



Integrating Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (Play and Film) into Language Education: A Classroom Investigation

*Ramadan Shalbag¹, Emhemmed Albeckai²

¹Al Mergeb University, Libya

²Sebha University, Libya

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ABSTRACT

Students today enjoy watching short films on YouTube using their mobile phones and other devices. Consequently, English teachers can guide their students in utilizing these technological tools to enhance their understanding of drama. Current learners are digital natives, familiar with technology, which highlights the importance for English teachers to integrate visual aids into their teaching strategies, especially when teaching English as a foreign language. Teachers should focus on key literary techniques, such as figures of speech, style and context, and narrative structure, to enhance students' analytical skills. Exploring character development and relationships, as well as encouraging the identification of themes and symbols, further deepens students' comprehension. By emphasizing these areas, educators can cultivate a richer understanding of literature. Many students feel overwhelmed by the linguistic complexity of literary texts. However, they have the opportunity to appreciate film adaptations of well-known dramas in English. An effective way to understand and value literary texts is through careful analysis of their language and components. Language teachers should help students recognize how the text functions and the specific meanings it conveys. One approach is to select a passage from a drama and pair it with a corresponding film clip. For instance, an extract from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* can be used in this way. The findings of the study indicated that the majority of students believe that viewing the film enhances their understanding of the drama. They also found the drama/film (D/F) technique particularly helpful, as it improves both their linguistic and metalinguistic skills, preparing them to better comprehend the visual elements on screen.

دمج مسرحية و فيلم آرثر ميلر " موت بائع متجول " في تعليم اللغة: دراسة فصلية

*رمضان الشليباك¹ و امحمد البكاي²

¹كلية التربية الخمس جامعة المرقب ليبيا

²كلية التربية الغريفه جامعة سبها ليبيا

كلمات المفتاحية

السمات اللغوية
التكنولوجيا
اليوتيوب
مقاطع الأفلام
إكستر

الملخص

يستمتع الطلاب اليوم بمشاهدة الأفلام القصيرة على يوتيوب باستخدام هواتفهم المحمولة وأجهزة أخرى. وبالتالي، يمكن لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية توجيه طلابهم في استخدام هذه الأدوات التكنولوجية لتعزيز فهمهم للدrama. الطلاب الحاليون هم من جيل الرقمية، معتادون على التكنولوجيا، مما يبرز أهمية دمج المعلمين للمساعدات البصرية في استراتيجيات التدريس، خاصة عند تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. يجب على المعلمين التركيز على تقنيات الأدب الرئيسية، مثل الصور البلاغية، والأسلوب والسياق، وبنية السرد، لتعزيز مهارات التحليل لدى الطلاب. كما أن استكشاف تطوير الشخصيات والعلاقات، بالإضافة إلى تشجيع التعرف على الموضوعات والرموز، يعمق من فهم الطلاب. من خلال التركيز على هذه المجالات، يمكن للمعلمين تنمية فهم أعمق للأدب. كثير من الطلاب يشعرون بالإرهاق بسبب التعقيد اللغوي للنصوص الأدبية. ومع ذلك، لديهم الفرصة لتقدير التعديلات السينمائية للدramيات المعروفة باللغة الإنجليزية. تعتبر التحليل الدقيق للغة ومكونات النصوص وسيلة فعالة لفهم وتقدير النصوص الأدبية. يجب على معلمي اللغة مساعدة

*Corresponding author:

E-mail addresses: r.r.a.alshalbag@elmergib.edu.ly, (E. Albeckai) beckay555@yahoo.com

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الطلاب على التعرف على كيفية عمل النص والمعاني المحددة التي ينقلها. ومن approaches أن يتم اختيار مقطع من دراما ومرافقته بمقطع فيلمي مطابق. على سبيل المثال، يمكن استخدام مقتطف من مسرحية آرثر ميلر "موت بائع متجول" بهذه الطريقة. أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن الغالبية العظمى من الطلاب يعتقدون أن مشاهدة الفيلم تعزز فهمهم للدراما. كما وجدوا أن تقنية الدراما/الفيلم (D/F) كانت مفيدة بشكل خاص، حيث تحسن من مهاراتهم اللغوية وما وراء اللغوية، مما يعددهم لفهم العناصر المرئية بشكل أفضل على الشاشة.

1. Introduction

The use of films can bring varieties and flexibility to the language classroom by extending the range of teaching techniques and resources, helping students to develop all communicative skills. Thus, it is important for a teacher of English to help his/her students understand and analyse the literary text in terms of linguistic features. Then he/she can also make the students watch the film clip that corresponds to the literary text and help them to analyse closely the images on the screen. This technique of course makes the learning style more interesting and beneficial and the students will show a tendency to read more about the author or about the same literary genre.

