

THE PRESENCE OF A FATHER IN SHAPING CHILD HAPPINESS IN A CHILDREN'S STORY BOOK TITLED "PULANG" BY SKETCH ULTRA PELANGI

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Abstract. This study aims to reveal how the representation of the presence of fathers in the children's story book *Pulang* by Sketsa Ultra Pelangi forms a picture of child *happiness*. The method used is descriptive qualitative with content analysis techniques against text and illustrations on pages 1–24 of the book. The analysis focused on three forms of father's presence, namely physical, emotional, and educational presence. The results of the study show that the father in *Pulang* is described as an active, warm, and supportive figure. His physical presence is a source of security for the child, his emotional presence creates a healthy attachment according to *Bowlby's attachment* theory, while his educational presence reflects the role of *the activation relationship* as described by Paquette, where the father provides space for the child to explore the world with a happy curiosity. Through a combination of narrative and soft illustration colors, *Pulang* presents a representation of a father who is not only a protector, but also a companion to the child's growth and development. These findings confirm that children's literature has the potential to be an important medium in strengthening awareness of the emotional role of fathers in shaping early childhood happiness.

Keywords: *father presence, children's literature, pulang, child happiness*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is an individual who has naturally carried a wide range of emotions from the very beginning of his life. Even when they are still in the womb, the child is able to feel and respond to the emotional atmosphere around him. Of the various forms of emotions present, happiness is one of the most inherent in children. As stated by Adjie Santosoputro, true happiness already exists in every individual, including in this context early childhood. Thus, early childhood becomes an individual close to the definition of happiness, so what is needed is not the creation of happiness, but its maintenance and emergence through the child's daily experience. In its golden age, early childhood needs stimulus that can foster that sense of happiness, both through play activities, social interactions, and the warmth of relationships in their environment.

The family is the first and most influential space for the growth of children's happiness. Warm relationships, open communication patterns, and a sense of security created at home play an important role in children's emotional balance. A child who is cheerful, expressive, and confident outside the home usually grows up in a supportive family environment, which makes him feel heard and accepted. In contrast, children who are easily anxious, introverted, or reluctant to tell stories often grow out of family relationships that are poor in communication and empathy. At this point, the role of parents is key, because children's emotional experiences are rooted in daily interactions with fathers and mothers.

However, in various early childhood education literature, discussions about parenting and child happiness often center on the role of mothers. The father figure often goes undiscussed, as if the father's involvement is secondary. In fact, the presence of the father has a very important influence on the emotional and social development of children. A number of recent studies confirm that fathers' involvement in childcare has a significant positive impact on children's development both cognitively, socially, and emotionally (Hardiningrum et al., 2024). This is also emphasized by Arianti, et al., that children whose fathers are actively involved, whether through direct interaction such as play, learning assistance, or providing emotional support, tend to show better cognitive

abilities in the aspects of arranging letters, matching numbers, and classifying colors (Arianti et al., 2025). Theory *activation relationship* He even explained that the role of the father tends to function as a "trigger for exploration" for children, training courage and the ability to face challenges, different but complementary to the role of the mother which tends to provide a sense of security and protection (Paquette et al., 2021). Thus, the involvement of the father not only affects the psychological balance of the child, but also on the happiness that the child feels in exploring the world around him.

Unfortunately, in the socio-cultural context of Indonesia, the role of fathers is still often narrowed to the economic realm, fathers are seen as breadwinners, not as caregivers who are emotionally present. This pattern has an impact on the way society, even children's media, represents the father figure. Children's story books, for example, still more often show the mother as a warm and loving figure, while the father is portrayed as busy, distant, or present only at the end of the story. In fact, media such as children's storybooks have a big role in shaping children's social perception of who loves and cares for them, as well as how family relationships should look.

In this context, the book *Pulang* by Sketsa Ultra Pelangi is interesting to research. This book depicts the relationship between a child and his father with strong emotional nuances. Through a simple but touching story, *Pulang* presents a warm, present, and meaningful representation of the father for the happiness of children. The father-son relationship depicted in this book reflects how the presence of the father can be a source of security, affection, and joy for the child. Through the analysis of the book, we can delve deeper into how *child happiness* is built through the presence of a father.

