

STRUGGLE IN DAVE PELZER'S NOVEL *THE LOST BOY*

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Abstract

This study aims at revealing struggle for life depicted in Dave Pelzer's novel *The Lost Boy*. This study applied a qualitative research method in analyzing. Analyzing the data comprises gathering data, making interpretations, and writing reports. This research adopts theory pioneered by Maizler who divided struggle into four kinds: positive, negative, inevitable, and chosen. The results of the study show that there are two dominant struggles depicted in the novel, namely positive and inevitable struggles. Both positive and inevitable struggle are found dominantly in the novel. Positive struggle is portrayed by the protagonist who deals with identity confusion since he has to adapt and to fit in with new environment. Inevitable struggle is when the protagonist deals with necessary loses inevitably. The protagonist has to move many times until he found the warmth of family love. It can be concluded that the protagonist in the novel clearly deals with two kinds of struggle, but positive struggle is presented in the study since it can be found dominantly in the novel.

Keywords: *inevitable struggle; positive struggle; protagonist, struggle*

1. Introduction

Literature expresses various problems in life. Literary work is a forum for expressing ideas, and thoughts with a picture of the experience. Literature presents the inner experience of the author to the reader or the public (Manugeran, Suhadi & Pardi, 2020). Literary works contain the beauty, sense of pleasure, emotion and other feelings of the readers as a human bridge to serve the meaning of life (Siregar, Nasution, Pardi, 2022). Novel is one of literary works.

The Lost Boy is a novel written by Dave Pelzer in 1997. This novel is a true story of a 12-year-old boy, the protagonist, who has escaped the violence perpetrated by his mother for eight years. His teacher notifies the police this violence and then takes him away from his home. However, it makes him live an uncertain life. His life is the responsibility of the court. He is taken care of by the social service who finds a family to adopt him. At first, he is happy and felt at home with his foster parents. With his harsh nature and attitude, he tends to be naughty because of the way he survives when he is with his mother. He has a lot of problems with his foster family.

This novel depicts a child struggle to survive by finding identity with his ability to fit in. The child tries to adapt to the new environment around him. The protagonist's adventure in life is full of irony, but it also finds him a purpose in life. What the

protagonist experienced in life was just complex and complicated. In relation with literature, especially novel, one of the values of life that can be learnt from the novel is that human's struggle in life is specially to reach the happiness in life. To struggles in life, human needs motivation from inner. Then, it becomes the strength to get what they want in life. Sometimes they need to struggle to get what they need (Diana in Larasati et al, 2021).

The struggle depicted in the novel can be positive, negative, inevitable or chosen. It depends on how it is portrayed in the novel. To analyze the data taken from the novel, Maizler's theory (2012) which divided struggle into four categories is applied. This is interesting for how important struggle is in the real life. It is relevant with Sabudu views (2014) that literature is the reflection of human life better in the society or in their private life. Every phenomenon found in the society usually reflects in the literary works such as poem, novel, drama, or short story. Then, literature is human life reflection shown through written form of language.

The analysis reveals and describes the positive struggle as the dominant type found in Dave Pelzer's novel *The Lost Boy*. The analysis only discusses those related to the type of struggle and how the protagonist's struggle in his life.

2. Literature Review

Character is one of a story elements beside plot, theme, conflict, and setting. A protagonist is one of character in a story. The writer creates the characters to describe the theme of his work (Setiawan & Pardi, 2022) for example struggle in *The Lost Boy* written by Dave Pelzer. A protagonist has an important role to run the plot. Baldick (2001) states that protagonist is the principal actor in a drama. A protagonist always becomes the opponent to the antagonist. In *The Lost Boy*, a novel written by Dave Pelzer, the protagonist struggle for better life. Struggling is a part of human life which can not be avoided in achieving their desire or get a better life. As Centeno (2014) said, sometimes struggle is exactly what we need in our life. People crippled if they were to go through the life without any obstacle.

Janet (2013) says that struggle is a necessary part of success in life. Struggle presents as a set of unique challenges for a variety of distracting factors. Sanusi (2015) says that struggle has values. Struggle values are a system based on components that interact, interrelate, and interconnect. Those values are value of unity, value of willing to sacrifice, value of nationalism, and value of tolerance.

