Creativity of Theatrical Analysis through Collaborative Projects

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Abstract

This research pinpoints the importance of integrating innovative methods into teaching literary texts to increase both motivation and academic achievement among college students. One of the strategies used by the researcher is the employment of collaborative projects in teaching canonical texts, particularly Shakespeare's. In the theoretical part, this paper sheds light on the most commonly used methods in teaching the dramatic works of the playwright and the necessity of applying more relevant strategies that appeal to twentieth first century students. The practical part focuses on the researcher's employment of collaborative projects with EFL students in Shakespeare course at University of Jeddah. It also analyzes the final outcomes which are highly dependent on the incorporation of teamwork with the students' various abilities and talents and its effect in enhancing their ability to criticize, analyze, create and innovate.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Drama teaching, Collaborative Projects, Theatrical Analysis

Today, Shakespeare's plays, such as Th Merchant of Venice, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Julius Caesar-to name a few- are among the most frequently taught literary texts in different colleges all over the world. The question that frequently arises is: "How Shakespeare's plays are taught?", to which there is no fixed answer. Instructors' ways usually fall into one of several commonly applied strategies where there is no empirical evidence that supports one over the other. The most known one is Performance-Based Methodology discussed by a number of researchers like L.M.Rose (1996), C.A.Le Master (2002), G. H. Gregory (2006), M. Schaefer (2005), T. H. Wood (2010), B. Strom (2011),and T. Irish (2011). It is an interactive method that requires students' physical and vocal engagement within a theatrical context in a number of activities like staged reading, role playing, script dramatization, improvisation and the like. Such tasks are done through "verbalizing the material and by demonstrating the physical movements which accompany such verbalizations (Storm 38). Other researchers like M. Schaefer (2005) and A. E. Good (2009) combine Performance-Based Methodology with text analysis method in a strategy called Integration. They aim at enabling the students to fully comprehend the plays not only by performing the moon stage but through giving them various writing tasks such as diaries, scripts, reports, altered plots… etc. If repeated performances are accompanied by the instructor's drills on different writing assignments like the mentioned ones, students' language will eventually be improved.

The adherents of the New Historical Approach, like T. A. Brunner (2003),believe that any literary text is the product of the historical period it is driven from. Having said that, students approach Shakespeare's plays from a historical angle through which they learn more about their cultural, social and economic background in a way that enables them to understand and comment on the issues related to that specific era. In doing so, students are given the opportunity of placing texts into their historical context and simultaneously providing their own interpretations. Another important method of teaching Shakespeare is Competency-Based Approach mentioned by P. Ribes (2011). This method mainly deals with improving students' level of critical thinking through a series of given tasks they are supposed to perform. Gradually, "their linguistic, historical, theatrical and intercultural skills are enhanced" till they become competent enough to critically and successfully approach other similar literary texts (Ribes 18).

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These tasks vary from comparing Shakespeare's plays with adapted movies or with other plays, reading and analyzing the sources he depends on or writing an in-depth critical analysis of the texts in relation with their historical contexts. For EFL students who are not yet accustomed to Shakespeare's language or have not been exposed to the culture of his characters, A. C. Yen (2010) remarks that Graphic Organizers, like mind maps and concept maps, that develop cognitive skills are useful tools to get over these obstacles. With the use of such organizers, students are enabled to "structure, organize, arrange, brainstorm, learn and memorize information in a highly organized way". They also help to "provoke logic and inspiration for skilled thinking practices" (37). From a different perspective, D. M. Brichfield (2009) believes that portraying the important events of the play through dancing is considered to be a vital method in any Shakespearean course claiming that the physical involvement enables the students to feel comfortable in dealing with the texts which in turn makes them relate more easily to the plot and all the other dramatic elements. In "Interpreting literature through movement", Brichfield states,"not only provides a clearer understanding of the text, but facilitates dramatic catharsis" (179).

