



Research article

A Mixed-Method Study on the Impact of Movie-Based Learning on Chinese Undergraduates' Cultural Identity

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Abstract

In the context of higher education in China, this mixed-methods study with an intervention design explores the impact of Movie-Based Learning (MBL) on university students' cultural identity (CI) within a movie education course. Quantitative findings indicated that MBL significantly enhanced CI, particularly in cognitive and emotional dimensions, while behavioral identity did not exhibit improvement. Notably, the effect of MBL on CI surpassed that of regular instruction in the control group, which improved general CI but not cognitive, emotional, or behavioral identity. Qualitative findings illuminated learners' acceptance of MBL, revealing emotional resonance and connection with culturally rich and diverse movies. Despite positive perceptions, participants expressed uncertainty about translating cultural knowledge and awareness gained in the classroom to real-world actions and behavior. This research contributes to the understanding of the nuanced impact of MBL on CI development, which highlights the effectiveness of MBL but also underscores the need to address the transferability of cultural knowledge to behavioral actions. Implications include the importance of refining instructional strategies to bridge this gap and enhance the practical applicability of cultural learning beyond the classroom.

Keywords: movie-based learning, cultural identity, higher education, China, movie education



1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, the dynamic interplay between globalization and cultural identity has become a focal point of academic exploration. As societies traverse the boundaries of tradition and modernity, individuals grapple with the multifaceted challenge of shaping and maintaining their cultural identity (CI) (Tuncer, 2023). Among these individuals, Chinese undergraduates are standing at a critical juncture, navigating the complexities of a rapidly

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changing sociocultural landscape while pursuing higher education and encountering significant hurdles in cultivating and sustaining their CI (Lin et al., 2021). Specifically, the confluence of globalization and exposure to diverse perspectives can create tension between embracing a globalized identity and preserving cultural roots (Gao, 2023; Lu, 2020; Song & Bai, 2018). This tension is exacerbated by the transition from hometowns to increasingly internationalized university environments, where students confront a myriad of cultural influences that shape their worldview (Dai et al., 2023). Challenges emerge as students seek to reconcile their cultural heritage with the evolving global milieu, leading to potential identity conflicts, acculturation stress, and a sense of disconnection from their roots (Liang & Xie, 2021).

Acknowledging the urgent need to tackle these challenges, Chinese researchers and scholars have put forth various measures, primarily aimed at augmenting existing pedagogies, learning materials, and activities with a cultural dimension (Mu & Yu, 2021; Pan, 2021; Wang, 2023; Zhang & Zhou, 2023). However, in this era of technology, there appears to be an oversight regarding how technology can contribute to shaping one's cultural identity, particularly in the realm of higher education (Dai et al., 2023; Liu, 2023). Thus, in light of recent national educational reforms and policies advocating the integration of technology and media into higher education to foster students' cultural competencies (Y. Yu, 2022), this study focuses on the innovative approach of movie-based learning (MBL) as a potential catalyst for enhancing the CI of Chinese undergraduates.

Movies, as a powerful medium, can engage students emotionally and intellectually, offering a nuanced lens through which cultural narratives can be explored (ipek, 2022). Leveraging movies as an educational tool can present a unique opportunity to immerse students in diverse cultural contexts and foster a deeper understanding of their own identity about the broader global landscape, a benefit proved in academia (Cannon, 2018; DeHart, 2023; Supiarza et al., 2020). However, despite the potential of MBL in this context, a notable research gap exists in comprehensively understanding its impact on the CI in China, with existing studies often focusing on broader aspects of CI or employing limited methodologies (J. Yu, 2022).

Therefore, this research seeks to bridge this gap by employing a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative measures and qualitative insights to provide a holistic understanding of the dynamics involved. The primary purposes of this study are to explore the efficacy of MBL in shaping CI among Chinese undergraduates, identify the factors influencing its effectiveness, and elucidate the nuanced ways in which this pedagogical approach intersects with the multifaceted nature of cultural identity development. By delving into these dimensions, this research aspires to offer valuable insights that contribute to the refinement of educational practices and the cultivation of a resilient cultural identity among Chinese undergraduate students.

2. Literature Review

Cultural Identity

CI is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses an individual's sense of belonging, identification with a particular culture, and the dynamic interplay between personal and cultural dimensions (Edensor, 2020). At a general level, CI is often viewed as a composite of several

components (e.g., ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, and historical heritage), shapes individuals' perceptions of self and others, and influences their values, beliefs, and behaviors (Li, 2015). Previous research in the broader context has explored how CI contributes to psychological resilience, social cohesion, and the negotiation of diverse identities in multicultural societies (Rothe & Pumariega, 2020), and understanding CI in a globalized world has become increasingly significant, which could influence various aspects of human interaction, education, and psychological well-being.

