



Social Interaction as a Determining Factor of Friendship Quality in the Novel *Melangkah* by Js Khairen

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ABSTRACT

Friendship is a fundamental social institution that serves as a forum for social interaction and psychological support for adolescents and young adults. This study examines the determinants of friendship quality in JS Khairen's novel "Melangkah" (Step Away) using a sociology of literature approach and descriptive qualitative methods. The analysis focuses on the formation of authentic friendships through the dynamics of intensive interactions between the characters Arif, Siti, Ocha, and Aura as they face various crises. The results show that friendship quality is determined by the synergy of three main factors. First, individual factors include complementary personality traits such as Siti's self-confidence and Arif's composure, a shared interest in pencak silat, and prosocial moral values that transform vulnerability into collective strength. Second, situational factors, such as survival experiences in extreme places like caves in Sumba, act as a powerful catalyst, transforming ordinary relationships into bonds of solidarity that withstand crises and provide mutual protection. Third, environmental factors include adaptation to Sumbanese local wisdom, a sincere acceptance of economic limitations with an anti-materialist approach, and the constructive use of social media for social contribution. This study aims to analyze the determinants of authentic friendship quality in JS Khairen's novel "Melangkah" (Step Away) using a sociological approach. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide practical insights as a reference for improving the quality of social interactions in real life.

Keywords: social interaction, friendship quality, novel

Interaksi Sosial sebagai Faktor Penentu Kualitas Persahabatan dalam Novel *Melangkah* Karya Js Khairen

ABSTRAK

Persahabatan merupakan institusi sosial fundamental yang berperan sebagai wadah interaksi sosial dan penopang psikologis bagi remaja serta dewasa awal. Penelitian ini mengkaji faktor-faktor penentu kualitas persahabatan dalam Novel *Melangkah* karya JS Khairen menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi sastra dan metode kualitatif deskriptif. Analisis berfokus pada pembentukan persahabatan autentik melalui dinamika interaksi intensif antartokoh Arif, Siti, Ocha, dan Aura saat menghadapi berbagai krisis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kualitas persahabatan ditentukan oleh sinergi tiga faktor utama. Pertama, faktor individual yang meliputi kepribadian saling melengkapi seperti kepercayaan diri Siti dan ketenangan Arif, kesamaan minat dalam pencak silat, serta nilai moral prososial yang mampu mengubah kerentanan menjadi kekuatan kolektif. Kedua, faktor situasional berupa pengalaman bertahan hidup di tempat ekstrem seperti celah goa Sumba yang berperan sebagai katalis kuat, mengubah hubungan biasa menjadi ikatan solidaritas yang teruji krisis dan saling melindungi. Ketiga, faktor lingkungan yang mencakup adaptasi terhadap kearifan lokal Sumba, penerimaan tulus terhadap keterbatasan ekonomi yang bersifat anti-materialisme, serta pemanfaatan konstruktif media sosial untuk kontribusi sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis faktor-faktor penentu kualitas persahabatan autentik dalam Novel *Melangkah* karya JS Khairen dengan pendekatan sosiologi sastra. Selain itu, penelitian ini diharapkan memberikan wawasan praktis sebagai referensi untuk meningkatkan kualitas interaksi sosial dalam kehidupan nyata.

Kata kunci: interaksi sosial, kualitas persahabatan, novel

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INTRODUCTION

Friendship is one of the most fundamental social institutions in human life, especially during adolescence and early adulthood. During this phase, individuals not only seek identity but also build social support networks that serve as their psychological support. In this context, friendship serves as a vital forum for social interaction, where individuals share experiences, values, and emotions. Fernandi (2023:3) states that friendships can form spontaneously, for example, when we meet someone who shares a common interest or passion, or they can also develop through a longer process, such as when we study or work together. The quality of friendships is often considered a key indicator of a person's emotional well-being, where the presence of friends who provide validation, care, and guidance can be a determining factor in mental resilience. Rahmat (2014:42) suggests that adolescents with high-quality friendships are likely to have high levels of trust, while those with low-quality friendships are likely to have low levels of trust. However, some individuals have high-quality friendships but lack mutual trust.

