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ISSN (Online) : 2455 - 3662  
SJIF Impact Factor :3.967

EPRA International Journal of  
**Multidisciplinary  
Research**

Monthly Peer Reviewed & Indexed  
International Online Journal

**Volume: 3 Issue: 1 January 2017**



**Published By :**  
**EPRA Journals**

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## TEACHING SHAKESPEARE THROUGH BBC ADAPTATIONS: AN EFFECTIVE TEACHING TECHNIQUE AT BEJAIA UNIVERSITY LITERATURE CLASSES

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### ABSTRACT

*Teaching English language and literature in Algerian universities nowadays becomes a challenging task especially with the limited use of ICT's in education and also the presence of a passive readership. Truly, it becomes a necessity to slot in new ideas and bring innovations into the learning environment to come up with more effective learning/teaching results. When it comes to literature and Shakespeare in particular, the mission becomes tougher in so far literature students need to train and adapt themselves to reading plays, novels, literary analysis and theory understanding. Thus, the present paper attempts to explore the teaching of Shakespeare's masterpieces in the Algerian EFL classes through their literary adaptations. The main purpose of the study is to see to what extent does the implementation of literary adaptations in the Literature classes help the students better understand Shakespeare's literary works and texts. For this reason, an experiment is conducted on 46 EFL Master II students majoring in Literature & Civilization at the Department of English - Bejaia University, Algeria. That is, the experiment was worked out on two different groups of learners; an experiment group watched the adapted version of Shakespeare play's 'Macbeth' and a control group who did its literary study of the text in the classical method relying only on the reading and interpretation of the written work (without watching the adaptation). After data analysis, the findings of the study revealed that the experiment group could successfully analyze the characters and the main themes of the work through pertinent and vivid portrayals and, still, they were able to supply direct quotations from characters. Moreover, they understood well the work's story, plot, and character development through the scenes. Unlikely, the control group faced serious problems mainly in character description and development throughout the text. Besides, the underlying themes also seem to be troublesome. At the end of the experiment, a short interview took place and almost all the participants expressed their understanding and involvement in the text (s) when viewing the adapted work (i.e., the film). Interestingly, most of the students expressed their eagerness and motivation to read more plays/novels and watch their adapted movies respectively so they will enjoy more the literary works and understand better the underlying themes. Hence, this will allow them to attempt for a deep and successful literary analysis and criticism. Finally, teaching literary masterpieces through their adaptations proved to be a successful and effective teaching technique at Bejaia University literature classes.*

**KEY WORDS:** Adaptation Studies, Algeria, ELT, Literature, Shakespeare.

## INTRODUCTION

The term literature may connote different meanings according to the person who uses it, the period in which it is weaved and the circumstances that have engendered it. Yet, emerging from an individual's watercourse of imagination and thought and brought up and even refined in a certain cultural world of particular beliefs, traditions, and experiences that may have affected and modeled the writer, literature integrates the salient aspects of the writer's, poet's or playwright's imaginative art sheltered in the beauty of its language and the universality of its themes, together with perspectives and comments on culture, history, politics and society. From the above definition, the word literature refers to texts of fictional nature that belong to a recognizable literary genre and that represent the bridge through which to cross over to other nations, languages, traditions, and cultures.

As far as the adaptation of the major literary masterpieces into films, audio and video versions as well as theatrical performances is concerned, Cartmell and Whelehan (2014) assert that:

*"Adaptation studies [are a growing] area in the Arts and Humanities and has brought numerous multidisciplinary perspectives to what used to be more commonly known as 'novel to film' or 'literature and film' studies. The impact of adaptation studies on English has been indisputably significant, and it could be argued that the study of adaptations has changed the way we teach the subject for good; at the very least it is now common to see English modules delivered with varying degrees of adaptation content across the globe..."* (1)

Accordingly, *The BBC Television Shakespeare* is a TV series of the British adaptations of Shakespeare's masterpieces. Thus, the present researchers selected Jack Gold's 'Macbeth' (1983) for the purpose of the study.