Particularly, education is recognized as a powerful social institution that plays a crucial role in transmitting cultural values, norms, and heritage. In the context of CI, educational systems worldwide are influential in shaping students' perceptions of self and others (Gao, 2023). The process begins in early childhood, as students navigate educational environments that reflect and transmit cultural narratives, histories, and societal expectations (Tuncer, 2023). Curriculum design and content emerge as critical factors in shaping CI within educational settings. The inclusion or exclusion of diverse cultural perspectives, histories and contributions in the curriculum can impact students' perceptions of their own CI and foster a sense of inclusivity or marginalization (Shahriar & Syed, 2017). As such, previous research has emphasized the importance of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies that reflect the diversity of students' backgrounds (Altugan, 2015; Esteban-Guitart, 2016).

In the Chinese context, CI holds particular importance given the country's rich history, diverse ethnicities and rapid socio-economic changes. Traditional Chinese CI has been characterized by Confucian values, collectivism and a deep connection to history and heritage (Lin et al., 2021). However, contemporary China reflects a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, resulting in evolving CI (Liang & Xie, 2021). Also, the CI of Chinese individuals is intricately linked to notions of nationalism and patriotism. Research in China has explored how the Chinese government's emphasis on a unified national identity intersects with regional and ethnic diversities (R. Wu, 2020; Ye et al., 2019), and has also examined the impact of historical events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on shaping collective and individual cultural identities (Cai, 2020; Wang & Huang, 2021).

In recent years, the influence of globalization and technological advancements on Chinese CI has been a subject of investigation. Rapid urbanization, exposure to Western media and increased international interactions have contributed to a more cosmopolitan outlook among Chinese youth (Gao, 2023; Li, 2015; Lu, 2020). Research has explored how these external influences could interact with traditional cultural values and give rise to hybrid identities and diverse expressions of Chineseness (Lin & Dong, 2023; Zuo & Wen, 2017), with education being gradually recognized as another influential factor.

CI in China is closely tied to educational practices, and the emphasis on a standardized national curriculum shapes students' perceptions of their CI (Lin et al., 2021). Research has delved into the impact of educational policies on fostering a sense of national pride and cultural continuity. For example, studies have explored how curriculum content and pedagogical approaches contribute to shaping students' understanding of their CI, which suggest that the emphasis on historical narratives (Huang & Liu, 2018; Liu, 2023; Yang et al., 2021), language instruction (Song & Bai, 2018; J. Yu, 2022; Zhu et al., 2022), and cultural traditions (Cui, 2019; Lin

et al., 2021) within the curriculum plays a crucial role in influencing students' perceptions of their CI. However, despite government-led initiatives and curriculum design that contribute to the construction of a shared cultural identity that aligns with national goals and values (Lu, 2020), previous studies have suggested that students across different levels lack independence and critical thinking skills regarding their CI (Dai et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Pan, 2021; R. Wu, 2020). This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing CI formation among Chinese students.

Movie-based Learning

MBL is an innovative educational approach that leverages the power of films to enhance the learning experience. While definitions may vary, MBL generally involves incorporating movies into educational settings, utilizing them as pedagogical tools to achieve specific learning objectives (Muthmainnah et al., 2022; Sekhri, 2022). This approach has gained prominence due to its multifaceted benefits in education.

One primary advantage of MBL lies in its ability to engage learners actively. The audio-visual nature of movies captures students' attention, fostering a dynamic and immersive learning environment (Cannon, 2018). The visual stimuli, combined with auditory elements, cater to diverse learning styles, making complex concepts more accessible and understandable (ipek, 2022). Moreover, movies offer a window into different cultures, societies and perspectives, contributing significantly to the development of cultural competence among learners (Supiarza et al., 2020). Exposure to diverse narratives, languages and traditions through movies cultivates a broader worldview and a deeper understanding of cultural nuances (Muthmainnah et al., 2022), which is particularly valuable in an increasingly interconnected world where cross-cultural communication skills are essential.

The impact of MBL on learners' CI is noteworthy. As students explore different cultural settings through movies, they develop a more profound connection to their own CI while gaining an appreciation for the diversity represented on screen. This dual process encourages self-reflection and promotes a sense of belonging within a global context (J. Yu, 2022). Moreover, MBL provides students with a unique opportunity to engage with cultural content in an immersive and experiential manner. Through visual and narrative elements, students are exposed to various cultural perspectives, traditions and values portrayed in movies (Glotov, 2021). This exposure fosters a more comprehensive understanding of cultural diversity and challenges preconceived notions, contributing to a more nuanced and open-minded approach to CI.

Otherwise stated, the interactive nature of MBL allows students to actively participate in the learning process, providing agency in selecting and interpreting cultural content. This autonomy empowers learners to explore their own cultural heritage in parallel with exploring diverse global cultures, creating a dynamic interplay that enhances their cultural identity formation (ipek, 2022; Xu, 2023). The engagement with MBL extends beyond the classroom, as students can continue exploring cultural themes independently and reinforcing the integration of cultural elements into their daily lives (Yang et al., 2021).