This kind of study is important not only to enrich the discourse on early childhood parenting, but also to fill a gap in the literature that has been more centered on the role of mothers. By looking at how the representation of fathers is presented in children's media, we can understand how people's perceptions of the role of fathers are shaped and inherited. Furthermore, research like this also has the potential to inspire a change in perspective in home parenting practices, that a child's happiness grows from two hands, not only the gentle hands of the mother, but also the warm and present hands of the father.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a focus on content *analysis* of the children's storybook *Pulang* by Sketsa Ultra Pelangi. This approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the purpose of the research, which is to understand how the representation of a father's presence is displayed in text and book illustrations, as well as how this representation is related to the concept of *child happiness*. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to read the text meaningfully, diving into the emotional relationships, symbols, and values implied in the story.

The main data in this study is the narrative text and illustrations contained in the book *Pulang*. The two elements are read as a unit that reinforces each other, because in children's books, meaning is built by words and also by visuals that support the narrative. The researcher traced how the father's character was displayed, how he interacted with the child's character, and how the emotional atmosphere created reflected the child's happiness. Every element in the story, from the dialogue, the actions of the characters, to the colors and visual expressions, is read as part of the construction of meaning about the father's presence.

The analysis was carried out through three stages. The first stage is deep reading (*close reading*) against text and illustration to discover narrative patterns as well as emotional nuances that emerge in the father-son relationship. The second stage is thematic coding, which is to identify the main themes related to the role of fathers and the happiness of children, such as: physical presence, emotional presence, and educational presence. The final stage is the interpretation of meaning, in which the thematic findings are linked to theories and previous research results on the role of fathers in early childhood development, in particular theories *attachment* (Bowlby) dan *activation relationship* (Paquette et al., 2021).

In the analysis process, the researcher also pays attention to the socio-cultural context that surrounds the work. Children's books reflect the values and views of society towards family and parenting. Therefore, the representation of the father in *Pulang* is not only read as a personal story, but also as a social discourse on how society views the role of the father in the modern Indonesian family. The results of the analysis were interpreted descriptively to understand the depth of meaning and the contribution of father's representation to our understanding of children's happiness. Thus, this method focuses on how the meanings in the book form the overall narrative about the presence of fathers in shaping *child happiness*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Physical Presence

Book *Go home* It was opened with the atmosphere of the school towards noon, when the bell went home and the children cheered happily. The sentence "Horee, that's Dad! Today Dad picked up Nino at school" became a simple, but meaningful starting point. On a textual level, the spontaneous cry of "Horee, that's Dad!" signifies an outburst of pure happy emotions, a sense of security that arises from the presence of a beloved figure, in this case a father. In perspective *attachment theory*, this moment depicts the shape of *secure base*, which is a condition in which the child feels safe because he knows that there is a reliable caregiver figure (Bowlby, 1988). The father's physical presence becomes an anchor that calms Nino's emotional world.

The illustration on the fourth page, when the father stands at the school gate with a warm smile and a slightly forward posture, supports the narrative. The dominant warm colors, such as yellow and soft brown, signify a sense of comfort and intimacy. The father's slightly lowered body gesture shows equality in the relationship; He does not stand as an authoritative figure, but as a figure who is ready to welcome children with love.

Subsequent scenes show the father "patiently following Nino's steps" all the way home. This sentence textually shows the form of *active presence*, a presence that is not just physically present, but is present with full attention. In theory *activation relationship* (Paquette et al., 2021). The father who actively accompanies the child in the exploratory space (in this case the way home) serves as *secure base* at once *activation figure*: It accompanies while providing space for children to take initiative and explore. By walking together, the father allowed Nino to lead the way of the journey, a symbol of safe freedom.

The light blue and soft green colors on the road background and the position of his father who is always not far behind Nino show the dynamic between freedom and protection. The visual composition affirms the basic principle *secure attachment*: the child is given autonomy, but still feels safe because there is a reliable caregiver figure nearby (Amseke et al., 2024).

2. Emotional Presence

The father's emotional presence is seen through verbal and nonverbal interactions that are consistently warm. When Nino almost fell and slipped, the narration writes, "Dad quickly helped Nino." Then followed by a gentle remark, "Nino, be careful with your steps." From the point of view *attachment theory*, these actions reflect high emotional responsiveness, one of the main components *secure attachment* (Ningsih, 2020). Dad does not react with anger or reprimand, but with soothing attention. Thus, children learn that failure or mistake does not threaten the affection of their parents.

