
Original Research Article

Cinematic Pedagogy and Competency-Based Education: Reconfiguring Teaching and Learning in the University

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Abstract: Contemporary universities are increasingly expected to move beyond transmission-oriented teaching towards learner-centred approaches that develop demonstrable competencies, including critical thinking, communication, creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, and the application of knowledge in situated contexts. Competency-Based Education (CBE) foregrounds practical application, learner agency, and authentic demonstration, while scholarship on film and education recognises cinema's potential to facilitate experiential, visual, and multimodal learning. However, limited attention has been given to how cinematic form itself can function as a pedagogical framework for enacting CBE in university classrooms. This paper addresses this gap by conceptualising cinematic pedagogy beyond the use of films as instructional materials, positioning it as learning organised through narrative, visuality, performance, sound, editing, interpretation, and critical engagement. It examines how cinematic pedagogy can reconfigure university teaching and learning within a competency-based framework and facilitate the development and demonstration of learner competencies. The study adopts a qualitative interpretive, literature-based design, synthesising scholarship on CBE, film pedagogy, multimodal learning, visual literacy, reflective practice, and higher education. Findings indicate that cinematic pedagogy promotes experiential, participatory, reflective, and multimodal learning, enabling learners to interpret complex situations, communicate perspectives, collaborate, solve problems, and connect theory with lived realities. The study has implications for curriculum design, pedagogy, learner engagement, and authentic competency-based assessment.

Keywords: Cinematic Pedagogy; Competency-Based Education; Higher Education; Multimodal Learning

Introduction

The contemporary university is being asked to perform a difficult pedagogical balancing act. It must preserve disciplinary knowledge while preparing learners to act intelligently in situations that cannot be reduced to the reproduction of that knowledge. Employers, professional bodies, governments and students increasingly expect higher education to cultivate capacities that travel across contexts: critical judgement, communication, collaboration, creativity, ethical reasoning, digital and media literacy, problem-solving, and the ability to transform knowledge into action. Competency-Based Education (CBE) responds to this pressure by shifting attention from what institutions deliver to what learners can demonstrate. In its stronger formulations, CBE is not simply a change in the wording of learning outcomes. It entails a reorganisation of curriculum, pedagogy, pacing, feedback, assessment and the relationship between academic knowledge and practical performance (Boyer, 2019; Evans et al., 2021; Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020).

This shift creates a significant pedagogical question. If competence is something learners must enact rather than merely know about, what forms of classroom experience allow that enactment to occur? The question becomes particularly pressing in universities where lectures, readings, examinations and written assignments remain dominant even when curricula formally identify communication, creativity, critical thinking and collaboration as graduate attributes. Recent scholarship on CBE has repeatedly identified implementation, assessment and institutional alignment as persistent challenges. Tahirsylaj and Sundberg (2020), for example, demonstrate that competence remains inconsistently defined across curricula, while Evans et al. (2021) show that implementation requires systemic changes rather than isolated instructional innovations. In higher education, Boyer (2019) similarly describes CBE as a student-centred and potentially transformative design whose implementation depends upon institutional systems capable of supporting flexible and personalised learning.

Within this debate, film presents an underdeveloped pedagogical possibility. Film is already widespread in university teaching, but its use often remains instrumental: a lecturer shows a film to illustrate a concept, provide an example, introduce a social issue, or make a lesson more engaging. Such practices are useful, but they do not exhaust the pedagogical possibilities of cinema. Recent work has begun to challenge this limited conception. Nguyen (2023) demonstrates that university lecturers need film literacy if feature films and television are to function effectively as multimodal pedagogies. Her study emphasises that film selection, supporting materials, screening practices and classroom activities influence what students actually learn from audiovisual representations. Walker (2022) likewise argues that film education requires critical media literacy rather than technical skills detached from questions of representation and power. More recent research has extended the argument. Bursa (2026) found that film-based social justice education can strengthen empathy and critical awareness among pre-service teachers, while Mahajan and Bhowmik (2026) provide empirical evidence that an interdisciplinary film course can generate multiple dimensions of undergraduate engagement, including academic and skills relevance.

These studies are important, but a conceptual gap remains. Film pedagogy and CBE have largely been discussed as separate educational concerns. Film scholarship asks how cinema can facilitate engagement, critical literacy, reflection or disciplinary understanding; CBE scholarship asks how institutions can define, teach and assess competencies. Less attention has been given to the possibility that the formal properties of cinema, its organisation of time, space, image, sound, narrative, performance, perspective and editing, can themselves constitute a pedagogical architecture through which competencies are developed and demonstrated. The issue, therefore, is not simply whether films improve learning. It is whether cinematic ways of organising experience can help universities rethink what learning looks like when competence, rather than information accumulation, becomes the central pedagogical concern.

