

Efforts to Improve the Quality of Education
in Freedom Writers by Richard LaGravenese

Refi Perdana¹, An Fauzia R. Syafei², M. Al- Hafizh³
Program Studi Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
FBS Universitas Negeri Padang
email: reveena_prdn@yahoo.com

Abstrak

Skripsi ini merupakan analisa naskah film *Freedom Writers* (2007) yang ditulis oleh Richard LaGravenese. Permasalahan yang dibahas dalam naskah film ini adalah bagaimana karakter utama, Erin Gruwell yang memiliki usaha- usaha sebagai seorang guru dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan dan sejauh mana karakter, plot (konflik) dan setting mengungkapkan usaha- usaha yang dilakukan oleh karakter utama. Metode yang dilakukan untuk menganalisa naskah film ini adalah *text based approach*. Tujuan penganalisaan ini ialah untuk mengetahui sejauh mana naskah film *Freedom Writers* memperlihatkan usaha untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan. Penganalisaan ini difokuskan pada karakter, plot dan setting yang didasarkan pada teory *moral development* oleh Kohlberg. Hasil penganalisaan memperlihatkan bahwa untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan dibutuhkan usaha yang keras dan pengorbanan. Hal ini diperlihatkan oleh karakter. Karakter tersebut melakukan usahanya lewat merubah kebijaksanaan yang ada di sekolah dengan yang lebih baik dan merubah pola hidup siswa- siswanya.

Kata kunci: usaha, meningkatkan, kualitas, pendidikan

A. Introduction

The United States is a nation of immigrants. They are from many countries from all over the world. There are many kinds of immigrants in the United States. White immigrants are from europe. Non white immigrants come from Asia, Africa, and America. Immigrants in United States which have skills have good life. They earn money through having good job.

¹ Mahasiswa penulis Skripsi Prodi Sastra Inggris untuk diwisuda periode September 2012

² Pembimbing 1, dosen FBS Universitas Negeri Padang

³ Pembimbing 2, dosen FBS Universitas Negeri Padang

Moreover, they run their life better than in their home land. Therefore, they do not want to go back to their country.

However, not all of immigrants in United States have ability to earn much money. There are many immigrants without any skills come to United States. Since, they do not have any ability, they only work at places with low salary. Therefore, they live in poverty. Usually, rate of violence in this area are high. Most of the people here are addicted to drug. Some of them are member of gang. Among the member of different gang are fighting each other over the territory. This kind of immigrants' life are not condusif.

Besides, immigrants without ability in United States, there are also immigrants from refugee camp. Commonly, people are from camp of refugees lost their family member. It is for sure, they do not have any job to fulfill their needs. The immigrants are not only from refugee camp but also from juvenile hall. Most of them do violence. Therefore, they tend to have attitude and behavior different from others.

Immigrants which live in poverty and do not have job tend to have a chaos life. it affects their children's future. Their parents do not really care about their education. They only think about how to earn money and to fulfill their needs. That is why, these children have low motivation toward the education. They have no reason to go to school. At last, they will have future life not far from now. Hawkins (2009) said that:

Million of non- white students are locked into "dropout factory" high schools where huge percentages do not

graduate, and few are well prepared for college or a future in the U.S economy.

It is clearly stated that immigrants who are not condusif almost are non- white immigrants. Shildren of non- white are trouble with schools. They do not care about education. It is caused by their parents do not have much money to send them to good schools to get education. As a result non- white childre will not getting involve in the future of the United States.

Children of immigrants go to multi ethnics school. At multi ethnics school, there are American, African- American, Hispanic, and Asian students. Multi ethnics schools is full of the students which are poor. As Hawkins (2009) stated that schools in low- income communities remain highly unequal in terms of funding, qualified teachers, and curriculum. It means that the schools get unfair treatment from the government. This unequal make the quality of the schools are low. The schools apply bad lesson plans to the students because of the different curriculum from other schools. The schools do not have many books to improve the quality of the students. It is because of lack of funding for the schools. Teachers at the multi ethnics schools s are also substandard. Those things affect students' quality.

The unequal system at the multi ethnics school needs a teacher who has a good will to make the school becomes better. This teacher must have efforts to make it becomes real. As Garfield (2012) said that things do not turn up in this world until somebody turns them up. It means that everything in this world does not exist just the way it is. There is someone who makes effort to make it happen. Therefore to achieve something, people need effort. Without effort, nothing can

happen. Not all of teachers have a desire to improve students' quality at the multi ethnics schools. Teacher who wants to do such thing is a worthy teacher. Teacher wants to sacrifice her or herself to the improvement of the students at the multi ethnics school.

