

**THE SEARCH FOR MEANING OF EXISTENCE IN *FREEDOM*
WRITERS MOVIE BY RICHARD LAGRAVENESE (2007);
EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH**



RESEARCH PAPER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Freedom Writers is the American movie that has true story of what happening today in America. This movie is a good and definitely has a value. And it is the truth about somebody who has braved to stand up to do something for change the future of teenagers. *Freedom Writers* was released on 5 January 2007. This movie is directed by Richard LaGravenesse. The story is based on a true story about a high school teacher named Erin Gruwell, and her English class students who overcome huge obstacles and use the power of writing to turn their lives around. It is a true story of what happening today in America. This movie has duration about 123 minutes. The starring are Hilary Swank as Erin Gruwell, Imelda Staunton as Margaret Campbell (The Head of department in Woodrow Wilson School), April L. Hernandez as Eva Benitez, Patrick Dempsey as Scott Casey (Erin's husband), those four are the major character. There are also nine minor characters, like Scott Glenn as Steve Gruwell (Erin's father), Jason Finn as Marcus, Deance Wyatt as Jamal Hill, Mario as Andre Bryon, Kristin Herrera as Gloria Munez, Robert Wisdom as Dr. Carl Cone, John Benjamin Hickey as Brian Gilford, Pat Carroll as Miep Gies, Jacklyn Ngan as Cindy Nigor. Music by Mark Isham, Cinematography is Jim Denault, Editing by David Moritz, Distributed by Paramount Pictures. The background country is USA and using English language, with budget is \$21 million and gross revenue is \$43,090,741. *Freedom Writer* garnered a number

of nominations in the 2007 film awards season, in the Academy Awards. Beside that this movie has got the two awards. The first is from humanitas prize (2007), for category feature film category, and the result is won. The second is from images awards (2008), for category Outstanding Writing in a Motion Picture (Theatrical or Television), and the result is just nominated.

The director of this film is Richard LaGravenese, he is not only as a director but also as a writer in this film. He was born on October 30th, 1959 Brooklyn, New York, USA. He is also got the award nominated for Oscar another 4 wins & 7 nominations. He Jump to filmography as: Writer, Director, Producer, Actor, Thanks, Self. He is as a writer in production: 2000s, 1990s, and 1980s. There are many his works. They are *The Oscar* (film), a 1966 comedy about a film star, *Oscar* (1967 film), a comedy starring Louis de Funès, *Oscar* (1991 film), a remake of the 1967 film, starring Sylvester Stallone. This movie was directed by Richard LaGravenese. He had written *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (2010) (filming) (screenplay), P.S. *I Love You* (2007) (screenplay), *Freedom Writers* (2007).

Erin Gruwell is in the beginning of a new teacher in Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach since the riots. Hilary Swank plays the role of Erin Gruwell, a new teacher who leaves the safety her hometown, Newport Beach, to teach at Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach. This region has new integration program puts the students of all backgrounds and races in a class together. Her effort to be a good teacher for her students and she never give up until her students to be better. Her enthusiasm quickly dwindles away when she realizes that her class is unteachable students. They must be forced into class by security guards and segregate themselves into racial group in the

classroom. The tension is apparent every time students from one race look at those from another. Not only does she meet opposition from her students, she also has a hard time with her head of department, who believes she should focus less on teaching her students to learn and read, and more on teaching them discipline and obedience.

One night, two students' of Erin Gruwell, Eva, a Jewish girl and her gank, also a Cambodian refugee, Cindy, meet themselves together with their own gank in the same convenience store. Another student, Grant Rice (Armand Jones), is found frustrated at losing an arcade game and asks for a refund from the owner of the store. He is so angry and breaks out the things in the store. When he storms out, Eva's boy friend left his seat of the car and tries to shoot, accidentally killing Cindy's boy friend. As Eva is witness, so she intends to protect her own kind her race.

At school, after the staff of teacher has been had a meeting, Gruwell comes to the class and intercepts a racist' students drawing one of her students. From that event, Gruwell is conscious about the problem and she uses it to teach them about Holocaust. She gradually begins to earn their trust and buys them competition books to record their diaries, in which they talk about their experience of being abused like seeing their friends die, and being evicted. Therefore no supporting from the head of department, Erin find two part – time jobs to pay more books to buy more book about Holocaust. According to her, this is the best way that she can do. She also spends more time in school, it makes disappoint to her husband (Patrick Dempsey). Her students start to behave with respect and learn more books. A transformation is especially visible in one of her students, Marcus (Jason Finn). She invites several

Holocaust survivors to talk with her class about their experiences and takes them on a field trip to the Museum of Tolerance. Meanwhile, her unorthodox teaching methods are scorned by her colleagues and department chair Mss. Margareth Champbell (Imelda Staunton). Mss. Champbell does not like to see her success in teaching the students who unteachable. Beside that Erin has a big problem in her family. She is in a divorcing process with her husband. Her husband does not agree with Erin do. He thinks about his disagreement life that he has. Erin has a difficult situation. But her father always supports her. She has a great father.