### Statement of the Problem

As lecturers of Literature and Discourse Analysis, the present researchers notice the passive readership of their EFL students and their lack of motivation to participate in literary text analysis and criticism. And when it comes to Shakespeare's texts the mission becomes harder and even complicated. That is, teaching Shakespeare's masterpieces in the Literature classes is a challenging task because of the linguistic features that characterize the Shakespearean text as a whole, the complicated themes, his use of old forms and models, abstract images, ...etc. Therefore, from this standpoint, the present researchers attempt to implement the BBC adaptations of Shakespeare's works in the Literature class as a technique to motivate and help the students better understand literary works. Moreover, by doing such, the learners will construct a full picture of the scenes in their minds and will have less difficulty when reading the written text after viewing the play.

### Questions of the Study

The present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent does the implementation of literary adaptations of Shakespeare in the Literature classes help the students better understand his literary works and texts?
- Does this technique motivate the students to study Shakespeare?
- What are the students' attitudes towards this technique?

### Hypotheses of the Study

The present researchers hypothesize that the implementation of literary adaptations of Shakespeare is an effective technique that helps the student better understand the studied text. Importantly, if the students watch the adaptation first, before reading the text, they will understand better the literary text and perform well during text analysis. Besides, they believe that this technique motivates the students to study Shakespeare 'without fear' and will have positive attitudes towards the abovementioned technique.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The introduction of literary adaptations into L2 literature classes to improve both the quality of learning and teaching has been the focus of many studies, and a subject which has received increasing interest. As a result, many researchers conducted their studies investigating the impact of using literary adaptations on the learning/teaching processes. Besides, they tried to replace traditional methods by supplanting them with new techniques that will revolutionize the learning environment and will target different learning/teaching strategies. Hence, in what follows, the researchers selected some reviewed studies and summarized them for the reader to put him/her in the context of literary adaptations' studies and attempt to show the contribution of the present study in the last paragraph (of this section).

Muller (2006) investigates the impact of studying, analyzing and illustrating many concepts and abstract ideas related to literary theory through cinematic techniques. For Muller, film differs from literature in the sense that films can make use of some techniques of which literature fell short of. These techniques include lightening, music, and camera angles as tools with which to connote a certain themes, identify a certain character or highlight certain events in the story. He claims that *"black wardrobes and dark lighting or that an upbeat musical theme announces the coming of a hero and students can speculate on the biases of the director by observing how characters or groups are presented in terms of lighting, music, and camera angles"* (33). To prove his ideas, Muller uses the 1998 made-for-television movie *Moby Dick*, a novel by the American writer Herman Melville to simplify the plot and to teach through it theories such as Dark Romanticism, archetypal theory, and deconstruction. Indeed, Herman Melville's full text is too lengthy and difficult to fit practically in most curricula, and teachers often opt to show a film

version instead of reading the entire text. According to Muller, studying Moby Dick as a cinematic adaptation, teachers encourage students to note elements of the Dark Romantic setting such as the sea, Dark Romantic characters such as Captain Ahab, and the relationship between the two. Muller suggests that “*visual cinematic elements of Dark Romanticism in the movie also include Characters’ whose faces are often partly hidden inside lighting. Light sources are blocked in strange patterns by ship masts, sails, netting, and drainage covers*” (36). The author showed also how the film version of Moby Dick can illustrate the ideas in the archetypal theory such as the journey motif illustrated in the journey of Ishmael into the sea in search of the whale, and his going through three different stages underlying the quest motif the — departure, initiation, and return. Muller concludes that Even though film adaptations cannot supplant language skills such as reading, writing, and the study of printed literature, “*it has the potential to bridge students’ inherent interest in multimedia with the essential, active, critical thinking skills that are at the heart of the English classroom*” (38).

Brown (2009) examines the ways to use cinematic adaptations of certain literary texts (novels) as an alternative way to alleviate the difficulty of reading lengthy novels and to simplify complex literary theories to students. By pairing works of literature with assistant films, the author provides reachable paths for encouraging classroom discussion, insight into literary theory and the literary adaptations associated with them. Literary theories that the author covers in his book includes major theories such as psychoanalytic criticism, illustrated through famous films such as ‘The End of August’ and ‘Grand Isle’, cultural criticism illustrated through the well-known novel/film, ‘A Streetcar Named Desire’, and thematic criticism ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ a poem by William Wordsworth and the film adaptation ‘Splendor in the Grass’.

