

Exposure to Book-based Blockbuster Movies: Bridging the Gap in Reading Motivation

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Abstract: Extensive research shows that students lack of reading motivation is at the center of many of the problems teachers are facing in literacy instruction. This dilemma is deeply felt in the Philippine educational system and often leads to failure in school. Against this background, this paper considers the utilization of book-based blockbuster movie, which aimed to bridge this gap in the reading process. Thirty-five Grade Seven high school students in one university in the Philippines were the participants of the study. McNemar Test was used to analyze the data from a survey questionnaire. The evidence suggests that exposure to book-based blockbuster movie positively effect a significant change to students' motivation to read the book. This implies that reading teachers could use book-based blockbuster movies as part of their reading instruction, and could be included as key components in any reading program. Importantly, movies should be screened and evaluated vis-à-vis learners' social and cultural orientation, school's curriculum, and educational goals and objectives.

Keywords: Book-based blockbuster movies, reading motivation, literacy instruction, Philippines

1.0 Introduction

Movies are seen as powerful forces in changing social norms and values, transforming one's perspectives and views in life (Spector, 2001; Turnau, 2004; Vetrie, 2004). They are considered modern-day story telling instruments (Fisherkeller, 2000; Nel, 2002), and these are evidently seen in some book-based blockbuster movies like *Harry Potter* series (Kooy, 2003), *The Twilight Saga* (Granger, 2011), and *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Robinson, 2004), to name just a few. Apparently, the fundamental formula in movies is anchored primarily in its well-crafted images, sounds, plot or story lines, famous actors/actresses, and its magnificent colors (Duncum, 2009; Eken, 2002; Faulkner, 2003; Rader, 2005). Hence, films and movies are considered a big part of youth popular culture, and are now embedded in our modern-day society (Duncan, Nolan, & Wood, 2002; Metzger, 2010; Shepperd 2007). Further, these are also seen in cartoons or animated movies (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2003; Fukunaga, 2006), which proved to be influential among children and teenagers, extending its reach to the four corners of the classroom (Booth & Booth 2003; Evans, 2004; Fukunaga, 2006; Lefstein & Snell, 2011; Ranker, 2008).

1.1 Movies that promote literacy

There are movies that have positive effects to reading and literacy. For instance, Williams (2007) emphasized the role of movies in shaping the perceptions of adolescents about literacy practices.

He elaborated that movies and television programs are filled with scenes of people from all walks of life reading and writing to solve mysteries, and to avoid or overcome obstacles and dangers. Specifically, some action heroes in movies are well-educated and good readers like *James Bond*, Tyrion Lannister in *Game of Thrones*, and *Jason Bourne*. Further, sidekick is also a bookish and nerdy character (e.g., Carl in *Van Helsing*). This portrayal of literacy might be an effective tool to solve problems in reading motivation because most children and adolescents normally emulate what they see in television and movies (Dalton et al., 2001).

In a classroom setting, it is a fact that learners mostly forget what their teachers said to them (or the topic itself) after several days or months or years, but not the movies and video clips they have seen, as used in instruction. Novak (2008) stressed that the human brains have remarkable capacity for acquiring and retaining visual images. He cited the study of Shepard in 1967 in which subjects were presented pictures of common scenes, and later asked which of two similar pictures shown was one of the 612 seen earlier? After the presentation the subjects were 97% accurate in identifying picture they had seen. Three days later, 92% correct, and three months later 58%. Likewise, many researchers and scholars agreed (especially in the academe) that our culture is more visually oriented compared in the past decades; this is the main reason why movies thrived among children and adolescent learners (Metzger, 2010; Rodriguez & Perez, 2008) which somehow, one way or the other, help to improve their motivation to read the book (Hendershot, 2007). As anchored on the theory of intertextuality (Martin, 2011; Moi, 1986; Newman, 2008), movies and films are considered texts (Allen, 2000) and should be used in literacy instruction (Golden, 2007; Metzger, 2010; Morrell, 2002; Vetrie, 2004).