This paper advances the concept of cinematic pedagogy as such a framework. Cinematic pedagogy is understood here as the deliberate use of cinematic texts, cinematic modes of representation, and film-making practices to organise inquiry, interpretation, collaboration, reflection, communication and performance. The concept, therefore, extends beyond film as an audiovisual resource. It treats cinema as a way of structuring encounters with knowledge. A scene can become a problem-space; editing can become a model for comparison and synthesis; characterisation can become a basis for ethical and perspectival inquiry; sound can direct attention to dimensions of experience that are not immediately visible; and production can convert learners from consumers of representation into producers of knowledge. The pedagogical question consequently changes from “What does the film teach?” to “What kinds of knowing, doing and reflecting does the cinematic encounter make possible?”

The paper is interdisciplinary by design. Education provides the framework for understanding competence, curriculum, learner agency and assessment; teaching and learning scholarship clarifies the pedagogical processes through which students interpret, discuss, practise and reflect; film studies supplies the conceptual vocabulary for analysing narrative, *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, sound and spectatorship. Bringing these fields together allows cinematic pedagogy to be theorised not as a fashionable classroom technique but as a serious mode of curriculum enactment. The paper aims to examine how cinematic pedagogy can reconfigure teaching and learning within university CBE and asks three related questions: How can cinematic form facilitate the development of university-level competencies? What pedagogical processes are necessary to transform film viewing into competency enactment? What implications does cinematic pedagogy have for curriculum design, lecturer roles, learner agency and assessment?

The central argument is that cinematic pedagogy has particular value for CBE because it can bridge three domains that are too often separated in university education: conceptual knowledge, situated experience and demonstrable performance. Its contribution lies not in making learning entertaining, nor in assuming that visual media are inherently superior to print. Rather, cinema can provide complex, situated and emotionally resonant objects of inquiry while requiring learners to interpret formal choices, test claims, negotiate perspectives, construct arguments and produce responses. When these activities are

intentionally aligned with competency outcomes, the cinematic encounter becomes a site where knowing, doing and reflecting are integrated.

Competency-based education and the university

CBE is best understood as a reorientation of educational logic rather than a single instructional method. Its fundamental question is not simply whether students have encountered a body of content, but whether they can mobilise knowledge, skills and dispositions appropriately in meaningful contexts. This distinction matters because competence is inherently relational. A student may know the principles of communication but remain unable to communicate effectively in a difficult professional situation. A learner may define critical thinking but fail to evaluate competing claims when confronted with ambiguous evidence. CBE therefore places emphasis on demonstration, transfer and application. The literature nevertheless warns against treating “competence” as a simple list of discrete skills. Tahirsylaj and Sundberg (2020) show that the competence discourse contains considerable conceptual variation, with definitions differing across educational systems and disciplines. This creates a danger of reducing competence to atomised behaviours that can be easily ticked off in curriculum documents. Such reductionism is pedagogically problematic because complex competencies emerge through the interaction of knowledge, judgement, context, identity and experience. Competent performance is rarely a single observable act; it is an ability to make appropriate choices under conditions of uncertainty.

This point is particularly important in university education. Universities are not vocational training centres alone. Their educational responsibility includes developing the capacity to interpret complexity, question assumptions and generate new knowledge. A robust university CBE model, therefore, needs to avoid replacing disciplinary depth with generic employability skills. Instead, competencies should be understood as ways of mobilising disciplinary knowledge in intellectually and socially meaningful situations. The challenge is to design learning environments in which students can practise that mobilisation before they encounter high-stakes professional contexts. Recent CBE scholarship reinforces the systemic nature of this challenge. Evans et al. (2021) argue that CBE reshapes understandings of what, when, where and how students learn and demonstrate knowledge and skills. Their review also highlights assessment as fundamental because claims about competence ultimately depend on evidence of performance. Boyer (2019) similarly identifies the organisational infrastructure required to support CBE in higher education, including systems capable of accommodating student-centred and personalised learning pathways. CBE, therefore, cannot be implemented convincingly by changing learning outcomes while retaining unchanged pedagogical and assessment routines.

The implication is that pedagogy becomes the hinge between curricular intention and demonstrated competence. If a programme specifies critical thinking but students spend most of their time listening to lectures and reproducing notes, the curriculum contains a contradiction. If collaboration is identified as a graduate competency but assessment

remains overwhelmingly individual, the pedagogical system sends a different message from the formal curriculum. If creativity is valued but students are rewarded only for reproducing predetermined answers, creativity becomes rhetorical rather than enacted. This is where cinematic pedagogy becomes significant. Cinema provides a pedagogical environment in which knowledge can be encountered as situated, contested and multidimensional. A film does not merely present information; it constructs a world through selective choices. It asks viewers, often implicitly, to decide what to notice, whose perspective to trust, how to interpret gaps, and how to relate one event to another. These processes can be pedagogically designed to support competencies rather than treated as incidental responses to entertainment.

