

## **Is Shakespeare still relevant and important today and should his works be taught in schools in all countries, not just Britain?**

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### **Abstract:**

“Shakespeare reveals a different face to different cultures and different people at different times,” explained Bruce Smith, Dean’s Professor of English and professor of theatre at University of southern California. This study investigates the immortality of Shakespeare in twenty-first-century. William Shakespeare, as known to the entire universe has left a great impact upon most of the people in the world. His masterpieces are ubiquitous and individuals from every part of the world are reading and renewing them. However, when it comes to schools and their syllabus, each country has their own methods and opinions whether or not to teach Shakespeare in their schools. Therefore, the aim of this study is to figure out people’s views and perceptions towards this topic. The study is carried out amongst individuals from as diverse backgrounds as possible and the questions encompassed all the aspects of Shakespeare’s works. To what extend do the interviewees agree that Shakespeare is still relevant and his works have to be taught in every part of this universe.

**Key words:** Shakespeare, ubiquitous, immortality, schools, methods, cultures

## کورتەی بابەت:

پروفسور بروس سەتمام مۆستای بەشی ئەدەب لە زانکۆ باشوري کاليفورنيادەلى: ويلیام شکسپیر رۆخسارو وىنایەکى جىاواز دەبەخشىت بە كەلتورو مەرۆقەكانى دى لە كاتە جىاوازەكاندا و دوبارە دروستىيان دەكتاتەوە. ئامانج لە نوسىنى ئەم توپىزىنەوە بىرىتىيە لە لىكۈلىنەوە و خويندنى شکسپير وەك نوسەرىيکى نەمرو و زىندووى سەدە بىست و يەك. شکسپير، ھەروەك ناسراوە بۇ ھەموو جىهان كارىگەرىيەكى زۆرمەزنى دروستىردوھە لە سەر ئىيانى زوربەي مەرۆقەكانى جىهان. شاكارەكانى ويلیام شکسپير زۆر بىلاوو باون لە جىهاندا و مەرۆقەكان لە تىكراي شارو ولاتانى جىهاندا بەبەر دەھوامى دەيىخ خويندنەوە و دەيائىزىنەوە. بەلام كاتىك بابەتكە پەيەوست دەبىت بە قوتا بخانە و خويندىڭاكانەوە، ھەر وولاتمۇ بىرۇپۇچۇنىيەكى ھەمە ئايى كە شکسپير لە خويندىڭاكاندا بۇوەتىيەوە وەك بابەتكىيى بىنچىنەيى يىاخود نا. بۇيە مەبەست لە ئەنجامدانى ئەم توپىزىنەوە ئەوهەيە كە بىرۇپۇچۇنى زوربەي مەرۆقەكان بىزانىن لە وولاتە جىاوازەكان دەربارە ئەم بابەتە. و بۇ گەشتن بەم مەبەستەش كۆمەلە پرسىيارىيەكى پەيەوست بەو بابەتكە و ئامادەكراون و لە چەندىن كەس كراون بۇ ئەمە دەرمان بۇچۇنى زورىنە بىزانىن دەربارە شکسپير. ئايى ئەم خەتكە پىيىان وايى كە شکسپير ھىشتا زىندووە و پىوپۇستە بۇوەتىيەوە لە خويندىڭاكاندا، پرسىيارەكان كۆكراونەتەوە و شىكراونەتەوە و لە كۆتايدا ئەنجامەكان پىشىكەش كراون.

