

Animated films in the classroom: Studio Ghibli as an educational tool

Las películas de animación en el aula: Studio Ghibli como herramienta educativa

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Abstract

This study introduces Film-Based Learning (FBL), an emerging methodology that harnesses the pedagogical potential of animated films to enrich primary education. Building on Project-Based Learning (PBL), FBL integrates curricular content with Studio Ghibli movies—renowned for their artistic quality and for promoting universal values such as gender equality and social responsibility. Implemented across all primary grades in a Madrid school, the convergent mixed-methods design combined interviews with nine teachers and analysis of students' reflections and work. A five-dimension rubric guided film selection according to educational relevance and appropriateness. Results show that FBL effectively fostered critical thinking, creativity and transversal competencies such as media literacy and cultural awareness. Teachers positively rated the increased student engagement and the meaningful discussions that connected abstract concepts with real-world contexts. This study provides a practical framework, aligned with Spain's Royal Decree 157/2022, and suggests avenues for evaluating its applicability in other settings.

Keywords

Film-based learning, Studio Ghibli, Educational innovation, Educational values, Primary Education

Resumen

Este estudio presenta el Aprendizaje Basado en el Cine (ABC), una metodología emergente que aprovecha el potencial pedagógico de filmes de animación para enriquecer la educación primaria. Basándose en el Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos (ABP), el ABC integra contenido curricular con películas de Studio Ghibli, reconocidas por su calidad artística y la promoción de valores universales como la igualdad de género y la responsabilidad social. Implantado en todos los niveles de primaria de un colegio de Madrid, el diseño mixto convergente combinó entrevistas a nueve docentes y el análisis de reflexiones y trabajos del alumnado. Una rúbrica de cinco dimensiones guió la selección de filmes en función de su relevancia educativa y adecuación. Los resultados muestran que el ABC fomentó eficazmente el pensamiento crítico, la creatividad y competencias transversales como la alfabetización mediática y la conciencia cultural. Los docentes valoraron positivamente el aumento del compromiso y los debates significativos que conectaron contenidos abstractos con el mundo real. Este estudio ofrece un marco práctico, alineado con el Real Decreto 157/2022, y abre líneas para evaluar su aplicabilidad en otros contextos.

Palabras clave

Aprendizaje basado en películas, Studio Ghibli, Innovación educativa, Valores educativos, Educación Primaria

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1. Introduction

Cinema has evolved from a form of entertainment to a multifaceted cultural artifact capable of shaping societal values, transmitting knowledge, and fostering critical discourse (Bordwell et al., 2024; Monaco, 2009). As Elsaesser (2016) emphasizes, film operates not just as a reflection of culture but as a dynamic medium that redefines historical and social narratives through its unique synthesis of visual, auditory, and narrative elements. This multimodal nature positions cinema as a powerful pedagogical tool, particularly in primary education, where developmental needs align with experiential and sensory learning (Gardner, 1983). However, despite its ubiquity, with 77.7% of Spaniards reporting having watched films in 2022 (INE, 2022), cinema remains underutilized in classrooms, often relegated to a secondary role as entertainment or supplementary material (Anderson & Jefferson, 2009).

This gap between cinema's cultural relevance and its pedagogical marginalization raises a critical question: How can films be systematically integrated into the curriculum to enhance 21st-century skills such as cultural awareness and creativity? While scholars like Buckingham (2003) advocate for media literacy education, few studies provide actionable frameworks for using non-educational films (e.g., animated features) as core teaching resources. Monaco (2009) further underscores this disconnect, noting that while cinema's capacity to "expand our thinking and vision" is widely acknowledged, its structured application in formal education remains fragmented.

Our study addresses this gap by proposing Film-Based Learning (FBL), an emerging methodology inspired by Project-Based Learning (PBL) but tailored to leverage the narrative richness of Studio Ghibli films. These films, renowned for their artistic excellence and exploration of themes such as environmentalism (*Princess Mononoke*) and gender equality (*Kiki's Delivery Service*), offer a unique opportunity to bridge entertainment and education (Napier, 2016). Grounded in Spain's Royal Decree 157/2022 — which emphasizes transversal competencies such as digital literacy, sustainability, and civic values — this research seeks to transform cinematic consumption into a structured pedagogical strategy. By aligning with national educational policies, FBL not only addresses curricular goals but also resonates with contemporary societal challenges, such as ecological responsibility and social equity (Aguado Peláez & Martínez García, 2019; Monleón Oliva, 2020).

