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**Study of Pygmalion Effect with Reference of Characters in The
Play *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw**

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Abstract:

Today we refer to the concept, that a person will achieve or perform as he is expected to perform as "The Pygmalion Effect". The main idea concerning The Pygmalion Effect is that if you believe that someone is capable of achieving greatness then that person will indeed achieve greatness. In other words, believing in potential simply creates potential. "The Pygmalion Effect" may occur all around us-whether it be at work, at schools or even at home.

Key Words:

Pygmalion Effect, behaviour, personality, lifestyle, self-realization.

Introduction:

People's beliefs about us influence how we behave. This is known as the Pygmalion Effect, after George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1916). In it, Professor Higgins transforms a Cockney flower seller, Eliza Doolittle, into someone who passes for a duchess. As Shaw has Higgins express it, "The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another."

The truth is we are all Eliza. We behave according to how we are treated. How might we all behave as Professor Higgins suggested when we interact with one another? The most important question is whether our beliefs about others bring out the best in them. As Nobel Laureate Nelson Mandela said, "It never hurts to think too highly of a person; often they become ennobled and act better because of it."

Objectives:

- Define Pygmalion effect as psychological theory and its real-life application in education.
- Study of Pygmalion effects contact of character of the play *Pygmalion*.
- Analyse Pygmalion effect as main theme of the play *Pygmalion*.
- Examine behavioural patterns of characters in the play.
- Impact of behaviour and its outcomes instance of characters of the play.



Research Methodology:

The present study is research in life and is concerned basically with books, library and web references. Therefore, the research intends to follow Interpretive and analytical methods supported thinking and critical opinions of the critics.

Pygmalion effect as psychological theory and its real-life in education: In a classic study fourth grade teachers were told that certain students would “bloom” during the school year. Because the teachers were given what they perceived to be “credible” information, they had high expectations for those who were predicted to do well. What they didn’t know was that “bloomers” had been selected at random—that is, without regard to actual potential. The teachers’ positive expectations influenced them to behave differently toward bloomers than they behaved toward other students. Social psychologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson observed that teachers called on bloomers more often, gave them more time to respond, and provided them with more instructional feedback. Not surprisingly, bloomers demonstrated significant growth in academic achievement. The teachers’ beliefs and behaviours created a self-fulfilling prophecy. Multiple studies, even without the variable of an authority figure such as a teacher, have substantiated these findings.

The Pygmalion Effect works in two ways. We mirror people’s expectations of us, and they mirror ours of them. Despite perceiving reality as something outside and separate from us, we all live in and co-create a “participatory truth”—our assumptions and expectations create our experience of one another. We live in a network of mutual influence. What we believe to be true helps to create what is true. In meetings, many of us underestimate the impact of our beliefs about or expectations of others. Perhaps more importantly, the Pygmalion Effect also operates when we don’t have positive expectations of others. For example, suppose I’m in a department meeting at work, and I expect Michelle will not support my proposal. I believe Michelle isn’t supportive of anyone other than herself and the people in her unit. As I present my idea, I wait for her to interrupt and challenge my rationale for the project. Because of this, I don’t notice that she’s smiling, nodding her head, and maintaining eye contact. When she briefly looks down to look at the project proposal, I assume she’s no longer listening. In other words, I pick out “evidence” that confirms my preconceptions about her. Preconceptions blind us to what we don’t expect. We forfeit the chance to notice what is different in the moment. Annoyed by the story I’m running in my head about Michelle, I become defensive about the project. This frustrates Michelle and confuses my colleagues. Their enthusiasm for the project decreases.



What I don't realize is that there's an influential relationship among us: we are co-creating the interaction. My beliefs about Michelle altered my behaviour and began to alter hers and that of others. My defensiveness changed the dynamic of the group. What we believe about others influences our interactions for good or ill.

Pygmalion Effect context of the play *Pygmalion*:

George Bernard Shaw is a prolific writer in the west who wins the Nobel Prize in 1925. As an Irish outsider in English society initially, he fights his way into the literary centre in England. His work *Pygmalion* is, somehow, an indirect representation of his personal growth and reflects his understanding of his time, especially his concern for the reality of the lower class. *Pygmalion* is about the transformation of a flower girl in the underclass. Higgins, a linguist, runs across Liza, a flower girl, and Pickering in the street. He boasts he can transform the "ragamuffin" of a flower girl into an exquisite duchess. The two men are later engaged in the bet that Higgins can live up to his brag. Higgins wins the wager, but not the respect of Liza. The New Liza, being independent of Higgins, declares that she will leave Higgins and maintain her present social status by teaching phonetics. Since its publication, *Pygmalion* has been adapted to the film

and the musical version. The two adapted versions boost the popularity of *Pygmalion*, but they disappoint Bernard Shaw, who thinks that both the film and the musical miss his realistic implication. Shaw's original play is more insightful than the film and the musical and conveys far-reaching significance. Shaw is never a sentimental playwright. The play's attention in the myth *Pygmalion* shows the writer's strong desire for social reforms. That's why Shaw is a famous member of the English Fabian Society, which endeavours to carry forward social reform. With the realistic ending, Shaw does not intend *Pygmalion* to arouse the audience's strong emotion as much as to be didactic, to inspire the audience to meditate over the fact that the economy has the highest say in social life in this economic society. However, he does not

agree with the decay of morality. With this in his heart, Shaw, along with Ibsen, initiates a revolution in drama: they use drama to represent social reality, to broadcast their social ideas, and to inspire the audience to realise these ideas.

