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The Motivation of Main Character in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

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Abstract

The novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is a 19th children novel written by Mark Twain in 1876 and first published in 1884 by The American Publishing Company. This novel tells the story of Tom Sawyer who has desires and hopes for freedom and faces various challenges to achieve his goals. This study aims to analyze the motivation of the main character, Tom Sawyer. The theory used in this research is the motivation theory by Ryan and Deci, which classifies motivation into two categories, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. The method used in this study is the descriptive qualitative method, which is suitable for literary analysis as it involves examining and describing written texts or documents using the theory of motivation. Every individual has different dreams and needs, and this is reflected in the various motivations shown by Tom Sawyer in the novel. Based on the analysis, it is found that Tom Sawyer's actions and behaviors are driven by intrinsic motivation, such as adventure and curiosity, pleasure and entertainment, and the desire to test boundaries, as well as extrinsic motivation, including recognition and praise, love and acceptance, avoidance of punishment, and social status. Both types of motivation are rooted in the fulfillment of basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Keywords: Main Character, Motivation, Psychology of Literature.

1. Introduction

Every human being in the world must have a dream or even a hope to achieve something in their life. Those dreams and needs are influenced by motivation. Human motivation plays a critical role in shaping behavior and determining actions. It serves as the driving force behind individuals' efforts to achieve their goals, fulfil their needs, and respond to various stimuli in their environment. Uno (2012) stated that motivation is a psychological process that can explain a person's behaviors. Essentially, behavior is oriented towards a goal. In other words, a person's behaviors are designed to achieve a specific objective. To reach that objective, an interaction process involving several elements is necessary. Therefore, motivation is the driving force that compels someone to take action in order to achieve their goal.

According to Damayanti (2016), people have varying characteristics, leading to differences from individual and another. Depending on how a person responds to the situations they face, their character can be shaped in either positive or negative ways. It means that every motivation that shows in every person is caused by the environment around the person itself. Motivation can be broadly categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic types (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

Intrinsic motivation comes inside the person, driven by personal satisfaction, curiosity, and the inherent enjoyment of the task itself. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is influenced by external factors, such as rewards, recognition, and social approval. This type of motivation often involves performing tasks to obtain desirable outcomes or to avoid negative consequences. It is particularly the person's self needs, either it is something that the person wants to achieve or accomplish and it will be giving benefit for the person itself. The person will be satisfied if he/she was able to achieve their motivation or their needs. Moreover, there are some people who will do anything or even dangerous things in order to achieve their needs.

Bernhardt (1953) also stated that human activity is subject to learning, this learning itself has a cause or is motivated by something or someone around them. It can be seen from the statement that, every action by human does not come spontaneously from themselves. It supposed to be understood and influenced by themselves. In order to get more knowledge about motivation, the writers analyze the main character's Motivation that portrayed in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain through motivation theory by Ronald M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci (2017). *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is the best choice to be used as a source of data in order to analyses the Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation. The reason is because the novel provides a lot of motivation that shown by Tom Sawyer. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is a novel that published in 1884 which was written by one of the greatest American writers of all time. Moreover, this novel talks about the children who desire of freedom. The story takes place in St. Petersburg, on the banks of the Mississippi River in the United States of America. The main character of this novel is Tom Sawyer. A child who has an incredible imagination and sometimes causing himself and his friends into a big trouble. The only reason is because he craves of nature and an adventure. He wants a freedom for himself, because he was living with his aunt Polly who always punished him if he does something wrong. In addition, Tom's adventures to Jackson's Island and McDougal's Cave in order to take him away from the society. In the village, the community always looking down at Tom. They thought that Tom was only a bad child who did not obey his aunt and all the rules in the community. Meanwhile, Tom is always put his concern for others above his concern for himself. Such as when he testifies at Injun Joe's trial. Tom shows his initiative to help others instead of himself. These actions show his maturity, competence, and moral integrity as a child.

Researches related to the motivation of the main character was carried out by Puspasari (2023) to reveal the motivation of the character Merry Riana in the novel *Mimpi Sejuta Dolar*. From this research, it can be seen that the motivation is to fulfill multilevel needs according to Abraham Maslow's theory, namely fulfilling physiological needs, security needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Another research was conducted by Sentana, Marnina, & Winarsih (2023) to reveal the motivation of the main character in the short story *To Build a Fire*. In this research, the authors tell the intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation possessed by the main character in the short story using Ryan and Deci's motivation theory. This research was also assisted by Abraham Maslow's theory of achieving multilevel needs which are the things behind the main character's motivation. The third study was conducted by Aprianus Agung Empawi, Clarry Sada, and Eka Fajar Rahmani (2024), titled "An Intrinsic Motivation Analysis of the Main Character in the Joy Movie." This research aims to reveal the intrinsic motivation of the main character, Joy.