Others urge students to explore Shakespeare's themes, dramatic techniques, characterization through computer technology and hypertexts like M. J. Collins (1995), H. J. Schwartz (1998), and Desmet and Bailey(2009). Collins argues that movies, in particular, makes Shakespeare more accessible to students as they help to increase their recognition and appreciation of the canonical texts(232). In the same token, and J.D. Morrison calls for asking students to produce generated film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. The production of such films requires close reading and careful interpretation of the texts as the students are expected to write, perform, direct and shoot some adapted scenes (47).L. Baines, likewise, declares that following a multimedia approach in teaching Shakespeare like using the internet, films, videos, or music make students easily engaged in a number of activities like writing, analyzing or performing. What is more important is that they happily endure the plays of the Bard (194).

Whatever strategy is used, instructors often address the problem of having students with no motivation, enthusiasm or interest in Shakespeare's drama and they usually complain about their resistance in dealing with classical works. They struggle to engage students properly not only with analyzing the texts but also with simple basic tasks like reading, summarizing or expressing opinions. This might be due to the playwright's elevated old language, the length of his plays and the students' belief that such works are archaic and irrelevant to their lives. L. Baines, in "The Shakespeare Frolic Project: Massaging Shakespeare through Multi-media", justifies such an attitude saying: "the recent emergence of new technologies that allow rapid exchange of information, and the emphasis on oral/visual media may render traditional teaching methods both limiting and academically incomplete in the eyes of students today" (195).In other words, traditional strategies fail to equip modern students with the tools needed for enhancing their ability to relate to the texts. Hence, students in the twentieth first century are in need not only for amore visually stimulating method but also one that enables them to implement their talents and develop their skills to face the challenges of the modern world. Instructors have to alter their teaching strategies in order to bring relevance and accessibility to the taught materials, stimulate interest, peak curiosity and gain an appreciation for canonical texts. To achieve that, project-based method is applied in this study and the outcomes are integrated in the course grading system. Project work is defined by Diana L. Fried-Booth as "student-centered and driven by the need to create an end product" (6). It is a well-planned learning experience where students are given the chance to seek knowledge in different areas and apply it creatively to real life situations.

The difference between collaborative projects and any other team work lies in the fact that the former elicits intellectual negotiation and creative thinking that result in elevating the students' comprehension of content and the subsequent noticeable academic development. In her book Project Work, Diana L. Fried-Booth also distinguishes two closely related types of projects: full-scale projects and bridging activities (13). In the first type, the instructor together with the students first discusses the content, project scope, and data collection. Then, out of the classroom, students work, according to each individual's task, to achieve the previously planned objectives. In the second type, the assigned tasks are done only inside the classroom. They are applied to accomplish short-term objectives in every lesson mainly to train the students to work later in groups. In fact, bridging activities prepare students for the full-scale projects which are extended outside the learning situation. From 2013 to 2017, I have been applying the first type, full-scale projects, in Shakespeare course at the eighth level in the European Languages Department at

University of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. Every term, two Shakespearean plays are given, a tragedy and a comedy: Macbeth or Julius Caesar, Twelfth Night or The Merchant of Venice. In the assigned collaborative projects, students are asked to work together in groups outside the lectures on structured and well-planned tasks given to them from the beginning of the term. Choice of content is done by the students themselves and size of groups depends on the number of registered ones in the section, approximately, in this study, between three to four members.

They are required to analyze a significant idea or a concept taken from any of the plays given and create a collaborative useful project. Assigning students to groups could be teacher-selected, random, or student-selected. Researchers debate whether to group members randomly or on the basis of their abilities so that stronger students can help the weaker ones. Though there are a number of researches that favor this diversity, others like Carol Mills and William Durdenremark that if mixing by abilities occur, gifted students are held back (12). They believe that the outcome of a group set according to abilities is usually a product that hinders the good members leading to inequalities of achievement. With different views on the issue, most instructors follow what they think is the most appropriate strategy based on their objectives. From my own experience, student-selected groups prove to be the best because they choose those who complement them and whom they feel comfortable working with when it comes to task division. In different methodological textbooks, there are references to similar steps when designing any project work. The first stage is usually the planning stage where the instructor raises broad questions to challenge thinking and receive suggestions of different topics. The content choice depends on the students' comprehension of Shakespeare's plots, characters, dramatic techniques, and issues presented and discussed in the classroom. Once the content is chosen, definition of the project objective is required. Discussion, negotiation, and arguments are raised to set the basic frame, broaden or minimize its scope, and focus on the expected outcomes. This stage also includes data collection where students plan a list of tools they need to accomplish their objectives. The needed materials vary according to the nature of each project; they can be concrete materials, visual or audio clips, drawings, recordings, graphs, electronic programs and so on. The second stage in the process is often referred to as the implementation stage where all written materials are designed. For example, writing scenarios for performance, scripts for oral audios, questionnaires, interviews, surveys, maps, … etc. When content, aim, data are approved by the instructor, students carry out their tasks to fulfill the previously set objectives. They usually work together for almost twelve weeks till the final production is created. Every task is followed by weekly discussion sessions in which the instructor monitors the performance, collates information, and gives feedback for noticeable progress.