However, despite the potential of MBL, it is still a novel pedagogical approach that needs to be explored in academia and education (Muthmainnah et al., 2022). In China's context, for instance, traditional teaching methods have long dominated the education landscape of various disciplines, emphasizing rote memorization and standardized assessments (Zhang, 2021). The integration of innovative approaches, such as MBL, faces challenges rooted in the existing educational culture and practices. For example, one significant challenge is the widespread perception of movies as entertainment rather than educational tools (Chen et al., 2022), and the traditional view may hinder the acceptance of MBL as a legitimate method for academic and cultural enrichment (Wang, 2020). Moreover, the availability and accessibility of suitable movie resources pose challenges. While the Chinese film industry is vibrant and diverse, integrating films that align with educational objectives and cultural sensitivity can be a meticulous process (Yao et al., 2019). As such, teachers may encounter difficulties in selecting films that cater to diverse needs and cultural backgrounds among students. This is associated with another consideration of the need for teacher training and professional development in implementing MBL effectively, given that teachers may lack experience in integrating multimedia resources into their curriculum and may require guidance on creating meaningful learning experiences through movie-based activities (Chen et al., 2022; Sang, 2020).

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of MBL, as mentioned above, in cultivating cultural understanding make it a promising avenue for educational reform in China. However, given the lack of empirical research on MBL (Chen et al., 2022), whether the anticipated benefits arising from theoretical exploration manifest in practice still needs thorough examination. Meanwhile, without empirical insights into the implementation of MBL in Chinese classrooms, it is challenging to ascertain its effectiveness, identify potential obstacles and provide evidence-based recommendations for its widespread adoption. This deficiency in evidence justifies the present study aiming to provide a preliminary understanding of the application of MBL in the researchers' context.

3. Methodology

Research Designs and Sampling

The study was conducted in a public film education course for undergraduates at the School of Media, at a comprehensive university in China. This course was selected because the viewing, appreciation, and analysis of films were integral components, aligning with teaching requirements from both the university and the government (Luo, 2021). The primary goal of film education, as stipulated by these requirements, was to furnish learners with a fundamental understanding of different cultures and foster their CI. This context facilitated the incorporation of MBL into the course. To address this, the following research questions (RQs) were formulated to explore the effects of MBL on CI and comprehend the implementation of MBL:

- Could MBL facilitate the development of CI in undergraduates?
- Did MBL surpass regular instruction in enhancing students' CI?
- What are students' perceptions of MBL in developing their CI?
- What factors in MBL could be considered influential in developing students' CI?

Consequently, the study employed an intervention design that combined both quantitative and qualitative research approaches, the strength of which was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effects of an intervention (Poth, 2018). In the quantitative phase, a quasi-experimental design featured an experiment group (EG) instructed by MBL and a control group (CG) receiving regular instruction. Two intact classes were conveniently sampled to ensure ecological validity (Hanif et al., 2018), and their demographic information is provided in Table 1. For the qualitative study, data were primarily collected from the EG during and after the study, with an endeavor to achieve qualitative trustworthiness by triangulation, member checking, and rich description (Poth, 2018). Seven students (refer to Table 2), recruited through voluntary sampling, participated in post-intervention interviews, the size of which was acceptable for qualitative saturation (Hennink & Kaise, 2022). This sampling method could help researchers recruit participants willing to provide enough data for analysis (Hanif et al., 2018). Informed consent was obtained from all participants and gatekeepers at the research site before the study commenced.

	EG	CG
Number of Students	52	52
Age	20-21	20-21
Year Level	Year 2	Year 2
Gender	Male: 51% Female: 49%	Male: 48% Female: 52%
Major	New Media: 34% Theatre Film and Television Directors: 14% Design: 22% Journalism: 14% Advertisement: 9% Communication Studies: 7%	New Media: 31% Theatre Film and Television Directors: 16% Design: 26% Journalism: 15% Advertisement: 7% Communication Studies: 5%

Table 1. Demographic Information of the EG and the CG

Participant (PA)	Gender	Major
1	Male	New Media
2	Male	Design

3	Male	Communication Studies
4	Female	New Media
5	Female	Theatre Film and Television Directors
6	Female	Advertisement
7	Female	New Media

Table 2. Demographic Information of Qualitative Participants

Intervention

MBL was employed as the intervention for the EG. While various frameworks existed, the intervention primarily adopted one developed by Chen (n.d.). As depicted in Figure 1, the framework began with a needs analysis of students, the learning context, and the curriculum, focusing primarily on two dimensions: affective and subject. This required curriculum planners and teachers to be aware of the teaching context and the area in which MBL would be adopted, as well as the learning needs of students and the curriculum, primarily centered on the affective dimension (e.g., connection with cultures) that needed to be addressed. Based on these specific needs, appropriate movies should be selected, and decisions should be made about how to incorporate the movies in class—whether fragments, segments or the full movie should be shown. With these decisions in mind, MBL could be implemented with various activities, such as using multimodal materials to evoke students' interest and motivation for learning, transitioning learning from watching movies to other activities and vice versa, and organizing relatively comprehensive activities that required more systematic designs and student engagement. Formative and/or summative assessment, along with teacher reflection, was needed at the end of the class, which could inform further teacher activities. The intervention spanned 13 weeks within an academic semester, providing sufficient duration to assess its effectiveness (Hu et al., 2023).