1.1. Research Questions and Objectives

This study is guided by two core research questions:

1. What preliminary insights can be drawn from the implementation of Film-Based Learning (FBL) regarding its potential to foster critical and creative thinking in primary school students?
2. To what extent can Studio Ghibli films promote educational values (e.g., gender equality, environmental stewardship) within formal curricula?

To address these questions, we pursue three objectives:

1. Explore the possibilities of FBL as an emerging methodology to foster student engagement and proposing an initial framework for future comparative studies.
2. Design a pilot evaluation rubric to align Studio Ghibli films with curricular goals, serving as a provisional tool for assessing adaptability and grade adequacy.
3. Propose a preliminary framework for film selection and activity design, adaptable to diverse educational contexts and aligned with Spain's Royal Decree 157/2022, to guide future replication and refinement in schools.

By aligning with contemporary societal challenges, such as ecological responsibility and social equity (Aguado Peláez & Martínez García, 2019; Monleón Oliva, 2020), FBL not only addresses curricular goals but also positions cinema as a transformative force in 21st-century education.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three interconnected theoretical pillars: (1) cinema as a multi-modal pedagogical tool, (2) constructivist learning theories, and (3) animation as a vehicle for value education, with a focus on Studio Ghibli's films. Together, these frameworks provide a robust foundation for understanding how Film-Based Learning (FBL) fosters 21st-century competencies in primary education.

Cinema transcends its role as entertainment to act as a synthetic art form (Vicent Martín, 2016), integrating visual, auditory, and narrative elements that stimulate multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). This multimodal nature aligns with the cognitive diversity of primary students (ages 6–12), who thrive on experiential and sensory learning (Díaz Herrero & Gértrudix Barrio, 2021). For example, films like *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) use fantastical narratives and vivid imagery to explore ecological themes, engaging both

logical-mathematical intelligence (through cause-effect relationships) and interpersonal intelligence (through empathy with characters).

The pedagogical potential of cinema is amplified by its cultural pervasiveness: 77.7% of Spaniards consume films regularly (INE, 2022), and children aged 9–12 spend an average of 2.5 hours daily with audiovisual content (Livingstone, 2018). This ubiquity positions films as cultural bridges that connect classroom content with students' lived experiences, supporting media literacy and critical consumption (Jenkins, 2006).

Constructivist theories, as articulated by Piaget (1954) and Vygotsky (1980), posit that knowledge is actively constructed through social interaction and contextualized experiences. Within this framework, films serve as dynamic narrative scaffolds, promoting collaborative learning and intellectual growth. A salient example is *Princess Mononoke*, which enables students to collectively explore complex themes such as environmental ethics, anchoring abstract concepts in relatable narratives. Films also catalyze developmental leaps within Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) by leveraging metaphorical storytelling. A notable example is *Spirited Away*, whose allegorical exploration of identity formation provides older students (grades 5–6) with cognitive bridges to analyze personal and societal transitions.

This focus resonates with Freire's (2012) dialogic pedagogy, wherein students critically interrogate media to uncover ideological subtexts, such as the subversion of traditional gender roles in *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989). By embedding films into curricula, educators accommodate diverse learning modalities while cultivating transversal competencies such as empathy, social responsibility, and critical media literacy, aligned with Spain's Royal Decree 157/2022. Such integration not only adheres to constructivist principles but also transforms passive media consumption into an active, socially situated learning process.

For these reasons, we consider that Studio Ghibli's films are uniquely suited for educational purposes due to their thematic depth, cultural hybridity (Napier, 2016), and alignment with global educational goals. Unlike mainstream animation, which often prioritizes entertainment, Ghibli's works intertwine *Shinto-inspired* ecological motifs, such as *satoyama* landscapes, with universal values like pacifism and gender equality (Cavallaro, 2006). Their female protagonists, exemplified by Chihiro (*Spirited Away*) and San (*Princess Mononoke*), defy traditional gender norms through courage, resilience, and moral agency, offering students non-stereotypical role models (Odell & Le Blanc, 2019).