Creation of the end-products is the last stage. Every student, together with members of the groups combines their achieved tasks to produce the final outcome. Each member is accountable for her own task which is continuously assessed. The final products of the collaborative projects could be a story, booklet, documentary, caricature, video clip, dramatic performance, diary, game, an app, voice recording, … etc. After the final approval, a contest called "Students Got Talents" is established at the end of the term usually before the final exams where all collaborative Shakespearean projects are presented in front of an audience; vice dean of the college, chairlady of the department, staff members, mothers, relatives, friends, students from other departments and guests from outside the campus. These projects are evaluated according to a given criteria by a jury consisting of three specialized professors from the department who announce the winners of the first, second and third place in the competition. All other participants are given certificates of appreciation by head of the department. So far, six Seasons have been launched in College of Arts and Humanities. In 2015, the application of this method was recognized and I was honored with a certificate for "The Best Teaching Practice" in the college. Three years later in 2018, I was chosen as "The Distinguished Instructor" and honored among other fellows from other departments. Throughout the three previously mentioned stages, the instructor's role in such cooperative learning situations differs considerably from that in the traditional instructor-centered lecture. Through imposing less control, it is no longer the instructor who spoon feeds the student as the latter becomes both the creator and vital participant in the whole learning process. The following schedule contains all Shakespearian projects done in the subject from 2013-2017:

Text	Project Title	Idea	Objective	Final Product
Julius Caesar	Gray Zone	Analyzing Caesar's epileptic seizures through the lens of neurology interviewing real patients and physicians	To spread epilepsy awareness	Video Clip
	Signals	A diary written by Brutus narrating Caesar's ignorance of all warning signals and the resulted downfall	To warn against the denial of God's messages	Dramatic Performance
	The Possible Dream	Narrating the play in sign language and interviewing a specialist in a deaf center	To let deaf people be exposed to Shakespeare's plays	Play in Sign Language
	Hijaziyyat	Converting the tragedy into a comedy using the Saudi Hijazi dialect.	To present a comedy that suits the taste of Saudi audience	Dramatic Performance
	Young Shakespeareans	Making an experiment on Saudi children to analyze their beliefs of the supernatural events found in the play	To show the effect of media on Saudi children	Video Clip
	Paradox	Converting the play into the Japanese culture with drawings and voice recordings	To expose the audience to the Japanese culture	Drawing Story
	The Weirdness of Ancients	Presenting strange facts about the Roman leaders	To display the odds of Roman ancient life	Video Clip
	Zodiac Analysis of Shakespeare's Characters	Analyzing Shakespeare's characters through horoscope science	To offer a new methodology of character analysis	Blog
	In His Own Way	Comparing Julius Caesarwith Plutarch's historical account	To pinpoint similarities and differences between the play and the source	VideoClip
	The Great Rabbit	Writing an animal story based on the play	To introduce children to a simplified version of the play	Printed Animal Story
	The Other Side of the Blind	Rewriting the play in braille language	To give the blind people an opportunity to read the classics	Play in Braille Language
	Man Friendship Vs. Animal Friendship	Comparing Caesar and Brutus' friendship with a real story of an animal and its owner	To show animal loyalty to humans	Video Clip
	Darkness and Light	Dramatizing the play with masks and light effects	To perform the play in the Greek way	Mask Performance
	The Merchant of Alexandria	Converting the play into the Egyptian culture	To teach children the true meaning of friendship in a comic way	Puppet Show
	Innocent Souls	Comparing Portia's relation with Nerissa and the way maids are treated nowadays	To spread an awareness of maids' rights	Video Clip