From film as a teaching aid to cinematic pedagogy

The distinction between “using film” and “cinematic pedagogy” is central to this paper. The first describes a resource decision: the lecturer introduces a film because it illustrates content or increases engagement. The second describes a pedagogical orientation: the lecturer designs learning around the specific affordances of cinematic representation and production. The distinction is consequential because a film can be present in a classroom without changing the epistemic structure of learning. Nguyen’s (2023) research is especially important in this regard. Drawing on lecturers across disciplines, she shows that the pedagogical effectiveness of feature films and television depends on film literacy, supporting materials, screening choices and learning activities. Film is therefore not pedagogically self-explanatory. Students do not necessarily learn what a lecturer intends simply because they watch a sophisticated film. Without framing, questioning and opportunities for interpretation, viewing can remain passive. The lecturer may believe that students have experienced a rich multimodal text, while students have primarily consumed a narrative.

Film literacy changes this situation because it makes the form itself available for inquiry. Students can ask why a close-up was used, what an editing transition implies, how sound modifies the meaning of an image, whose perspective structures a sequence, what the camera withholds, or how mise-en-scène positions characters in relation to social power. Such questions transform spectatorship into analysis. They also create opportunities for competencies that CBE values: observation, evidence-based reasoning, communication, interpretation, collaboration and reflective judgement. Walker (2022) extends this concern into film education by arguing for critical media literacy within skills-based film classrooms. The point is not merely that students should know how to operate cameras or editing software. Technical competence without critical analysis can reproduce inherited assumptions about representation. Film pedagogy, therefore, requires both production and critique. Learners need to understand that every cinematic choice constructs meaning and that production is consequently an ethical and social act.

The same principle applies outside film programmes. In a literature classroom, a film adaptation can become an opportunity to compare narrative strategies and medium-specific choices. In history, documentary and historical drama can become objects

through which students interrogate evidence, memory and representation. In sociology, film can stage social relations and institutional structures for analysis. In teacher education, classroom scenes can become cases for examining professional judgement, inclusion, authority and learner relationships. In business education, films can provide situations for analysing leadership, organisational culture, ethics and decision-making. In health education, carefully selected narratives can create spaces for examining communication, professional identity and ethical dilemmas. The interdisciplinary value of film, therefore, lies partly in its capacity to connect disciplinary concepts to complex human situations. Mahajan and Bhowmik's (2026) study is significant because it empirically demonstrates the interdisciplinary potential of film analysis among undergraduates. Their study of a "Films and Society" course found that academic and skills relevance was strongly associated with perceived learning, alongside societal, aesthetic and cognitive dimensions. The finding supports the argument that film analysis need not be confined to film studies. When situated within a multidisciplinary curriculum, cinematic texts can operate as boundary objects through which students encounter questions that exceed the conceptual boundaries of a single discipline.

Cinematic pedagogy, therefore, involves a shift from film as illustration to film as inquiry. It also involves a shift from viewing it as an endpoint to viewing it as the beginning of a sequence. A pedagogically designed cinematic lesson may involve pre-viewing questions, focused viewing, scene annotation, group interpretation, comparative analysis, reflective writing, debate, role-play, creative production and competency-based assessment. The film becomes one component of an experiential learning cycle rather than the lesson itself.

Theoretical foundations of cinematic pedagogy

The interdisciplinary argument developed here draws on four mutually reinforcing theoretical orientations: constructivist learning, experiential learning, multimodal learning and critical visual literacy. These are not presented as interchangeable theories. Each illuminates a different dimension of the pedagogical problem. Constructivist approaches foreground the learner's active role in making meaning. From this perspective, knowledge is not simply transferred from lecturer to student; learners interpret new information in relation to prior understandings, social interaction and contextual experience. Cinematic texts are particularly compatible with this orientation because they are interpretively open. A scene can generate multiple plausible readings, and those readings can be tested through evidence, discussion and comparison. The pedagogical value lies partly in the fact that cinema can make interpretation visible. Experiential learning adds another dimension. Learning becomes more consequential when learners move through cycles of experience, reflection, conceptualisation and experimentation. Film can provide vicarious experiences, but cinematic pedagogy should not stop there. Students need opportunities to reflect on what they have seen, conceptualise the underlying issues and experiment with responses. A film about conflict, for example, should not simply evoke emotion; it can become the basis for analysing conflict theory, evaluating decisions, simulating alternative responses and

producing a reflective argument. The cinematic encounter thus becomes a trigger for a broader learning cycle.

