

ENHANCING CHINESE CULTURAL LEARNING THROUGH FILM-BASED MICRO LESSONS IN ONLINE CLASSROOMS FOR BACHELOR'S DEGREE STUDENTS

Yu LIU¹ and Piyanan Pannim VIPAHASNA¹

¹ Faculty of Technical Education, Rajamangala University of Technology
Thanyaburi, Thailand; yu_li@rmutt.ac.th (Y. L.); piyanan_p@rmutt.ac.th (P. V.)

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to 1) design and implement Chinese cultural film-based micro lessons for undergraduate students in online classrooms in order to provide structured exposure to Chinese cultural knowledge, 2) evaluate the learning achievements of these film-based micro lessons by comparing students' pre-test and post-test performance on cultural learning achievement, and 3) investigate students' satisfaction with learning through film-based micro lessons in the online classroom environment as an indicator of the practicality and acceptance of this instructional approach. The research employs a quasi-experimental design with 35 undergraduate students from Yinchuan University of Science and Technology in China. The FILM-CULTURE matrix, an instructional framework combining cultural symbol extraction with online scaffolding strategies, was applied through micro lessons. Data were collected using pre-tests, post-tests, and a satisfaction survey, and were analyzed with SPSS through paired-sample t-tests. The results show that students' post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores; and students reported being very satisfied with the lessons. These findings suggest that film-based micro lessons can enhance cultural cognition, improve student engagement, and foster positive learning experiences. The study contributes conceptually by integrating Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Cultural Intelligence (CQ) into film-based pedagogy and practically by offering a replicable framework for culturally sensitive, technology-supported higher education.

Keywords: Film-based Learning; Micro Lessons; Online Classroom; Cultural Intelligence

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has transformed higher education by increasing the demand for intercultural competence among undergraduate students, particularly as they engage in academic exchanges and international collaboration. However, one of the persistent challenges in cultural education is the learning of Chinese culture, which involves complex symbolic systems, layered metaphorical meanings, and contextual nuances that are difficult to convey in traditional classroom settings (Kramsch, 1993; Wang & Chen, 2022). As a result, students often develop fragmented understandings and limited motivation, leading to misinterpretations in cross-cultural contexts.

Film has long been regarded as a powerful educational medium that provides authentic cultural resources, including symbols, narratives, and practices. Films enable learners to move beyond textbook-based instruction and immerse themselves in cultural experiences that reflect social norms and value orientations (Mayer, 2005; Luo, 2024). Recent studies confirm that film-based learning can promote intercultural awareness and enhance learner engagement. At the same time, the rise of online education has introduced micro lessons—short and focused instructional units—as an effective tool to sustain attention, reduce cognitive load, and provide flexible learning pathways (Sun & Gao, 2021; Balasundaram et al., 2024). Together, films and micro lessons offer promising potential for improving cultural learning in digital environments.

Nevertheless, important gaps remain. The use of films in many classrooms often follows a “play-and-discuss” model without systematic alignment to learning objectives. Similarly, while micro lessons have been applied in language and technical training, their integration with film resources for cultural learning remains limited. Few studies have addressed how structured instructional frameworks can combine cultural symbol extraction, scaffolding strategies, and modularized micro lessons to achieve measurable learning outcomes (Zhao & Xu, 2023).

In line with these gaps, the present study introduces the FILM-CULTURE matrix, a structured instructional framework designed to integrate three key dimensions: 1) extraction of cultural symbols from films, 2) design of online scaffolding strategies to support interpretation and reflection, and 3) modularization of content into micro lessons for online classrooms. By aligning symbolic analysis with intercultural learning theory, this framework aims to strengthen cultural learning achievement and learner satisfaction.

In addition to addressing these gaps, the study contributes to both theoretical and practical dimensions of cultural education. Theoretically, it extends the application of intercultural learning frameworks by operationalizing the FILM-CULTURE matrix in an online classroom setting. This integration demonstrates how cultural symbol extraction, scaffolding strategies, and micro lesson modularization can be systematically combined to generate measurable learning achievement. Practically, the study offers insights for educators seeking innovative methods to design culturally rich online courses. By illustrating how films can be transformed into structured micro lessons, the findings are expected to inform curriculum development and provide guidance for enhancing students’ intercultural competence in higher education.