Social interaction is a reciprocal relationship that influences each other. There are actions and reactions. The actors are more than one: individual with individual, individual with group, group with group (Mulyadi et al., 2020:37). Social interaction is a dynamic process involving contact between individuals, both physically and through communication, with the goal of mutual understanding, influence, and response to one another in order to fulfill life's needs. This process is the main foundation of friendships, where emotional bonds, mutual trust, and mutual support are formed. Through positive social interactions, such as sharing stories or working together, friendships grow stronger, while negative interactions can lead to conflict that undermines the harmony of friendships.

JS Khairen, through his novel "Melangkah," offers a narrative that emphasizes the importance of maintaining togetherness through a sense of

belonging, sacrifice, and genuine empathy. Their friendship is tested not only in comfortable situations but also in critical, life-threatening situations, such as a dangerous adventure in Sumba. Here, friendship functions as an alternative social institution, providing a sense of security when other structures might be unable to provide it, thereby strengthening and testing the quality of the relationship.

To understand how the depth of these relationships is formed, a study is needed that can connect fictional stories with social reality. In this context, literary works exist as both a reflection and documentation of the dynamics of human life. Literature is not only a form of recreation, but also a social document that records how individuals negotiate their identities and relationships with their environment. Hawa (2022:1) argues that literature makes a valuable contribution when it can highlight the social aspects of human life. JS Khairen's novel "Melangkah" (Steps) is a relevant work to study within this framework, as it presents a narrative that not only offers entertainment but also reconstructs the values of friendship in society. The approach used to uncover this is the sociology of literature, which views literary works as inseparable from the social reality that surrounds them. Human social life, as studied by sociology, can be vast, complex, and multi-layered, ranging from all the pulses of human social life that are directly visible to broader social structures or relationships (Faruk, 2019:18). Sociology attempts to understand how society is made possible, how it operates, and how it persists (Bagtayan, 2021:34). Through this lens, research can penetrate layers of text and capture the social aspects underlying character interactions, so that analysis extends beyond intrinsic aspects.

Based on this background, the research problem is formulated as follows: What are the factors that determine the quality of friendship in J.S. Khairen's novel "Melangkah"? This study aims to describe the individual, situational, and environmental factors that influence friendship quality. The benefits of this research are expected



to provide a comprehensive understanding of friendship as a forum for social interaction capable of creating authentic relationships. The theoretical review in this study utilizes Fernandi's (2023:4-6) theory of friendship factors, namely Individual Factors, Situational Factors, and Environmental Factors. The first relevant article supporting this research is a study by Kinanti & Tjahjono (2022) entitled "Dimensions of Local Wisdom of the Sumba Community in J.S. Khairen's Novel "Melangkah" (Literary Anthropology Study)." The aim is to describe local wisdom according to Jim Ife.

Second, Irwan Soulisha's 2024 study, titled "Analysis of the Values of Struggle in the Novel "Melangkah" by J.S. Khairen," aims to determine the values of struggle contained in J.S. Khairen's novel "Melangkah," using sociological literary theory. Third, Cahyaningsi 2018 study, titled "Friendship in the Novels kpkp: Diary Persahabatan and Pita Persahabatan by Zahirah," aims to describe the values of friendship, including tolerance, trust, cooperation, and expressions of affection in the works KKP K Pita Persahabatan and Diary Persahabatan by Nabila Izzati Zahirah, using social psychological theory.

In general, this study aims to uncover and analyze in depth the factors that are the main determinants of the formation of authentic friendship quality in JS Khairen's novel "Melangkah" (Step Away) using a sociological literary lens. Furthermore, this study also aims to provide practical contributions and insights for readers regarding the dynamics of healthy relationships, so that these findings can serve as references or inspiration for improving the quality of social interactions in real life.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. Ahmadi (2019:6), Razak (2017:276) states that literary research tends toward qualitative research. Qualitative methods were chosen because they aim to explore deeper meaning and describe in detail the individual, situational, and

environmental factors that influence friendship quality. This research focuses specifically on identifying the variables that constitute friendship quality to examine how authentic social interactions are formed and sustained, as opposed to the phenomenon of pseudo-friendships. The primary data source for this study is the novel "Melangkah" by JS Khairen, the eighth edition of 2024, published by PT Grasindo, which is examined using Fernandi's (2023:4-6) theory of friendship factors.