## الملخص:

يقول بروس سميث، أستاذ عميد اللغة الإنجليزية وأستاذ المسرح في جامعة جنوب كاليفورنيا: "شكسبير يكشف وجهاً مختلفاً للثقافات المختلفة والأشخاص المختلفين في أوقات مختلفة". وتحقق هذه الدراسة في خلود شكسبير في القرن الحادي والعشرين. وليام شكسبير، كما هو معروف للكون كله ترك تأثير كبير على معظم الناس في العالم. روائعه في كل مكان والأفراد من كل جزء من العالم يقرأون له. ومع ذلك، عندما يتعلق الأمر بالمدارس ومناهجها، فإن لكل بلد طرقه وآرائه الخاصة سواء كان يعلم شكسبير أم لا في مدارسها. لذلك، فإن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو معرفة آراء الناس وتصوراتهم تجاه هذا الموضوع. وقد أجريت الدراسة بين أفراد من خلفيات متنوعة قدر الإمكان، وشملت الأسئلة جميع جوانب أعمال شكسبير. إلى أي مدى اتفق الأشخاص الذين أجريت معهم المقابلات على أن شكسبير لا يزال ذات صلة، وأن أعماله يجب أن تدرس في كل جزء من هذا الكون.

## **1. Introduction**

William Shakespeare, the greatest English writer and the author of so many masterpieces in English Literature, is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language. Shakespeare's reputation as a dramatist and an actor is unique. He is considered by many to be the greatest playwright of all time. His remarkable writings make him world-famous. Shakespeare is everywhere in our culture. Not only in Britain, but also in most countries of the world, there are thousands of people who are eager to get more familiarized with this talented and amazing man (Bruster, 2003). The works of Shakespeare were not specified for a small group of people or a specific country. On the other hand, they were directed for all people from different levels and even different cultures. "Shakespeare did not flaunt his learning, but it was at the centre of his mind and nature so he could not avoid displaying it in his writing" (Michel, 1996). According to this quote, it is clear that Shakespeare exhibits greatness and talent in his writing because they are part of his personality. He, on the other hand, is not showing off. Greatness and genius are part of his nature. He was able to move and inspire so many people from different nations. He has an unwavering place in English Literature on one hand, and the history of humanity on the other (The Times, 2011).

This research project will discuss the ubiquitousness of Shakespeare and the impact he has had on people's lives. The research will, in particular, answer the question of whether or not Shakespeare's work should be taught in schools in all countries, not just Britain. To achieve these, the research is divided into some sections. Firstly, different opinions from different authors will be mentioned in the literature review. Secondly, the primary research will be conducted. Thirdly, the findings from the questionnaire will be examined. Then the opinions from the literature review and the findings from the primary research will be compared and contrasted in the discussion section. Eventually, conclusions about this research project will be drawn.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

William Shakespeare's works never grow old. There are several advantages of teaching Shakespeare. Yet some researchers and critics find it difficult for a modern reader to understand Shakespeare's works. To answer the main question of the research project, which is whether or not Shakespeare's work should be taught in schools in every country, not just Britain, the Literature review is divided into three sections; firstly, the arguments for teaching Shakespeare in schools in every country. Secondly, the arguments against teaching Shakespeare in schools in every country, and lastly there will be a summary. The research will, nevertheless discuss many points of view from various sources. The advantages and the disadvantages of teaching Shakespeare in schools will also be stated during the literature review. Eventually, the opinions will be evaluated in the final paragraphs of the Literature Review.

### **2.2 Arguments for teaching Shakespeare's work in schools in every country.**

Shakespeare is worth teaching in schools in every country, not just Britain because his work will enrich pupils' lives in many ways. For example, reading his plays, and poems, and experiencing the plays in performance, make people understand the world in a better way. Shakespeare's works make the readers more sensitive to language and therefore more

capable of expressing themselves and of responding to experience. They also enhance people's view of others and prevent them from making wrong judgements about other people (Wells and Orlin 2003). Reading Shakespeare's plays, allows pupils to enter different states of mind from their own and thus enlarges their imaginative experience. School pupils are at a very crucial stage of their lives and they need to be taught lessons about life and how to think.

Margreta and Wells (2001) make a significant point about Shakespeare when they say 'Shakespeare belongs to the world'. It further strengthens the idea that Shakespeare was a universal man. He wrote for all people without excluding any specific group of people. Shakespeare's work will open up pupils' minds and thoughts about the world. Shakespeare, moreover, never grows old. His works contain lessons about life and personal matters. Due to the fact that they are so precious and always remain alive, it is really essential to teach new generations and the school pupils Shakespeare's work.(Halliday, 1956, The Guardian,2011).