1.2 Gap in reading motivation

Many researches proved that reading motivation is an important aspect in the reading process (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010; Haycock, 2005; Johnson & Blaire, 2003; Sturtevant & Kim, 2010; Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004). It constitutes half of the said process but sadly the most neglected one, as compared to the other half which is reading comprehension (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). How to improve learners' reading motivation has been the subject of many researches, and has long been a primary concern and at the center of many of the problems teachers face in educating their students (Cequena, 2008; Edmunds & Tancock, 2003; Pitcher et al., 2007; Uygulamada & Bilimlari, 2011; Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004)

This dilemma, however, is deeply felt in the Philippine educational system and consequently, it often leads to failure in school especially in many subjects (Borja, 2009). Decades of reforms and millions of pesos had been spent waging against it, but it is like a cancer plaguing the system. In a report published by the Department of Education (DepEd) in 2003, unveiled that only 10% among high school graduates were not ready for college. This result was substantiated in the 2005 National Achievement Test (NAT) and the High School Readiness Test (HRT) manifesting English skills of students waning over the years (Papa, 2005). This is in consonance with the results of the 2007 Region-Wide Assessment in math, science, and English (RAMSE)

that Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM) had conducted on samples of second year students in Regions 11, 12, and in Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in the Philippines, indicating students failing the minimum mastery level of 75% (Bautista, Bernardo, & Ocampo, 2009). They rather watch movies or play computer games, reflecting lack of motivation to read the traditional texts (i.e., textbooks, trade books, magazines, and others).

One of the things educators and researchers are looking into as a possible solution, specifically, in the problem of reading motivation is the use of movies; they capitalize this knowledge and turned some of these movies into classroom materials (or part of the instructional process) to motivate learners to read more (Eken, 2002; Faulkner, 2003; Duncum, 2009). Most students today are interested in visual media. They are familiar with soap operas, programs in television, hundreds of films, and even books turned into blockbuster movies and mostly Hollywood productions (McEntee 2007; Metzger, 2010).

However, other scholars and educators believe that films do not belong in any educational curriculum; instead of motivating learners to read they become passive and abhor reading (Alvermann, 2006; Vetrie, 2004). Against this background, this paper aimed to find out if exposure to book-based blockbuster movie could motivate students to read the book.

2.0 Methodology

This study utilized experimental design specifically it made use of non-parametric test: McNemar Test. This statistical test is suited and deemed appropriate in this study in which the focus is before and after a particular intervention/treatment, and whether there was a significant change in individual's motivation to read the book. Further, data were measured on a nominal scale (Salkind, 2010; Siegel & Castellan, 1998).

