THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SKILL IN FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT'S A LITTLE PRINCESS NOVEL (1904): A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

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by:

LINDA PRATIWI FRIDAYATI
A 320 080 110

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Nama : Linda Pratiwi Fridayati
NIM : A 320 080 110
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LINDA PRATIWI FRIDAYATI
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Accepted and Approved by the Board of Examiners
School of Teacher Training and Education
Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta

Team of Examiners:

1. Drs. M. Thoyibi, MS.
   (Chair Person)

2. Nur Hidayat, S. Pd.
   (Member I)

   (Member II)

Drs. H. Sohyan Anif, M.Si.
THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SKILL IN FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT’S *A LITTLE PRINCESS* NOVEL (1904): A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

Linda Pratiwi Fridayati
Department of English Education
Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta
lind_people@yahoo.co.id

ABSTRACT

The major problem of this study is how the importance of social skill is reflected in *A Little Princess* novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett. The objective of this study is to describe the importance of social skill in the novel based on the sociological approach. The writer uses qualitative method. The data sources consist of primary data and secondary data sources. The primary data source is *A Little Princess* novel and the secondary data sources are the other sources related to the analysis. The method of the data collection is library research. The technique of data analysis is descriptive analysis. The outcome of the study is shown in the following conclusions. First, Burnett describes the theme of the novel that life is unbearable without the ability to draw courage and to build hope. It gives emphasis that people should be aware of the way of treating others and should appreciate and respect each other as well as they respect themselves. Second, based on sociological analysis, it shows that there is a correlation between *A Little Princess* novel and social realities of English society in the early twentieth century.

*Keywords: social skill, sociological analysis, A Little Princess.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Generally, social skills are one of the importance points to understand in the process of increasing communication with other people (www.mysocialskills.com). Often we take our social skills for granted, without realizing all the complicated skills we use when we interact with others. Some of these skills are very basic and simple, like saying hello and good-bye, or smiling and making eye contact when we see someone we know. Others are more complex, like the skills we use to negotiate in a situation of conflict with somebody. Some people learn social skills easily and quickly, whereas others find social interactions more challenging, and
may need to work on developing their social skills consciously. (www.embracethefuture.org)

Social skills are not only learned by adults but also very important to learn by children. Adults have to teach the children as early as possible about social skills, especially when children start to communicate with other people. In a family circle, parents are responsible to their children’s attitude, while in education circle the responsible of children’s behavior depend on the teachers. When adults have good behaviors then the most children around them also will have good behaviors, the other way, if adults show bad behaviors then the children will do so because children have characteristic to do as someone does around them. When children have good social skills then they will easier to make relationship with other children.

The studying of social skills not only draws attention to the parents or teachers but also the author of A Little Princess novel, Frances Hodgson Burnett. Burnett was the eldest daughter in a family of two boys and three girls. She was born in Manchester, England on November 24 1849. A Little Princess was written by Burnett in 1904 and published in United State by Warne Publication. It is a children’s novel that revised and expanded version of Burnett’s 1888 serialized novel entitled Sara Crewe: or, What happened at Miss Minchin’s boarding school, which published in St. Nicholas Magazine. (www.imdb.com)

In her novel, A Little Princess, Burnett talks about a little girl named Sara Crewe who at the beginning of the novel is a solemn seven year old girl. Sara is the only daughter of the widowed Captain Crewe, and during her early childhood in India she was given everything a little girl could possibly desire. Sara was brought all the way to London in Victorian-era England for a formal education and to escape the inevitable hardships of India such as disease. When Captain Crewe leaves Sara at Miss Minchin’s boarding school, he wishes that Miss Minchin will give
everything to her – Sara have a private sitting room, a personal maid, and all the comforts that money can buy.

In the story, everyone is ready to think about Sara as an arrogant and spoiled child, but instead she is compassionate, considerate, very intelligent, polite, and creative young girl, and very much aware that her father’s great fortune does not make her better than anyone else. But, after four years coincide with Sara’s eleventh birthday, she gets news that her father died. Her father dies after a friend loses his money in a business deal in India. Sara is left penniless and without any family, then she has to work as a servant at the school. She lives in the attic room next to the cook and not only runs errands of all kinds but also must keep up with her studies and help teach the younger girls about French lesson. The next story is about Sara’s survival to life as a servant in Miss Minchin’s boarding school and to face her sufferings because sometimes Miss Minchin does not give her meals whereas Sara has finished working hard all day. But that’s not for a long time because Sara return become a wealthy girl after she meets Mr. Carrisford, the one who “lost” Captain Crewe’s fortune in a business. But in reality the business deal is successful but Captain Crewe dies before knowing the truth about his money and about his friend.

