

## AUTHORITARIAN TEACHER REFLECTED IN TERRENCE MALICK'S THE TREE OF LIFE

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### Abstract

Authoritarian teaching style have a tendency to control children in their learning process. The teaching style itself can bring bad impact toward the learner. The impact of authoritarian teaching has a relation to the theory of hierarchy of needs. The act of authoritarian itself can be found in various occasions such as in school with authoritarian teacher or family with authoritarian parents. The phenomenon can be found in a movie entitled The Tree of Life that is directed by Terrence Malick, the movie depicts a children' life with his authoritarian parents that later will be discussed. This study discusses about how is the act of authoritarian in the movie entitled The Tree of Life that is done by the father to his children. The method used in the study is descriptive qualitative. The data is collected by through documentation and is analysed with interactive data analysis. The study shows that there are several depiction of authoritarian teaching in the movie that impact the children and is related to the uncompleted of hierarchy of needs.

**Keywords:** authoritarian, hierarchy of needs, The Tree of Life.

### Abstrak

Gaya mengajar otoriter memiliki kecenderungan untuk mengontrol anak dalam proses belajar mereka. Gaya mengajar ini sendiri dapat memberikan dampak buruk pada pelajar. Dampak dari pembelajaran otoriter memiliki hubungan dengan hirarki kebutuhan. Perilaku otoriter ini sendiri bisa ditemukan pada beberapa kesempatan seperti di sekolah dengan guru otoriter atau di dalam keluarga dengan orang tua otoriter. Fenomena ini bisa ditemukan di sebuah film berjudul The Tree of Life yang disutradarai oleh Terrence Malick, film ini menggambarkan kehidupan anak dengan orang tuanya yang otoriter yang kemudian akan dibahas. Studi ini membahas tentang bagaimana perilaku otoriter di film berjudul The Tree of Life yang dilakukan oleh sang ayah pada anaknya. Metode yang digunakan pada studi ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan dengan dokumentasi dan dianalisa dengan analisa data interaktif. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa ada beberapa penggambaran perilaku pembelajaran otoriter di dalam film yang berdampak pada sang anak dan berhubungan dengan tidak terpenuhinya hirarki kebutuhan

**Kata kunci:** otoriter, hirarki kebutuhan, The Tree of Life

## INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning process that is done in the family environment freed parents to use any method as long as it is appropriate to their children characteristic. Learning process that match with children characteristic will make the learning condition more favorable for them and will lead into a good output. Generally, the most visible character of children is their love of freedom, that means in teaching children the parents must give their children a wide space of freedom. In the same way, parents should also subtract their act of controlling the learning process so it will not narrow the freedom that the children have. Moreover, the way of teaching like this is important to do to prevent parent of becoming an authoritarian teacher.

Authoritarian teaching in its practice gives teacher complete control of the classroom and put student as a passive learner, for an education that aim to build creative student, of course authoritarian teaching style is terribly bad for children especially for their psychology. The matter occurred because the atmosphere of authoritarian teaching classroom feels very unpleasant, if it is done by parents toward their children it will only make them scared of learning since in authoritarian teaching if children make mistake, they sure will get punishment. Based on Walker (2008:220) authoritarian teacher is very demanding and unresponsive for the students' needs. The needs of student is related with the theory of hierarchy of needs from Abraham Maslow. Based on McLeod (2018:3) the term of self-actualization itself is a part of Maslow's theory that is called "Hierarchy of Needs". This theory groups the human basic needs into 5, as follows: (1) physiological need, (2) safety need, (3) love and belongingness need, (4) esteem need, (5) self-actualization. Also, the characteristic of authoritarian teaching itself can be

mentioned as follow; (a) teachers are inclined to absolutely control the students' behavior, (b) teacher are mostly pressing the students in verbal. Similarly, authoritarian teachers or parents can be seen on their characteristic that are; (a) teachers or parents try to build, control and evaluate students or children behavior in absolute as the teacher or parents' rule, (b) teachers or parents apply obedience as the main value, demanding, work and to keep a tradition, (c) teachers or parents like to give pressure in verbal and pay less attention to the matter of receiving and giving, (d) teachers or parents give pressure the students or children' freedom and their autonomy (Anisah, 2017:73).