In class, when reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Marcus gives Erin idea to all students to write a letter to Miep Gies (Pat Carroll), the woman who sheltered Anne Frank from the German soldier. Then they collect the fund to invite Miep Gies. After they raise the money to bring her over, she tells her experiences hiding Anne Frank. When Marcus tells her as his hero, she denies it, claiming she was merely doing the right thing. Her denial causes Eva to think lying during her testimony. When she testifies, she finally breaks down and tells the truth, much to some of her family members' dismay. Meanwhile, Gruwell asks her students to write their diaries book form. She compiles the entries and names it *The Freedom Writers*.

Margaret tells her she cannot teach her kids for their junior year. She fights this decision, eventually convincing the superintendent to allow her teaches her kids' junior and senior year. The movie ends with a note that Gruwell successfully brought many of her students to graduation and college.

This movie concludes drama because it ends with happy ending in which Erin Gruwell and her students are very happy, to know themselves, and

able to write daily life in the diary and write in computer. *The Freedom Writers* movie drama is interesting movie. There are many kinds of the reactions from the society about of this film. There are persons that suppose this movie is great movie and there are people that feel unlike toward this film. These are two examples of society's reaction toward the Freedom Writer movie. Dion & Serenity Adelaide, SA (31 Mar 2007) stated that "Worth the entry charge my partner and me went along not knowing what to expect. We enjoyed it so much that we're both waiting for it to be available for purchase. When you throw in some racial tension into the mix it is really sad to see this type of racial violence going on. You only have to look in our own backyard to see this sort of situation occurring. It is highly recommended in viewing." Debbie and Kyle Perth, WA (26 Mar 2007) also stated that "best I have seen in a while I took my 20 - year - old son with me to see this film. He was the first to say it was a great movie. We had a few laughs a few tears and we actually learned a thing or two about history. The story was great and there were some very real lessons for us all to think about."

Nevertheless, *Freedom Writers* movie also invites contra, one of them is noted by Dr. Pezz, and she said that this movie is too vulgar movie in violence. Thus, it is not suitable to watch in all age of child. Because, according to her opinion, if the audiences of this movie are children, it can be copied in violence if there are no parents beside them. It proves to all people that the thing that they impress well even the best, for other people it does not certain to another yet. She also said she has an admitted bias, as a white person she tries to enter the school and saves the minority races of children.

Then, the research discovers four reasons why choosing this movie. First, from character and characterization, the major character of this movie gives many inspirations in education. Gruwell gives a very exciting and wonderful behavior as a teacher by showing a high dedication in her students and gives the proof of her said. This movie gives the researcher many ideas in developing many models of teaching practice. In this occasion knowing the informal method in teaching is very important in increasing students' ability in mastering language firstly in English. It makes initiatives of the researcher more progress in developing teaching models. Second, plot the story of *Freedom Writer* is so interesting because it starts from the top of conflict that real happens directly in California generally and it portrays Woodrow Wilson High School as the specific object. Third, setting of this movie is in California and this movie gives the real event that happens in California before this movie has made. Then, the last reason is the casting. The researcher focuses on Hillary Swank as Erin Gruwell, the major character. She plays the major character well. Her character is almost suitable with the real Erin Gruwell in real event. She is able to play the behaviors an ideal teacher well. Theme in this term is the exactness in search for meaning of existence in choice is determining the future.

Searching for meaning of existence becomes a term that is chosen by the researcher of this movie. The searching for existence is actually one of man's efforts in building his meaning of life. Somebody can find his meaning of his life when the man thinks that he is able to manage to actualize his idealism. From this actualization his idealism, a man can find his identity. Then, in the scope of societies the existence will be developed and grown up.

The term existence can be seen from two sides, in outside a man appears to be just another natural creature and from inside he is an entire universe, the center of infinity.

Man is equal, but existentially man has his own world, which differs from another. It is understandable only in the term individual's existence, his particular experience of life. Thus, to understand a man, somebody cannot merely appreciate form the physics. A man is valuable if he has an existence rather than has being or essence. A man's experience is unique, radically different as of everyone else's. It can be understood truly in the term of his involvement on life or commitment to it.