Data collection was conducted through extensive literature review. Zed (2014:4) states that literature research is certainly not merely a matter of reading and taking notes on literature or books as is often understood. Literature research, often also called library research, is a series of activities related to library data collection methods, reading and taking notes, and processing research materials. The researcher intensively read the entire novel to identify quotes representing individual, situational, and environmental factors.

Furthermore, the data analysis technique used Endraswara's (2011) sociological literary analysis steps, which include assumptions, the use of concepts of understanding in literary works, and data analyzed from various sources concerning the relationships between literary works and social systems, as well as values ??and behavioral norms.

RESULTS

The study of JS Khairen's novel "Melangkah" (Step Away) revealed that the quality of authentic friendship is formed through a dynamic synergy between individual, situational, and environmental factors. The following are the research findings based on the classification of these factors, focusing on the most significant data.

1. Individual Factors

Individual factors are internal aspects of the characters that form the initial foundation for closeness. In this novel, individual factors are manifested through personality, interests and hobbies, as well as values and beliefs.

1.1 Personality: Self-Confidence and Openness

A strong personality is the driving force behind the quality of friendship, where self-confidence and openness act as emotional anchors. The following data demonstrates how Siti and Ocha's self-confidence builds a sense of collective security.

"What if she always carries it? That item is very important to Runa. There's no way she'd just leave it behind," Arif said. "Like I said, let's split into teams. One will ambush Runa, the other will look for her car." "Who then? Didn't you see how well she fought?" Aura reminded her friends. "Me." Ocha took a step forward. Arif remained silent. "Me too," Siti said confidently. "Hey, what?" Aura doubted. "Have you forgotten, the owner of thirty gold medals?" Siti boasted. (Khairen, 2020: 307)

Siti's self-confidence, based on real-life experience (gold medals), is not a form of individual arrogance, but rather a group defense mechanism. When Aura doubted the team's abilities, Siti's confidence functioned as a "confidence transfer" that transformed fear into collective courage. This self-confidence enhances the quality of friendships because it creates a clear distribution of roles; friends know exactly who to rely on in a crisis. Furthermore, openness to vulnerability and personal pain has also been shown to strengthen bonds. When Aura questioned their abilities, "Hey, how?" Siti didn't flinch; instead, she demonstrated objective proof of her competence, "having thirty gold medals." This demonstrates that in group dynamics, rational self-confidence can transform fear into a structured action plan. Ocha and Siti's support provided a sense of security for Arif, who had previously been hesitant and unsure, creating a clear distribution of roles in dealing with the crisis. This confidence enhanced the quality of the friendship because friends knew exactly who to rely on in critical situations. Furthermore, openness about

vulnerability and personal wounds also proved to strengthen bonds.

"He's deceived many Sumbanese people. Including everyone in my village, my father and mother too... We have to stop him! He's a martial artist!" (Khairen, 2020: 290)

Aura's openness about her family's downfall was an emotional turning point. In authentic friendship, the ability to reveal "personal wounds" to friends without fear of judgment sparks total solidarity. The unanimous response was "READY!" The stories of Siti, Arif, and Ocha demonstrate that emotional openness actually sparks a stronger sense of shared commitment than mere formal relationships. Aura's openness transformed the motivation behind their friendship; it was no longer simply about socializing, but about protecting each other from injustice. In authentic friendship, moments of honesty like this spark a stronger sense of shared commitment than mere formal relationships.

1.2 Interests and Hobbies: Similarities in the Field of Silat

Shared interests and hobbies, particularly in pencak silat, create a unifying "language" and a shared mindset that facilitates coordination without much talking.