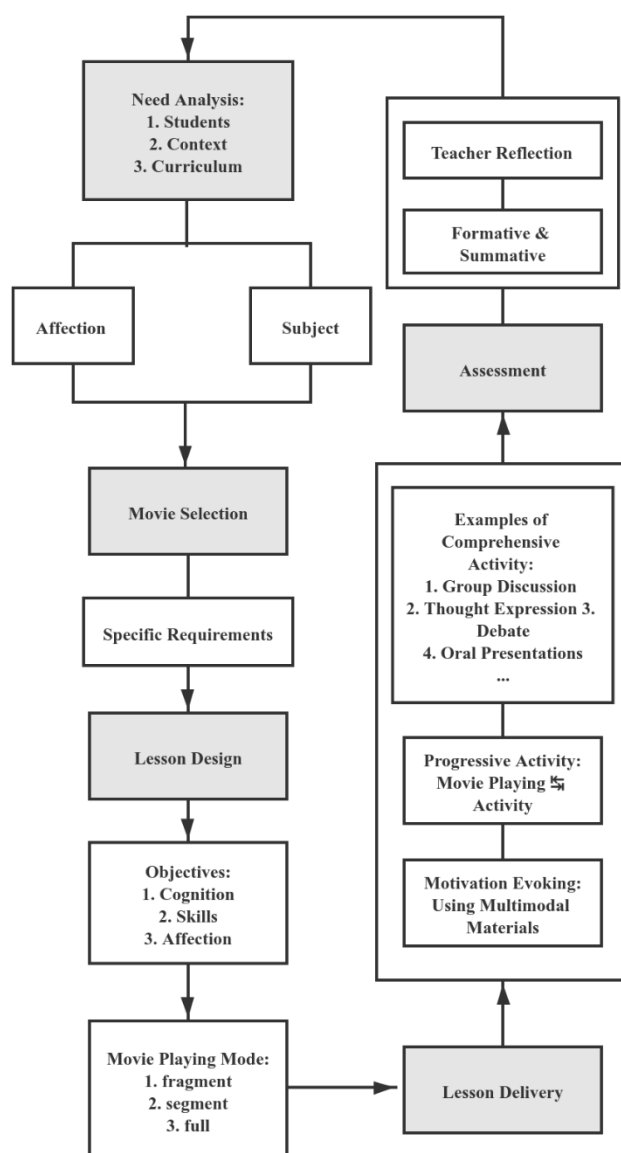


Figure 1. MBL Framework

Utilizing this framework, a set of movies, such as *Chang An* (Xie & Zou, 2023), *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms* (Wu, 2023), *Ne Zha* (Yu, 2019), *Full River Red* (Zhang, 2023), and *Wolf Warriors 2* (Wu, 2017), were chosen to support MBL. In contrast, the regular instruction in the CG employed the same films but with a simpler approach. Similar to issues documented in academic literature (Wang, 2018; D. Wu, 2020), film education in the CG required students to watch prescribed films in class and write movie reviews or texts expressing their impressions. Detailed lesson plans had been uploaded to ULearning, a cloud-based learning management system, and were available upon request.

Data Collection and Analysis

To assess participants' cultural awareness, the CI questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale, developed and validated by Fu and Luo (2023), was employed. This questionnaire was chosen due to its tailored design for Chinese university students, taking into account both traditional Chinese cultural values and awareness of modernity in China. Additionally, its validity had been confirmed through factor analysis. A pilot study conducted before the main research indicated that each construct of the questionnaire demonstrated acceptable Cronbach's alpha values (refer to Table 3), signifying satisfactory reliability.

Construct	Definition	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Cognitive	an individual's intellectual understanding and awareness of their cultural background	4	.93
Emotional	the affective or emotional responses associated with one's cultural background	4	.89
Behavioral	observable actions, behaviors, and practices that reflect an individual's affiliation with a particular culture	4	.91

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha questionnaire

The questionnaire, administered in a pencil-paper format, was given to both the EG and the CG before and after the study. Subsequently, the gathered data was processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for both between-group and within-group comparisons. To ensure the appropriateness of statistical tests, the normal distribution of data was initially verified, permitting the utilization of independent samples *t*-tests and paired samples tests.