Multimodal learning is equally important because cinema communicates through coordinated modes. Image, spoken language, music, ambient sound, gesture, movement, colour, framing and editing operate together. Nguyen (2023) demonstrates the importance of film literacy for understanding how these modes affect learning. The implication is not that multimodality automatically produces better learning. Rather, learners need to be taught how to interpret multimodal meaning. The ability to read an image critically is itself a competency increasingly relevant to professional and civic life. Visual literacy provides the critical dimension. Matusiak (2020) shows that visual literacy has become an important area of educational research as images increasingly shape academic and everyday information practices. Rattanawongsa et al. (2020) further identify components of visual literacy among undergraduates that include accessing, interpreting, evaluating, using and creating visual materials, alongside ethical awareness. These capacities align strongly with the logic of CBE because they involve observable acts of interpretation, evaluation and production. The ACRL Framework for Visual Literacy in Higher Education similarly treats visual competence as multidimensional, involving perception, critical discernment and ethical visual practice (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2022). Although visual literacy is broader than film literacy, cinema offers an especially rich site for cultivating it because moving images combine temporal, spatial, auditory and narrative dimensions. A learner who can interpret cinematic representation is not merely acquiring knowledge about film; the learner is practising ways of reading contemporary visual culture.

Critical pedagogy adds an additional caution. Film is never neutral. Every cinematic representation involves selection, framing and exclusion. Who speaks? Who is visible? Who remains outside the frame? What social assumptions are normalised? Which forms of knowledge are treated as authoritative? Walker (2022) argues that film education must address such questions if it is to avoid reproducing representational inequalities. Bursa's (2026) findings similarly indicate that film can stimulate critical awareness of systemic inequality when pedagogical processes explicitly connect representation to social justice. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that cinematic pedagogy should be understood as a layered process: learners encounter a multimodal text; they interpret its formal and social construction; they connect it with disciplinary knowledge; they test interpretations collaboratively; they reflect on their assumptions; and they produce evidence of learning. This sequence closely corresponds with the movement from knowledge acquisition to competency enactment.

Methodological orientation: A literature-based interdisciplinary inquiry

This paper adopts a qualitative interpretive literature-based research design. It does not report data collected from a new cohort of students or lecturers. Instead, it synthesises and critically interprets recent scholarship published between 2017 and 2026 on competency-based education, film pedagogy, film literacy, visual literacy, reflective

practice, multimodal learning and university teaching. The purpose of the design is conceptual development: to identify convergences across fields and formulate an interdisciplinary account of cinematic pedagogy appropriate to university CBE. The literature was examined thematically rather than through a claim of exhaustive systematic review. Particular attention was given to peer-reviewed research that directly addressed film in higher education, cinematic pedagogy, visual literacy, teacher education, competency-based education and assessment. The analysis focused on four recurring questions: how film is positioned pedagogically; what kinds of learning it appears to support; what conditions shape its effectiveness; and how those conditions relate to competency development.

The interpretive approach is appropriate because the paper is concerned with meanings and pedagogical relationships rather than effect sizes alone. A central issue is not simply whether film “works,” but what kind of learning is made possible when film is integrated with specific pedagogical processes. This distinction is important because the literature itself cautions against assuming that the presence of film constitutes effective pedagogy. Nguyen (2023), for instance, identifies lecturer decision-making, film literacy and instructional design as significant variables. Similarly, Roberts et al. (2021) demonstrate that reflective practice becomes more productive when learners receive structured frameworks, dialogue and coaching. The literature, therefore, functions in this paper as both evidence and conceptual material. The goal is to move from isolated findings towards a pedagogical proposition that can be tested in future empirical research.

Cinematic form as pedagogical architecture

The strongest case for cinematic pedagogy emerges when the formal properties of cinema are treated as pedagogical resources. Narrative is the first of these. Narrative gives events sequence, consequence and perspective. It can transform abstract concepts into situated problems. A lecture may define ethical leadership; a film can place a character in a situation in which competing obligations make ethical leadership difficult to practise. The educational task then becomes interpretive and performative: students identify the dilemma, evaluate choices, construct alternative responses and justify them. Narrative also supports systems thinking. Many university concepts involve relationships among actors, institutions, histories and consequences. Film can make these relationships visible by distributing information across scenes and perspectives. Learners can be asked to map causal relationships, identify turning points, distinguish evidence from inference and reconstruct alternative narrative trajectories. Such activities move beyond comprehension towards analysis and synthesis.

Mise-en-scène provides another pedagogical resource. Space, costume, lighting, props, setting and actor placement communicate social relationships without necessarily being verbalised. When students learn to read mise-en-scène, they learn to attend to implicit structures. A classroom scene, for example, can reveal authority through spatial arrangement before a character speaks. A workplace film can communicate organisational

hierarchy through office architecture, movement and access. Such analysis develops observational precision and interpretive judgement.

Cinematography similarly trains attention. Camera distance, angle, movement and framing influence the viewer's relationship with characters and events. A close-up can intensify affect; a long shot can situate an individual within a broader environment; a subjective shot can align the viewer with a character's perspective. When students identify these choices and relate them to meaning, they practise evidence-based interpretation. The competency is not "knowing camera shots" in isolation. It is being able to explain how formal choices shape meaning and to support that explanation with evidence.