The phenomenon about the teacher at the multi ethnics school is actually happened in reality. Erin Gruwell is a new teacher at the multi ethnics school at the Wilson High School in Long Beach, United States. She has the students who live in racial community, expose to gang violence, have broken homes family and addict to drugs. These kinds of students became challenge for her as their teacher. The school judges these students too stupid to read new book. However, Gruwell said that her students had given up education because of their dark background. She tries to change her students' assumption about education. She gives the students motivation books and encourages the students to be a better person. In this case, she makes efforts to improve the quality of education.

The successful story of Erin Gruwell is made into a movie script by Richard Lagravenese on 2007 entitled *Freedom Writers*. The efforts to improve the quality of education is clearly described in the main character, Erin Gruwell which makes the topic is interested to be analyzed. She does some actions to improve the quality of her students at the multi ethnics school.

The analysis of this movie script is closely related to the concept of moral development by Lawrence Kohlberg (1985). Kohlberg focuses on moral development and proposes a stage of theory of moral thinking which goes well

beyond Piaget's initial formulations. The development stages are due both to the maturation on of the person (related to the age) and to experience (proper educational experiences will promote development). Kohlberg identifies six stages of moral reasoning which are grouped into three major levels. The analysis is only focus on the second level.

The second level of moral development is the conventional morality which occurs at pre teens to adult. It assumes that the attitude expressed would be shared by the entire community. There are two stages at this level, third stage and fourth stage as the continuous of the first level. As stated in Crain (1985) Kohlberg mentions the third stage, the good interpersonal relationships as young people believe that people should live up to the expectations of the family and community and behave in good ways. Good behavior means having good motives and interpersonal feelings such love, empathy, and altruism. In encyclopedia for psychology (2011), empathy is the capacity to vicariously experience and understand the thoughts and feelings of another person by putting one self in that person's place. It means that the empathy is the capacity to recognize and to some extent, share feelings. As stated in encyclopedia of psychology (2011), altruism means helping behavior (without expectations of extrinsic rewards and sometimes involving personal risk or sacrifice) that benefits individuals or society. Altruism is the behavior that promotes the survival chances of others and sacrifices for the benefit of others. Reasoning works best in two person relationships with family members or close friends where one can make a real effort to get to know the other's feelings and needs and try to help. It means that the desire to avoid

rejection and disapproval of others. At the fourth stage, maintaining the social order, Kohlberg in Crain (1985) states that these adult become more broadly concerned with society as a whole. Now the emphasis is on obeying laws, respecting authority, and performing one's duties so that the social order is maintained.

The second level of moral development plays the important concept since it is related to the topic of the movie script. In this case having love, empathy and altruism, helps the character in this movie script to improve the quality of education. The efforts are changing the school's policies and changing students' way of life.

This analysis is an annexation of text based interpretation. Guerin (2005) explains that text- based interpretation focuses merely on the work itself. Everything outside of the text is ignored. It signifies the meaning of the whole story which is uncovered from the text by observing the interrelationship of the elements of a text such as theme, characteristics, setting, and language.

This movie script is analyzed through examining the fictional devices; characters, plot (conflict) and setting. Character is the important things to reveal the meaning. Ford (2005) defined character as a person who is responsible for the thoughts and actions within a story or play in a piece of literature. The different attitudes, mannerisms and even appearances of character can greatly influence the other major elements in literary work. The analysis of the characters can be done through actions, thoughts, dialogues, and how they react toward certain conflicts

or circumstances. The character in the movie script *Freedom Writers* is Erin Gruwell who makes efforts to improve the quality of education.

The second device that is going to be involved in this movie script is plot which is focused on conflicts. According to Robert (1999) conflict refers to people or circumstances that a character must face and try to overcome. It can be seen through shape of envy, hatred, anger, argument, avoidance, gossip, lies, fighting, and many other forms of actions. In this analysis, the conflicts which are faced by the character are from the circumstances at the multi ethnics school. Furthermore, conflict is needed to reveal the issue of efforts to improve the quality of education since the character wants to make a better change at the multi ethnics school.

Another important element that can help in the process of analyzing of this movie script is setting. Setting does not only mean place and time in the movie script but also the atmosphere of the story. Madden (2002) says that setting is the location and the atmosphere of the story. Moreover, Endriga (2003) stated that setting have a way of drawing the reader into a place of literature while facilitating understanding of the characters and their actions. This sentence shows that setting can give big affect on characters. The situation in this movie script happened in Long Beach 1997. The harsh lives of the students and the situation at the multi ethnics school become setting in this analysis.

