

SELF-TRANSFORMATION THROUGH EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF TARA WESTOVER'S STRUGGLES IN THE MEMOIR "EDUCATED"

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ABSTRACT

This research examines Tara Westover's memoir, Educated, through Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, which emphasizes critical reflection as a catalyst for profound personal change. The memoir chronicles Westover's journey from an isolated and oppressive upbringing to achieving academic success, illustrating education's role in fostering self-awareness, resilience, and identity transformation. Using qualitative methods, including literature analysis, the study focuses on the stages of transformative learning disorienting dilemma, self-examination, critical reflection, and reintegration as reflected in Westover's narrative. The findings reveal how education challenges ingrained beliefs, enabling individuals to navigate societal constraints and redefine their perspectives. Westover's academic journey, culminating in a doctorate from Cambridge University, underscores the power of education to transcend familial limitations and foster personal growth. This analysis highlights the dual function of education: as a means of acquiring knowledge and a transformative tool for personal empowerment. By linking individual experiences with societal structures, the study contributes to discussions on education's broader implications. Westover's memoir serves as a compelling testament to the transformative power of education in reshaping identities, fostering adaptability, and enabling individuals to contribute meaningfully to society.

Keywords:

transformative learning theory, Tara Westover, Educated.

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Introduction

The term "educated" refers to an individual who has acquired formal education, developed critical thinking skills, and gained the ability to navigate complex societal and personal challenges (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Tara Westover's memoir, *Educated*, explores themes of familial loyalty, identity, and the transformative power of education. Despite being raised in a restrictive and abusive environment, Westover's journey demonstrates how education can become a tool for transcending personal and societal constraints (Jiang et al., 2022). Education is universally acknowledged as a foundation for individual and societal progress, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability to a rapidly evolving world (UNESCO, 2021).

In line with this, self-transformation through Education is a concept that is increasingly relevant in the context of contemporary education, linking the learning process with profound personal and social changes. In a constantly evolving world, education not only serves to acquire technical knowledge but also as a tool for self-transformation, enhancing self-awareness, and honing the ability to adapt to change. According to research by Senge et al. (2020), education that focuses on lifelong learning and self-reflection can help individuals develop a more open and adaptive mindset, which is necessary for success in a dynamic world. In addition, education also plays a crucial role in strengthening self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and the ability to contribute positively to society. (Smith & Johnson, 2021). Thus, education not only serves as a means to acquire practical skills but also as a foundation for comprehensive personal transformation.

The concept of self-transformation through educational has garnered significant attention in contemporary academic discourse, emphasizing the multifaceted role of education in fostering personal and societal growth, equipping individuals with critical thinking skills, creativity, and adaptability essential for navigating an evolving world (UNESCO, 2021), beyond technical knowledge, education is increasingly viewed as a tool for profound self-transformation, enhancing self-awareness, and enabling individuals to adapt effectively to changing circumstances.

Self-transformation through has emerged as a pivotal concept in contemporary discourse, education is not merely a medium for acquiring technical skills but also a dynamic tool for enhancing self-awareness, adaptability, resilience. Senge et al. (2020) highlight that lifelong learning and self-reflection within education foster open-mindedness and adaptive thinking, essential for navigating the complexities of a rapidly changing world. Moreover, education strengthens self-confident interpersonal skills, and the capacity for constructive societal contributions (Smith & Johnson, 2021). These insight underscore education's role as a catalyst for comprehensive personal transformation.

According to Dirkx (2012), self-transformation also has an emotional dimension, as it involves navigating feelings of dissonance and ambiguity that arise during significant shifts in understanding. Such emotional engagement allows learners to connect deeply with their experiences, leading to more meaningful personal development. Moreover, transformative educational practices often create spaces for dialogue and interaction, which are essential for fostering empathy, collaboration, and interpersonal growth (Brookfield, 2017).

Memoirs as a literary genre offer unique insights into the interplay between personal narratives and broader social issues. Their reflective and introspective nature allows for an exploration of identity and memory within specific cultural contexts, making them powerful tools for fostering empathy and understanding (Smith & Watson, 2020). The study of memoirs like *Educated* is instrumental in highlighting the relationship between personal transformation and societal structures, bridging the gap between individual experiences and collective themes (Couser, 2021).

This research applies Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory, which emphasizes critical reflection on experiences as a catalyst for profound shifts in an individual's worldview (Mezirow, 1997). The stages of transformative learning—disorienting dilemma, self-examination, critical reflection, and reintegration—are clearly reflected in Westover's narrative. Her educational journey serves as a compelling example of how education can lead to personal growth and a redefined sense of identity (Taylor, 2008).

While previous studies have extensively analyzed themes of trauma, resilience, and empowerment in *Educated* (Smith, 2019; Johnson, 2020; Harvard Educational Review, 2020), there is limited exploration of the memoir through the lens of transformative learning theory. By addressing this gap, the current study offers a novel perspective on how education fosters identity transformation and contributes to the broader discourse on the societal implications of personal growth.

