

## Potential of Fables as Learning Resources for Environmental Education and Its Relevance to the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum

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### Abstract

The development of noble character, especially the awareness of protecting the environment, can be optimized through the internalization process in learning. Children's literary media is an effective medium, especially applied to elementary school-aged children at the golden age of character planting. Stories in children's literature can dialogue life in an interesting, concrete, and contextual way. The fable entitled "The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Teaches It to Fly" by Luis Sepulveda is one of the translated fables with the theme of environment and family, which is considered to have the potential to be used as a learning resource for environmental education. Research that attempts to analyze the environment's value in fables and its use as a learning resource in the era of the *Merdeka Belajar* (independent learning) curriculum is still very limited. This research aimed to; 1) describe the value of environmental education in the fable "The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Teaches It to Fly" by Luis Sepulveda; 2) describe the use of fables as a learning resource for elementary school students; 3) describe its relevance to the profile of Pancasila students in the independent learning curriculum. This research is qualitative, using a text study approach and descriptive analysis. This study showed that this fable can be used as a source of learning materials for elementary school students following the theories that support student development and learning approaches, such as; meaningful learning and constructivism, as well as relevant to the proclamation of the Pancasila student profile in the *Merdeka Belajar* (independent learning) curriculum. The implication of this study is a recommendation for developing children's literature-based learning media to internalize environmental awareness characters.

Keywords: Ecological awareness, Fables, *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum

### INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues are still a classic problem that never goes away. One factor that greatly influences is human awareness as part of the universe. Ecological awareness leads to a method of revitalizing the relationship between humans and nature (King, 1989). Humans and the environment (ecosystem) should be on parallel lines of connection, not the relationship between subjects and objects (Freire, 2010). This statement implies that humans are not necessarily in a more dominant position, so they are free to exploit the environment without any effort to maintain it.

In fact, many people still release exploitative and destructive causes of various crises or environmental damage. In the environmental sector, we found various problems such as; pollution, forest fires, waste pollution, global warming, and other damage. The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) released research results on natural damage in Indonesia. His research stated that environmental practices that destroy the environment that ignores spatial planning and the environment had been proven to exacerbate the intensity of disasters in Indonesia. During the reform period from 1998 to 2015, it was found that the deforestation rate was still very high, namely 3.52 million hectares/year in the 1997-2000 period; and 1.09

million hectares/year. This condition places Indonesia as the sixth largest contributor to carbon emissions worldwide (Zulfa, 2021). According to 2018 IPBES data, every year, Indonesia loses 650 hectares of forest (Walhi, 2021). Environmental damage is caused in producing inequality in aspects of life such as economic, social, gender, educational, and health (Haug et al., 2017).

As a system equipped with tested and measurable tools, education has great potential to support the efforts to teach environmental awareness. Research shows that children's empathy for ecology tends to increase after participating in REDE (The Respect Empathy Djur Etik) training. This research was conducted in Sweden. REDE is a program to develop children's empathy, concern for others, and respect for animals and nature (Angantyr et al., 2016). It is an example of the importance of special ecological education.

Implementing environmental education (EE) in Indonesia is insignificant, unsatisfactory, and temporary. EE is more likely to be political and ineffective (Parker, 2018). So, education requires an approach to the mission of internalizing the character of environmental awareness, especially through literary media (Kahn, 2011). The literature that focuses on ecological themes is referred to as green literature. Green literature is a medium for caring for nature, and its contents include a reminder of human greed in exploiting the environment (Gaard, 2009).

Literary media and learning approach can provide deep meaning to students, or in other ways, essential value-oriented learning (Dunkley & Smith, 2019). But, the early years of a child's life are a golden period for forming his character, so the elementary school age is the most effective age to teach these values (Hurlock, 1980). Moreover, if this approach is applied in the era of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. The characteristic of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is contextualization in learning, another aspect that is no less important in the independent learning curriculum is the character survey. This character assessment is, of course, not in the form of a test assessment. Instead, use survey and observation methods related to the application of character, religion, and Pancasila values in the students' personalities (Mustagfiroh, 2020).