The study also uses Ryan and Deci's theory to uncover the intrinsic motivation of the main character. However, the study does not explore the extrinsic motivations influencing the main character. Therefore, this research will reveal both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that influence the actions of the main character, Tom Sawyer, and uncover the needs behind these motivations.

2. Methods

This research is a descriptive qualitative study conducted through a literature review. The data source is taken from the novel by Mark Twain entitled *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* which is written in 1876 and first published in 1884 by The American Publishing Company. The novel used as a data source is a novel published in a new edition. The primary data in this research consists of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, or descriptions of paragraphs about the motivations of the main character in the novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The research techniques employed in this study are library research, observation, note-taking, and documentation. After data is found using the observation technique, note-taking is also required as a supporting technique to record the data that has been found through the previous observation technique. Note-taking is a method used in research to record all data related to the research problem, specifically the motivations of the main character in the novel.

3. Results

This study analyses *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* novel by Mark Twain. In this research, researchers decided to focus with the reasons of Tom Sawyer's motivation to going for adventures and the reason of his desires to be freedom. The reason is because the writer realize that this topic is new and nobody has analyzed it before. A lot of previous study was only focus with the characteristics of Tom Sawyer or his adventures in Jackson's Island. Yet, there is nobody has focus or analyze about his motivation behind his behaviors and actions. Furthermore, according to Ryan and Deci (2017), motivation is classified into two categories, which are intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The findings will be described as follow;

3.1. Tom Sawyer's Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is motivation that comes from within an individual. In this novel, Tom Sawyer's intrinsic motivations for his actions are adventure and curiosity, pleasure and entertainment, and desire to test boundaries.

3.1.1 Adventure and Curiosity

Intrinsic motivation is the drive to engage in an activity because the activity itself is enjoyable or satisfying, without the need for external rewards. Two key examples of intrinsic motivation are adventure and curiosity. In this novel, adventure and curiosity encourage Tom to try new things.

“The harder Tom tried to fasten his mind on his book. The more his ideas wandered. So, at last, with a sigh and a yawn, he gave it up. It seemed to him that the noon recess would never come.... Tom's heart ached to be free, or else to have something of interest to do something of interest to do pass the dreary time” (Chapter 7, p. 53)

As can be seen from the statement above, Tom's desires to be free and going for an adventure has haunted him so bad. He really loves nature and do not want to follow the society rules or his aunty Polly's rule to be a good boy, stay at home, go to school and have a good grade. He wants to explore the world; he always imagines to be a pirate who can sailing everywhere and his life will be full of adventures. Moreover, it is clearly shows that, no matter how hard Tom trying to focus study at school, yet he could not lie to himself that he wants to be free and going for an adventure.

"Tom dodged hither and thither through lanes until he was well out of the track of returning scholars, and then fell into a moody jog. He crossed a small 'branch' two or three times, because of a prevailing juvenile superstition that to cross water baffled pursuit. Half an hour later he was disappearing behind the Douglas mansion on the summit of Cardiff Hill, and the schoolhouse was hardly distinguishable away off in the valley behind him." (Chapter 8, P. 58)

Through the statement above, it can be seen that Tom desires be free and loving nature was shown in the statement above. The situation above explains about Tom who mad with Beck and they argue at school. Not like the other child who will going home and reporting to their mother that they just argue with another child, Tom follows his heart and went to a lot of three and looking to nature for a comfort. This situation truly shows his love towards nature and become an intrinsic motivation to have an adventure, and to be free as a child.

3.1.2 Pleasure and Entertainment

Tom often engages in activities purely because of the fun and enjoyment they bring him. Tom is constantly seeking ways to avoid boredom. His desire for fun leads him to engage in a variety of activities, from playing pirates and robbers to going on treasure hunts. This need for excitement often drives him to take risks and seek out new adventures. This can be seen in the following quote:

"The boys dressed themselves, hid their accoutrements, and went off grieving that there were no outlaws any more, and wondering what modern civilization could claim to have done to compensate for their loss." (Chapter 2, p. 62)

Tom derives great pleasure from playing make-believe game, like pretending to be Robin Hood or pirates. These activities are not motivated by external rewards but by intrinsic satisfaction and joy they provide.