"Ki, are we fighting?" Aura asked fearfully. "There's no other way. This is like a belt-clinching exam. Four against one." Arif took his stance. "Combine the silat attacks we learned for competition, and any possible movements..." (Khairen, 2020: 207)

The silat hobby is not just a physical activity, but an identity that is united in the body. In a critical situation that triggered Aura's fear, Arif used this shared interest to defuse the tension with the phrase "belt exam." This term wasn't just a figure of speech, but an effective psychological



strategy for transforming a dangerous, frightening situation into a familiar, structured challenge, something they had experienced together. When Arif "put on a stance" and instructed the use of the movements "we learned for competition," it was evident that the silat hobby had created a mental and physical synchronization between them. The shared training background meant they didn't need lengthy explanations to understand the strategy; Arif's instructions were immediately understood as a collective action plan. This demonstrates that a shared hobby creates a foundation of competence-based trust, where each member believes their teammates possess the same technical abilities to protect each other.

1.3 Values and Beliefs: Absolute Trust

The value of trust in individuals keeps them calm in situations crisis.

"Aura couldn't possibly leave us, Siti! She's our friend. She's the one who brought us here!" (Khairen, 2020: 266)

In a crisis situation where Siti seemed to be starting to feel worried or doubtful about Aura's whereabouts, Arif's statement served as a crucial emotional buffer. Arif rejected the negative assumption that Aura had betrayed them with logic based on their relationship history and the definition of friendship: "She's our friend. She's the one who brought us here!" For Arif, Aura's act of bringing the team to the location was not evidence of guilt, but rather evidence of shared responsibility. This absolute trust allowed Arif to maintain a sense of calm and reason amid the pressures of prison, preventing mutual suspicion that could have divided the group. Despite being trapped in despair, Arif's belief provided a strong psychological foundation; he chose to uphold the value of loyalty rather than succumb to situational panic. This data demonstrates that the value of trust serves as a mental shield that prevents the group from fraying. In quality friendships, the belief that

friends will not abandon us, regardless of the difficulties, is the primary foundation that maintains the emotional stability of all members.

2. Situational Factors

Situational factors refer to external conditions that facilitate deep interactions. Research has found that extreme places and time intensity play a role in triggering the process of building quality friendships.

2.1 Place: The Cave as a Test of Loyalty

The setting in the novel transforms into a symbolic space that tests the depth of friendship commitment.

"Arif and Siti, in a narrowing cave crevice, try to save Aura. But the strong currents prevent them from keeping up with Aura's speed, who is drifting alone." (Khairen, 2020: 112)

The "ever-thinning" cave crevice symbolizes the increasingly limited space for movement, both physically and psychologically, where hope for survival seems diminishing. In a situation where logic might dictate self-preservation, Arif and Siti's continued "effort to save Aura" demonstrates that the instinct for friendship overcomes selfish survival instincts. The physical limitations of this place—described as having "strong currents" and narrowness—force them to set aside their personal fears to focus on the safety of others. Despite their nearly impossible efforts, "unable to keep up with the pace," the fact that they persisted confirms that loyalty is unconditional. The narrow and dangerous cave crevice forces Arif and Siti to work together to save Aura's life. This extreme setting obliterates individual egos and fosters a collective protective instinct. The quality of their friendship is tested not in comfort, but in the narrow confines of life where physical failure is almost certain. This place proves that their bond is not shattered by danger, but rather strengthened by a sense of shared destiny in the face of death.

2.2 Time Intensity: Moments of Silence and Commitment

The intensity of time spent together creates irreplaceable moments of intimacy.

"Siti immediately embraced Aura without saying anything. They held each other for a long time. The sun was setting, the refraction of light becoming more beautiful. They savored the moment." (Khairen, 2020: 347)

Time duration is a key indicator of the quality of a relationship. The phrase "a long time" emphasizes that the moment was not rushed; They let time pass slowly, allowing them to fully absorb each other's presence. In the context of a friendship that has just endured numerous perilous trials, silence ("saying nothing more") is more meaningful than a thousand words, as it demonstrates a level of understanding so profound that verbal communication is no longer necessary to express gratitude, relief, or regret. The beauty of the "refraction of light" as the sun sets serves as a mood-boosting backdrop, symbolizing peace and hope after the conflict. The evening (sunset) is used to create emotional intimacy without words. A "long" embrace at dusk demonstrates the emotional depth of their friendship, capable of absorbing fatigue and transforming it into serenity. This intensity of quality time distinguishes their friendship from the rapid and superficial nature of digital interactions.