Rahmoun (2013) studies the possibility of teaching Anglo-Saxon literature to EFL students at the University of Tlemcen through film adaptations. According to Rahmoun, the University of Tlemcen witnessed a certain unwillingness and even indisposition vis-à-vis the use of technological novelties in teaching literature. As such, Rahmoun conducted a study to show the possibility and even the suitability of multimedia resources, especially film adaptations to teach Anglo-Saxon literature for second year students at the university. The study was quantitative involving two questionnaires, for learners and teachers. His sample consisted of 50 second year students enrolled in the LMD system and teachers lecturing literature at the same university. The findings that his research divulged denote that film adaptations are to a considerable extent beneficial to the teaching of literature at the university. For him, film adaptations “*offer a rewarding learning atmosphere and, most importantly, promote students’ understanding of*

*literary texts’ content*” (iii). More important than this, the researcher concluded that film adaptations are positively taken by students simply because the majority of them are audio-visual learners, naturally directed to watch and visualize rather than read.

Hence, the present study concerns itself with the implementation of the BBC adaptation of Shakespeare’s Macbeth in Literature classes at Bejaia University, Algeria. It agrees with the previous reviewed studies in that it deals with the teaching of Literature using literary adaptations. Besides, they are conducted inside the EFL classroom. However, the present study is different from its predecessors in the following: it is conducted in a different perspective with a different sample. Besides, as stated earlier, the present study is genuine in the EFL classes at the University of Bejaia. Thus, it is a new contribution to the literature of the subject.

## METHODS

The research design of the present study is experimental where an experiment is conducted on 46 Master II students majoring in Literature & Civilization at the Department of English - Bejaia University, Algeria. Moreover, the sample of the study is equally distributed between the experiment group and the control group (i.e., 23 for each). The experiment group watches the Macbeth’s adaptation first than joins his classmates (i.e., the control group) and studies with them Macbeth in the ‘classical method’ relying on the printed copy of the play.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The main purpose of the study is to see to what extent does the implementation of literary adaptations in the Literature classes help the students better understand Shakespeare’s literary works and texts. Besides, the students’ attitudes towards the aforementioned technique will be explored.

### *Population & Sample of the Study*

The population of the study consists of all the Master II students of Literature & Civilization enrolled in the department of English at Bejaia University during the academic year of 2015-2016. They are 65 in number. Hence, the sample of the study consists of 46 students (36 females and 10 males). They represent  $\approx 70\%$  of the whole population. They are randomly selected and randomly split into two groups of 23 students (one as the experiment group and the other as the control group). However, the present researchers acknowledge that the variables of age and gender are not considered in the present experiment.

### *Significance of the Study*

To the best knowledge of the present researchers, there is no similar study at the University of Bejaia. That is, neither colleagues nor students of ours explore the implementation of the literary adaptations, namely the BBC adaptations of Shakespeare, in the Literature & Civilization classes. Thus, from this exclusivity and originality, the present study derives its significance. Moreover, since the findings of the present study show

significantly the effectiveness of the abovementioned technique in the teaching of literature in the Algerian EFL classes, it could be considered as a significant contribution to the flourishing field of ICT's in Education and ELT in Algeria.

**RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

The present study is based mainly on an experiment. However, for more validity of the findings, the present researchers conducted a short interview with the participants after the experiment. Thus, in what follows, the results and discussion of both experiment and interview are addressed.

**I. The Experiment:**

After having watched the 1983 BBC adaptation of Shakespeare's Macbeth, directed by Jack Gold and starring Nicol Williamson as Macbeth, the experiment group joined the control group inside one classroom and started reading together the printed copy of Macbeth. Moreover, during four lectures, 'Macbeth's characterization, plot, and underlying themes were explored. Furthermore, the present researchers devoted the fifth lecture to the evaluation of the participants' understanding of the studied material. Hence, an evaluation sheet encompassing six major questions is addressed to all participants. And the answers were evaluated by the researchers on the basis of their pertinence and relevance.