This study is intended to reveal efforts to improve the quality of education through changing school's policies and changing students' way of life in a movie

script *Freedom Writers* (2007) written by Richard LaGravenese. This analysis is going to find out how the character makes the efforts. This study also investigates the setting and conflict in giving contribution to reveal the meaning.

B. Methodology

The analysis of this movie script is done through text based approach. It is focused on analyzing fictional devices, which are character, plot (conflict), and setting. Character, plot (conflict) and setting are inseparable because they are interrelated each other. Character is used to disclose the efforts to improve the quality of education by analyzing through character's actions and dialogues. In analyzing the plot, it is done by analyzing the conflicts on the character. While setting deals with atmosphere that make up the story in this movie script. Those three elements give contribution to the process of analysis that are helpful in revealing the meaning. Moreover, these elements are analyzed based on the concept of moral development by Lawrence Kohlberg.

C. Discussion

Effort to improve the quality of education is represented by the character in this movie script, Erin Gruwell. She is representative of a teacher at the multi ethnics school who wants to improve the quality of education and does some efforts to reach it. Her actions are changing the school's policies and changing students' way of life.

a) Changing school's policies

The character in this movie script, Erin Gruwell, is a representative of a teacher who has desire to improve the quality of education at multi ethnics school. She does efforts in reaching her goal even though there are many obstacles outside and inside the school. Her first effort is changing school's policies since the policies there have bad effects to the future of the students. The policies at the school are: students may not read any other books except the one that is required at the school, lesson must be done at the classroom, teachers may not give lessons which make students think critically, and teachers do not allow changing lesson plan that has been stated by the school.

The first policy, students may not read any other books except the one that is required at school, is head off the students to improve their knowledge. Meanwhile, the providing books are not good. It would be not easy for the students to improve their quality. Moreover, Margaret as the department head of the school judges the students badly. It is reflected in this quotation below:

(at the library)

ERIN

What about these? Romeo and Juliet.

That's a great gang story.

MARGARET

No, not the books.

This is what we give them

It is Romeo and Juliet,

but it's a condensed version.

But even these,

look how they treat them.

See how torn up they are?

They draw on them.

ERIN

Ms. Campbell?

They know they get these

because no one thinks

they're smart enough for real books. (Page 27)

The character shows her effort to change the policy through this quotation; *what about these? Romeo and Juliet*. However, the department head does not agree with character's action. It shows from the sentence *No, not the books*. The condition on this sentence refers to the rejection from the department head toward the character's efforts to change the policy at the school. The condition causes conflict between the character and the department head. The sentences *this is what we give them. It is Romeo and Juliet, but it's a condensed version* imply the policy at the school. Students may not read that book. The department head underestimates students. It shows from the word *condensed*. It means that school only gives simplify books for the students. In addition, from these sentences *look how they treat them. See how torn up they are? They draw on them* can be concluded that the administration thinks negatively toward the students. The way to release her conflict is by convincing the department head that the students are smart enough to read good books. It is stated from this quotation *Ms. Campbell? They know they get these because no one thinks they're smart enough for real books*. It also means that the character has love and empathy toward her students. Therefore, she wants to fix the policy at the school to improve her students' quality.

The effort of the character to change the first policy at the school is succesfull. It can be seen from the following quotation:

(at classroom 203)
ERIN
(to the students)
Okay, guys, gals, listen up!
This is what i want you to do
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. (Page 54)

The quotation shows that the character are success to make her students to read many books which are not required at the school. It is stated from the sentence *take one of these borders bags which contain the four books we're gonna read this semester*. It indicates that she tries hard to achieve her effort.

The second policy at the school is lesson must be done at the classroom. The character changes it into giving her students lesson inside and outside the school. The character believes that learning process is not only at the classroom but also outside the class. Nevertheless, her effort is not easy at all. Department head of the school is againts her action. The following quotation proves it:

MARGARET
Apparently you're taking your students
on a trip?

ERIN
Yes, but it's over the weekend,
so it won't affect any test schedules.
I know how busy you are,
And since I'm paying for it myself,
I didn't want to bother you.

The sentence *apparently you're taking your students on a trip* implies that the department head does not agree with the character's action that takes her students on a trip because she against the policy at the school. The condition of the word "*apparently*" is full of disagreement and becomes her conflict to deal with. The sentences *but it's over the weekend, so it won't affect any test schedules* shows the character's effort to overcome her conflict. It implies that the character plans her action carefully to get the permission of department head. It is shown that she does effort to improve her students' quality. In addition, the character uses her

own money to bring her students outside the school. It is seen from the sentences *I'm paying for it myself, I didn't want to bother you.* The sentences also imply that it would not disturb school's finance. It shows that she really wants to change the school's policy becomes better. It is supported by good empathy and altruism that she has.

