



Bachelor Thesis

Facing the Friction of a Totalitarian Government

A critical reading of Orwell's *1984* applying the Pedagogy of Discomfort to themes
related to government control

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Abstract

This study explores the potential application of George Orwell's novel *1984* in ESL instruction and its influence on promoting discussion among students on divisive political issues. The objective is to examine how the novel's underlying concepts of oppression, dictatorship, and propaganda could encourage critical thinking and social interaction among ESL students. The study considers cultural sensitivity, language skill levels, and the growth of intercultural competency as it examines the difficulties and advantages of adding *1984* into the ESL curriculum. This study sheds light on Orwell's portrayal of political dystopia and its consequences for deliberative democracy, offering valuable suggestions for using literature to foster critical participation in ESL classes.

Moreover, the study examines the literary elements, ideas, and applicability of George Orwell's novel "1984" in contemporary culture. With an emphasis on the experiences of the main character Winston under a totalitarian government, the study analyses the utilisation of third-person perspective and language to portray a dystopian society. The effects of governmental control, alienation, and media manipulation are investigated to draw attention to the reflection of totalitarianism and its influence on personal freedom. The study accentuates the importance of studying *1984* from an educational standpoint and suggests utilising agony to encourage critical thinking and consideration of power, control, and personal freedom in the classroom.

Ultimately, the study examines the usefulness of George Orwell's novel *1984* for discussing contemporary political issues in ESL classes. Understanding the digital world is made

more accessible by the analysis, which highlights the significance of politics, surveillance, and authoritarianism in contemporary society. Students can better analyse complex subjects and cultural influences by knowing the effects of tyranny, surveillance, and propaganda. Students should read and analyse such important works of literature to assess *1984*'s applicability and elicit moral and political debates. Future studies need to embrace the pedagogy of discomfort and consider other consequences. Ultimately, lesson objectives and timetables must be created to ensure that students effectively engage with the subject matter.

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1. Introduction

According to Repucci and Slipowitz (1), there was a notable proliferation of authoritarian power worldwide during the early 2020s. This indicates a significant transformation in political landscapes and potential ramifications across various aspects of society. The student population is one of the demographics affected by these developments. One area of direct consequence for students is the emergence of conflicts between nations, such as the tensions and war between Russia and Ukraine. These conflicts create uncertainty and geopolitical challenges, which can have profound consequences for individuals, societies, and international relations. Additionally, political decisions and judgments, such as the Roe v. Wade decision in the United States, introduce ethical and moral dilemmas that shape public discourse and influence policies. Understanding the historical connection between conflicts and the ensuing debates surrounding individual rights versus governmental authority is crucial in fostering informed civic engagement.

It becomes increasingly significant for educational institutions to incorporate discussions on political discourse, democracy, and individual freedoms into their curricula following the significance of such global developments (Çekrezi 1). Schools are essential in equipping students with the necessary knowledge and critical thinking skills to engage as citizens in a democratic society responsibly. Moreover, educators can empower students to actively participate in shaping the future of their communities and nations by fostering a robust comprehension of the complications and consequences of political transformations (Çekrezi 1).

Democracy, personal freedom, and the ability to engage in deliberative democracy are fundamental values in education and within the common core educational approach. They are cited explicitly within the compulsory school syllabuses (Skolverket 1). Gutmann states that “a

democracy is deliberative to the extent that citizens and their accountable representatives offer one another morally defensible reasons for mutually binding laws in an ongoing process of mutual justification” (xii). Thus, the ability to critically consider and deliberate governmental action about questions of personal freedom is possible and should be encouraged within the classroom. Though this is often more closely associated with social studies, the deliberation of politics and ethics is also highly relevant in the literature classroom (Porto & Zembylas 246). One specific area of opportunity is the selection of literature that centres on these topics and allows teachers to teach students how to think about and discuss challenging issues.

The concept of the Pedagogy of Discomfort, which refers to the conscious use of the experience of uneasiness for teaching purposes and learning process, can significantly influence the acquisition of English as a second language. Such an approach encourages students to challenge their preconceived notions and beliefs by shifting the concentration from the teacher to the students themselves. Consequently, it fosters critical thinking skills, particularly concerning sensitive and uncomfortable subjects. The role of the teacher in this context is to facilitate open dialogues and assist students in critically evaluating their culturally influenced ideas. Embracing discomfort becomes essential for comprehending the social context and eliciting emotional responses.

Moreover, English language learners can develop essential skills, including critical thinking, reflection, and intercultural awareness by implementing discomfort pedagogy. Furthermore, it allows literature to delve into historical topics, including authoritarianism, thereby aiding readers in understanding society and its trajectory. Ultimately, teachers are essential in empowering students to take ownership of their inquiries and encouraging them to take action.

Within English as a school subject, as stressed within the Common Core Objectives, students should develop knowledge of democracy and the foundations of democratic governments. More specifically, the Reading for Information section of the objectives states that the readers should be able to delineate and evaluate the reasoning in critical elements of literature, or seminal texts, that “include the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy” (RI.11-2.8). This parallels the fundamental values of Swedish compulsory education, which holds that “education should impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based” (Skolverket 5). This includes reading “seminal” works of literature, like Orwell’s *1984*.