Teachers of English insist that literary texts play an important role in both language learning and language teaching. One of the aims in teaching literature is to encourage students to feel that they can read and enjoy books on their own. Because literature is a language. accordingly, students who read literary text spend a lot of time looking at language and aesthetic and moral values of that literary text. Kennedy, Gioia, and Revoyr (2012) claim that there is a relationship between studying literature and achievement in the real world. They add that interpreting writing and reading about literary texts enhance the competitiveness in the job market. This will help the readers of literature to develop their personalities. Carter, R. and Long, M. (1991) argue that there are three main reasons for the teaching of literature and each reason embraces a particular set of learning objectives for the students of literature. These are: (1) the cultural model, (2) the language model, (3) and the personal growth model. For example, teaching literature within the culture model helps students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space. However, teaching literature with in language model is important because it enables students promote language development.

2. Literature Review

Drama gives teachers the opportunity to teach their students in a way which would create love for learning. It provides valuable problem solving, social, and creative skills. Drama also embraces the students' imagination and emotions. It is also an effective learning tool. This is because it involves the students intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally. The use of action clip in teaching drama gives the students the opportunity to enjoy acting out a small part of the story without worrying. Thus, the best way of taking the advantages of teaching literature in the classrooms is to use the extracts from the book and film clip. This is simply because the use of films in learning process makes the environment of the classroom more interesting and the teacher will be sure that all the students become involved. Lazar (1994) states that there are many advantages of using extracts from books and films. First, it provides students with a fascinating glimpse of the conventions and conflicts of another culture. Second, it encourages meaningful language practice. For example, through images on the screen, students will have chance to express their feelings and opinions about the book and the film. Students will also be engaged with the filmmaker's interpretations of the novelist's craft.

Lazar (1994) also adds "This approach can be exploited in a number of ways. It can be used over an extended period of time to focus on selected extracts and film clips from a whole novel and drama. Or it can be used in an occasional basis on literature courses that take in selected writings. This technique is also different from traditional education and has become a new way of teaching style. It can be applied into two ways: the former, the students can watch the film clips at homes and read the extracts from the book at class. In this case

, students who study with mouse, keyboard, screen do not see any teachers' expressions of encouraging or criticizing in the learning environment, the latter, the teacher designs the teaching by making the students read the extract then asks the students to watch the clips in the class or making the students watch the clips first then read the extracts from the book.

For Zettl (2008:340) film dialogue informs viewers about the theme, plot, characters and circumstances of the story it helps the audience in the interpretations of the story line and understanding relationship between characters including moods, attitudes of characters and their personality. A film's sign sensually and perceptually represent what in the text is.

Sherman, J. (2010:15) mentions types that make films difficult or easy to comprehend. She addresses the things that make the film difficult as follows:

- High verbal density, i.e. a lot of speech with very little action
- Words which don't match the actions, e.g. words which are in conflict with action or an ironic commentary
- A high degree of naturalism in speech, e.g. actors with their backs to the camera, inconsequential dialogue
- Dialect and regional accent
- Period language remains difficult

There are also some features that make films easy. They are:

- A close connection between speech and action
- Clear conversation story-lines: straightforward love stories aimed at adolescents (e.g. *A Dirty Dancing*), (*Titanic*). Such stories have simple plot lines and language
- Clearly enunciated speech in standard accent
- Films where one of the main characters isn't able to communicate very well because he/she is deaf or a foreigner.

(see Sherman, J.

2010)

A relevant study is conducted by Shalbag (2013) on the use of extracts from a novel and film clips. It reveals that the technique of using novel and film in language classroom helps students to be engaged in a never-ending process of interpretation and evaluation

For the nature of examinations in literature most of teachers design their questions on integrated language-based approach to literature. Carter, R. & R. Michael (1992:159-161) suggest some characteristics They are:

a) Paraphrase and Context

In this type of questions, students are exposed to the extracts from the texts they have studied. The extracts are normally pivotal to the text and the students are required to say what is pivotal about them in terms of the structure. Such questions are sometimes about the plot, character or a whole and this kind of the questions are called context questions. Paraphrasing then is done by the students who are also asked about tropes as metaphors similes or other rhetorical devices.

b) Describe and Discuss

These questions are the most common type and they are widely used by the teachers of literature. For examples students are asked to comment on what happens to character with some discussions of reasons or motives for an action.
e.g. *Do you find any differences between the character in the book you read and in the film you watch?*

Such questions are widely used in the university level. The

following is an example from Cambridge university:

Describe Snowball and explain what happens to him (George Orwell, *Animal Farm*)

The same questions on watching can be applied here as follows:

Describe Mr. Darcy's feelings when Lizzy refuses his proposal. (Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*)

Such questions can be regarded as paraphrase and context questions. But one may ask if there is a format of such questions or not.

