



Analysis of Teacher's Role in Freedom Writers Film

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the importance of the teacher's role in creating a meaningful learning process, as depicted in the film "Freedom Writers." The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of the teacher shown in the film based on Jeremy Harmer's theory of the teacher's role and to examine the emerging discourse using Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method, with data collection techniques through observation and documentation of dialogue and scenes in the film. The results indicate that the teacher in "Freedom Writers" plays the role of controller, prompter, participant, resource, and tutor. Critical discourse analysis reveals that text structure, social cognition, and social context significantly influence the portrayal of the teacher's role in the film. This research is expected to inspire and serve as a reflection for teachers and prospective teachers in educating students.

Keywords: CDA1; Freedom Writers film 2; Teacher's role 3

INTRODUCTION

Education is an effort in various ways so that students are able to develop themselves actively which includes reasoning, intelligence in science, mental skills, spiritual strength, self-control, and other skills (Sanga & Wangdra, 2023). One of the important aspects of education in Indonesia is the teaching of English as a foreign language. Language plays an important role in human life because language is a means of human communication in daily life (Setiyono et al., 2021). Wherever we go, when we can speak English it will help when we communicate with foreigners even though we don't speak the language of that country, because English is an international language. As a universal language, English is the language used in the world of technology, education, politics, business, and so on (Wengrum & Nurhartanto, 2021). Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Indonesia has its challenges because English is not a second language, but is a foreign language that is rarely used in daily life, especially in rural areas. Therefore, English learning in schools is often formal and limited to the classroom. Teachers must know if their students do not speak English in their environment and they learn English not only as a compulsory subject but as a necessity to be used in society and daily life. Creating awareness in students to love English will be the main key to fostering an interest in learning English.

Several recent studies highlight the role of teachers in supporting English learning in Indonesia. A good teacher is a teacher who has a wise, mature, steady, authoritative personality, so that he can be an example for his students (Nalapraya 2023). The role of teachers in general is to educate, teach, and train. The role of teachers in schools is to be able to position themselves as a second parent and be able to attract the sympathy of students so that any lesson given should be a motivation for students to teach. In the educational process, teachers hold a central position as facilitators, motivators, and mentors in the academic journey and life of students. The definition of a teacher is someone who has devoted himself or herself to teaching a science, educating, directing, and training his students to understand the science taught (Dewi Safitri, S.Sos.I 2019). Being a student really requires the role of a teacher to help in the process of self-development, talents and abilities that students have (Fitriani Basri, Harlina Sahib 2023). Teachers have an important role in the management of learning activities carried out by students in achieving the desired learning goals (Ahmad Zamhari et al., 2024) The role of a teacher is not only to teach but also to teach by transferring good values and morals to students. According to Jeremy Harmer in his book *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (2007; 108-113), the role of teachers in the context of learning is very diverse and can be categorized into several different roles. Each role has specific goals and benefits, and understanding these roles can assist teachers in creating a more effective and enjoyable learning environment. Effective teachers must be able to adapt and switch between various roles of controllers, prompter, participants, resources, and tutors according to the situation at hand. By understanding and implementing these roles, teachers can create a more dynamic learning environment and support student development optimally. Despite these insights, many studies in Indonesia have primarily discussed English teaching in general terms and have not deeply explored how teacher's roles are represented in specific real life or media contexts.

From the review above, it becomes clear that there is a gap between the theoretical discussion of teachers' roles and their practical implementation in real-life contexts. Previous studies have not fully examined how teacher roles can be represented and analyzed through critical discourse, particularly in media such as films that portray educational realities. The film *Freedom Writers* provides a relevant case, as it depicts the inspirational journey of Erin Gruwell in guiding marginalized students through her multiple roles as a teacher. *Freedom Writers* is an American film released in 2007 directed by Richard LaGravenese. The film is adapted from the book *The Freedom Writers Diary* published in 1999 written by Erin Gruwell. This film tells the story of the struggle of a teacher named Erin Gruwell to arouse the learning spirit of her students who come from a neighborhood that at that time was threatened with riots in Los Angeles in 1992. However, scholarly attention to this film from a linguistic and critical discourse perspective remains limited.