The present study therefore investigates the learning achievement of Chinese cultural film-based micro lessons in the online classroom. Specifically, it seeks to: 1) design and implement Chinese cultural film-based micro lessons for undergraduate students; 2) evaluate students’ cultural learning achievement through pre- and post-test comparisons; and 3) examine students’ satisfaction as an indicator of the practicality and acceptance of this instructional approach.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Film-Based Learning and Cultural Instruction

Films have long been treated as rich cultural artifacts that embed symbols, narratives, and practices reflective of a society’s values. Kramsch (1993) emphasized that language education is inseparable from culture, and that learners must encounter culture in context to develop

genuine understanding. In film, cultural meanings are vividly staged through visual and auditory channels—costume, gesture, architecture, dialects, musical motifs, and pragmatic routines—thereby making tacit norms observable. Building on multimedia learning theory, Mayer (2005) argues that learning improves when words and pictures are integrated coherently; film offers precisely such integration, presenting culture as lived experience rather than abstract description. Recent work (e.g., Luo, 2024) shows that cross-cultural films can cultivate sensitivity to nuance by prompting viewers to interpret symbolic cues and compare perspectives.

Despite these advantages, much of the film-in-education literature foregrounds language acquisition or motivation, with fewer studies detailing how films can systematically enhance recognition of cultural symbols per se. Without explicit attention to symbol extraction, learners may watch attentively yet retain only storyline or emotions. In higher education settings, where instructional time is limited, a structured approach is needed to help students notice, name, and interpret the cultural cues embedded in cinematic form. Accordingly, the following three hypotheses derived for this study: Hypothesis 1 (H1);

H1. Film-based micro lessons that incorporate systematic cultural symbol extraction will significantly improve students' cultural learning achievement, as reflected in their ability to recognize and interpret cultural symbols.

Micro Lessons as an Educational Innovation

Micro lessons—short, focused instructional units typically lasting 5-10 minutes—have emerged as a response to the demands of digital learning. They target a single concept or skill, reduce cognitive load, and accommodate fragmented study schedules common in online environments (Sun & Gao, 2021). By modularizing content, instructors can build sequenced pathways, allowing students to progress at an individualized pace while revisiting challenging segments. Empirical evidence suggests that microlearning enhances engagement and retention across domains (Balasundaram et al., 2024). However, the micro-lesson literature has largely concentrated on technical training and language drills, where learning objectives are narrowly skill-based. Cultural learning presents different challenges: it requires interpretation of symbols, contextualization of practices, and reflection on values. If micro lessons are deployed as isolated fragments, they may inadvertently atomize culture, leaving learners with disconnected facts rather than integrated understanding. The key, therefore, is modularization with coherence—designing micro lessons that build cumulatively toward cultural themes and that connect cinematic evidence to conceptual vocabulary (e.g., tradition/modernity, collectivism/individualism). When such coherence is achieved, micro lessons can transform films into structured learning experiences rather than one-off screenings. Accordingly, this study proposes Hypothesis 2 (H2):

H2. The modularization of film-based content into micro lessons will be positively associated with students' cultural learning achievement, supporting the practicality and acceptance of this instructional approach.

Cultural Intelligence and Online Scaffolding

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings and is commonly described through cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions (Earley & Ang, 2003). In online classrooms, CQ can be cultivated when instruction deliberately prompts learners to analyze cultural cues, compare perspectives, and translate insight into communicative behavior. Scaffolding strategies—guided questions, discussion prompts, reflective journals, peer feedback, and formative quizzes—mediate this process by focusing attention, preventing misinterpretation, and encouraging deeper reasoning. Consistent with multimedia learning principles, scaffolding helps learners connect what they see and hear in films with what they know and value, thereby consolidating meaning (Mayer, 2005). Recent studies in digital intercultural pedagogy (Zhao & Xu, 2023) show that scaffolded

tasks improve participation and reflective depth; yet evidence on measurable cultural learning achievement and learner satisfaction in university-level online courses remains limited.

