

# ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDENT'S PREFERENCE OF READING LITERARY BOOKS OR WATCHING THE MOVIE ADAPTATION AND THEIR ACCOUNTS FOR THE TENDENCY

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## ABSTRACT

**Thesis.** Today's students are very much influenced by globalisation and advances in technology. This has brought about some changes in the attitudes and perceptions of the new generation of students which are worthy of attention. The present study aimed to shed light on one such shift of focus and explored Iranian literature students' preferences for either reading or watching the movie adaptations of literary works. The second aim of the study was to examine the reasons for their preferences and to analyse them to see where they originated from.

**Concept.** To this end, a mixed methods design was used in which the quantitative data was gathered through a questionnaire from the University of Mazandaran English literature students (N=141). In the questionnaire, their tendencies towards either watching movies or reading literary books was explored. Based on convenient sampling, for the qualitative data, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 5 students from each category to find the reasons behind their preferences. The data from the interviews were transcribed and then content analysed.

**Results and conclusion.** The results showed there existed a higher tendency towards movie watching (58%) among these students. Content analysis of the students' responses to interview questions also revealed some factors affecting their inclination towards movie watching. The main reason for such a tendency was mentioned to be time constraints. Other reasons were disclosed which will be reported in the article. The implications of the study will also be discussed fully under conclusion.

**Keywords:** watching movies, reading books, literature students, classic literary works

## INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-moving world where information is easily and quickly accessible, individuals are required to be able to think critically and evaluate and interpret the information. Therefore, for students in general and

EFL students in particular, critical thinking and obviously critical reading gain more significance. In the past decades, cultivating critical thinking skills and critical disposition in students has become an important goal in higher education. In addition to critical thinking, experts also point to the importance of media literacy, strategies for verifying the credibility of information sources, the rational assessment of issues and reflection of reality (Gadušová et al., 2021; Tkáčová et al., 2023).

Critical thinking has received even more prominence owing to the fast developments happening in today's fast-changing world. This means that individuals today need better literary skills to survive in the globalised and technologically-mediated age in which completely new vulnerabilities of people arise (Tkáčová et al., 2023). It seems essential that teachers make the learners aware of their performance, as well as their needs. So, by knowing their needs, they would know in which areas they need more practice; i.e., they might focus on the areas that need more attention and dedicate more time to the weaknesses (Aziziet al., 2020). This can also be crucial in strengthening critical thinking and other, currently necessary skills.

Reading can be summarised as an essential tool for learning in various forms, channels and shapes (Rosli et al., 2017). Reading involves active comprehension and decoding of a message for different purposes which often require cognitive skills (Loh, 2015). Thus, improving reading skills as a prerequisite for critical thinking and autonomy is vital. Through providing experience, reading helps to broaden one's horizons and gain deeper insights about the world and self (Chettri, 2013). Therefore, for the young people who build the future of every nation, it is very significant to develop good reading habits.

Research has also indicated that reading literary works develops critical thinking skills. Literature reading, specifically, was found to develop critical thinking skills mainly because it requires readers to construct meanings of the text by recalling, retrieving and reflecting on their own experiences. At the same time, they foster the ability to distinguish facts from opinions and to differentiate when something is stated literally and when it is implied. Students also need to look for the connections between the events or actions as they read.

Above all, they will be able to learn to use this knowledge and skill in the real world. In other words, readers learn to practice and apply "explanation," "analysis," "synthesis," "argumentation," "interpretation", "evaluation," "problem-solving," "inference" "logical reasoning," and "application" (Facione, 2007; Paul & Elder, 2007). This is what critical thinking skill means and, in this regard, Donald Lazere contended that "literature...is the single academic discipline that can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise critical thinking" (1987, p. 3).

Additionally, through reading a literary work, readers will encounter a large number of novel experiences found in the real world which helps them to construct meanings for themselves. Reading a literary work, in fact,

serves as a useful means for enhancing reading autonomy in students, but it is important to note that for developing autonomy in learners, they should foster their reading skills and achieve a high level of reading proficiency as well. At the same time, they ought to increase their reading interest by reading from varied resources (Tsai, 2007). Finally, a significant benefit of reading also comes from group reading, which is an interesting experience, popular among young students, and has, among other benefits, a demonstrably positive effect on improving the ability to write (Azizi et al., 2020).

