



Flow Experience in Reading and Viewing Shakespeare: A Quantitative Study of the Lovers' Quarrel Scene in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

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Abstract

The study investigates the flow experiences of readers and viewers of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* using Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory. The study aims to compare the levels of flow experienced through reading and viewing. The flow experience is divided into seven dimensions: concentration, enjoyment, sense of control, time distortion, immersion, loss of self-consciousness, and clear goals and understanding. A quantitative design was used with a sample population of 21 participants, comprising a reading group (n=10) and a viewing group (n=11). Participants completed a 17-item flow state questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale after reading the literary text or viewing the corresponding scene from the film adaptation. The flow was calculated for each dimension and the overall flow experience was also measured using descriptive statistical analysis. The study recorded a higher level of flow for both the reading and viewing groups; however, the reading group obtained higher mean scores across all dimensions. The overall mean flow for the reading group was 4.42, and that of the viewing group was 4.01. The study suggests that Shakespeare's language continues to facilitate greater immersion in the literary text among contemporary audiences. The findings obtained through the lens of flow theory contribute to Shakespeare studies and Reader Response Theory by providing empirical evidence of readers' engagement with the literary text.

Keywords: Flow Theory, Shakespeare Studies, Adaptation Studies, Quantitative research, Reader- Response Theory, Audience Immersion.

Introduction

The study aims to compare the experience of flow in Shakespeare's work through reading and

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viewing. This experience is measured through the Flow scale developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. The theory of flow by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is applied in the Shakespearean comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A quantitative research design is employed to obtain measurable and objective findings of the research. All literary works have been read and interpreted through text and the emerging new trend is to adapt them into movies. Flow is a theory developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi referring to a state of deep focus on an activity with deep immersion. This is closely related to Reader- Response Theory, which argues that an author writes a text to involve the reader actively in their work. Literary reading involves concentration, which leads to a flow experience. Shakespeare has used his rich language, comic plot and characters to draw the audience towards a flow experience. An adaptation study is one of the emerging trends where literary texts are converted into visual forms through media such as films and theatre productions. Unlike reading, auditory senses are involved in adaptation studies. Reading creates the imagination in the reader and it is shaped by performance and music. The quarrel scene in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* among the lovers is chosen for the comparative study. The objective of the study is to compare the flow experience by finding the flow experience of reading and viewing separately. By comparing the results, we find out which medium of experience facilitates more flow.

Review of Literature

Flow Theory was introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990). His research was mainly focused on finding out what makes people happy. When a person is in flow, he is completely immersed in the activity and time is distorted while the person is in the activity. This activity gives them happiness that makes them enjoy the task and remember it forever in their memory. This flow was experimented with the artists in the beginning and later he found that it could be applied to other activities like athletes, singers, dancers and chess players. In collaboration with Professor Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania, they published an article in *American Psychologist* in 2000, contributing to the development of Positive Psychology. Reading demands concentration and focus and it is closely associated with the flow experience. McQuillan and Conde (1996), in their article *The Condition of Flow in Reading: Two Studies of Optimal Experience*, conducted an experiment in two sample populations. They found that flow experience is more prevalent in fictional reading rather than non-fictional works. In the experiments conducted among students, flow was higher when they had an interest towards the text. In another study by Thissen et al (2018), in their article, *Measuring Optimal Reading Experiences: The Reading Flow Short Scale*, a flow scale was developed specifically for reading. They selected 229 readers and conducted their research through online by asking them to read a novel for 20 minutes. They found that reading depends on interest and concentration. They also found a strong balance between readers' reading skills and the text. Reader Response Theory emphasises readers' meaning while reading the text. It focuses on the reader's construction of meaning in a text. In his work, *The reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, Rosenblatt (1978) discusses the experience of the reader of a text rather than the text itself. Also, Iser (1978), in his work *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, argues that a reader always fills the text with their imagination. Later, Fiser (1980) in his work, *Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities* implies that it is the reader who gives meaning to a text. Hutcheon (2006), in his work, *A Theory of Adaptation*, views that adaptation must be seen as a new creation rather than a secondary imitation of the original work. Scholars of adaptation studies have increased their focus lately on audience reception, which directly has a connection with the flow state.

