

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains a summary of the entire research in general. This chapter covers the research background, statement of problem, research objectives, conceptual framework and previous studies, in order to explain and summarize what is the focus of this research.

1.1 Research Background

In this section, the author examines the topic of power, knowledge, and decision, making as the primary focus for understanding the dynamics of individual life choices. This topic is derived from the research object, a novel titled *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig, published in 2020, which narrates the journey of the main character as they confront various life choices and their consequences. To analyze these themes, the researcher adopts Michel Foucault's theory of Power and Knowledge, which provides a conceptual framework for understanding the interplay between knowledge and power. The author method employed is descriptive qualitative, based on the approach of (Borg & Gall, 1983), allowing the researcher to explore the content of the novel in depth. Additionally, several previous studies related to power and knowledge serve as a foundation that strengthens this analysis, thereby providing a solid theoretical basis for this research.

The transformations in Nora's experiences across multiple realities provide a meaningful lens through which to observe the subtle interplay of knowledge and power in her journey. Each life she inhabits not only represents an alternative possibility but also reflects how these possibilities are shaped by her self-perception, her understanding of the world, and the limits of what is deemed attainable. In this context, David Kellogg Lewis's (Kellogg Lewis, 1986) idea of alternate realities helps clarify how these lives maintain internal logical consistency, yet remain shaped by the values and forms of knowledge Nora has absorbed over time. Her journey is therefore far from an entirely open path, it is informed and constrained by her

memories, desires, and long-standing personal as well as social convictions. When viewed through Foucault's notion of power and knowledge, it becomes evident that each choice Nora makes is embedded within established discursive structures that define the scope of what can be imagined, pursued, or realized.

The movement from her original life to these alternative versions further reveals an ongoing exchange, one in which gains are accompanied by inevitable losses. Choosing to step away from one life means surrendering the relationships, opportunities, and identities tied to it, while gaining access to new ones unique to the life that replaces it. Such exchanges are rarely balanced; what is acquired often comes at the cost of something equally significant, creating a constant negotiation between loss and attainment. This dynamic underscores that each reality carries its own material and emotional trade-offs, making Nora's search for meaning not only a deeply personal endeavor but also a reflection of the broader ideological forces shaping the boundaries of her choices.

In Literary works, Power refers to the representation of unequal relationships between individuals or groups, where one party holds the ability to influence, control, or dominate another. In literary studies, power is often explored through how texts portray social conflict, ideological pressure, character interactions, and the dynamics between individuals and broader societal structures. As (Tyson, 1950) explains, power in literature involves questions of who holds control, how that control is exercised, and how characters respond to it. The presence of power within a literary text allows readers to observe how cultural, political, and social values are reflected through characters' actions and relationships. Power is not only portrayed through physical or political dominance, but also symbolically, through language, education, social class, and societal norms. Thus, the concept of power in literature not only enriches narrative conflict but also serves as a

tool for critiquing social inequality and the structures that shape everyday human experience.

Knowledge within literary works highlights the ways texts shape meaning and construct readers' understanding of the world, identity, and cultural values. Rather than appearing solely as factual content, knowledge often emerges through interpretation, character experience, and social interaction within the narrative. In literary analysis, knowledge is seen as a cultural construct embedded in narrative structure, language, and thematic development. According to (McHale, 2004), literature does not merely reflect knowledge but functions as a space where knowledge is questioned, reimagined, and negotiated. Through characters, plotlines, and the fictional realities they inhabit, literary texts convey diverse forms of knowledge, emotional, spiritual, and ideological. Thus, examining how knowledge operates in literature allows for a deeper understanding of how texts shape readers' perceptions of themselves and the world around them, while also revealing the role of narrative in sustaining or challenging dominant discourses.

Michel Foucault views power not as something possessed by individuals or specific institutions, but as a network of relations that operates broadly across society through various institutions and social practices. Power is not only repressive but also productive it shapes norms, knowledge, and identities. In this view, institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons do not merely transmit knowledge, they also regulate behavior and influence how individuals perceive themselves and their social environments. For Foucault, knowledge is not value, free and is often aligned with the interests of those in power. It serves to maintain authority and construct truths in ways that reflect dominant ideologies. Furthermore, alternative or marginalized forms of knowledge, those rooted in lived experiences or local cultures are often excluded by dominant discourses. Thus, power and knowledge are deeply interrelated, functioning together to govern social life.