Reading books vs watching movies is a 'never-ending war' and there are a lot of movies and TV series produced based on books and a great many blockbuster hits are made by film industries which continuously dig into books. It has been so big and successful that a lot of people have parted their ways with book reading. Stephen king once said, comparing books to movies is like comparing oranges and apples. Each of them has their own benefits and it is therefore important to create a complete balance between watching movies and reading books.

However, when it comes to educational issues and especially university education, one expects to see more emphasis is placed on reading the literary works because this is based on what is expected of a literature student to be able to read the text critically and evaluate the writer's ideas. Literature also stimulates the imagination in many ways, and gives a view of other places, other times, and people of different conditions than our own. Moreover, critical reading, which mostly revolves around inference making through questioning, and evaluating a text and drawing a conclusion (Chen et al., 2017) develops through reading but not through watching. Despite the fact that studies show positive results for the effect of reading literature on developing critical reading and thinking, what happens today is that the tendency to read seems to be decreasing as a result of advancement in technology. This study attempts to discover whether literature students prefer watching movies over reading books and why they do so. The present paper is based on the belief that reading is an essential tool and an asset for literature students which with its cognitive processes allows for a deeper comprehension and more profound meaning compared to watching.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Technology is fast in changing peoples' lives and reliance on technology has affected many aspects of our lives and many fields. As Lawrence Baines and Micah Dial (1995) put it, it seems that students nowadays „are becoming increasingly attuned to the moving image and less patient with mere words on a page" (p. 86). The growing interest of the student population in technology enhanced education has led some educators across the world to focus on creating a learning environment similar to the real world in which the students live. As a result of this advancement, a lot of students pay

more attention to more attractive forms such as movies to learn different subjects. Availability and popularity of short YouTube clips, podcasts, TED talks, etc. as a form of learning has made it more prevalent to resort to such means for learning instead of the more traditional means, i.e., the book.

Reading is a process through which readers get information from a text, and with the help of their previous knowledge of the world and self, construct a meaning from it (Eskey, 2002). Margaret Baudoin et al. (1994) defined reading as a complex activity that requires skills in different areas including words, sentences and connected paragraphs. Some scholars emphasise that reading is a prerequisite for autonomous learning (Marianne Celce-Murcia et al., 1995; Weiss et al., 2023). Others such as Ellen. J. Langer (1997) believe that reading literature opens “horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore” (p.607).

Moreover, scholars have found visualisation as a facilitating element in reading and argue that helping students gain visualisation skills helps a great deal to develop greater comprehension when reading (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). This has provided solid grounds for the idea that teachers use movies in their classes alongside reading. In recent years, several studies have documented the benefits of movies in general and movie adaptations of literary works in particular (Hanley & Herron, 1992). This is supported by Elin Oliver Keene & Susan Zimmerman (1997) who indicated through their research that students tend to become more involved in their reading and interpret and recall more details from the text. In the same vein, Jia-Jen Luo’s (2004) study investigated the role that DVD films play in enhancing students’ reading comprehension. DVDs were incorporated into the course content as the main materials which were supported by some purposefully designed activities. The results of the study indicated the reading skills of students improved significantly through the use of DVD films. Similarly, a study by Ann Nielson Hibbing and Joan, L. Rankin-Erickson (2003) also indicated that movies provide a great opportunity for students to activate their background knowledge which is useful for improving their comprehension of text. They suggested using a combination of reading and watching to create a more anxiety-free and motivating atmosphere for the students. In another study, Linda Gambrell and Paula Brooks Jawits (1993) also contend that movies could be a useful tool for activating or creating background knowledge for a subject that students are going to read. The above-mentioned literature somehow pinpoints the potential of movies as a supporting tool for fostering reading skills, but whether all the young generation today show interest in their use and the reasons behind their choices has been under researched. Thus, the present study aims to shed light on this issue further in a foreign language context to contribute to our better understanding of this phenomenon. The following research questions guided this study:

- Do literature students prefer reading books or watching the movie adaptation of literary works?
- What are each group’s reasons for their preferences?