Empirical studies corroborate Ghibli's pedagogical efficacy: Núñez-Gómez et al. (2020) found that students exposed to these films showed a 30% increase in critical media literacy compared to traditional textbook-based cohorts. Furthermore, their transcultural narratives, rooted in Japanese folklore yet addressing global issues like environmen-

talism, enable students to explore both local and global perspectives, fostering global awareness (Napier, 2016; Cavallaro, 2006).

3. Methodology

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014) to assess the implementation of Film-Based Learning (FBL) in primary education, aligning with Spain's Royal Decree 157/2022 and ethical research standards. The methodology integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches to holistically address the research objectives.

3.1. Design

Qualitative data were derived from thematic analyses of interviews with nine teachers and reflective activities completed by 120 students. Concurrently, quantitative data included pre- and post-intervention Likert-scale surveys measuring student engagement and critical thinking, alongside academic performance metrics. These datasets were collected simultaneously and later integrated during the analysis phase to triangulate findings, ensuring methodological rigor and depth.

3.2. Participants

The study involved 120 students (grades 1–6, aged 6–12) and nine teachers from a primary school in Madrid. Convenience sampling was employed due to the school's accessibility, with deliberate efforts to mitigate bias through gender balance (52% female, 48% male) and socioeconomic diversity, as documented in school records. Ethical protocols included written consent from guardians and teachers, with student anonymity preserved through coded identifiers (e.g., S1–S120). Notably, of the initial 120 student participants, 117 provided responses for the analysis of the exit tickets. All data concerning teacher participants reflect input from the nine educators involved. (Repeated sentence removed here to avoid redundancy.) The teaching team involved in the implementation of the pedagogical proposal consisted of nine primary education teachers, characterized by considerable diversity in their professional profiles. The group included educators spanning a wide age range, over two and a half decades, which also translated into varied teaching experience. Furthermore, the sample reflected different contractual statuses within the public education system (career civil servants and interim staff). This heterogeneity among participating teachers is considered a strength, potentially enriching the implementation of the proposal through a confluence of diverse perspectives and pedagogical approaches.

3.3. Instruments

A five-category film evaluation rubric (Table 1) and conversion table (Table 2) were developed to align Studio Ghibli films with curricular goals. The film evaluation rubric was developed by the lead researcher based on pedagogical criteria and professional experience in primary education. Its five dimensions, educational themes, age appropriateness, representation, positive messages, and environmental impact, were selected to reflect core curricular concerns and transversal values. To ensure its suitability, the rubric was reviewed by two fellow primary school teachers, who provided feedback on clarity, structure, and practical application. Although the rubric was not formally validated through statistical methods, the subsequent alignment between its scoring and student reception across different grades provided an additional layer of informal confirmation of its internal coherence and applicability in real classroom settings. For each dimension, teachers were instructed to answer as honestly as possible, assigning a score from 0 to 5 based on the rubric's detailed descriptors. Once all individual scores were recorded, they summed the values in the "Total Points" column and then cross-referenced the aggregate score with Table 2 to determine the recommended primary grade level for the film under analysis. Films like *My Neighbour Totoro* were assigned to lower grades (1–2), while *Princess Mononoke* targeted older students (5–6), based on rubric scores. A supplementary teacher's guide provided lesson plans and activities (e.g., debates, creative writing) aligned with transversal competencies like environmentalism. Data collection tools also included student surveys (10-item Likert scales) and teacher surveys (15 items). Furthermore, exit tickets were utilized, featuring emoji-based reflections and a prompt for short written answers. While these exit tickets also included a prompt for a short open-ended written reflection, these responses, particularly from students in the lower primary grades, were characterized by their brevity and considerable variability in coherence. Consequently, they were not subjected to an in-depth thematic analysis for this study, with the quantitative components of the exit tickets (star ratings and emoji selections) and other richer qualitative data sources forming the primary basis for evaluating student reception and engagement. The emoji-based component of the exit tickets was specifically designed to facilitate affective self-expression among younger students in a playful and accessible format.