1984 is a dystopian novel published in 1949. Orwell is considered a cautionary tale regarding authoritarian government. It focuses on the dangers of totalitarian regimes modelled after those of Hitler and Stalin. This provides a structure for examining other issues related to personal freedom and political manipulation, particularly propaganda. As such, it is an appropriate text for students to use when beginning to engage in deliberative democracy in the classroom. George Orwell’s *1984* is appropriate for use with a more mature student sub-set, based on the abstract nature of the subject/ theme, the linguistic complexity and related reading level of the text, and the overall complexity of the related teaching unit. Thus, it is most appropriate for use with students, specifically students in year 2 and 3 in upper-secondary school. Some critics claim that George Orwell’s *1984* contains violent, torturous, sexual themes and other explicit or upsetting material that may not be appropriate for younger students. It is assumed that exposing students to such material could harm their mental health or be improper for their age group.

George Orwell's *1984* can be valuable when taught in ESL classrooms because when analysed using a pedagogy of discomfort, it provides an opportunity for exploration of themes relevant to democracy and personal freedom and the opportunity it presents for the development of deliberative democracy-based skill sets.

1.1 Aim and Objectives

1.1.1 Aim

This study will analyse the themes of oppression, totalitarianism, and propaganda in George Orwell's *1984* in the context of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). The study will examine in what ways George Orwell's *1984* may be utilised in the ESL classroom to encourage student discussion of divisive political themes and whether the novel's themes and vocabulary may encourage ESL students to engage in critical thinking and interpersonal communication. The study will provide some background information for political dystopian literature in what follows. The essay will analyse George Orwell's *1984* in great detail, looking at its storyline, narrative style, and development of topics.

1.1.2 Objectives

The research will encompass the following objectives:

- a. To analyse Orwell's treatment of oppression, totalitarianism, and propaganda in *1984*
- b. To determine whether the novel's themes and vocabulary can encourage ESL students to engage in critical thinking and interpersonal communication
- c. To examine the challenges and benefits of including George Orwell's novel *1984* in the ESL curriculum, considering cultural sensitivity, language proficiency levels, and intercultural competence development among ESL students.

2. Background

2.1 Orwell and *1984*

The Oceanian government uses cameras, microphones, and a complex network of secret police to pressure citizens to act in ways that align with the society's ideology. This includes encouraging citizens to spy on and report back to the government regarding the activity of their fellow citizens. The government uses its structure and the resulting power to force citizens into obedience by removing privacy, personal power, and the appearance of freedom. Through the primary protagonist, Winston Smith's perspective, the reader is forced to consider the discomfiting idea of a government that carries out constant surveillance to wield total power over its citizens. Hence, the story fits within the more prominent theme of totalitarian dystopian literature.

George Orwell's novel *1984*, published in 1949, demonstrates the effects of the apocalyptic times following the two World Wars, particularly felt throughout Europe. Millions of people were killed. The work is political and creates space to discuss fascism, communism, and state control allegories. Even now, the work offers a discussion of the nightmarish vision of the future. It offers concrete and naturalistic debate about the past and future. The rearrangement of materials from histories like the Cold War, The Great Depression, and the World Wars is present in the work and makes it more realistic than fiction. Totalitarianism represents a form of political terrorism, as witnessed in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, during different eras in history.

Moreover, Orwell *1984* is the most ambitious work which realises a citizen's ultimate fear – a totalitarian state--, and yet Orwell had told his publisher that he was not happy with the book. Orwell *1984* significantly influenced both the canon of literature and modern culture. It is renowned for how it portrays the suppression of individualism, authoritarian surveillance, and thought control. The book was inspired by several themes that resonated with readers worldwide,

such as propaganda, governmental manipulation, and the power of language. It has spurred ongoing discussions about the boundaries of power and the importance of preserving individual liberties.

Six months after Orwell's death, the novel was widely acclaimed and was already changing people's consciousness. The novel sold over 400,000 copies in Britain and the United States in one year. The work had been compared with Swift and been called "momentous" and "a great work of kinetic art" (Suplee). The novel is about a society where the government rewrites history per the ultimate authority's wishes – Big Brother. The novel warns of the use of permanent wars to keep the population under control and manipulations like "two minutes hate" being used to control citizens via fear.

Based on these topics, it is impossible to discuss surveillance, privacy, propaganda, authoritarian politics, and the distortion of truth today without referencing *1984*. Within the novel, Orwell coined terms now used to specifically discuss totalitarian governments, including words like *memory hole*, *unperson*, *doublethink*, *Newspeak*, *thoughtcrime*, *thought police*, and *Big Brother*, all of which have ongoing uses and specific application to propaganda and political discussions today. During the Cold War, the novel was discussed behind the Iron Curtain, leaving people wondering if Orwell's novel was a work of prophecy rather than fiction. The work has continued to be required reading in high schools worldwide, even today.

2.1 Totalitarianism in Dystopian Literature

Althusser claims that "all ideology hails or interrelates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" who are susceptible to the beliefs and values forced upon them within the totalitarian government or setting (162). He holds that the subject, or those citizens living in a totalitarian state, will slowly begin to believe in the totalitarian agenda as he becomes inspired by the ideas forced

on him and that this, in time, will turn to actions as he "acts according to his ideas" over time, further submitting himself to the ideologies and social functions of the totalitarian body (157). This aligns with the ideas of Foucault, who states that individuals are exploited in society by those that hold power through discipline and punishment. The Foucauldian concept of power is totalitarian in that it is also inescapable. The perception that one is wholly outside of power's grasp is challenged by the fact that power is constantly there and that resistance becomes relevant exactly where power is utilised. The author highlights the ability of resistance to cause havoc and restructure oppressive frameworks, suggesting hope of transformation by acknowledging the multifaceted nature of power dynamics.