In this study, the researcher wants to delve into the "Analysis of the Role of Teachers in the Film *Freedom Writers*" which focuses on how teachers as controllers, prompters, participants, resources, and tutors and The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model of Teun A. Van Dijk, which includes text structure, social cognition, and social context in the film "Freedom Writers". This research is expected to provide insight and inspiration, especially for prospective teachers or educators, about the importance of the role of teachers in creating change and building a better generation. Based on the description above, the researcher was able to decipher the problem issues in this study including:

1. How is the role of teachers shown in the movie *Freedom Writers* based on Jeremy Harmer's theory?
2. How is the representation of the role of the teacher analyzed using the Teun A. van Dijk Critical Discourse Analysis model?

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of Harmer's pedagogical framework with van Dijk's CDA model to examine teacher representation in a film narrative. By doing so, this study not only contributes to the understanding of teacher roles in English language education but also highlights the potential of films as reflective media for teacher education and professional development.

METHOD

This type of research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, because it aims to analyze the role of teachers in the film *Freedom Writers* in depth through the interpretation of the meaning contained in the dialogues, scenes, and actions of the characters. Qualitative research is a research process to understand human or social phenomena by creating a comprehensive and complex picture that can be presented in words, reporting detailed views obtained from informant sources, and carried out in a natural setting (Walidin, Saifullah & Tabrani, 2015: 77). This approach was chosen because it is by the purpose of research that wants to uncover the hidden meaning behind discourse.

The qualitative analysis that the author will use is the discourse analysis of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model from Teun A. van Dijk, which emphasizes three dimensions of analysis: text, social cognition, and social context. Discourse analysis is defined as an attempt to reveal the hidden intentions of the subject who makes the statement. Meanwhile, the presentation is descriptive analysis, as it aims to describe and interpret the role of teachers as controllers, prompters, participants, resources, and tutors in the film *Freedom Writers*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. *The Role of Teachers as Controllers in Freedom Writers Films*



Erin Gruwell: "I want you to move to this front seat right here now"

Jamal: What?

Erin: Come on. I'm sick of these antics in my classroom.

Jamal: Well there you are. I was wondering when you were gonna lose that damn smile.

Erin: Switch with Ben. Come on.

Ben: I Can't go back there alone.

Erin: It'll be fine.

Ben: No, it won't

Sindy: I'm not sitting near him

Erin: All right, you know what? I want you to all the move to this side of the room. You in the back up here. Sindy and all of you move to the back. Come on. Let's go, Now!

Erin Gruwell's role as a controller is evident early in the film, when she enters a chaotic and hostile classroom. She quickly takes control by establishing rules, arranging student seating, and leading the class with firmness but composure. Her actions, including creating a lesson plan and managing student conflict, demonstrate the need for structure and assertiveness in a disorganized environment. Despite student resistance, Erin's approach helps create a more comfortable learning environment, which is crucial in the early stages when trust and camaraderie are yet to be established.

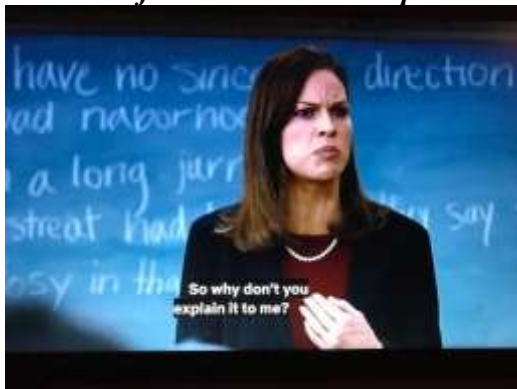
2. *The role of teachers as Promter in Freedom Writers Film*



"Erin Gruwell: Everyone has their own story. And it's important for you to tell your own story, even to yourself. We're gonna write every day in these journals. You can write about whatever you want, the past, the present, the future. You can write it like a diary, or you can write songs, poems, any good thing, bad thing, anything. But you have to write every day. And they won't be graded. How can i give an A or a B for writing the truth, right? and i will not read them unless you give me permission"

In Freedom Writers Film, this role is evident as Erin Gruwell gives the students a journal and encourages them to write down their own life stories. He does not judge their writing and will only read journals if allowed by the students. This approach greatly encourages students' confidence and autonomy. Erin helps students who aren't used to sharing or writing to start opening up slowly.

