# MALAYSIAN ANIMATED TV SERIES UPIN & IPIN THROUGH PIAGET'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

Malaysia's animated TV series, Upin & Ipin is one of the biggest names when it comes to the animation industry. Upin & Ipin's ability to attract a large number of local and international fans has inspired an investigation into the internal workings of the elements that contribute to its success. This research aims to identify the content development of the Upin & Ipin series in association with notions of child psychology. By framing Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, this research explores the development of a child's psychology in efforts to formulate animation content best suited for a young viewership. The research identifies with young children below the age of twelve with regards to their preference and interests through observation and questionnaire survey. Furthermore, this research paper debates Livingstone (2000) who disagrees with Davies's (1989) view that television is an important medium for children. Although they use different media in their everyday life, television remains the most popular medium and occupies a significant proportion of children's time. And up until 2003, Kaiser Family Foundation has revealed the how's and why's of children watching television. Finally, this research paper has discussed the content and type of stories that psychologically impact and appeal to children.

**Keywords**: Upin & Ipin, Cognitive Development, Children, Jean Piaget

## Introduction

There are various kinds of children's animated TV series with different themes, content and characters shown in Malaysia. However, few are successful in attracting and sustaining the attention of our local viewers especially among young children. This research will analyse one phenomenon in Malaysian TV animation, especially in terms of content development. The animated TV series that has been specifically selected is *Upin & Ipin*.

This research is an effort to study and determine the suitable elements in creating content for our local production in order to produce high-quality TV programmes for children in the future. The research focuses on a children's TV series because children are easily influenced by not only their environment but also by the programmes they watch on television.

There is a myth that a child that watches a violent programme will become violent. Wojcik-Andrews (2000) highlights that children's films grow out of various personal experiences. Certain children at certain ages will adore *Barney and Friends* or *Sesame Street* meanwhile children of other ages may prefer programmes such as *The Power Rangers, Dragon Ball*, and *Ben-10*. Wojcik-Andrews suggested that the main criterion of children's films is not just about children but also about what they watch and that is why the impact may vary throughout what they see on television. *Upin & Ipin* is a series that is watched by multiple levels of children's age and the message has positively impacted many children. It is agreed

by parents and teachers who witnessed their children or students attempted to behave or imitate the characters in the *Upin & Ipin*.

## BACKGROUND OF *UPIN & IPIN*

The animated series *Upin & Ipin* was produced by Les Copaque' Production Sdn. Bhd. (LCP hereafter) which are based in Shah Alam, Selangor. LCP was founded by Haji Burhanuddin Md. Radzi and Hajah Ainon Ariff in December 2005. Their vision and mission was to create simple stories that anyone, no matter what age or background, could relate to. In assessing that the majority of local viewers are Malay Muslims, the founders decided to produce their early stories within a 'kampung' or village background. *Upin & Ipin* centres around the stories of an adorable pair of 5-year-old twin brothers named Upin and Ipin. It revolves around their daily lives which are filled with fun activities that involve their friends and events that allow them to learn new things. Upin and Ipin also have a younger sister, Ros. The three siblings are orphans and are raised by their grandmother, Opah.

The first six episodes of the series made its debut in September, 2007 on TV9, a local TV channel. The content at that time focused solely on the month of Ramadhan and Eid celebrations. The focus on Ramadhan and Eid was intended to instil awareness in young viewers, especially children on the significance of the Islamic holy month. Into 2008, the series became known as *Upin & Ipin: Setahun Kemudian* as the stories developed more content regarding Upin, Ipin and their friends as they underwent and shared their fasting experiences in their village, Kampung Durian Runtuh.

The third season in 2009 focused on general issues such as friendship, sharing and respecting elders. Meanwhile, the fourth season brought about new adventures through sports, such as badminton and football. The series grew even more in the fifth season when the twins and their friends learnt the ideals and ideas of humanity. They learned how to raise money for a noble cause and how to respect the uniqueness of people with special needs. The series continued to stay true to its focus on issues in influencing children, running into season six and seven with more fun and educational stories filled with moral values, tipped with humour and action.