Method

According to Bogdan and Taylor (1982), qualitative research is a method that generates descriptive data from people's written or spoken words as well as observable behaviors; it takes a holistic approach to the situation and persons. The object of this research is the memoir *"Educated"* by Tara Westover. The object of this research is the memoir *"Educated"* by Tara Westover. Collecting data the researcher used in this research is a literature study. The steps of data collection in this study are (1) reading the memoir slowly. (2) searching for theoretical sources used as a guide for analysis (3) rereading the memoir and noting the relevant data (4) collecting other information sources needed for the research.

The data analysis technique used by the researcher is the descriptive analysis technique. According to Sugiyono (2013: 244), data analysis is an analysis used to analyze data using how to describe the data that has been collected and then make conclusions that can be understood from the data. The main instrument of this research are the three researchers as a collector, reader, and analyzer. And the lecture as the corrector.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Tara Westover, who resides in the mountainous region of Idaho, USA, is the subject of this book. She was the youngest and lived with her mother, father, and six siblings. Tara is from a very traditional and extreme family. In addition to their disbelief in schooling, Tara's family also has no faith in the government or medical facilities. Only after deciding to leave her home and pursue higher education did Tara, who had never attended formal school, start to interact with the outside world. Tara's persistence allowed her to finish her doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge. Tara illustrates how education can alter viewpoints and one's comprehension of the world in this narrative.

The Transformative Learning Theory developed by Jack Mezirow focuses on how individuals undergo significant changes in their understanding and perspectives of the world. The Transformative Education Theory states that after undergoing psychological and convictional processes, people can alter their conduct (Opere: 2020). This transformation process involves several stages, namely: disorienting dilemma, self-examination, critical reflection, and reintegration.

1. Disorienting Dilemma

"I was afraid of being 'found out.' I thought if I said anything, if I let myself believe I was different from them, my father would realize that I was no longer his." (Westover: 2018)

This quotation demonstrates Tara Westover's perplexing predicament. The information and experience he gained from education made him doubt the values he received in his family. According to DeAngelis (2019) A disorienting dilemma can be defined as an instance in which someone has been prompted to doubt something they have firmly believed to be true by fresh knowledge. Problems that cause confusion might be subtle or profound. Her reluctance to acknowledge that she was beginning to diverge from her family, particularly her father, is evident in this sentence. The statement, *"I was afraid of being found out."* Captures Tara's internal struggle as she starts to distance herself from her family's prespective.

Tara's anxiety about her father noticing her differences is a reflection of a turning point in her development of a sense of dissonance between her own values and those of her family. This is the central point of the confusing problem, where she has to deal with the psychological and emotional difficulties brought on by her shifting worldview and her function in the family.

This quotation also demonstrates the tremendous strain Tara faces to stay faithful to her family despite the fact that her heart is starting to turn elsewhere. This conflict serves as a vital starting point for her journey of transformation.

2. Self-examination

"I don't know what I believe. What I do know is that I want to believe in something." (Westover: 2018)

In Tara Westover's journey of transformation, this quote demonstrates self-examination. At this point, Tara starts to doubt the convictions that have guided her since she was a little child, but she hasn't yet established a strong new basis.

The phrase *"I want to believe in something."* demonstrates Tara's need to discover values or beliefs that are genuine and significant to her, while the comment *"I don't know what I believe."* captures her bewilderment and uncertainty as she starts to distance herself from her family's teachings.

Because it depicts the point at which Tara genuinely assesses her identity, convictions, and desire to create a new worldview, this stage is significant in the transformative learning process. The individual weighs, questions, or even challenges the basic presumptions or ideas that have long been accepted as true as part of critical self-reflection (Hardika: 2020). Her intellectual and emotional development is built around this fight.

3. Critical reflection

"Everything I had worked for, all my studying, all my reading, all my effort to expand my mind, had been to unravel the story of my family's world. But now that I was finally in that world, I wanted to retreat back into my old one. The truth was too painful, too destabilizing." (Westover: 2018)

This quotation demonstrates how Tara critically assesses the ideologies and stories her family has given her and how they run counter to the reality she learns via schooling. In addition to challenging her past, this critical reflection forces Tara to face the hurt brought on by her shift in viewpoint.

Critical reflection is at the heart of transformative learning, where one reassesses their old beliefs based on new information and experiences. Fitriana (2021) argues that critical reflection can shift understanding, change worldviews, and create transformative learning experiences. In the context of Tara, this is the moment she realizes that her family's life and worldview can no longer serve as the foundation of her identity.