3. Environmental factors

Environmental factors include the social and cultural influences surrounding the characters, which shape their perspectives on friendship to become more inclusive and anti-materialistic.

3.1 Cultural Environment: Adaptation and Local Wisdom

The Sumbanese cultural environment, which values solidarity, "infects" the characters' perspectives.

"If a Sumbanese man doesn't use a machete, it's the same as being naked! ... Now you two are officially Sumbanese!" (Khairen, 2020: 231)

Aura's statement regarding the machete as a symbol of identity and self-actualization for Sumbanese men becomes a meeting point for unifying the group's perspectives. When Arif and Siti finally wear or accept this cultural symbol, the implication of the phrase "officially becoming Sumbanese," this signifies a profound process of cultural assimilation. This action demonstrates that to strengthen their friendship and survive, they must shed the barrier of "being outsiders" and replace it with the collective identity of "we as Sumbanese." Arif, initially hesitant, eventually trusts Aura and follows local customs. This acceptance of local culture demonstrates that their friendship is adaptive and respects local wisdom. They don't impose their city's standards, but rather adapt to respect the host environment, creating a sense of togetherness that transcends the boundaries of their native cultures.

3.2 Social Environment: Acceptance of Economic Limitations

The social environment teaches them comfort in simplicity and distances friendship from materialism.

"This is what it's like to go on holiday to my house. It can't be like staying at a hotel..." "It's okay. We're on holiday on a shoestring budget, too, Neng," (Khairen, 2020: 143).

Aura's comparison of her home to a hotel reflects the discomfort and feelings of inferiority that often arise from differences in economic status. However, Siti's spontaneous acknowledgment of their "barely enough" situation serves as a highly effective leveling mechanism. By being frank about her own limitations, Siti eliminates the potential social gap between "host"



and "guest" and normalizes the situation so that Aura doesn't feel insulted or burdened. The honesty and sense of humor displayed by Siti here are not mere lip service, but rather evidence that the comfort in their friendship is built on authenticity, not image. Siti's sincere and humorous acceptance of the "mediocre" conditions in Aura's home demonstrates that their friendship is free from standards of luxury. The quality of their friendship actually improves when they are able to accept each other's financial shortcomings without shame or judgment. They prove that the essence of friendship lies in togetherness, not in facilities or material things.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of research on JS Khairen's novel "Melangkah," authentic friendships between characters are not formed by chance, but through a complex synergy between internal factors, external conditions, and environmental influences. An in-depth analysis of these three factors is described below.

Individual factors are the internal foundation that most determines the depth of friendships in this novel, where the quality of social interactions is supported by a similarity of character and moral values. The results of the study indicate that although a shared hobby (pencak silat) is the initial gateway to meeting, what maintains the quality of the relationship is the existence of complementary personalities, such as the assertive and confident Siti and the calm and strategic Arif, who create a solid group defense mechanism when facing a crisis. This aligns with recent research by Julian and Basaria (2025:4474) which confirms that moral values, especially those of a prosocial orientation, encourage individuals to be empathetic, fair, and responsive to the needs of others, which are essential components of a quality friendship. Furthermore, Aura's openness about personal wounds and the deception that befell her family is evidence that emotional vulnerability can trigger total solidarity, as Sudarminta (2020:31)

argues that true and lasting friendships can also support each other in knowing and accepting oneself, recognizing each other's strengths and weaknesses through honest criticism and feedback from friends.

Situational factors in this novel serve as catalysts that accelerate the process of emotional closeness, transforming ordinary friendships into bonds of "lifelong struggle" and proving that crises can improve the quality of social interactions. The results of the study revealed that the quality of friendship is not tested in comfortable hangouts, but rather in extreme crisis spaces such as narrow cave crevices and dangerous escape situations. Pressuring and life-threatening geographical conditions force individual egos to fade, replacing them with collective protective instincts and mutual dependence for survival. This proves Saeng's statement (2019:115) which emphasizes that relationships between humans can be called friendship only if between both parties there is mutual trust, mutual understanding, mutual service, readiness to sacrifice, loyalty for the common good and mutual love. In addition to place, the intensity of time spent together, both in moments of tension and quiet moments such as dusk, creates meaningful shared memories, where a long, wordless embrace indicates a high level of emotional understanding. This phenomenon is supported by the opinion of Salsabila et al (2025:119) who stated that peers can encourage and push each other to achieve their goals, they can share successful experiences and provide positive examples of how to overcome obstacles.