The researcher turns to analyze *Freedom Writers* movie based on the perspective of existentialist because of the two considerations, the first is Erin Gruwell exists as a woman who has two roles in her life as a teacher and as a wife. It is a unique movie. She touches the researcher's the deepest heart in giving high dedication in teaching although the students have many problems in their life about races. The second is that the movie has great possibility to know the phenomenon in searching for meaning of existence using existentialist approach of the major character. In this study the researcher encourages himself to give a title **THE SEARCH FOR MEANING OF EXISTENCE IN *FREEDOM WRITERS* MOVIE BY RICHARD LAGRAVENESE; EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH.**

B. Literature Review

As far as the writer knows, there are two researchers have conducted to study the *Freedom Writers* movie in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

The first previous researcher is Astuti (UMS, 2009) in her paper *The Influence of Learning Model on Student's Personality Development in Freedom Writers Movie: Educational Psychology Approach*. In this research, the researcher employs qualitative method. She uses two data sources. First, primary data source is the movie itself and the secondary data sources are books, internet, journal, etc. The method of data collection is descriptive technique. Based on the analysis, the result of this study source that the students' personality in school can be formed by a teacher whom understand his or her roles as the teacher based on educational psychology and also he or she has to know the characteristic of the adult learners. A teacher is an agent of change. This research has the same object, *Freedom Writers* movie. The difference of this research is from the approach of the research.

Second, Dewi Erna Patmawati (UMS,2009) in her paper *Struggle for Existence in Erin Gruwell Freedom Writers* directed by Richard LaGranevese: *An Individual Psychological Approach*. According to her the object of this research is the movie entitled *Freedom Writers* by Richard LaGraneverse. The major problem of this study is how the struggle for existence reflected in Erin Gruwell's a major character of *Freedom Writers*; therefore the objective of the study is to analyze *Freedom Writers* based on structural element and to analyze main character based on individual psychological approach. This study belongs to qualitative study.

She uses two data sources; they are primary and secondary data. The primary data is *Freedom Writers* movie directed by Richard LaGravenerse. The secondary data sources are the books about psychology and the other sources, which are related to the analysis. Based on the analysis, the study

reveals there are some motives underlying the struggle of Erin Gruwell. The motives are, getting safety in the job, family, respected by other and the last motive is to actualize the potential as professional teacher.

The differences of this study and two previous studies are in the perspective of the research. The first researcher uses Educational Psychology Approach. In her research the teacher must know the development of a psychology a student. The teacher has to know the characteristic adult learners. Then, the second researcher said that the profession as a teacher is a motivation to get more safety job in family, respected by other and the last motive is to actualize the potential as professional teacher. Then, the similar previous research with this research is it has the same object, there is *Freedom Writer* movie.

C. Problem Statement

The problem statement in this research is “how is Gruwell’s search for meaning of existence consciousness for her students to stop the violence and make them aware of their behaviors reportrayed in LaGravenese’s in *Freedom Writers* movie.

D. Limitation of the Study

The researcher focuses on the analysis of Erin Gruwell’s search for meaning of existence as a teacher to do the best of teacher’s duty and the major character in Richard LaGravenese’s movie, viewed from the existentialist perspective.

E. Objective of the Study

Based on the problem statement and background of the study above Gruwell gives her student what is the meaning of existence by showing the

previous tragedy and makes them to be one and makes them aware about the wrong behavior. In this term, the objective of the study is to analyze the *Freedom Writers* movie by using existentialist theory.

F. Benefit of the Study

The benefit of this research will be:

1. Theoretically

- a. To give some information which can be used by the other researcher who are interested in analyzing this literary work.
- b. To give a contribution to the literary research especially in the study of the *Freedom Writers* movie.

2. Practically

- a. For getting deeper understanding about existentialist issues in the *Freedom Writers* movie.
- b. For getting bachelor degree of education in English Department.

G. Research Method

1. Object of the Study

The object of the study is Richard LaGravenesse's *Freedom Writers* publishing by Paramount and DreamWorks Pictures in 2007.

2. Type of the Study

The type of this research is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative is a type of research, which result the descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from the observed object.

3. Type of Data and Data Source

- a). Type of Data

The data of this study are image and text in *Freedom Writers* movie by Richard LaGravenese.

b). Data Source

1. The primary data source is the film and script of *Freedom Writers* movie directed by Richard LaGravenese which is related to the study.
2. The secondary data sources are the books and other sources that support the analysis.

4. Method of Collecting Data

The method of data collection in this study is note-taking and image-capturing. The researcher views the primary data repeatedly to reach more understanding of source. Next, the writer takes, compares, quotes, and studies others data into some categories and develops them into a good unity.

5. Technique for Analyzing Data

In analyzing the data, the researcher employs the descriptive analysis in Erin Gruwell's search for meaning of life as a teacher to do the best of teacher's duty and the major character in Richard LaGravenese's movie, viewed from the existentialist perspective.

H. Research Paper Organization

This paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is introduction which explains background of the study, literary review, problem statement, and limitation of the study, objective of the study, benefit of the study, research method, and research paper organization. The second chapter is underlying theory of Existentialist perspective. The third chapter consists of structural analysis of the

movie and discussion. The fourth chapter consists of analysis based on Existentialist approach. In addition, the last chapter is conclusion and suggestion.