Theoretical Framework

Flow Theory

Since Aristotle, the world has always sought happiness over everything else. Happiness could be in the form of health, beauty, money or in any other form. But humankind has always sought this happiness for centuries. Humans strive their entire lives in search of this happiness. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi spent his entire life working on this. He felt that psychology has spoken less about finding happiness. He collaborated with Martin Seligman and developed the concept of flow and positive psychology. Flow is a deep sense of enjoyment and exhilaration when a person does an activity, and this becomes a memory to be cherished forever in their memory. He described this as an optimal experience. This experience helps the individual to attain happiness. It involves the control of consciousness, and consciousness determines the quality of life. This flow state and optimal experience help one to achieve happiness in their life. There is also a temporal distortion when a person is in a flow state. They tend to forget their worries and are deeply immersed in the activity. He also gives the conditions for flow. In any activity, flow depends on two variables: skill and challenge. When a person's skill is high, and the challenge is low, it leads to boredom. When a person's skill is low, and the challenge is high, it leads to anxiety. To achieve flow, there should be a balance between skill and challenge. Both should be high to achieve flow state. He has developed a Flow State Scale to measure flow. This study employs the Flow theory to compare the participants' flow experience in reading and viewing the lovers' quarrel scene in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare.

Concepts of Immersion and Engagement and Reader Response Theory

The concepts of Immersion and Engagement are closely associated with flow state, as they also need deep concentration and interest to achieve a task. Literary text always involves the reader's involvement in reading, interpreting and constructing its meaning. When a person reads a fictional work, he is transported into the fictional world in their imagination. Every character described is imagined in his own mind with the details of the text. Every scenic narration described is built in his own imagination. This differs from every reader and the meaning of the text is constructed by the reader and not the author and text itself. This deep involvement in the text is associated with flow state. Reader-response theory also constructs the same idea that a reader constructs the meaning of the text through their interaction with the text. They connect themselves with the text they read through their immersion, imagination and engagement with the characters and events of the story. The concepts of immersion and engagement are important to understand how participants experience Shakespeare through both reading and viewing.

Adaptation Theory

The Theory of Adaptation provides the theoretical basis for comparing literary texts and movie adaptations. Linda Hutcheon defined this adaptation theory in her work *A Theory of Adaptation*. She claims that adaptation does not stop with the transformation of literary texts into films, but it has been an ancient practice for ages. She argues that the stories were transformed into other media like paintings, operas, songs and dances. Modern adaptations have been in the form of movies. She asks the audience to view adaptations as an original work and not just a visual imitation of the original text. According to her, adaptation works must be seen as independent creative works. This theory helps us to understand how the same narrative can create different audience reception on screen and on the pages. Shakespeare's works have been adapted into movies and, in recent days, as modern retellings. Shakespeare himself wrote the text for stage productions. The movies and stage productions in modern days differ from

those of the Elizabethan age with the improvement of visual aids.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative experimental design to analyse the flow experience in reading a Shakespearean text and watching its adapted version in a movie. It used the flow theory by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as the primary theoretical framework. The flow scale has been modified according to the research design, and the exact scale was not used. The data was collected through a questionnaire and the results were observed and interpreted statistically. The obtained statistical data were used to compare the differences in the flow experience. A particular scene from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was used to find the flow difference. The lovers' quarrel scene from Act 3, Scene 2, was used for the study. It was selected because of its humour and emotional intensity. It is one of the most engaging scenes in the entire drama. The corresponding scene from a film adaptation was used for the study. The study was conducted among Undergraduate students from National College, Trichy. The students were divided into two groups, one for reading the text and the other for viewing the movie. Data collection took place in a classroom under controlled conditions to ensure uniformity among the groups. A group of 21 students was selected and divided into two groups: a reading group (n=10) and a viewing group (n=11). The reading group was given the drama script to be read and the viewing group were allowed to watch the movie. Following this procedure, both groups were administered a flow questionnaire to be filled out through Google Form. Their personal data was also collected through the same questionnaire. A questionnaire based on the dimensions of flow was used to tailor a flow scale. It measures Concentration, Enjoyment, Immersion, Sense of Control, Time Distortion, Loss of Self-Consciousness and Clear Goals and Understanding. Questions were administered under each title to measure the flow. The responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale. Participation was voluntary and their consent was obtained before the process. The students who were familiar with Shakespearean studies were chosen for the study. The collected data were analysed using statistical techniques. Percentage analysis for demographic data was conducted. The mean was found in the flow scores for two different groups. The obtained mean scores for different groups were used to compare the flow experience. The results are represented in charts, tables and descriptive interpretations to find out the differences between the flow experience of the two groups.

