luxuries he could enjoy like other children who still had the love and attention of their parents. Through the stories of his struggles to continue his education, his responsibility of caring for his sick grandmother, and the types of work he does to earn money, the novel highlights Aziman's character as a caring, loving, and responsible child. The portrayal of Aziman's willingness to face these conflicts strengthens the depiction of educational and social development aspirations in this novel.

Next, it is significant that the early conflicts that engulfed Aziman, an orphan since childhood, are further intensified through 'unexpected conflicts' that arise as he grows into adolescence.

In this case, the term 'unexpected conflicts' refers to sudden changes in Aziman's life that increase the pressure on him as he strives to escape the grip of poverty. Nonetheless, Aziman is depicted as facing these conflicts with patience and resilience, even when he is forced to move from place to place. Regarding this matter, it can be said that the passing of his grandmother becomes the first unexpected conflict for Aziman because, at that time, he is shown to be not yet capable of managing his daily life on his own. In other words, the loss of his grandmother, his last remaining family member to rely on, is utilized as a turning point for Aziman to start becoming independent and setting the direction for his life. In this regard, although the character Dato' Penghulu (the village headman who owns the land and house where Aziman and his grandmother live) offers Aziman a place to stay and guarantees food, drink, and the opportunity to study, the offer also involves an issue of comfort. This arises because Aziman is depicted as being obligated to maintain his relationship with Arshad (Dato' Penghulu's youngest son) while living in their home. Arshad, who is Aziman's peer, is portrayed as spoiled, lazy, and extravagant, often taking advantage of Aziman's presence in the family for his own benefit. For instance, Arshad frequently pressures Aziman to let him copy his homework and take over tasks that his parents assign to him. It is important to note that Aziman always remains patient when dealing with Arshad's antics. Thus, Aziman's eventual move to Batu Pahat town is explained as being due to the offer to study in an English school from Amir (Dato' Penghulu's eldest son), who works in the town.

The portrayal of educational and social development aspirations becomes more pronounced when the novel introduces a larger unexpected conflict for Aziman. This occurs when Amir is depicted as failing to fulfill his initial promise to Aziman. In this new place, Aziman is not only denied the opportunity to study at an English school but is also treated like a servant by Amir's wife, Habsah. In this context, the long distance and difficult transportation network between Batu Pahat and Penang in the 1960s prevented Aziman from immediately returning to his original home. This unexpected conflict further becomes a reason for Aziman to leave Amir's house and seek new employment to support himself. However, the novel also utilizes Aziman's actions to introduce him to Pak Hamid (the owner of a food stall), whom he meets on a bus heading to Muar. Pak Hamid, sympathizing with Aziman's plight, is willing to take him in as an adopted son. In line with the educational and social development aspirations highlighted in the novel, a long and comfortable period is provided for Aziman to study at an English school. However, the next unexpected conflict that disrupts Aziman's plans arises when Pak Hamid dies from severe injuries sustained during a robbery at his food stall. The loss of Pak Hamid, who was kind and caring, is presented as a new conflict for Aziman, as there is no longer an adult willing to provide protection and guidance during his adolescence. Although there are stories about Aziman's determination to become independent by running the food stall, this effort is ultimately unsuccessful. This is partly explained by Aziman's inability to inherit Pak Hamid's cooking skills, leading to a loss of customers and the depletion of working capital. Additionally, the loss of Pak Hamid's protection exposes Aziman to negative influences in his community, such as gambling, truancy, and theft.

In the context of reinforcing educational and social development aspirations, the novel continues by depicting Aziman's involvement with a group of delinquent youths after Pak Hamid's death. This situation is described as occurring because Aziman, in his adolescence, believes he can take care of himself and refuses Mak Limah's (Pak Hamid's wife) invitation to live with her at her child's home in the village. However, Aziman, who is still in his early teens

at the time, is portrayed as unable to take care of himself as he thought he could without adult guidance. This becomes evident when Aziman is depicted as becoming involved with a group of delinquent youths in Muar. As a result of this involvement, Aziman's character changes from a well-mannered, ambitious youth to a rebellious teenager who neglects his own future. Among the misdeeds described are his frequent truancy and late-night gambling with his friends. The consequences of these actions are severe, as Aziman is eventually expelled from the English school. In other words, Aziman's chance for academic success is closed off, becoming the biggest conflict he must bear.

