Representation of the Education System in Novel Transgenik Sifar (2015) By Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop Based on Ingermanson's Concept of the "Story World"

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the representation of the education system in Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop's science fiction novel *Transgenik Sifar* (2015) using the concept of the "story world" proposed by Randy Ingermanson and Peter Economy. The study aims to identify the forms of education represented in the novel and to analyse the functions of education in the construction of the story world. A qualitative approach was employed through textual analysis. Data comprising excerpts, events, character actions, and representations of educational institutions were identified through close reading and subsequently categorised according to three components of the story world, namely the natural world, societal culture, and the background of conflict. The findings demonstrate that education in *Transgenik Sifar* is represented through primary education, secondary education, higher education, as well as physical and intellectual training. These institutions, fields of study, and training programmes function not merely as settings but also shape the material and non-material culture of the underwater society and demonstrate human dependence on scientific knowledge and technology. The analysis further reveals that the conflict between human expertise and the capabilities of transgenic humans raises questions concerning the value of knowledge, the limits of technology, and the position of education in a futuristic society. The study concludes that the education system functions as a structural component that connects space, culture, and conflict in the construction of the novel's story world.

Keywords: science fiction, story world, education system, material culture, non-material culture,

INTRODUCTION

Education in literary works does not merely serve as a backdrop to the experiences of characters; it can also function as a vehicle for shaping the values, knowledge, identity, and social structure of a particular society. Within the context of literary education, creative texts have the potential to connect readers' experiences with issues concerning knowledge, character development, and social life (Fathin Noor Ain Ramli & Azhar Wahid, 2018). Therefore, the study of education in novels should go beyond merely identifying schools, universities, or learning processes. Instead, education should be examined as part of the social and cultural system that shapes the narrative world.

This need becomes more significant in science fiction because the genre constructs alternative living spaces through the imagination of science and technology. *Transgenik Sifar* (2015) portrays a futuristic society living in underwater stations following major changes to the Earth's environment. Within this setting, education, engineering, military training, and technological mastery become important mechanisms for survival. Accordingly, the education system in the novel can be examined not merely as a social background, but as an element that connects physical space, societal culture, and the conflicts that constitute the "story world."

Within the context of the story world, the education system can also be viewed as a medium for developing a knowledgeable, morally grounded society capable of confronting the changes of the times. Technological developments such as artificial intelligence (AI), robots, virtual reality, and digital learning can be portrayed as components of a future education system. Nevertheless, technological advancement should not disregard human

values such as manners, responsibility, compassion, cooperation, and morality. Therefore, education portrayed through science fiction is not solely intended to produce technologically literate and skilled generations, but also to develop individuals with a strong sense of identity, cultural values, and good character.

Problem Statement

Previous studies demonstrate that education in literary works has been examined from several major perspectives. Malarvili Jaganathan and Manonmani Devi M.A.R. Annamalai (2022) focused on educational challenges and character strategies in the novels of Re. Karthigesu, while Amir Asyraff Jamin and Mary Fatimah Subet (2018) examined criticisms and recommendations concerning the Malaysian education system in Indie novels. Muhammad Zarif Hassan @ Zulkifli (2013), meanwhile, discussed the Philosophy of Malay Literary Education through the dimensions of intellect, spirituality, and emotion, while Shamsudin Othman, Azhar Md Sabil, and Ghazali Lateh (2015) connected Malay Literary Education with the development of civilisation, identity, and value systems. These tendencies demonstrate that education has received attention as a character experience, a platform for social criticism, and a vehicle for human development.