The Merchant of Venice	Why Not Me?	Comparing the concept of disguise in the play with Lord of the Rings, Mulan and To the Beautiful You	To highlight the purposes and consequences of disguise in all works	Video Clip
	Pictionary	Creating a game with cards similar to monopoly about the themes of the play	To test audience's comprehension of the play	Card Game
	Clay of our Neighborhood	Converting the play into Hijazi Saudi dialect using characters made by clay	To expose Saudi Hijazi children to the play	Clay Story
	Magical Lamp	Comparing the rules of marriage in the play with those followed in some Saudi families	To spread an awareness of the causes of spinsterhood	Story with Drawings
	I can be Your Eyes	Rewriting the play in braille language	To give the blind people an opportunity to read the classics	Play in Braille Language
	Juniors' The Merchant of Venice	Making a pop-up book of the play with drawings	To display the play for children in an interesting way	Pop-up Book
Macbeth	Twitspeare	Making an interview with Shakespeare as if he is alive and creating a twitter account to discuss his ideas in relation to current events	To expose the audience to Shakespeare's personality, concepts and famous quotations	Twitter Account with an Interview with Shakespeare
	Save the Knight	Creating and publishing an electronic game in google play based on Shakespeare's words	To test people's knowledge of Shakespeare's vocabulary	Mobile Game
	The Ladder	Comparing Macbeth with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and The Pursuit of Happiness	To pinpoint the similarities among all three works	Video Clip
	What's beyond?	Analyzing Macbeth, JuliusCaesar and Romeo and Juliet from a psychological point of view	To prove that all characters suffer from mental illnesses	Documentary
	Bloody Hands	Analyzing the causes of Macbeth's murders comparing them with similar recent crimes	To illustrate the various causes of killing one's relatives	Video clip
	Magical Sand	Narrating the play with pictures made by sand	To present the play in a unique way	Sand Story
	Macbeth	Rewriting the play in a simplified language for children	To expose children to the classics	Printed Children Story
	Macbeth Nowadays	Comparing Macbeth with Bashar Al-Assad	To show the negative effects of ambition	Video clip
	Black and White	Comparing Macbeth with Adam, Lady Macbeth with Eve, The serpent with the three witches in the play	To highlight the similarities found among these characters	Video clip
	Over Achievers	Comparing Macbeth with a real successful Saudi handicapped man, Ammar Bogus	To show the difference between positive and negative ambition	Video Clip
	Birds of Peace	Comparing Macduff's revenge with a true Chinese story about	To highlight the importance of	Video Clip

		forgiveness	forgiveness	
	Murderous Minds	Comparing Lady Macbeth with the famous female Egyptian serial killers, Raya and Sakina, and other recent crime stories	To show how men can be easily manipulated by evil women	Video Clip
	The Cunning Women	Comparing Lady Macbeth with Aljalila, a historical figure in Yemen	To highlight women's power	Video Clip
	Foul and Fair	Comparing Macbeth with Almansur Mohammad ibn Abi Amir in Rabie` Cordoba	To show the similarities with the real Arabic leader	Video Clip
	Over and Over	Comparing Lady Macbeth with Shajarat Al Durr in the Abbasid Era	To pinpoint the similarities between the two smart women	Video Clip
	The Dark Side of the Moon	Comparing Lady Macbeth with Hedda Gabbler	To shed light on the negative effect of ambition	Video Clip
Twelfth Night	What Girls can do?	Comparing the concept of disguise in the play with Mulan	To emphasize the concept of gender equality	Video clip
	A dream Seeker	Comparing Viola's determination to succeed with Oprah Winfrey's	To prove that success depends on hard efforts not gender	Video clip
	She is the Man	Comparing Viola with Jane Eyre	To show similarities between the two characters	Video clip
	Fearless Women	Comparing Viola with Portia in The Merchant of Venice and other real female figures	To highlight women's determination to succeed	Video clip
	Colors	Drawing some Elizabethan dramatists by using colors and glue	To show the students' artistic talents	Portraits
	Fashionistas	Designing an Elizabethan dress using recycled materials	To produce a new dress design reflecting the era	Recycled Elizabethan Dress
	Faces	Making portraits of some Elizabethan playwrights	To show the uniqueness of collages	Face Collages
	Say Cheese	Drawing caricatures based on the comic scenes of different plays	To mock some concepts in the plays that are found in our society till now	Caricature Booklet