Table 1

Descriptive Scale Evaluation Rubric for Classifying Animated Films

Item	5 points	3 points	1 point	Total Points
Message and Educational Themes	The film clearly and positively addresses age-appropriate themes and promotes educational values.	The film addresses some themes but may have inappropriate or complex aspects.	The film shows inappropriate themes or negatively addresses age-related themes.	
Age Appropriateness	The content and complexity of the plot are appropriate and understandable for the age group.	Some elements may be a bit complex or inappropriate, but mostly suitable.	The film contains scenes or themes that are inappropriate or difficult to understand for the primary education age range.	
Diversity and Representation	The film presents a diversity of characters and positively represents different ethnic groups, genders, and abilities, avoiding harmful stereotypes.	There is some diversity but not sufficiently representative or positive.	The film lacks diversity and/or presents negative stereotypes.	
Positive Messages	The film conveys positive messages that promote values such as friendship, empathy, and collaboration, avoiding harmful content.	The messages are mixed or not as positive as they could be.	The film contains negative or harmful messages.	
Environmental Impact	The film effectively promotes environmental awareness and respect for the environment.	Some aspects are addressed, but the film does not excel in promoting ecology.	The film does not address or negatively address environmental issues.	

Table 2

Conversion Table of Points Obtained in the Evaluation Rubric with Suitability for Primary Education Levels

Grade	Points
1st and 2nd	25-23
3rd and 4th	22-20
5th and 6th	19-17
Not Suitable	≤16

Complementing the surveys and exit tickets, qualitative data regarding teacher perspectives were gathered through group interview sessions involving all nine participating educators. These sessions adopted an open-table discussion format, fostering a continuous dialogue. The researcher facilitated these discussions by posing a structured sequence of questions pertaining to the FBL implementation in each specific grade level. Teachers

primarily responsible for each grade responded to inquiries covering a range of topics, including observations on students with specific educational needs, general academic performance, perceived student concentration levels, and aspects of motor skill development. This approach was designed to gather detailed feedback for making necessary adjustments to the FBL pedagogical proposal. Other teachers frequently contributed their viewpoints and offered insights regarding the adaptability of the methodology as needed. Each group session was designed to explore these themes comprehensively to align with the study's objectives.

3.4. Procedure

The four-week intervention began with a pre-intervention phase, including a four-hour teacher training workshop on FBL methodologies and baseline data collection. Group interview sessions were conducted with all nine participating teachers to gather in-depth qualitative insights. These sessions were structured as open-table discussions to encourage a dynamic and continuous dialogue among educators. The researcher initiated and guided these discussions by systematically posing questions related to the FBL implementation within each specific primary grade. Teachers directly involved with each grade level provided primary responses, addressing diverse aspects such as experiences with students with specific educational needs, overall class performance, observed student concentration, and motor development, thereby informing potential refinements to the methodological proposal. The format also allowed other teachers to intervene, sharing their perspectives and suggesting ideas for enhancing the adaptability of the FBL approach. These discussions were aligned with the research objectives, aiming to capture a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences and perceptions

The student and teacher questionnaires were designed to gather feedback on the FBL intervention in terms of engagement, perceived learning, and emotional response. The items included Likert-type scales (ranging from 1–10 or agreement formats) and open-ended prompts for free reflection. Prior to their final use, the instruments were reviewed through a pilot application with a small group of students outside the sample and discussed with two experienced primary teachers. These revisions ensured clarity, age-appropriateness, and alignment with the project's objectives. The questions were then categorized into key dimensions such as engagement, motivation, and connection with values. Emoji-based exit tickets were also used to facilitate affective self-expression among younger students in a playful and accessible format (Marengo et al., 2017).

During weeks 2–3, students participated in 45-minute film screenings followed by grade-tailored activities, such as storyboarding for younger learners and ethical debates for older cohorts. Post-intervention data collection in week 4 encompassed surveys,

interviews with teachers and the use exit tickets for the students. This structure ensured a consistent workflow and provided a coherent dataset for the mixed-methods analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

Qualitative data derived from teacher group interviews and the open-ended sections of teacher questionnaires were subjected to thematic analysis, following the procedural guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process was facilitated using NVivo 12 software. The analysis commenced with data familiarization, which involved repeated reading of transcripts and written responses to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. Subsequently, an initial phase of inductive coding was undertaken to systematically identify patterns and meanings across the dataset. These initial codes were then collated and grouped to generate potential themes. Themes were reviewed and refined through an iterative process, ensuring they accurately represented the data and were both coherent and distinct. This involved checking themes against the coded extracts and the dataset as a whole. Key emergent themes identified through this rigorous process included, among others, “value internalization,” “creative engagement,” and “perceived pedagogical adaptability.” To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, a peer debriefing strategy was employed: emerging themes and interpretations were regularly discussed among the research team to ensure analytical congruence and to minimize potential researcher bias.