There are some reasons why the writer interested in studying this novel. The first reason is the character of the novel, especially Sara Crewe as the main character. Sara is a unique and interesting girl. Sara always thinks like an adult even though she was only seven years old. Her mother’s death since Sara still a baby makes her closes and loves her father very much. Sara is a realist and imaginative girl. Since she knew that her father had died and she has nobody as her family, she realizes that she has to fill her needs by her own self. But in that situation, she still has imagination and hope that helps her to face her suffers.

The second reason is the theme of the novel. From the story, it can be concluded that one of the themes is about the way to treat others. This is seen when Miss Minchin knew that Sara was no longer a rich girl, she told
Sara to work as a maid and not half-hearted to torment her. Especially when the other servants also told Sara doing all the work for a girl her age is very hard to do.

The last reason is the importance of social skill which is reflected in *A Little Princess* is one of appealing aspects that interesting to be studied. Sara Crewe is one of the examples how social skills become very important for children when they have no other people to depend on.

The problem statement of the study is how the importance of social skill is reflected in *A Little Princess* written by Burnett. Based on the problem, the writer formulates the objective of the study to analyze and to describe the importance of social skill in the novel based on the sociological approach.

In analyzing this novel, the writer found other researches using Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess*. The first research was conducted by Sulistiana graduated from Muhammadiyah University of Malang (2005) entitled *An Analysis of Sara Crewe’s Suffering in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s Novel “A Little Princess”*. The purpose of the research is to find out what are Sara Crewe’s sufferings, what are the causes of Sara Crewe’s sufferings and how does Sara Crewe solve her problems. The result of the research shows that there were six Sara Crewe’s moral sufferings, include: sadness of her father’s death, feeling lonely, being neglected, being hated by Miss Minchin, being scorned by everyone and being hopeless. In addition, it was found out that there were three Sara Crewe’s physical sufferings, include: Sara was kept in the Attic, the hunger and coldness was faced by Sara Crewe and the clothes were wore by Sara Crewe. Then, Sara Crewe’s suffering was caused by her father’s tragic death, leaving no money for her. Next, the way Sara Crewe solved her sufferings was by being an errand girl and servant and becoming a beggar.

The second research was conducted by Palchick graduated from Truman State University (2007) entitled *A Feminist Analysis of Frances*
Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*. This paper examined the ways in which the young protagonist of Frances Burnett’s *A Little Princess* overcomes hardship as a young intellect in the Victorian era trapped under the oppression of feminine expectations, restrictions, and projected ideals using a Feminist perspective.

From the literary reviews above, the writer can show that this study has similar parts from those researches that is the writer also analyze *A Little Princess* novel written by Burnett. Then, the difference between this study and the researches above is that the writer focuses to analyze the importance of social skill in *A Little Princess* novel by using a sociological perspective.

Sociology is a study that deals with the society. It is related to the life of human being as a member of society where each other can create all kinds of interactions. The focus of sociology is on social structures and the influences from society which can affect the behavior of people, their experiences, and their interpretations of the world around them. The study of sociology is to learn about how human societies are constructed, and where our beliefs and daily routines come from and how our social identities are formed (wiki.answer.com). Therefore, sociology is basically the study of people and how we interact with each other.

Sociology studies the real life, whereas literature is created based on social phenomena. Literature is work of art which expresses of human life and the conflicts on society especially concern with law, religion, norms, economic and politic. The purpose of literature research from sociology perspective is to get a complete and total description of the interrelated relationship among the author literary work and society. Lowenthal as quoted by Swingewood and Laurenson (1972: 16) argues that “the main purpose of any viable sociology of literature must be to discover the ‘core of meaning’”. From this argument, sociology has the function as an instrument to grasp the meaning of the authors work and to improve understanding of society based on the phenomena as social life.
B. RESEARCH METHOD

The primary data source of the study is *A Little Princess* novel written by Burnett. The secondary data sources are books and other sources that support the analysis. The technique of data collection is library research, the steps are: a) reading repeatedly the story book, b) determining the character that will be analyzed, c) underlying of important parts in both primary and secondary data, d) classifying and determining the relevant data, e) taking notes from the material and some other resources related to the novel. The technique used in analyzing the data is descriptive analysis.