The intervention was observed in a non-participant manner by the researchers. An observation protocol, adapted from the study by Heng et al. (2020), was employed to facilitate observation. This protocol aided in identifying and documenting key learning moments and students' responses to culturally rich activities. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants from the EG post-study, utilizing an interview protocol and relevant prompts adapted from the study by Pan (2021). This approach ensured an effective interviewing process, enabling researchers to comprehend students' perceptions and the MBL process. These two protocols had been checked by experts before the study, ensuring their face validity. The collected data were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis using NVivo. The analysis followed the process of becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, collating codes with supporting data, grouping codes into themes, and reviewing and revising themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The qualitative findings aimed at complementing and elucidating relevant quantitative findings in the subsequent discussion (Poth, 2018).

4. Findings

Quantitative Findings

Between-group comparisons were initially conducted to assess the EG's and CG's pre-test and post-test CI scores. Descriptive statistics in Table 4 and inferential statistics in Table 5 revealed that, before the main study, although mean values slightly varied among participants in different groups, there was no statistically significant difference identified in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral CI, as well as in general CI ($p > .05$). However, following the intervention, significant statistical differences emerged between the EG and CG in cognitive and emotional CI ($p < .05$), as well as in general CI ($p < .001$), with the EG exhibiting higher average scores. This suggested that the intervention surpassed regular instruction in enhancing CI. Notably, no statistical difference in behavioral CI was observed between the two groups after the study ($p = .856$).

	Construct	Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	Cognitive	EG	2.233	.212
		CG	2.267	.175
	Emotional	EG	2.333	.157
		CG	2.400	.141
	Behavioral	EG	2.233	.417
		CG	2.267	.344
	CI	EG	2.267	.224
		CG	2.311	.191
Post-test	Cognitive	EG	3.144	.817
		CG	2.361	.274
	Emotional	EG	3.317	.755
		CG	2.517	.277
	Behavioral	EG	2.333	.222
		CG	2.313	.261
	CI	EG	2.931	.277
		CG	2.397	.183

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of CI

	Construct	F	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test (EG-CG)	Cognitive	.198	-.383	.706
	Emotional	.596	-1.000	.331
	Behavioral	.214	-.195	.848
	CI	.133	-.478	.639
Post-test (EG-CG)	Cognitive	13.398	2.876	.015
	Emotional	28.874	3.144	.009
	Behavioral	.152	.184	.856
	CI	1.405	5.085	.000

Table 5. Inferential Statistics of Between-Group Comparisons

Further within-group comparisons, as presented in Table 6, revealed significant improvements in both cognitive and emotional CI within the EG during the intervention ($p < .05$). Although there was no discernible change in behavioral CI ($p > .05$), the overall CI in the EG exhibited a significant increase post-intervention ($p < .001$), substantiating the efficacy of the intervention. Conversely, the CG showed no statistically significant differences in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral CI ($p > .05$). Nonetheless, a noteworthy enhancement in general CI was observed in the CG after the study ($p = .031$), suggesting that regular instruction retained some effectiveness in bolstering CI.

Group		Mean	Standard Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
EG (Pre-test–Post-test)	Cognitive	-.911	.769	-3.745	.005
	Emotional	-.983	.722	-4.307	.002
	Behavioral	-.100	.225	-1.406	.193
	CI	-.665	.191	-11.010	.000
CG (Pre-test–Post-test)	Cognitive	-.095	.185	-1.612	.141
	Emotional	-.117	.223	-1.655	.132
	Behavioral	-.047	.109	-1.353	.209
	CI	-.086	.107	-2.550	.031

Table 6. Inferential Statistics of Within-group Comparisons

Qualitative Findings

Cultural Representation in Films

Classroom observation demonstrated that the selected films spanned various genres, each embodying the core values of Chinese culture, such as patriotism, unity, and brotherhood—an alignment with the values advocated in the curriculum. This deliberate choice aimed to create a diverse cinematic experience for students while ensuring a consistent infusion of cultural principles throughout the MBL sessions. Particularly, participants consistently expressed a heightened sense of cultural connection when films featured characters from diverse backgrounds. The portrayal of relatable characters allowed students to see elements of their own CI reflected on screen. Example quotes were:

- “Seeing characters who share aspects of my cultural background made the stories more personal. It was like seeing a part of myself in the narrative.” (PA2)
- “There are different characters in the movies, who can be considered as the embodiment of traditional and modern Chinese cultures.” (PA4)

In addition to the portrayal of culturally rich movie characters, students were immersed in multifaceted cultural narratives that added depth and complexity to their learning experience. These narratives went beyond the surface representation of cultural values and delved into the nuances of Chinese society, history, and everyday life. Students, therefore, appreciated films that delved into the complexities of cultural experiences, showcasing a more nuanced perspective beyond stereotypes. Example quotes were:

- “The films did not just show one side of a culture ... They explored different aspects and challenges and give a more realistic view of what CI means.” (PA1)
- “Being exposed to different kinds of Chinese cultures, such as historical events, methodologies, heritages, and spiritual values, I can gain a deeper understanding of my identity.” (PA6)