Cambridge proficiency level examinations contain relatively a high promotion of descriptive and plot-based questions.

c) Evaluate and Criticize

Such questions are more advanced type. Students are required to be more critical and sometimes they are invited to evaluate the relative success the writer has in conveying a particular scene or idea or character. This means that the focus is always on the plot and character. Compare between these two examples:

- *Illustrate from the stories how Lawrence's attitude to his characters is often a mixture of ridicule and compassion.*
- *Illustrate from pride and prejudice Jane Austen's attitude to her characters is often a mixture of ridicule and compassion.*

From the above explanations it can be derived that most of the students examinations are designed for the students to consider characters in plays, novels and even poems as complete. Students are less common asked to elicit from the texts the moral, religious and sociological ideas. Unfortunately most teachers advise students to read slim and summarized book in order to make students pass the examinations. Plot and characters summaries are also provided

In relation to the above Sherman, J 2010(120-121) mentions the strategies of addressing questions after watching a film on a novel. He divides the questions into different types such as context and content, vocabulary and comprehension questions. For the context and content questions he suggests the following points:

- After giving plenty of background ask students to describe the characters involved.
- Ask student to write down the antagonist and protagonist characters.
- After describing the actual content of the whole film, ask students to paraphrase what they understand.

For comprehension questions Sherman, J. (2010) suggest the following:

- Ask very simple questions after the first viewing (low-order questions). Then move to difficult ones after the second viewing.
- Get the students to prepare comprehension questions on what they have seen as well as on what they have heard.
- Check their grammar while they are preparing the questions then have them ask each other the questions from the group to group.
- View again to check the answers
- Get the students to identify the difficult scene which they don't understand.
- Ask students each to concentrate on one speaker and follow what he/she says then select anything he/she says which is not clear to them and which is more important. Review these parts and explain them.

A recent study was done by Dawoud et al. (2023, 336-339), the study explores the impact of drama techniques on speaking components, fluency, and accuracy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. A non-equivalent quasi-experimental design was employed to achieve this objective. The participants consisted of 143 sixth-grade EFL students, both boys and girls, from Palestine, divided into two experimental groups and two control groups. Unlike the control group, those in the experimental groups engaged in speaking lessons for nine weeks utilizing drama techniques. To assess speaking fluency and accuracy, the study adapted Villalobos's 2010 speech evaluation rubrics alongside the Cambridge Key English Test for School Samples oral assessment designed for primary EFL learners. The results indicated that drama techniques significantly enhanced the fluency

and accuracy of primary EFL students. These findings offer EFL teachers strategies to address fluency and accuracy challenges while fostering meaningful speaking skills. This research introduces innovative instructional approaches to improve English speaking skills, highlighting the relatively novel application of drama techniques in this area. Future studies should further examine the effects of drama techniques on various language skills across different age groups.

In this study, the researchers use Miller's death of a salesman as a sample. The main reason of using films in the classroom is that Miller uses a zigzagging process that spans present past and future.

This means that the plot is not developed chronologically. It is created in a bit-by-bit piecing together of events. The play begins in the present as Willy shown in the grips of his conflict. Miller make us understand through a series of flashbacks and daydreaming sequences. This makes the students get confused because the events are not presented chronologically.

It can also be added that the arguments which occur for many years and which are close to the surface facilitate the eventual clash which occurs at the end of Act 2 and which leads to such harsh words as those exchange between Willy and his son Biff: "You vengeful, spiteful mutt". We understand the reason behind such intense condemnation. Such speech seems unbelievable and would reflect badly on the speaker. But students watch the film, they find execution to this because they know what is happening to Willy' mind and they accept the fact that he is desperate better than depending on reading .

3. Research Objectives

This study aims at investigating the value of using the scripts from the drama and film in language classroom. In choosing the scripts, the teacher should ensure that the language is accessible to the learners and relevant to their needs and that the topic arouses the

students interests. Themes relating to family situations are therefore useful. Thus, Miller's death of a salesman meets the students' needs.

4. Research Questions

This research seeks to find answers to the questions which are raised to examine the actual utilization of the extracts from the book and film in the language classroom among university students.