C. FINDINGS

Based on the sociological analysis of *A Little Princess* novel, there is relation between the novel with English society where the novel appeared. The novel reflects the reality of English society in the early twentieth century. Those realities in society are as follows.

1. Social Aspect

During Victorian era, English society was divided into classes; there are the upper classes, the middle classes and the working classes. Since *A Little Princess* novel was published in 1904, it was still in Victorian era because Queen Victoria was crowned in 1837 until her death in 1901. The characters in *A Little Princess* can be classified and suited into those three classes.

Burnett portrays the characteristics of the upper class members by creating Captain Crewe and his daughter, Sara Crewe. In the beginning of the story, Burnett first introduces Sara Crewe as a wealthy little girl who always receives everything she wants. She is seven years old but she is grown up in her manners for someone young. Burnett draws her as an upper class little girl but she has respectfulness for others. She has a tendency of thinking of other people needs before her own, which very few children normally would have done.
Unfortunately, her father dies after a few years, which makes her life change radically. In debt and orphaned, she is employed as a servant in the school where she goes from being the most wealthy student to the poorest servant. She becomes a working class girl who still has a kind heart. Burnett describes her as a lower class girl who is willing to work hard and pays attention for duties that give to her.

Sara could be trusted with difficult commissions and complicated messages. She could even go and pay bills, and she combined with this the ability to dust a room well and to set things in order. (ALP, 1904: 62)

In the end of the story, Sara is described as a wealth girl because she finally meets Mr. Carrisford who is for a few years looking for her. Burnett introduces Mr. Carrisford as a rich man from India. He becomes an upper class man after his diamond mines change from bankrupt to increase enormously. Although now he is a rich man, he is not really using his wealth for pleasure. Instead, it burdens him and makes him ill because the half of his wealth supposes belong to Captain Crewe’s daughter, Sara Crewe, the girl he looks for.

"I wonder how many of the attics in this square are like that one, and how many wretched little servant girls sleep on such beds, while I toss on my down pillows, loaded and harassed by wealth that is, most of it—not mine." (ALP, 1904: 96)

The middle classes are represented by Miss Minchin and Mr. Carmichael. Miss Minchin is drawn as a middle-aged woman who has her own girls’ boarding school to support her life with her younger sister. She has several employees and a little girl servant. Burnett draws her as a greedy employer. Mr. Carmichael works as a lawyer. He becomes lawyer and friend of Mr. Carrisford. He lives with his wife, mother and eight children, and he has several servants. Burnett explains him as a warm, friendly and wise father.

Meanwhile, the working class is represented by Becky; Miss Minchin’s servant who sleeps at the attic next to Sara’s when Sara employs as a servant at school. Becky is drawn by Burnett as an
uneducated girl, but she is kind. Miss Minchin, as her employer, treats her bad and inappropriate.

In the Victorian era, it is commonly for children to get work, especially from poor family. They are force to work because the economic condition at that time. Although in the early 19th century the churches provided schools for poor children, the government did not take responsibility for education until 1870. The government had passed the Education Act which laid down that schools should be provided for all children. In 1880, school was made schooling compulsory for children aged five to thirteen. However school was not free, except for the poorest children until 1891 when fees were abolished. From 1899 children were required to go to school until they were 12. But then, there are still many of children who work for their life and poverty that force them to be beggar.

2. Economic Aspect

The rapid change since Industrial Revolution changed London into an enormous trouble in poverty due to pollution and unsanitary environment had beaten the town. Industrial Revolution had become a successful agent in high unemployment, rapid urbanization, poverty, children labour exploitation and crimes in London. People were unable to seek a job and finally they reside in a workhouse of which condition was made very harsh. Even a workhouse is unable to provide a better life for inmates including orphans to whom workhouse gives a dietary.

At that time, there are so many women and children who have to work hard for their living. Burnett shows the economic condition through the characters she creates. For instance, Becky as a servant at school she has to work hard everyday but she gets very few wages for a week. She has no other choice but to do everything the people asks to.

She was a forlorn little thing who had just taken the place of scullery maid—though, as to being scullery maid, she was everything else besides. (ALP, 1904: 31)
Becky would have been packed out of the house before breakfast, but that a scullery maid could not be dispensed with at once. The servants knew that she was allowed to stay because Miss Minchin could not easily find another creature helpless and humble enough to work like a bounden slave for so few shillings a week. (ALP, 1904: 133)

The economic regards someone social status. When it is a rich man, he/she can have everything and gets to have done whatever, but while someone is an indigent therefore she shall work to just get eating and home. The extremely change of Sara’s economic status forces her to work as a servant at school and everyone treats her awfully.