Currently, Shakespeare's works are being taught in schools in many countries. A new report by a local newspaper of Oman (Al Roya, 2011) demonstrates that Shakespeare is compulsory in Omani schools. There are now 1140 primary and secondary schools across Oman. Most of these schools teach William Shakespeare as part of their school syllabus. Furthermore, in the northern part of Iraq, Shakespeare is taught in some of the high schools in the theatre classes (New Sabah, 2001). In Italy, he is considered a genius and there are so many translations of all of his works, which are taught in some of their high schools but in the Italian language. Shakespeare is taught in Denmark too. Russian, Italian and German scholars claim that Shakespeare's language is superior once translated to any of the given languages. They strongly suggest that Shakespeare's work should be taught in the schools of their countries because they are very advantageous to the school pupils (BBC, 2010).

An additional reason, perhaps the most significant one, for studying Shakespeare is his pervasive influence on the English Language. The huge proportions of vocabulary and the grammatical structures are of great use for the readers globally. Pupils from different cultures who are eager to learn the English language and enrich their knowledge about English culture will find it really helpful to start with the work of William Shakespeare. He has used an enormous range of vocabulary in his writings, some of which might not have been existed before (Lund, 2005). Teaching Shakespeare in primary or high schools has lots of great advantages. For example, Shakespeare's works greatly help in improving students English Language and they can be used as dictionaries for the English language. Moreover, young pupils are very much in need of the lessons which are taught in Shakespeare's work because it lightens their paths in life.

### **2.3 Arguments against teaching Shakespeare in schools in every country**

In contrast to the advantages and benefits of Shakespeare's work, teaching Shakespeare's work in schools in every country brings some disadvantages. For example, Shakespeare generally wrote for theatres and the theatres of his time were obviously very different from the theatres now. A current school pupil will face difficulties in understanding terms such as, 'above' and 'aside' (Wells and Orlin 2003). The fact that he wrote largely in verse and used classical and biblical allusions brings difficulties for the modern reader. He often expresses intellectual thoughts and the

shifts of his wordplay are not easy for the people in general and young school pupils in particular.

Another significant point against teaching Shakespeare's work in schools everywhere is the fact that since Shakespeare's time the English language has changed. Some of the words that he uses have become very old-fashioned, others have shifted in meaning. That is why a current school pupil might find it very difficult to understand Shakespeare's work (Wells and Orlin 2003). The fact that his works were written about four centuries ago, means that it is not always easy to come to them without previous knowledge. People need to have a background of this time. They need to refer to the history of that time when Shakespeare's works were written for a complete understanding of his works.

#### **2.4. Summary**

Both the advantages and the disadvantages of teaching Shakespeare's work were explained in the above two sections. It is true that there might be some difficulties in understanding his works and some of Shakespeare's writings refer to a specific period of time, yet the advantages of teaching his work are greater. There are so many great lessons to learn in his plays. Shakespeare tackled every subject about life delicately and wittily, that is why teaching Shakespeare's work in schools in every country is really necessary. Now the research will continue to the primary research to present the current opinions of people about whether Shakespeare's work should be taught in schools in every country or not.

### **3. Primary Research**

#### **3.1 Aims**

The aim of this research project is to find answers to the main question of the research, which was about the universality of Shakespeare, and whether or not his work should be taught in schools all over the world, not just in Britain. Previously, various opinions and points were discussed in the literature review section. The perspectives, however, varied from one source to the other. Moreover, several advantages of teaching Shakespeare have been illustrated along with some difficulties and obstacles in understanding Shakespeare's work. Whereas, the previously mentioned opinions and views were almost all of the past years, the primary research, on the other hand, is being carried out to know present perspectives about this subject.

