

FEATURE FILM AS A MEDIA EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LESSONS

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Abstract

This paper discusses how feature films can be used as a media education technology in English language lessons, especially with learners at the middle and upper-secondary stage (approximately CEFR A2–B2). Films offer rich, multimodal input: learners do not rely only on words, but also on facial expressions, gestures, setting, and tone of voice. Because of this, films can support comprehension, motivation, and communicative practice. However, film-based lessons often fail when teachers either turn the classroom into a cinema or reduce the work to translation and vocabulary lists. To avoid these extremes, the paper proposes a practical classroom framework: selecting short scenes with clear communicative value, defining a specific speaking goal (e.g., requesting clarification, negotiating, persuading), using a staged task sequence (pre–while–post), and assessing performance with simple, transparent criteria. A sample lesson model is provided to demonstrate how film scenes can develop listening skills, pragmatic competence, fluency through chunks, and interactive speaking. The paper argues that films become most effective when they function not as entertainment, but as structured media texts that help learners interpret meaning and communicate it in realistic contexts.

Keywords: Feature film; media education; English language teaching; multimodal input; communicative approach; pragmatics; scaffolding.

Introduction

For many learners today, English is not something they meet first in a textbook. They meet it on screens—through films, series, video platforms, games, and social media. This is exactly why feature films can be powerful in the English classroom: they connect classroom learning with how English exists in real life.

At the same time, teachers know the danger: a “film lesson” can easily turn into passive watching, or into a long translation session that kills interest and leaves little space for communication. In other words, films are not automatically effective. They become effective only when they are used with clear pedagogical goals and strong lesson structure.

From a media education perspective, a film is not only “content,” but a **media text**. Meaning is created not only by words, but also by voice, silence, body language, camera focus, and cultural context. This is highly relevant for language learning, because real communication also depends on more than grammar.

Aim:

To describe effective classroom practices for using feature films as a media education technology in English language lessons.

Objectives:

1. to explain why films are useful as multimodal input in ELT;
2. to propose practical criteria for choosing film scenes and supporting learners;
3. to describe a task-based lesson framework (pre–while–post);
4. to present a sample lesson model and a simple assessment rubric.

2. Pedagogical Value of Feature Films in ELT

Feature films can support language learning in several important ways, especially when lessons are built around short, purposeful scenes.

2.1. Multimodal input makes comprehension easier

A film scene gives learners multiple “clues” at once—setting, action, facial expressions, and tone. Even if learners miss some words, they can still follow the situation. For A2–B1 students, this can reduce stress and make listening feel achievable.

2.2. Films show how people actually speak

Textbook dialogues are often clean and predictable. Real interaction is not. Film dialogue includes hesitation, interruptions, softening, implied meaning, and emotional tone. Learners can notice how requests become polite (or rude) depending on intonation and context. This helps develop **pragmatic competence**, which is essential for real communication.

2.3. Emotional engagement supports learning

Stories create attention. Characters create opinions. Conflict creates discussion. This emotional engagement is a real advantage, but only if it is channelled into communicative tasks. Otherwise, learners remember the plot—but not the language.

2.4. Films naturally support media literacy

Media education is not only about watching. It is about interpreting: recognising perspective, stereotypes, persuasion, and how meaning is constructed. Film-based tasks can develop these skills while still serving language goals (speaking, writing, arguing, evaluating).

3. Selecting Film Material and Supporting Learners

The main methodological rule is simple: **do not try to “teach a film.” Teach a scene.**

3.1. Criteria for selecting an effective scene

A good scene for classroom use is:

1. **short** (1–4 minutes is usually ideal);
2. **clear in action** (learners can infer meaning visually);
3. **age-appropriate and ethically safe**;



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4. **useful for a communicative goal** (negotiating, apologising, refusing, persuading, complaining, etc.);
 5. **language-accessible** (manageable speech rate and lexical density);
 6. **culturally explainable** (any cultural reference can be clarified quickly).

3.2. Scaffolding: keep the scene authentic, support the task

Teachers often “solve” difficulty by simplifying the text. With films, this is not realistic—and it also reduces the value of authenticity. A better approach is scaffolding:

- pre-teach only “must-have” vocabulary (about 6–10 items);
- provide sentence starters and functional phrases;
- set clear viewing purposes (gist first, details later);
- use subtitles strategically (e.g., first viewing without, second with English subtitles);
- reduce load with tables, checklists, or guiding questions.