3.1.3 Desire to Test Boundaries

Tom has a strong intrinsic motivation to test boundaries and challenge authority. This is seen in his rebellious actions, such as running away to Jackson's Island with Huck and Joe Harper, and his frequent mischief in school and at home. Tom's need to push limits is a fundamental part of his character.

"Send the r'yals up! Lay out aloft, there, half a dozen of ye, –foretopmast-stuns'!! Lively, now!" (Chapter 13, p.85)

Tom frequently challenges the rules set by authority figures like Aunt Polly, school teachers, and other adults. This rebellion is a way for Tom to assert his independence and autonomy. For instance, he often skips school, sneaks

out at night, and disobeys direct orders, finding excitement and satisfaction in defying expectations. By testing boundaries, Tom often seeks to draw attention to himself. Whether it's by performing daring stunts or engaging in mischievous behavior, he aims to stand out and make a mark, even if it means getting into trouble.

3.2. Tom Sawyer's Extrinsic Motivation

In this novel, extrinsic motivations that drive Tom to take action are recognition and praise, love and acceptance, avoidance of punishment, and social status.

3.2.1 Recognition and praise

Tom often seeks validation from Aunt Polly, despite frequently getting into trouble. Moments when he earns her praise, such as when he admits to taking the blame for Becky's misdeed, are particularly meaningful to him and reinforce his desire for recognition. In school, Tom's efforts to impress his teachers and earn their praise, such as when he memorizes Bible verses to win a Bible as a prize, highlight his need for approval from authority figures.

"The prize was delivered to Tom with as much effusion as the superintendent could pump up under the circumstances; but it lacked some of the former interest, however, as the moment's interest had not been waited and contrived for with the utmost painstaking and labor." (Chapter 4, p. 35)

As can be seen from the statement above, Tom tried to collect enough tickets from memorizing Bible verses to receive a prize in the form of a Bible. Although Tom did not actually memorize the verses, he went to great lengths to gather tickets from other children. His goal was to gain recognition and praise in front of the adults, especially when an important guest visited the Sunday school class. Tom often engages in daring or attention-grabbing activities to receive recognition and admiration from his peers and adults. For example, he stages elaborate pranks and feats, such as pretending to be dead and then dramatically revealing himself at his own funeral, to gain attention and praise.

4.2.2 Love and acceptance

In the Adventures of Tom Sawyer, love and acceptance are crucial themes that significantly influence Tom's actions and motivations. Tom's infatuation with Becky Thatcher is a clear example of his desire for love and acceptance on a romantic level. He goes to great lengths to win her affection, including showing off, taking risks, and trying to protect her. His feelings for Becky drive many of his actions, from his attempts to impress her to his efforts to comfort and support her when they are lost in the cave.

"She sank to the ground and burst into such a frenzy of crying that Tom was appalled with the idea that she might die, or lose her reason. He sat down by her and put his arms around her; she buried her face in his bosom, she clung to him, she poured out her terrors, her unavailing regrets, and the far echoes turned them all to jeering laughter." (Chapter 31, p. 177)

This can be seen in the quotes above that Tom shows his affection for Becky. Tom tries to win Becky's heart by doing several actions, such as he tries to win her affection by showing off, taking risks, and even taking punishment on her behalf. His actions are driven by a desire for Becky's approval and affection.

3.2.3 Avoidance of punishment

In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the avoidance of punishment is a recurring theme that influences many of Tom's actions and decisions. Tom frequently employs his wit and resourcefulness to escape consequences for his behavior.

"The boy whose history this book relates did not enjoy the prayer. He only endured it- if he even did that much. He was restive all through it. He kept tally of the details of the prayer, unconsciously- for he was not listening. But he knew the ground of old, and the clergyman's regular route over it- and when a little of new matter was interlarded, his ear detected it and his whole nature resented it. He considered additions unfair, and scoundrelly" (Chapter 5, p. 40)

As can be seen from the statement above, Tom was forced to pray at the church. Tom considered this situation as an unfair treatment from the society. The society's expecting all children must have a religion and prayer in the church. It can be seen that Tom cannot have a right as a human being who can choose his own religion. Meanwhile, the society is the one who decides and all of the children must obey this rule. In addition, every time Tom was forced to sit in a church and must prayer, his mind always feels the unfair treatment and wish to be free. However, Tom still did what he was told because he was afraid of getting punished.

3.2.4 Social status

Tom craves recognition and often seeks to elevate his social status among his peers. This is evident in his leadership in games and adventures, his efforts to impress Becky, and his desire to be seen as a hero.

