2026 ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE AND RESEARCH EXPO (AIICARE)
Vol.3, No.1, 2026: December; 1-14

Education As an Instrument of Social Mobility in Andrea Hirata's Novel Guru Aini: A Study of Literary Sociology

Marwanto Marwanto[1]

[1] Pascasarjana, Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia, UMS, Surakarta
Email: mar84333@student.ums.ac.id

Submission Track:
Received: 30-09-2026, Final Revision: 24-11-2026, Available Online: 01-12-2026
Copyright © 2026 Authors

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

ABSTRACT
This study aims to explore how education is presented as a tool for social mobility in Andrea Hirata's novel Guru Aini. In this work, education is not only associated with the transfer of knowledge but also seen as a way to change life circumstances, open social opportunities, and achieve dreams despite economic limitations. The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive, using a literary sociology approach. The data analyzed include words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narratives that reflect issues of education, socio-economic situations, students' struggles, the role of teachers, and hopes for improving life. The analysis process involves identifying, classifying, interpreting, and channeling text data with concepts of education and social mobility. The research findings suggest that in Guru Aini, education is portrayed in four main forms, namely (1) education as a solution to socio-economic limitations, (2) education as a tool to shape aspirations and the future, (3) teachers as agents of change in society, and (4) persistence in learning as a tactic for social mobility. Aini's character shows that economic conditions and social environments do not completely limit a person's future, as long as there is access, motivation, and guidance in education. The character of Teacher Desi further reinforces this depiction through her commitment to supporting students facing learning challenges. Thus, the novel 'Guru Aini' presents a critique of inequality in access to education while highlighting education as a force that can transform individuals and enable social mobility.
Keywords*: education, social mobility, literary sociology, social inequality, Guru Aini.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature not only brings imagined stories but also depicts the social life of a community. Literary works can be a place for writers to explore human relationships, how people live together, the problems that arise, injustice, the principles they hold, and the changes happening in society. Every literary work can narrate the life journey of characters and also depict aspects of human life and human nature more deeply (Hidayat, 2023). Literary works contain various kinds of values, including social, educational, religious, moral, and cultural values (Alfindra et al., 2024). Therefore, literary works can be analyzed from the perspective of literary sociology to understand the relationship between literature and the social reality behind it.

A literary work is considered successful if it can portray various human experiences, each with its own unique values (Wahyuni et al., 2022). Literary works can refer to the social world, representing and projecting models of social distribution and relationships imaginatively that exist in society (Faruk, 2013). Literary works offer life metaphors narrated in a cinematic way to depict another life that can be read as a reflection of human life itself (Ambarwati & Wahyuni, 2020). A literary work is a reflection of human life in a multidimensional way, so a literary work cannot be separated from things outside the text (Lathifah et al., 2019).

Literary works are social elements that can influence and be influenced by society, as they are created by writers to be enjoyed and understood, and utilized by the reading public (Anugerah et al., 2023). Literary works tend to reflect that humans live within three aspects of life: the past, the present, and the future, thus representing the self of society (Azzahroh, 2017).

In the novel *Guru Aini* by Andrea Hirata, the theory of social mobility addresses the process by which an individual shifts their social position within the structure of society—a transition facilitated by education, knowledge, personal struggle, and life opportunities.

Social mobility in *Guru Aini* represents an individual's struggle to alter their social standing through education. In his work on social mobility, Pitirim Sorokin (1927) defines the concept as the movement of an individual or group from one social position to another within a societal structure. There are three compelling focal points for analysis.

First, education serves as a vehicle for social mobility. Aini views education as a pathway to transform her life circumstances; her aspiration to become a doctor is not merely a personal ambition, but is also tied to the hope of improving her family's situation.

Second, poverty acts as a barrier to social mobility. The economic conditions of Aini's family illustrate that the opportunity to pursue education and achieve a better life is not equally accessible to all individuals.

Third, the teacher functions as an agent of social change. The character Desi Istiqomah demonstrates that a teacher does more than impart knowledge—they also play a pivotal role in opening up opportunities for social mobility for their students.

A novel can be seen as an attempt to rebuild the social world, meaning human relationships with family, the environment, politics, the state, the economy, and so on, which are also topics discussed in sociology (Hidayat, 2023). A novel is a literary work that has a significant function in the way we understand human life through the power of imagination (Alfi et al., 2012).