3. *The role of teachers as Participants in Freedom Writers Film*



Erin Gruwell: So why don't you explain it to me?

In Freedom Writers Film, this role is seen in one of the scenes when Erin Gruwell is directly involved in a class discussion. The context in this class scene is Erin Gruwell telling the students about the Holocaust and then the students feel that the teacher is judging them so

that there is one student who can't accept it and makes Erin ask the students, "So, why don't you explain it to me?" This speech shows that the teacher is acting as a participant because at that moment the teacher joins the discussion by asking questions to the students. This sentence is simple yet powerful. Instead of rejecting or reprimanding students' opinions, Erin invites students to dialogue equally and positions herself as an active listener in the discussion. This shows that he or she is prepared to understand the student's point of view and provide space for them to express their own thoughts as well as experiences.

4. *The role of teachers as Resouce in Freedom Writers Film*



Erin Gruwell: "I want each of you to step forward and take one of these Borders bags, which contain the four books we're gonna read this semester. They're very speacial books, and they each remind me, in some way, of each of you"

This statement is not only about sharing books, but also relating the content of the book to students' personal experiences. Erin wants students to find meaning in reading, feel emotionally connected, and learn through self-reflection. This shows that he as a teacher provides relevant resources, yet still lets students discover their own meaning.

5. *The role of teachers as tutors in Freedom Writers Films*



Erin: Now, I have one final project in mind.

Eva: Ms. G wanted us to put our diaries together in a book, just like Anne Frank. She got this businessman, John Tu, to donate 35 computers so we could work. She told us we have something to say to people. We weren't just kids in a class anymore. We were writers with our own voices, our own stories. And even if nobody else read it. The book would be something to leave behind that said we were here, this is what happened, we mattered. Even if was just to each other and we won't forget. Ms. G didn't promise it would get published or anything, but we could get it out there ourselves. She asked us to come up

with a title, something to call ourselves.

Through this project, Erin demonstrates the dedication and role of the tutor in real life, she guides the writing process, gives students space to tell their life stories in an authentic way, and gives them the confidence that their voices are worth reading and remembering. It also does not promise popularity, but rather instills the meaning that their writings are a legacy that proves their existence as meaningful individuals.

Discussion

This research aims to find out what roles are contained in the film *Freedom Writers*. Based on the results of the analysis conducted by the researcher, this study revealed that the role of teachers shown in the film *Freedom Writers* is very relevant to the theory of the role of teachers according to Jeremy Harmer (2007), namely as controllers, prompters, participants, resources, and tutors. Each role is analyzed through the Critical Discourse Analysis approach of the Teun A. van Dijk model, which includes the structure of the text, social cognition, and social context.

In the role of controller, Erin Gruwell showed firm mastery of the classroom at the beginning of teaching. He set seating rules to create a more structured and orderly classroom atmosphere. Through CDA, it is seen that microstructures such as firm word choice and direct syntax reflect a strong controlling role. Cognitively, Erin understands the importance of creating a sense of security before building a learning process. In a social context, this seating arrangement is done to change old habits where it is common to sit with a racial group. This role shows that strict initial control is not just a disciplinary action, but an important foundation for fostering respect and order in the classroom against the backdrop of conflict.

As a prompter, Erin uses an empathetic approach in encouraging students to write journals. It does not force, but rather provides space for freedom and a guarantee of privacy. The superstructure shows a resolution that builds a sense of security and confidence of the student. Soft and repetitive language choices such as "you can write" reinforce a supportive atmosphere that makes students feel wanted. In a social context, this approach seeks to change or influence the education system that has not provided enough space for students from marginalized groups to voice their opinions. This role also reflects how subtle nudges from teachers can reactivate students' narrative awareness, helping them rediscover their own identities and voices through writing.