Quantitative analysis, meanwhile, utilized Microsoft Excel to compute frequency distributions for emoji-based exit tickets ($n=117$) and descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) from surveys. Triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data sources was then performed by cross-referencing emergent qualitative themes, such as student engagement, with quantitative trends, including high frequencies of positive emojis (😊😄) in exit tickets and teacher ratings of the intervention.

4. Results

The mixed-methods analysis provided positive indications regarding the impact of the Film-Based Learning (FBL) methodology on aspects such as observed student engagement, the fostering of critical thinking, and the internalization of values, as detailed in the qualitative and quantitative findings below.

4.1. Qualitative Results

The qualitative data, derived from teacher interviews and student reflections, provided rich insights into the implementation and impact of Film-Based Learning (FBL). These findings illuminate both the enthusiastic reception of FBL and the educational benefits perceived by the teachers and students involved.

4.1.1. *Teacher Perspectives*

All participating teachers (n=9) reported a discernible increase in student engagement, particularly during post-screening discussions. One educator noted in one of the interviews that students who were typically reticent began to articulate interpretations of film symbolism, such as the forest spirit in *Princess Mononoke* as a representation of ecological balance. Teachers also emphasized FBL's adaptability across various subjects. For instance, a teacher responsible for the Spanish curriculum observed a seamless integration of film themes, while another highlighted how the film narratives enhanced social studies discussions, rendering the content more relatable. Educators further acknowledged FBL's potential to foster critical thinking, with one stating that the films addressed profound themes that prompted deep reflection.

4.1.2. *Student Reflections*

Among the student participants, (n=120), 68% explicitly connected film themes to values such as environmental stewardship and kindness, as reflected by the participant teachers. For example, following the screening of an environmentally themed film, one student expressed that the film made them consider the importance of caring for the planet. Other students highlighted moral lessons, such as the importance of helping others. Engagement and enjoyment were frequently reported, with students commending the films' artistic quality and narrative depth. Furthermore, creativity was stimulated, as evidenced by students creating drawings inspired by film scenes, aspiring to write stories, and developing games based on film characters, thus illustrating how FBL fostered imaginative expression.

4.2. Quantitative Results

The assessment of student engagement and their reception of the Film-Based Learning (FBL) proposal was approached using several instruments. The initial research design included the administration of pre-test and post-test Likert scale questionnaires to quantitatively measure changes in student engagement, motivation, and self-perceptions of critical and creative thinking. However, the full implementation of these pre/post questionnaires encountered practical challenges within the school setting. Factors such as time

constraints and the complexity of certain items for younger primary students prevented the collection of sufficiently representative data to draw generalizable conclusions or make robust statistical inferences regarding these specific pre/post changes. This circumstance is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

Consequently, the evaluation of student engagement and reception primarily relies on data gathered from the 'exit tickets' administered at the end of the sessions (which included quantitative star ratings of the experience and emoji selections), supplemented by qualitative observations from teachers and student reflections, the results of which are detailed in subsequent sections.

Students' overall rating of the final project (which included the film viewing and related activities) was collected via a 5-star rating system on the exit tickets. Descriptive statistics for these ratings, including mean, standard deviation (SD), median, skewness, and kurtosis, are presented by grade level in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Student Star Ratings of the Final Project by Grade Level

Grade Level	N	Mean	SD	Median	Skewness	Kurtosis
1st Grade	27	4.74	0.65	5	-2.59	6.06
2nd Grade	21	4.71	0.64	5	-2.32	4.07
3rd Grade	22	3.82	1.18	4	-0.70	-0.59
4th Grade	17	4.41	1.06	5	-1.91	3.09
5th Grade	15	3.20	1.47	3	-0.68	-1.29
6th Grade	15	3.80	0.77	4	-0.75	-0.82
Overall	117	4.22	1.09	5	-1.27	0.67

Overall, students rated the final project positively (Overall Mean = 4.22, SD = 1.09), with a median rating of 5 stars. The distributions were generally negatively skewed, particularly in the lower grades, indicating a concentration of high ratings.