In gaining a more profound comprehension of participants’ CI, several also expressed that this course broadened their perspectives on cultural diversity. Participants highlighted the significance of movies that moved beyond cultural stereotypes. Representations that challenged prevailing stereotypes and presented authentic cultural practices contributed to a more accurate and respectful understanding. Meanwhile, the facilitation of cross-cultural understanding through movies was a recurring theme, with some participants describing instances where exposure to unfamiliar cultures led to a broader understanding and broke down preconceived notions. Example quotes were:

- “I liked that the movies did not rely on clichés. They showed our culture as it is, not just what people might expect.” (PA2)
- “It was like a window into worlds I had not explored. The movies made me curious, and that curiosity helped me understand cultures I knew little about.” (PA7)

Emotional Resonance and Connection

Participants overwhelmingly expressed a profound emotional resonance with the films used in the MBL approach. The narratives evoked deep emotional responses, creating a sense of connection that extended beyond mere academic engagement. For example, students described how certain scenes within the movies elicited strong emotional reactions. One participant (PA1) shared, "When watching *Chang An*, a historical drama movie, the historical scenes resonated with me emotionally. It made me feel a stronger connection to our cultural roots."

Additionally, participants highlighted the impact of emotional engagement on their overall learning experience. The emotional resonance facilitated a more immersive understanding of cultural nuances and historical contexts presented in the movies. Another student (PA3) emphasized, "Feeling emotionally connected to the characters and the storyline helped me grasp the cultural elements more vividly. It was not just about learning facts; it was about experiencing the emotions tied to those facts." This resonated with another participant's (PA7) response: "Movies became a gateway to understanding our cultural history. When you feel the emotions portrayed in the stories, it becomes easier to remember and internalize the cultural aspects. It is like living through those moments."

Instructor Guidance and Facilitation

Participants consistently acknowledged the crucial role of instructor guidance and facilitation in their MBL experience. The instructor's approach and involvement emerged as significant factors influencing the effectiveness of MBL in enhancing cultural identity. For example, participants appreciated the instructor's thoughtful selection of films that resonated with Chinese cultural values, which was in line with the observation findings. One student (PA2) expressed, "The instructor chose films that were not only entertaining but also rich in cultural elements. It felt like each movie was carefully selected to contribute to our understanding of Chinese culture."

The instructor's efforts in providing contextual information before screenings and facilitating post-viewing discussions were also noted in the observation and the interview. A participant (PA6) mentioned, "Our instructor did not just leave us to watch the films. There was always a prelude, helping us understand the historical and cultural context. And after the movie, we had insightful discussions that added layers to our understanding." When engaged in discussions or other activities, such as debates and oral presentations about the movies, participants emphasized the importance of the instructor in creating an open and inclusive environment for dialogues. One student (PA3) reflected, "The instructor encouraged us to share our perspectives, even if they differed. It created an atmosphere where everyone felt comfortable expressing their thoughts on cultural aspects depicted in the films." This was similar to another student's (PA4) response, which was: "Our instructor never insisted on a single interpretation. There was room for diverse viewpoints, and that made the discussions richer." This flexibility in interpretations and communications encouraged the development of critical thinking and analysis of one's CI, a theme highlighted by one participant (PA5), who shared, "We were not just passive viewers. Our instructor urged us to critically analyze the cultural nuances portrayed in the films. This made the learning experience more engaging and intellectually stimulating."

The findings underscored the pivotal role of the instructor in guiding and facilitating MBL sessions. In other words, creating a culturally responsive, flexible, and critical MBL module could shape a learning environment that fosters deep cultural understanding and identity development among participants.

Acceptance of MBL

Classroom observations consistently demonstrated that students were attentive and participative during MBL sessions. One observed phenomenon was the reduction in cognitive strain, as students seemed to effortlessly absorb cultural information presented through movies. Interview responses echoed this sentiment, with participants expressing that MBL provided a more enjoyable and less mentally taxing learning experience. One participant (PA1) mentioned, "The movies made it easier to understand cultural concepts because it was not just reading from a textbook. The visuals helped to illustrate things and make it less overwhelming."

The integration of verbal and visual elements in MBL also emerged as a key factor contributing to a deeper understanding of cultural elements among students. Classroom observations noted instances where students actively discussed and interpreted cultural nuances depicted in the movies. The combination of spoken language, non-verbal cues, and visual context allowed students to grasp cultural subtleties that might be challenging to convey through traditional teaching methods. Interviews further underscored this point, with participants expressing how MBL facilitated a more holistic understanding of CI. One interviewee (PA4) remarked, "Seeing cultural practices and traditions on screen made it more real for me. I could connect words to actual performance, and it stayed with me better than just reading about it." This accorded with another participant's (PA6) response: "Movies are a type of multimodal text. I feel it is much easier to learn about cultures when they are presented both verbally and visually".