The effort of the character to change the second policy is success. it can be seen through this quotation:

(ERIN received a letter from DR. COHN at the school board)
O.K
You have permission for
The trip
DR. COHN (page 48)

From the text shows that the character is success to get permission from someone in power, Dr. Cohn, the head of school board. The setting in the quotation refers to the condition of happiness.

The third policy at the multi ethnics school is teachers do not allow to use technique of teaching different from what school has been stated. However, the character applies unique teaching method to make her students are interested in studying. She is done her action by doing some efforts. The character applies different way of teaching at her class in order to reach her goal. She never gives up in making her effort even though department head is never agree with her. Margaret, the department head, tells to Dr. Cohn, the head os school board, that the character's technique of teaching is not suitable with the multi ethnics school. It can be seen through this quotation:

(at the office of Long Beach Board Unified School District)

.....

MARGARET
(to DR.CHON)

.....

Her methods are impractical,
Impossible to implement with regularity.
What if every teacher
performed in this way?
We have millions of children
To get through the education system
in this country,
And we need a means
of accomplishing that
which allows as many students
to benefit as possible,
Not just special cases. (Page 84)

The quotation above reflects that the department head does not like the way the character teaches. The sentence *her methods are impractical, impossible to implement with regularity* means that according to the school board the character's method cannot be used in the class because it takes much time, energy, and money. The setting in this sentence relates to the dislike of department head. It causes conflict to the character. Department head also tries to get agreement from someone in power. That is why she talks to Dr. Cohn, the head of school board. This situation leads conflict to the character. Even though, she is already tries hard to make her efforts success. From this quotation, it can be seen that the character has altruism characteristic.

The success to improve the quality of her students' quality by changing the school's policy is proven. The character is able to make her students become better than before. It is supported by the following quotation:

(at the office of Long Beach Board Unified School District)
MARGARET

Once they're out of her class,
believe me they'll slip back
into their old habits

ERIN
Their reading scores, their writing
has markedly improved, Ms. Campbell. (page 83)

It shows that the character is able to improve the quality of her students. It is indicated by the sentence *Their reading scores, their writing has markedly improved.* The setting refers to the result gained by the character through applying different unique method in teaching her students.

Clearly, the character does hard efforts to improve the quality of education in multi ethnics school. The effort is changing the school policies at the school which are head off the students to improve their quality. The setting refers to the condition when the character is trying hard to overcome the obstacles that she faces. Furthermore, it can be revealed from the conflicts when character get rejection from others. Her altusim, love, and empathy help her in reaching her goal. Finally, she is success in changing the school's policies.

b) Changing students' way of life

The character in this movie script is a new teacher at the school segregation. She teaches students who are from different ethnics, American, African- American, Hispanic, and Asian. The students segregate themselves based on their ethnics. They always feel suspicious toward each other. Almost of the students do not have good attitude in socializing with people who are different with their ethnics. Moreover, the students are not really care to their education.

They do not want to change their lives because of their environment that force them to stay like that and not to change. Because of this condition, the character as their teacher has desire to change students' way of life.

The first action to change her students' way of life is to break the gap among her students. Since her students at the multi ethnics school sit based on their ethnics. She wants to make her students socialize normally. She breaks the gap among the students by mixing them. However, her students do not like her decision to unite them. It is seen from the quotation below:

(at classroom 203)

ERIN

(to the students)

You know what? 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.

Well, there you are.

JAMAL

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.

I ain't going up there without my homey.

I'm not sitting back there alone!

ERIN

All right.

STUDENTS

Shut up.

ERIN

All right, you know what?
I want you all to 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!
JAMAL
Get your ass to China, all of y'all.
(students are fighting each other)
ERIN
So, everybody happy
with the new borders?
(Students stop coming to the class) (Page 16- 17)

The setting in the quotation above refers to madness condition that is faced by the character. The sentence *I am sick of these antics in my classroom* implies that the character does not like the condition at her class. She wants to change it by making new sitting arrangement. The external conflict is shown when her students reject to do what she is asking. They do not agree with her decision. It is stated through this sentences *I can't go back there alone, I'm not sitting near him*. It also says that students get mad to her. Students do not want separate with their own group. It can be seen through this sentence *I ain't going up there without my homey*. It implies that is not common for students to seat near with other ethnics without their own friends. The situation in this quotation is anger. Students are angry at the character. Even though, her students mad at her. She still hopes that her students will not feel suspicious between them.