For film-based cultural instruction, scaffolding performs three pedagogical roles. First, it orients perception by specifying what to notice (e.g., “Which symbols signal filial piety in this scene?”). Second, it supports interpretation through prompts that link cinematic detail to cultural constructs (e.g., collectivism, ritual, face). Third, it consolidates learning via brief reflective writing, polls, or peer discussion that externalize reasoning. Well-designed scaffolding thereby converts passive viewing into active inquiry and positions learners to articulate evidence-based interpretations—outcomes that can be captured through achievement tests and satisfaction surveys. Accordingly, this study proposes Hypothesis 3 (H3):

H3. The integration of film-based teaching with online scaffolding strategies will positively influence students’ cultural learning achievement and enhance their satisfaction with online cultural learning.

The FILM-CULTURE Matrix and Conceptual Framework

Synthesizing the foregoing literature, the present study adopts the FILM-CULTURE matrix as a structured framework that operationalizes film-based cultural instruction in online classrooms. The matrix integrates three interrelated dimensions: 1) Cultural Symbol Extraction (Cognitive). Drawing on semiotic analysis and intercultural learning theory, this dimension requires instructors to curate clips and explicitly guide learners to identify visual and auditory symbols (e.g., costumes, rituals, dialects, music), label them with disciplinary vocabulary, and connect them to broader cultural values and historical trajectories. This process turns films into analyzable data rather than mere narratives. 2) Micro-Lesson Modularization (Design). Film content is segmented into short, goal-aligned units (8-10 minutes), each centered on a micro-objective (e.g., recognizing a symbol set; interpreting a value conflict). 3) Online Scaffolding Strategies (Pedagogy). Each micro lesson embeds support mechanisms—guiding questions, short reflections, polls, and peer prompts—aligned with the targeted micro-objective. Scaffolding is calibrated to minimize cognitive overload (concise prompts, limited choices) while maximizing critical reflection (why-questions, compare-contrast tasks). The online platform affords quick feedback and visibility of peer reasoning, both of which are associated with motivation and satisfaction.

The three dimensions function jointly. Cultural symbol extraction supplies the content focus; micro-lesson modularization structures delivery; and scaffolding regulates processing. Together they aim to produce measurable gains in cultural learning achievement and to improve learner satisfaction by making expectations clear, tasks manageable, and progress visible.

From the literature review, the conceptual framework can be drawn as shown in Figure 1.

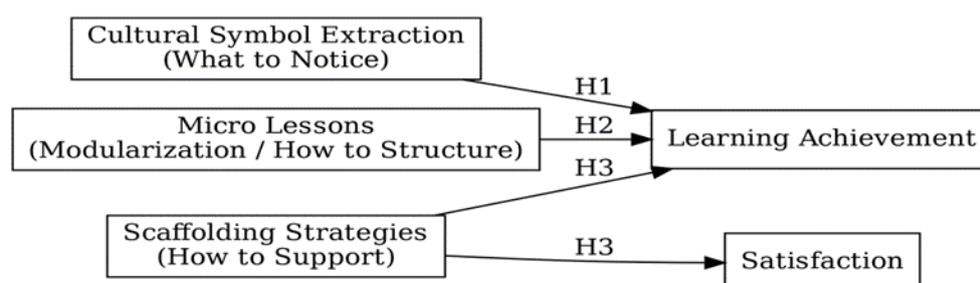


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In response to examining the learning achievement and satisfaction of undergraduate students through Chinese cultural film-based micro lessons in the online classroom, this study was designed to adopt a quantitative research approach. The population in this study consisted of undergraduate students enrolled at Yinchuan University of Science and Technology. The studied sample was determined purposively to include 35 undergraduate students who had not previously taken a specialized course in Chinese culture during the spring semester of 2025. All participants voluntarily joined the study and gave informed consent prior to data collection. The intervention was designed according to the FILM-CULTURE Matrix, which integrates three major dimensions: 1) Cultural Symbol Extraction, identifying and analyzing cultural elements embedded in films, such as clothing, rituals, dialects, music, and symbolic metaphors; 2) Online Scaffolding Strategies, providing guiding questions, discussion prompts, and reflection tasks to support comprehension and critical cultural reflection; 3) Micro-Lesson Modularization, dividing film clips into 5-8 minute instructional units to be flexibly embedded into the online classroom, enabling personalized and structured learning paths.