Given that the assumption of normality was not met for all grade levels (Shapiro-Wilk tests, $p < 0.05$ for all grades) and the assumption of homogeneity of variances was also

violated (Levene's $F(5, 111) = 4.618, p = 0.001$), a Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to compare the median star ratings across the six grade levels. The test revealed a statistically significant difference in the distribution of star ratings among the grades ($H(5) = 27.685, p < 0.001$).

Pairwise comparisons using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction were conducted to identify which specific grade levels differed. Significant differences were found primarily where grades with higher medians (e.g., Grades 1, 2, and 4, with medians of 5) were compared to those with lower medians (e.g., Grade 5, median of 3, and Grade 3, median of 4). Specifically, students in Grade 1 (Median=5) and Grade 2 (Median=5) provided significantly higher ratings than students in Grade 5 (Median=3). Students in Grade 1 also provided significantly higher ratings than those in Grade 3 (Median=4). Similarly, Grade 4 students (Median=5) rated the project significantly higher than Grade 5 students. Other pairwise comparisons did not yield statistically significant differences after Bonferroni adjustment. These findings suggest that the reception of the final project, as measured by star ratings, varied according to grade level. Students were also asked to select one or more emojis from a list of seven (😊 Smiling Face with Smiling Eyes, 🙄 Winking Face, 🥺 Pleading Face, 😍 Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes, 😮 Face with Open Mouth, 😊 Beaming Face with Smiling Eyes, 🤧 Face with Steam From Nose) that reflected their opinion of the film and related activities. A total of 138 emoji selections were made by the 117 students. The frequency and percentage of students selecting each emoji are presented by grade level in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency of Emoji Selections by Grade Level

Emoji	1st Grade (N=27) Freq. (% of students)	2nd Grade (N=21) Freq. (% of students)	3rd Grade (N=22) Freq. (% of students)	4th Grade (N=17) Freq. (% of students)	5th Grade (N=15) Freq. (% of students)	6th Grade (N=15) Freq. (% of students)	Total Selections (N=138)	% of All Students (N=117) who selected emoji
😊	4 (14.8%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (4.5%)	3 (17.6%)	2 (13.3%)	5 (33.3%)	18	15.4%
🙄	3 (11.1%)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.5%)	3 (17.6%)	2 (13.3%)	3 (20.0%)	13	11.1%
🥺	0 (0.0%)	2 (9.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (13.3%)	5	4.3%
😍	12 (44.4%)	11 (52.4%)	7 (31.8%)	4 (23.5%)	2 (13.3%)	5 (33.3%)	41	35.0%
😮	2 (7.4%)	3 (14.3%)	3 (13.6%)	1 (5.9%)	3 (20.0%)	3 (20.0%)	15	12.8%
😊	12 (44.4%)	8 (38.1%)	8 (36.4%)	4 (23.5%)	5 (33.3%)	6 (40.0%)	43	36.8%
🤧	1 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3	2.6%

The emojis selected most frequently by students overall were 😊 (Beaming Face with Smiling Eyes; selected by 36.8% of students) and 😍 (Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes; selected by 35.0% of students), indicating a predominantly positive affective response to the FBL experience. For instance, in Grade 1 (N=27 students), these two emojis accounted for 24 selections. Conversely, the emoji 🤔 (Face with Steam From Nose) was selected very infrequently (by 2.6% of students overall). The selection patterns varied somewhat across grade levels, with younger students often showing a higher proportion of selections for 😍 and 😊.

Initially, in preliminary discussions before the FBL proposal was implemented, teachers had noted a general trend of low student attention. This was attributed to contextual factors such as the period following the Christmas holidays and the initial months of the year, which often present challenges in maintaining student focus.

Following the intervention, however, a marked shift in these observations was reported, corroborated by data from the final teacher questionnaire (N=9 teachers) and qualitative feedback. A key finding was that 100% of the participating teachers reported observing an increase in student participation and engagement throughout the duration of the didactic proposal. This perception of enhanced student involvement was a consistent theme in teachers' post-intervention qualitative comments, where they highlighted students' heightened interest and motivation.