According to journalist Rozdan Mazalan (2010), Malaysians should be proud of the two local characters of Upin and Ipin as they had created a new phenomenon within the local animation scene. What made the series unique was not only its strong 3D animated characters, which was created fully by local animators, but the uniqueness of the stories that contained positive messages which were reflected through cultural and local experiences. Local culture's content such as the 'kampung' life style is reinvented through the animated series. As the producer of LCP, Burhanuddin Md. Radzi stated in the e-zine, Majalah Niaga (Ed. 20, 2012), the story for *Upin & Ipin* must have Asian background in order to attract the target market which is the local Malay population, especially local Malay children. This is because Burhanuddin Md. Radzi did not want to create a series mirroring any Western animated series. By that, LCP come out with *Upin & Ipin* where the setup of the story is purely a village lifestyle.

*Upin & Ipin* has become a huge phenomenon as it has managed to captivate not only local audiences but also international audience. Furthermore, the series was screened on Disney Channel Asia. *Upin & Ipin*'s first season gained its first award for Best Animation at the

2007 Kuala Lumpur International Film Festival. From that point onwards, the animated series has received positive response and reception through numerous blogs, newspapers and magazines, as well as various multiple recognitions. The stories that are presented in *Upin & Ipin* are mainly stories about the daily lives of a group of Malaysian children who live in a village and away from city life. It depicts the tales of what children do and what they go through as learning experiences. Taking into consideration the psychological development of the child as well as the influence of their social and cultural environment, this research applies the theory of cognitive development by Jean Piaget to analyse the development of story content that is considered suitable for a children's programme. The theory of cognitive development is used to study mental development starting at a very young age. In parallel, the *Upin & Ipin* series is also a programme designed for young viewers. This is the primary reason for the theory of cognitive development by Jean Piaget to be considered as it is ideal to be tested on *Upin & Ipin* series.

## JEAN PIAGET: THEORY OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Jean Piaget (1969) is the first psychiatrist who concentrates on a child cognitive development. He was a French-Swiss developmental psychologist and philosopher known for his epistemological studies with children. Piaget comes up with the theory of cognitive development where he believes children learn through hands-on-experience and their success or failure affect children's cognitive development. He believes that children learn according to the four main stages and each stage has its own development.

As Piaget continues his study, he notices that a **schema** or skill for an infant happened by accidents. For example, the infant accidentally grabs a toy and put into his or her mouth to chew, the infant finds it delightful. So, the infant learns that grabbing toy is one of the skills to have fun. When the infant comes across some other new object, the infant will try to use the same schema onto the new object. This is called **assimilation**. The baby assimilates a new object into the schema he or she learnt before. But when the infant comes across another object that is not for chewing, instead it is for squeezing, he or she will accommodate the old schema to a new schema. This is called **accommodation**, where the infant learns a new skill from chew to squeeze through the new object. These assimilation and accommodation are the two sides of **adaptation**, which is a learning process. Piaget sees it as a fundamental of the biological process.

According to Piaget, assimilation and accommodation work like pendulum swings in advancing our understanding of the world and our competency in it. They are directed at a balance between the structure of the mind and the environment. This idea, he calls as **equilibrium**. As he continues his investigation of the infancy, he notices that there are periods for each assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium to dominate. And so, he develops the idea of stages of each process known as cognitive development and becomes a major contribution in a child psychological study. Piaget's reputation is also based on his written books toward child psychology and his study is accepted internationally. Most of his books are translated into at least seven different languages especially *Children and Adolescents: Interpretive Essays on Jean Piaget* (1970). Piaget's essay explains the theory on children's cognitive development that consists of four primary stages: **Sensorimotor, Pre-Operational, Concrete Operational** and **Formal Operational**. These are the stages of children's behavior according to their age.

The sensorimotor stage extends from birth until the age of two. During this stage, senses, reflexes, and motor abilities are developed rapidly. The infant uses his or her senses and motor abilities to understand the world around them. Intelligence is first displayed when reflex movements become more refined, such as when an infant reaches for a preferred toy to play, or will suck on a milk bottle and not a pacifier when hungry. These infants understand the world that involves only perceptions and objects in which the infant has direct experience with. Towards the end of the sensorimotor stage, the ability to understand something is formed such as a bottle of milk will satisfy their hunger.