Editing introduces temporal and relational thinking. Montage can place images in conceptual proximity even when they are separated in story time. Cross-cutting can make parallel processes visible. Ellipsis can require the viewer to infer what has happened between scenes. These techniques can become models for analytical reasoning. Students can compare sequences, identify what has been omitted, and discuss how different arrangements of the same material would produce different interpretations. In this sense, editing becomes a pedagogy of selection, sequencing and argument.

Sound is equally important because it often carries meanings that images alone do not provide. Dialogue communicates explicit information, while music, silence, ambient sound and sonic transitions can shape affect and interpretation. Teaching students to analyse sound expands the range of evidence they recognise as meaningful. It also demonstrates a broader principle of multimodal literacy: meaning is produced through relations among modes, not through isolated elements.

Performance provides another bridge between interpretation and competency. Characters model decisions, relationships, conflicts and consequences. Students can analyse performance and then reconstruct scenes from alternative perspectives. They may role-play a character, rewrite dialogue, stage a missing scene or produce a short response film. Such activities require students to transform interpretation into performance, which is precisely the movement CBE seeks to make visible.

Finally, spectatorship itself can become pedagogical. Students should be encouraged to recognise their own interpretive positions. Campbell's (2022) reflective study of a South African teacher education film module is instructive because the author discovered that learning occurred not simply through the film but through reflection on how personal and socio-cultural assumptions shaped pedagogical responses. This insight complicates the idea that film produces empathy automatically. The learner's position matters. Cinematic pedagogy, therefore, needs reflective structures that ask not only "What does this film show?" but also "Why did I respond to it in this way?"

Cinematic pedagogy and the development of core competencies

Critical Thinking and Analytical Reasoning

Critical thinking is perhaps the competency most readily associated with film analysis, but its development depends on how film is taught. Passive viewing can generate

opinions without necessarily producing reasoned judgment. Cinematic pedagogy becomes critical when learners are required to move from reaction to evidence. A useful sequence is observation, interpretation, justification and evaluation. Students first identify what is represented, then propose what it means, support the interpretation through formal or narrative evidence, and finally compare competing readings. This process is valuable because cinema often contains ambiguity. Ambiguity creates an educational space in which there may be several plausible interpretations, but not infinitely many equally defensible ones. Students must learn to distinguish between personal response and evidence-based argument. That distinction is central to university-level critical thinking.

Communication and Argumentation

Cinema can also support communication competencies because it provides a shared object around which learners can construct arguments. Students who disagree about a scene are not simply exchanging preferences; they can be required to identify the precise cinematic evidence underlying their positions. Group discussion, therefore, becomes a rehearsal for professional communication, where claims need to be articulated, challenged and revised. The production dimension strengthens this further. Asking students to create a short scene, video essay, or visual argument requires them to communicate through multiple modes. They must decide what to show, what to say, what to omit and how to structure their message. Communication becomes an act of design rather than only verbal performance.

Collaboration

Cinematic production is inherently collaborative. Even a short educational video can involve scripting, research, directing, acting, cinematography, sound, editing and production management. When such tasks are assessed through clearly defined competencies, students can demonstrate collaboration in ways that conventional individual essays cannot capture. However, collaboration should not be romanticised. Group work can reproduce unequal participation. CBE therefore requires transparent criteria for collaborative performance, individual reflection and peer contribution. The film project becomes pedagogically valuable when students learn not merely to work together but to negotiate roles, resolve disagreements, meet deadlines and produce a coherent collective artefact.

Creativity and Problem-Solving

Cinema provides a particularly strong environment for creative problem-solving because production involves constraints. Students must work with limited time, equipment, locations, performers and editing resources. These constraints require decisions. Creativity becomes the capacity to generate effective alternatives within real conditions rather than the production of unrestricted novelty. This is closely aligned with CBE. Competence involves appropriate action in context, and context always imposes constraints. A learner who can redesign a scene when a location becomes unavailable, communicate a complex idea

through limited visual resources, or restructure a narrative after peer feedback is demonstrating adaptive competence.

Ethical Reasoning and Social Awareness

Film can also create spaces for ethical inquiry. Characters frequently confront dilemmas involving justice, responsibility, identity, power and consequence. Yet ethical learning should not be reduced to asking whether a character was “right” or “wrong.” More demanding pedagogy asks students to reconstruct the conditions surrounding the decision, identify competing values, examine consequences and consider alternative actions. Bursa’s (2026) research is relevant here because participants reported enhanced empathy and critical awareness after structured engagement with films addressing social justice. The significance of the finding lies not in the claim that film automatically produces empathy, but in the role of pedagogical framing. The film created a representational encounter; discussion and reflection transformed that encounter into learning.