## METHODOLOGY

### *Design*

The study used both quantitative and qualitative design to collect data through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was used in order to collect quantitative data from students to answer the research question. The interview was another research tool for collecting qualitative data.

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were 141 literature students studying at the University of Mazandaran, Iran, within the age range 18-21. They were freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior students majoring in English literature. They were volunteering students who completed and returned the questionnaire out of the total population of 178. On the basis of the results of the questionnaire, 10 students (5 from each group) who volunteered to participate were interviewed.

### *Procedure*

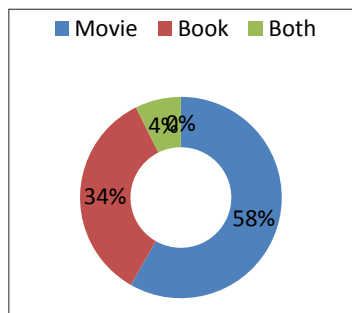
First, a questionnaire comprising some questions about students' preferences for movies and books was used. It was circulated to 141 participants in paper form. The results obtained were collected and analysed through descriptive statistics. Then based on convenient sampling, ten students, 5 from each category were invited for semi-structured interview. The interview focused on asking students to explain their reasons for the preference of one mode over the other. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded to answer the research question.

## RESULTS

### *Analysis of the Questionnaire*

The first thing which was obvious after analysis of both the questionnaire and students' interview results was that the majority of students had a tendency towards movies (58%), 34% preferred books and 4% said that they liked both which is shown in the Figure 1.

The analysis of the questionnaire indicated that only 39.7% of participants preferred reading books while 50.3% preferred watching movies when asked which one their preference was. However, despite their tendency towards watching movies rather than reading books, 74% of the students found reading more effective in improving their critical thinking skills than movies. But the main reason why most of the students (91.4%) preferred movies to books was because they said movies in comparison to books can save a lot of time. Time seems to be among one of the main reasons why they are more inclined to watch movie adaptations of literary works.



**Figure 1**  
*Students' preferences*

Source. Own research.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency and Percentage of Responses*

Items	Frequency	Percent
1. I prefer reading books to watching movies.	56	39.7
2. Books improve imagination skills more than movies.	65	46
3. Books help experience the protagonist's feelings with greater intensity than movies.	66	46.8
4. Reading books let us possess more emotional expression compared to watching movies.	42	29.7
5. Books improve language and communication skills better than movies.	45	31.9
6. Reading books improve our creativity more compared to watching movies.	65	46
7. Reading books improve our critical thinking skills more compared to watching movies.	74	52.4
8. Watching movies can save a lot of time compared to reading books.	129	91.4
9. I watch movies because I cannot read fast.	5	28.2
10. I watch movies because I don't have enough time.	73	51.7
11. I watch movies because they give a better picture of the plot, theme and characters.	42	29.7
12. I watch movies because books bore me.	86	60.9
13. I watch movies because reading books requires special skills that I don't have.	35	24.8
14. Movie adaptations inspire me to read books.	138	97
15. Learning English literature through the movie adaptation is more motivating.	129	91
16. Learning English literature through the movie adaptation is easier.	98	69.5
17. Movie adaptations facilitate comprehension of the content of literary texts	112	79.4

Source. Own research.

Another finding of this research was that 60.9%, i.e., more than half of these literature students found reading a boring task as compared to watching movies which is quite unfortunate and sad to hear.

A majority of students (97%) stated that movies inspire them to read literary books and 91.5% said that movies make literature learning more



interesting and motivating for them, but interestingly 69.5% didn't find it easier than reading books in helping them to learn literature. Also 79.4 % thought that movie adaptations facilitate comprehension of the content of literary texts. Table 1 illustrates the information given above.

## INTERVIEW RESULTS

After reading the transcripts, the answers were categorised into two parts: book readers' accounts and movie watchers' accounts. The first question which we asked both groups was what the main reason they think is that students don't read these days. Some believed it is due to their busy schedules at the university that they cannot read as much as they want. Others felt that it is because the younger generation have not patience and that they seek to look for shortcuts and quick ways of doing things. Interestingly, even movie watchers knew that books were much more profound but still had their own reasons for not reading books. In what follows, the responses of both groups are shared.