2.1 The participants of the study

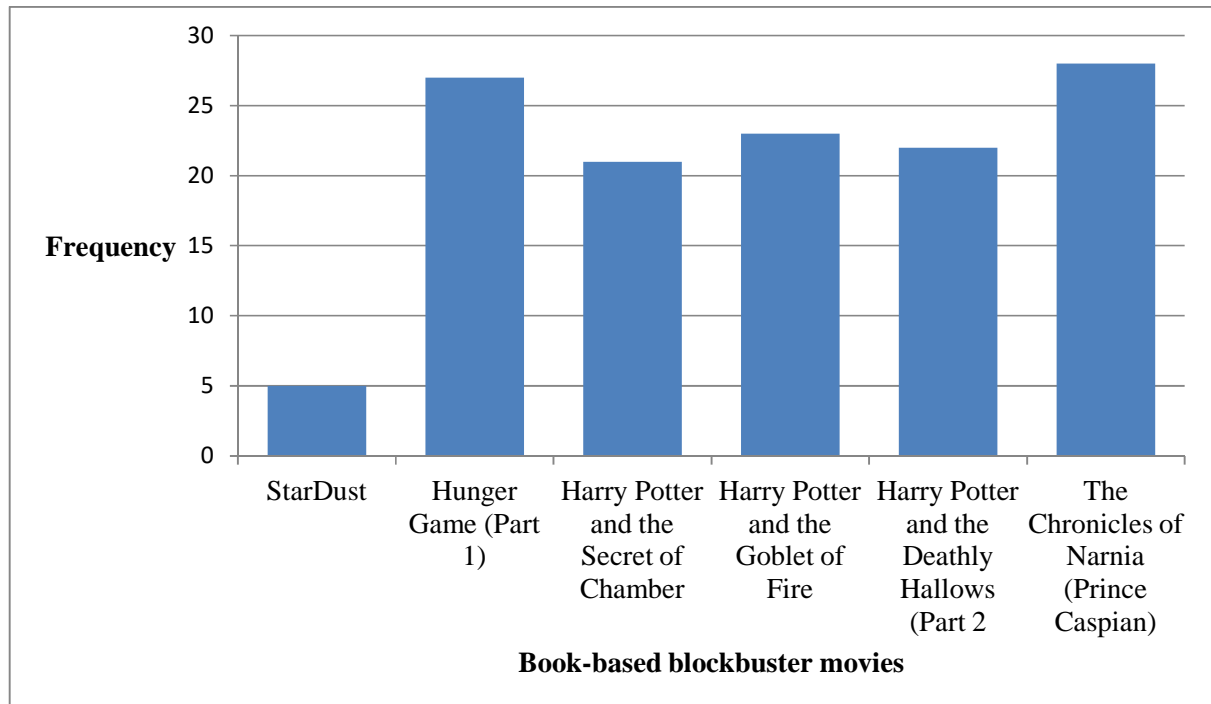
The participants of the study were Grade Seven high school students at the Integrated Laboratory School (ILS) in one university in the Philippines. The researcher applied purposive sampling (Dawson, 2009), since the ILS has only one Grade Seven section. This section consisted of 35 students: 14 males and 21 females. Most of these students are sons and daughters of the faculty and staff of this university. Hence majority belonged to the middle class. Some students have won regional and national contests (e.g., science and math contests, news writing, editorial writing, etc.). Importantly, informed consent and anonymity of students were strictly considered (Creswell, 2014).

2.2 The instruments

The researcher developed a survey questionnaire aimed to identify a significant change in individual's motivation to read the book, and what book-based blockbuster movie will be utilized as treatment/intervention. Particularly a movie that most students, if not all, have not yet watched

(see Figure 1). The survey had undergone experts' validation (three professors in another university).

Figure: 1



Frequency of book-based blockbuster movies that students watched

Anchored on the results of the survey questionnaire, the researcher used the book-based blockbuster movie *Stardust* during the video showing. This movie is a 2007 British fantasy film from Paramount Pictures and based on Neil Gaiman's novel of the same title (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=stardust.htm>); it is a blockbuster movie earning a total of \$135,553,760 worldwide particularly, it made more than \$38 million in the US, and \$31 million in the UK. The novel is a bestseller book and won the 1999 Mythopoeic Award for best novel, and considered as one of the best books of the year by Publisher's Weekly, Barnes & Noble, & Amazon (<http://books.google.com.ph/books/about/Stardust>).

2.3 Data gathering procedure

The data collection started with the approval of the research study from the ILS director and the Dean of College of Education of the university. The first task was to administer the survey questionnaire to identify what movie to be shown, as mentioned earlier. Another objective of the questionnaire was to get the baseline data (pretest) for the McNemar Test. This was done during students' free time so as not to disrupt their class schedule. The second task was the film

showing. It was shown the following day at the university's theater right after the participants' class, then the researcher conducted the posttest using the same questionnaire.

2.4 Data analysis procedures

The researcher used simple frequency count to identify what movie to be shown, as reflected in the survey questionnaire. McNemar Test for the significance of changes (as stated previously) was utilized to answer the research question (Salkind, 2010; Siegel & Castellan, 1998).

3.0 Results and discussion

The result of McNemar Test is reflected in the contingency table below (Salkind, 2010). The null hypothesis of the study was: Exposure to book-based blockbuster movie does not effect a significant change in students' motivation to read the book. Frequency was tabulated and computed before and after the treatment (movie showing) to find out if there is a significant change of participants' motivation to read the book. The researcher set the test at 0.05 level of significance with $df=1$ which has a critical value of 3.84. The decision rule was to reject the null hypothesis if the computed $X^2 \geq 3.84$ (Siegel & Castellan, 1998). The computed McNemar Test resulted to $X^2=7.11$, which is greater than 3.84. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected at $\alpha=0.05$. It means that exposure to book-based blockbuster movie positively effect a significant change to students' motivation to read the book.