As literary elements, power and knowledge in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* serve as key components that strengthen the novel's theme and narrative structure. Knowledge functions as a window for the protagonist, Nora Seed, to understand the various possibilities of life she could have lived, while power represents her capacity to make decisions that shape the direction of her life. Haig portrays the relationship between the two in a profound way, knowledge gives Nora the power to transform her perspective on life, but it also reveals how the power derived from knowledge can carry a heavy emotional burden. In literary terms, power and knowledge are not merely tools for character development but also symbols of a universal human conflict the dilemma between understanding too much and accepting one's limitations. Through these elements, Haig delivers a message that is both relevant and deeply human, true strength does not lie in having complete control over life but in the ability to come to terms with the choices available. In this way, power and knowledge not only add complexity to the story but also make the novel a profound reflection on human existence.

Within this framework, individual choice is never entirely autonomous, as it is shaped by pre-existing structures of power and systems of knowledge. What appears to be free choice is often constrained by cultural norms and expectations that limit decision-making. Foucault emphasizes that even though individuals are embedded within power relations, they still possess the capacity to resist and transform those relations through concrete actions. For him, choice is not merely about selecting among available options, but also involves recognizing how those options have been shaped by power and knowledge. Therefore, decision-making reflects the ongoing tension between individual freedom and structural constraint, opening a critical space to examine how subjectivity is formed within complex social influences.

One contemporary novel that presents philosophical and sociological themes through a unique narrative form is *The Midnight Library* (Haig, 2020) by Matt Haig, as the object of this study for its profound exploration of life

choices and the forces that shape them. Through its protagonist, Nora Seed, the novel portrays a woman trapped in an in-between space, a metaphysical library, where each book represents a different version of her life based on the decisions she made or neglected. This premise not only raises questions of personal freedom and self-determination but also reflects the influence of social structures, norms, and expectations on individual decision-making.

Furthermore, the novel engages with significant questions regarding the nature of regret and the pursuit of happiness. As Nora explores her alternate lives, she encounters limitations arising from both internal and external forces, mirroring broader social pressures that often define the life paths available to women and marginalized individuals. The exchange between her original reality and these alternate lives also offers a depiction of how each choice carries distinct consequences, some functioning to fulfill needs and life purposes, while others fail to produce any tangible benefit. This process underscores that not every seemingly promising opportunity results in constructive outcomes, so that each “exchange” reflects an ongoing negotiation between potential and constraint within the prevailing social framework.

By constructing the library as a space of infinite possibility, the novel reflects the tension between personal agency and external limitation. Nora’s journey across these alternate lives demonstrates how societal values and definitions of a “successful life” are closely interwoven with systems of power and access to knowledge. The exchange between the original reality and the alternate lives also illustrates how each decision carries different implications, whether serving to meet essential needs and goals or ultimately lacking in meaningful value. This dynamic reveals that not all opportunities, even those appearing desirable, will yield constructive results, making each “exchange” between one life and another a form of negotiation between possibility and limitation within the social order. Such an interplay resonates with Foucault’s framework of power and knowledge, where control is

exercised not solely through coercion but also through shaping perceptions of what is considered desirable, possible, and attainable.

The narrative vividly conveys the psychological and social dimensions of decision-making, showing how Nora negotiates her own desires with the expectations imposed by those around her. Each alternate life becomes both a reflection of her latent aspirations and a subtle mechanism of influence directing her path. Through this depiction, the novel underscores the existential struggle to define one's essence through action, in line with Sartre's notion that "existence precedes essence."

Moreover, *The Midnight Library* critiques the broader cultural and ideological frameworks that determine what counts as achievement or fulfillment. It examines how deeply embedded norms, shaped by education, relationships, and social discourse, become internalized as part of self-perception and influence self-worth. By presenting Nora's experiences across multiple realities, the novel not only explores the relationship between freedom and limitation but also questions whether a truly autonomous life can exist outside the pervasive structures of power and knowledge that shape human experience.