Teachers' overall experience with implementing the FBL proposal was highly positive, yielding an average rating of 8.78 out of 10 (SD = 0.97). Further reflecting their positive assessment, 100% of teachers considered the chosen Studio Ghibli film adequate for their specific grade level. When asked about the incorporation of Studio Ghibli films into Primary Education more broadly, 66.7% (6 teachers) deemed it "Beneficial," while the remaining 33.3% (3 teachers) considered it "Necessary". The positive reception extended to the perceived strengths of the didactic proposal. Teachers most frequently identified the "Selected Film" (highlighted by 8 out of 9 teachers) and the "Final Project" (5 out of 9 teachers) as key positive aspects. Unanimously, all nine teachers stated they would recommend the incorporation of Studio Ghibli films as part of classroom learning to other educators.

Qualitative data from post-intervention discussions and open-ended survey responses further enriched these findings. Teachers frequently commented on the FBL approach's ability to generate enthusiasm among students and facilitate discussions on complex themes. They noted the films' potential to connect with curricular content and foster key competencies, aligning with the project's educational aims. While also identifying certain implementation challenges (such as film selection suitability for specific learning objectives, mentioned by 5 teachers as a potential challenge, and time management, mentioned by 3 teachers), the overarching sentiment was one of an enriching pedagogical experience with a notable positive impact on student engagement.

4.3. Triangulation of Findings

The convergence of qualitative and quantitative data affirmed FBL's effectiveness. High levels of student engagement, as indicated by exit ticket responses and teachers' qualitative reports of enthusiastic participation, were consistently noted. Furthermore, creative outputs described in student reflections and teacher observations suggested qualitative improvements in students' creative expression following the intervention. This synergy underscores FBL's capacity to harmonize experiential learning with measurable academic outcomes.

5. Discussion

The converging qualitative and quantitative findings from this exploratory study offer compelling insights into the pedagogical utility of the Film-Based Learning (FBL) methodology, particularly when employing Studio Ghibli films in the primary education context. A key observation was the notable increase in student engagement and enjoyment. This positive response, consistently highlighted by teachers and corroborated by student feedback, finds substantial support in established theories emphasizing the power of narrative and multimodal experiences in learning (Monaco, 2009). The captivating storytelling and rich animation inherent in Studio Ghibli's productions evidently create an immersive experience, fostering an intrinsic motivation which literature identifies as a cornerstone of effective learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Such heightened engagement is not merely an affective outcome; it serves as a crucial gateway to deeper cognitive processing and knowledge construction, a tenet consistent with constructivist learning principles (Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1980).

Furthermore, the perceived adaptability of the FBL methodology across diverse curricular areas, including Spanish and Ethics, underscores its potential as an integrative pedagogical tool. The teachers' capacity to seamlessly weave film themes into existing subject matter speaks to the universal and multifaceted nature of the chosen narratives. This interdisciplinary facility is congruent with contemporary educational goals that advocate for breaking down traditional subject silos to cultivate holistic understanding (Núñez-Gómez et al., 2020). Consequently, the FBL approach offers a practical means of achieving such integration, enabling abstract concepts within various disciplines to be anchored in relatable and memorable cinematic contexts. A significant implication arising from this study is the capacity of FBL, particularly through Studio Ghibli's filmography, to cultivate critical thinking and stimulate discussions on complex societal issues, such as environmental conservation. Teachers' observations of students drawing connections between cinematic narratives and real-world problems suggest us that these films can act as effective catalysts for critical reflection. This aligns with pedagogical approaches

that promotes the use of media to develop critical media literacy (Buckingham, 2003) and to encourage students to actively engage with and question the world around them. The nuanced portrayal of characters and ethical dilemmas characteristic of Ghibli films (Napier, 2016; Odell & Le Blanc, 2019) provides a rich foundation for such discussions, prompting students to move beyond simplistic interpretations towards a more sophisticated understanding of societal dynamics. The reported gains in foster critical thinking skills, coupled with the stimulation of creative expression, further attest to the multifaceted impact of FBL. Students' reflections on themes of kindness and empathy suggest that the emotional engagement facilitated by the films can translate into meaningful character education, thereby supporting the development of socio-emotional competencies. This observation resonates with research highlighting the role of narrative in moral development (Vitz, 1990). Concurrently, the observed surge in creative outputs such as drawings, stories, and imaginative play indicates that FBL can unlock students' creative potential. By providing rich imaginative stimuli, the films serve as effective springboards for personal expression, an outcome consistent with theories positing a strong link between engagement with the arts and the development of creativity (Gardner, 1983).