Other studies have focused more specifically on didactic functions, value and moral development, and the dissemination of knowledge. Norazimah Zakaria, Mazarul Hasan Mohamad Hanapi, and Nordiana Hamzah (2019) examined educational elements through conflict and value formation in *Syair Siti Zubaidah*; Maisarah Yaakob (2017) discussed educational and *tarbiah* elements in KOMSAS novels; Muhamad Nur Al-Hakim Mohamad Hanafiah et al. (2021) examined the polemics of folktales in the moral development of children; and Nik Rafidah Nik Muhamad Affendi (2013) demonstrated the function of fantasy as a teaching medium that contributes to moral development and creative thinking. Farah Nadia Azman, Syamsul Bahrin Zaibon, and Norshuhada Shiratuddin (2014), meanwhile, demonstrated that educational content can be represented either implicitly or explicitly through comic presentation techniques. Overall, these studies reinforce the function of education in literature, although their focus has largely been on educational content, values, didactic effects, character experiences, and criticism of existing systems.

Based on these tendencies, there remains a research gap concerning education as part of the structural construction of the narrative world. Previous studies reviewed have not given equal attention to the relationship between educational institutions, living spaces, societal culture, areas of expertise, science and technology, and conflict as an interconnected system. This gap becomes more apparent in the context of science fiction because the genre constructs alternative or futuristic societies whose lives are shaped by environmental changes and technological developments. Under such circumstances, education should not be examined merely as a teaching element or schooling experience; rather, it should be analysed as a mechanism that helps shape social organisation, knowledge requirements, expertise, and societal survival within the world created by the author.

Novel *Transgenik Sifar* by Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop's (2015) provides an appropriate space for addressing this gap because the novel depicts a futuristic society living in underwater stations and possessing an educational structure encompassing primary education, secondary education, higher education, physical training, and intellectual training. The existence of schools, military academies, universities, engineering and intelligence fields, and specialised training demonstrates that education is not merely a backdrop to character development but is directly related to the living environment, the formation of expertise, and the needs of the underwater society. Nevertheless, based on the studies reviewed, no research has been identified that specifically explains how this education system functions in the construction of the overall "story world" of *Transgenik Sifar*.

The research problem becomes more significant when education and expertise acquired through learning are brought into contact with the capabilities of transgenic humans. The character Humam not only receives formal education but also undergoes physical and intellectual training intended to maximise his abilities. At the same time, Rasydan represents a human being who develops expertise through education, experience, and engineering knowledge. The confrontation between Rasydan expertise and Humam extraordinary capabilities raises questions concerning the value of knowledge, the position of human expertise, and the limits of technology. Thus, the conflict in the novel does not merely depict competition between characters but also brings together

two forms of human development: development through education and enhancement of human capabilities through technological manipulation.

Therefore, the principal research gap addressed by this study is the lack of specific attention to the education system as a component that connects the natural world, societal culture, and the background of conflict in the construction of a science-fiction world. This study seeks to address this gap by identifying the forms of education represented in *Transgenik Sifar* and analysing the functions of the education system in the construction of the "story world" based on the three components proposed by Ingermanson and Economy, namely the natural world, societal culture, and the background of conflict. Through this approach, education is not merely interpreted as didactic content but as a structure that helps explain how the underwater society is formed, functions, and responds to changes in science and technology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review demonstrates that education in literary works has been discussed through various genres and approaches. Overall, previous studies can be grouped into several major tendencies: education as a character experience and challenge, education as criticism of social systems, education as a medium for value formation and *tarbiah*, and education as a method of knowledge dissemination. This categorisation is important for demonstrating the development of research focuses and subsequently identifying areas that have yet to receive sufficient attention.

The first tendency can be observed in the study by Malarvili Jaganathan and Manonmani Devi M.A.R. Annamalai (2022), which examined the novels of Re. Karthigesu based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. The study focused on the educational challenges encountered by the main characters and the strategies they employed to overcome them. The findings demonstrate that educational achievement is associated with the characters' efforts to fulfil their needs and confront challenges in life. This study portrays education as an experience that shapes individual development. However, its focus is directed more towards characters and strategies for overcoming educational challenges than towards the education system as a structure that shapes the entire narrative world.

