

# INTEGRATING FILM ANALYSIS AND CASE STUDIES: PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN SOCIOLOGY EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** Traditional theoretical instruction in sociology courses often struggles with the challenges of abstraction and disconnect from practical application. This study explores an innovative teaching approach that combines film analysis with case study methodology, aiming to link abstract sociological concepts with real-world social contexts. Through techniques such as situational introduction, case analysis, and classroom discussion, students gain a concrete understanding of sociological theories within tangible social phenomena, enhancing emotional resonance, critical thinking, and social observational skills. This approach bridges theory and practice, fostering students' analytical capabilities in sociology and their preparedness for practical applications.

**Keywords:** Sociology teaching innovation; Film analysis; Case study method; Pedagogical reform; Elderly care management

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In undergraduate education for elderly care management, sociology serves as a foundational course, essential for helping students understand social structures and phenomena. However, the course faces unique challenges within this discipline. First, sociology is taught as a foundational course in older adults care management program, which falls under the umbrella of public management. Its core disciplines include public management, sociology, and medicine. Given the limited curriculum space, sociology is often restricted to a single foundational course. As a result, this course must establish a comprehensive framework for students to grasp fundamental sociological knowledge and concepts.

Second, compared to sociology majors, elderly care management students often face greater difficulty in understanding sociological theories and concepts. While sociology emphasizes understanding social phenomena and their structural mechanisms, along with fostering critical thinking, public management focuses more on managing public affairs and executing policies, with an emphasis on practicality and efficiency. Therefore, in constructing the curriculum and setting educational objectives within the framework of public management, it is essential to enhance students' capacity to assimilate abstract concepts and develop critical thinking skills.

To address these challenges, incorporating concrete examples becomes key to aiding students in understanding foundational sociological knowledge. Using vivid representations in films and applying case study methods allows for the integration of abstract sociological theories with real-life social phenomena. This enables students to comprehend complex sociological concepts in contextualized settings, thereby improving learning outcomes. This innovative approach not only stimulates students' interest but also enhances their understanding and application of sociological principles, laying a solid theoretical foundation for their future work in older adults care management. This paper examines the design and implementation of sociology course pedagogy that integrates film analysis with case studies, offering insights for undergraduate teaching in interdisciplinary fields. The goal is to provide valuable references for fostering effective teaching practices in the intersection of sociology and applied disciplines like older adults care management.

## 2 INTEGRATING FILM ANALYSIS AND CASE STUDY METHODS IN SOCIOLOGY EDUCATION: APPLICATIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL FEASIBILITY

### 2.1 Application and Feasibility of Combining Film Analysis and Case Studies in Sociology Courses

The use of films in sociology courses encompasses not only popular movies and television dramas but also documentaries and public sector-oriented programs. These diverse forms of media possess unique audiovisual advantages, offering rich social contexts that play a crucial role in teaching sociology[1]. Films can serve as a vital medium for knowledge dissemination and an effective teaching tool, providing students with an intuitive lens to analyze the interplay between society and human nature[2]. While watching films, students can also engage in analyzing social labels, visual representation, and societal phenomena, deepening their understanding of various social dimensions[3].

The case study method complements this approach by applying sociological theories to specific social scenarios, allowing students to adopt the role of social analysts. Through these experiences, they can explore the interplay between symbolic interactionism and diverse production relations[4]. This method encourages students to develop a deeper understanding of social phenomena and critical thinking, transforming abstract sociological theories into tangible social practices[5]. Additionally, case studies reveal the complexity of social phenomena and equip students to conduct

practical analyses in areas such as local governance through direct societal observations[6].

Combining case study methodology with films makes sociology teaching more engaging and effective, with significant pedagogical potential. Films are particularly suited for case analysis because of their media-specific attributes and emotional resonance[7]. These visual tools make social phenomena more accessible and relatable, enabling students to resonate deeply with the content and enhance their perception and analytical skills in real-world contexts[8]. Compared to traditional text-based cases, films integrate seamlessly into students' visual and cognitive experience, making case analysis more impactful and emotionally engaging[9].