One social issue that often appears in literary works is education. Education plays a very important role in people's lives because it is related to individuals' opportunities to gain knowledge, skills, jobs, social status, and a better quality of life. In societies facing economic and social inequality, access to education often becomes a crucial issue. Differences in economic conditions, family background, educational facilities, and learning opportunities can influence a person's journey in achieving social mobility.

The concept of social mobility is related to the movement of individuals or groups from one social level to another. This movement can happen either vertically or horizontally. Vertical social mobility occurs when someone experiences a change in social status to a

higher or lower level. Education can be one path to social mobility because it provides knowledge, skills, and qualifications that enable individuals to attain a social and economic position different from before.

The issue is interesting to analyze in the novel 'Guru Aini' written by Andrea Hirata. This novel presents educational issues through the interactions between Aini and Teacher Desi. Aini is portrayed as a student who faces challenges in mathematics but has a strong desire to master the subject. Aini's journey is inseparable from her family's economic and social background as well as her aspirations for the future. On the other hand, Teacher Desi is depicted as an educator committed to supporting students in facing the learning challenges they encounter.

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of the gap between academic achievement and the realization of upward social mobility in Andrea Hirata's Guru Aini. Unlike previous studies that primarily identify educational inequalities and their social implications, this study investigates how structural economic constraints mediate the conversion of educational achievement into actual socioeconomic mobility. By integrating Sorokin's social mobility theory, the study conceptualizes the condition of potential but constrained upward mobility, in which individual agency and academic achievement create opportunities for social advancement, yet unequal access to economic resources prevents their full realization.

Several previous studies have examined the novel *Guru Aini* by Andrea Hirata through various sociological perspectives on literature. Syaipudin and Awwalin (2022) explores social critique and educational values, while Rahman (2023) analyze social conflict and educational issues using a critical discourse analysis approach. Cahayawati and Sukowati (2025) examine social values and class relations from a Marxist perspective. More specifically, Sabrina, Harahap, and Riyanto (2026) have identified disparities in access to and the quality of education for lower- to middle-class communities, encompassing economic, social, and gender-based barriers, as well as curricular and institutional limitations.

Meanwhile, Nensilianti and Parsyam (2026) investigate the hyperreality of education, representing it as a symbol of social mobility. the struggle and educational idealism of the character Desi Istiqomah (Sahidin & Safitri, 2026), and social conflicts (Hudhana & Datika Azzahra Prasetya, 2023). None of the studies that discuss “Guru Aini” are the same as this research.

These studies provide an essential foundation for understanding the education, inequality, and social conditions depicted in *Guru Aini*. Nevertheless, there remains room to analyze further how unequal educational opportunities influence the processes, prospects, and actualization of vertical social mobility for the characters. In particular, these studies have not primarily focused on distinguishing between academic success, access to higher education, and the realization of a shift in socioeconomic status.

Addressing this gap, this study analyzes the relationship between education, poverty, social class, and individual agency, drawing upon the concepts of social mobility, social reproduction, and the capabilities approach. The analysis centers on Aini's journey: she succeeds in developing her academic abilities and gaining admission to a medical school, yet she faces financial obstacles that hinder her from seizing this opportunity. This situation highlights a disparity between the academic mobility she has achieved and the socioeconomic mobility that remains unrealized. Thus, this study offers a critical reading of education as a potential mechanism for social mobility—one whose realization is nonetheless constrained by the distribution of resources and structural inequalities. The study's contribution lies in developing an understanding of "hindered" potential for social mobility: a condition in which an individual's educational success is insufficient to guarantee a shift in their socioeconomic position.

With this background, this study will focus on the question: how is education portrayed as a tool for social mobility in Andrea Hirata's novel Guru Aini?

This study aims to describe and analyze how education is represented as a means to improve social mobility in the literary work titled Guru Aini. More specifically, the research

focuses on the connection between education and socio-economic conditions, the role of a teacher in promoting social change, and the characters' efforts to use education as a path to a better future.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a literary sociology approach. The qualitative method is chosen because the research data consists of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narratives, and events in the novel that depict educational issues and social mobility.

The main data source for this study is the novel *Guru Aini* by Andrea Hirata. The research uses parts of the text that explain: (1) the social and economic conditions of the characters; (2) the characters' opinions about education; (3) the characters' efforts to obtain education; (4) the relationship between teachers and students; (5) the characters' goals and future directions; and (6) the potential changes in the characters' living conditions or status through education.

Data collection is done by reading and taking notes. The researcher reads the entire novel, then identifies sections relevant to the research topic. The data found is noted and organized by topic.