In conducting this research, the researcher felt it was necessary to review previous studies that address similar topics and share the same subject matter. Therefore, the author aims to present at least several studies that are considered comparable to the discussions in this research.

The first research is a thesis entstudy was conducted (Sitti & Muslim, 2023) titled *The Analysis of Naturalness in the Translation of Matt Haig's Book The Midnight Library*. This research focuses on how the concept of "naturalness" is applied in translating *The Midnight Library* into Indonesian, using Eugene Nida's theory. The study emphasizes cultural appropriateness, message context, and the characteristics of the target language audience. Through textual analysis comparing the source and translated texts, the

findings show that appropriate cultural adjustments and contextual sensitivity make the translation more natural and accessible to Indonesian readers. This research reinforces the significance of the naturalness principle in enhancing the quality of literary translations.

The next study was written by (Theebiha, 2024), exploring the role of memory and nostalgia in *The Midnight Library*. Employing narrative techniques and symbolism, the study analyzes how these two themes shape the emotional development and search for meaning of the main character, Nora Seed. Memory is portrayed as a longing for an idealized past, which becomes a central motivator in Nora's journey through alternate lives. The study also compares Haig's approach to Charles Dickens' classic work *A Christmas Carol*, emphasizing the importance of accepting the past while remaining open to future possibilities.

The Third study is research by (Setiawati et al., 2019) also focuses on memory and nostalgia in shaping Nora Seed's psychological dynamics. Utilizing similar narrative and symbolic approaches, the study demonstrates that each of Nora's alternative lives reflects the reality that no life is without imperfection. The research offers valuable insights into how past experiences, regret, and hope influence an individual's search for identity and meaning in life.

The fourth study is written by (Rozadi, 2022), titled *The Impact of Post-Trauma on the Personality Development in Matt Haig's The Midnight Library: A Psychoanalytical Study of Character*. This research analyzes the character of Nora Seed through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, with a particular focus on how past trauma, especially childhood experiences affects personality development in adulthood. The study suggests that Nora's life is significantly shaped by unconscious forces rooted in early trauma, such as the loss of her parents and her upbringing under psychological pressure. By applying the concepts of id, ego, and superego, Rozadi interprets Nora's decision to commit suicide as an outcome of unresolved psychic conflict and

suppressed emotional pain. The library is seen as a symbolic space where these internal struggles are externalized, giving Nora a chance to reflect on her unconscious desires. Although this study shares an interest in Nora's psychological complexity and her process of decision, making, it approaches the novel strictly through a clinical psychological framework, without interrogating how *power* and *knowledge* operate as underlying philosophical forces in her transformation. Therefore, this study differs from the present research, which explores how the interplay between power and knowledge influences Nora's decisions across alternate realities.

The last study was conducted by (Prasad & Sharma, 2025), entitled *Library as a Source for Transformation: A Study of Matt Haig's The Midnight Library*. This research explores how the Midnight Library serves as a symbolic and literal liminal space where the protagonist, Nora Seed, undergoes a profound transformation. Employing Homi K. Bhabha's borderland theory, particularly the concept of "liminal space," the study interprets the library as a threshold between life and death, a site that allows the main character to reassess, reimagine, and ultimately reconstruct her identity and purpose. The library is portrayed not only as a repository of books but also as a "library of possibility," where each volume opens alternate pathways for Nora's life, shifting her mindset from suicidal despair toward self, affirmation and resilience. This study positions the library as a space of healing and creative self, discovery, emphasizing its psychological and symbolic function in shaping Nora's emotional and existential journey. Although this research engages with themes of transformation and identity, it primarily focuses on spatial metaphors and psychological liminality rather than analyzing Nora's decision, making process or the philosophical relationship between power and knowledge. Thus, it differs significantly from the current research, which investigates how the dynamics of power and knowledge influence Nora Seed's choices and experiences across multiple realities.