The pedagogical feasibility of this combination can be illustrated through four key aspects:

### **2.1.1 Enhancing the intuitiveness and dynamism of social analysis**

The integration of case studies and films renders social analysis more vivid and dynamic. Unlike static text-based cases, films vividly depict characters and events, showcasing the dynamic nature of social phenomena. This approach highlights the complexity of societal interactions, enabling students to gain a deeper understanding of the interplay within social processes[10].

### **2.1.2 Fostering empathy and immersion**

Films evoke strong emotional resonance, allowing students to empathize with social phenomena in ways text-based cases cannot[11]. Since students often lack firsthand experience with many social phenomena, films provide a surrogate experience that immerses them in the social environment[12]. This compensates for their limited exposure while helping them better understand interpersonal interactions and societal processes within sociological theories.

### **2.1.3 Overcoming Practical Constraints and Standardizing Learning Experiences**

Limited time and space in classroom settings often preclude students from directly experiencing certain social situations. Films address this by offering a uniform contextual experience to all students, facilitating collective discussions and analysis[13]. This consistency establishes a shared foundation for case studies, enabling students to delve into social phenomena and their underlying theories from a common starting point[14].

### **2.1.4 Enhancing observation and critical thinking**

Combining films with case studies sharpens students' observational and analytical skills. By observing characters' behaviors, situational dynamics, and social interactions in films, students engage in multi-perspective analyses, fostering critical thinking[15]. This approach allows them to grasp social structures and stratification from diverse angles, making their understanding of sociological theories more multidimensional and comprehensive[16].

## **3 TEACHING DESIGN AND METHODS FOR COMBINING FILM ANALYSIS AND CASE STUDIES**

The pedagogical design for integrating film analysis with case studies in sociology courses involves a structured sequence: situational introduction, case analysis, group discussions, class presentations, and post-class reflections. This teaching cycle aims to closely tie sociological theories with real-life contexts, helping students bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical analysis.

### **3.1 Goals and Principles of the Teaching Design**

The teaching goals and principles serve as a guiding framework for this pedagogical innovation. The design follows the principles of "situational introduction, case analysis, and critical reflection," emphasizing student engagement and emotional resonance. The objective is to embed sociological theories into students' lived experiences, making the learning process both meaningful and practical.

Special attention is given to selecting films that resonate with the localized context of Chinese society. By incorporating culturally relevant examples, students are better equipped to understand and relate to societal phenomena, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the learning experience.

### **3.2 Case Selection for Teaching**

The selection of teaching cases is crucial in sociology courses. Appropriate cases can contextualize sociological concepts and theories, helping students connect abstract ideas to real-life scenarios. Films with relevant social backgrounds offer students a direct understanding of theories, evoke emotional resonance, and foster critical thinking. Particularly, films that reflect Chinese social phenomena allow students to relate them to their own experiences, deepening their comprehension of sociological theories and enhancing their social observation and analytical skills (Table 1).

**Table 1** Examples of Sociological Concepts and Film Selections

Key Sociological Concepts	Film Title	Summary of Film Content	Teaching Application
Social Conflict, Power Structure, Rule of Law vs. Rule of Man	The Story of Qiu Ju	A rural woman persistently petitions for justice, highlighting conflicts between local customs and legal awareness	Understanding the interaction between individual actions and social structures, and the tension between traditional norms and

Social Welfare, Healthcare Equity, Class Conflicts	Dying to Survive	A common man's struggle for access to affordable medicine, revealing issues of healthcare equity and welfare	modern rule of law Exploring the impact of social welfare on individuals and understanding the systemic challenges faced by vulnerable groups
Group Behavior, Social Norms, Power Dynamics, Prejudice	12 Angry Men	Jury deliberations that demonstrate the influence of group pressure on individual decision-making	Understanding group decision-making theories and the impact of social pressure on individual behavior
Social Stratification, Social Mobility, Cultural Capital	Slumdog Millionaire	An Indian youth changes his destiny through a quiz show, revealing class immobility and wealth disparity	Analyzing theories of social mobility and understanding the role of cultural capital in shaping social roles

### 3.3 Teaching Process Design

The teaching process is structured to guide students through theoretical and practical learning. Key stages include:

#### 3.3.1 Course introduction

The introduction phase aims to immerse students in the course context and stimulate interest. Films are assigned as pre-class viewing, selected for their thematic relevance and emotional resonance. During class, the instructor briefly introduces the film's background and key content, providing students with a sociological framework to analyze the depicted social phenomena.

