

## **THE SEARCH FOR MEANING OF LIFE IN MITCH ALBOM'S *TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE***

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### **Abstract**

People often realize that they need to search the meaning of their life. The main character in the novel Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Morrie, exemplifies the process of this searching the meaning of life. This study is designed for analyzing how Morrie searches the meaning in life and how this process also influences the supporting character, Mitch, who tries to grasp the meaning in his life. The methods used in this study are library research and psychological approach that relate to the extrinsic analysis. This study uses Viktor Frankl's existentialism that concentrates on the three pathways in discovering the meaning to analyze the extrinsic aspect of this novel. The analysis shows that Morrie and Mitch successfully find their meaning of life by creating something; experiencing something or encountering people; and taking the attitude toward unavoidable suffering. The good deed they make together is by creating their last project which gives advantages not only for both of them but also for people around them. Experiencing something or encountering people gives both of them a deep understanding about the importance of love and human's relationship rather than the importance of having materialistic things. Suffering helps both of them to accept everything in their life sincerely. Those efforts successfully change their perception of life to be a better perception that brings them into a better future of life.

Key words: meaning in life, library research, psychological approach, Viktor Frankl, existentialism

## 1. Introduction

A work of fiction, especially novel, may be different from other written works because it adapts human's real life. Clara Reeve in Wellek and Warren states, "The novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the time in which it is written" (1956: 216). A novel takes the fact that comes from reality and builds it up with imagination. In a novel, problems in human's life are reflected in the character's life.

One of those problems is psychological problem. Anxiety is one of the psychological problems that can be found in a story. The character feels anxiety when he faces many difficulties in his life that he cannot solve. The anxiety may come to the characters because they feel empty in life and lose their way of life. This condition leads to the state when the characters do not know the meaning of life. They are challenged to solve this condition by searching for the meaning of life. They have choices whether they want to do that or not. Those choices will show them the way to find the meaning of life and make their life meaningful, or otherwise meaningless.

One of the literary works that explains about discovering the meaningful life is *Tuesdays with Morrie*, a novel by Mitch Albom. This novel describes searching the meaning of life of the main and the supporting character of *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Morrie and Mitch. Experiencing many difficulties in their own lives makes both of them try to figure out the meaning of life. Morrie has found the meaning of life within sufferings and happenings that he feels in his life. On the contrary, Mitch has not found the meaning of life. He sinks to the failure in his life as he is losing the purpose of life and his beloved person. Because of that failure, he runs after his only goal to achieve a great amount of money. He thinks that if he works hard and gets a lot of money, he can do anything with his money. He does it for paying his feeling of uselessness because he cannot do something that is useful to his uncle and his life. However, Mitch is haunted by the emptiness, which brings him to an enlightenment moment. He

reunites with his beloved professor from college, Morrie, who helps him to find his orientation and meaning of life.

This long journey for discovering the meaning of life is a magnet for this study to obtain a deep understanding of this novel. That is the reason why this study is titled, **“The Search for Meaning of Life in Mitch Albom’s *Tuesdays with Morrie*”**.

This study tries to achieve the following purposes: (1) to reveal the factors that motivate Morrie and Mitch to search the meaning of life; (2) to reveal how Morrie and Mitch search the meaning of life; (3) to reveal the results that Morrie and Mitch get from their searching the meaning of life. To achieve those purposes, this study uses library research method and psychological approach.

## **2. Viktor Frankl’s Existentialism: The Meaning in Life**

The extrinsic elements are the elements that influence the text from the outside and may not have a direct role on that text. Extrinsic elements include social, politics, economy, ideology, religiosity, and psychology. One of those elements that is analyzed in this novel is psychological aspect.

Existentialism theory of Viktor Frankl is deemed useful to analyze the psychological aspect of the novel. According to Frankl the central theme of existentialism, “To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering” (1984: 11). Existentialism is all about finding meaning in oneself. He has to find the purpose in every condition, even in the worse condition has a purpose.

In this theory, there are three important foundations which are freedom of will, will to meaning, and meaning in life. Frankl in Lewis states that, “Freedom of the will refers to freedom to choose one’s response to the conditions of life; it is not freedom from conditions in life” (2011: 9). Freedom is an important thing in human’s life. It is the mean for everyone to take what he should do in facing every situation in his life. Frankl in Evans finds that, “The will to meaning is the primary motivation and the deepest longing of every human being” (2012: 7). Freedom of will is followed by the will to meaning. Every human has desire to

satisfy or complete his freedom. This desire motivates human being to find the meaning in life. If one man has freedom and will so he is able to achieve the meaning in life. Frankl in Lewis states, "Meaning in life is believed to be an objective demand characteristic of the environment" (2011: 10). The meaning of life is in one's life itself. He has to discover his meaning by himself because every human has his own meaning in life.

In Viktor Frankl's existentialism, he formulates the three pathways to meaning. He states:

According to logotherapy, we can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering (1984: 133).