### BOOK READERS' ACCOUNTS

One of the interesting things about this interview was that even though the majority of students preferred movies but the reasons provided by book lovers were definitely more profound both in quantity and quality. For one of the interviewees, reading books was important as a literature student because she saw books as a useful input for modelling the second language she was trying to master. She said that they contained excellent, carefully placed words and well-written sentences. Another point she stated was the "Writer" element in the book and she believed that if writer element was removed which is something happening with movies, then there is no longer any meaning left to explore.

Another student said: "For me, the best part about reading a book is creating the world in my head." For her the book was the author's words and the readers' imagination. She also emphasised that we should never judge a book by its movie.

For the third student, there were many reasons for why, he preferred books over movies.

When you pick a novel to read, it's not just a book you are holding, it's a whole new world with all its characters and stories about them, ready to be unfolded by you, to be imagined and perceived in the very way you want. A world that takes you to an unexplored dimension, definitely with lots of new life experiences. It's as if you are living a thousand lives in just one life of yours!! Imagine all this while watching a movie! Quite impossible!! So, you see, watching movies is only for entertaining yourself, reading novels is much more than that.



He also added:

I think movies actually spoil the plot of the books; I mean it misses huge chunks of the storyline resulting in missing out important details. By the way, the story in the book, is never compromised because of any problems in the acting, filming issues, etc.... Because you imagine the whole scenario inside your head, and it's never boring and it'll never disappoint you. You can actually see inside the head of the characters, so as to what's going on, how are they are feeling.

The fourth student said that he'll always prefer a book. But the only disadvantage he sees in a book is, it takes time. But, to him, the advantages outweigh this particular disadvantage. According to him, reading a book is always better than watching a movie!

He was also of the same opinion that reading books makes it possible for us to enter the character's head. We can feel exactly what the characters feel, and how they see and interact with the world around them. He also emphasised the linguistic power by saying that books are able to create vast, highly detailed scenes through the power of words saying "a writer's captivating and alluring words have the capacity to not let you put the book down. Most times, I'm so hooked to the story, I tell myself – one more chapter, just one more."

He added:

I'd prefer to rely on my own imagination to lead me and walk me through the plot; rather than listening to someone's adaptation of it. I'd like to give myself a chance to picture the characters, the events, trying to be in the protagonist's shoes, and being able to feel closest to author's vision.

The fifth student also had great reasons for preferring books to movies. For her, a movie was only a matter of 2-3 hours; while a book was an experience!

Only a true book-lover will be able to describe the feeling one gets as she holds a book in her hands, slowly going through the pages and devouring each and every paragraph, line and word to the fullest. This is a feeling that you can never get while watching a movie. Without doubt, reading a book is better than watching a movie

She also had the same opinion as others about books and imagination:

In the case of a movie, we just have to watch it. But a book gives us the opportunity to imagine the situations. While reading the books, you imagine what is written in words, and create characters, and everything. It is your imagination that gives you happiness while reading the book. Everyone enjoys books in a different way, and all have different imaginations, so the book is interpretation of your imagination.

She also believed that books lose things when they're made into a movie. Most movie adaptations come nowhere near the quality of the source material. She said that movies don't give you time to think, you are just enter-

tained by a single dimension of imagination of the director or some people who are part of the movie making. She also enjoyed the experience of reading words rather than watching a story narrated through film. What she loved about books was the free reign it gave to her imagination – she said she could visualise scenery, setting, characters, emotions etc. better when she was doing it herself.

To sum up students' accounts, a book allows the imagination of the reader to run free, not bound by anything whereas, a movie is equivalent to the director's imagination being thrust upon you. This is the simple reason why most book lovers are not able to appreciate the movies based on their favourite books. Thus, it seems that reading enables people to use their imagination. Watching a movie, on the other hand is not comparable to reading because it is not the readers' vision of the narrative since the brain need not imagine and all the thinking and imagining is done for them by the director and actors.

### MOVIE WATCHERS' ACCOUNTS

A few students have stated that they prefer to watch movies because of the subtitles. For these students understanding an unabridged version of a novel was difficult and they gave it up because they found it tedious and got bored but with the help of the subtitles, they could understand the story much more easily.