*Question 01: Would you elaborate on the character of Macbeth and his development throughout the scenes?*

**Table 01. Pertinence of Answers to Question 01.**

	Pertinence of Answers
Experiment Group	77%
Control Group	28%

Table 01 shows that the majority of the respondents (77%) in the control group could successfully answer the first question related to the character of Macbeth and his development throughout the scenes. Unlikely, only few students (28%) in the control group could pertinently answer the question. Accordingly, this shows that watching the adaptation helped them more in the understanding of characterization. Importantly, some students could elaborate remarkably well and draw a pertinent portrait of Macbeth.

*Question 02: Would you elaborate on the character of Lady Macbeth?*

**Table 02. Pertinence of Answers to Question 02.**

	Pertinence of Answers
Experiment Group	68%
Control Group	29%

As far as the second question is concerned, table 02 shows that 68% of the participants in the experiment group provided a pertinent answer whereas only 29% did it in the control group. In other words, the experiment group could elaborate

pertinently on the character of Lady Macbeth and importantly depict evil in her and how she manipulated Macbeth and led him to his tragic end.

*Question 03: How is the setting a clue to theme and character development?*

**Table 03. Pertinence of Answers to Question 03.**

	Pertinence of Answers
Experiment Group	67%
Control Group	41%

As far as the setting as a clue to theme and character development, table 03 reveals that the majority of the participants (67%) in the experiment group could appropriately answer the question. However, in the control group, only 41% of the participants could answer the question appropriately. Once again, this speaks highly of the importance of viewing the adaptation especially for the setting. That is, the setting is easily identified when in screen rather than in a written page.

*Question 04: Would you describe the dagger scene?*

**Table 04. Pertinence of Answers to Question 04.**

	Pertinence of Answers
Experiment Group	80%
Control Group	42%

Table 04 shows that 80% of the participants in the experiment group could successfully and pertinently describe the dagger scene (one of the prominent scenes in 'Macbeth'). However, only 42% of the participants in the control group succeeded in their descriptions of the abovementioned scene. Significantly, watching the adaptation helped them much in the description. That is, they relied on the mental image that they constructed and saved in their memory. Accordingly, the adaptation served them as a visual aid. Concerning the control group's low performance, it could be attributed to difficulty in assimilating the written text which made the construction of scene in their minds a little bit difficult.

*Question 05: Would report any quotation from the characters?*

**Table 05. Pertinence of Answers to Question 05.**

	Pertinence of Answers
Experiment Group	52%
Control Group	49%

Table 05 shows that both groups performed almost equally with regard to question 5. That is, 52% of the participants in the experiment group could supply at least one relevant quotation from the characters – mainly from Macbeth. And 49% of the participants in the control group could provide pertinent quotations.

**Question 06:** *To what extent is Shakespeare's Macbeth a tragedy?*

**Table 06. Pertinence of Answers to Question 06.**

	Pertinence of Answers
Experiment Group	70%
Control Group	53%

Table 06 shows that the experiment group performed better than the control group in the overall understanding of Shakespeare's Macbeth. In other words, 70% of the participants in the experiment group could successfully develop, in a short essay, the tragedy of Macbeth and pertinently portraying him as a tragic hero (with pertinent reference from text). However, only 53% of participants in the control group could fittingly show the tragedy of Macbeth. This demonstrates significantly the effectiveness of using the adaptation in the literature class.

## II. The Interview:

For more validity, a short interview is conducted with the participants (in the experiment group) after the experiment. Thus, a summary of its findings is presented as follows:

**Question 01:** *Generally, do you find literature difficult to study?*

Most of the participants from the experiment group said that they face difficulties in studying literature. However, seven participants asserted that they enjoy the study of literature. And they opted for this discipline by their own choice and motivation.

**Question 02:** *If yes, what are these difficulties?*

According to the interviewed participants, the main difficulties encountered in the study of literature are as follows: (1) difficulties in understanding the dignified language of the literary texts. (2) Difficulties in understanding some terminology that is hard to find in dictionaries. (3) Difficulties in understanding the lengthy plot and events of the story. (4) Difficulties in understanding the abstract ideas of certain literary theories. (5) And difficulties in reading voluminous novels (with more than 300 pages).