#### 3.3.2 Core case analysis

This stage forms the backbone of the teaching process. Through group discussions, students collaboratively apply sociological theories to analyze key sociological themes presented in the films, such as power dynamics, class structures, and cultural conflicts. Instructors facilitate the discussion, ensuring students effectively link theoretical knowledge with observed social phenomena.

### 3.4 Teaching Methods and Techniques

The course incorporates visual and interactive teaching methods to enhance understanding and engagement, transforming students from passive recipients to active participants.

**Visual Learning:** Films provide a vivid representation of social phenomena, fostering emotional resonance and critical thinking. **Collaborative Learning:** Group discussions, presentations, interactive Q&A sessions, and role-playing encourage multidimensional engagement.

**Interactive Tools:** Students practice analytical skills by identifying and critiquing social structures and behaviors depicted in the films, bridging theory and practice.

### 3.5 Evaluation of Teaching Outcomes

The course employs diverse assessment methods to evaluate knowledge acquisition, active participation, and critical thinking.

#### 3.5.1 Formative and summative assessments

**Formative Assessments:** Monitor students' progress through class discussions, group tasks, and interaction, evaluating participation and understanding.

**Summative Assessments:** Conducted at the semester's end, these include group reports, reflective essays, and classroom presentations to assess theoretical understanding and application.

#### 3.5.2 Comprehensive evaluation

Quantitative tools measure performance, while qualitative feedback fosters continuous improvement. Class presentations allow students to showcase their findings, receive feedback, and refine critical thinking and communication skills.

## 4 PRACTICAL TEACHING APPLICATION: CASE STUDY OF WEBER'S BUREAUCRACY IN CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Weber's theory of bureaucracy is a foundational concept in sociology, emphasizing institutionalization and legitimate authority. This course incorporates public sector programs to analyze public governance and the features and limitations of bureaucratic systems.

### 4.1 Case Selection

Programs like Questioning Shandong and Sunshine Accountability focus on public accountability and administrative

discussions. Unlike dramatized portrayals in films, these programs offer unembellished records of institutional operations, showcasing characteristics like legitimacy, hierarchy, institutionalization, and professionalism. They also reveal systemic inefficiencies, such as bureaucratic inertia and responsibility evasion, helping students critically evaluate bureaucratic structures.

## 4.2 Teaching Steps and Classroom Activities

### 4.2.1 Concept explanation and demonstration

The instructor begins by explaining Weber's bureaucratic theory, including characteristics such as rationalization, hierarchy, and clear functional divisions. Using a municipal park construction delay as a sample case, the instructor demonstrates how to analyze the bureaucracy's operations, identifying departmental responsibilities and the causes of delays.

### 4.2.2 Students are guided to discuss

Strengths and Weaknesses of Bureaucracy: How do the organizational strengths, like procedural rigor, contribute to quality management?

Systemic Limitations: How do the inherent features of bureaucracy lead to inefficiencies, such as delays?

Proposed Improvements: What strategies could improve efficiency while preserving the advantages of bureaucracy, such as clear accountability mechanisms?

### 4.2.3 Group assignments and preparation

Students are divided into groups, each selecting a case from the programs, such as platform development or river pollution control. Groups analyze these cases by focusing on power structures, role interactions, and institutional execution, preparing a detailed analysis for class discussion.