Reservations over MBL

One prominent theme that emerged was the perceived inadequacy of MBL in addressing the depth and complexity of CI. Some participants expressed reservations about the oversimplification of cultural themes in movies, stating that certain nuances and intricacies were often overlooked or misrepresented. For instance, a participant (PA1) noted, "While movies offer a glimpse into culture, they cannot capture the depth of our cultural identity. It sometimes feels like a superficial exploration."

Another facet of participants' reservations pertained to the perceived limitations of MBL in shaping individuals' behavior or actions related to CI. While movies were acknowledged as providing a visual representation of cultural elements, participants questioned the extent to which MBL could influence tangible, real-world behavior. The concern centered on the potential for MBL to remain confined to the realm of passive observation, with limited impact on participants' active engagement or behavioral changes concerning their cultural identity. Participant statements reflected a desire for more explicit connections between MBL and practical applications in daily life. For instance, a participant (PA3) expressed skepticism, stating, "Watching movies is one thing, but how does that translate into real changes in how we interact with our cultural identity? There

is a gap between what we see on the screen and how we navigate our cultural experiences.” Moreover, participants highlighted the need for supplementary activities or interventions that could bridge this gap and facilitate the application of insights gained through MBL and suggested that without deliberate efforts to connect cinematic experiences to real-world practices, the potential transformative effects on behavior might be limited. For example, a student (PA5) suggested: “Simply watching and analyzing movies in class may not necessarily influence our cultural behavior. There should be a clearer connection between what we have developed in class with what we can do in real life.”

5. Discussion

The quantitative findings, as previously discussed, initially indicated that well-designed MBL had a positive impact on learners’ CI. Notably, regular movie education, characterized by watching and analyzing movies in the research context, demonstrated a positive effect on students’ CI, consistent with existing academic literature (Wang, 2018; D. Wu, 2020). However, the intervention employing well-designed MBL surpassed the impact of regular movie education. This aligns with prior research, which has consistently highlighted the potential of active and purposeful integration of multimedia resources in educational settings (Chen et al., 2022; Wang, 2020; Yao et al., 2019; J. Yu, 2022).

The effectiveness of the intervention could be attributed to the intentional design of MBL activities, where movies were carefully selected to align with specific cultural elements and provide a more targeted and immersive learning experience (Glotov, 2021; Supiarza et al., 2020). The qualitative findings, as outlined above, justified this association. Participants consistently praised the intervention for its ability to provide a rich tapestry of cultural representation and multifaceted narratives. This diversity not only resonated with the students but also added depth and complexity to their learning journey. The immersive nature of MBL allowed learners to explore cultural nuances beyond the surface level, fostering a more nuanced and interconnected view of diverse cultures (İpek, 2022; Xu, 2023). Building upon the qualitative findings, the positive impact of MBL on CI aligned with the principles of narrative learning theory. This theory posits that storytelling plays a pivotal role in the learning process, allowing individuals to construct meaning and understanding through narrative structures (Karlsen & Häggström, 2020; Resuloglu et al., 2018). In the study’s context of MBL, movies served as powerful narratives that went beyond mere information delivery, unfolded cultural stories, depicted traditions, and showcased real-life scenarios, allowing learners to connect emotionally and cognitively with the content.

Particularly, MBL had a more profound effect on learners’ cognitive CI (i.e., an individual’s intellectual understanding and awareness of their cultural background) and emotional CI (i.e., the affective or emotional responses associated with one’s cultural background). This dual impact was particularly evident in the positive interview responses from participants, who not only demonstrated a deeper intellectual grasp of their cultures but also expressed heightened emotional resonance and connection with their cultural backgrounds. The emotional dimension of CI became apparent as participants shared personal anecdotes and emotional responses triggered by the movies. These findings underscored the idea that well-curated movies could serve as catalysts for enhancing learners’ cultural awareness and understanding in educational

contexts (Muthmainnah et al., 2022; Sekhri, 2022; Wang, 2018). According to the theory of multimodal learning, the immersive nature of movies, coupled with visual and auditory stimulation, appeared to evoke a more holistic engagement with cultural content (Hu, 2022; Jamil & Aziz, 2021). Furthermore, the findings align with the idea emphasizing the role of emotion in learning and memory. Emotionally charged learning experiences, as facilitated by MBL in this study, are more likely to be retained and integrated into one's cognitive schema (Ortony et al., 2022). Thus, the emotional connection participants felt towards their cultural background through MBL could contribute to a lasting impact on their cultural awareness and understanding.