Children's literature discusses all aspects of life's issues, becoming information and understanding for children. Stories in children's literature can dialogue with life interestingly and concretely. Children's literature (in the form of stories) offers two main things: understanding and enjoyment. Lukens at (Nurgiantoro, 2018) also stated that readers in the category of children have fantasy characteristics that develop in accepting all kinds of stories

regardless of whether they make sense. Children's literature is considered a very important and influential media in forming children's mindset (Setiyawan & Lestari, 2020).

Children's literature can develop children's insight into human behavior (Tarigan, 2011). This is supported by the theory of characteristics of children's literature according to Saxbi (1991) in (Farahiba, 2017) that children's literature contains images and or metaphors of life that are within reach of children, children's literature involves aspects of emotions, feelings, thoughts, sensory nerves, and moral experiences, and expressed in linguistic forms that children readers can also reach and understand.

The fable entitled "The Story of a Seagull and a Cat That Teaches It to Fly" by Luis Sepulveda is one of the translated fables with an environmental theme (Sepulveda & Agustinus, 2020). The reason for choosing this fable is because it has advantages in a systematic storyline, is rich in meaning, and conveys a message about the effects and causes of environmental damage; besides that, this fable is also packed with humor. In addition, few fables in Indonesia focus on and specifically discuss criticism of environmental damage. Most of the fables that appear in elementary school textbooks display the value of honesty, friendship, or mutual assistance, such as the stories of The Kancil and the Crocodile, the Rabbit and the Turtle, and the Starling and the Buffalo. There are still very few iconic fables that are known by the public compared to other literary genres such as folklore or legends.

This is unfortunate, even though a fable has the potential to be a persuasive medium for building ecological awareness. In a study conducted by Alice Gibson, entitled *Philosophical Fables for Ecological Thinking: Resisting Environmental Catastrophe within the Anthropocene*, shows that fables have a philosophical value that can be used as a critique of anthropogenic activities that cause damage to the environment (Gibson, 2020). So this study aimed to describe the value of environmental education in fables and the potential of fables as meaningful learning media with an insight into ecological awareness in the era of independent learning.

## **METHOD**

This research is qualitative research using a text study approach. According to Bogdan and Taylor, the qualitative research method is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of words (can be spoken for social, cultural, and philosophical research), and notes related to meaning, value, and understanding (Kaelan, 2005).

Text study is carried out by taking notes and searching for meaning to find parts of the story related to the relationship between humans and the environment. The relationship between humans and the environment is then broken down using descriptive analysis methods

to provide a clear picture, followed by conclusions about the potential for fables to be developed into learning media. The data used are primary data sources, namely in the form of text notes, in dialogue, and fable narrative entitled "The Story of a Seagull and a Cat That Teaches It to Fly" by Luis Sepulveda with a thickness of 90 pages, publisher Margin Kiri.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **The Value of Ecological Awareness in Fables**

The value of environmental awareness depicted in fables both explicitly and implicitly includes three aspects, namely; living environment, animal world and exploitation, as well as pollution. These three aspects in the fable not only occupy a complementary position, but become the central point of the entire fable flow. These three aspects, the living environment, the animal world and exploitation, and pollution are contained in the following quotations.

*"A swarm of herrings in the harbor!" exclaimed the scout gull, and the news was immediately greeted by the entourage from the Red Sands Lighthouse with a sigh of relief. (Sepulveda, 2020; 1).*

*Following the pilot's gull-gull order, the entourage from the Red Sand Lighthouse took a cold air current and plunged towards the herring herd. One hundred and twenty bodies plunged into the water like arrows, and when they came to the surface again, each of them had already flanked a herring in its beak. ....(Sepulveda, 2020; 2)*

*... Female gulls like herself will be busy with a large feast of sardines and squid, while males lay out nests on the edge of the cliff...*

Based on the quote above, it is known that there is an environmental value, namely in the aspect of habitat. It is told that the coastal area in the port is an ideal ecosystem for bird populations to migrate. The coastal area in the port is also an ecosystem that provides a source of food, a location to reproduce, and hatch gull eggs. This section also emphasizes that habitats in coastal areas as nursery ground areas for many biota (Ragunathan, 2017). After the depiction of the habitat of the dwelling, this fable then begins the conflict of the story with the main problem, namely the pollution of the aquatic environment, which is illustrated in the following excerpt.