Table: 1
*Participants' motivation to read the book
before and after the movie showing*

<i>Before Movie Showing</i>	<i>After Movie Showing</i>	
	Agree	Disagree
Disagree	10	1
Agree	21	1

This result is in consonance with the conclusion of some researchers (e.g., Spector, 2001; Turnau, 2004; Vetrie, 2004; Williams 2007) that movies are seen as powerful force in changing one's values and perception – even perception towards reading and literacy researchers. Yankelovich (2008) and Nel (2002) proved that movies like the *Harry Potter* series, which are based on the novels with the same title written by JK Rowling, had indeed motivated children to read these books – as supported in the present study. Further, book-based blockbuster movies could also improve students' critical thinking skills, especially movies which foreground political and social dimension (Detmering, 2010), and could draw out familiar art emotions which call upon the viewers to read the books (Shepperd, 2007). Significantly, the most concrete effect of book-based blockbuster movies to motivation to read is the study of Hendershot (2007)

in which she analyzed circulation statistics gathered from five elementary school libraries in the Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill regions of North Carolina of five children's books made into blockbuster movies. The author found that there was a considerable surge of request of these books in the said library, days after the movies were released. However, some studies revealed that some Christian organizations opposed the utilization of some book-based blockbuster movies in classroom instruction for these promote evils (e.g., wizardry in *Harry Potter*, *Beautiful Creatures*, etc.) and anti-Christian values like violence, foul language/words, etc. (Booth & Booth, 2002; Hollander, 2010; Turnau, 2004), and develop apathy for reading (Alvermann, 2006; Vetrie, 2004).

4.0 Conclusion and recommendations

This study confirmed previous researches that movies, particularly book-based blockbuster movies, have significant effect to reading motivation and literacy (Dalton et al., 2001); Duncum, 2009; Hendershot, 2007; Metzger, 2010; Rodriguez & Perez, 2008; Williams, 2007). This implies that movies could bridge the gap in reading motivation, especially students who are "resistant readers" (Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna, 2013, p. 567); they know how to read but choose not to read (Pitcher et al., 2007). This study also proved that students today are more visually inclined (Novak, 2008); they learn more through the use of this medium. Movies appeal to students' orientation of popular culture and sense of reality (Duncum, 2009; Eken, 2002; Faulkner, 2003), and some highlight characters who love reading (Williams, 2007) which promote reading and literacy. Therefore, book-based blockbuster movies can become an effective tool (especially in the hands of a dedicated and creative teacher) to provide learners the necessary schemata for comprehension (Stevens, 2001; Vetrie, 2004) and the needed motivation (Dochy, De Rijdt, & Dyck, 2002; Evans, 2004; Makey, 2003; Morell, 2002), especially when reading complicated texts (Newman, 2008).

This study suggests several course of actions for instructional practice. Primarily, reading teachers should use movies as part of their reading instruction, for example, before an assigned reading task is introduced to class; it is recommended that students should watch first the movie version to motivate them to read, and provide the necessary schemata for students to comprehend better the reading task, especially if they are not familiar with the topic/subject (Armstrong & Newman, 2011; Hermosa, 2006; Tracy & Morrow, 2006). Movies are now considered texts (Allen, 2000; Armstrong & Newman, 2011); therefore, it is important that book-based blockbuster movies should be included as key components in any reading program, especially public schools in the Philippines (Bautista et al., 2009), in which most students shy away in reading books. It is also suggested that parents should expose their children to book-based blockbuster films and combined these with the book versions (Navarrete, 2018). Significantly, before presenting these to students, movies should be screened and evaluated first vis-à-vis learners' social and cultural orientation, school's curriculum, and educational objectives

(Golden, 2007; Metzger, 2010; Vetrie, 2004). Further research could be undertaken to explore a large number of participants coming from the public schools. It could look into finding whether it is reading the book first that motivates an individual to watch the movie version, or is it watching the movie first that motivates a student to read the book, as proven in this study.

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