



## Effectiveness of Incorporating Film Adaptations in EFL Literature Courses: A Case Study in Saudi Arabia

Hadeel Jamal Azhar

Department of English, College of Social Sciences, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia



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### ABSTRACT

In line with the recent and ongoing technological changes in Saudi Arabia, which place greater emphasis on cinema and film adaptations, this study aimed to investigate the effect of incorporating films and visual media into literature courses on students' understanding of and motivation towards literary texts. The participants were 41 fourth-level female students in the Department of English at Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia. The treatment group (n=21) read Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* (1879) and watched the adapted film, whereas the control group (n=20) was asked to only read the play and discuss it in class. The findings revealed that the treatment group performed better in terms of answering questions about play after watching the film adaptation. It is suggested that incorporating film adaptations into literature courses has a positive impact on English as a foreign language students' understanding of assigned literary texts. This research adds a new case study to the expanding literature. Limitations and future research directions are discussed.

### KEYWORDS

English language, literary texts, motivational tools, students' comprehension, teaching methods, visual media

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## 1. Introduction

Recently, several rapid technological changes that assign more value to cinema and film adaptations have taken place in Saudi Arabia. Both the public and the private sectors have started competing to keep up with the ongoing development. Umm Al-Qura University, for instance, is one of the educational institutions that has set a strategic plan for 2027 to contribute to Saudi Vision 2030 through different paths, including teaching and learning. To my knowledge, no research has been conducted to explore the value of introducing film to literature courses in the Department of English at Umm Al-Qura University. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap by examining the effectiveness of incorporating films and visual media into literature courses to enhance students' understanding of and motivation towards literary texts. In so doing, this research adds a new case study to the expanding scholarship in the realm of teaching literature.

### 1.1. Literature Review:

Mascuch (2001) explored the effectiveness of incorporating film in literature courses, arguing that this approach "has enabled us to trace narratives that have nearly one hundred years of history among them. While emphasizing the intricate narrative complexities, cinema is capable of portraying" (Mascuch, 2001, p121). Similarly, scholars, such as Herron *et al.* (2002), have highlighted the effect of multimedia on the cultural element:

[S]ome scholars praise multimedia technology for its ability to present students with long stretches of oral discourse embedded in a rich visual context. The rationale behind the extensive use of multimedia texts is that in addition to stimulating students' intrinsic interests, they can also stimulate authentic and up-to-date linguistic and cultural exchanges encountered in the foreign country. (Herron *et al.*, 2002)

In addition to its significance for cultural appreciation, Luque-Agullo (2004) reported on the role of films in motivating students to read as follows:

Both literary works and films are authentic materials that can be exploited in and outside the classroom, motivating the students to work with two codes which also have a great value as a source of entertainment. Films, in particular, constitute a stimulating and appealing activity in our everyday life, and books should also be part of it. If they do not, watching the film may stimulate the students' interest in reading the written version. (Luque-Agullo, 2004)

Snyder (2011) has also highlighted the value of integrating film adaptation into the study of literature: "Lit-to-film adaptation studies encourage students to critically think through their previously held notions about both literature and film. It makes an experience they've taken for granted as purely entertaining and personal and moves it into the realm of a learning experience" (Snyder, 2011, p262). She further emphasized its effectiveness on the students' critical thinking: "Lit-to-film adaptation is an up-and-coming means to teaching students how to analyze and think critically, through their reading of a text, through their viewing of a text, and through their comparison/contrast of the one entity used to make another, and the influences that can bear down on each medium" (Snyder, 2011, p263).

Yunus *et al.* (2013) noted the role of films as motivational tools in enhancing students' interest in reading literary texts, claiming that "there is a need to insert the use of visual aids in teaching literature in order to trigger students' motivation in reading literary texts" (Yunus *et al.*, 2013, p114). According to them, this approach further "allows the students to have full concentration on the texts which leads to their understandability of the story and flow of texts" (Yunus *et al.*, 2013, p115). In their study, they concluded that "the majority of the teachers have positive perceptions of the use of visual aids in teaching literary texts" (Yunus *et al.*, 2013, p116).

According to Keles (2015), "adaptation films which use literature as a source can be regarded as profit in terms of literature teaching. Because in point of expression, solid and fast film media contains in many literary element in itself" (Keles, 2015, p653). This effectiveness of film-based teaching was also emphasized by Olson *et al.* (2016) as follows: "The growth of YouTube and other video-streaming services

creates opportunities for adult educators looking for innovative ways to incorporate film-based assignments. Several studies have explored how film-based presentations or assignments promote deep learning" (Olson *et al.*, 2016, p62).