This study has a different focus compared to previous studies. While many other studies tend to analyze aspects of memory, translation, or character psychology, this study specifically investigates the theory of power and knowledge by Michel Foucault and its application in shaping Nora Seed's life choices across alternate realities in *The Midnight Library*. In addition, this research highlights how Nora's decisions are influenced not only by personal desire but also by external structures such as social norms, expectations, and institutions. With this approach, this study offers a new contribution in understanding how literary narratives can be examined through the lens of discourse, agency, and structural constraint.

1.2 Statement of Problems

Referring to (Williams, 2007), he stated that including the formulation of the problem helps researchers to focus the discussion from various aspects, one of which can be said to be perspective and can also help in choosing an approach that is appropriate to the subject of the research. In this study the author focuses on Power, Knowledge, and Choice used in the novel *The Midnight Library*. The questions raised in this study include the following: Therefore, the researcher formulates two research questions as follows :

1. What are Nora's decisions in her life choices at *The Midnight Library*?
2. How does the relationship between power and knowledge shape Nora Seed's journey across alternate realities in *The Midnight Library*?

1.3 Research Purposes

According to (Walliman, 2011), in a study there will be a reason why the research is conducted, or what problems will be discussed in the study. The problem will raise the subject of the study, its goals and objectives, and will indicate what type of data needs to be collected to investigate the problem raised and what type of analysis is suitable to allow you to arrive at conclusions that provide answers. To

answer the questions above, the author developed several final objectives to prepare this study, the final objectives of this study are :

1. To identify Nora Seed's decisions in *The Midnight Library*, knowledge serves as a tool that allows her to explore alternate lives through the magical library. Each book provides insight into the consequences of her past choices, reshaping her values and priorities. This knowledge grants her power to rewrite her narrative, though it comes with emotional weight as every decision carry sacrifices. Ultimately, power is shown not in limitless choices but in accepting and valuing the life she chooses.
2. To examine how power and knowledge influence Nora's journey, Foucault's theory highlights how knowledge provides both freedom and constraint. Nora's awareness of alternative lives gives her power to redefine herself, but it also forces her to confront the limitations of choice and happiness. This interplay reveals that power arises not from control over every possibility, but from the acceptance of one's identity within those constraints.

1.4 Research Significances

This study contributes to modern literary studies by offering a critical analysis of *The Midnight Library* through the lens of Foucault's theory, particularly the concepts of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. This broadens the understanding of the interaction between power structures and character development in fictional narratives and provides an analytical framework that can be used by other literary researchers to explore similar themes in other literary works.

This study helps readers understand the philosophical themes hidden in *The Midnight Library*, enhances their appreciation of the work, and provides a better understanding of how individuals can interpret and manage their life choices amidst the influence of power and knowledge, which is relevant to the context of everyday

life. By bridging literary theory with contemporary social realities, the research offers insights into how personal identity, societal expectations, and the construction of meaning are negotiated in the face of structural constraints.

In addition, this study can be used as discussion material in literary and philosophical education, encouraging students and readers to engage critically with the ways in which fictional narratives illuminate, question, and even challenge the dynamics of power and knowledge in society. Contextually, the research links *The Midnight Library* to broader contemporary issues such as life choices, identity formation, and the pervasive influence of social structures. In doing so, it underscores the enduring value of literature as a medium for critical thought, self-reflection, and social critique.

1.5 Definition Of Key Terms

In this section the author tries to share and explain the ideas used in this research as the main focus and also as a reference for understanding the points that are the scope of this research in order to avoid misunderstandings in the context that being discussed.

1.5.1 Power

Power can be understood as the capacity or ability of an individual or group to influence the behaviors, decisions, and actions of others. In the realm of social psychology, power is often interpreted as a form of interpersonal influence, shaped by perceptions, social relationships, and the legitimacy of authority held by the actor. Power does not solely originate from formal positions within an organization, but also from control over information, communication skills, and the ability to shape others' perceptions in social contexts.

As (Yukl, 2008) explains, "*power is the ability of one person or group to influence the behavior and outcomes of others, often*

through authority, expertise, or access to resources". This perspective emphasizes that power is multifaceted and may emerge from various sources that interact with each other, such as expertise, social legitimacy, and strategic access to resources. In practice, power is a central element in both organizational dynamics and social relations, as it forms the basis for decision, making processes and the formulation of actions that affect others.