#### **3.2 Methods**

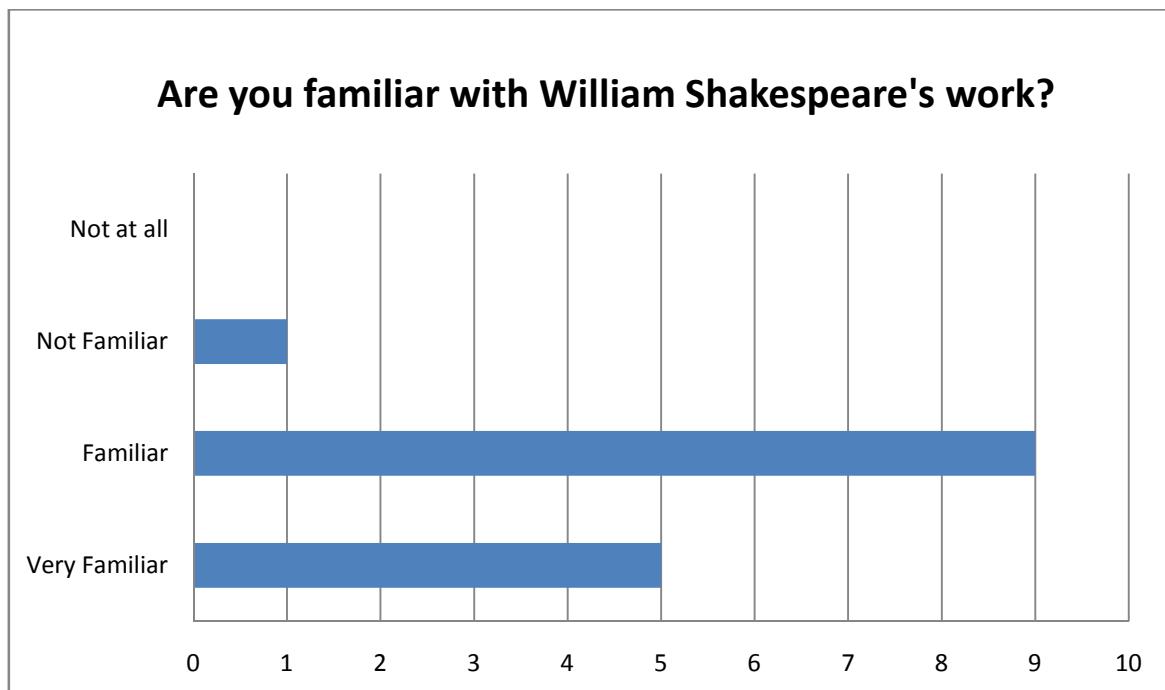
To achieve the ultimate goal of the research project, which was finding different points of view about Shakespeare's universality, a survey (see Appendices) was carried out at Cihan and Sulaimani universities on Wednesday, October 26, 2011. The questionnaire contained 12 questions, some of them concerned personal information and students' backgrounds. The other questions, however, involved general knowledge about the English language, in general, and William Shakespeare's work in particular.

### **3.3 Sample**

In the questionnaire 15 students, who are currently taking degrees at Brunel University, were interviewed. The students were selected at random. Nevertheless, there were twice as many male as female students in the questionnaire. The students were from different nationalities and cultures and their ages were between 15 and 30 years old.

### **3.4 Findings**

In the questionnaire, respondents were firstly questioned whether or not they were familiar with William Shakespeare's work. The following figure illustrates the interviewees' answers.



**Figure 1**

As is obvious from the above figure, a huge majority of the students who were interviewed were familiar with William Shakespeare's work. While the majority were very familiar, only a small minority were not familiar with Shakespeare's work.

Next, the respondents were questioned if they have read any of Shakespeare's work and the results were as follows:

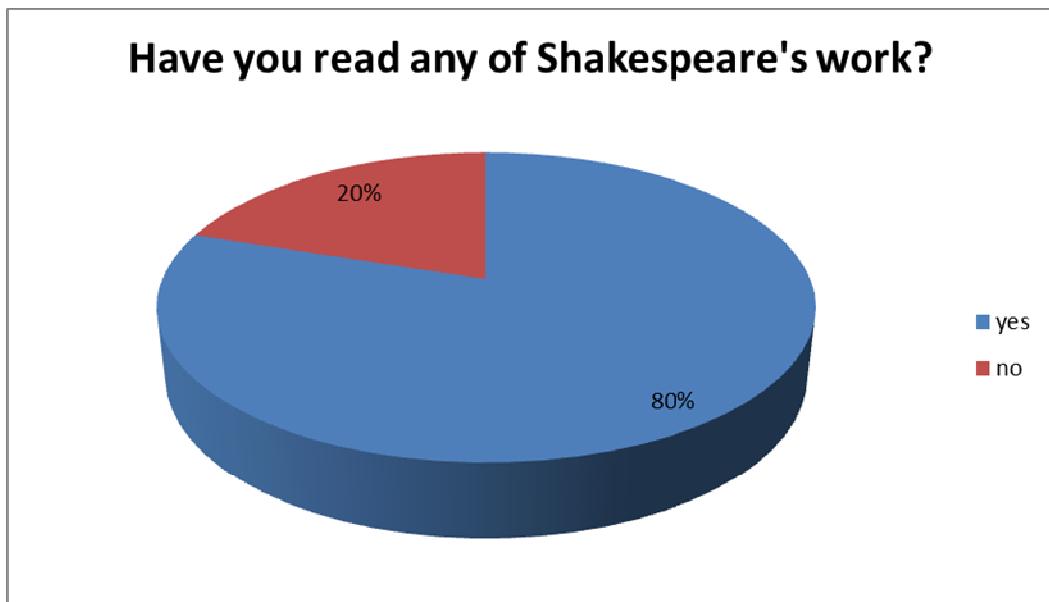


Figure 2

As is clear in the figure 2, a significant majority of the students have read Shakespeare's work. However, there were different opinions about how they find William Shakespeare's work. The following figure illustrates the students' opinions about Shakespeare's work.

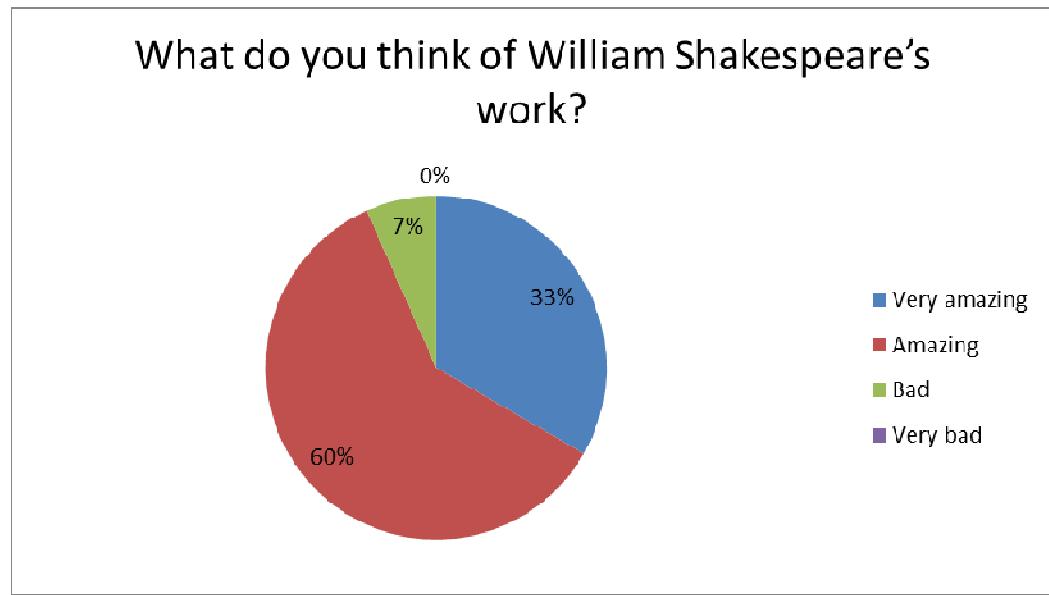


Figure 3

Of the respondents, overall a large majority found Shakespeare's work amazing. Only a small minority found Shakespeare's work bad. What is most significant is that the number of female students who found Shakespeare's work very amazing is only one fourth of the number of male students. However, One fourth of the female students believe Shakespeare's work is very amazing.