The illustrations support this meaning very clearly: the soft blue color on the background reinforces the calm atmosphere after a small tense moment, while the expression of the father's face is shown with a light smile and an empathetic gaze. The movement of his hand helping Nino is depicted in a circle, as if it is a warm protector. All of these visual elements work together to build *emotional availability* (Qomariah & Yusuf, 2024), the readiness of the father to respond to the child's emotions with a loving presence.

In addition, in some pages, for example when Nino exclaims "Dad, look! The crab came out of the nest!" the father did not respond with advice or prohibitions, but remained present with a patient and open expression. This scene is in line with the theory *activation relationship*, where the father plays the role of a facilitator of exploration: he lets the child engage with the surrounding environment while remaining a safe point if the child needs protection. In the context of a child's happiness, this moment illustrates the balance between independence and emotional closeness, two important pillars of healthy emotional development (Nasution, 2022).

The color selection on the exploration page, fresh green, navy blue, and bright yellow, gives the impression of a lively and warm world. These colors are psychologically associated with calmness and happiness (Salam et al., 2020). In the context of children's books, color is not just decoration, but a visual language that reinforces the message, which is a safe world that is a world full of color and love.

3. Educational Presence

The presence of fathers in *Pulang* also acts as a natural educational medium. Along the way, my father gave Nino space to learn from his own experiences. Sentences such as:

"There are many things that Nino can see on the trip,"

"They also want to go home,"

It shows that the child's learning process takes place in a meaningful daily context. The father does not direct, but accompanies; not to teach, but to facilitate. This concept intersects with theory *scaffolding* (Khadijah, 2016), where the adult provides enough support for the child to be able to complete a task or understand a new experience. In the story, the father gives *scaffolding* not through instruction, but with a patient and open presence. He allowed Nino to interact with nature, count ants, pay attention to crabs, observe rocks, so that learning activities became fun and meaningful experiences.

In context *activation relationship*, this is the form *guided exploration*, fathers create safe conditions for children to explore the world with high curiosity. The presence of the father allows the child to feel happiness that comes from a sense of ability and freedom. Children are happy because they are given the opportunity to discover themselves, not because they are directed (Amini, 2014).

The illustration in this section shows the dominant colors of green, blue, and light brown that represent the outdoors, tranquility, and warmth. The composition of the image in which Nino appears slightly in front of the father confirms the symbol of the child's independence that remains within the safe reach of the father figure. On the other hand, the position of the father who is never absent from every page illustrates *continuous availability*, a presence that is not distracting, but always ready when needed.

The closing scene shows Nino and his father arriving home, greeted by the aroma of his mother's cooking. Sentence:

"Eating with mom and dad is a lot of fun"

Emphasizing that children's happiness ultimately grows from the integration of the presence of both parents. The father here is not an additional figure, but a whole part of the family's affective system. Within the framework of *attachment theory*, the family becomes a *collective secure base* where children find love, protection, and meaning.

CONCLUSION

The book *Pulang* by Sketsa Ultra Pelangi shows how the presence of fathers is a source of happiness and emotional security for early childhood. Through simple narratives and gentle illustrations, the father figure is portrayed not only as a physically present, but also emotionally and educationally present. It accompanies, guides, and provides space for children to experience the world with curiosity and joy. From the perspective of *attachment theory*, the father in *Pulang* plays the role of a *secure attachment figure (secure base)* of someone whose presence gives a sense of calm and consistent love. Meanwhile, from the perspective of *activation relationships*, fathers also appear as figures who encourage exploration, giving children the opportunity to develop independently in a supportive atmosphere.

The presence of the father figure as depicted in *Pulang* is also a subtle criticism of the tendency of children's literature and media to highlight the role of mothers in parenting. This warm and active representation of the father expands our understanding of *child happiness* as a result of the emotional collaboration of both parents. A child's happiness grows not only from protection, but also from the space for growth that is lovingly provided. Through this book, children not only learn about the journey home from school, but also about the deeper meaning of returning home to the presence of a father who is patient, supportive, and loves unconditionally.

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