Results

The chosen sample population were students from the Department of English of National College at Trichy in Tamil Nadu. The study included students from undergraduate studies. The participants were divided into two groups: Reading group (n=10) and Viewing group (n=11). Participation was made voluntarily and all of them were proficient in English. They belonged to the third year of their graduate studies and were only introduced to the background of their Shakespearean studies. They had not previously read any Shakespearean drama. This made it necessary for the researcher to provide them with a brief introduction to the story and plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Demographic information collected includes their name, gender, ID number and programme. Demographic information was collected only to describe the sample size and it is not an independent variable in the analysis. The reading group read the lovers' quarrel scene and the viewing group were made to watch the corresponding scene from the film adaptation.

The overall flow experience was divided into seven dimensions, namely Concentration, Enjoyment, Sense of control, Time distortion, Immersion, Loss of Self-consciousness and Clear Goals and Understanding. Each dimension had two or three questions under it, designed to measure a specific aspect of flow experience. The mean score for each dimension was

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calculated separately for reading and viewing groups. In the first category, Concentration, the mean of the reading group was 4.30 and the mean of the viewing group was 4.03. The mean of the reading group is higher than that of the viewing group. This suggests that the participants who read were able to concentrate more than the participants who viewed. However, the difference between the means is only slightly higher than the viewing group.

Table 1
Comparison of Mean Scores for the Concentration Dimension Between the Reading and Viewing Groups

Concentration	Reading (n=10)	Viewing (n=11)
Question 1 Mean	4.50	4.36
Question 2 Mean	4.50	4.18
Question 3 Mean	3.90	3.55
Overall Mean	4.30	4.03

Note. Mean scores are based on participants' responses to a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

For the dimension of enjoyment, the reading group recorded a mean of 4.73 and the viewing group recorded a mean of 4.21. The reading group recorded a higher mean than the viewing group. This shows that reading provided them more enjoyment than the viewing group. Both groups enjoyed their activity; however, the reading activity provided more enjoyment and a satisfying experience for the participants.

Table 2
Comparison of Mean Scores for the Enjoyment Dimension Between the Reading and Viewing Groups

Enjoyment	Reading (n=10)	Viewing (n=11)
Question 1 Mean	4.70	3.91
Question 2 Mean	4.90	4.45
Question 3 Mean	4.60	4.27
Overall Mean	4.73	4.21

In the next dimension, Sense of Control, the reading group showed a mean score of 4.40 and the viewing group showed a mean score of 4.05. The participants of the reading group had more control over their reading material. The participants of the viewing group felt less control over their material.

Table 3

Comparison of Mean Scores for the Sense of Control Dimension Between the Reading and Viewing Groups

Sense of Control	Reading (n=10)	Viewing (n=11)
Question 1 Mean	4.50	3.73
Question 2 Mean	4.30	4.36
Overall Mean	4.40	4.05

The dimension, Time distortion, had two questions under its category and the reading group recorded a mean of 4.70 and the viewing group recorded a mean of 4.09. The reading group shows a relatively higher mean than the viewing group. This shows that participants of the reading group felt lost in the track of time more than the viewing group. This shows the reading group has a deeper level of involvement in the activity.

Table 4

Comparison of Mean Scores for the Time Distortion Dimension Between the Reading and Viewing Groups

Time Distortion	Reading (n=10)	Viewing (n=11)
Question 1 Mean	4.90	4.09
Question 2 Mean	4.50	4.09
Overall Mean	4.70	4.09

In the dimension Immersion, both groups show more engagement in their activity. The reading group recorded a mean of 4.23 and the viewing group recorded a mean of 4.03. They show a relatively slight difference in their mean scores. Though the difference is relatively small, the reading group showed more sense of immersion with their reading material.