George Orwell's novel *1984* points out that individuals within the power dynamic, or underneath the totalitarian government, are not trapped because they have free will and the power to stand up, even if they cannot necessarily "jump outside the situation" (386). This invites the possibility for change, but only if the individual fights to change the situation that they are in. Within a totalitarian government, this amounts to rebellion. Foucault holds that the ruling class, or those with power, use calculated manipulations of the class, or classes below them, to coerce a desired pattern of behaviour (138). This leads to subordination to the state.

This ties directly to dystopian literature and how power is presented within totalitarian literature. As described by Malak:

“Power's repression of human potential and the unwavering quest for perfect social order, as demonstrated by *1984*, are topics explored in dystopias. They show power functioning effectively and ruthlessly as it approaches totalitarianism. It is interesting how dystopias frequently feature exterior conflict or dangers, mixing inward horror with external tension.” (Orwell 10)

Approaching this limit inspires rebellion or reaches the point that society must push back against power. This directly ties these ideas, related to totalitarianism, and their role in literature to the novel *1984* by Orwell. More specifically, it applies to the role of Big Brother in the novel, as the governing force putting pressure on the main character, Winston Smith, and his rebellion, or failure to rebel, as a reflection of his free will.

2.3 Literature Review

A significant body of research exists on Orwell's *1984* and the pedagogical application of the novel. Specifically, there is a large amount of recent research and related academic literature related to applying pedagogy to explore the theories of dystopian literature to the text to explore political truths (Dunder & Palovski 577; Gerhard 2; Maskova 1). This shows a renewed interest in the primary themes explored in *1984* and how they remain relevant for use in high school classrooms. For example, Bowker focuses on the autobiographical elements of the novel (1), Regis (109) discusses the significance of themes of power and technology in the novel, and Lynsky considers how other authors influenced Orwell to write about totalitarianism (5). Several subjects that have resonated with readers worldwide, inspiring this book, include propaganda, governmental manipulation, and the influence of language. However, there is a lack of research that specifically focuses on applying the pedagogy of discomfort in *1984*. Hence, this paper attempts to fill that gap.

To provide greater detail, in the book *The Ministry of Truth: The Biography of George Orwell's 1984*, Lynskey examines how the work of Hadley Cantril, author of *The Invasion from Mars*, influenced Orwell, and he gained insights into totalitarian methods (1). In Orwell's *Day*, the radio had the power to manipulate the opinions of the public. In the context of the novel, the country was exposed to the Danger of misunderstood news and incomplete news about the medium

that has yet to prove its performance competency. In this sense, Danger does not come from foreign sources but from a theatrical demagogue. Information control and manipulation, therefore, become a means of controlling the public and forming a totalitarian government within the central setting and become an essential part of the central theme in *1984*.

Correspondingly, Jeremy Bentham, the social reformer who also gave the utilitarianism theory, states that the outcomes of actions decide whether they are moral or immoral. His idea of the Panopticon is that of a circular structural building with a watchtower at its centre, as featured in *1984*, and the guards on this watchtower can monitor the prisoners in their cells at all times. The guards can also contact prisoners with tube-like connections, but the prisoners cannot talk to each other. The prisoners can also not see the guard as a bright light is installed on the watchtower. The prisoners constantly feel that they are being watched and do not do any illegal activity. This theory establishes the basic idea of panopticon control. This theory will give an understanding of the imprisonment in *1984* under the watchful eye of Big Brother as it relates to totalitarianism and how governments gain power over their people (Bentham 30).

In his work “Discipline and Punishment”, Foucault argues that discipline and surveillance have altered the way of punishing and controlling people, as is seen in his paranoia of Winston (Sobolczyk 2018). Discipline and punishment intend to produce obedient students who willingly adhere to social rules and do not behave under corporal threats. This aspect is seen through the interactions between Winston and the rest of the people of Oceania (Sobolczyk 1). Foucault has used the Panopticon to discuss control or how the government controls people via various mechanisms designed to impact them socially and cognitively. More specifically, discipline and punishment are a critical part of Foucault's theory, where he claimed punishment systems to be present in specific political economies similar to Oceania. Discipline is meted out on the body and

comes from the distribution of people in space. The discipline's spatial and temporal aspects are defined in people's lives by power, and in the case of *1984*, this power is in the hands of Big Brother (Sobolczyk 1).

Finally, in Arendt's work ("Hannah Arendt (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)"), totalitarianism is depicted as a process by which a regime transforms different classes into large masses through propaganda. The process is distinct from autocratic rule, as it is not characterised by excessive utilisation. Totalitarian regimes strive to control every aspect of life, while dictatorial regimes aim to obtain absolute power over people. It persecutes all higher forms of intellectual, artistic, and spiritual activity. Arendt claims that it is done through surveillance, propaganda, fake governments, agencies, esoteric doctrines, and adverts that conceal and distort radical ideas of totalitarianism from the non-totalitarian world. Terror and surveillance are essential to this form of totalitarian government. Despite extensive research on pedagogical implications, the pedagogy of discomfort has yet to be applied to George Orwell's *1984*. By examining the unsettling authoritarian concepts offered in *1984* and their applicability in educational settings, this research seeks to fill that vacuum.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this exploration of *1984* comprises two key elements. First, there is the pedagogical framework based on the pedagogy of discomfort and its application within the educational setting. This is related to the ability of the text to provide educational opportunities through the broaching of uncomfortable topics, through the medium of the novel's text, with a group of students. A limited body of research has been completed, which specifically centres on applying a pedagogy of discomfort to *1984*'s totalitarian themes. Secondly, within the theoretical model, totalitarian dystopia, a subgenre of dystopian literature, is explored to frame the connection between the critical elements of discomfort pedagogy and the specifically uncomfortable topics presented in *1984*. Thus, the second part of the theoretical framework will be used to set up a critical process for discussing the complex topics related to totalitarianism when reading literature, specifically *1984*.