The second tendency involves the examination of education as a form of social criticism. Amir Asyraff Jamin and Mary Fatimah Subet (2018) examined Indie novels in Malaysia and found that the works analysed contained criticisms and recommendations concerning the Malaysian education system. The study demonstrates that novels can serve as a platform for evaluating the education system existing within society. Muhammad Zarif Hassan @ Zulkifli (2013), meanwhile, examined the presence of the Philosophy of Malay Literary Education in Form 4 and Form 5 Malay Literature subjects, focusing on the concepts of developing intellect, spirituality, and emotion. Shamsudin Othman, Azhar Md Sabil, and Ghazali Lateh (2015) discussed the position of Malay Literary Education in the development of civilisation, identity, and societal value systems. These studies confirm the close relationship between education, society, and human development; however, their discussions remain grounded in educational realities and the function of literature within existing social contexts.

The third tendency positions education as a medium for the formation of values, morality, and *tarbiah*. Norazimah Zakaria, Mazarul Hasan Mohamad Hanapi, and Nordiana Hamzah (2019) demonstrated that conflicts in *Syair Siti Zubaidah* can convey educational elements through character and value formation. Maisarah Yaakob (2017) examined *tarbiah* elements in 19 KOMSAS novels based on the Takmilah Theory and found that the texts contained various elements relating to the relationship between human beings and Allah as well as relationships among human beings. Muhamad Nur Al-Hakim Mohamad Hanafiah et al. (2021) similarly demonstrated that polemics in selected folktales contribute to children's moral development. Nik Rafidah Nik Muhamad Affendi (2013) emphasised the function of fantasy stories as a teaching medium capable of supporting moral development and stimulating children's creative thinking. Collectively, these studies demonstrate the broad functions of education in literature, although their primary focus lies on didactic effects, values, and audience development.

The fourth tendency concerns techniques for representing educational content. Farah Nadia Azman, Syamsul Bahrin Zaibon, and Norshuhada Shiratuddin (2014) compared techniques for presenting educational elements in general comics and educational comics. The findings demonstrated that general comics tend to convey educational elements implicitly, whereas educational comics present scholarly content more explicitly. This finding is important because it demonstrates that education in literary works does not necessarily appear through direct didactic statements but can be constructed through representational techniques, narrative structures, and elements that form part of the textual world.

Based on this synthesis, previous studies have portrayed education as a character experience, a platform for social criticism, a vehicle for value formation, and a medium for knowledge dissemination. Nevertheless, a gap remains in the study of education as part of the construction of a fictional world. The relationship between educational institutions, living spaces, societal culture, areas of expertise, science and technology, and conflict has not received equal attention, particularly in science-fiction novels. In this genre, education has the potential to function not merely as a social background but as a mechanism that determines how society adapts to its environment, develops expertise, and maintains its survival.

Accordingly, the study of *Transgenik Sifar* distinguishes itself from previous studies by focusing specifically on the function of the education system in the construction of the "story world." Primary education, secondary education, higher education, and physical and intellectual training are examined in relation to the three components of the story-world concept: the natural world, societal culture, and the background of conflict. Through this approach, the study does not merely identify the forms of education found in the novel but explains how education functions within the organisation of the underwater society, how knowledge and expertise become part of societal culture, and how the emergence of transgenic humans generates conflict concerning the value of knowledge and the position of education. In this way, the study seeks to address a gap that has not been specifically examined in previous research.

Approach to the "Story World" Concept

This study employs the concept of the "story world" described by Randy Ingermanson and Peter Economy (2009) in *Writing Fiction for Dummies*. This concept is used because the construction of a story does not depend solely on its setting but on the entire system that enables characters to live, act, and experience conflict within a narrative space. For the purposes of this study, three main components are emphasised: the natural world, societal culture, and the background of conflict.

The natural world component refers to the physical and geographical environment that establishes the conditions for characters' lives. In *Transgenik Sifar*, the Earth's submersion under water and the existence of underwater stations determine settlement patterns, mobility, occupations, and education. Therefore, educational institutions cannot be separated from the design of the futuristic environment that enables society to continue living underwater.