To demonstrate the application of the FILM-CULTURE Matrix, several micro lessons were developed. For instance, *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) was used to highlight issues of cultural identity and tradition versus modernization; *The Road Home* (1999) was chosen to illustrate filial piety and rural tradition. Each micro lesson consisted of a short film clip (3-5 minutes) followed by structured guiding questions and reflection tasks delivered through the online learning platform.

The research instrument included four parts. The first part consisted of demographic questions, covering variables such as gender and age. The second to the fourth parts adopted a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree," to measure: Cultural Learning Achievement Test (Pre-Post) (20 items, multiple-choice), Student Satisfaction Questionnaire (covering content, engagement, instructional design, film-based teaching, and overall evaluation), Cultural Symbol Recognition Test (CSR), and Cultural Sensitivity Scale (CSS, 12 items) as well as Learning Engagement Scale (IES, 3 subscales: behavioral, emotional, cognitive).

For data collection, both the pre-test and post-test were conducted in the online classroom. The pre-test was administered before the intervention, while the post-test and satisfaction questionnaire were administered after six weeks of film-based micro lesson instruction.

Regarding data analysis, descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, and frequency were employed. Furthermore, paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare pre-test and post-test scores. The effect size was reported using Cohen's *d* to determine the magnitude of learning achievement. The internal consistency of the instruments was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha reliability testing. To address the achievement of the focused objectives, the results are reported in a descriptive. All the details are portrayed in the following section.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Comparison of average scores of cultural pre- and post-class academic tests using film-based micro lessons

Table 1 shows the learning achievements of students learning with Chinese cultural film-based micro lessons. The mean score on the pre-test was 73.20, with a standard deviation of 10.20. After the six-week intervention, students' cultural learning performance improved significantly, reaching a mean score of 82.60 with a standard deviation of 8.90. Comparing the pre- and post-test scores, a paired-sample t-test yielded a value of 4.10, indicating a significant difference between pre- and post-test scores ($p < 0.05$). Overall, post-test scores were significantly higher than pre-test scores, demonstrating the learning achievements of film-based micro lessons in promoting cultural cognition.

Table 1 Comparison of average scores before and after Micro-lessons study

| Items | n | \bar{X} | S.D. | t-test | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-----------|----|-----------|-------|--------|-----------------|
| Pre-test | 35 | 73.20 | 10.20 | 4.1 | < 0.05 |
| Post-test | 35 | 82.60 | 8.90 | | |

Student satisfaction evaluation results

Based on Table 2, the sample group that responded to the satisfaction questionnaire consisted of 35 undergraduate students from Yinchuan University of Science and Technology. Among them, 25 were male (71.4%) and 10 were female (28.6%). This distribution demonstrates that male students accounted for the majority of the participants, while female students formed a smaller but still notable proportion of the group. Although the gender ratio is uneven, the overall sample size of 35 provides a reasonable basis for evaluating students' satisfaction with film-based micro lessons. The representation of both genders also allows the analysis to reflect perspectives across different student groups, ensuring that the results are not confined to a single demographic profile.

Table 2 The number and percentage of the sample groups who answered the questionnaire

| Sex | Number | Percentage |
|--------|--------|------------|
| Male | 25 | 71.4 |
| Female | 10 | 28.6 |
| Total | 35 | 100 |

Table 3 presents a detailed evaluation of students' satisfaction with film-based micro lessons across five dimensions: Content, Interest and Engagement, Instructional Design, Film-based Teaching, and Overall Evaluation. The results indicate consistently high levels of satisfaction, with average scores ranging from 4.23 to 4.74 (on a 5-point Likert scale).

Table 3 Evaluation results of students' satisfaction with film-based micro lessons