3.1 A Pedagogy of Discomfort

Pedagogical discomfort is "the feeling of uneasiness due to the process of teaching and learning from others" (Zembylas 165). It is a process that removes the teacher from the centre of the learning process, allowing it to be student-driven and providing an opportunity for students to independently challenge their own "cherished beliefs and assumptions about the word" (Zembylas 165). This allows for engagement in critical inquiry or provides a scaffold within which the students can examine their beliefs and analyse their feelings surrounding uncomfortable or difficult topics and themes (Boler 180). The instructor must assume the facilitator position to facilitate student discussion and critically analyse "how our modes of seeing have been specifically shaped by the dominant culture of the historical moments" (Boler 179). This approach aims to understand the social context of reaction and the contextual basis for personal feelings and emotional

responses by using discomfort as a springboard for progress. The teacher should apply the notion of pedagogical pain to encourage a growth mentality among ESL students. According to Zembylas, pedagogical discomfort is the unease experienced while collaborating with others to educate and learn. With this strategy, the emphasis is placed on the students rather than the teacher, allowing them to confront their assumptions and worldviews actively. When learning English, pedagogical discomfort allows students to participate in critical inquiry and independently assess their beliefs, especially regarding uncomfortable or difficult topics and themes. Students can examine their emotional reactions and the societal forces that have affected their viewpoints by building an investigation scaffold.

Megal Boler first introduced the Pedagogy of Discomfort to create space for feelings in the classroom and specifically to address the power of feelings traditionally viewed as uncomfortable (176). The use of the pedagogy of discomfort is designed to acknowledge how emotions, ethics and personal investigation of life experiences are critically tied to one another and directly influence how humans experience life (Head 78). Moreover, it allows education to directly support students by acknowledging that cognitive and emotional expressions or responses to complex stimuli cannot be excluded and are critical to participating in political and sociocultural analysis (Head 79).

Thus, in fulfilling this purpose, the pedagogy of discomfort has been designed with two critical elements related to the experienced discomfort "inquiry", or exploration of the discomfort through questioning, and "action", or the ability to take action in the face of discomfort (Boler 176). As students both ask questions, and take action in response to the conclusions they draw, students, within this pedagogy, can take on multiple roles, specifically either a spectating or a witnessing role, and the act of witnessing is to be preferred (Boler 179). Boler defines a spectator

as one who is anonymous and seeks to create distance between the self, and the other, within the theme of discomfort. In other words, during the inquiry portion, they ask questions, but then in the action portion, they remain actionless. In other words, a spectator would view a conversation on totalitarianism from an abstract or impersonal position. However, they would not see it as relevant to their position and would not act against it. This gap between inquiry and action comes from feeling like they are outside the effect of the discomfort, which allows them to “abdicate any possible responsibility” (Boler 184).

This is contrasted directly against the role of a witness or of witnessing. Witnessing is a dynamic and engaged process in which the implications of historical responsibilities with current action and reaction are analysed and openly discussed (Butler 179). A witness considers their relationship with the topic of discomfort and takes responsibility for the action that should be taken in response. In other words, they would engage in inquiry over totalitarianism, see how their government or other governments are acting totalitarian, and then take active steps related to that. This might include funding countries that cannot defend themselves against enormous powers. This moves beyond inquiry and analysis to taking personal responsibility and action.

The teacher's role is crucial in distinguishing between the two roles and facilitating the student's movement between those roles (Butler 180). Teachers are responsible for helping them take personal responsibility and action. When applied to literature, this means considering the depiction of historical patterns, like the pattern of totalitarianism.

In the context of totalitarianism depicted in *1984*, a potential approach involves examining historical patterns of totalitarianism, particularly within Europe's history. This analysis allows for a comparison with the actions and reactions of characters in "1984," offering insights into potential future implications concerning evolving forms of totalitarian governance. This can be tied to

literature through the close reading of literature and consideration of the emergence of key themes, like totalitarianism and government control, within the work of literature.

3.2 Critical Reading

Pedagogy of discomfort is helpful because it allows teachers to lead students in an inquiry process about complex topics. Specifically, concerning totalitarianism, it allows students to question what they know about government, how it functions, and how that directly affects the lives of citizens. This allows them to explore their relationship with the government and social norms surrounding the government while determining whether or not those are healthy connections and serve the public well.

The theoretical framework is concerned with how a critical reading is conducted to provide a review of *1984* as a case study of applying the pedagogy of discomfort to government, specifically totalitarianism, within the larger body of literature. Critical reading has been used in the academic, scientific, and other reading communities to engage in a deeper understanding of the text and move from comprehension to problem-solving related to the text (Koray & Cetinkilic 400). Critical readers, according to Koray and Cetinkilic, “establish a balance between themselves and the author and move beyond what is written by approaching the text from all angles” (401). This is accomplished through an inquiry process in which the reader develops questions out of the context of the text and begins extending those questions to the real world.

More specifically, when applied to literature and the sociocultural constructions presented in the thematic basis of the text, the reader can use critical reading to develop a more critical consciousness regarding the cultural dimensions of the text, which in this case are concerned with totalitarianism as an element of dystopia, and their reactions, as a reader, to the text during the

physical reading process (Lundhal 264). Thus, critical reading will be used as the mode by which pedagogy of discomfort is applied to the case of *1984* in the current study.