"You can do anything you are told," was the answer. "You are a sharp child, and pick up things readily. If you make yourself useful I may let you stay here. You speak French well, and you can help with the younger children." (ALP, 1904: 57)

"You will have to do more than teach the little ones. You will run errands and help in the kitchen as well as in the schoolroom. If you don't please me, you will be sent away. Remember that." (ALP, 1904: 58)

3. Political Aspect

In *A Little Princess*, Burnett does not draw any political condition that seems to affect the story. There are no political acts or regulations issued by the government during the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century that influence the flow of the story. Neither domestic nor foreign political policies which influence any events in the story can be found since it does not depict any political process. In the novel, Burnett does not portray any role of society in political process or the role of society in decision making and public policy, too.

4. Science and Technology Aspect

It seems that Burnett wants to give emphasis on traditional values on her novel. She wants to show the simplicity of life as well as of tools that have not been touched by complex methods that are usually derived from the modern technology. During 1870s, Britain led international communication with the development of postal services
and pioneering work in telecommunication. Thus, the innovation in telecommunication improved fast. In the middle of nineteenth century, the electric telegraph had been invented. Soon the exchanging messages were able to connect London and New York in the middle of 1860s. Within ten years exchanging telegrams had become part of everyday life.

However, Burnett does not draw any technological development in *A Little Princess*. It can be seen from the way Sara and her father sent letters to each other. There is no trace of innovation of communication in the novel since the exchanging messages are still done by writing letters.

A few weeks before Sara's eleventh birthday, a letter came to her from her father, which did not seem to be written in such boyish high spirits as usual. (ALP, 1904: 42)

When she had replied to the letter asking her if the doll would be an acceptable present, Sara had been very quaint. (ALP, 1904: 43)

5. **Cultural Aspect**

The drastically change of her social economic condition, does not change the way of Sara’s thinking. When she used to be a wealth girl, Sara uses her imagination to entertain herself and her friends. She tells magnificent stories that help little Lottie through her grief over the death of her mother and carry Ermengarde through the pain of disappointing her father with her lack of academic skills and continually upsetting Miss Minchin with her seemingly slow wits. Sara also tells stories that help Becky, the underfed and overworked scullery maid who is only a few years older than her, make it though her long and exhausting days. Even as a poor little girl, she keeps using her imagination to help her when she faces a difficult time.

"Soldiers don't complain," she would say between her small, shut teeth, "I am not going to do it; I will pretend this is part of a war." (ALP, 1904: 64)

"The Bastille," she said, hugging her knees, "that will be a good place to pretend about. I am a prisoner in the Bastille. I have
been here for years and years—and years; and everybody has forgotten about me. Miss Minchin is the jailer—and Becky”—a sudden light adding itself to the glow in her eyes—"Becky is the prisoner in the next cell." She turned to Ermengarde, looking quite like the old Sara. "I shall pretend that," she said; "and it will be a great comfort." (ALP, 1904: 68)

6. Religious Aspect

Burnett does not give strong emphasis about religion through her characters she creates. For example, although Sara was born and used to live in India when she was child, she is not Hinduism. She reads bible and tells Lottie about heaven. One time when Sara tells a story about heaven, Lavinia attacking her for making fairy stories about heaven and tells Lavinia that she will never find out about heaven if she is not kinder to people.

"There are much more splendid stories in Revelation," returned Sara. "Just look and see! How do you know mine are fairy stories? But I can tell you”—with a fine bit of unheavenly temper—"you will never find out whether they are or not if you're not kinder to people than you are now. Come along, Lottie." (ALP, 1904: 31)

"I don't believe he worships that idol," she said; "some people like to keep them to look at because they are interesting. My papa had a beautiful one, and he did not worship it." (ALP, 1904: 86)

When Sara is employed as a servant, she is bossed around and teased, but never loses her dignity. She rightly judges that to refuse to respond to abuse with anger demonstrates that she is more powerful than her tormentors. There are obvious Christian parallels here.