| Evaluation Items | \bar{X} | S.D. | Result |
|--|-----------|------|----------------|
| 1) Content | | | |
| 1.1 The learning content is well-structured and logically organized. | 4.34 | 0.48 | Satisfied |
| 1.2 The cultural topics presented are interesting and engaging. | 4.63 | 0.49 | Very Satisfied |
| 1.3 The lessons cover the main cultural learning objectives. | 4.43 | 0.56 | Satisfied |
| 1.4 The cultural content is appropriate for undergraduate students. | 4.63 | 0.49 | Very Satisfied |
| 1.5 The film clips help students better understand Chinese cultural symbols. | 4.66 | 0.48 | Very Satisfied |
| 1.6 The cultural exercises are closely related to the film-based content. | 4.60 | 0.50 | Very Satisfied |
| 1.7 Regional culture (e.g., dialects, customs) is clearly demonstrated. | 4.40 | 0.50 | Satisfied |
| 1.8 The lessons make cultural concepts easier to grasp compared to traditional teaching. | 4.46 | 0.56 | Satisfied |
| 2) Interest and Engagement | | | |
| 2.1 The film-based lessons are more interesting than traditional classroom learning. | 4.74 | 0.44 | Very Satisfied |
| 2.2 The lessons increased students' willingness to participate in class activities. | 4.46 | 0.51 | Satisfied |

| Evaluation Items | \bar{X} | S.D. | Result |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 2.3 The lessons increased students' interest in Chinese culture. | 4.58 | 0.47 | Very Satisfied |
| 2.4 Students are motivated to explore Chinese culture beyond the classroom. | 4.23 | 0.49 | Satisfied |
| 3) Instructional Design | | | |
| 3.1 Learning tasks are reasonably designed, helping students recognize and understand Chinese cultural symbols. | 4.71 | 0.46 | Very Satisfied |
| 3.2 The audio and subtitles are clear and accurate. | 4.57 | 0.50 | Very Satisfied |
| 3.3 Interactive elements (discussion, reflection tasks) are sufficient. | 4.34 | 0.48 | Satisfied |
| 3.4 The color and layout design are consistent and attractive. | 4.54 | 0.51 | Very Satisfied |
| 3.5 The instructional design supports independent learning. | 4.60 | 0.50 | Very Satisfied |
| 4) Film—based micro lessons teaching | | | |
| 4.1 The film-based cultural content is easy to understand. | 4.65 | 0.57 | Very Satisfied |
| 4.2 The films used are interesting and culturally rich. | 4.60 | 0.50 | Very Satisfied |
| 4.3 The film-based lessons encourage critical cultural reflection. | 4.43 | 0.56 | Satisfied |
| 4.4 The length of each micro lesson is appropriate. | 4.60 | 0.50 | Very Satisfied |
| 4.5 Students are willing to learn other subjects through film-based micro lessons. | 4.46 | 0.51 | Satisfied |
| 5) Overall evaluation | | | |
| 5.1 The micro lessons helped me better understand Chinese culture. | 4.69 | 0.47 | Very Satisfied |
| 5.2 The difficulty of the lessons is appropriate. | 4.60 | 0.50 | Very Satisfied |
| 5.3 The lessons improved my absorption of cultural knowledge. | 4.65 | 0.57 | Very Satisfied |
| Total | 4.54 | 0.50 | Very Satisfied |

Table 4 shows the pre-test and post-test comparison of CSR scores. The post-test mean was significantly higher than the pre-test mean, indicating improvement after the intervention.

Table 4 CSR Test Pre-Post Comparison (N = 35)

| Measure | Pre-Test M (SD) | Post-Test M (SD) | t | p | Cohen's d |
|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------|------------------|
| CSR Score (0-100) | 66.6 (10.5) | 79.4 (9.4) | 6.12 | < 0.05 | 0.72 |

Table 5 Analyses include overall CSS improvement, subscale comparisons (Awareness, Openness, Empathy, Adaptability), and internal consistency.

Table 5 Overall CSS Pre-Post Comparison (N = 35)

| Measure | Pre-Test M (SD) | Post-Test M (SD) | t | p | Cohen's d |
|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------|------------------|
| CSS Total (1-5) | 3.00 (0.48) | 3.40 (0.45) | 10.57 | < 0.05 | 1.79 |

Table 5 summarizes the pre-post comparison of overall cultural sensitivity. Post-test scores were significantly higher than pre-test scores (paired t-test, $p < 0.05$). The effect size indicates a meaningful improvement attributable to the intervention.

Table 6 presents the results of the Learning Engagement Scale (IES). All three dimensions—Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive—showed significant improvement ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the intervention enhanced both active participation and reflective engagement.