4. Methodology

The following literary study comprises a close reading of the related themes for discussing the pedagogy of discomfort to the fictional work Orwell's *1984*. Thus, the data used for the current text is that of Orwell's novel *1984*. Data in the form of extracts from the text are used to develop a narratological analysis of the novel. It provides a scaffold on which the story's themes and use of language can be analysed, specifically via the pedagogy of discomfort, to lead inquiry and analysis of uncomfortable topics related to totalitarianism, government and politics. More specifically, to consistently apply the theoretical foundation, a pedagogy of discomfort, critical close reading was used to carry out a thematic analysis, which focused on themes directly related to totalitarianism in *1984*. This allowed three key themes to be directly addressed: totalitarianism, control, and propaganda-based communication. To provide evidence of this process, a framework matrix was used according to the standard created by Bryman (528). The primary themes found included family totalitarianism, propaganda, and patriarchy, as they relate to control and the erasure of individualism, which are critical, as well as the related subthemes.

5. Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter, a short narrative analysis of the novel will be used to consider its textual or language features and the primary themes related to sociocultural issues tied to governmental control or totalitarianism. These are related explicitly to totalitarianism, propaganda, and control.

5.1 Textual Features of *1984*

The novel is narrated in the third person and is told from Winston's point of view, making Winston the focalizer of the story. Through his experiences, the reader can observe how a

totalitarian society functions. The reader understands how telescreens and spies monitor and control illegal thoughts. The reader is in Winston's mind, so they make the same mistakes as he makes in identifying the true nature of other people. For example, at a certain moment, a person may remind themselves that they will know who will be vaporised in the next few years and who will retain their life, indicating their awareness of the situation. His predictions have proven to be inaccurate. Nonetheless, this behavior has given rise to a paranoid society in which all connections and interactions with others are permitted only to a certain extent. Any actions beyond this boundary are deemed illegal. It is not possible to know fellow people.

As a result of using Winston as the focalizer, he is a well-developed character whose stream of consciousness is often present in the story's narration. Winston shows the inclination of the proletariat and yet looks at them as inferior, as they lack the resources or the ability to change their positions in society. Despite being spiteful, he also exhibits an interest in the high social position of the wealthy, particularly O'Brien, which sparks a conversation regarding prejudices towards people of a particular social class.

One of the primary elements often discussed in examining the text is Orwell's distinct use of language and, more specifically, how he coined terms for use in the novel, which remain a regular part of the English lexicon today. These include Newspeak, Big Brother, double talk, and other similarly well-recognised phrases that are part of the government's specific structure to remove power from the people. Blakemore argues that Orwell worked to isolate his characters by using a foreign and newly developed lexicon (349). More specifically, he "prepared a new dictionary so man cannot express himself through language," providing The Party with a new element of control (349). Similarly, Hodge and Fowler claim that using this language leads to

chaos and incoherence that take power away (27). Thus, linguistics is directly tied to the novel's ideas of totalitarianism and control.

When considering this use of unique language, it is essential to return to the theoretical framework and consider the pedagogy of discomfort. The use of language makes the student uncomfortable. It forces them to confront negative and complex concepts like the loss of control when governments overstep or take too much power. Thus, the critical reading of the novel and analysis of these elements, including Winston's point of view, his character development, and his relationship with the words coined by Orwell and used as symbols or tools of government power, provides an avenue by which teachers can use the inquiry process to explore the relationship between students and governments, especially those wielding totalitarian or dystopian power.

5.2 Theme 1: Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism imposes total dominance, profoundly alters every facet of existence under its control, and relentlessly monitors every part of society. In the novel *1984*, Orwell shows how alienation materialises through powerlessness to demonstrate totalitarianism's impact. From the perspective of social-psychological alienation theory, one can explore and examine his experiences and events in the context of a broader range of social constructs. Social Alienation theory is a concept used to describe the experience of an individual, or a group, like the citizens in this novel, who feel tension from or a lack of identification with the values of their surrounding society (Al-Subahihi & Ismail 289). Al-Subahihi and Ismail argue that social-psychological alienation was created in *1984* by focusing on Winston as a character and how he becomes alienated even by himself (289). Specifically, Winston in *1984* shows "powerlessness" that also brings the character's alienation from the rest of the world. He is a worker, and as a worker, he is alienated to such an extent that the authority dictates the rationale for all his decisions.

In addition to advanced technology, the totalitarian rule affects Winston as his life is restructured and dominated by the establishment that has complete control of the economy. Winston also experiences class struggle as he sees the totalitarian regime separating him. Orwell also brings the political atrocities practised by the Communist Party, the Spanish Government, and the Stalin Regime. In addition to these, *1984* is also the philosophical identification of totalitarianism as a derivative of the source of power. The events in this novel are for the philosophical recognition and understanding of totalitarianism as an agent of control. Thus, *1984* provides a thematic and critical assessment and analysis of the tools of power instead, which can be related through a pedagogy of discomfort to situations experienced in engagement with government in real life.

Control and isolation are made possible because of the cutting-edge technology utilised by the party, which includes telescreens, cameras, and microphones. People are constantly being watched, which makes it risky to look about in public because it could be interpreted as a sign that you are trying to hide something. Even whispering to oneself in private is not allowed. Because expressions regarded as deviant or undesirable are penalised, individuals are prevented from having and expressing creative thoughts without fear of experiencing repercussions or becoming estranged from the community. The circumstances in which Winston finds himself serve as a clear illustration of his profound sense of solitude. In *1984*, technology further deepened the people's estrangement from one another by offering a mechanism to repress their feelings and pledge loyalty to the party.