Reflective Practice

Reflection is central to competency because competent action requires learners to examine their own decisions. Film offers repeated opportunities for this. Students can reflect on their responses to characters, their assumptions about social situations, their interpretive choices, and their performance in production tasks. Roberts et al. (2021) demonstrate that reflective practice becomes more effective when structured and dialogic. Cinematic pedagogy can operationalise this insight through viewing journals, reflective annotations, peer critique and post-production commentary. The reflective component should ask students to explain how their thinking changed and why, rather than simply describe what they watched.

Reconfiguring the lecturer and the learner

Cinematic pedagogy changes the lecturer’s role. The lecturer remains important, but the role shifts from primary transmitter of information to designer, facilitator, curator and critical interlocutor. This does not mean abandoning disciplinary authority. On the contrary, cinematic pedagogy requires lecturers to possess sufficient disciplinary and film literacy to guide interpretation without closing it down. Nguyen (2023) emphasises the importance of the lecturer's knowledge about film literacy. This is crucial because poor selection or poorly structured viewing can produce cognitive overload or superficial engagement. The lecturer must therefore make deliberate decisions about what to show, how much to show, when to pause, what questions to pose and how the film connects to the intended competencies.

The learner’s role changes as well. Instead of receiving an interpretation, learners become interpreters and producers. They investigate, question, compare, construct, perform and revise. This is consistent with CBE’s emphasis on demonstration. A learner cannot demonstrate competence merely by repeating the lecturer’s reading of a film. The learner must produce evidence of independent judgement. This redistribution of pedagogical authority also introduces productive uncertainty. Film interpretation rarely has one final answer, and this can be unsettling in educational systems accustomed to predetermined

responses. Yet uncertainty is precisely where higher-order competencies become visible. Learners must make judgements without complete certainty, justify decisions and remain open to revision. Campbell (2022) offers an important warning here. Reflecting on teaching film to pre-service teachers, the author found that the deeper learning involved understanding how personal socio-cultural assumptions shaped pedagogical practice. Cinematic pedagogy should therefore not simply place students at the centre while leaving the lecturer unchanged. It should make the pedagogical relationship itself open to reflection.

Designing cinematic learning experiences

The value of cinematic pedagogy depends on design. A lecturer cannot assume that a film becomes educational simply because it has educational content. Pedagogy begins before the screen is switched on. The lecturer must identify the competency to be developed, the disciplinary knowledge required, the cinematic material that can generate productive inquiry, and the evidence through which learning will eventually be demonstrated. This backward movement from intended competency to learning experience is especially important in CBE because it prevents film from becoming an attractive but disconnected activity.

The first principle is purposeful selection. Film selection should begin with the learning problem rather than with the popularity of the film. A lecturer should ask what the film makes visible, difficult, ambiguous or contestable that another pedagogical resource might not make equally visible. A film should earn its place in the curriculum. Its length, cultural context, representational assumptions, accessibility and relationship to the intended competencies should be considered before inclusion. Nguyen (2023) similarly emphasises selection criteria and supporting materials as central to effective film-based teaching. The second principle is pedagogical framing. Students need to know what they are watching for. Framing does not mean giving them the interpretation in advance. It means identifying an analytical purpose. A lecturer might ask students to track how authority is represented, how a conflict develops, how evidence is constructed, how a character's decision changes across the narrative, or how sound and image create meaning. Such questions turn viewing into inquiry. The third principle is active viewing. Instead of presenting an uninterrupted feature film in a long session, lecturers can use selected sequences, pauses, comparative viewing and scene annotation. Students can record observations, identify formal choices, formulate questions and compare interpretations. The purpose is not to fragment cinema unnecessarily but to make its formal operations available for deliberate attention. The fourth principle is dialogic interpretation. Students should have opportunities to test interpretations with peers. Small-group discussion can be structured around evidence rather than opinion. One group may defend an interpretation while another challenges it using alternative cinematic evidence. Such dialogue develops both communication and intellectual humility because learners discover that plausible interpretations can coexist while still differing in evidential strength. The fifth principle is production. Students should sometimes move behind the screen. Rewriting a scene, storyboarding an alternative ending, creating a short documentary, producing a video essay or recording an audio-visual argument requires

learners to make decisions about representation. Production, therefore, exposes the constructed nature of media and makes learning performative. It also allows lecturers to observe competencies that remain invisible in conventional written assessment. The sixth principle is reflection. Students should be asked to examine both their learning and their positioning. Reflection can address how an interpretation changed, what evidence was persuasive, what assumptions were challenged, how group decisions were negotiated, and what the student would change in a revised production. Campbell (2022) demonstrates the importance of this reflexive dimension by showing how engagement with film prompted deeper reflection on the teacher's own socio-cultural assumptions. The seventh principle is assessment alignment. Every cinematic activity should connect to an assessable competency. If students analyse cinematography, the rubric should identify what competent analysis looks like. If they produce a film, the assessment should distinguish conceptual understanding from technical polish. If collaboration is an intended competency, evidence of contribution and negotiation should be captured. Such alignment prevents the cinematic component from becoming an extracurricular activity attached to a conventional course.