Giving advice to her students is character's second effort to change her students' way of life . However, she faces difficulty in understanding her students. Students do not believe in her. Moreover, most of the students insult her. It is seen from the quotation below:

(at classroom 203)
MARCUS
(to ERIN)
You don't know nothing, homegirl.

ERIN
No, I don't, Marcus!
So why don't you explain it to me?

EVA
(to ERIN)
You don't know nothing!
You don't know the pain we feel.
You don't know what we got to do. (Page 23)

The word *homegirl* means that student insults his teacher. Moreover, another student also says something bad to her. It is stated from this sentences *you don't know the pain we feel, you don't know what we got to do* imply that the student does not want her teacher to intervene their lives. She asks her to do her job as teacher and does not care much about their life, because before no one cares about them. They think that is only euphoria for Erin as the new teacher who is exciting with her new job. The situation in this quotation expresses anger from the students. They feel that character does not really want to help them. The sentence *so why don't you explain to me* implies that the character convinces her students about her effort. It is a trick for her to know how hard her students' life. It also show her effort to change her students' way of life. Even though, she is despised by her students, she still has empathy toward her students.

Another step that the character does is teaching her students to respect each other. Even though they do not respect by other, they still have to respect people. It is stated from the quotation below:

ERIN
You don't feel respected

Is that what you're saying, Eva?
Well, maybe you're not.
But to get respect, you have to give it. (Page 23)

The phrases to *get respect, you have to give it* implies that people have to respect each other no matter what they belong to our kind or not. The character teaches how important respect other to the students. The character tries to make her students realize that what they do before is wrong. Because if we respect others, another people will respect us also.

Moreover, the character also makes the students feel comfortable at the classroom. She tries to make her students feel better. Therefore, students can change their life even though their life is hard. It is seen from the quotation below:

MIGUEL
"my crazy English teacher
From last year,
"is the only person
that made me think of hope.
"Talking with friends
about last year's English and our trips,
"I began to feel better.
"I receive my schedule and the first
teacher is Mrs. Gruwell in room 203.
"I walk into the room and feel as though
"all the problems in life
are not so important anymore.
"I am home." (Page 57)

The sentence *my crazy English teacher is the only person that made me think of hope* implies that the character is the only one who gives the students chance to be a better person while the others not. The word crazy means that her student adores her because of her altruism. She convinces to her students that everyone has right to be better person. The phrases *I began to feel better* implies that the character is success to make her students believe in her and the live will not worst. Her

students finally have a hope to have a better life. She makes her students feel comfortable studying with her and thought that the problems outside the class can be solved. It is stated from the phrases *feel as though all the problems in life are not so important anymore*. The character successes to make her students belief in an education to change their life. Because, she can make her classroom like a home for her students. It is seen from the sentence *I am home*. Her students feel safe in the classroom with her.

From the analysis above, it is clear that the character makes effort to change her students' way of life. It can be seen through her actions in uniting her students to break the gap among the students. She is also giving the students advices to be better person even though they live in hard situation. Moreover, she is teaching her students to respect each other. Finally, she is changing their bad behaviours by sharing feeling and ideas to other people that can motivate them. She is also makes her students feel comfortable learning with her. In addition the setting including the condition of the students' live makes her effort becomes worthy.

D. Conclusion

The movie script *Freedom Writers* (2007) by Richard LaGravenese reflects efforts to improve the quality of education. It is reflected through text based interpretation by focusing on fictional devices such as character, setting and conflict. The character in this movie script is Erin Gruwell, teacher at the multi ethnics school. The character does efforts to improve the quality of education. The efforts are changing the school's policies and changing students' way of life.

The first effort is changing the policies at the school. The policies at the multi ethnics school have bad effects to the future of the students. Because of the character has good empathy, she has desire to change the policies. She sacrifices her self to make her efforts success. She has part time job to raise money for providing special teaching media for her students. She bets her job because she changes the policies at the school. The condition of the school that againts her makes her effort becomes worthy. The second effort is changing students' way of life. Students at the school segregation live in the area with gang violence, broken homes family, and poor people. Therefore, they are not really care about education. This situation motivates the character to change their way of life. She does her actions with unique ways that make her students believe in her. The condition of the background of her students makes her effort can be called worthy.

The character can be seen as the representative of the teacher who has desire to improve the quality of education. She sacrifices her self to do her efforts. Because of her empathy towards the students, she wants to make a change related to the improvement of the students. She cares much about her society that makes her called as a worthy person. This is a good example for teachers to do their job as well as they can.

Note: this article is written based on thesis of the writer with Advisor I Dra. An Fauzia Rozani Syafei, M.A. and Advisor II Muhd. Al-Hafizh, S.S, M.A.

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