The Pre-Operational is the second stage where it begins at about the age of two and lasts till the child is about seven years old. The Pre-Operational child develops mental combination by now and is able to pretend. The child is ready to understand the next level which is the used of symbol. A symbol is a thing that represents a meaning and it can be in the form of a drawing, a written word or a spoken word which is understood to represent a real thing. The symbol of the spoken word is, of course, the prime example such as "No!" as a sign to a negative instruction. Along with symbolisation, it can also create an understanding of a simple instruction throughout the experience.

The Concrete Operational stage starts from seven to twelve years old and also will be taken into the test of this research paper. The word operation refers to logical operations or principles we use when solving problems. At this stage, the child not only uses symbol representation but can also understand those symbols logically. Most children develop the ability to understand the number, length, and liquid volume. However, at the early third stage of cognitive development, their ability to logic a thing is still fragile.

Lastly, is the Formal Operational stage for the adolescents group. Adolescents who reach this fourth stage of intellectual development are able to logically use symbols related to abstract concepts, such as algebra and science. They can think about multiple variables in systematic ways, formulate hypotheses, and consider possibilities. They can also ponder abstract relationships and concepts such as justice, anger, devastation and so on. Although Piaget believes in lifelong intellectual development, he insists that the formal operational stage is the final stage of cognitive development and that continued intellectual development in adults depends on the accumulation of knowledge. In watching television, older children also develop critical thinking, about what they like and don't like, becoming more sophisticated viewers in the process. This process of engaging in critical viewing practices as part of the process in which they construct their own identities.

Piaget's research towards understanding children presumably can assist this research in understanding the methods of developing suitable content for children's animated TV programmes. To produce an animated TV series, Marx (2007) in *Writing for Animation, Comics, and Games*, suggests that "…children's animation must be geared well with educational content…" (p. 63). According to Marx, the content of a programme must be developed with a beneficial content so that any produced animation TV series is not just for the entertaining but also to educate them. *Sesame Street*, produced by Children's Television Workshop in 1969, is one of the examples of children's TV programme that reflects the idea of Marx. *Sesame Street* uses a combination concept of animation and real action in shaping its content that makes *Sesame Street* known for its educational content and creativity in entertaining children.

**LIVINGSTONE (2002) VS DAVIES (1989)**

Research by Livingstone (2002) in *Young People and New Media* argues that children's television consumption now takes place in a much more complex media environment. Livingstone reviews an academic research entitled *Television is Good for Your Kids* that was conducted in 1989 by Davies, strongly disagrees that television is an important medium for children, especially on lifestyle these days.

Every house owns a television and each family will watch television in a day and children is not exceptional in this culture. So the culture of watching television's has been formed, the content for TV programmes, especially animated series because it is close to children, must be developed in a serious manner. Through television, children are exposed to information that is useful to them and also bad information as well. Davies adds that while all children are born with an innate human capacity to learn, televisual literacy requires some learned and taught skills. She argues that children need to understand the world in which they live in, including the way that it is represented in different symbolic forms. These representations vary depending on a child's home environment (the cultural, political and socio-economic background of the family) and where they live. Literacy, therefore, is about giving children access to representations, which allow them to understand and use the systems that represent reality, including audiovisual representations of reality.

In contrast, Livingstone believes that television, the internet, radio and any social medium is not suitable to children because the input coming from the devices that cannot be controlled. This may bring bad influence for the children and cause behavior damages, such as bad attitude and reactions. Despite that, research by Davies also makes a good justification on devices like television and radio which are useful in educating children. On top of that, both types of research apply psychology manners in which reacceptance and actions should be taken to control the new media.

A research conducted by Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella for Kaiser Family Foundation (2003) titled *Electronic Media In The Lives Of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers*, reports that many studies have focused on television and children over the last three decades with a fair amount of emphasis on preschool-aged children. Infants and toddlers receive limited attention during this period. Only recently, there is an explosion in the electronic media market that targets the youngest generation in our society. Videotapes and DVDs aimed at infants, zero to 18 months, TV programmes specifically designed for children as young as 12 months and computer games for children are booming in the market all over the world. The rapid changes in our media environment have not been accompanied by a similar growth in our knowledge of how new media may impact children's cognitive, social, emotional or physical development.