**Question 03:** *As a student of English Literature, do you prefer to:*

- *Read the written version of the literary works.*
- *Watch the adapted version of the literary works.*
- *Both of them.*

All the participants prefer both of them i.e., reading the written version of the literary works along with its adaptation.

**Question 04:** *If both of them, tell us why?*

The majority of the participants believe that watching first the literary adaptations (as it is done in the experiment of the present study) than reading the written version will help them better understand the story. Moreover, they will have vivid pictures of the characters and the setting which help them in the understanding of the work's plot and underlying themes. Besides, they believe

that symbolism and characters' dress can be seen well in the adaptation than in the written form. Importantly, some participants revealed that thanks to the adaptation they enjoyed the work and they are no more afraid of Shakespeare's works (which is the ultimate goal of the present experiment).

**Question 05:** *What attracted you more in the BBC adaptation of Macbeth that you have watched?*

All the participants expressed their admiration towards the adaptation. Moreover, for the majority of them, it is the first time where they watch a BBC adaptation. The majority of the participants assert that thanks to the adaptation, they could understand well the monologues / dialogues between the characters, the scenes reflect faithfully the setting and the real events in the story, and they could enjoy some major scenes like 'the dagger scene'.

**Question 06:** *What do you think of this technique (i.e., introducing the literary adaptations into the Literature class)?*

All the interviewed participants expressed their positive attitudes towards the aforementioned technique and they enthusiastically asked the researchers for its implementation in the coming courses of literature. Significantly, all the students expressed their eagerness and motivation to read more plays/novels and watch their adapted movies respectively so they will enjoy more the literary works and understand better the underlying themes. Besides, they stated that watching the adaptation saves them time because all the work could be seen in a very short period of time (nearly 2 hours). Finally, they added that by watching the adaptation and reading the play/novel, they will no more 'fear' the study of literary works, especially the Shakespearean works.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study show that teaching Shakespeare through its BBC adaptations is proved to be an effective teaching technique in the Literature classes at the Department of English, University of Bejaia, Algeria. To be precise, after the analysis of the evaluation sheet, the participants in the experiment group (who watched first the adaptation then read the written play) performed better in all questions than their peers in the control group (who have read only the written text without viewing the adaptation). That is, the scores of the experiment group are higher than those of the control group except for question 5 where they had nearly the same scores (52% and 49% respectively). Moreover, the findings of the interview join the findings of the experiment. That is, all the interviewed participants in the experiment group agree that it is better to read the written work and view its adaptation together for an optimal understanding of the work, and thus, a better performance in examinations. Furthermore, all the participants articulated their appreciation towards the adaptation of 'Macbeth'. They added that, via the adaptation, they could enjoy the play and understand many parts of it such as the setting, the characterization, the tragedy of Macbeth, the Evil in

Lady Macbeth, among others. Interestingly, all the participants (in the experiment group) have positive attitudes towards the abovementioned technique and kindly asked the researchers to integrate it in the curriculum. Moreover, all the students revealed that they are eager to read more plays/novels and watch their adapted movies respectively. Significantly, some of the participants claimed that by watching the adaptation first than reading the literary work, they will no more 'fear' the study of literature especially the works of Shakespeare (which is the central aim of the present study).

In short, the findings of the present study have answered all the questions of the study and confirmed the hypotheses. That is, when the students watch the adaptation first, before reading the play/novel, they will comprehend better the literary work and perform well during text analysis and examination. Besides, this technique motivates them to study Shakespeare 'without fear'.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The present study has the following two main limitations: first, the sample of the study consists of 46 Master II students of Literature & Civilization at the Department of English at Bejaia University. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to other universities. Second, both variables of age and gender are not considered here. Hence, they fall outside the scope of the present study.

#### **Acknowledgment**

The present researchers would like to acknowledge that they have seen the abovementioned adaptation first before displaying it to the participants. And they made sure that the presented material is ethical and it does not contain any offending or irrelevant scene. Importantly, this is why they opted for the BBC adaptations and not others.

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