The first pathway is by making or creating something. The second pathway is by experiencing something or encountering someone. The last pathway is by taking the attitude toward pain or suffering. Through those pathways, people are able to find the meaning of life.

### **2. 1. Creating Work or Doing Deed**

The first pathway is by creating work or doing deed, and it also can be said as the creative value. According to Lewis, "The creative value encompasses all acts that give something to life that would not otherwise exist. The creative value may be actualized through work, through hobbies, or through doing good deeds" (2011: 8). People are able to find the meaning of life by making or producing something that gives advantages for themselves and others. They who create an advantageous work will make a good impact to many people. It includes creativity, such as art, music, writing, and invention.

### **2. 2. Experiencing Something or Encountering Someone**

The second pathway is by experiencing something or encountering someone which can be called as the experiential value. People can discover the meaning of

life by encountering something or someone that affect them in some ways. They can learn and take the positive thing from what they experience whether it is good or bad. Love is the important thing in this way. According to Frankl, “Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him” (1984: 134). By accepting and giving love, people value the person who is important for them for all of his side, both the negative and the positive side. As a result, they value the meaning of life.

### **2. 3. The Attitude toward Unavoidable Suffering**

The third pathway is by choosing the attitude toward unavoidable suffering or it can be said as attitudinal value. Frankl in Wong states that, “If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death” (2011: 625). People can discover the meaning of life by the way of thinking or behaving that they take to face the pain that is very difficult to prevent. Suffering is an example. It makes people take an action to face everything in his life wholeheartedly. It also causes somebody to realize that life is not only offering the goodness but also the badness. Thus, they have to accept those two parts of life. Suffering brings people to their sense, to be grateful with all of occurrences that they experience in life. Besides, they can take the positive effect of the suffering and improve their understanding about life and the meaning of life.

### **3. Conclusion**

Psychological aspect can be analyzed not only in human’s real life but also in character’s story of life by using Viktor Frankl’s theory to analyze the character’s search for the meaning of life. The analysis of the novel *Tuesdays with Morrie* shows that the main and the supporting character, Morrie and Mitch, are examples of the characters that go through many periods of life to search for meaning in life. There are many occurrences they experience that bring them in completing the task to find the meaning of life which are by creating work or doing deed;

encountering people or experiencing something; and taking the attitude toward unavoidable suffering.

Morrie attains the meaning of life by working at a mental hospital, teaching at Brandeis, having interviews, and making discussions. As a researcher at a mental hospital, he observes the patients and the treatments that give him a deep understanding about the meaning of life. After becoming a researcher, he becomes a professor at Brandeis University. He does not want to waste the lesson and the time he has so he starts to share what he has got to his students. He also has interviews in order to get his message for more people around the world. Moreover, he creates Tuesday's discussions with Mitch. Mitch tries to attain the meaning of life as well by taking part of the discussion and making the last project with his old professor, Morrie. By participating in discussion and making the last project, Mitch starts to understand the meaning of his life. Those actions that they do show how Morrie and Mitch search the meaning of life.

Morrie finds the meaning of life by experiencing something or encountering someone. He feels the love from the beloved people in his life. In addition, he gives out his love to people who are close to him. When he was young, he gets love and affection from his relatives. Besides, he also gets love and affection from his new stepmother who takes care of him like his real mother. As he learns from the love he gets, he tries to give the time and love for many people. Mitch tries to find the meaning of life by this way too. He gets a lot of love and lesson from Morrie when he becomes Morrie's student at Brandeis. As he learns more about Morrie's story, Mitch tries to give love for Morrie. He visits Morrie regularly and gives him a lot of affection and love like what Morrie did to him before.

There must be good thing and bad thing in human's life. It also applies to Morrie that experiences happiness and suffering in his life. As a child, he has to carry big burden by being left of his mother who died because of sick. Furthermore, he has to get bad treatment from his father who is irresponsible and

is not caring. His father does not give him love. He also asks him to erase the memory of his mother. Besides, his father commands him to work when he is still young. His pain is not over yet. Morrie has to struggle to live his life on because he must fight his illness. Through these sufferings that come one by one into his life, he learns something that is to accept every condition that happens in his life, especially the illness that only attacks his body but never takes his spirit. Additionally, Mitch suffers a lot. It starts from the dream that never come true, the death of his beloved uncle, the family member's relationship that is wide apart, to the losing job. These sufferings teach him to be sincere and indicate the factors that motivate Morrie and Mitch to search the meaning of life.

Morrie's journey and struggle can be a good model for Mitch because Morrie is able to encounter those big burdens strongly. As Mitch's suffering is not as difficult as Morrie's suffering, he should be brave to encounter the burden in order to discover the meaning of life as well as Morrie did. Moreover, Morrie and Mitch successfully become better person in having perception of life by going through the three pathways in discovering the meaning of life. Morrie gets the peacefulness feeling when he goes through many occurrences especially after he has an unforgiving illness which is the good result for him. Mitch is able to restore his relationship with his brother and accepts everything that happens to him are the good results he takes.

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