Data analysis is carried out through several stages. First, collecting data involves identifying texts that discuss education and a person's ability to advance to a higher social level. Second, grouping data involves dividing it into several themes, such as education, social and economic conditions, the role of teachers, the learning process, and social mobility. Third, interpretation, which involves giving meaning to the data from the perspective of literary sociology. Fourth, contextualization, which is connecting the issues in the novel with ideas about education and social movement. Fifth, concluding, which is arranging the pattern of the relationship between education and changes in the social conditions of the characters. The literary sociology approach is used to understand that the issue of education in the novel

is related to the existing social structures and conditions. So, the analysis doesn't just look at the parts of the story itself, but also examines how education, poverty, social class, and dreams are connected in the characters' lives.

DISCUSSION

1. Education as a Way Out of Socio-Economic Limitations

   One of the important issues discussed in the story of Teacher Aini is the relationship between the world of education and social and economic conditions. Aini's life shows that the family's economic situation affects learning experiences and how one views the future.

   In that context, education is seen as one way to overcome existing limitations. The desire to learn is not just about earning grades at school but also about the hope of a better future.

   That representation shows that education has a role in society. Education provides the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that can be used in everyday life. When someone lives in a social environment with a limited economic situation, education can be a way to increase their social opportunities.

   Aini shows that connection through her effort in studying math. Math, which used to feel difficult for her, she eventually sees as something she must master to reach the dreams she longs for. As a result, the learning process becomes part of the social struggle. From a social movement perspective, this situation offers hope for changing life circumstances through education. Education becomes a social investment for individuals. The more skills and higher degrees someone has, the more social and economic opportunities they can get. However, the novel also shows that education cannot directly eliminate social inequality. Successful education still depends on family conditions, the surrounding environment, the quality of the learning process, motivation to learn, and

support from those around. Because of that, the novel's education also highlights the structural problems someone experiences.

> *"That's why Teacher Desi doesn't have any wealth. She also always refuses help from her rich mother because she says she is independent. She lives alone in a type 21 official house in the teachers' housing, without any furniture, let alone a sofa!"* (Hirata, 2020: 135).
> *"Are you sure you want to be a teacher, Desi? Look at the fate of those teachers!"*
> *"That's an inappropriate thing to say! How can you talk like that! How could we judge the noble profession of a teacher just by material rewards like that!"* (Hirata, 2020: 3)

2. Education as a Means of Shaping Aspirations

Education in Aini's life also serves as a tool to build future orientation. Aini's aspirations are closely connected to the way she learns. She doesn't study just because of pressure from school, but because of specific goals she wants to achieve.

The link between education and aspirations shows that education can influence how someone views the future. Knowledge opens opportunities for individuals to imagine a life different from what they are currently experiencing. In this context, school is not just a place for the transfer of knowledge. School becomes a social space for individuals to develop their hopes, identity, and future orientation.

Aini's effort to master mathematics shows that aspirations can motivate the learning process. The challenges she faces don't make her back down from education. On the other hand, those challenges become integral to his struggle. This shows a connection between educational aspirations and social mobility. People who have hopes for the future generally tend to see education as a path to achieving their dreams. In this way, the novel portrays education as more than just an institutional process but as one that builds social hope.

> *"Ever since I met Mrs. Marlis, back in 3rd grade, I've wanted to become a math teacher, Ma'am. That's the biggest hope in my heart because I've always felt that*

being a math teacher is the reason why I, Desi Istiqomah, exist in this world" (Hirata, 2020:1).

3. Teachers as Agents of Social Change

Teacher Desi plays an important role in shaping the image of education in the novel. Teachers not only teach lessons but also help students overcome the difficulties they face.

The relationship between Teacher Desi and Aini shows that success in education does not depend only on the students' abilities. The educator's role also has an important influence. Teachers can create a comfortable learning environment, give encouragement, help students stay disciplined, and motivate them not to give up easily when facing challenges.

From a literary-sociological perspective, the depiction of Teacher Desi can be interpreted as highlighting teachers' social role in society. Teachers play a role in the process of social reproduction and transformation. On the one hand, education can preserve existing values and knowledge. On the other hand, education can enable someone to change their life circumstances. Teacher Desi shows that transformative role. She tries to help Aini overcome her academic limitations. The relationship between Teacher and student is a type of social relationship that can lead to change. Therefore, teachers in the novel are not just seen as a profession, but also as figures who can bring social change. A teacher's commitment has a social impact by allowing students to improve their skills and pursue their dreams.