Institutional and lecturer readiness

Cinematic pedagogy also requires institutional conditions. Universities need access to suitable audiovisual resources, screening spaces, digital platforms, copyright guidance and staff development. Yet infrastructure should not be confused with pedagogy. A technologically sophisticated classroom can still reproduce transmission-oriented teaching. Conversely, a modest classroom can support rich cinematic inquiry when lecturers possess pedagogical confidence, and students have structured opportunities to analyse and create. Staff development is therefore crucial. Lecturers who are experts in their disciplines may not automatically possess film literacy, just as film specialists may not automatically possess expertise in competency-based curriculum design. Interdisciplinary professional development can address this divide. Film scholars can contribute expertise in form, representation and production, while education specialists can contribute knowledge of curriculum alignment, assessment and learning design. Collaboration between the two fields is itself an example of the interdisciplinary practice that the paper advocates. This institutional dimension is particularly relevant in Kenya. Current scholarship on university preparedness suggests that CBE implementation requires more than curricular revision; it also depends on staff capacity, assessment systems, infrastructure and organisational readiness (Kawinzi & Mulwa, 2026). Imbunya (2026) similarly argues that Kenyan universities need pedagogical shifts from teacher-centred towards learner-centred approaches. Cinematic pedagogy can contribute to this shift, but only if institutions treat it as part of a broader pedagogical transformation.

Research Agenda

The conceptual framework proposed here creates several directions for empirical inquiry. First, researchers could examine whether different cinematic tasks produce different competency outcomes. For example, scene analysis may be particularly useful for critical reasoning, while collaborative production may provide stronger evidence of

communication and teamwork. Comparative studies could test these possibilities. Second, research could investigate the relationship between film literacy and learning outcomes. Nguyen (2023) indicates that lecturers' film literacy shapes pedagogical decisions. Future studies could examine whether students taught by lecturers with stronger film literacy demonstrate greater ability to interpret multimodal texts. Third, longitudinal studies could examine whether competencies developed through cinematic pedagogy transfer beyond the course. It is one thing for students to perform well on a film analysis assignment and another for them to apply critical visual reasoning in professional or civic settings. Fourth, research should investigate inclusion. Students enter university with different levels of access to cinema, technology and cultural knowledge. Empirical work should therefore examine how cinematic pedagogy can be designed so that it expands rather than reproduces educational inequalities. Finally, Kenyan universities offer a particularly valuable context for research because the country is negotiating a significant transition towards competency-oriented education. Future studies could examine how cinematic pedagogy operates across public and private universities, disciplines, resource environments and student populations. Such research would move the concept developed here from a theoretical proposition to an evidence-based pedagogical framework.

Assessment: From watching to demonstrating

The strongest test of cinematic pedagogy within CBE is assessment. If students watch a film and then sit a conventional recall examination, the pedagogical potential of the cinematic experience is largely neutralised. Assessment must therefore capture the competencies that the cinematic process is intended to develop. Authentic assessment provides one pathway. Students might produce a video essay, scene analysis, documentary proposal, adaptation, collaborative short film, oral defence, reflective portfolio or multimodal critical presentation. Each task should be mapped to explicit competencies and accompanied by criteria that distinguish levels of performance. Assessment should also value the process. Film production is iterative. Scripts change, footage fails, interpretations evolve, and edits are revised. A final product alone cannot reveal all the competencies involved. Process documentation, reflective commentary and peer assessment can provide additional evidence. This aligns with the broader CBE literature, which treats assessment as central rather than supplementary. Evans et al. (2021) note that determining competence is fundamentally an assessment decision. A curriculum may claim to value creativity, but unless assessment allows creativity to count, the claim remains weak. Likewise, collaboration must be visible in assessment if it is to become meaningful. This alignment makes cinematic activity academically accountable: students are assessed for learning, not merely for producing polished media. Alignment supports transparent and defensible competency claims.

Towards a conceptual model of cinematic competency pedagogy

The analysis suggests a five-stage model through which cinematic pedagogy can support CBE: encounter, interrogation, interpretation, production and demonstration. The first stage, encounter, involves purposeful exposure to a cinematic text or practice. The film

is selected because it creates an authentic or intellectually productive situation connected to the competency and disciplinary objective. The second stage, interrogation, involves guided questioning. Learners identify assumptions, perspectives, contradictions and formal choices. The third stage, interpretation, involves constructing and defending meaning through disciplinary concepts and evidence. The fourth stage, production, requires learners to transform their understanding into an artefact, performance, argument or solution. The fifth stage, demonstration, involves assessment and reflection in which learners show what they can do and explain how their thinking developed. This sequence distinguishes cinematic pedagogy from conventional film use. In a conventional approach, the sequence may be simply “teach concept, show film, discuss.” In cinematic competency pedagogy, the sequence is recursive. Encounter generates questions; questions produce interpretation; interpretation informs production; production generates feedback; feedback leads to revision and reflection.