A closer look at the schedule shows that these projects stem from an analysis of either a concept or character in any of the given plays. The obvious diversity of topics employed is in itself a proof that ideas are always renewable even if the texts are fixed. To accomplish the objectives listed above, students search in other fields of study such as: History, Politics, Neurology, Sociology, Art, Fashion, Human rights, Handcrafts and so on. This search for information could not have been possible without technology; the most appropriate medium that builds relevance with the students' own lives. Undoubtedly, the creativity of the final projects is related to the students' various talents. Whatever the academic level might be, it is the students' motivation and commitment that determine the final overall success. From another angle, through these projects, students have in fact reached all levels of Bloom's taxonomy; "a multi-tiered model of classifying thinking according to six cognitive levels of complexity" (Forehand 2).

It is widely applied for curriculum planning and assessment and often referred to as a stairway or "a cumulative hierarchy"; if students succeed in climbing one level of thought, this means that they have mastered all previous levels (Krathwohl 212). The lowest levels in the revised Bloom's taxonomy are: remembering, understanding and applying while the three highest levels are: analyzing, evaluating and creating. If we apply the previously mentioned Shakespearean projects to these levels, it becomes obvious that students could climb to the top of the taxonomy. First, they recall and retrieve the previously obtained knowledge from the subject (Remembering). Second, they construct meaning from this knowledge through multiple actions like exemplifying, interpreting, classifying, or summarizing (Understanding). Third, they carry out what they have understood through implementing them in the projects (Applying). Fourth, they break the knowledge into parts to determine their relevance (Analyzing). Fifth, they self-assess themselves through giving judgments over what they have analyzed (Evaluating). Sixth, they put different components together to produce something new (Creating). As illustrated, those students could not reach the creative level until they master the prior skills. As Eric Hadley remarks, when Shakespeare is thought of outside the Elizabethan context, the Bard of Avon becomes a contemporary voice that stimulates learners to think critically and creatively about their own world (76). Accordingly, when relevance is established, creativity is produced.

The followed project-based method has produced forty-five creative Shakespearean projects. With their completion, students develop their self-esteem, mastery of subject, ability to work within a group, and most importantly, a positive response towards learning Shakespeare. In order to make their achievements memorable, almost all projects are downloaded on a special YouTube channel called "Student Got Talents" (https://goo.gl/bNWs6f). Some are excluded from publishing either because they are dramatic performances or upon personal requests. In "Teaching Shakespeare with YouTube", Christy Desmet declares that it is more encouraging for students if they are asked to post their projects on YouTube instead of merely presenting them in class (66).Hence, the purpose for publishing them is twofold: first, to document the students' efforts and contributions in a way that makes their projects last forever and second, to motivate all college students to participate and show their talents to the whole world. From my own experience as the supervisor of these projects, I have found that integrating collaborative projects as part of the course grading system has lots of benefits. Since they are mostly done in English, the students' four skills are all developed. They read the original texts for full comprehension of all the details as well as other various critical essays, write their own data, listen to a number of audios and video clips, and speak to the instructor and their colleagues in the discussion sessions. Through working together as a team, interpersonal and teamwork skills are emphasized too. In addition to that, students are in fact trained to self-assess their own efforts as they continuously, edit, direct, rearrange and evaluate their projects several times before discussing their progress with the instructor who gives immediate feedback for each member; an advantage that is not found in large groups where two or three discuss and the rest keeps silent. These follow up sessions reinforce the students' comprehension of the plays; the more they ask, the more their level of understanding increases.