"Until now, the teacher has been teaching Aini with the view that the mathematics inside the child has already collapsed, and then the teacher tried to rebuild that collapsed structure. Now the teacher is trying a new strategy: she will leave that collapsed structure and build a new one (Hirata, 2020:185).

4. Perseverance in Learning as a Strategy for Social Mobility

   Social mobility, as embodied by Teacher Aini, is also evident in her dedication to learning. Aini did not immediately master mathematics. The process went through challenges, failures, practice, and guidance.

   Perseverance becomes an important aspect because social mobility through education does not happen quickly. Education requires a long and continuous period. The knowledge and skills gained through this process become assets for individuals in facing society.

   From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, education is closely related to cultural capital. Knowledge, skills, mindset, and educational qualifications can serve as resources that help someone attain a certain social position (Bourdieu, 2021). In the context of Aini's journey, her effort to master mathematics can be seen as a step toward acquiring capital useful for achieving future goals. Therefore, learning activities have a deeper meaning than just academic tasks. Learning is a process of accumulating knowledge and skills. This novel shows that initial limitations are not a barrier to making changes. Change requires process, motivation, support, and opportunities.

   > *"Coming home from school, Aini went straight to the local library. She borrowed as many middle and high school math books as she could. She used Enun and Sa`diah's library cards so she could borrow even more books"* (Hirata, 2020: 140).

5. Educational Inequality as Social Critique

   Besides explaining education as a tool to move within society, Teacher Aini also criticizes the unfairness in access to education.

   These differences can be seen from varying social and economic conditions, making school learning experiences different as well. Not all students start from the same point. Some students receive support from their families, have sufficient tools, and have a good learning environment, while others struggle with many obstacles.

This issue shows that education has two sides. It can be a tool for social advancement, but at the same time, it can be a place where social inequality becomes clear.

From a literary-sociological perspective, this is important because literary works not only present individual characters but also depict the social structures around them. Aini's difficulties in learning can be understood in a broader social context, not just because of her own shortcomings. The novel shows that success in education can't be achieved without support from the surrounding community. People do need to try and be diligent, but the chance to learn also depends on the environment around them—motivation, support, and opportunities.

> *"She remembered how proud Aini was to show him her continuously improving exam scores. Dinah felt really bitter. A smart child shouldn't be born into a messed-up family like this, and shouldn't have high aspirations, because that would only end up breaking the child's own heart. Today, Dinah regretted living as a poor person."* (Hirata, 2020: 187)

6. Education and Life Transformation

The study's main findings show that education at Guru Aini is a life-changing force. Education helps people sharpen their skills, create dreams, and imagine a better future.

This change is not only about economic aspects but also about a shift in mindset. Education gives the courage to pursue aspirations and strive for what was previously considered difficult to achieve.

In this sense, social mobility is not just about getting a job or a higher income. Mobility can also be seen as a change in an individual's capacity to understand themselves, their surroundings, and the future they might have.

The novel Guru Aini demonstrates that education can provide individuals with the opportunity to experience self-transformation. This change has the potential to result in

a shift in social status. In this way, education can be seen as both a means of social mobility and a tool for social transformation.

> *"Indonesia needs math teachers, Ma'am, so I'm ready to serve anywhere. Even to a remote island"* (Hirata, 2020: 1-2).
> *"By leaving his family, he has taken the first step to follow his heart's calling; to serve"*(Hirata, 2020: 19-20).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that education in the novel "Guru Aini" by Andrea Hirata is depicted as an important tool that influences a person's movement within society. This representation is evident in four main aspects: education as a means of freeing oneself from social and economic limitations; education as a means of shaping dreams; teachers as important figures in changing society; and diligence in learning as a way to achieve a better life. Aini shows that education is closely linked to hopes for the future. Her struggle to learn mathematics shows that education is not just about getting good grades but also about opening new opportunities in life. Meanwhile, Teacher Desi shows how important a teacher's role is in helping students face challenges and develop their abilities.

This book also critiques the imbalances in the education system. A person's economic and social background can affect their experiences and opportunities in accessing education. Therefore, education, which serves as a tool for social mobility, requires not only the individual's own motivation but also support from family, teachers, schools, and the surrounding environment. In general, Teacher Aini shows that education has a broader role than just providing knowledge. Education can be a cultural asset, a way to shape dreams, a path to social advancement, and a life-changing force. Through the story of Aini and Teacher Desi, Andrea Hirata shows that education is not just about learning but also about personal struggles and social issues related to equal opportunities and the community's future.