4. Reintegration

"I had learned to see the world in a new way, to see it not as an endless source of threats, but as a place to make a future for myself." (Westover: 2018)

Reintegration is the last phase of Tara Westover's path toward transformative learning, reflected in this quote. According to Hardika (2020), at this phase, a person begins to be interested in trying to use a new perspective, namely the perspective held by others, to view, understand, or interpret reality or experiences. By repeatedly trying to use a new perspective and finding it more accurate in interpreting reality, a person has undergone a process of transformation.

This statement demonstrates Tara's internalization of a more upbeat and self-empowering viewpoint. The world she formerly perceived as dangerous has now transformed into a place where she can create her own future. A strong and independent identity is the outcome of this metamorphosis, which signifies the reconciliation of prior experiences and fresh perspectives.

This quotation affirms Tara's progress in achieving emotional and intellectual independence while also describing her triumph against childhood trauma and brainwashing.

Discussion

According to research by Pratidina dkk. (2024), Tara Westover's journey is described as a transformative experience that is profound and reflects the evolution of a child who is terisolasi and not able to learn to become an educated adult. The core of this transformation is the confrontation with family, minor trauma, and self-identity, which is

closely related to the transformative phases described in Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Education.

Her metamorphosis was further hindered by childhood trauma. She struggled to balance her desire to forge her own path with her familial loyalty as a result of the emotional and psychological scars she suffered. She struggled with ambiguity about her identity and views, which is reflected in her self-examination moments, as evidenced by her admission, "I don't know what I believe." I am certain that I wish to have faith in something (Westover, 2018). Tara's perseverance is demonstrated by her search for her identity. She realized via critical thinking that the beliefs she was instilled with no longer defined her, illustrating the harsh truths about her family's worldview. Despite the emotional toll, Tara was able to change her viewpoint during this phase. She eventually reintegrated into society, demonstrating the transformational power of education by viewing the world "not as an endless source of threats, but as a place to make a future for myself" (Westover, 2018). By changing her viewpoint, she was able to transcend the constraints placed on her by her background and reinvent who she was.

According to Pratidina et al. (2024) and bolstered by the results of Westover's story, Tara's journey highlights the interaction of trauma, personal conflict, and the quest for knowledge in forming an individual's identity. It supports the notion that change is a difficult but liberating process, and that education is essential to helping people rise above their current situation and forge a new future for themselves.

And in result of Ishaq et al. (2024) Tara Westover's transformative journey is deeply connected to self-transformation as analyzed in the article Shaping Identity Through Crisis: An Eriksonian Investigation in Educated by Tara Westover. The article highlights how Tara's experiences, framed within Erikson's psychosocial theory, reveal the pivotal role of crises in reshaping identity. Her struggles with familial expectations and societal constraints align with Erikson's stages, particularly "Identity vs. Role Confusion," where she wrestles with defining herself amidst conflicting values. These crises acted as catalysts for Tara to critically reflect on her upbringing and ultimately redefine her purpose and worldview through education.

This self-transformation aligns with Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, particularly through stages such as disorienting dilemmas and critical reflection. Tara's realization of the limitations imposed by her family's beliefs echoes Erikson's notion of autonomy, demonstrating her courage to assert her individuality. Her memoir captures this evolution, emphasizing how education empowered her to break free from her past and forge a new identity. Both frameworks collectively affirm the transformative potential of adversity, introspection, and resilience in shaping one's self-perception and ability to transcend circumstances.

Transformative Learning Theory, might improve individual behavior. According to Tara Westover's memoir, Education facilitates identity transformation through critical reflection, disorientation, and reintegration. This illustrates how education serves as a guide for both private and social growth in addition to being a tool for fostering knowledge. In addition, this study strengthens the position of memoir as a medium for understanding the deeper connection between personal experiences and social topics. Utilizing the transformative learning theory, this study also gives students practical advice on how to foster reflection and adaptation in their social circles.

Benefits include many aspects. Individuals are encouraged to use education as a tool for self-improvement. In the field of education, this study offers a fresh approach to designing lessons that encourage self-awareness and transformation. Simply put, the

general public believes that education is crucial to helping people deal with their personal and social problems.

Conclusion

Tara Westover's memoir, *educated*, exemplifies the transformative power of education, as framed by Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Westover's journey from a restrictive, isolated upbringing to achieving academic and personal growth highlights the profound role education plays in reshaping identity and perspective, through the stage of disorienting dilemmas, self-examination, and critical reflection. Tara confronts and ultimately transcends the constraints of her familial beliefs, demonstrating how education fosters self-awareness and adaptation to change.

This study underscores the dual role of education as a means of acquiring knowledge and as a catalyst for deep personal transformation, by analyzing Westover's experiences through the lens of transformative learning. The research provides valuable insight into how individuals can navigate profound life changes and redefine their identities. Ultimately, *educated* serves as a compelling narrative of resilience and growth, emphasizing the broader societal implications of personal empowerment through education.

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