Kabooha (2016) conducted a study on the use of movies in EFL classrooms and reached the following conclusion: "All the students agreed that the use of films provided an authentic and meaningful context for them to learn English. As they watched the movies with plenty of conversations between native speakers, they felt a need to learn to speak English naturally and fluently in order to communicate with others" (Kabooha, 2016, p252). She also noted that "interviews have indicated that movies are very motivating for EFL learners. The participants in the current study found themselves more involved in the English classes with the use of films, and they were more willing to interact in English" (Kabooha, 2016, p252).

Sarıçoban and Yürük (2016) considered the influence of films on students' comprehension and appreciation of foreign language and culture. According to them:

Films may be used in the foreign language education in two ways: first, films can serve as a model of language use, in particular as a vehicle to improve listening comprehension, enrich vocabulary, and develop translanguing competence; second, they can serve as a model and reflection of the target cultural artifacts, values, and behaviours and therefore a vehicle to develop students' transcultural competence. (Sarıçoban and Yürük, 2016)

In addition, Sarıçoban and Yürük revealed the role of films in triggering students' motivation: "The use of film in the classroom or as an outside school activity can uphold the motivation of the learners, because of its playful component. Using films through specific task activities provides an ideal vehicle for active learning, as well as encouraging interaction and participation" (Sarıçoban and Yürük, 2016, p111). This further enhances learners' communicative skills as follows: "using films and other multimedia instruments are essential and efficient ways to fulfil the needs of learners in terms of creating competent learners in communication" (Sarıçoban and Yürük, 2016, p111).

To highlight the role of using films in language classrooms, Goctu (2017) stated that "Movies attract students' attention, present language in a more natural way that found in course books. Movies also offer a visual context aid which helps students understand and improve their learning skills" (Goctu, 2017, p121). Another study conducted by Kalra (2017) revealed that "using films in the classroom can be one of the most powerful instructional media which help in developing students' language skills. The participants, both students and teachers, have positive attitudes in incorporating films in their classrooms to improve English skills" (Kalra, 2017, p299).

According to Djamaa (2018), "film viewing engenders emotional involvement as it creates connected learning, which values affective experiences. It trains students to enter the minds and hearts of characters, relate to them, and understand their thoughts, feelings, and motives in depth" (Djamaa, 2018, p92).

Herrero and Vanderschelden (2019) argued that "audiovisual media have become an integral part of the way that most language learners get access to their second (L2) and foreign language (FL) and culture" (Herrero and Vanderschelden, 2019, p. xv). This significance is further indicated in the following statement:

The importance of visual literacy in education is becoming more widely acknowledged. There is an increasing acceptance that education needs to develop students' skills in and their ability to interpret images and communicate visually: in many schools, there is a move away from a reliance on print as the

primary medium of instruction towards moving-image media and the screen. Furthermore, an increasing number of educational theorists stress that film literacy is fundamental to literacy in the 21st century if young people are to be able to participate fully in a rapidly changing world in which moving images are increasingly predominant. (Herrero and Vanderschelden, 2019)

In addition to their centrality to literacy with the everyday growth of technology, audiovisual media and films have proven to be of particular importance in literary courses. Liu (2022) suggested that "Teachers should strive to meet the needs of curriculum reform, continue to learn, update their ideas, and improve their own cultural literacy, according to literature" (Liu, 2022, p2). He also stated, "In addition to strengthening the teaching of traditional poetry, novels, essays and dramatic literature styles, literature also needs to add fresh blood" (Liu, 2022, p3).

In another recent study on incorporating films into literature courses, Grama (2022) concluded the following: "there are many methodological approaches to teaching literature and each of them is useful and interesting but all of them can be complemented by the use of film and multimedia tools to enrich students' both cognitive and affective experiences" (Grama, 2022, p78).

## 1.2. Research Questions:

Building on the literature, this study explores the following research questions:

- Q1: When combined with a close reading of the literary text, can a film adaptation enhance EFL students' understanding of the literary work and the culture to which it belongs?
- Q2: Can film adaptations trigger EFL students' motivation and stimulate their interest in reading literary texts?
- Q3: Will there be significant changes in the performance of students who receive film-based literature instruction compared with those taught merely through critical reading?

## 1.3. Hypotheses:

The following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: The incorporation of film adaptations into literature courses enhances EFL students' understanding of literary works (settings, themes, characters, and plots).
- H2: Film adaptations help motivate EFL students and stimulate their interest in reading literary texts.
- H3: Compared with those taught only through critical reading, students who receive film-based literature instruction may experience slight changes in performance.