Table 5

Comparison of Mean Scores for the Immersion Dimension Between the Reading and Viewing Groups

Immersion	Reading (n=10)	Viewing (n=11)
Question 1 Mean	4.30	4.45
Question 2 Mean	4.10	3.91
Question 3 Mean	4.30	3.73
Overall Mean	4.23	4.03

For Loss of Self-Consciousness, the reading group showed a mean of 3.90 and the viewing group showed a mean of 3.50. The participants who read were more involved in the narrative than the group who watched the corresponding scene. The participants who read were less aware of themselves while engaged in their reading activity.

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Table 6

Comparison of Mean Scores for the Loss of Self-Consciousness Dimension Between the Reading and Viewing Groups

Loss of Self-Consciousness	Reading (n=10)	Viewing (n=11)
Question 1 Mean	3.60	3.36
Question 2 Mean	4.20	3.64
Overall Mean	3.90	3.50

The final dimension, clear goals and understanding, consisted of two items. The reading group recorded a mean of 4.70 and the viewing group recorded a mean of 4.05. The readers understood their objectives and understood their material better than the viewing group.

Table 7

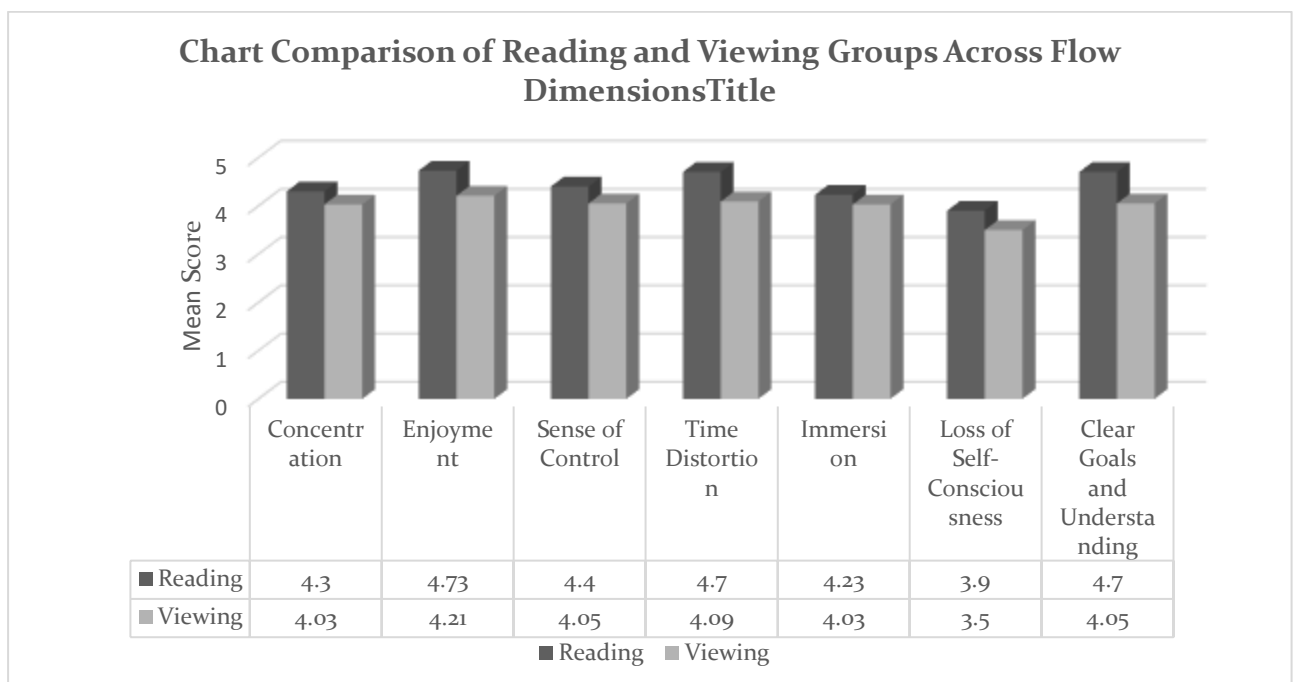
Comparison of Mean Scores for the Clear Goals and Understanding Dimension Between the Reading and Viewing Groups

Clear Goals and Understanding	Reading (n=10)	Viewing (n=11)
Question 1 Mean	4.70	4.00
Question 2 Mean	4.70	4.09
Overall Mean	4.70	4.05

The highest difference obtained between the two groups was seen in the dimension Clear Goals and Understanding and the lowest difference between the groups was seen in the dimension Immersion.