The use of media in this age has a significant impact. These issues are of deep concern not only to parents but also to educators, health providers, policymakers, and advocates. Many experts have argued that it is especially critical to understand the use of media by the young children, noting that because the social and intellectual developments are more malleable in these early years. In regards to it, Kaiser Family Foundation's research reveals the media habits of infants, toddlers and preschoolers which are brand-new information and it will take some time for the academic, educational and medical communities to absorb it and determine what steps should be taken next. The most significant findings of this research for Kaiser Family Foundation are:

i.       Children six and under spend an average of two hours a day with screen media, mostly TV and videos.

ii.      TV watching begins at very early ages, well before the medical community recommends.

iii.     A high proportion of very young children are using new digital media, including 50% of four- to six-year-olds who have played video games and 70% who have used computers.

iv.    iv. Two out of three zero to six-year-olds live in homes where the TV is usually left on for at least half the time, even if no one is watching and one-third live in homes where the TV is on "almost all" or "most" of the time.

v.      Children in the latter group of homes appear to read less than other children and to be slower in learning to read.

vi.    Many parents' see media as an important educational tool, beneficial to their children's intellectual development, and parents' attitudes on this issue appear to be related to the amount of time their children spend using each medium.

vii.   Parents clearly perceive that their children's TV watching has a direct effect on their behavior, and are more likely to see the positives rather than the negative behaviours which are being copied.

Based on these significant findings of Kaiser Family Foundation, I am taking it into consideration of how and why children are watching the *Upin & Ipin* series. It answers the reason for children watching the animated series, *Upin & Ipin* and how they assess the television during the school day. This is because most of the *Upin & Ipin*'s viewers watch the series on weekdays as compared to actual new episode which is shown every weekend.

The debate usually centers on television's negative effects but, as expounded across a range of different studies, it is clear that television can enhance academic skills such as school readiness and vocabulary, as well as pro-social behaviours and critical thinking practices. Television is neither good nor bad for children, but its impact is complex in a way it affects children's knowledge, beliefs, and values. Although children rarely seek out educational content, they can derive both pleasure and learning from programmes which combine both elements. In this sense, 'edutainment' programmes such as *Teletubbies* promote learning and entertainment, are ideal for both children and adults.

## CHILDREN'S FILM

According to Wojcik-Andrews (2000) in *Children's Film: History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory*, there are many ways in defining the idea of cinema for children. Wojcik-Andrews states, "It's a complicated issue and involves a range of personal, pedagogical, critical, textual, institutional and cultural/imperial point of view. There are films aimed at children, films about childhood, and films children see regardless of whether or not they are children's film." (p.19). For example, the recently produced Disney animated film, *Tangled* (2010) which is based on a classic by the Grimm Brothers fairy tale titled *Rapunzel*.

*Rapunzel* is a German fairy tale in the collection assembled by the Grimm Brothers, and first published in 1812 as part of *Children's and Household Tales*. Rapunzel is a story of a girl named Rapunzel who is the main character of the story. She is not a lost princess stolen by a witch for her magical hair. She is just the daughter of a regular couple who gets caught stealing from a witch's vegetable garden and as a punishment, her parents have to give her away. As for *Tangled*, the story structure and characters have been improvised causing them

to become hilarious and contain romantic gestures and action sequences. This is intentionally built up in the new narrative to give the look and feel of a family movie, where it is suitable to be watched by both children and adult audiences. Although *Rapunzel* is a story for children, but over decades, the story has evolved from the small audience (children) into a bigger scope of audience. This is what Wojcik-Andrew means "there are children's films, but there is no such thing as a children's film," (p. 19) mainly due to the storyline and content which is more universal rather than based on children's content only.

Hilliard (2000) in his book *Writing for Television, Radio, and New Media* discusses the idea of television programmes for young viewers must have information, ideas, morals and entertainment that are combined together at one time. Only then these children will stay in front of the television and watch their favorite animation from the beginning to the end. Marx (2007) agrees with Hilliard and states in his book *Writing for Animation, Comics, and Games*:

> The one thing that doesn't change, whether the project is done in 2D or 3D, is the need of strong stories, compelling characters, and well-written scripts. The fact that the Oscar now includes a category for best-animated feature supports the need for top-quality writing in an art form that continues to mature. (p.42)

In the end, the story structure and development in all kinds of filmmaking is actually the most important key, and it is even a bigger challenge when writing for children's art form, especially animated TV series. This is because creating a TV series also means as to sustain the followers of that particular programme. To sustain or increase the number of followers, it depends on the ability of the programme itself. This is also identified as a part of the watching television culture.