Table 6 IES Subscale Scores (Pre-Post) (N=35)

| Subscale | Pre M (SD) | Post M (SD) | Gain | t | p | Cohen's d |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------|------|--------|-----------|
| Behavioral | 2.94 (0.29) | 3.53 (0.28) | +0.59 | 8.63 | < 0.05 | 1.46 |
| Emotional | 2.95 (0.24) | 3.44 (0.25) | +0.49 | 7.36 | < 0.05 | 1.24 |
| Cognitive | 2.95 (0.24) | 3.50 (0.28) | +0.55 | 9.82 | < 0.05 | 1.66 |

Taken together, the results from the four instruments—CSR, CSS, and IES—consistently demonstrate the learning achievements of the FILM-CULTURE micro lessons. Students significantly improved their recognition of cultural symbols (CSR), developed higher levels of cultural sensitivity across awareness, openness, empathy, and adaptability (CSS), and showed greater engagement in learning behaviors, emotions, and cognition (IES). These findings collectively suggest that embedding films into micro lessons with structured scaffolding provides both cognitive and affective benefits, offering a holistic and engaging approach to Chinese cultural education at the undergraduate level.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of film-based micro lessons on undergraduate students' cultural learning achievement and satisfaction, employing the FILM-CULTURE Matrix as the guiding framework. The matrix integrates three key dimensions: 1) cultural symbol extraction, involving systematic identification and analysis of symbolic elements embedded in films; 2) online scaffolding strategies, including guiding questions, discussion prompts, and reflective tasks to support interpretation and critical reflection; and 3) micro-lesson modularization, which structures film content into short, flexible units to sustain attention and personalize learning. The findings demonstrate that the synergy of these dimensions yields significant cognitive and affective gains in online cultural education.

The observed improvement in cultural symbol recognition (CSR) illustrates the central role of cultural symbol extraction. Students were able to decode visual and auditory elements as carriers of cultural meaning. For instance, a micro lesson built on *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) highlighted themes of cultural identity, tradition, and transformation in 20th-century China. Learners analyzed stage costumes, opera performance, and gestures as symbolic artifacts, guided by questions such as “What cultural symbols are depicted in this scene?” and “How do these symbols reflect traditional Chinese values?” Such tasks enabled learners to connect artistic representation with broader historical and cultural processes, demonstrating how symbolic analysis bridges representation and cultural understanding.

The gains across all dimensions of cultural sensitivity (CSS)—awareness, openness, empathy, and adaptability—underscore the importance of scaffolding strategies. In a micro lesson designed around *The Road Home* (1999), students examined village rituals and marriage customs. Reflective prompts such as “How do these traditions convey values of continuity and filial responsibility?” directed learners to recognize the cultural logic embedded in everyday practices. Through structured prompts and guided reflection, film viewing was transformed into a dialogic and interpretive process that fosters intercultural sensitivity, aligning with theoretical perspectives on cultural intelligence.

The significant increase in learning engagement (IES) further demonstrates the value of modularization. Dividing films into 5-8 minute units reduced cognitive load and sustained learner motivation.

This study confirms that Chinese cultural film-based micro lessons, when systematically designed through the FILM-CULTURE Matrix, can significantly enhance students' cultural learning achievement, sensitivity, and satisfaction in online higher education. By operationalizing cultural symbol extraction, scaffolding strategies, and modularized delivery,

the research advances theoretical understanding of intercultural pedagogy while offering practical strategies for digital learning environments.

Despite growing interest, prior studies have rarely addressed systematic integration of film-based learning and micro lessons for cultural achievement, and few have reported on the contextual limitations or detailed instructional design processes. The present study addresses these gaps through the FILM-CULTURE Matrix.

However, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample ($n = 35$) from a single institution, which constrains the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the exclusive focus on Chinese films may limit cross-cultural applicability. Future research should test this framework with larger and more diverse samples, incorporate films from different cultural contexts, and adopt longitudinal designs to examine sustained effects on intercultural competence and communication skills.

In summary, this study contributes empirical evidence and conceptual refinement to the growing field of intercultural education. Film-based micro lessons, when carefully structured through the FILM-CULTURE Matrix, offer a replicable and adaptable instructional model that effectively balances cultural authenticity with pedagogical rigor. This approach not only enriches students' immediate cultural learning achievement but also provides a foundation for cultivating long-term intercultural competence in increasingly globalized educational contexts.

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