1.5.2 Knowledge

Within various theoretical frameworks, knowledge is positioned as the outcome of internalized processes shaped by empirical experience, linguistic structures, and cultural constructs that influence how individuals perceive the world. Rather than being a mere accumulation of information, knowledge is formed through complex mental representations embedded in cognitive structures that enable individuals to recognize patterns, construct meaning, and interpret phenomena within social and symbolic contexts. In the domains of literature and cultural studies, knowledge is often manifested through narratives, myths, or dominant discourses that shape collective perceptions of identity, power, or morality frequently detached from objective facts.

Referring to (Alavi & Leidner, 2001) *"knowledge is a justified belief that increases an entity's capacity for effective action"*, highlighting its functional and operational value. From this perspective, knowledge transcends its theoretical dimensions and serves as the foundation for deliberate and effective action. In both organizational and broader social contexts, justified knowledge equips individuals and groups to respond to complexity with greater clarity and direction. Thus, beyond being a cognitive and cultural construct, knowledge must also be viewed

as a strategic resource one that continuously evolves and adapts in response to changing conditions and needs.

1.5.3 Decision

Decision, making is generally regarded as a cognitive and administrative process involving the selection of a course of action from among multiple alternatives. Within the framework of organizational theory and cognitive psychology, decisions are influenced not only by the information available, but also by the cognitive limitations of individuals and the constraints of bounded rationality. Rather than being perfectly rational acts, decisions often emerge from a negotiation between ideal logic and the imperfect realities of perception, time pressure, and incomplete data.

As (Simon, 2013) emphasizes, *“Decision, making is the heart of administration, and administration is the heart of decision, making”*. This statement underscores the idea that decision, making is not a peripheral task within governance or management, but its very foundation. Decisions are shaped by organizational structures, value systems, and institutional norms that guide both individual and collective preferences. In this light, decision, making is not merely a technical act but a socially embedded process central to the functioning of any administrative system and fundamental in determining the trajectory of policy, action, and social impact.

1.5.4 Realitas

Reality cannot be understood as an absolute or objective entity; rather, it emerges as a social construct shaped through interaction, language, and collective agreement. Within the framework of sociology and social theory, reality is interpreted as

intersubjectively produced that is, created and maintained through processes in which social meanings are negotiated and legitimized over time. Perceptions of what is “real” are deeply influenced by cultural backgrounds, power structures, and symbolic systems embedded within a given community.

According to (Berger & Luckmann, 2016), “*Reality is socially constructed. The sociology of knowledge must therefore concern itself with the analysis of the process in which this occurs*”. This perspective positions reality not as a fixed condition, but as the result of ongoing social processes. Reality is shaped not only by individual experience but also by institutions, discourses, and social practices that define and regulate how meaning is produced and sustained. Thus, understanding reality requires attention to the mechanisms of social legitimation and the structures of shared consciousness embedded within cultural and institutional contexts.

1.5.5 Perception

Perception is not to be understood as a passive reception of sensory stimuli, but rather as an active process involving interpretation, expectation, and prior knowledge. Within the domains of cognitive psychology and perceptual neuroscience, perception is shaped by prior experiences and internal models of the world. What is perceived is not always a direct reflection of external reality; instead, it is a constructed interpretation based on both sensory input and stored knowledge. This dynamic explains the existence of perceptual illusions, where the mind generates coherent interpretations that may diverge from objective reality, yet remain subjectively convincing.

As argued by (Gregory, 1997), “*Perception is not determined simply by the stimulus pattern; rather it is a dynamic*

searching for the best interpretation of the available data". This perspective frames perception as a form of hypothesis, testing, where the brain actively generates and evaluates potential interpretations of sensory input. Gregory emphasizes that perception involves filling in informational gaps, drawing from experience and expectation to resolve ambiguity. Consequently, perception is not merely a biological process, but also a cognitive and epistemological act deeply embedded in how individuals comprehend, navigate, and make meaning of the world around them.