Figure 1

Comparison of Mean Flow Scores Between the Reading and Viewing Groups Across Flow Dimensions



Note. The figure compares the mean scores of the Reading Group (n = 10) and the Viewing Group (n = 11) across the seven dimensions of the Flow Questionnaire. Scores are based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher mean scores indicate greater levels of flow experience.

To compare the flow experiences of the Reading and Viewing groups, the overall flow experience was divided into seven dimensions. Each dimension had either three or two questionnaire items based on the required specifications for flow measurement, resulting in a total of 17 questions. Mean value was calculated for each dimension by dividing the total score of that dimension by the number of participants and the number of questions in that dimension. To determine the overall flow mean, the total scores across all 17 questionnaire items were summed for each group and divided by the product of the number of participants and the total number of questionnaire items. The overall flow mean was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Overall Mean} = \text{Total Score} \div (\text{Number of Participants} \times \text{Number of Questionnaire Items})$$

For the Reading group:

$$\text{Overall Mean} = 752 \div (10 \times 17) = 752 \div 170 = 4.42$$

For the Viewing group:

$$\text{Overall Mean} = 750 \div (11 \times 17) = 750 \div 187 = 4.01$$

The overall flow mean score of the reading group is 4.42, and that of the viewing group is 4.01. In all seven dimensions, the reading group consistently obtained higher mean scores than the viewing group.

Table 8

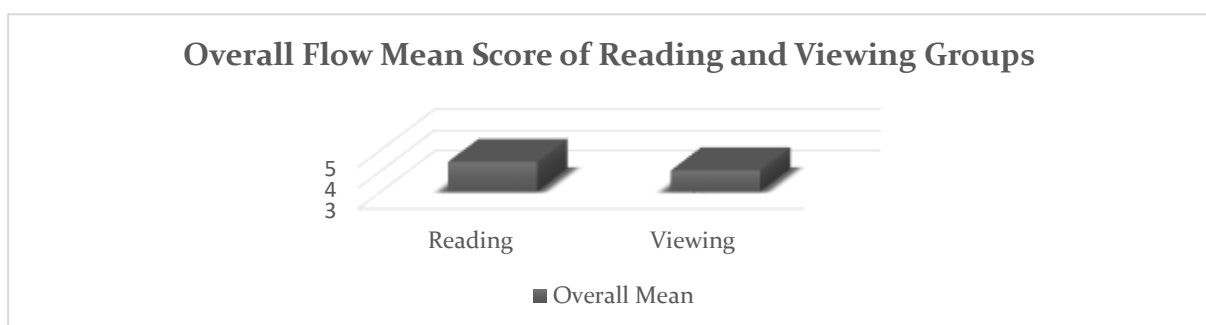
Comparison of Overall Flow Scores Between the Reading and Viewing Groups

Group	No of Participants (n)	Total Score	Overall Mean Score
Reading	10	752	4.42
Viewing	11	750	4.01

Note. The overall mean score was calculated from participants' responses to all 17 items of the Flow Questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale.