However, struggle is a strategy to protect self and to survive from problems or stresses in life. Struggle exists because people try to accomplish or achieve the goal by giving the best efforts had. People will learn a positive thing by struggling. Al-Banna considers that one of the characteristics of person who struggles is that they are distinguished in the fields of life, and they are able to achieve what is not usually expected from those of their age, and to exploit the abilities, energies and potentials to the maximum extent possible, and have a far-sighted view of goals, as they set future goals and be the conduct of their studies. With its troubles, it is the means to reach those goals, and this behavior is drawn up plans in their lives, and they work hard on those plans until they reach their desired goals (Hajj and Mansour, 2017),

Struggle is a good or bad dose not depend on whether the goal is to defeat the bad or achieve the good, but, whether the object one is trying to realize or preserve is deemed good or bad (Kaptein, 2017). In line with the statement, Maizler (2012) divides struggle into four categories; negative struggle, positive struggle, inevitable struggle,

and chosen struggle. Negative struggle is a goal achievement that involves eliminating a deficit state such as attempting to get back to the norm. Positive struggle is goal achievement that involves a transformation from your steady state into a more evolved, grown, or developed state of being. Positive struggle, in contrast to negative struggle, does not involve overcoming pathology. Examples of positive struggles are going to graduate school or writing a book. Positive struggle may still certainly involve overcoming resistance and discomfort. Inevitable struggle deals with the necessary losses and attendant discomfort for struggling to adjust with a new and less comforting world. During life, people struggle with sadness and loss when friends, parents, or partners die or go elsewhere. Inevitable struggles are an automatic condition of the life. Chosen struggle is the product of personal choice and are not automatic conditions of life. Simple examples of chosen struggles are climbing a mountain, going to graduate, or becoming a bodybuilder. Categories of struggle proposed by Maizer (2012) above are used in analysing the data taken from Dave Pelzer's novel *The Lost Boy*.

3. Research Method

Since the data is in the form of word, this study uses qualitative descriptive approach based on Sugiyono (2009). The approach is used to describe the dominant type of struggle found in the Dave Pelzer's *The Lost Boy* as the source of data. Data were collected by taking note method proposed by Sugiyono (2009) and quoting method by Sutopo (2005). These techniques are used to select the relevant data to the research problems by selecting information without depending on the the number of information. triangulation method is used to validate the data. Data were analyzed using the techniques proposed by Creswell (2013). Data reduction is conducted after all data collection process to make the data organized based on the kinds of struggle. After categorizing the data, data interpretation is conducted to answer the research problem..

4. Discussion

This study focuses on the kinds of struggle shown by the protagonist in Dave Pelzer's novel *The Lost Boy*. The protagonist's struggle depicted in the novel is positive struggle.

Positive Struggle

Dave Pelzer, the protagonist is a young boy with many ways faced his mother tortured. He lives in fears for years, beating and eating out of garbage cans, treated inhuman. He has been tortured not only psychically but also verbally by his own mother for eight years which also gives impact to him mentally. Moreover, Dave's mother refuses to give him status as a child in the family but something which makes him getting crisis identity as portrayed in data 1 below.

I have no home. I am a member of no one's family. I know deep inside that I do not now, or will I ever, deserve any love, attention or even recognition as human being. I am a child called "It."
(Pelzer, 2009: 8).

Gustaman and Lolowang (2021) state that life is not only full of beautiful things and happy moments but also difficulties. The statement is in line with the data 1 above that life is sometimes difficult. Data 1 above shows the discomfortness the protagonist feels. It is portrayed by the use of word *it*. *It* is a pronoun usually used to refer to an

animal or a thing. The word *it* used above indicates that the protagonist has been treated in a bad way. He barely can hold his mother evil's clutches. He decides to run away and leaves his mother. The decision he makes to run away indicates a positive struggle to avoid the tortures. Data 2 below also shows how the protagonist is eager to escape from the torture.

"I'm so excited that I nearly trip on my feet and stumble down the stairs. I grab on to the handrail to stabilize myself. I make it to the walkway, and fight to control my breathing. I turn right and walk up the street until I'm sure no one can see me past The House, then I break into a run. I make it halfway up the street before stopping, only for a moment, to look back down at The House (Pelzer, 2009: 12)."

Data 2 portrays that the only thing Dave knows is to escape from his house. It is in line with Mulia & Pardi's opinion (2020) that relatively a person makes a struggle to get happiness and perfection of life. The words *so excited* used indicates that he is really eager to avoid his abusive mother. Nearly trips on his feet, stumbles down the stairs, and fight to control his breathing indicate how he struggles to be free in positive way. To step away from the house is a very hard thing to do for him. But then, as the police officer found out, they take him back to the house. One day, the protagonist's school teacher is suspicious about serious injury on his body and notifies the police. Dave then is rescued to the country social services. As the result, he is separated from his mother. Therefore, it would be better. The protagonist then asks to go to court and clarifies his case. Data 3 below shows more about the protagonist's positive struggle.

"I tried my best to tell myself that through the wonder of county's social services and the court system, I had a new lease on my life. I tried my best to isolate my past, to bury my dark experiences deep inside my heart. Like a light switch, I imagined myself flicking off my entire past." (Pelzer 2009: 50)

Data 3 above shows the protagonist struggle to leave behind his past and grow. It is indicated by the clause *I tried my best to isolate my past ..* above. However, with his harsh nature and attitude he tends to be naughty because of the way he survived when he was with his mother. Even, to get recognition and acceptance, he obeys his friend, John, to flatten the tyres of their teacher's new car. Also, he knowingly commits arson and attempts to burn a classroom at Monte Cristo Elementary School. How Dave is being naughty and obeys his friend's command is portrayed in the following Data 4.