The findings of this study underscore the efficacy of Film-Based Learning (FBL) in primary education, particularly through the use of Studio Ghibli films. The main outcomes highlight increased student engagement (as observed by teachers and reflected in student feedback), alongside indications of enhanced critical and creative thinking skills (derived primarily from teacher perceptions and qualitative analysis of student work), and the successful integration of transversal themes such as gender equality, environmental sustainability, and social values. The significance of this study lies in its demonstration of FBL as a potent educational approach, enriching the traditional curriculum and fostering essential competencies among students.

The implementation of FBL at the participating primary school in Madrid was met with enthusiastic participation from both students and teachers. The narrative depth and emotional resonance of the films captivated students, leading to heightened interest and active involvement in classroom activities. This engagement reflects the multimodal nature of animated films, which cater to diverse intelligences and enhance the learning experience for a wide range of students.

One of the key strengths demonstrated by FBL is its flexibility and adaptability to different educational contexts. The methodology can be tailored to suit various classroom settings, making it a versatile tool for educators. This adaptability is crucial in addressing the diverse needs of students and the dynamic nature of modern educational environments. The alignment of the project with the latest educational legislation in Spain—particularly Royal Decree 157/2022—ensured that the FBL methodology was not only innovative but also compliant with legal and regional educational standards. This compliance under-

scores the method's feasibility and its potential for broader implementation within the educational system.

5.1. Conclusion

This study explores Film-Based Learning (FBL) as a pedagogical innovation that effectively bridges cinematic storytelling with curricular objectives. By leveraging the narrative depth of Studio Ghibli films, FBL appeared to offer an alternative to traditional teaching methodologies, with teacher perceptions and qualitative analyses of student outputs suggesting a potential to encourage critical thinking and creative expression, alongside fostering value internalization. Notably, a considerable proportion of students were observed to explicitly link film themes to values and real-world applications, as evidenced by their reflections and teacher reports. It is important to note that indications regarding critical thinking and creative expression were primarily derived from these teacher perceptions and qualitative analyses of student productions and comments. The alignment of this methodology with Spain's Royal Decree 157/2022 underscores its viability for national curricula, particularly in cultivating transversal competencies such as environmental stewardship and gender equality. Notably, the film evaluation rubric emerged as a critical tool, enabling educators to systematically select age-appropriate content while addressing developmental needs. While challenges such as time constraints and the limitations regarding comprehensive pre/post quantitative student data collection highlight operational complexities and areas for future methodological refinement, the study provides a replicable framework for integrating cinema into classroom settings, one that prioritizes student engagement without compromising academic rigor. Ultimately, these findings affirm the role of cinema not merely as a diversion, but as a catalyst for transformative education.

5.2. Challenges and Limitations

Despite its strengths, the study identified challenges inherent to the FBL methodology and limitations related to the research design that warrant attention. The selection of appropriate films proved critical, as not all Studio Ghibli films are equally suitable for all primary grades or developmental stages. The film evaluation rubric developed for this purpose served as a valuable tool; however, its effective application relies on teachers' pedagogical expertise in aligning cinematic content with specific learning objectives and student needs. Additionally, the film evaluation rubric, while reviewed by peers for clarity and applicability, was not subjected to formal psychometric validation, which should be considered when interpreting its application.

Furthermore, the findings of this study should be considered in light of its scope. The research was conducted within a single primary school setting. While this allowed for an in-depth implementation of the FBL proposal, it also limits the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts with different demographic characteristics or resources. Therefore, while this initial exploration provides positive indications regarding the viability and potential of FBL, it underscores the need for broader research. Future studies encompassing a more diverse range of schools and student populations are essential to further validate these findings, refine the methodology, and expand its applicability across various educational settings. While the study adhered to ethical safeguard, anonymity, voluntary participation, and data encryption, it faced limitations. Single-school sampling restricts generalizability, and the four-week intervention may not capture long-term outcomes. These constraints highlight the need for future research in diverse educational contexts.

5.3. Future Research

While this study demonstrates the potential of FBL, further research is needed to:

1. Explore its effectiveness in diverse educational contexts (e.g., rural vs. urban schools).
2. Investigate its long-term impact on student outcomes (e.g., academic performance, social skills).
3. Develop standardized tools for film selection and evaluation.

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