The societal culture component encompasses the social systems, values, practices, institutions, and technologies shared by a community. In this study, schools, academies, universities, educational materials, engineering fields, and specialised training are interpreted as manifestations of material and non-material culture. Material culture refers to educational facilities and technologies, whereas non-material culture encompasses values concerning knowledge, training, expertise, responsibility, and survival.

The background-of-conflict component is used to examine the tensions that drive changes within the story world. In the novel, conflict becomes significant when human expertise acquired through education and training is compared with the extraordinary capabilities of transgenic humans. Thus, the analysis does not stop at identifying educational levels but evaluates how education functions in the relationship between space, culture, and human–technology conflict.

Research Objectives

This paper outlines two research objectives as follows:

1. To identify the forms of education represented in novel *Transgenik Sifar* (2015) by Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop.

2. To analyse the function of the education system in the construction of the "story world" of *Transgenik Sifar* based on the components of the natural world, societal culture, and the background of conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach through textual analysis. The primary source is novel *Transgenik Sifar* (2015) by Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop., published by UTM Press. The text was purposively selected because the novel constructs a futuristic underwater society characterised by educational institutions, professional training, and dependence on science and technology as integral aspects of social life.

Data were collected through close and repeated reading. The units of analysis consisted of narrative excerpts, dialogue, events, character actions, and spatial descriptions related to formal education or training. The data were subsequently thematically coded into several categories, namely primary education, secondary education, higher education, physical training, and intellectual training. These categories were then interpreted using the three components of the "story world" concept: (i) the natural world, (ii) societal culture, and (iii) the background of conflict.

The analytical process was conducted in two stages. The first stage identified the forms and basic functions of education found in the text. The second stage connected these findings to the structure of the story world in order to assess how the underwater environment influences education, how education shapes societal culture, and how knowledge and expertise become sources of conflict when confronted with transgenic technology. Textual excerpts were used as evidence, while the explanations following the excerpts provided interpretations based on the research framework.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that education in *Transgenik Sifar* functions as one of the principal mechanisms ensuring the survival of the underwater society. Changes in the physical world compel humans to adapt their social system to new settlement spaces; therefore, schools, academies, universities, and specialised training are established in accordance with the requirements of life in underwater stations. From the perspective of the "story world," education connects the natural-world component with societal culture because the knowledge acquired determines how humans adapt, work, and master technology.

Primary Education: Institutions, Space and Socialisation

At the primary education level, the novel portrays the existence of schools as an indication that underwater society continues to maintain an organised social structure. The characters Dian and Humam represent children undergoing formal education. JB 3 Primary School is not merely a place of learning but part of the station's infrastructure, demonstrating that education has been integrated into the design of the underwater living environment.

"Sekolah Rendah JB berada di Tingkat 11, Stesen Johor Bharu. Rasydan boleh sahaja berjalan kaki untuk ke jeti jika dia tidak membawa Dian bersama-sama. Tetapi demi peristiwa istimewa hari ini, dia membawa Dian menaiki tren, melalui jalan berliku dari tingkat 11 berkeliling."

(Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop, 2015: 65)

The excerpt demonstrates the direct relationship between the educational institution and the geography of the station. The location of JB Primary School on a particular level, the train network, and the movement of residents

demonstrate that the school constitutes part of the material culture of the underwater society. At the same time, the existence of schooling routines signifies the continuity of non-material culture, namely the belief that children's education should continue even though society lives in a futuristic environment fundamentally different from life on land.

Humam enrolment in the same school further reinforces the representation of access to education as part of the process of social integration. Haifa's actions in preparing a school bag and reading materials demonstrate the role of the family in supporting education. The selection of reading materials such as *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Moby Dick*, and stories by Hans Christian Andersen also demonstrates the continuity of knowledge and literary heritage within a society that has undergone a radical transformation in its living environment.

"Kamu akan bersekolah bersama Dian. Sekolah akan mula esok. Beg sekolah kamu sudah siap di bawah meja belajar. Jika kamu ada masa lepas ini, sebelum tidur, bolehlah kamu tengok."

(Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop, 2015: 83)

This excerpt emphasises that Humam education is regarded as both a guardian's responsibility and a prerequisite for participation in social life. Within the framework of societal culture, the school and learning materials represent material culture, while family responsibility, discipline, and the value placed on knowledge constitute non-material culture. Education therefore becomes a mechanism that normalises Humam within the community before his identity as a transgenic human generates a larger conflict.

Secondary Education: Specialisation and the Formation of Social Roles

At the secondary education level, Ammar experience demonstrates the relationship between education and professional specialisation. His education at the Royal Malaysian Military Academy, Intelligence Division, indicates that the futuristic society's education system not only continues general education but also provides training tailored to security and defence requirements. This demonstrates education as an institution that produces specialised human capital to ensure the stability of the underwater world.

"Ammar ialah pewaris satu legasi yang membanggakan. Pada zaman remajanya, Ammar ialah penuntut di Akademi Tentera Diraja Malaysia, Bahagian Inteligensia sebelum menyempurnakan pengajian di Stesen Universiti Skudai."

(Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop, 2015: 115)

The excerpt demonstrates that Ammar secondary education is shaped by the requirements of the military institution and the continuity of family legacy. From the perspective of the story world, military training develops non-material culture through values of discipline, loyalty, and responsibility for societal security. Education here functions as a process of socialisation that prepares characters for particular roles within the futuristic social structure.

Higher Education: Knowledge, Engineering and Societal Survival

Higher education highlights the position of scientific and technological knowledge within the hierarchy of knowledge in the underwater society. Skudai University Station functions as a centre for training and the production of expertise, particularly in engineering, intelligence, and warfare strategy. Humam specialises in Environmental Engineering, while Ammar pursues studies related to intelligence and strategy. Rasydan, meanwhile, functions as an instructor and technology expert, thereby demonstrating the university as an institution that connects knowledge production with solutions to the challenges of underwater life.

"Nama-nama penerima ijazah sedang disebut sehingga akhirnya tiba giliran Humam"

"Cemerlang dalam kelasnya bagi kejuruteraan Persekitaran-Humam Abdullah."

(Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop, 2015: 114)

Humam excellence in Environmental Engineering demonstrates that technical expertise is highly valued because it is directly associated with the survival of the community. Institutions of higher learning, engineering fields, and graduation ceremonies constitute both material culture and social rituals within the story world. However, Humam expertise also becomes ironic because his genetically engineered biological capabilities subsequently raise the question of whether knowledge acquired through education retains the same value when technology is capable of producing extraordinary abilities directly.

Physical and Intellectual Training: Education or Human Optimisation?

In addition to formal education, the novel presents physical training as a specialised form of education associated with transgenic experimentation. At Futurgen, Humam is trained to live both underwater and on land. This training does not aim to develop an individual according to the conventional education system; rather, it seeks to maximise the capabilities of a body resulting from genetic modification. This distinction marks the boundary between education as a process of learning and technology as a process of human enhancement.

"Oh! Dia juga menjalani latihan fizikal untuk kehidupan di atas darat. Subjek Sifar lebih kuat daripada manusia lelaki yang sebaya dengannya. Kami hanya berharap yang dia boleh dilatih untuk mencapai potensi yang maksimum."

(Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop, 2015: 54)

This excerpt demonstrates that Humam physical training is instrumental in nature: his body is measured, tested, and enhanced in order to achieve maximum potential. Within the context of the story world, Futurgen functions as a technological space that produces a new culture concerning the human body and human capabilities. Training is no longer merely an educational endeavour but becomes part of a transhumanist project that ultimately raises ethical questions and value conflicts.

Humam intellectual training, meanwhile, involves pattern recognition, code breaking, memory exercises, and the reading of specialised materials. This training demonstrates that the development of mental capabilities is systematically conducted to fulfil specific operational purposes. Unlike formal education, which develops knowledge progressively, Humam's training is intensive and function-oriented, thereby revealing the distinction between ordinary human learning and the optimisation of transgenic humans.