Hence, Stabile and Harrison (2003) summarise the changing pattern from watching a movie to television, a pattern that started in the 1960s during which video cassettes were popular. Parents were convinced to let their children stay at home and watch either rented or purchased video cassettes (or VHS) at home in regards of watching movies at home is safer than going out to the cinema. But, watching at home means everybody in the family members will join the session, including children, and of course, the contents or types of the movies is appropriate for children. This video cassettes popularity has led to the culture of family movie time and from here, the TV station started to produce TV programmes. There are few programmes produced and one of the popular children's TV programmes is *Sesame Street* (1969). Flint (1996) reports that the success of the home video culture derives from the time spent at home, in front of the television. Throughout the 1990s, Disney furthered their incursions into cable and broadcast content provision in supplied animated television programmes and became the top supplier of children's programmes for television networks. This shows that the centrality of the television has opened up the opportunity to producers in creating more children's TV series to serve the needs of the children as their audience.

In addition, Buckingham (2003) mentioned that children are frequently identified as a special audience with distinctive characteristics and needs. Their behaviour can reflect what they have seen on television, especially when children nowadays spend more time in front of the television. He said, "The identification of children as a special audience for television is not simply a matter of viewing figures. On the contrary, it invokes all sorts of moral and ideological assumptions about what we believe children – and, by extension, adults – to be." (p. 468). This means that television programmes can damage children's psychology by showing certain shows that contain violence, politic, sex and many more. On the other hand,

as television is the closest medium to reach children, it can also be used as an educational tool such as beneficial and knowledgeable programmes, and especially ones that manage to surprise them. It can be either an image or sound and children will direct their attention to the television or precisely the programmes itself.

The signs of children and television are bonded, were discovered by Joan Ganz Cooney and Lloyd Morrisett, the creator of *Sesame Street*, says Lesser in *Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street*. In the book, Lesser quotes from Morrisett as they began to plan Sesame Street during the 1960s where at that time; there was a great concern about preschool education for young children. The idea that television might benefit children is a tribute to the development of television itself where by 1950s; almost every family in the United States owned a set of television. According to Morrisett, preschool children up to age six are the heaviest audience in the United States. Moreover, a child's intellectual is extremely developed during preschool years and play a major part for their learning process. And so, Cooney and Morrisett took the chance to produce a television show, to test the television's usefulness in teaching young children. The show's production company, CTW (Children's Television Workshop) in 1969, before it was changed to Sesame Workshop in 2000, has created a system of television show planning, production, and evaluation based on collaborations between producers, writers, educators, and researchers.

Early studies in the 1970s show that *Sesame Street* functioned to teach intellectual skills and also promoted friendship and other pro-social behaviour, including more positive attitudes towards children from other races. According to Lesser, children who were regular viewers of the show were rated more highly by teachers for their relationships with other children and for their school readiness than children who did not see the show. Studies of *Mr. Rogers' Neighbourhood* over time also showed that children improved pro-social skills such as persisting with tasks, assisting others, and being more cooperative after watching episodes where the characters helped others. The positive effects are stronger if accompanied by follow-up activities. This pro-social tradition is continued by more recent shows such as *Dora the Explorer*, which introduce children to different cultures.

Based on the *Sesame Street*'s discussion above, one of the criteria of a good children's programme is related to children's psychological element. Theoretically, to study children's traits and behaviour, this research paper is going to use Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development to relate how children's minds work towards *Upin & Ipin*. According to Piaget's *The Child's Conception of the World* (1926), translated by Joan and Tomlinson (2007), "The child is simply playing and if he comes to believe what he says or play with, he believes the games are true and real in his minds." (p.16). Based on this statement, it can be identified that throughout the *Upin & Ipin* series, the focus on the stories is related to the daily lives of children. The relation to daily events in a child's life draws the attention of the children and hooks them into watching the programme. As Hilliard (2000) mentioned, "the foremost principle of making children's programmes is to remember that television has an effect on the vulnerable young viewers' minds and emotions". (p.338).