While collecting their data, students are exposed to various authentic materials other than the plays themselves. For instance, they have to search in newspapers, magazines, electronic sources, different apps, … etc and accordingly, their general knowledge is also expanded. This acquired knowledge is actually applied in real life experiences. What is really interesting is the acceptance of individual differences so members of each group cooperate and help each other in the areas lacking in some till they reach their main objective. In "Cooperative Language Learning", Olsen and Kagan stress the fact that "positive interdependence occurs when group members feel that what helps one member helps all and what hurts one member hurts all" (29). Hence, a spirit of mutual support is gradually built within each group. Undoubtedly then, one shared objective stimulates a group of different unequal abilities to produce one complete comprehensive creative work. Since many projects depend on comparing the Elizabethan era with other cultures like Arabic, American, African or Asian, an intercultural awareness is promoted. Students reflect upon and reply to the various issues raised concerning a particular culture. Their views are either corrected or emphasized. Therefore, their cultural knowledge is actually broadened as they relate to each other adding to their own perspectives. In addition, studying Shakespeare and working with diverse members help students to appreciate different ideologies and traditions different from their own. With the passage of time, they inevitably learn how to deal with people from different backgrounds accepting their cultural differences and this, indeed, will prepare them for the larger world they will face in their future careers.

For those who have never realized that they are capable of doing something unique, the project-based method has given them the opportunity to discover their hidden abilities and use them creatively. Those who are good at drawing, sketching, painting, singing, dramatizing or making hand crafts will make use of such talents and skills in the creation of their projects. Consequently, studying Shakespeare becomes more beneficial, enjoyable and of great importance and fun to them; a subject where their talents find the right way to be exhibited and directed. What is worth mentioning here is that the whole process from beginning to end is actually a journey of personal development? Even those who are week in English have excelled as well primarily because they work in other areas they are more interested in. Being the decision makers, the learning situation becomes student-centered rather than teacher-directed. Interestingly, though I allot fifteen marks as an assessment -three marks for each criterion: content, language, creativity, techniques and performance- students do their best not only for the sake of marks but because they enjoy doing what they like and they desire to stand unique among other competitors. The only disadvantage has found is related, in fact, to the instructor. Constant monitoring, assessing and giving feedback are both time consuming and exhausting as well. Besides the known responsibilities of the instructor, most importantly teaching and researching, she/he has to exert more effort and time in planning, monitoring, and assessing not only the content of the projects but also data, materials, techniques, coherence, and the intended message to be delivered.

The frequent follow up sessions are, indeed, very tiring. The role of each member in the groups has to be monitored to ensure that each one is rightly doing her part mainly because individual accountability does not only affect the individual performance but the progress of the group at large. To avoid such commitment, instructors usually do not resort to such type of method, despite its great importance and tremendous benefits, as they usually prefer the traditional set of activities inside the classroom. This research, as I believe, sheds light on the need for innovative methods for teaching traditional literature to modern diverse students. From my own experience that lasts for five years, applying the concept of collaborative projects in teaching literary courses, Shakespeare in particular, makes the learning situation more focused on the students' involvement and participation in a way that prepares them for the job market where the ability to work cooperatively within groups is the key to success. Passive receivers are turned into active participants. Instructors become learners and students at times become teachers. For both, Shakespeare's plays, as this research proves, can be enjoyable and of great benefits. Such projects stimulate critical and creative thinking, develop interpersonal and communicative skills, promote comprehension, bridge cultural and personal gaps, and encourage literary appreciation, increase motivation and academic achievement, and direct talents in the right way.

This method has been very well liked by my students primarily because it creates a healthy positive and competitive environment where diversity is celebrated and all contributions are valued reflecting a wide range of perspectives. New opportunities are opened for the talented ones as there is no limit to their creativity. The less linguistically talented students, as this research shows, cab be creative artists, gifted technicians and great analysts. The route to achieving the final version of the projects, though tiring, is what makes it worthwhile. I hope that this paper creates awareness on how to properly approach and teach Shakespearean texts. It is highly recommended that in the future, curriculums are developed to officially include collaborative projects as part of the grading system of any literary course accompanied by other innovative instructional strategies that increase students' full engagement in the learning process. Doing so will definitely make Shakespeare's effects be resurrected.

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