The control of power and the ever-present corruption affect the citizens of Oceania, dissociating them from their sense of power (Everest Media 1). The citizens are left powerless. There are different opinions about the use of power, especially concerning one's ability to

accomplish anything one desires. People in a social situation will be free to act out of their volition, despite resistance. Orwell has shown a futuristic society with a totalitarian regime having complete control. The omnipresence of Big Brother constantly shadows Winston. The countless posters plastered all around Oceania and featuring the tagline "Big Brother is Watching You" and a picture of Big Brother's moustached face serve as an epitome of how widespread he is (Orwell 43). Notably, Winston can personally attest to Big Brother's constant surveillance.

Totalitarian power is in the anthropomorphic form of Big Brother and is accentuated by posters throughout the novel. The party demands complete and absolute obedience and commitment from the citizens of Oceania. Big Brother is a replacement for God as an ultimate being. The people have to betray their own emotions and spirituality to accommodate the rules given by Big Brother. The image on the posters is an extension of a strict government and ruling. Orwell warns about the government's transition from liberal principles and rejects the totalitarian system as it is destructive. The events shown in the novel are the events that take place under undemocratic governments that degenerate society overall. When the government controls all aspects of society, the individual feels that making a decision is impossible, and there is no more space for thinking, movement, or enjoyment. In his diary, Winston's writing "Down with Big Brother" (Orwell 48) is seen as an act of defiance. He later writes, "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two is four. If that is granted, all else follows" (Orwell 48). Winston needs to consistently stand up for that freedom and right, allowing the totalitarian government, over time, to take greater control of his life and even his thoughts.

The totalitarian government of Oceania exterminates all forms of freedom. Winston's diary-keeping comes under Thought Crime and is a punishable offence. It suggests the complete submission to Big Brother. When Winston buys his diary, he does not know why. He carries it

with tremendous guilt, even when it is blank. The compromising possession, as felt by Winston, shows the level of oppression by the government of Oceania. The Party Slogans (Orwell 50) show that the party has organised these slogans to ensure that Oceania's residents remain subdued and their control continues. Such power over the people ensures that the eternal state of war unites people towards what the government sees as a "common enemy." Similarly, "ignorance is strength" implies that the people's ignorance is the government's strength.

Moreover, *1984* demands discussion through the extrapolation of Winston's tragedy. The states in the novel are different from the present, but their power conglomeration is similar to the world's superpowers in today's world. Parallels can be made throughout the novel about different zones of influence. The three Orwellian states have their internal and external strategies. Each state subdues its citizens and brainwashes them to have hatred against other states so that there is a continuation of the war. It is now appropriate to engage in a meaningful discussion regarding the extent to which the fictional realm depicted in the novel *1984* has manifested in our present reality, as well as underpin the potential for further realisations in the future in light of surpassing the significant milestone of 1984. For example, in 2022 and 2023, the Ukrainian capital has been bombarded by Russian missiles. With a complete disregard towards world peace treaties and organisations, Russia has shown evidence of how "war is peace", similar to that of the Orwellian State. This shows the currency and educational relevance of the theme within the text.

After understanding this theme of totalitarianism through *1984*, students can use an inquiry process to consider the application of the ideas of totalitarianism in the present time. This is accomplished via the pedagogy of discomfort; everything that is not forbidden is considered allowed, which is contrary to what O'Brien says to Winston in *1984* "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever" (Orwell). The novel is more a political

statement than a prophecy that warns. Orwell did not think that after the novel's publication, someone would rule the world; however, he claimed that *1984* could occur if an individual is oblivious to the assaults on his freedom and liberty. According to Orwell, personal freedom is the most precious right.

Although, Orwell *1984* looks at totalitarian themes, it does not detail how these concepts might be used in the classroom or the idea of a pedagogy of discomfort. It is crucial to consider how *1984* might be studied in educational settings to promote critical thinking, reflection, and discussions about power, control, and the value of individual freedom to address this element. Teachers might inspire students to investigate the connections between the dystopian society of *1984* and modern society by introducing them to its dystopian setting. A forum for critical analysis can be created in the classroom by participating in conversations and exercises that challenge students to think critically about the erosion of individual liberties, governmental monitoring, information manipulation, and the effects of authoritarianism. By designing learning experiences that push students' preconceptions and encourage them to confront uncomfortable ideas and opinions, the idea of a pedagogy of discomfort can be used. This can entail reviewing historical instances that reflect some features of the book, looking at real-world examples of government surveillance and control, and considering the effects of giving up personal freedoms for protection.

5.3 Theme 2: Control

The government in *1984* engages in massive surveillance and meddling in every area of people's life. Even children are subjected to extensive manipulation for rebelling against their parents. Society is used as a tool to exert control over the people under the government. There are elements of Panopticon control that dismantle the private lives of individuals (Zuboff 75–89). To maintain totalitarian rule, citizens have no privacy or individuality. A private space is something

where one is free from observation and scrutiny. This space is eliminated from people's lives through two-way telescreens, microphones, and remote monitoring gadgets. The operators and executors of these methods are called "thought police" (Orwell 4). This signifies Orwell's utilisation of the novel to illustrate the various elements of the Panopticon's influence on citizens and its ultimate role in establishing total control.

The party's aim in imposing these surveillance methods is to have direct knowledge of the behaviour of its citizens, especially when they are displaying an inclination to rebel, question, or enlightenment that would harm their power? Moreover, the party has a set of departments that work in different roles to manage the party and supervenience. One of the departments in the party is the "Ministry of Truth," where Winston works. However, the character of Emmanuel Goldstein argues that the party aims "to conquer the entire earth and extinguish once and for all the possibility of independent thought" (Orwell 201). Thus, they create a ministry of truth that aims to eliminate truth from the world, holding their dogma as truth over individual thought or experience.