Another important review by Lesser, author for *Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street* (1974) is a study of children's programmes is based on *Sesame Street* and identifies a few important elements of to catch children's attention. These elements include music and sound effects, repetition, surprise and incongruity, animation, action, humor, anticipation and diversity of programme elements. Music and sound effects in film or television are called 'background', a companion to the action and dialogues. As for children,

music and sound effects serve a bigger function to gain attention by signaling the entrance of a familiar, appealing character or episode. Music also functions as an aid to memory through memorising, especially in reciting the alphabet song and recalling orders. The reason music play a great impact towards young children is that it evokes physical participation. Children easily sway their bodies according to the simple melodies, and the 'bouncier' the tune, more physical reactions will occur.

The reappearance of a familiar character, episode or format will often recapture a child's whole attention. Repetition is another factor in eliciting attention. Lesser suggests that children seem to enjoy certain pieces of televised materials better after they have seen them several times. When children watch a single short animation for the first time it contains some surprises and a few elements that they cannot understand in a single viewing. Repetition permits children to confront the grounds and understand it even better during the next viewing. The repeated segment or scene acts as a mind-stretcher, permitting the child to return repeatedly to a subject incompletely explored during its first presentation. The use of repetition also has its limitations and must be used judiciously when repeated. As for example, long segments or slow paced sections tend to decline with repetition. Repetition will only hold attention until the different facet of a complex segment has been explored. These elements introduced by Lesser are similar to the theory of Jean Piaget as discussed earlier. Lesser's elements may be merged to Piaget's theory.

Another element spotted by Lesser is children will direct their attention to what surprises them, either through an image or sound. Television provides several means of confronting children with surprises and incongruities. Slow motion, stop action, playing videotape backward and fast action are parts of the techniques in catching their focus while watching television. Other cameras and editing techniques permit appearances and abruptness in catching attention. The animation is another production technique in creating incongruity as it is used primarily for its reversibility, producing endless cycles of annihilations and resurrections. Kael (1970) describes animation as anything that can turn magically into anything else, and children love it for the illogic that is a visual equivalent of their nursery rhymes and jingles and word games. Her opinion supports the importance of animation in children's lives because nowadays, children and animated series cannot be apart. Just when we turn on the television, there are programmes dedicated for children, and this is parallel to what has been reviewed by Wojcik-Andrews regarding children and television.

Naigles and Mayeux (2001) in *Television as Incidental Language Teacher* also find that in certain circumstances, children can learn words and their meanings from educational programmes specifically designed for them. Children under the age of two years old frequently pay attention to objects on screen and then ask questions regarding what they see. This means as that particular programme is engaging for children. Although there is not much evidence to suggest that educational programmes help children to learn grammar, but there is evidence to suggest that they can learn the meaning of words from educational programmes.

In a further study, Singer and Singer (1998) in *Research, Paradigms, Television and Social Behavior* investigate the extent to which pre-schoolers can learn unfamiliar nouns from *Barney and Friends*. Children who watch ten pre-selected episodes of the show over 2-3 weeks in a day care setting showed improvement in their vocabulary to produce correct definitions as compared to those children who did not watch the same Barney episodes. The improvements were even larger if children participated in 30-minute lessons about the

episodes after viewing. This book also suggests that the learning experience from television is enhanced through adult involvement.

Children develop different types of media literacy as they grow up. Today children start experiencing television almost from birth even if it is just on in the background. As children mature, television viewing increases due to increased comprehensibility. Anderson and Pempek (2005) in their article *Television and Very Young Children*, states that children aged 12 - 24 months paid higher levels of attention to *Teletubbies*, a programme specifically designed for them, than to *Sesame Street*, a programme targeted at older children. This act of paying attention was part of the process of developing cognitive skills. Anderson and Pempek conclude that videos and TV programmes that are directed at infants and toddlers can gain high levels of sustained attention. If the comprehension is minimal, attention to television by very young children may be purely reactive due to frequent elicitations of the orienting reaction by the visual and auditory change. On the other hand, programmes that are directed at them may be comprehensible and reflect higher cognitive processing.