When asked which one they preferred most, the first student said; "It's a war which never ends! But I prefer movie over books." Others also agreed with him on this and they also stated that reading a book is really boring for them and they are not patient enough to wait for a week or more to understand what happened. This is what one of the students exactly mentioned about this:

In my opinion, movies are way better than books because time is an issue for us nowadays and we actually have no time to go through 200 pages of a book. And if I want to read something I prefer to read a short summary or watch a YouTube video.

He continued

You read a book alone most of the times unless you are part of a book club or something which are basically for discussing what you've read not reading together! But you can watch a movie with your friends which is totally an amazing experience. What's more, you can watch a movie over and over again but how many times have you read the same book again and again?

Another student goes on:

Movies are more visually appealing; I mean it takes less time because they remove the unnecessary parts for you and you can relax watching them. Sometimes books get boring because they contain a lot of descriptions and unnecessary details.

The next student's opinion was about time. He said: "Watching movies saves a lot of time. Reading books takes a long time because you have to read everything and a lot of the time you get bored."

The third student continued to pinpoint her own reasons. She believed those who cannot read fast or do not have good reading skills prefer a movie because it's easier for them. She thought that those who enjoy new things prefer watching movies because movies are renewed more quickly than books.

The fourth student said he is too lazy to read a book: "The time you spend to read one book can be spent to watch nine or ten movies. For me it is hard because I read very slowly" He and the fifth student also mentioned that in addition to what their friends have said, they think there is a similarity between books and movies in that they both increase our knowledge.

## DISCUSSION

In the present study, literature students mostly preferred watching movies to reading books mainly because they thought they had time constraint and that they took less time to finish. Also, they preferred movies mainly because they looked for shortcuts and were not patient enough to finish the books. Interestingly, even those who preferred watching movies confessed that reading books was definitely much better but because of their stated reasons, they went for the movies. Some few students found reading difficult mainly because they were slow readers.

Youmei Liu (2010) also found similar results and contended that obviously movies as the newer form of the art in comparison to books are more appealing and it is natural that the new generation prefers them over books. According to Liu (2010) and Mary Lee (1994), there are certain factors such as time investment, visual effects, entertainment, price, portability, and quotability which affect the preference of students. The present study also found similar results.

One of the students mentioned the idea that it can be tricky to decide which to choose and she called it a never-ending war. But at the same time, she said she preferred watching the movie especially because she didn't have much time. Veronica Mars (2014) also states that for many, time is an issue and that is why they decide to watch the movie adaptation of the book. Similar to the current research, Mars (2014) asserts that some movie adaptations of books are so good that watching them without reading the book is possible and it is as if you are reading a concise summary of the book. According to Mars (2014), some movies which remain faithful to the original story enrich the books based on which they are produced. This was also implied by some of the respondents in the current study. According to Moyer (2010) reading habits are decreasing more among young learners between the age range of 18-24 than older learners which was shown to be true in the current study.

In summary, the results of the present study were for the most part in line with other similar studies conducted elsewhere but they cannot be generalised and further research in various contexts both EFL/ESL is needed to confirm the results.

## CONCLUSION

This study attempted to raise awareness about the benefits of reading and promoting good reading habits particularly for literature students. Knowledge is one the most valuable assets available to an individual and reading good books plays a significant role in cultivating this knowledge. This becomes more important when students- especially foreign language learners- can develop their critical thinking, language and communication skills through developing good reading habits. The results of this study indicated that even though young students find reading useful, they do not read as much as they should do and prefer movies instead. This means that students need to become motivated to read more. There were some factors that affected the respondent's preference; among them time appeared to be a major issue for students and because of their hectic academic schedule, they looked for shortcuts such as movies adaptation. Another was because of the visual appeals of the movies and the entertainment it provided in addition to learning. Lastly, the movie did the thinking for them and they didn't have to understand and interpret the whole book themselves. Most of the students had positive attitudes towards the usefulness of movie adaptations in raising and keeping their reading interest.

This study intended to bring to light an important issue which can be seen everywhere in this global world and definitely needs more attention to gain insight into students' and teachers' perceptions in wider contexts. Thus, further research with novel situations is needed to illuminate the field of foreign/second language learning.

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