Moreover, Orwell demonstrates that "the aim of the party is also to prevent men and women from forming loyalties that it might not be able to control" (Orwell 68). This paranoid thinking of the party is behind their practice of continuously monitoring its citizens so that they can be controlled at the very first sign (Sobolczyk, 174–90). This provides a platform for students to discuss governmental control and surveillance related to the modern world and current societies. Teachers can make connections between the dystopian society portrayed in the passage above and contemporary examples of government surveillance and control by having dialogues with their students about these examples. Students can better grasp the themes in the novel by investigating the ethical ramifications of such practices, how they affect people's privacy and freedoms, and how governments gather and use data. This analysis of situations promotes critical thought regarding

the potential adverse effects of unchecked governmental power and the significance of preserving individual thought and autonomy.

Like the prisoners at Panopticon, the citizens of Oceania need to be made aware of the mode and means of surveillance. Winston states, "Here was, of course, no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork" (Orwell 8). Bentham envisioned the same surveillance in Panopticon.

In the novel, Big Brother is eventually the nameless, faceless entity that engages in surveillance to exert governmental power (Orwell 3). The people of this state are hammered with the warning, "Big Brother is watching you" (Orwell 3). The posters in public spaces have this warning written to have dangerous information. The observers are ignorant about who Big Brother is. Since they know him only through telescreens, they are also unaware of whether Big Brother is human or something else. Thus, the people remain oblivious as to whether Big Brother is an entity or a mere method to monitor them. Big Brother exists in their houses, too (Orwell 18). The concept of Big Brother is parallel to Bentham's prison setup. Big Brother is a ubiquitous figurehead, while the Panopticon has a central watchtower. In both situations, people are constantly worrying about being observed, which induces self-control and conformity.

Moreover in *1984*, surveillance of the populace using telescreens and covert technologies encourages fear and conformity. This analogy emphasises how oppressive surveillance is, stifling individual individuality, and promoting adherence to social standards. The Panopticon and Big Brother show the perils of unfettered observation and control. In the novel, Emmanuel Goldstein says this about the presence of Big Brother in their lives:

"At the apex of the pyramid comes Big Brother. Big Brother is infallible and all-powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, and all virtue are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration." (Orwell 216)

Big Brother of Oceania is like the guards in the watchtower of Panopticon. This constant surveillance affects and alters the behaviour of the citizens of Oceania. In contrast, Winston values his private space and personal opinion so much that he makes himself vulnerable to Danger by expressing himself in the journal.

His strong values become evident as he deliberately walks through a slum-like area of the town and purchases a diary. (Orwell 8). He is on guard when he brings this diary as he knows this act is a punishable offence even if he does not write anything. In this aspect, Panopticon is different from Oceania, as, in the former, expressing personal ideas in a journal was allowed. Oceania is stricter than Panopticon as the citizen's actions and emotions are both under control, as Winston thinks:

"In public or near a telescreen, allowing your thoughts to wander was perilous. The tiniest detail could expose you—a nervous tic, an anxious glance, even muttering to oneself—all implying abnormality or concealed secrets" (Orwell, 57).

The party believes facial expressions are enough reason to punish citizens. There must be no signs of extreme emotion or nervousness. The individual's expression is invaded to observe their faces' micro-expressions so Panopticon can dominate them. Winston finds a secluded area in his apartment where Big Brother has no prying eyes. He uses this spot to write down his negative ideas against the Party and Big Brother (Orwell 7). He does this in private as he knows at all other times he is being surveilled, and what he is doing comes under Thought Crime (Orwell 24). Thus,

he is never free and is genuinely more imprisoned than those in the model prison. Through critical reading, this can be analysed as it relates to possible surveillance and abuse of power in the modern context.

In the novel *1984*, the government establishes the standards for what is deemed permissible and acceptable, while in 2023, similar control is observed as only a few private firms wield complete authority over what can be shared online. This analogy emphasises the transition from a setting where corporate entities exercise significant influence over what is posted online. Further, evidence suggests that online entities, like social media, may have direct political ties in determining what users can say and what viewers can see. Even though there are substantial differences, comparing the extent of surveillance and control shown in *1984* to the state of digital control now is worthwhile. Social media platforms in today's culture utilise algorithms to keep an eye on their users and impose restrictions encompassing barring, flagging, or limiting their capabilities depending on specific unstated criteria. The people affected by these measures frequently lack the chance to appeal because these corporations carry out these acts autonomously and without interference from the government. Additionally, the government effectively manipulates the collective memory of its citizenry by constantly contradicting past pronouncements through continuous press releases (Kleve, 2009, 195-215).

5.3 Theme 3: Propaganda and Communication

Propaganda is used liberally in contemporary society, permeating various communication tools. The ministry is now inconsistent with reality as they substitute the truth with falsified details with the destruction of records from the past. There is censorship, as Winston admits, "Statistics were just as much a fantasy in their original version as in their rectified version" (Orwell 48). In creating propaganda of fact, Winston censors what the party wants. Winston sets down a news

report that replaces the report printed in the *Times*. The new write-up appreciates an organisation like FFCC for reporting the news. Moreover, he reports Ogilvy who surrendered his uncle to the Thought Police for committing a crime of this kind (Orwell 54).