To further emphasize the theme of educational and social development aspirations in the novel, Aziman's delinquency continues when he becomes involved in a theft at a shopping mall during the Chinese New Year celebration. Aziman is forced into this act because he has no money to buy food. However, after escaping a crowd of people, Aziman reflects on his criminal actions and decides to surrender himself to the police. A significant outcome of this decision is that Aziman returns to the path of pursuing his original dreams when he is placed in a children's welfare home (an orphanage). With the guidance and care from the adults working at the welfare home, Aziman is later depicted as becoming diligent and hardworking once again. This transformation occurs because, after staying at the home, he is able to resume his studies at the English school, pass public exams with distinction, and successfully continue his education at a university abroad in the field of medicine. The strategy of ending the story in this manner effectively reinforces the educational and social development aspirations conveyed in the novel.

### **Social Aspirations in the 1960s**

This study finds that the educational and social development aspirations portrayed in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* are closely related to contemporary developments in Malaysia during the 1960s. The discussion of educational aspirations in the novel highlights the government's desire to encourage students to pursue fields of science and technology, which were the educational priorities of the country in the 1960s. The aspiration for science and technology education was considered an important vehicle for strengthening the role and presence of Malays in the social and economic spheres. For instance, Abdullah (1965), explains that science and technology education in schools needed to be enhanced to address the social and economic challenges faced by the Malays (p. 33). This also aligned with the Malaysian government's move to collaborate with the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate in 1967 to revise the science curriculum in primary and secondary schools. According to Tahir (1967) the school science curriculum needed revision to enable more students to pursue higher education (pp. 12–13). As illustrated in the previous discussion, it is clear that educational aspirations are shown in the novel through Aziman's resilience and perseverance in overcoming the conflicts he faces in his quest to become a medical doctor. In this context, Aziman is also depicted as believing that the educational advancements he achieves have the potential to lift him out of poverty.

The discussion of social development aspirations in the novel also reflects the Malaysian government's awareness and commitment to realizing the *Mental Revolution* agenda, a large-scale and comprehensive movement through government agencies to advance society in the areas of social, economic, and educational development. This agenda, among other things, called for the involvement of the Malay community, which was still far behind at the time, in

government-driven programs in these fields. Writings from the 1960s generally urged the community (especially the Malays) to seize the development opportunities being offered and to escape the cycle of poverty. For example, Rahman (1968), encouraged Malays to let go of their satisfaction with the comforts they enjoyed, arguing that there were still many untapped opportunities for development (pp. 2–3). He further stated that the Malays had the ability to fill these developmental gaps if they understood the goals of government-run programs in education, agriculture, entrepreneurship, and other areas. Rahman explained that the main limitation of the Malays at that time (the 1960s), was a mental weakness that hindered them from entering new and challenging fields. Additionally, writings by Hitam (1968), Osman (1968), and Ali (1968), also urged the Malays to free themselves from a mindset of inferiority and self-doubt. According to these authors, these attitudes were the reason the Malays were significantly behind other ethnic groups. Based on these writings, it can be said that social development aspirations were indeed one of the key issues discussed throughout the 1960s, and similar aspirations can be found in the perseverance of Aziman, an orphaned and impoverished child, who is able to find a way out of the poverty that surrounds him.

### **Conclusion**

In essence, the observations of societal aspirations in the novel *Aziman Anak Yatim* reveal the general tendencies of Malaysian society in the 1960s. As a novel written for children and young adults at the time, it presents Aziman as a hardworking, determined character who bravely faces challenges and learns from his mistakes to achieve his dream of becoming a doctor. As a poor orphan, the novel illustrates that Aziman had to work hard, taking on paid village labor during his childhood and managing his own business in adolescence, as a reflection of his determination and perseverance in achieving his life goals. Aziman's success at the end of the story shows that the positive attitudes he possesses enable him to escape the cycle of poverty. In this regard, it is clear that the stories of Aziman's success are aligned with the societal aspirations for education and social development in the 1960s, which emphasized the importance of education and social progress for the entire Malaysian population.

This study makes significant contributions to two fields of knowledge. Firstly, it elucidates the structure of Malaysian society during the early days of independence by discussing the novel's content. The study provides a detailed explanation of how social and economic changes influence societal aspirations for success. The application of Genetic Structuralism Theory, as proposed by Lucien Goldmann, aids in explaining the impact of these changes on the conflicts faced by the main character, Aziman. Secondly, the study indirectly contributes to the discourse on the history and development of young adult novels in Malaysia. The novel "Aziman Anak Yatim" tells the story of its protagonist, Aziman, who grapples with the challenges of fulfilling his various needs and ambitions. Through Aziman's journey, the text effectively captures the struggles that many young adults face in reality, thus allowing readers to relate to the character's experiences. Overall, the novel exemplifies the characteristics of young adult literature, making it relevant and engaging for its intended audience.



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