After that, the nine students who found Shakespeare's work amazing were next asked about the possibility of teaching Shakespeare's work everywhere, and whether or not they

agree that Shakespeare's work should be taught in schools in every country. The results were as follows (see table 1):

**Table 1 Do you agree that Shakespeare's work should be taught in every country, not just Britain?**

	Male	Female	Total	%
Strongly agree	2		2	22.2
agree	1	3	4	44.4
Neither agree nor disagree	2	1	3	33.3
disagree			0	0

The most essential point in the table is that a significant majority agrees that Shakespeare's work should be taught in schools in every country. Furthermore, it is clear that not even one student disagrees that Shakespeare's work should be taught in every country. It is also worth noting that a significant number of the sample (33.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Further questions examined the factors that make Shakespeare's work universal. (See table 2)

**Table 2 What factors make Shakespeare's work universal?**

	male	female	total	%
Vocabulary and structure	2		2	13.3
Subject matters and plots	2		2	13.3
both	6	5	11	73.3
Not universal at all			0	0

As it has shown in the table, a big majority believes that it is both the vocabulary and subject matters that make Shakespeare's work so world-famous. What is more significant in the table is that none of the respondents chose not universal at all, which suggests that all the students believe that Shakespeare is universal.

The final question invited students to write one advantage of teaching or studying Shakespeare's work in schools in every country, not just Britain. The large majority of the

students wrote that teaching Shakespeare's work will, probably, enrich pupils' general knowledge about this life because his writings contain so many precious lessons about the life. The small minority, on the other hand wrote teaching Shakespeare is a key point for learning the English Language. These were the main findings of the research which were obtained from the questionnaire. These findings are going to be compared and contrasted with the Literature review in the next section of the research, which is the Discussion section.

#### **4. Discussion**

There are four main findings from the survey. These findings must be mentioned and discussed in this section because they directly relate to the main question of the research project. First of all, it is very obvious from the findings that almost all of the students are familiar with Shakespeare's works and some of them are even very familiar (figure 1). This point is really significant because it strengthens the idea of Shakespeare's universality once again. It is, moreover, very consistent with an opinion of the Literature review which says Shakespeare is a universal man and he belongs to the world (Margreta and Wells, 2001). This finding suggests a possible answer to one part of the question, which was about Shakespeare's universality.

The second essential finding illustrates that a significant majority of the students have read Shakespeare's work. In spite of the fact that Shakespeare's works were written centuries ago, and most of the words that he used are no longer in use, new generations read his work. This finding is crucial because it provides evidence of Shakespeare's immortality. This opinion is similar to the one in the literature review, which says Shakespeare never grows old (Halliday, 1956). Both Halliday (1956) and the interviewees believe that Shakespeare's works apply to all people of any time. Based on Halliday's opinion (1956), and the results that were obtained in the survey, which says the large majority of the students have read Shakespeare's work (see figure 2) it can, possibly, be decided that Shakespeare is still relevant today. Hence, the next part of the main question, which is about Shakespeare's relevancy today, has also been answered.

The third and, perhaps the most substantial finding in the survey, is the question of Shakespeare's work, and whether or not his work should be taught in schools in every country, not just Britain. As it has been shown in table 1 of the survey, a large majority of the students agree that Shakespeare's work should be taught in schools in every country. This is, perhaps, due to the fact that there are so many precious lessons in Shakespeare's work, and everyone can benefit from them, especially the young pupils. Of the respondents, not even one single student totally disagrees. This is, likely, the most suitable answer for the last part of the question, which was about people's opinion about whether or not Shakespeare's work should be taught in schools in every country. This finding is, nevertheless, strongly consistent with one of the opinions in the literature review, which says there is nothing bad in teaching Shakespeare in the schools in all the countries of the world (Lund, 2005).