"Yeah man, all right. I'll do it. But, after that, I'm in the gang and I don't have to do anything like this again, right? (Pelzer, 2009: 106)"

According to Maslow in Kalish (1971), each person has desires for reputation, status, fame, dominance, recognition, attention, importance, dignity, and appreciation that come from others to fulfill the esteem needs. The protagonist can be identified as a low self-esteem person, remembering how bad his mother parenting style, his self-esteem decreases during the abuse. *I'll do it* in Data 4 above indicates that Dave will do something told. It shows how Dave struggles to form a positive struggle even though in a negative way in order to find his identity. Society influences someone's self-esteem fulfillment. If someone does not get the influence from others, he cannot fulfill the esteem needs well. Dave, as a young boy has to struggle to find his self-identity.

Erikson in Feist (2006) states that young people must experience some doubts and confusion about who they are, before they evolve a stable identity. Data 5 below indicates the situation.

“David, you’re a little boy – excuse me, a 12 year young man- who’s a little confused, thinks too much about some things and not enough about other things. I know you must have had to think ahead a great deal in order to survive, but you need to turn that off. You may never find your answers, and I don’t want your past to tear you up. I don’t even know why these things happen to children, and I may never know. But I do know you need to be very careful of what you’re doing right now, today, rather than trying to find the answers to your past. I’ll help you as much as I can, but you have to really make a better effort to maintain yourself (Pelzer, 2009: 102).”

Data 5 above illustrates the protagonist confusion about himself and how he has to struggle to find his true self-identity and be a better person. He even hates someone who thought him a little boy. He is twelve years old and he thought that he is not a child anymore. As a young boy, he feels lost and overwhelms of what is going on in his life as shown in the following Data 6.

“I was furious for allowing myself to let down my guard. David! I yelled at myself. How could you have been so stupid! I then jumped off the bed and began pacing the floor, becoming more upset at everything in my life (Pelzer, 2009: 115).”

Data 6 above shows that there is a struggle in the protagonist’s mind which is called internal conflict. The protagonist has to struggle to understand himself, his feeling and what he is doing in life. Redman (1964) defines there are two kinds of conflicts. The first one is the inner or internal conflict which means a struggle between the heart and mind of the protagonist or the conflict between oneself. External conflicts are the conflicts between a character and the outside forces. To be in a positive struggle, the protagonist must not only face internal conflict but also external one with the people around him. The external conflict faced by the protagonist then becomes the trigger for his struggles. The following Data 7 portrays the statement.

“David, you’ve got your head in a noose. Lord knows, one more incident, you hung for sure. you’ve overcome more in 12 years than more folks will ever accomplish in a lifetime. if you can do that ... you can do this too. but you have to fight a good fight!”
(Pelzer, 2009: 125).”

From his mother’s encouragement, Dave realizes that he could not live like that anymore. He had to make changes in his life. He has to be a better person first to get a better life. According to Perine (1974), Dave is categorized into a dynamic character. Dave’s characteristics change by the influence of the surrounding environment and his past experience.

Dave gets even better after he saw a psychiatrist when he was with Mrs. Lilian Catanze. The protagonist tries to changes to be a better person. After turning 17, Dave changes a lot, he struggles to be an independent man by starts to work hard. See the following quotation.

“My hunger for work was fueled by the fact that I was 17 and had less than a year to go in foster care (Pelzer, 2009: 171).”

Once he left the foster care system at age 18, Dave enlists in the U.S. Air Force. Darwin (1859: 33) says that people who suffer from struggle are characterized by the presence of stress, depression, and so on. This means that struggle can give impact to humans either in positive or negative effect. Despite experiencing depression, however, protagonist's struggle has made him doing so much to grow up in his life condition. He becomes a responsible, confident and strong boy which is can be concluded as positive struggle.

The analysis above shows that the struggle aspects present how the human's efforts dealing with the challenge to find his own identity as a positive struggle as Maizler's statement (2012) that positive struggle is a goal achievement that involves transformation from your steady state into a more evolved, grown, or developed state of being.

5. Conclusion

Dave Pelzer's novel *The Lost Boy* is a true story which tells about the protagonist's struggle. The dominant struggle in the novel is positive struggle. Positive struggle experienced by the protagonist can be seen through the protagonist's actions. He fights to survive by escaping from his house and being free from his mother's torture. He tries to find his self-identity because he wants to achieve his dreams. The protagonist's struggle is triggered by the bad treatments he got from his abusive mother. He struggles to live a better life in the future. Even though it is not easy, the protagonist tries to survive for a better life. The gloomy past does not extinguish his enthusiasm to pursue his dream. The protagonist's adventure in life is full of irony but it also finds him a purpose in life. What the protagonist experienced in life is just complex and complicated. However, the kindness of his foster parents and other people around him makes him feel the warmth of family love and even stronger.

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