Environmental factors play a role in expanding the scope of the meaning of friendship from interpersonal relationships to relationships that contribute to society and are adaptive to culture. The interaction of the four characters with the Sumbanese socio-cultural environment shapes their perspective to appreciate local wisdom, where cultural symbols such as machetes become a medium for unifying identities, as Arif and Siti "officially become Sumbanese." This shows that

their friendship is adaptive and respects local wisdom, eliminating the barrier of "outsiders" to create a stronger collective identity. In addition, the social environment teaches them about comfort in simplicity and distances the value of friendship from materialism, seen when Siti with humor and honesty accepts Aura's "mere" economic condition. This attitude emphasizes that the essence of friendship lies in sincere togetherness, not in facilities or material things. Furthermore, the digital environment is utilized positively as an instrument to support the life of the surrounding community, not just to show off personal lives. This aligns with research by Talib et al. (2021:9), which states that by introducing various arts and cultures through social media, Indonesian culture can be introduced to the outside world simply by posting photos on social media. This improves the quality of friendships, fostering a broad social perspective. The strength of this research lies in the use of a sociological literary approach, which uncovers layers of meaning within friendship, not only from an intrinsic perspective, but also how extreme environmental and situational factors (such as in Sumba) influence relationship dynamics. This provides a new perspective, suggesting that quality friendships are often formed in situations of crisis, not comfort. However, this study is limited by its sample size, focusing on only one literary work (the novel "Melangkah" or "Step Away"), so generalizability of the results may not fully reflect the dynamics of friendship in other literary genres or social contexts.

Based on the research and discussion conducted on JS Khairen's novel "Melangkah," it can be concluded that friendship serves as a vital platform for social interaction. The depth of relationships between the characters Arif, Siti, Ocha, and Aqua is formed through the synergy of individual, situational, and environmental factors. Individual factors, including complementary personalities, such as Siti's self-confidence and Arif's composure, as well as a shared interest in pencak silat, serve as an internal foundation that

enables effective communication and a clear distribution of roles within the group. This research demonstrates that prosocial moral values such as absolute trust and emotional openness are not merely personal traits but social interaction mechanisms that transform vulnerability into collective solidarity. Thus, these individual foundations demonstrate that social interactions within authentic friendships are built on competence and character compatibility, not merely physical proximity.

Furthermore, situational factors such as survival experiences in extreme environments and intense shared time are proven to act as catalysts, transforming ordinary friendships into bonds of solidarity "in the struggle for life" that are tested through crisis. This study found that the quality of social interactions actually increases sharply when the characters are in crisis situations in narrow cave crevices or facing shared danger, where individual survival instincts transform into collective protection instincts. These critical moments force the creation of positive interdependence and the building of strong shared memories through the intensity of meaningful time. This demonstrates that the dynamics of extreme situations are a key area for demonstrating that friendship functions as a powerful platform for social interaction to collectively face uncertainty and environmental pressures.

Environmental factors enrich the meaning of friendship in this novel by incorporating an inclusive socio-cultural dimension and the constructive use of technology as a form of broader social interaction. The characters' interactions with local Sumbanese wisdom and their sincere acceptance of economic limitations demonstrate that their friendship is adaptive and anti-materialistic, capable of bridging cultural differences and eradicating social barriers. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the friendship in this novel does not function as a closed group, but as an agent of social change that utilizes social media to promote culture and



support the community's economy. Overall, through the lens of literary sociology, the novel "Melangkah" (Melangkah) reconstructs friendship as a social institution that not only provides a sense of psychological security but also serves as a platform for transformative social interaction, connecting personal interests with shared values and real contributions to society.

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