The model also allows different disciplines to adapt cinema without reducing disciplinary specificity. A literature course may emphasise adaptation, narrative and symbolism. A teacher education course may emphasise classroom interaction and professional judgement. A business course may focus on organisational decisions. A health course may explore communication and ethical dilemmas. The cinematic framework remains consistent while disciplinary competencies change. The model further supports the integration of cognitive, affective and practical learning. Cognitive processes involve interpretation and analysis; affective processes involve perspective-taking and ethical reflection; practical processes involve production and performance. CBE becomes richer when these domains are not artificially separated.

Discussion

The central contribution of this paper is to reposition cinema from pedagogical object to pedagogical architecture. This distinction addresses a limitation in both film pedagogy and CBE scholarship. Film pedagogy has demonstrated that audiovisual media can support engagement, critical literacy, reflection and interdisciplinary learning. CBE scholarship has established the importance of authentic performance, learner agency, assessment and contextual application. The conceptual space between these literatures is where cinematic pedagogy becomes most productive. The argument does not rest on the assumption that film is inherently more engaging than text. Such a claim would be both empirically weak and pedagogically unnecessary. Rather, cinema offers a distinctive configuration of modes through which learners can encounter complexity. It can show bodies in space, actions unfolding in time, relationships changing, institutions operating, and consequences accumulating. These characteristics make it particularly suitable for situated inquiry.

The concept also challenges the idea that competencies are detachable from knowledge. Cinematic analysis requires knowledge. Students cannot interpret historical representation without historical knowledge, analyse organisational behaviour without conceptual frameworks, or evaluate ethical dilemmas without understanding relevant

principles. Cinema, therefore, does not replace disciplinary knowledge; it creates situations in which disciplinary knowledge must be mobilised.

This is perhaps the most important relationship between cinema and CBE. The movement from knowledge to competence is not a movement away from knowledge. It is a movement towards its purposeful use. Cinematic pedagogy can create that movement because films provide situations in which knowledge becomes necessary for interpretation and action. The approach also reconfigures learner agency. Instead of asking students to reproduce a predetermined interpretation, cinematic pedagogy can require them to construct, defend and revise interpretations. This creates a more dialogic classroom. The lecturer remains an expert but becomes less exclusively responsible for producing meaning. At the same time, the paper rejects an overly individualistic conception of agency. Competence develops through social interaction, institutional resources and cultural context. Group production, peer critique and collaborative interpretation demonstrate that learning is relational. This is especially relevant to university CBE because professional competence frequently involves working with others rather than performing in isolation.

The assessment implications are equally significant. If competence is demonstrated through performance, then assessment must move closer to authentic practices. Cinematic production provides one route, but the deeper principle is authenticity. Students should be assessed through tasks that require them to interpret, create, communicate, collaborate and justify decisions. Film can support these tasks, but it is the alignment among outcomes, learning activities and assessment that makes the pedagogy competency-based.

Conclusion

Cinematic pedagogy offers a productive way of rethinking the relationship between film, teaching and competency-based university education. The central argument of this paper is that cinema should not be confined to the role of an illustrative teaching aid. Its narrative, visual, auditory, spatial, temporal and performative properties can become components of a deliberately designed learning environment in which students interpret, question, collaborate, create, reflect and demonstrate competence. Recent scholarship supports the foundations of this proposition. Research on film in university teaching emphasises the importance of film literacy and instructional design; studies of visual literacy identify interpretation, evaluation and ethical production as important contemporary competencies; research on teacher education demonstrates the value of reflective and collaborative engagement; and CBE scholarship highlights the need to align curriculum, pedagogy and assessment around demonstrable performance (Bursa, 2026; Nguyen, 2023; Roberts et al., 2021; Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020). The interdisciplinary contribution of cinematic pedagogy lies in its capacity to connect these insights. Education contributes the language of competency, curriculum and assessment; teaching scholarship contributes learner-centred and reflective practice; film studies contributes attention to representation, form, spectatorship and production. Their intersection provides a basis for moving CBE from formal curriculum statements into lived classroom experience. The implication is not that every university course should become a film course. Rather,

universities should recognise cinema as one potentially powerful environment for competency enactment. When carefully selected, critically framed and pedagogically integrated, cinematic texts and production practices can help learners move from receiving knowledge to mobilising it. The university classroom can consequently become less a site where students demonstrate that they have encountered knowledge and more a site where they demonstrate what they can do with it.

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