The role of the participant is shown by Erin as she not only teaches but also engages in discussions. The dialogue "So why don't you explain it to me?" reflects his willingness to be a listener and an active participant to give their opinions. This builds equality between teachers and students. Socially, Erin's participation reduces tension and increases interaction between ethnic groups that were originally hostile to each other so that the atmosphere is fluid and comfortable. Through this role, teachers transform from authoritarian figures to discussion partners, strengthening democratization in an equal and mutually respectful learning process.

As a resource, Erin provides students with emotionally relevant books. He not only provides teaching materials, but relates them to the real lives of students. Microanalysis shows that word choices such as "special books" and "remind me of you" create an emotional bond with students. The social context shows that Erin challenges educational exclusion by opening up access to meaningful literacy. Furthermore, it serves as a bridge between the outside world and the student world, allowing them to learn from figures who went through similar struggles, while expanding students' insight and empathy for history and humanity.

In the role of tutor, Erin guided the *Freedom Writers* Diary writing project intensively and personally. He assisted students in compiling their life narratives as a form of identity

affirmation. The structure of the CDA shows a transition from self-doubt to strong self-belief and articulation. Socially, the project became a form of resistance to a system that marginalized student voices, and Erin became the liaison that made this transformation possible. The role of the tutor demonstrates the importance of consistent and personalized mentoring in helping students formulate the meaning of their lives, believe in their potential, and make personal experiences a force for change.

Overall, these findings reinforce that the role of teachers is very important in teaching activities not only to deliver material but as controllers, prompters, participants, resources, and tutors to awaken students' interest in learning and create an inclusive and empowering learning environment. Critical discourse analysis shows that teacher language is not only a means of communication, but also a means of power, liberation, and empowerment. The film *Freedom Writers* clearly illustrates how teaching practices can become an arena of social change when carried out with full awareness of social context, student cognition, and relationship dynamics in the classroom. Through the CDA approach, this study shows that teachers' communication strategies have a significant impact on shaping the social structure of the classroom, changing students' mindsets, and creating more humane and transformative learning spaces.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research that the author conducted on the role of teachers according to Jeremy Harmer's theory, namely as controllers, prompters, participants, resources, and tutors and the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model of Teun A. van Dijk, which includes the structure of the text, social cognition, and social context in the film "*Freedom Writers*". So, the results of the research conducted by the author produce the following conclusions:

The results of the study revealed that the main character, Erin Gruwell, played several key roles in the teaching and learning process, namely as a controller, prompter, participant, resource, and tutor. Each of these roles contributes to building an inclusive, engaging, and empowering classroom environment, especially for students from intergang and racial riot backgrounds. So that students who used to come from the worst classes filled with the children with the lowest grades in school due to the influence of the riots that occurred in 1992, where gang violence and racial conflicts peaked, turned into individuals who had a high enthusiasm for learning, were able to work together positively, and showed significant academic and character development. This change cannot be separated from the role of teacher Erin Gruwell who not only teaches, but also understands the social, emotional, and psychological backgrounds of her students. With a personal strategy approach and the use of learning materials that are interesting and relevant to students' real lives, Erin is able to create strong emotional bonds, build trust, and open spaces for students to express themselves. This shows that the role of teachers is very important in shaping the character of students.

From the analysis of critical discourse, it is clear that teachers' communication structures (macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure) support the values of equality, justice, and student voice. Social cognition and social context also play an important role in shaping teachers' interactions and strategies in addressing racial, cultural, and socioeconomic challenges in the classroom. Thus, it can be concluded that teacher communication described through the critical discourse approach does not stand alone, but is strongly influenced and shaped by the social reality and individual cognition of teachers. This communication strategy is an important tool in building healthy relationships between teachers and students, as well as a means to foster a more equitable and open learning environment.

Overall, this study confirms that the role of teachers is not limited to delivering material, but also to be a person who helps change for the better, motivator, and emotional support for students. The film *Freedom Writers* depicts how effective and empathetic teaching can transform the lives of students, especially those who face a lot of pressure.

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