Furthermore, the advancement of technology is rapidly progressive. Teachers and parents can view this as a chance for them to improve their teaching, they can make benefit of the technology advancement, one of example is the use of audio visual as teaching media such as video, teacher can use a video-based sharing platform like Youtube to upload course material so that students can have access of it anytime they want and parents will become the supervisor. Similar with video, movie that also an audiovisual media can be used for teaching, aside from its value as an entertainment. Study through movie is not only limited on its linguistic aspect, movie can also be viewed on its philosophical aspect like what message that is brought by the movie for humanity and study through movie is not only aimed for student but it is also for teacher. Movie as a communication medium is used to deliver information, social purpose, motivation, exchanging opinions by conducting debates and discussion, educate, advance human life by spreading culture and arts, entertainment and integration (Nurhadi, 2017: 6).

Related with the previous discussion about authoritarian teaching style, the depiction of this matter can be found in the movie entitled *The Tree of Life* that is directed by Terrence Malick, it shows the act of the father that have a tendency of authoritarian parents. This movie released in 2011, it tells the story of Mr. O'Brien family played by Brad Pitt and his wife Mrs. O'Brien played by Jessica Chastain. The movie immensely highlights at how Mr and Mrs O'Brien nurture their children Jack, Steve and R.L, which they bring a pretty contrast characteristic at how they act with their children. The writer views that the action of Mr. O'Brien toward their children is considered as an implementation of authoritarian teaching style. So, in this research the researcher will discuss about how is the act of authoritarian teaching in the movie that is done by the father to his children and the bad impact by of authoritarian teaching in the movie that is done by the father to his children using the theory of Walker's authoritarian teaching theory and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs on McLeod (2018:3)

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

To perform the research, the writer used qualitative research. Based on Moleong (2007:6) stated that qualitative research is a research aims to comprehend the phenomenon experienced by the subject thoroughly and is described in the form of words and language, on a specific context by using various method. The research method used is descriptive and qualitative method. According to Sukmadinata (2017:73) descriptive qualitative method is a method that used to describe and depict a phenomenon that exist whether natural or a man-made phenomenon which more focused on the characteristic, quality and relation between activity. The object used to conduct the research is a movie entitled *The Tree of life*. The movie was originated from USA and released on 2011, directed and written by Terrence Malick. The technique of collecting data of this research is documentation. According to Arikunto (2006:158) documentation is looking for and collecting data related to the matter in the form of notes, transcripts, books, newspapers, magazines, reports, etc. The document is sourced from a movie entitled *The Tree of Life*. To collect the data, researcher watch the movie and take a notes of which

duration that shows a scene of authoritarian act. Data analysis techniques that used in this research is based from Miles and Huberman's interactive data analysis technique (Miles and Huberman, 1992:16).

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The study result will be discussed in two parts, as follow:

### 1. The act of authoritarian teaching from the father.

The depiction of authoritarian teaching from the movie will be divided into 2 according to the characteristics of authoritarian teacher from Walker that are high demandingness and unresponsive on student's needs. They will be explained as follow:

#### a) High demandingness

The film shows the act of Mr. O'Brien father of the main character Jack O'Brien that demand his children to be someone he wished them to be, but he often make their children uncomfortable about their father behaviour that often controlling them.


**Table 1. High demandingness**

Scene	Time/duration	Dialogue/action
	Dialogue in: 00:11:07	Mr. O'Brien: He was sitting next to me at the piano and I criticize how he'd turned the pages

Based on the scene, Mr. O'Brien talk about his grieve and his guilty toward his son that has passed away. The monologue showed that Mr. O'Brien has ever criticised his son about a simple thing that is the way his son turned a page.

Moreover, according to the monologue, Mr. O'Brien is realised about his behaviour that full of criticism and it also make his condition becoming more sad and full of regrets. But later, he still continues this behaviour of criticism and controlling other especially his sons and conclusion, this action is considered as a form of authoritarian because Mr. O'Brien demanded his son to do something exactly the same as he did.

**Table 2. High demandingness**



Scene	Time/duration	Dialogue/action
	Dialogue in: 00:55:53	Jack: Will you pass the butter please?
	-	Mr. O'Brien: Can you pass the butter please, sir?
	00:55:57	Jack: Sir



Based on the scene, in the dinner, Jack is asking for butter to his father but, Mr. O'Brien criticises the sentence of Jack's asking instead of giving the butter anyway and followed by annoyed face.