The fourth finding illustrates the student's opinions about a reason that they think has made Shakespeare's work universal. Most of the students picked both vocabulary and subject matter. The same point has been illustrated in the literature review, which says one of the reasons of teaching Shakespeare is to improve your English language and your vocabulary skills (Lund, 2005). The importance of subject matter has also been discussed in the literature review when (Wells and Orlin 2003, pp3) give examples of the actions

and the consequences of the characters, and how this will open readers' minds more. Consequently, teaching Shakespeare in the schools in every country is really essential and helpful to the young school pupils.

Of the above findings, it can be noticed that the most significant finding is the fourth finding. This finding gives a clear answer to the main question of the research project, which is whether or not Shakespeare's work should be taught in schools in every country. The majority of the students agree that his work should be taught in every country. This is perhaps because of the fact that Shakespeare's work deals with every subject in this life. The interviewees have gone through their early stages of life and they realize how essential it is to have someone to teach you those great lessons about life in the early stages of life. Other advantages of teaching Shakespeare might be learning the English Language and the enrichments of pupils' English vocabulary, which can be obtained from Shakespeare's writings. In brief, it is really useful to teach Shakespeare's work in the schools in every country. There are important and precious lessons in Shakespeare's work that cannot be bought by money or cannot be obtained except in Shakespeare's work.

## **5. Conclusion**

Recently, Shakespeare's works are being taught in schools in some countries such as Denmark, Oman and Iraq. If they were not beneficial, those countries were not teaching Shakespeare's work until the present time. The purpose of this research was to find out people's opinions about Shakespeare and whether or not Shakespeare's work should be taught in schools of every country, not just Britain. Based on the findings of the questionnaire and people's attitudes about Shakespeare along with the perspectives in the literature review, it can be said that Shakespeare is still relevant today and it is advisable to teach Shakespeare's work in the schools in every country, because they have many benefits for the students.

However, it should be noticed that the above data and information were obtained from a small group of people. There were unequal proportions of genders. As it is clear in the sample (see sample pp. 5) the number of male respondents was twice as many as females. The whole questionnaire, moreover, was carried out on the Brunel university campus, which can be counted as another restriction of the survey. In order to acquire more valuable evidence, it is advisable for the other researchers in the future to widen their scale of research.

In conclusion, it is strongly suggested that Shakespeare's works should be taught in schools in every country. The young and inexperienced pupils are, definitely, in need of some advice and lessons about life, all of which are achievable in William Shakespeare's works. Moreover, one of the best ways to learn the English language and to enrich pupils' vocabulary in English is through teaching Shakespeare's work in the schools. Shakespeare's works never die. They will always be there to serve the humanity. Whoever reads them, will appreciate them very much. Shakespeare is a golden bridge that links English to the world.

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## 7. Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Questionnaire

#### **William Shakespeare's Universality**

I am carrying out some research about the works of William Shakespeare. The purpose of this questionnaire is to figure out whether or not his work should be taught in the schools all over the world, not just in Britain.

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Please take 5 minutes to complete this questionnaire by putting a tick in **ONE BOX** for each question. Your participation in this survey is much appreciated and your responses will be strictly confidential and only be used in this research. Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions.

Q1. Gender       Male       Female

Q2. Age       Under 20       20-25       25-30       30-40

Q3. Nationality      (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q4. Education Level       High School       Under graduate       Postgraduate

Q5. How much do you know about William Shakespeare?

Very familiar       Familiar       Not very familiar       Not at all

Q6. Have you read any of his work?       Yes       No (if no, please jump to Q8)

Q7. What do you think of his work?

Very amazing       Amazing       Bad       very bad

Q8. Do you agree his work should be taught in every country, not just Britain?

Strongly agree       Agree       Neither agree nor disagree       Disagree

Strongly disagree

Q9. Is it easy to read and understand his writings?

Yes       No

Q10. What are the factors that make his work universal?

Vocabulary and structure  Subject matters and plots  Both  Not universal at all

Q11. Are there any advantages of teaching his work in every country?

Yes (if yes, please go to Q12)  No

Q12. Please write *One* advantage of teaching Shakespeare's work.

everywhere.\_\_\_\_\_

***“Thank you so much “***