REFERENCES

Alfi, Z., Thahar, H. effendi, & Tamsin, A. C. (2012). Aspek Sosiologis Tokoh Novel Cinta di dalam Gelas Karya Andrea Hirata. *Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, *1*(September 2012), 515–522.

Alfindra, R. F., Rahmat, D. P., & Rachmawati, K. (2024). Aspek Sosial dalam Novel Hello Karya Tere Liye : Pendekatan Sosiologi Sastra. *Indonesia: Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, *5(3)*(2013), 431–439. https://doi.org/10.59562/indonesia.v5i3.64617

Ambarwati, A., & Wahyuni, S. (2020). Coffee , Food , and the Crisis of Indonesian Family Relationship in the Poem of Khong Guan Banquette by Joko Pinurbo. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Community Development (ICCD 2020)*, *477*(Iccd), 88–92.

Anugerah, A. F., Amir, J., & Saguni, S. S. (2023). Konflik Sosial dalam Novel Rumpa ' na Bone Karya Andi Makmur Makka (Pendekatan Sosiologi Sastra). *Indonesian Journal of Pedagogical and Social Sciences*, *2*(2), 188–194.

Azzahroh, F. (2017). Konflik Sosial Dalam Novel Cermin Jiwa Karya S. Prasetyo Utomo (Perspektif Georg Simmel). *Jurnal Ilmiah Kebudayaan SINTESIS*, *10(1)*, 1–11.

Bourdieu, P. (2021). The Forms of Capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Polity Press.

Cahayawati, C., & Sukowati, I. (2025). Nilai Sosial dalam Novel Guru Aini Karya Andrea Hirata : Kajian Sosiologi Sastra. *HASTAPENA Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Pendidikan Dan Humaniora*, *2*(2), 50–57.

Faruk. (2013). *Pengantar Sosiologi Sastra: dari Strukturalisme Genetik Sampai Postmodernisme.* Pustaka Pelajar.

Hidayat, R. (2023). Analisis Kemampuan Literasi Digital sebagai Kompetensi Profesional Guru di SMAN 1 Selayar. *Journal of Educational Technology, Curriculum, Learning, and Communication*, *3*(1), 102–108.

Hirata, A. (2020). *Guru Aini*. Bentang Pustaka.

Hudhana, W. D., & Datika Azzahra Prasetya. (2023). Konflik Sosial Dalam Novel Guru Aini Karya Andrea Hirata. *Lingua Rima: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, *12*(3), 57–65.

Lathifah, N., Rachmawati, K., Nasional, U., Minggu, P., & Selatan, J. (2019). Tipologi Bunuh Diri dalam Novel San Francisco: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra. *Indonesia: Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia, 4 (1)*(61), 20–28.

Nensilianti, & Parsyam, M. (2026). Hiperrealitas Jean Baudrillard dalam Novel Guru Aini Karya Andrea Hirata : Simulasi Pendidikan dan Realitas Sosial. *Asas: Jurnal Sastra*,

15(2).

Rahman, F. (2023). Benturan Sosial dan Masalah Pendidikan dalam Novel Guru Aini : Analisis Wacana Kritis. *Imajeri: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, *05*(2), 133–146.

Sabrina, B., Harahap, N., & Riyanto, B. (2026). Balqis Sabrina[1] , Nurhayati Harahap[2] , Bambang Riyanto[3]. *JURNAL BASTRA*, *11*(4), 2285–2294.

Sahidin, L. O., & Safitri, W. W. (2026). Perjuangan dan Idealisme Pendidikan Tokoh Desi Istiqomah dalam Novel Guru Aini Karya Andrea Hirata: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra. *JURNAL BASTRA*, *11*(3), 1397–1404.

Sorokin, P. A. (1927). *Social Mobility*. Harper & Brothers.

Syaipudin, L., & Awwalin, I. N. (2022). Social Criticism And The Value Of Education In The Novel "Guru Aini" By Andrea Hirata Through A Sociological Literature Approach. *Jambura Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, *3*(1), 57–70.

Wahyuni, S., Ambarwati, A., Ghony, J., & Osman, Z. (2022). Model Authentic Assessment dalam Pembelajaran Sastra Terintegrasi Karakter Multikultural Authentic Assessment Model In Literature Learning Integrated Multicultural Character Universitas Islam Malang Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris Malaysia PENDAHULUAN. *Jentera: Jurnal Kajian Sastra*, *5*(2 (1)), 134–150.