- 1- What differences do you find between Willy Lowman in the reading passage and Willy Lowman in the film clip?
- 2- Which do you prefer- the extract from the Drama, or the scene from the film?
- 3- Do you think that the technique of using Drama/Films is preferable and more effective?
- 4- Does the film maker present the actions in the film as the same as in the book?

5. Research Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that students find the use of drama/ film is more beneficial; and it helps them to understand the play better so they prefer to watch the film before reading the play.

6. Subjects

The subjects for this study were native speakers of Arabic. They were studying English as a major subject of specialization in the department of English Faculty of Education, University of Al-Mergeb. They were fourth year university students of the academic year (2020/2021). The research samples were (20) participants. The reason behind choosing this level was based on the assumption that students at this stage were expected to be exposed to the many literary texts during the third and fourth years of their study.

7. Research Tools

The tool used in this study was an open questionnaire of 7 items. The mode of the questionnaire used in this study was a paper-and-pencil questionnaire administration where the items were presented on paper. Because of the covid19 participants send their answers via internet. The purpose of these questions was to gather information from the participants. For reliability the questionnaire was calculated by the

computer programmer. For validity the questionnaire was given to a number of professors of English language to examine them and to give comments on the questionnaire statements. The subjects were also asked to write their own comments on their answers.

8. Findings and discussion

1. **Do you watch the film clips of Miller's death of a salesman?** The whole participants answered this question with "Yes".

This means that the students watch the clips.

2. **If yes, what differences do you find between Willy Lowman in the reading passage and Willy Lowman in the film clip?**

Interestingly, it has been observed that most of the participants of this study have found some differences between the extracts from the drama and the images from the film with respect to some of the dialogues and the description of the characters. 95% of them agreed that the film maker focuses on the most important actions and he does not go deeply in details dramatist's does.

3. **Which do you prefer- the extract from the Drama , or the scene from the film? Provide comments on your choice.**

It is important in this study that 90 % of the Participants preferred watching play as a movie than reading it, because in the movie the events and characters are more interesting. They also add that watching the film can save time and effort. Only 10 % of the participants assured that reading the extracts from the drama is effective and fruitful for their own imagination.

4. **Which do you prefer to be first the extracts from the book or the clips from the film? Give reasons for your choice.**

It is interesting to note that 70% of the participants preferred to begin with the film clip, claiming that this leads to save both time and effort; while, 25% of them agreed to start with reading passages. This is because the participants have found that starting with the book will prepare them to understand the images on the screen. However, 5% assured that they get confused after watching the film.

One of the participants comments was that she prefers to watch it as a movie first so that the story is clear and then read it to find out more details and places.

5. **Is the filmmaker's message the same as the dramatist's?**

100% of the participants agreed that there is no differences between the message in the drama and in the movie, but in the film many feelings and attitudes are clarified.

6. **If you were the filmmaker, would you have done anything differently?**

70 % of the Participants insisted that if they were the film maker they may focus on more details.30 % provide no answer.

7. **Do you think that the technique of using Drama/Films is preferable and more effective?**

In responding to this question, 80% of the students insisted that viewing the film makes them understand the play more. They commented that reading the scripts from the book is not enough to enhance both the linguistic and literary understanding.

In other words, the students panic of the literary texts because of the linguistic complexity of these texts. However, 20 % of the participants assured that reading the scripts from the drama is

effective and fruitful for their own imagination. They also claimed that watching films on screens may contradict their culture. The participants also added that depending on the reading passages is easier to manage because some of the classrooms have no TVs and computers.

9. Conclusion

The use of drama / film technique can teach life skills; such as, cooperating with others, speaking publicly, being creative and imaginative, and becoming more confident. This way of teaching enriches the student vocabulary. This technique also helps students to be engaged in a never-ending process of interpretation and evaluation. For example, students will have chance to know both the dramatist's idea and the filmmaker's. This will encourage students to imitate the characters in the film clips. Students will also have chance to analyse passages from drama and their cinematic equivalents in an enjoyable and classroom task. Thus, the approach to teaching literature in a

language classroom should focus on certain features of language in order to generate an appreciation of the style, effects and techniques of writing in addition to carrying out language activities that help develop language competence and literary appreciation in relation to each other.

10. Direction for further Research

This paper is limited to investigate the value of using the extracts from the play and film clip in the language classroom. The researchers have used Arthur Miller's death of a salesman as a sample and the research project has been conducted on the fourth year university students of English department ,Faculty of Education, Khoms- Libya. This research paves the way to a number of researches that might be worth of investigation. For example, the N/F or D/F technique can be applied to other authors work. In addition to this point, a bigger number of participants might give clearer results about the use of D/F technique. Another point of view is that this research project can be conducted on students from other discipline or on other levels.

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