*... With flappable wings sticking to the body, gulls become easy targets for large fish, or they die slowly, claustrophobic by oil that seeps through feathers and clogs their pores..... Black stains. Black pestilence. While menanti death, Kengah cursed man. ....(Sepulveda, 2020; 13)*

*"But not everything. Don't I play flat," he said weakly. ....(Sepulveda, 2020; 13)*

*"I got an oil spill. Black pestilence. The Curse of the Ocean. I'm going to die," the gull chimed in chatteringly. ....(Sepulveda, 2020; 18)*

*... Often, from a great height, he saw large oil tankers stealing opportunities on foggy days on the coast to go draining their tanks in the middle of the ocean. Thousands of liters of thick, smelly liquid were spilled into the ocean, which was then carried away by the waves. But he also saw how smaller ships sometimes approached the tankers and prevented them from draining the tanks.*

*"Humans, unfortunately, are unpredictable. Often with the best of intentions, they cause the heaviest damage," the Colonel convicted. ....(Sepulveda, 2020; 54)*

*... Sometimes I think that humans are really crazy, because they seem to want to turn the ocean into a giant garbage dump. I just got home from multu Elbe River, and you can't imagine how much garbage is dragged there....(Sepulveda, 2020; 62)*

The excerpts of the conversation and narrative above describe the events that are central to the content of the story in fables, namely environmental pollution, especially in the sea, originating from human activities in efforts to improve the level of economy and welfare. In Facts show that continuous exposure to anthropogenic activity waste into coastal waters has had a significant ecological impact (Santosa, 2019). Furthermore, this fable also tries to review the relationship between animals and humans as in the following quote.

*"Such is the law of the cats, and not that they are not in the interest of communicating with humans. The risk lies in what response humans will give. What will they do with the talking cats? They will almost certainly lock him in a large cage to undergo all sorts of stupid experiments, for men in general are incapable of accepting that beings who are not the same as them can understand them and try to want to be understood. Kucing-cats know, for example, the sad fate of dolphins, who show intelligence in front of humans and are now told to bail in recreational shows air. Lions for example, those big cats are forced to live behind shells and endure shame... (Sepulveda, 2020; 74-75)*

In the above quote can be known the perception aimed at the relationship between humans and animals. Domesticated animals, and exploited as a tool of human interest especially in the economic sector. For example, the practice of circuses, monkey masks, cockfighting, which is often accompanied by acts of violence. As quoted on the Kompas.com page (22/02/2019) that there was a lot of urging from the public to stop circus performances because they began to realize about animal welfare, especially animals with protected status, so a number of circuses stopped operating and improved their performances (Kompas, 2019). In an ecocritical view, anthropomorphism is not a special treatment for animals, instead it is

considered as an insult and a shackle of freedom (Garrard, 2004). While Glofelty called this relationship as an environmental racism (Glotfelty, 1996).

### **The Potential of Fables as a Learning Medium in the Era of Independent Learning**

Fables can be used as a meaningful learning medium through development. According to Ausubel, learning must be meaningful, learning can be classified into two dimensions. The first dimension, relates to how information or subject matter is presented to students, through acceptance or discovery. The second dimension, concerns how students can relate that information to existing cognitive structures. The cognitive structure includes facts, concepts, and generalizations that students have studied and desired (Aryawan et al., 2018).

So this will also be relevant to the function of learning media, according to Yusufhadi Miarso, which channels messages and can stimulate thoughts, feelings, attention, and will to encourage a deliberate, purposeful, and controlled learning process (Miarso, 2011). The fable entitled *The Story of a Seagull and a Cat Who Taught Him to Fly*, charged with values about caring for the environment, can be used as a learning medium to instill the character values of ecological awareness. This fable can be developed into a learning medium in the form of illustrated stories or serialized comics, or it can also be in the form of a three-dimensional scrap book.