"Just as dead earnest as I'm a-sitting here. But Huck, we can't let you into the gang if you ain't respectable, you know." (Chapter 35, p. 201)

As can be seen from the statement above, Tom gives one condition to Huck if he want to join Tom's gang. The condition is Huck must have "respectable" if he wants to join. The word respect in here, means that Tom did not care about anything from anybody. He just wants a respect from them. The adventure that Tom experienced in a Jackson's Island has brought him to be a hero and admired by all of the people in the village. It has changed the society's perspective. They all admired him because Tom was able to survive in a Jackson's Island. Tom was also comeback to his village to tell the truth of the murder of Dr. Robinson. He was trying to tell the court that the one who kill Dr. Robinson is Muff Potter. Because of his behavior and good attitude, Tom was considered as a hero by the society. This is one of his Extrinsic Motivation to have an adventure, in order to change the society's perspective and achieve their respects towards him.

4. Discussion

Tom is known for his mischievous nature and love for adventure. He often engages in playful pranks and seeks out thrilling experiences. Tom is extremely clever and resourceful. He usually uses his wits to get out of difficult situations. Based on Ryan and Deci's motivation theory, it was found that the motivation behind the actions of the character Tom in the novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is motivated by several things, namely adventure and curiosity, pleasure and entertainment, and the desire to test boundaries. Tom Sawyer's extrinsic motivation is recognition and praise, love and acceptance, avoidance of punishment, and social status. This can be seen from the attitudes and actions carried out by Tom in his daily life.

Research related to the motivation of the main character was carried out by Puspasari (2023) to reveal the motivation of the character Merry Riana in the novel *Mimpi Sejuta Dolar*. From this research, it can be seen that the motivation is to fulfill multilevel needs according to Abraham Maslow's theory, namely fulfilling physiological needs, security needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Another research was conducted by Sentana, Marnina, & Winarsih (2023) to reveal the motivation of the main character in the short story *To Build a Fire*. In this research, the authors tell the intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation possessed by the main character in the short story using Ryan and Deci's motivation theory. This research was also assisted by Abraham Maslow's theory of achieving multilevel needs which are the things behind the main character's motivation. The third study was conducted by Aprianus Agung Empawi, Clarry Sada, and Eka Fajar Rahmani (2024), titled "An Intrinsic Motivation Analysis of the Main Character in the Joy Movie." This research aims to reveal the intrinsic motivation of the main character, Joy. The study also uses Ryan and Deci's theory to uncover the intrinsic motivation of the main character. However, the study does not explore the extrinsic motivations influencing the main character.

This research, unlike the first one which used Abraham Maslow's motivation theory, employs Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory to analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of the main character, Tom Sawyer. While the second research also used Maslow's theory to determine the needs behind the character's motivations, this study utilizes Ryan and Deci's perspective, which posits that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are driven by three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The third research used Ryan and Deci's theory but the researchers only reveal the intrinsic motivations of main character. Three basic psychological needs are fundamental for Tom Sawyer. Throughout the novel, Tom engages in various actions driven by intrinsic motivation, such as seeking adventure and satisfying his curiosity. These actions fulfill his need for autonomy, as he feels free to be himself and act according to his desires. Tom's pursuit of autonomy is evident when he tests boundaries and seeks pleasure and entertainment independently. Moreover, Tom strives to fulfill his need for competence by showcasing his abilities to his friends, Becky, Aunt Polly, and his teachers. He aims to demonstrate that he is capable and can lead his friends on adventures. Tom's competence is also highlighted when he supports Becky by taking her punishment, proving himself as a reliable and competent individual. At Sunday school, he exhibits his competence by memorizing the Bible to earn praise.

Lastly, Tom's actions are also driven by his need for relatedness. He puts forth his best efforts to gain acceptance and praise within his community, especially from his friends and school environment. Relatedness involves feeling connected to others, having supportive relationships, and feeling a sense of belonging. In "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," it is evident that the needs for competence and relatedness underpin Tom's extrinsic motivations. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that Tom Sawyer's actions are deeply rooted in his desire to fulfill these three psychological needs, as proposed by Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory.

5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis using Ryan and Deci's motivation theory, it is found that the main character in the novel "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" has intrinsic and extrinsic motivations underlying his actions and behaviors. The intrinsic motivations of the main character include adventure and curiosity, pleasure and entertainment, and the desire to test boundaries. Meanwhile, the extrinsic motivations are recognition and praise, love and acceptance, avoidance of punishment, and social status. Both types of motivation possessed by Tom Sawyer are driven by the fulfillment of the three basic human needs according to Ryan and Deci's theory, namely the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

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