So, Eliza says to Pickering, "... it was from you that I learnt really nice manners; and that is what makes one a lady, isn't it? You see it was so very difficult for me with the example of Professor Higgins always before me. I was brought up to be just like him, unable to control myself, and using bad language on the slightest provocation. And I should never have known that ladies and gentlemen didn't behave like that if you hadn't



been there.”

The first lesson of this story, therefore, is that the professionalism of linguist Henry Higgins was not enough. Eliza could not become a lady simply by learning to speak refined English. She also had to learn, following Pickering's example, how to control her attitude towards other people. In today's dialect, we would say that Higgins taught Eliza "hard skills" and Pickering "soft skills"!

The original Pygmalion is a sculptor who creates a beautiful woman out of clay and is rewarded when she turns human. How does Henry Higgins Mold Eliza's character in much the same way? As Eliza's creator, does Higgins deserve a certain amount of control over her? Where does his creation end and Eliza's independence begin? What is the nature of the relationship between artists and their art? Discuss.

Throughout Pygmalion, Higgins gives Eliza many qualities and lessons that few others, if anybody, could give her. From a poor but independent flower girl who spoke very 'low-class' English, Higgins transformed Eliza into an ostensibly higher-class human being by changing only her mannerisms and way of speaking. Still, the change was only nominal, and though he gave her the tools to better her station in life, he didn't give her that station in life or even do what she actually asked of him. He taught her to speak like a queen, not like a lady in a flower shop.

As mentioned in the post above, Higgins deserves absolutely no control over Eliza. His 'creation' was the successful teaching of grammar, intonation, and mannerisms. He willingly gave all of these characteristics to a fully able and aware human being. And so, like a gift that has been given, he has no right to dictate the use of such a gift or decide the fate of its new owner. His creation ends in her successful implementation and retention of the lessons he taught, and do not go any further. Eliza's independence begins in how she uses those lessons and every single other action she chooses.

In this case, the artist and his art are similar to a teacher and his/her student. A teacher is no master, but a willing giver of knowledge and time. In response to the patience and selfless nature of the teacher's endeavours, the student gives the teacher his/her respect, admiration, and attention, but nothing more is necessary. The strength of the student-teacher relationship is dependent on both parties maintaining these characteristics. Thus, with Higgins and Eliza playing these roles, the strength of their relationship depends on the same things. However, once Eliza is done being the student and Higgins therefore is unable to play the teacher, these necessities to one another end. At that point, it is their choice to become friends or



nothing. Friends only owe each other what they agree on. Nothing more, nothing less.

The nature of the Higgins-Eliza relationship is still weird because of the lingering memories of their previous roles. This explains Higgins's missteps and assumptions, and additionally explains Eliza's reaction to those missteps and assumptions. Ultimately, once the art is created, the bond between artwork and artist ends, and the artwork is free to do as it pleases, provided it is able to do so.

Colonel Pickering, the author of Spoken Sanskrit, is a match for Higgins (although somewhat less obsessive) in his passion for phonetics. But where Higgins is a boorish, careless bully, Pickering is always considerate and a genuinely gentleman. He says little of note in the play, and appears most of all to be a civilized foil to Higgins' barefoot, absentminded crazy professor. He helps in the Eliza Doolittle experiment by making a wager of it, saying he will cover the costs of the experiment if Higgins does indeed make a convincing duchess of her. However, while Higgins only manages to teach Eliza pronunciations, it is Pickering's thoughtful treatment toward Eliza that teaches her to respect herself.

Literature Review:

Dr. Saman Hashempour: George Bernard Shaw Interprets an Ovidian Tale about Transforming

The primary purpose of this paper is to analyse the theme of transformation in the play by focusing on identity and self-identity, the importance of appearance, language and communication issues. The story has a mythological background and got known by Ovid's poem,

“Metamorphoses.” The mythological story is reflected in many poems, drama plays and short stories written by authors globally.

Jun Cai (Shangluo University Shangluo, China) Application of Pygmalion Effect in Classroom Education

The Pygmalion effect is the phenomenon whereby higher expectations lead to an increase in performance. The expectations of teachers showed a very powerful predictive relationship with student behaviour. High expectations of teachers create a better atmosphere for student learning. The Pygmalion effect can influence student achievement and offer the support to help students achieve their goals. The Pygmalion effect refers to the phenomenon in which the greater the expectation placed upon students the better they perform. The



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Pygmalion effect is a type of self-fulfilling prophecy where if you think something will happen, you may unconsciously make it happen through your actions or inaction. Psychological research on Pygmalion effect began with Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson. In the classic study "Pygmalion in the Classroom", psychologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson describe an experiment in which certain teachers had been informed that they had exceptionally intelligent students. Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson conducted an research in which teachers at an elementary school were informed that twenty percent of the students in the school who were showings unusual potential for intellectual growth and they would bloom academically within the year.

Conclusion:

The similarities between Pygmalion the sculptor and Higgins the teacher reach beyond the way they transformed their subjects. In both cases, they reap the rewards of their creation, though to different extents. Pygmalion receives a love that he adores and that adores him. Higgins, on the other hand, created an equal that respects him and that he respects. Pickering's astonishment, she added: "You see (...) the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins because he always treats me as a flower girl and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me like a lady, and always will. And this is the famous "Pygmalion effect": believing in a person's ability to succeed in what they have undertaken increases their probability of success!



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