## 1.4. Methodology:

Sarıçoban and Yürük (2016), along with Herrero and Vanderschelden's argument (2019), are used as substantial approaches in this research to examine the effectiveness of film adaptations in triggering students' motivation and enhancing their understanding of literary texts.

### 1.4.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 41 fourth-level female students aged 18-20 year old in the Department of English at Umm Al-Qura University in Saudi Arabia. They were enrolled in the Introduction to Literature (731720-3), which is the first literary course in the students' Bachelor of Arts academic plan. All of the participants were Saudi native speakers of Arabic who had studied English as a foreign language for a minimum of three years in middle and high school before majoring in English at university.

### 1.4.2. Instrumentation

The tool consisted of three sections, with varying complexity levels and objective and subjective questions to be administered in 40

minutes. The survey included questions about the students' backgrounds and their perceptions of introducing cinematic adaptations into literature courses and concluded with questions about Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* (1879).

#### 1.4.3. Procedure

The study was conducted in an experimental setting. The present study aimed to evaluate the hypotheses using a control group. After providing consent, the participants were randomly divided into two groups as follows: treatment (n=21) and control (n=20).

#### 1.4.4. Phase 1

The first phase of this study was conducted over three weeks in January 2023. Both groups were enrolled in the Introduction to Literature course (731270-3) in the second trimester of 2023. The course syllabus includes an assortment of English and American literature. It provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the main genres of literature, including fiction, poetry, and drama. In addition to identifying and discussing the key elements of literature, the course offers a wide range of critical perspectives for reading literature.

During this phase, the method implemented by the researcher—lecturer was to assign Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* for close reading and discussion. Using traditional teaching procedures and classroom activities, the students were encouraged to identify the different elements of the play, themes, and plot lines and were then asked to provide their input on the events and how they reflected the prevailing norms. At the end of the first phase, both groups were asked to complete a survey under the supervision of the researcher—lecturer.

#### 1.4.5. Phase 2

The second phase of this study began after both groups completed the survey. The treatment group was assigned to the film adaptation of the play, with emphasis on the fact that watching the film was for the purpose of conducting research and measuring the students' performance. After watching the film, the students were asked to complete the same survey. Owing to the short duration of the trimester and the number of topics that needed to be covered in the course, this study adopted the first approach addressed in Herrero and Vanderschelden's (2019) study, which is "to show the whole film in one sitting" rather than viewing "the whole film in short sequences over a number of sessions" (Herrero and Vanderschelden, 2019, pp10–11). According to these authors, this approach has both advantages and disadvantages.

A possible advantage of showing the whole film is that it offers students extensive exposure to authentic language, and they may pick up useful interactive language. A clear disadvantage of this approach is that students may find it difficult to concentrate for up to two hours, leading to cognitive overload and students watching the film passively. (Herrero and Vanderschelden, 2019)

This drawback was avoided by giving the students a short break in the middle of the film.

## 2. Results

As shown, the proposed hypotheses mentioned at the beginning of this paper were verified.

### 2.1. Pretest:

#### 2.1.1. Students' Background

All of the participants were Saudi native speakers of Arabic. While 5 out of 41 students had received education in private and international schools, the rest had graduated from public schools,

with a minimum of three years of exposure to the English language. Approximately 18 out of the 41 participants claimed that they had never watched adapted films of literary texts and that this course offered them the opportunity to do so. The frequency of watching literary adaptations varied among the other 23 participants as follows: 1 = always, 14 = sometimes, and 8 = often.

#### 2.1.2. Students' Motivation Towards Literary Texts and Adapted Films

Table 1: Students' Motivation Towards Literary Texts and Adapted Films

2.1 When reading English literary texts for the first time, I find them	enjoyable but challenging to interpret (25)	boring and irrelevant to my culture (0)	enjoyable and interesting (14)	difficult to understand (2)
2.2 Watching the adapted films of English literary texts make them	more enjoyable (5)	easier to understand (11)	both enjoyable and easier to interpret (24)	none of the above (1)
2.3 Incorporating films into literature courses is in line with the ongoing technological changes in Saudi Arabia	strongly agree (20)	agree (19)	disagree (1)	strongly disagree (1)

#### 2.1.3. Students' Understanding of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

This section contained questions about the play's thematic focus, characters, settings, and sequence of events. It also comprised questions that included quotes from the play to examine the students' critical thinking and understanding of Western art and culture.

Q 3.7 How does the following quote reflect 19<sup>th</sup> century ideals concerning women?