This action is considered as an act of authoritarian according to the action of Mr. O'Brien that demands how his son is asking to him in certain way as he likes and it also show Mr. O'Brien's gesture from his face that looks annoyed caused by listen to his son asking.

**Table 3. High demandingness**

Scene	Time/duration	Dialogue/action
	Dialogue in: 01:17:33	Jack: He says don't put your elbows on the table. He does
	-	
	01:17:37	



Based on the scene, Jack is praying to God and talk about his father behaviour that likes to order him not to put elbows on the table but in fact, his father himself does not do what he told his son to do.

This thing is considered as an act of authoritarian that Mr. O'Brien demands his son to do certain thing that also control his son behaviour, but in other way Mr. O'Brien does not show the behaviour that he taught to his son. The order that is said by Mr. O'Brien won't be working effectively if his behaviour were not reflecting his own word and his children will just ignore his father's order.

**b) Unresponsive on student's need**

The film shows that the father character Mr. O'Brien have a tendency of not responsible toward his action to his children that it makes the children especially Jack O'Brien become to hate his father figure.



**Table 4. Unresponsive on student's need**

Scene	Time/duration	Dialogue/action
	Dialogue in: 00:56:51	Mr. O'Brien: What'd you do today?
	- 00:57:09	Jack: Went to school
		Mr. O'Brien: After that? What about the yard?  Did you put the runners in, like I asked?  Jack: Yeah, yes sir  Mr. O'Brien: Well, it didn't look like it  Mrs. O'Brien: Mr. Reese liked Jack's book report and-  Mr. O'Brien: What is that sweetheart?  Mrs. O'Brien: Wanted him to make a model  Mr. O'Brien: You know this? Bhrams

Based from the scene, in the dinner, after an argumentation about Jack asked his father for a butter, Jack's mother Mrs. O'Brien is bringing them together by telling his husband that

Jack's book report gets appreciation from his teacher. But, Mr. O'Brien acts unexpectedly, that he shows his vinyl instead of showing an expression of pride about his son's achievement. This is considered as an act of authoritarian since Mr. O'Brien does not support his children achievement.

**Table 5. Unresponsive on student's need**

Scene	Time/duration	Dialogue/action
	Dialogue in: 01:13:24	Mr. O'Brien: Did you get it all?
	-	Jack: Yes, sir
	01:13:29	

Based on the scene, in the day time, Jack is ordered by his father to crop the grass on the yard and Jack do it by himself until all his pant become dirty. Meanwhile, Mr. O'Brien is only sitting outside his house watching his son working without giving a hand or even any support. When Jack has done his task, Mr. O'Brien only ask him whether has he done or not yet and does not thanking Jack about his work.

The lack of support that Mr. O'Brien does not give is proven that this is an act of authoritarian because Mr. O'Brien does not fulfil Jack's need of appreciation or esteem need and also does not show his love toward his own son.

**Table 6. Unresponsive on student's need**

Scene	Time/duration	Dialogue/action
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Dialogue in:

RL: Be quiet

01:35:12 - 01:35:59

Mr. O'Brien: What did you say?

Jack: Leave him alone!

Mr. O'Brien: Come here!

Mrs. O'Brien: Honey!

Jack: Leave him alone!

Mr. O'Brien: Come here!

Get back. Come here!

Get out of there



Based on the scene, in a lunch time, R.L or Mr. O'Brien's second son criticises his father because of he's noisiness when having his lunch. But, Mr. O'Brien does not like about his son's critic and it makes him angry to R.L. Then, Mr. O'Brien's anger makes all his children frightened and takes everyone out of the room.

The act from Mr. O'Brien that does not accept the criticism from his children is proven as an act of authoritarian since Mr. O'Brien does not support or reject about other's opinion. Moreover, the anger from Mr. O'Brien that makes everyone frightened proves that he does not fulfil his children's safety need.

## 2. The bad impact caused by authoritarian teaching from the father.

The disadvantages of authoritarian teaching style have a correlation to the theory of hierarchy of needs that authoritarian teaching ignored several needs of children that later can impact their learning process. The explanation will be described according to the needs that is not fulfilled, as follow:

### a) Safety needs

Children needs of safety means that children need to be secured from any harm or violence and this need can only be reached if the first need that is physiological need is already accomplished. The depictions of unfulfilled safety need are shown in Table 2. High demandingness and Table 6. Unresponsive on student's need. Which, in Table 2. High demandingness the act can be seen on Mr. O'Brien's face that seems slightly angry to hear Jack's asking and similarly, in Table 6. Unresponsive on student's need the act is shown at how Mr. O'Brien handle R.L's critic with anger and scared everyone in the room. In short, all of these depiction is considered as an act of authoritarian by ignoring the needs of safety that the scenes mostly show the uncontrollably emotions or anger from Mr. O'Brien toward his children critic and behaviour.