The new stories that replace the old show the Party in a more positive light. It asks the people to serve the party and be loyal to it more than their families. Winston also writes praising Big Brother, demanding abstinence and recommending other virtues. This kind of propaganda is the propagation of falsified truths. Aspects of statistics, historical documents, war reports, and so on are not just falsified but changed to propagate specific values. Citizens of Oceania believe the facts to be accurate, and these facts subtly also persuade them in a particular direction. The significant fact is that people are better than they used to be (Orwell 85). This message is present throughout the novel and extends that Big Brother is worthy, respectful, and deserves admiration (Lee, 202).

The Ministry of Truth also supplies newspapers, books, films, programs, novels, and other media for instruction, information, or entertainment. Newspapers, and scientific journals, tell facts; however, in *1984*, these typically reputable sources are used for advertising lies. This kind of propaganda is selling lies as facts and directing values to the people of Oceania. After the propaganda of facts, there is also propaganda of fiction. Julia is employed in the fiction department with a novel-writing machine (Orwell 12). Anyone can be a writer with a novel writing machine in Oceania. This department produces fiction that serves only one purpose in the guise of entertainment – it creates fictional stories designed to keep the party in high regard in people's minds. Fact and fiction both serve the same purpose in *1984*. Winston is in charge of the facts and Julia the fiction, and both write similar stories about the Party and Big Brother. Factional stories work the same way as fictional ones in propagating values (Martinache 207). The propaganda of

fact turns lies into facts. The propaganda of fact also pushes specific values indirectly. This approach of spreading ideas forces people to self-censor and pretend to be the watcher against what one believes.

The reader knows about surveillance not as an actor but as a message about surveillance. The phrase reiterates how watchful Big Brother is not just associated with surveillance but also associated with propaganda (Marks, 202). The poster is not watching, but the message of being watched is constantly hammered in the minds of the people of Oceania:

"On coins, stamps, book covers, banners, posters, and cigarette packages—everywhere—the eyes of Big Brother followed you. There was no escape from the constant surveillance and the voice that surrounded you." (Orwell 31)

The metaphors of “voice enveloping” and “eye watching” have no escape for Oceania. There are multiple images of eyes throughout, and while the eyes cannot watch literally, they work as a reminder of the presence of the policy. All the items Winston mentions, like books, slogans, banners, packaging, and posters, are propaganda and not surveillance but continue to serve a panoptic function. The image of Big Brother exists to persuade people to follow the rules of Oceania.

Comparisons can be drawn between the propaganda depicted in Orwell's novel and contemporary events, offering a basis for fruitful discussion. In *1984* people spy on one another and often interrupt each others' activities to Big Brother. The enemies change regularly, but their practice of two-minute hate goes on. The description of two-minute hate describes how people turn against one another with a rage that has no basis. Their undirected emotions and pent-up feelings take the form of hatred that is only increased by Big Brother. The description is fantastical but very familiar when it is seen in the context of social networks today (Martinache 207). Hoaxes

and Hashtags are publicised through fake accounts until they are trending. There are misogynist and racist propaganda memes that are digitally publicised (Lee 202). Highly organised hate campaigns are directed at everyday bullying and harassment of people. Some of the hate campaigns go as far as abuse and death threats. Even forwarding and sharing these messages are a part of hate campaigns.

Learners must consider the relevance and implications of George Orwell's novel *1984* while reflecting upon their engagement in a social media conflict or argument and pondering the underlying motivations. The trending aspects of social media outrage are the modern 21st-century version of two-minute hate. Thus, pairing these themes and critical reading of the themes with applying the pedagogy of discomfort can provide students with a way to react to and plan activities related to their relationship to these governmental and social constructs.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *1984* has tremendous potential for discussing politically relevant topics that are often uncomfortable as students study in today's digital age in the ESL classroom. A critical reading of this work has shown an understanding of history, ideas, political situations, issues of privacy, and society. These topics provide for the pedagogy of discomfort as it relates to the current state of governmental power and how it is discussed in the classroom. The analysis of the novel shows politics, surveillance, and totalitarianism in present society. This book presents a variety of subjects that may be drawn from and utilised to comprehend the modern digital environment more effectively, making it very pertinent for debate and analysis in ESL classes. Exploring these subjects is crucial for ESL students because it helps them analyse and understand the complexity of the modern digital environment. Following the principle of pedagogy

of discomfort, the analysis of the work also shows that for the analysis to be critical, the students must face discussing complex topics and how culture has shaped society today.

Topics of totalitarianism, surveillance, and propaganda have shaped many events in history and altered the course of development of several countries. For example, why an individual falls victim to trends and unconsciously succumbs to hateful practices on the internet can be understood through the concept of propaganda that encourages to show anger towards anyone who deviates from the established norm. His predictions are inaccurate yet, this behavior has led to a paranoid society in which all associations and relationships with others are permissible only up to a certain extent. Going beyond this extent is deemed illegal. Learners are responsible for learning from great works of literature like *1984*. It is necessary to examine and evaluate the prevailing current circumstances in the current setting.

A compelling conclusion can be drawn based on the findings of this research: George Orwell's *1984* is a dystopian work of fiction that serves as a valuable resource and catalyst for students, providing profound ethical, political, and moral deliberations highly relevant to the contemporary digital era. However, there is a need for future research to consider additional implications of the concepts discussed in the novel so that they are included in the current study more thoroughly to educate students about contemporary world situations. The potential of Orwell's novel using the pedagogy of discomfort for analysing relevant topics also helps examine implications in greater detail in the classroom. Lesson plans and time frames for working through this novel will be relevant to the research.

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