As explained in the previous discussion, some of the values of ecological awareness contained in this fable can provide students with an understanding of seagulls' habitat (residence) on a beach. Through their habitat, groups of seagulls forage in the sea as fish or crabs. Knowledge of habitat (residence) will make students understand the importance of maintaining habitat and the animals or marine life that live in it. So that when students are in a place (beach, wildlife), students will be careful with all their actions and attitudes, such as not littering, because in that place, there are habitats (residences) of other creatures that must be maintained.

Through developing this fable as a medium for defending students, students can also understand the importance of keeping the environment clean and unpolluted. Students can be invited to do a simple practice about the dangers of oil in water, bird or chicken feathers, or objects around them. So that in addition to students hearing or reading stories, they can practice the dangers themselves if they litter the sea with oil or garbage.

Based on the explanation above, the use of fable content as a learning medium also has the potential for holistic assessment, which includes three aspects of the assessment domain, namely the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Sudjana, 1989). This is in keeping with research on holistic ecology in reading Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls*. This research

also uses novels to build characters who care about the environment. Thus, *A Monster Calls* can contribute to children's environmental education by illustrating the relationship between the natural environment and man: the eternal bond between "the Green" and "the Man"(Yarova, 2020).

The use of this fable as a learning medium can be started from the elementary school level. The cultivation of the value of ecological consciousness is ideal to start early. According to Piaget, children of primary school age belong to the stage of concrete operations and formal operations. In the stage of concrete operations (7-11 years) the individual begins to think logically about events of a concrete nature, and the Individual can already distinguish the same object under different conditions ((Slavin, 2011). As in the research conducted by (Kembuan & Irwansyah, 2019) that in facing the challenges and problems of community life, nation, and state, including challenges in the life context sector, elementary school education is a potential institution to educate and provide knowledge at the primary level and forerunner of the emergence of the nation's generation and successor.

Judging from the linguistic aspect, the Fables of the Story of a Gull and the Cat That Taught Him to Fly by Luis Sepulveda, translated by Ronny Augustine use language that is easy for students to understand so that it can be used as learning material. In addition, the storyline on the fable is varied and will make students imagine where students will be very interested in the story of two friendly animals (gulls and birds).

Implementing the embedding of the value of environmental awareness in the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum has the same wedges and is in line. These slices meet in the implementation of learning that upholds aspects of the independence of creativity, innovation, and deep contextual meaning of a material or information, as well as ethical outcome. Especially on the Pancasila student profile information.

The profile of Pancasila students in the era of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum has six main characteristics: having faith, being devoted to God, having a noble character, having a creative character, being cooperative, independent, reasoning, and creative. In the character of faith, devotion to the fatherhood of God, and noble character, there are five key elements in its implementation, namely; (a) religious morals; (b) morals pribadi; (c) morals to man; (d) morals to nature; and (e) state morals (Ministry of Education Culture Research and Technology, 2021). Morals to nature, one of which is by internalizing environmental education, which contains the value of ecological awareness in the learning process in an effective and meaningful way. So this shows the use of the fabled story of a gull and a cat that

teaches him to fly as a learning resource for environmental education is very relevant to the proclamation of the profile of Pancasila students in the independent learning curriculum.

## CONCLUSION

The Fable Story of a Seagull and the Cat That Taught Him to Fly by Luis Sepulveda the novel puts environmental issues, especially pollution of marine ecosystems and animal exploitation, at the center of the story. Zorbas and his friends' journey of raising gull cubs left to die by their mothers due to oil spills describes and highlights criticisms of human and environmental relations that have often occurred, intending to build awareness of environmental stewardship.

Some of the environmental values in the fable of the Story of a Gull and the Cat That Taught It to Fly that can be developed in the form of learning media include the habitat or residence of living things that have important significance for the survival of living things. In addition, there is also an understanding of the impact of environmental pollution on living things, most of which come from human activities. This fable can be developed into a learning medium in the form of illustrated stories or serialized comics, or it can also be in the form of a three-dimensional scrap book. The use of the fable as a learning medium is also relevant to the era of the independent learning curriculum, namely the character value of the Pancasila student profile, where one of the key elements is morals towards humans and the universe. So, the implication of this study is a recommendation for developing children's literature-based learning media to internalize environmental awareness characters.

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