This study's outcomes were in continuity with prior research recognizing the potential of multimedia interventions in educational settings. Previous studies suggested that movies, as a dynamic and visually stimulating medium, could have the ability to create a memorable and emotionally resonant learning experience (Chen et al., 2022; Liu, 2023; Supiarza et al., 2020). The present findings extended this understanding by specifically highlighting the dual impact on cognitive and emotional aspects of CI. Effective instructor guidance and facilitation emerged as a notable theme from students' interviews and classroom observations, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying the observed impact of MBL on CI. Firstly, the instructor's role encompassed not only the selection of movies but also the deliberate integration of these films into existing curriculums. The findings underscored the importance of aligning movie content with educational objectives and cultural learning outcomes (Chen, n.d.; Wang, 2020), and this intentional integration ensured that movies were not just viewed passively but were actively processed in a way that contributed to a more profound understanding of CI (Wang, 2020). Additionally, the study shed light on how instructors approached the review of movies in class. Classroom observations revealed that effective reviews were not limited to surface-level discussions but involved guided conversations that encouraged critical thinking (Wang, 2018). Instructors facilitated discussions that prompted students to analyze cultural elements, interpret diverse perspectives, and connect cinematic narratives to real-world cultural contexts, which addressed the importance of associated activities that complemented the cinematic experience, such as group discussions, reflective writing assignments, and cultural exploration projects. These activities not only reinforced the cognitive understanding of CI but also elicited emotional responses from the learners.

This positive correlation between instructor guidance and enhanced cultural understanding resonated with the principles of constructivism, underscoring the role of the instructor as a facilitator in the learning process (DeHart, 2023). The findings supported the idea that well-designed MBL, when accompanied by skilled facilitation, could create a synergistic effect going beyond the inherent qualities of the movies themselves (Chen et al., 2022). This aligned with previous literature on effective pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of instructor involvement in shaping meaningful learning experiences (Hu, 2024; Hu et al., 2023).

However, despite the highly positive evaluations from participants, reservations about MBL emerged during the study. One significant concern raised by participants revolved around the challenge of bridging the gap between cultural learning in the classroom and the translation of that knowledge into real-life behavior and actions, which explained why behavioral CI did not improve after MBL. Specifically, participants expressed uncertainty about the practical applicability of cultural insights gained through MBL and questioned how the knowledge and awareness

acquired in the controlled environment of the classroom setting could effectively inform their behavior, interactions, and decision-making in the complexity of real-world situations. This concern highlighted a perceived disconnection between the theoretical understanding of CI acquired through movies and the practical integration of that understanding into daily life. This tended to contrast most previous findings on the efficacy of MBL in enhancing cultural behavior (Chen et al., 2022; Liu, 2023; Wang, 2020) and prompted a new consideration—effective cultural education should not only impart knowledge but also equip learners with the skills and perspectives needed to navigate diverse cultural landscapes in their everyday lives.

6. Conclusion

The paper has presented a mixed-methods study exploring the impact of MBL on students' CI development within China's higher education setting. MBL demonstrated positive effects on learners' CI, particularly on cognitive and emotional dimensions. This positive influence was further supported by learners' favorable perceptions of their CI, revealing a deeper understanding of their cultures and a robust emotional resonance and connection. The effectiveness of instructor guidance and facilitation emerged as a critical factor in enhancing learners' CI through MBL. This included the meticulous selection of movies and the integration of movie-watching with various classroom activities to foster critical dialogue and elevate cultural understanding and awareness among learners. However, despite the generally positive perceptions of MBL, a notable concern arose regarding the transferability of cultural awareness and understanding from the classroom to real-world behavioral actions. This uncertainty was voiced by participants and contributed to the absence of observable improvement in participants' behavioral CI.

On the one hand, the study contributes valuable insights into the multifaceted impact of MBL on CI development in China's higher education. The positive effects on cognitive and emotional dimensions, coupled with learners' positive perceptions, underscore the potential of MBL as a powerful tool for cultural education. On the other hand, the observed gap between classroom-based cultural learning and practical application in real-life scenarios emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive approach to MBL implementation. While MBL excels in building cognitive and emotional connections to CI, addressing behavioral aspects may require additional strategies. To address this gap, instructors and educational programs utilizing MBL should consider incorporating explicit guidance on applying cultural insights in daily life. This could involve real-life scenarios, practical exercises, and experiential learning opportunities that mirror the complexity of diverse cultural interactions outside the classroom.

Despite these implications, several limitations of the study also need to be addressed to guide future research in the MBL domain. One notable limitation is the geographical and cultural context specificity of the study, as it focused on China's higher education setting. Generalizing the findings to diverse cultural and educational contexts requires caution, considering the potential influence of cultural nuances, educational systems, and contextual factors. Another limitation lies in the exclusive focus on university students. Extending research to different educational levels and age groups would provide a more comprehensive picture of MBL's applicability and effectiveness across various educational settings. Furthermore, the study did not delve into the potential influence of participants' prior exposure to movies or cultural diversity. Participants with

more exposure to diverse cultural content or those with a higher baseline level of cultural awareness might have responded differently to the MBL intervention. Examining the moderating effects of individual differences and prior experiences could offer nuanced insights into the effectiveness of MBL for diverse learner groups.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Consideration

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants of the study.

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