"—When you will not fly into a passion people know you are stronger than they are, because you are strong enough to hold in your rage, and they are not, and they say stupid things they wish they hadn’t said afterward. There's nothing so strong as rage, except what makes you hold it in—that’s stronger. It’s a good thing not to answer your enemies.—"” (ALP, 1904: 82)

If Nature has made you for a giver, your hands are born open, and so is your heart; and though there may be times when your hands are empty, your heart is always full, and you can give things out of that—warm things, kind things, sweet things—help and comfort and laughter—and sometimes gay, kind laughter is the best help of all. (ALP, 1904: 42)
D. DISCUSSION

The vivid portrait of how important is social skill is mostly drawn by Burnett through the description of the major character, Sara Crewe, as a true ‘princess’. Sara Crewe a kindred spirit, a young person struggling to maintain her dignity and sense of worth despite the abuse of others. She shows us how to behave and to focus on behaviour all of the barriers that exist over money, class and status became irrelevant, even when situations changed.

Social skills are specific strategies used by an individual to perform social tasks effectively which will be judged socially competent. There are often two types of social skills; they are environmental social skills and social interaction skills. Environmental social skills are essential to perform tasks in an educational setting and include skills such as listening and following instructions. Social interaction skills are skills that facilitate any positive social interaction, such as starting and maintaining a conversation, complementing others and resolving conflict.

Social skills include our emotions, intellect, ethics, and behaviours. Emotionally, we learn to manage strong feelings such as anger and show empathy for others. Our intellect is used to solve relationship conflicts and make decisions. Ethically, we develop the ability to sincerely care for others and engage in socially-responsible actions. Behaviourally, we learn specific communication skills such as turn-taking and how to start a conversation.

Children do not need to be the most popular in their class, but they do need good social skills. Being sociable helps us with resilience or the ability to withstand hard times. Children who are constantly rejected by peers are lonely and have lower self-esteem. When they are older, these children are more likely to drop out of school and use drugs and alcohol. Parents can help their children learn social skills so that they are not constantly rejected or begin to bully and reject others.
The social skill is important because it is a basis for many positive communications. People need other people, but can alienate themselves when they fail to say please and thank you consistently. Social skills are inevitable aspects to interactions and should be harnessed to work for us rather than against ourselves.

The important thing to remember is that the ability to have good social relationships is not simply about personality or in-born traits. People who get along with others have learned skills to do so, and they practice these regularly. Social skills are skills that can be learned at all ages; children need to be reminded that even adults continue to learn social skills. Children need to understand the importance of using effective social skills.

In *A Little Princess* novel, Burnett presents one of theme that is suitable with the importance of social skill. The theme called ‘the way to treats others’ undoubtedly matches with the people attitude and behaviour. People should have respectfulness for others since people live with other people and need to help each other.

In the cultural aspect of *A Little Princess*, Burnett wants to show that a change of someone’s social economic condition should not change the way of their thinking. Through her major character, Burnett describes that even in bad condition someone should act positively and has courage in facing adversity.

Burnett does not want to depict any modernity both in science as well as in technology. Burnett explicitly gives emphasis on traditional values in her novel. She wants to show the simplicity of life as well as of tools that have not been touched by complex methods that are derived from the modern technology. In other words, Burnett does not draw any technological development in her novel.

Having analyzed the novel based on sociological perspective, the writer concludes that there is a correlation between the social background of English society in the early twentieth century and the story of *A Little*
Princess novel. Thus, the writer can find the answer of the problem of the research in which how the importance of social skill is reflected in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s A Little Princess. Thus, the importance of social skill can be traced from the synthesis among the characterization and the theme drawn by Burnett in A Little Princess. Moreover, it can be seen from the unity of several aspects such as social, economy, science and technology, culture and religious.

E. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION
The entire analysis of Burnett’s A Little Princess which has been done by the writer by using Sociological perspective can be concluded as follows. There is a close relationship between A Little Princess novel and England social realities in the early twentieth century.

England social realities give contributions to create the story. The social class in England contributes to characters, characterizations and theme of the story. The economic, cultural and religious aspects also give contribution to create the characters and characterizations in the novel.

As human beings we are sociable creatures and have developed many ways to communicate our messages, thoughts and feelings with others. A Little Princess novel offers the great value such as the courage against adversity, the way to treat others, how to respect each other, be responsibility, etc. Social skills are important aspects to our personality that affect how well we can interact and how approachable we are to other people. Social skills are skills that can be learned at all ages. As children get older, they become part of a larger social world. Therefore, children need to be reminded that even adults continue to learn social skills.

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