You have loved me as a wife ought to love her husband. Only you had not sufficient knowledge to judge of the means you used. But do you suppose you are any the less dear to me, because you don't understand how to act on your own responsibility? No, no; only lean on me; I will advise you and direct you. I should not be a man if this womanly helplessness did not just give you a double attractiveness in my eyes. (Act III)

Four participants did not respond to the question, while two responded "I don't know." Some of the others answered as follows:

- Sample 1: "Her husband thinks that she can't act independently and that he needs to control her."
- Sample 2: "Women were always expected to obey men without having any sense of individuality, and men back then did not want an independent woman."
- Sample 3: "It reflects that men back then wanted to control women."
- Sample 4: "She's upset with her husband because he does not respect her as a woman."

When asked to reflect on the transformation of Nora's character and whether they could relate such a metamorphosis to women's empowerment in light of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, three participants did not respond, seven did not see any connection, and some of the others responded as follows:

- Sample 1: "Nora used to be powerless and had no way to control her life and live it by her own rules. But then everything changed, and she made her own decisions just as the Saudi Vision 2030 is giving women opportunities to make their own decisions."
- Sample 2: "I believe that Nora's transformation reflects the achievements and transformation of contemporary Saudi women. At present, girls are becoming more independent and are less reliant on men."
- Sample 3: "I can relate Nora's character to Saudi women in the past. This is because they were dominated by men. Contemporary Saudi women have a lot of potential similar to the ending in the play that shows the changes in Nora's character."
- Sample 4: "I think that the transformation of Nora's character is rather similar to how women in Saudi Arabia are realizing their worth. Even the Saudi government is helping women stand up for their rights, just like Nora stood up for herself."

### 2.2. Posttest:

#### 2.2.1. Students' Background

This section remains the same as the survey on the selection of the students.

### 2.2.2. Students' Motivation Towards Literary Texts and Adapted Films

Table 2: Students' Motivation Towards Literary Texts and Adapted Films

2.1 When reading English literary texts for the first time, I find them	enjoyable, but challenging to interpret (12)	boring and irrelevant to my culture (1)	enjoyable and interesting (8)	difficult to understand (0)
2.2 Watching the adapted films of English literary texts make them	more enjoyable (5)	easier to understand (9)	both enjoyable and easier to interpret (7)	none of the above (0)
2.3 Incorporating films into literature courses is in line with the ongoing technological changes in Saudi Arabia	strongly agree (11)	agree (10)	disagree (0)	strongly disagree (0)

### 2.2.3. Students' Understanding of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

All 21 students responded to the questions given to them prior to watching the adaptation. Their responses to question 3.7 were as follows:

- Sample 1: "Women were treated as dolls at the time, and men believed that women were not capable of doing anything. They were only expected to stay at home, raise kids, and take care of them. They were not given chances to play any role in society, except that of a mother or wife."
- Sample 2: "It reflects how the Victorian era perceived women. Everyone expected them to be obedient and believed that it was a woman's job and duty to love her husband. In addition, the women had no knowledge or judgment that they were being treated as mere dolls, making them more attractive. The general belief was that women do not know how to act or handle responsibilities, and they need men to guide them."
- Sample 3: "Back then, the more dependent the woman was on her husband and the more 'helpless' she was, the more attractive she was. Women were considered dependent creatures who had to rely on men for the simplest things possible. This is the reason her husband repeatedly calls her by name, showing her that he is superior to her."
- Sample 4: "Women had no rights. They were selected for marriage on the basis of their beauty. They did not have the right to study or work; their only job was to be a housewife and care for their children. Women were considered insane if they thought of getting divorced and leaving their husbands and children. They had a lower status than that of men, and they were not considered human; they were merely dolls. Marrying a woman to a person was similar to a transaction; the relationship was only for mutual interests, so she helped her father complete that deal or trade. Men viewed women as less important. They were expected to get married only to have children and raise them; they could not be independent. They were considered to be weak."

The responses to the other question, which asked students to reflect on their own experiences as Saudi women, were as follows:

- Sample 1: Independent women have the right to say what they think and want. Women have the right to study, get educated, work, and earn money. The law and the government help them understand their rights and protect them. Most importantly, women are equal to men. They have the right to choose their own futures and husbands. Women have the right to have children after a divorce. Vision goals will be achieved in 2030. Women can work in any job and achieve their goals. Women's roles in society have a strong impact on the entire community. It has been recognized that women make up half of society and play an important role in it."
- Sample 2: "There is a connection between Nora's character development and the women in Saudi Arabia. Here, women are expected to behave and act exactly as their husbands or society instruct them. They are expected to be guided on how to live and

think. However, this is a different and better approach. Women can speak up and stand up for themselves. Similar to Nora, the woman of today needs to realize that she must find out who she really is."