Figure 2

Comparison of Overall Mean Flow Scores Between the Reading and Viewing Groups



Note. The figure illustrates the overall mean flow scores of the Reading Group (n = 10) and the Viewing Group (n = 11)

Interpretation of Findings

The present study examined the flow experience of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through two different modes: reading and viewing. The findings reveal that both groups showed relatively high levels of flow. However, the reading scale scored a relatively higher mean consistently in all seven dimensions, resulting in an overall flow mean of 4.42 for the reading group and 4.01 for the viewing group. This finding suggests that reading Shakespeare may facilitate a higher flow than viewing Shakespeare's film adaptation. While watching a movie scene, the viewer may reduce the extent to which they rely on their own imagination. While reading, the reader is given a text and has to construct the meaning and imagine the characters, which are the central characteristics of flow. Though viewing provides visual and auditory support, it restricts the imagination of the viewers. This could have led to the lower flow mean for viewing. In reading, the reader infers meaning and emotions without the visual support. This draws consistent attention and mental involvement. This corresponds to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's characteristics of flow. The overall flow mean score indicates that reading Shakespeare can produce a better literary experience. In viewing, the overall flow score is also high and not too low. Participants recorded a positive experience in all dimensions, especially in enjoyment and immersion. The theatrical experience and the audiovisual elements help the participants to understand the plot.

Reader Response Theory

The findings can be interpreted through the lens of Reader Response Theory. The higher flow experienced by the reading group supports the theory by making the participants active during the reading activity, constructing their own meaning with deep concentration. The viewing group glides along with the performance of the actors. Such active participation among the reading group aligns with the Reader Response Theory. They are involved with their subjective perception of the text and imagination. This might have contributed to a more flow experience for the reading group. Reader Response Theory does not suggest less concentration and engagement in viewing activities but that the text's meaning is constructed individually by the reader.

Humour

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a comical play by Shakespeare and must have contributed to the participants' engagement in both media. The humour element may have played a major role in the flow experience. His comical elements become more intense in the lovers' quarrel scene than in other parts of the drama. He uses misunderstanding as the central element to make confusion lively. The magical character, Puck, mistakes Lysander for Demetrius when King Oberon mentions the Athenian garments of a man. This mistaken identity makes Demetrius and Lysander fall in love with Helena. This creates a misunderstanding among the lovers, making the comical scene more intense. He also exaggerates the emotions of the four lovers. Hermia is disappointed to see Lysander leave her for Helena. She fights with her dear friend both emotionally and physically. Helena takes it as a mockery when both men praise her in love. She thinks all three of them are mocking her for pity state. Demetrius and Lysander's emotions are also exaggerated when they fight for Helena. Shakespeare intertwines playful interactions in their dialogues to make the narrative more interesting to read and also watch on stage. Both the reading and viewing groups have shown a higher level of flow in enjoyment, which suggests that Shakespeare's humour remained one of the important aspects for engagement in both reading and viewing groups. The mean of the reading group is slightly higher than that of the viewing group in enjoyment, which suggests that the original written narrative of Shakespeare enables the participants to enjoy his humour.

at their own pace. Reading enables the participants to read at their own pace and reflect upon the comic situation. Reading helps the participants to enjoy their word play and verbal humour. While viewing, the participants have to concentrate on the next dialogue to understand the story.

Shakespeare's Language and Audience Immersion

Shakespeare's language is also expressive, creating a poetic imagination and humour which contributes vehemently for audience engagement. Reading the archaic words of Shakespeare involves more effort. It requires more effort to understand the vocabulary and figurative language. This might have contributed much to the higher flow of the reading group. In viewing, the audience is more concentrated on enjoying the movie scene performed by the performer rather than enjoying the author's language. This linguistic activity may explain the higher concentration and immersion scores of the reading group. The viewing participants, on the other hand, are supported with performance, gestures, expressions, costumes and music along with the language. This reduces their linguistic activity, but the other elements help to keep the audience engaged in viewing.

Conclusion

The findings of the study show that reading Shakespeare enables a better engagement and immersion than viewing. However, both modes have created a positive experience among the participants. The study was only a pilot study with a small sample population. The students were undergraduates from the Department of English. The sample population could be generalised to other populations. It could be extended to other Shakespearean plays. It can also be extended by studying Shakespeare's tragedies, histories and romances. The study can be extended to studying the flow experience of different age groups, educational levels and cultural backgrounds. The audience engagement can be studied for live theatre performances and film adaptations to know the flow of audience engagement. The findings of the study demonstrate that both reading a text and viewing the film adaptation can facilitate flow. However, reading may provide more flow experience, highlighting Shakespeare's enduring power of language and universality.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9Ry0IUghcw>

Bio-note

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