A practical principle is: **don’t simplify the film; simplify the route to understanding.**

4. Lesson Design: The Pre–While–Post Sequence

A structured sequence keeps film lessons focused and productive.

4.1. Pre-viewing

Goal: build context, activate knowledge, prepare language.

Typical activities:

- prediction from a screenshot: “Who? Where? What is the problem?”
- quick discussion: “Have you ever experienced something similar?”
- key words + functional chunks for the upcoming speaking task.

4.2. While-viewing

Goal: understand meaning and notice useful language.

- Viewing 1: gist questions (What is happening? What does each person want?)
- Viewing 2: details (timeline, matching lines to speakers, true/false, short gap-fill)
- Noticing: underline polite markers, softenings, or useful chunks.

4.3. Post-viewing

Goal: move from understanding to communication.

Strong post-viewing tasks require an outcome:

- role-play (continue the scene; solve the conflict);
- group decision-making (choose the best solution and justify it);
- short writing (a message, review, or apology from a character);
- mini-debate (evaluate a character’s choice).

If the post-stage has no outcome, learners will talk less—or only retell the plot.



5. Sample Lesson Model

Level: A2–B1 (adaptable to B2)

Time: 45 minutes

Scene type: everyday conflict/decision (misunderstanding, complaint, negotiation, refusal)

5.1. Learning outcomes

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- understand the gist and key details of a short film scene;
- use functional phrases to clarify and disagree politely;
- participate in a role-play that ends with an agreement;
- explain and evaluate choices using reasons.

5.2. Procedure

Pre-viewing (7 minutes)

1. Prediction (2 min): show a screenshot; students answer three questions: Who? Where? What problem?
2. Key language (5 min): teach 8 key items + 3 functional chunks, for example:
 - vocabulary: appointment, mistake, refund, embarrassed, misunderstanding, calm down, manager, apologize
 - chunks: Could you explain...? / I'm afraid I can't... / What I mean is...

While-viewing (12 minutes)

- 3) Viewing 1 (gist): students choose the main problem from three options.
- 4) Viewing 2 (details): students fill a table:
 - What each person wants
 - What each person says
 - What causes the conflict
5. Noticing (2 min): students underline polite markers (e.g., I'm sorry, maybe, I think, could you...).

Post-viewing (22 minutes)

- 6) Role-play (10 min): pairs act out a similar situation and must:
 - request clarification at least once;
 - disagree politely at least once;
 - reach an agreement.
7. Group decision task (8 min): groups choose the best solution and defend it with two reasons.
8. Exit ticket (4 min): students write 3–4 sentences: "I agree/disagree with Character A because..."



5.3. Assessment rubric (0–8)

0–2 points each:

1. **Task achievement** (the outcome is reached)
2. **Interaction** (turn-taking, questions, responses)
3. **Clarity** (message understandable, basic cohesion)
4. **Language control** (functional phrases used; errors do not block meaning)

These rubric signals an important message to learners: communication matters. Perfect grammar is welcome—but not required for success.

6. Common Problems and Practical Solutions

1. **Passive watching** → keep scenes short; set a task before viewing; require a product after viewing.
 2. **Too much translation** → focus on communicative goals; translate only key phrases when necessary.
 3. **Vocabulary overload** → teach fewer items; focus on chunks; allow partial understanding.
 4. **Subtitles become a “crutch”** → use a planned strategy (no subtitles first, English subtitles second).
 5. **Cultural confusion** → give a short explanation and compare with learners’ own context.
- A film lesson should feel like a lesson with a film inside it—not a film with a bit of teaching around it.

Conclusion

Feature films can be a strong media education technology in English lessons because they provide multimodal input, show real interaction, and naturally motivate discussion. However, their value depends on how they are used. Films work best when teachers select short scenes, set clear communicative goals, scaffold comprehension, and design post-viewing tasks that require interaction and a concrete outcome. When film work is structured in this way, it supports communicative competence and media literacy at the same time, helping learners use English with more confidence in realistic contexts beyond the classroom.

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