"Ejen VanKemp menunjukkan kepada Subjek Sifar satu siri nombor dan Subjek Sifar diminta mengesan

(Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop, 2015: 94) pola siri nombor tersebut. Dan lagi, dan lagi. Subjek sifar melepasi satu demi satu ujian."

Humam ability to pass one test after another demonstrates that his intellectual training operates in conjunction with his biologically engineered advantages. Therefore, this training can more appropriately be interpreted as non-material culture that emphasises performance, efficiency, and technological mastery, while the training facilities and testing materials constitute material culture. The combination of these elements strengthens the novel's futuristic world and establishes the foundation for the conflict between acquired knowledge and engineered capabilities.

Conflict between Knowledge and Transgenic Technology

The conflict surrounding education becomes more apparent through the INDO034 rescue mission. In this event, Rasydan expertise as an engineer and the rescue technology he developed compete symbolically with Humam natural abilities as a transgenic human. The success of the mission should demonstrate the value of education, training, and engineering innovation; however, media attention is instead focused on Humam extraordinary capabilities. This tension transforms the question of education from one concerning mere access to knowledge into a more fundamental question: what is the position of human knowledge when genetic technology can produce physical and intellectual advantages that surpass the outcomes of conventional education?

"Rasydan memerhatikan bagaimana media tidak menghebohkan bagaimana sistem docking prob penyelamat dan pesawat yang direka olehnya sebagai satu faktor besar yang membawa kepada kejayaan pada misi menyelamat ini. Dia cuba mencari dalam hatinya jika itulah perkara yang membuatkan dia rasa terbakar dalam hatinya. Adakah dia cemburu kerana segala yang telah dia usahakan untuk memperbaiki kehidupan manusia di bawah laut dengan pelbagai ciptaan dan piawaian yang semata-mata berasaskan ilmu kejuruteraan mesin, telah dikalahkan oleh Humam, ciptaan falsafah transhumanisme yang tidak mempunyai batasan moral untuk mengubah fitrah manusia dengan segala bentuk teknologi yang ada untuk melipat gandakan kebolehan intelek, fizikal, dan psikologi manusia?"

(Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop, 2015: 144)

The excerpt demonstrates Rasydan internal conflict as an epistemological and ethical conflict. Rasydan does not merely feel marginalised because his contribution receives insufficient recognition; he questions the value of human knowledge, effort, and expertise when confronted with a transhumanist creation. Within the framework of the "story world," this conflict brings together the three principal components: the underwater environment requires technology, societal culture values engineering knowledge, and the emergence of transgenic humans challenges the existing status quo. Thus, education in the novel functions as a site of confrontation between human development through knowledge and human enhancement through technological manipulation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the education system in *Transgenik Sifar* is not merely a social backdrop but an important component in the construction of the "story world." Primary education illustrates the continuity of institutions and the process of socialisation within the underwater society; secondary education presents specialisation and the formation of social roles; while higher education emphasises the dominance of scientific knowledge, engineering, and technology in ensuring survival. Humam physical and intellectual training further expands the meaning of education by bringing together the learning process and human-enhancement technology.

From the perspective of the story-world concept, the three principal components are interconnected. The changing natural world creates educational needs; societal culture places high value on knowledge and expertise; while human–technology conflict tests the position of education when transgenic capabilities surpass abilities acquired through conventional learning. Thus, the novel raises a critical question concerning the future of education: whether knowledge will remain the foundation of human development or whether its role will change when technology becomes capable of directly altering the capacities of the human body and intellect.

This study is limited to a single novel and one analytical framework. Future research could compare *Transgenik Sifar* with other Malay science-fiction works, particularly from the perspectives of education, transhumanism, technological ethics, and the construction of futuristic societies. Such comparative research has the potential to broaden understanding of how Malay science fiction envisions the relationship between knowledge, humanity, and technology.

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