The lack of this need can impact to children behaviour that can make them afraid with other and can even make them to be afraid to give opinion, it can also make children to feel unsafe to do something similar like what Jack does such as asking for help or something to their father. The impact of lacking safety needs is also shown in the same tables that Jack becomes so quite after the argumentation and every of Mr. O'Brien's family scared of Mr. O'Brien himself.

### b) Love needs

The needs of love of children related to affection aspect means that children needs someone to belonging such as parents or friends while this need can only be reached if the second need or safety needs is accomplished. Then, in Table 5. Unresponsive on student's need, the scene shows that Mr. O'Brien does not show that he is showing his love to Jack by his order to Jack to crop the grass on the yard, it is shown that Mr. O'Brien clearly does not give any care to Jack's condition that all his pant is dirty and does not even ask anything about him but only ask about the work that Jack have done, if Mr. O'Brien love or care toward his children he should have helped Jack to do the work so the relation between father and children will be built well by giving a care and love toward each other.

To emphasize, from the scene in Table 5. Unresponsive on student's need it proves that the ignorance behaviour from Mr. O'Brien is considered as an act of authoritarian by ignoring the needs of love. In the same way, lacking of love needs can make someone in confusion or feel disconcerted and it will affect their emotion. This matter could impact on the children that can make him to question their belongingness on his own father.

### **c) Esteem needs**

Esteem needs means the needs of children of recognition and it must be completed to support them that they have dignity and this need can only be reached after the third need that is love needs is already accomplished. Meanwhile, in Table 4. Unresponsive on student's need the fulfilment of esteem is seemed absence. The scene shows that Mr. O'Brien ignored Jack's achievement in his school, which means that Mr. O'Brien is ignoring the fact that Jack needs an appreciation about his achievement from him not only from his mother and it is reflected in Jack's face that seems melancholy. Also, this matter makes Jack to feel that he is not special in the view of his father even his performance in school cannot make his father proud.

The lack of esteem needs can make children to be someone who is less in confidence, feeling weak and low motivation. Since the scene shows that Mr. O'Brien just ignored to support Jack's achievement, so it is clearly shown that Mr. O'Brien does not fulfil Jack's need of appreciation or esteem need and it could decrease his children' motivation to learn and it will impact on his school performance.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research's finding and discussion, it can be concluded that The Tree of Life movie is reflecting how is the act of authoritarian teaching style that is shown through the character of Mr. O'Brien with all his controlling behaviours, high demandingness to his children and ignoring or unresponsive on his children' needs. According to the document, Mr. O'Brien often put himself above other, whether in idea, or status that he mostly control his children behaviour but is ignorant about his children condition, he sometimes betrayed his own word whenever he is ordering his children to do certain thing but he does not do it either, he likes to criticise his children but in contrast he often reject other's criticism and respond it in verbal.

The same way, according to the hierarchy of needs, Mr. O'Brien's authoritarian acts ignore his children' needs mostly on their safety needs, love needs and esteem need. As their needs is not fulfilled, children will afraid to express their opinion about something and will choose to be quiet instead, their motivation to learn will be decreased, as there is limitation in expressing opinion, children' creativity will also be affected. This matter can lead into a bad impact for children and can disturb their experience of learning that will also affect their learning output.



## **SUGGESTION**

According to the study result, to prevent any teacher or parents becoming an authoritarian is by giving them a knowledge about the disadvantages of authoritarian teaching such as the impacts of this teaching style that can decrease students or children' creativity and also their learning motivation and suggests them to be more open at listening their students or children' opinion. Teacher or parents should be paying more attention at the needs of students or children that need to be fulfilled. Everyone including students or children should be aware of any authoritarian act in their surrounding that they must not do the same as it can bring bad impacts to other, if students or children experiences an authoritarian act from other whether it is from teacher or parents, students or children can choose to learn by autodidact that is not depending to other, students or children can also do their learning from internet or any other sources.

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