- Sample 3: "Vision 2030 has generated several changes in the past few years. Women can become completely independent and live independently. They can study, work, live, and raise their children. I am grateful to God and the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia for this change. I see that women are becoming more confident and are getting the opportunities that they truly deserve."
- Sample 4: "Earlier, women faced several restrictions and had certain duties and obligations, such as being a wife and taking care of their husbands, similar to Nora. Now, things are gradually changing. I believe that by 2030, women will have more freedom, the way Nora had at the end of the play."

## 3. Discussion

The findings of this study are discussed in relation to the research questions stated earlier. The findings suggest that cinematic elements boosted students' motivation towards literary texts and helped them visualize the written words. The number of students who initially faced difficulty reading English literary texts declined to zero after watching the film adaptation. Similarly, none of the students in the treatment group disagreed with the fact that incorporating films into literature courses was aligned with the ongoing technological changes, as all participants either strongly agreed or agreed with the given statement. Except for one participant, students in both the control and treatment groups revealed that watching adapted films of English literary texts made them either more enjoyable, easier to understand, or both enjoyable and easier to interpret.

In addition, incorporating film adaptations into literature courses has a positive impact on EFL students' understanding of assigned literary texts. Herrero and Vanderschelden (2019) argued that the significance of incorporating audiovisual media into EFL classrooms is not merely for motivation:

Although motivation is the most frequently cited reason for using film in the language classroom, it is by no means the only one. Another vital benefit of using films in language education is that they are a source of authentic language, as films are authentic materials and provide students with genuine input in which they can see and hear the foreign language being used in 'real' situations. Film also provides students with authentically interactive language. (Herrero and Vanderschelden, 2019, pp. 6–7)

They also mentioned that "Another benefit of using film in language education is its visual nature. When students watch a film, they often comprehend more because language is interpreted in a full visual context, which supports the verbal message" (Herrero and Vanderschelden, 2019, p7). As evident in their responses to the questions in Section 3, the students in the treatment group demonstrated a better understanding of the play. Their responses became more articulate and elaborate, showing their appreciation of the text and its context and thereby validating Herrero and Vanderschelden's views. The responses also reflect Yunus *et al.* (2013) argument that "learning literature through film puts struggling readers a less of a disadvantage. It was found out that the use of films helps students to visualize clearly the literary theory and cultural aspects found in the texts" (Yunus *et al.*, 2013, p115). In addition, the findings of this study are in line with Sarıçoban and Yürük's (2016) claim that "utilizing films as a part of language can be considered as an amusing and attractive vehicle. Learners in a non-English speaking environment may profit by utilizing films as a teaching instrument on

account of authenticity and real-life language" (Sarıçoban and Yürük, 2016, p116).

Unlike those of the control group, the responses of the participants in the treatment group included references to 19<sup>th</sup> century culture and how women were perceived in a male-dominated society. For some students, the transformation of Nora's character from a stereotypical conventional woman to someone pursuing her passions and dreams was reminiscent of the changing role of Saudi women within the framework of the ongoing reforms that are taking place in Saudi Arabia. Compared to those of the control group, the responses of the treatment group showed that they benefited from the use of film as a media to teach literature at the educational and cultural levels.

#### 4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has certain limitations, although confidentiality and reliability were carefully maintained. The small sample size (n=41), the short duration of the experiment, and the absence of male participants are factors that should be addressed in future research. Replication of this study with a larger, gender-balanced sample over a longer period is highly recommended to accurately determine the influence of film adaptations on EFL students' performance in literary courses.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study suggests that incorporating film adaptation as a tool in teaching literature courses enhances EFL students' understanding of the assigned literary texts. Furthermore, integrating films into literature classrooms triggers students' motivation to read English literature, which they initially found challenging to read and interpret. Insight into the advantages of this teaching method, reflected in the improvement in students' comprehension of the given text, may lead coordinators of literature courses for EFL students to reconsider incorporating films into syllabi. This research contributes to EFL research in that it adds a new case study to the ongoing discussion.

### Biography

#### Hadeel Jamal Azhar

Department of English, College of Social Sciences, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia, 00966504669667, hjazhar@uqu.edu.sa

Dr. Azhar is a Saudi associate professor of English Literature, specializing in women's poetry. She currently works as the Vice-Dean of the College of Social Sciences at Umm Al-Qura University. She attended and participated in more than 50 seminars and international conferences, and was awarded prizes based on the quality of her presented papers. Her research and teaching interests lie in Victorian and Edwardian Literature and Culture, including Women's Writing, interdisciplinary aspects of Law and Literature, Cross-Cultural and Comparative Studies. ORCID: 0000-0002-5513-1572.

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