*Teletubbies* is a good example of a programme that attracts high levels of active attention with singing, dancing, pointing, imitating behaviours, speaking back to the television and generally reacting enthusiastically with great joy. Several studies have shown how young children's language acquisition can benefit from television. In a study, Lemish and Rice (1986) find that babies and toddlers who watched *Sesame Street* learnt vocabulary, concepts of shapes and colours, and could identify letters and numbers if they were aided by parents. It shows that some pre-school programmes, but not all, can lead to larger vocabularies and higher expressive language (word production) among young children under 30 months. Some programmes, such as *Blue's Clues*, and *Dora the Explorer*, include on-screen characters talking to the child, encourage participation, label objects and invite children to respond, were positively related to expressive language production and vocabulary. These animated TV programmes are proven by researchers, Lemish and Rice, as powerful in playing an important role as an educational medium through media in learning basic academic skills. The *Upin & Ipin* series is not similar to *Sesame Street*, *Blue's Clues* or *Dora the Explorer* but it is more similar to programmes such as *Arthur and Clifford*, which had a strong narrative. The programme is visually appealing and contains opportunities to hear words and their definitions also appeared to support language acquisition.

Marx (2007) and Morrisett (1974) agree that children and television are bonded, and requires a good content so that it can educate children. In determining the criteria of suitable contents, this research applies Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development in assessing and determining appropriate content for children's animation. The research evaluates the *Upin & Ipin* series based on its programme content with the focus on its more popular episodes, those of high ratings. Piaget's study on intellectual development focused on his own three children, in which a theory was created to describe the stages that children experience as a process of developing their intelligence and formal thought processes. Piaget's early work with Alfred Binet had led him to conclude that children think differently than adults. It was this observation that inspired his interest in understands how knowledge grows throughout childhood.

## *UPIN & IPIN* THROUGH PIAGET'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

From the evaluation of the *Upin & Ipin*'s series through Piaget's theory of cognitive development and identification of their story and content, it can be assessed that the:

    i. Storyline is simple;

    ii. Dialogues used are short and simple, but proper

    iii. Combines various genres, themes and moral values in its storyline.

### Storyline

Most of the *Upin & Ipin*'s stories centers around simple plots or small things that occur during one's childhood. But when it comes to a heavy story, such as earth pollution in episode 28, 29 and 30, Season 8 titled *Upin & Ipin Dan Ultraman* in 2014, the overview of the earth pollution will be minimised and scaled down to a child's perspective. This is important when it comes to a children's story. A child will never consider adult's problem as their problem and this is proven through the research made by Kaiser Family Foundation. As for earth pollution issues, Les' Copaque Production collaborated with Tsuburaya Productions Co. Ltd, a Japanese company who produced the *Ultraman* series. The appearance of a superhero *Ultraman* itself managed to engage the audience into the story but the main objective of the episode is to deliver the message. To achieve it, the story of *Upin & Ipin* must be told as simple as possible, yet fun and engaging from the children's point of view.

Using the concept of child's imagination of being part of Ultraman's life, Upin and Ipin play a role as rangers who work in the department to save planet Earth from any danger, which is eventually was just a hallucination. The story is about a day when planet Earth was attacked by a monster that is attracted to air pollution. The more smoke created by human, the stronger the monster will be. This is a simple concept introduced by *Upin & Ipin* to make children understand the consequence of pollution. A child has difficulty understanding heavy issues. But, when it is described in a simple way, children are able to understand the message. This storyline concept of keeping it as simple as possible is used in almost every episode of *Upin & Ipin* and is proven successful in helping children understand.

### Dialogue

Dialogue is important in every story unless it is a silent movie. In *Upin & Ipin*, each dialogue, especially for the children's character such as Upin, Ipin, Mail, Mei Mei, Ehsan. Jarjit and other friends are constructed short and simple. No difficult vocabularies are used by these characters in order to make the characters realistic and relevant as a child will only speak in a very simple way using the familiar words around them. And the style of language is minimalist based on the grammar used. This may sound contradictory and inappropriate to the usage of the national language, Bahasa Melayu. To maintain the realistic speech of real life conversation, *Upin & Ipin* is willing to take a risk and maintain the daily conversation style in the series. However, this step is limited to where a dialogue may sound short as compared to complete sentences, but the usage of grammar is still in a proper way. The rules of grammar: subject and predicate in constructing a sentence are preserved well, including other grammar rules. Again, this is purposely constructed to make the proper local language sounded more attractive to children's ears and later, help them to memorize and learn the vocabulary.