## 4.3 Classroom Presentation and Group Discussion Analysis

In this segment, each group will present their analysis of a selected case study. Taking the case of "Smart Linyi Mall" as an example, the presentation focuses on the application of bureaucratic characteristics and problem diagnosis. Initially, group members will provide a brief background introduction, explaining that the Linyi municipal public sector invested heavily in building the "Smart Mall" to digitize traditional wholesale markets. However, five years later, the project failed to meet its goals, revealing typical issues inherent in bureaucratic operations. The group's analysis will be structured around the following three aspects:

### 4.3.1 Manifestation of bureaucratic characteristics

The group highlights how the project exemplified Weber's defined bureaucratic characteristics during its implementation, such as clear functional division (e.g., platform development managed by Linyi Mall E-Commerce Technology Co., Ltd.) and hierarchical decision-making chains. However, this strict division also led to a "buck-passing" problem. Once the construction phase was completed, management responsibilities were transferred to public sector departments, leaving subsequent operations unattended. This illustrates role ambiguity and communication barriers within the bureaucratic system.

### 4.3.2 Root cause analysis

The group explores the reasons behind the project's failure, citing inefficiencies in the bureaucratic system and an emphasis on formality over practical outcomes. Specifically, during platform development, managers focused solely on project completion while neglecting its usability, rendering the system a mere "showpiece." This reflects the rigidity and bureaucratic inertia that often plague such systems.

### 4.3.3 Proposed improvements

The group offers several improvement strategies, such as introducing market-oriented management approaches to enhance operational flexibility and reduce over-reliance on administrative directives. Additionally, some members suggest establishing a more effective accountability mechanism to ensure clear responsibility at every stage, from development to operation.

Following the group presentation, peers from other groups raised questions regarding the content, particularly about the advantages and limitations of bureaucracy. For instance, one student asked whether it is possible to retain the normative strengths of bureaucracy in the "Smart Mall" project while mitigating issues like communication breakdowns and responsibility evasion. These discussions prompted group members to reflect further on their analysis while fostering a dialectical understanding of bureaucratic strengths and weaknesses among the entire class.

Subsequently, the instructor guided students to connect Weber's theory of bureaucracy with specific scenes from the project's implementation. For example, the instructor pointed out that the development process of the "Smart Mall" exemplified the limitations of Weber's concept of "rationalization." While each step had clearly defined procedures and divisions, the lack of flexibility and responsiveness to actual needs resulted in the project failing to achieve maximum efficiency. This analysis helped students understand the constraints of rationalization in real-world bureaucratic systems and encouraged them to think about strategies to address these challenges, thereby promoting improvements in public administration.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The integration of film-based learning and case analysis in sociology courses provides students with diverse

perspectives and vivid contexts, helping them ground theoretical concepts in complex social phenomena. This teaching approach significantly enhances students' comprehension and application of sociological theories, particularly in visualizing abstract ideas and linking them to real-life situations.

### 5.1 Advantages of the Teaching Approach

The combination of films and case studies bridges the gap between abstract theories and concrete realities often found in traditional teaching methods. Through contextualized cases, students can better grasp sociological theories and develop keen insights and critical thinking about social phenomena. For instance, by analyzing the bureaucratic system in the "Smart Linyi Mall" case, students gain a tangible sense of the far-reaching effects of institutional frameworks on social actions.

### 5.2 Challenges and Solutions

Despite its unique advantages, this teaching method also faces challenges, such as selecting appropriate films and ensuring students engage deeply rather than passively watch. To address these issues, instructors should provide detailed viewing guides and discussion prompts to align the viewing process with clear learning objectives. Moreover, collaborative group learning and instructor-led facilitation are critical to the effectiveness of this method. Employing diverse teaching strategies to stimulate student participation and agency can effectively overcome these challenges.

### 5.3 Implications for Future Teaching

Looking forward, sociology teaching can further explore how other multimedia resources, such as documentaries and social experiment recordings, can be integrated into courses to enrich content. Additionally, incorporating students' fieldwork experiences into the curriculum can extend learning from the classroom to the field, achieving a holistic integration of classroom learning, social investigation, and civic engagement.

In conclusion, the innovative combination of film-based learning and case analysis not only broadens students' theoretical understanding but also strengthens their awareness of social realities. For students in older adults care service management programs, this novel teaching approach lays a solid foundation in theory and practical skills, equipping them for future careers in public administration and social services.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

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