


# Chapter 6

## Cinema-Based EFL. The Impact of Little Women on Students' Argumentative Moves and Outlook on Marriage

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the impact of a teaching unit centred around the film Little Women on EFL secondary students, focusing on their use of argumentative moves and their perspectives on the concept of marriage. Both aspects were analysed in essays written before and after the intervention. Statistically significant differences were observed in essay length, as well as in the use of counterclaims, backings, and conclusions. Furthermore, the cinema-based teaching unit prompted students to adopt a more complex perspective on marriage, which manifested in three distinct profiles: radical change of position, moderate change, and no ultimate change but with some refinements.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, cinema is widely regarded not only as a valuable tool for enhancing students' linguistic competence but also as a rich source of motivation. This can be attributed to its narrative and authentic aspects, its creative element, and the opportunities it provides for enhancing students' higher-order thinking skills and socio-critical awareness (Herrero & Suárez, 2023). Attention to the purported pedagogical advantages of cinema-based EFL has come mainly through theoretical studies (Sherman, 2003), pedagogical guidelines for prospective practitioners (Li & Wang, 2015), and examples of teaching sequences (Charlebois, 2008). The limited empirical research available has primarily focused on exploring teachers' and students' perspectives regarding the use of films as a pedagogical tool (Argynbayev et al., 2014; Kabooha, 2016; Sánchez Auñón & Férez Mora, 2021) and on the development of students' linguistic competence. Research into this latter line has been limited as it has mainly focused on delving into the micro-components of such competence, especially listening-related aspects including vocabulary (Alharthi, 2020) and pronunciation (Shing & Yin, 2017).

Given this backdrop, research has yet to examine the contributions of cinema to the development of students' linguistic competence at the level of text, such as in argumentative or explanatory texts, and to potential enhancements in students' understanding of topics related to social justice. Offering empirical evidence of cinema's contribution to the holistic development of the EFL learner and encompassing linguistic and conceptual aspects could potentially facilitate the integration of cinema into the English classroom. This approach could help overcome the unpedagogical, yet prevalent, practices of using film solely as a reward for exemplary behaviour or as a time-filling resource to manage student excitement before holiday periods (Sokoli & Zabalbeascoa, 2019). With this objective in mind, this study seeks to investigate the impact of a cinema-based teaching unit centred around the film *Little Women* (LW) (Gerwig, 2019) on the argumentative skills of secondary school students. The focal point of the film, marriage, serves as the stimulus from which students formulate their reactions. Within our teaching unit, marriage is examined as a topic of social justice, considering the societal pressures surrounding marriage that many women worldwide, both historically and in contemporary times as depicted in the film, may encounter.

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