Even though there are comments and feedbacks from parents say that the *Upin & Ipin* does not using proper language and parents are concerned that their children may not be able to speak in a correct language, the positive responses outweigh this negative aspect. Based on emails shared by Nur Naquyah Burhanuddin sent to Les' Copaque Production, some parents from foreign country mention that their child learns Bahasa Melayu through *Upin & Ipin*. Few classes teaching Bahasa Melayu for foreigners also used the *Upin & Ipin* as a reference in class to make the student understand the local language. This proved that technique of *Upin & Ipin* not only worked for local children but also children from international countries. It shows that the usage of dialogues in *Upin & Ipin* reflects the true culture and essence Malaysia.

## Combination of Genre and Moral Values

Every story is based on a message that is conveyed to the audience. From a message, a particular story will be expanded in many fascinating ways to deliver that message. In *Upin & Ipin*, the basis story is a minimal issue. For an example, episode *Kembara Kecil-Kecilan* center on a story about gratitude. It teaches children to appreciate things that you have, because sometimes, we wish for things that are only beautiful at the beginning or the outside but the truth is actually ugly. Upin and Ipin think being tiny as an ant may ease them to do a lot of things, including escaping from Ros, their sister. But it turns out that, when they are tiny, many difficulties await them. To embrace this moral of values, the storyline needs to be drafted as engaging to attract children's interest. If the story only reflects the plot on moral values, it will lose its interest on the creativity part of children's interest. Children's interest is an element as Lesser introduced earlier: music and sound effects, repetition, surprise and incongruity, animation, action, humor, anticipation and diversity of programme elements. Therefore, the story of *Upin & Ipin* is usually combines these elements in an episode through genre and moral value.

In *Kembara Kecil-Kecilan*, genre fantasy is combined to gratitude moral value in order to make it more interesting, rather than a flat story of twins must appreciate what they have in their live. There are actions parts in the fantasy part where they become tiny and from there, the story teaches children that being tiny may seem fun for certain parts, but there are also consequences. The combination of this genre and moral value apparently grabs the children's interest on the fantasy part only, but since the fantasy element overshadowed the whole story, subconsciously the children or audience absorb the moral value throughout the story. This can be seen in episode 40, 41 and 42 from Season 7, titled *Boria Suka-Suka* in 2013. The story combines musical genre with an honorable message from UNICEF of love, respect and care for the women. *Boria Suka-Suka* manages to escape the cliché of a story to respect elders, especially women into the local songs from Penang, Boria. This combination plays a big role as a camouflage tool to hide the weaknesses parts of a story and may be applied to any style of storytelling.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to rationalise Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development in relation to the development of content for the *Upin & Ipin* series, whose viewership consists mainly of children. These findings have proven that children's development on televisual skills must be in line with their cognitive development. This is because children do not perceive television in the same way that adults do.

Age and linguistic maturity determine how a child will respond to and engage with television. According to Piaget's four stages of cognitive development, it can be applied to television experience. 2 – 7 years old children during the Pre-Operational stage are acquiring language. Thus, they develop representational thinking skills which allow them to talk about their experience of television. Between 7 - 12 years old, the Concrete Operational stage, children begin to engage in abstract thoughts which allow them to understand the medium's codes and conventions which enable them to follow storylines. They develop level of perception and is called as televisual literacy. Televisual literacy refers to allowing them to understand the chunks and segments that constitute a television programme and how they are linked.

Television programme can be beneficial to children. It can bring them into a contact with aspects of life they would not otherwise become aware of. It can provide a valuable tool at home and at school not simply to keep children occupied but also, if used appropriately, as a constructive way to use their time. Television is a channel through which a range of entertainment, drama and learning at the same time. This is what *Upin & Ipin* has an imprint on children's lives nowadays.

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