



A Psychoanalytic and Pedagogical Analysis of Character Education in *Road's End in Taiwan*: Implications for Problem-Based Learning in English as a Foreign Language Contexts

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Abstract: This study explores the use of *Road's End in Taiwan* as a medium for character education in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning through the application of Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The research aims to analyze the psychological dimensions of the main characters—Damien, Steven, and Yishang—focusing on the dynamics of id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms, and to identify the character values embedded in their development. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed using film analysis as the primary method. Data were collected through repeated viewing and documentation of significant scenes, dialogues, and character interactions, and were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The findings reveal that each character demonstrates distinct psychological tendencies shaped by family conflict, identity struggle, and socio-emotional challenges. Damien exhibits a strong search for identity mediated by emotional repression, Steven reflects internal conflict between autonomy and familial responsibility, while Yishang shows resilience and denial as coping strategies. The study further identifies character values such as empathy, responsibility, resilience, and self-awareness emerging from the narrative. Based on these findings, a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model integrating film analysis is proposed to support English language learning and character education simultaneously. The study concludes that film-based psychoanalytic analysis provides an effective pedagogical approach for fostering critical thinking, language competence, and character development in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Film-Based Learning, Character Education, Psychoanalysis, Freud Theory, EFL, Problem-Based Learning, Literary Analysis, English Language Teaching.

Introduction

In the era of 21st-century education, learning English is no longer limited to linguistic competence but also includes the development of character ([Fitriyana et al., 2023](#); [Saidah et al., 2021](#)), critical thinking ([Budiman et al., 2026](#); [Hapsari & Prasetyarini, 2025](#); [Lin, 2018](#); [Schenck, 2024](#); [Tola Chala et al., 2025](#)), and socio-emotional skills. The integration of media, particularly film, has become increasingly important in creating meaningful and contextual learning experiences ([Musdalifah & Satriani, 2021](#); [Putra & Supatmi, 2025](#); [Zunia Adha Wati et al., 2025](#)). Film provides authentic language input and rich cultural narratives that allow learners to engage with complex human experiences. As stated by UNESCO ([Blake, 2023](#); [Cerqua et al., 2014](#); [Tatto, 2021](#)), “media literacy and multimodal texts are essential tools for

developing learners' critical and ethical understanding of global issues". In this context, film serves as an effective medium to bridge language learning and character education.

The use of film in education can be theoretically grounded in constructivism ([Ulya, 2024](#)) and experiential learning theory. Learners construct meaning actively through interaction with authentic materials and real-world representations. Kolb's experiential learning theory ([Kolb, 2015](#)) emphasizes that learning occurs through experience, reflection, and conceptualization. In addition, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory ([Huang, 2021; Kozulin, 2007; Vygotsky et al., 2012](#)) highlights the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. Recent studies emphasize that multimodal learning environments enhance students' engagement and deeper understanding of texts (Mayer, 2021). Therefore, film-based learning aligns with these theoretical foundations by providing experiential, contextual, and socially mediated learning opportunities.

Recent research has highlighted the effectiveness of film in language learning and character education. For instance, Almansour ([Almansour, 2024](#)) found that film-based instruction significantly improves learners' narrative comprehension and emotional engagement in EFL classrooms. Similarly, Omar & Razi ([Omar & Razi, 2022](#)) reported that films enhance students' empathy and moral reasoning when integrated into classroom discussion. Moreover, research by Hadjiconstantinou ([Hadjiconstantinou, 2021](#)) shows that audiovisual media increase students' motivation and critical thinking skills in language learning contexts. These findings suggest that film is not only a linguistic resource but also a pedagogical tool for developing affective and cognitive competencies.

This study employs Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory ([Freud, 1987; Sulloway, 1992; Yun & Kim, 2026](#)), focusing on the concepts of id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms. Freud ([Freud, 1987](#)) explains that human behavior is shaped by the dynamic interaction between unconscious desires (id), rational control (ego), and moral standards (superego). Defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies used to reduce psychological tension ([Cramer, 2015](#)). In this study, these concepts are applied to analyze character behavior in *Road's End in Taiwan* (Nicollier, 2025), allowing a deeper interpretation of psychological conflict and moral development. This framework is also linked to character education, which emphasizes empathy, responsibility, and resilience.

Several previous studies have investigated the use of films in language learning and character education from different perspectives. Almansour ([Almansour, 2024](#)) demonstrated that film-based instruction enhances learners' comprehension and emotional engagement in EFL classrooms. Omar and Razi ([Omar & Razi, 2022](#)) found that films can foster empathy and moral reasoning through guided classroom discussions. Hadjiconstantinou ([Hadjiconstantinou, 2021](#)) reported that audiovisual media contribute to students' motivation and critical thinking development. In the field of psychoanalytic film analysis, Zhang ([Zhang, 2023](#)) applied Freud's theory to examine character development and found that psychological interpretation can improve students' analytical and interpretative skills. Similarly, Rahman et al. ([Rahman et al., 2022](#)) highlighted the effectiveness of film-based learning in promoting critical thinking, while Daraselia and Jojua ([Daraselia & Jojua, 2024](#)) emphasized the role of character analysis in encouraging reflective

learning and moral awareness. These studies collectively demonstrate the educational value of films in language learning, character development, and psychological interpretation.

Despite these contributions, several limitations remain. First, most studies focus either on language learning outcomes or on literary and psychological analysis, without integrating both perspectives into a comprehensive educational framework. Second, previous research generally examines character values through moral or literary lenses, while the application of Freud's psychoanalytic concepts—particularly the interaction of id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms—to character education remains limited. Third, few studies provide a practical instructional model that translates psychological film analysis into classroom activities. Moreover, contemporary multicultural films such as *Road's End in Taiwan* (Nicollier, 2025), which portray complex issues of identity, family relationships, and cultural encounters, have received little attention in EFL educational research. To address these limitations, the present study integrates Freud's psychoanalytic theory with character education analysis, applies the framework to a contemporary transnational film, and proposes a film-based Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model that systematically connects psychological interpretation with pedagogical practice. Through this approach, the study offers a more comprehensive framework for fostering linguistic competence, critical thinking, and character development in English language learning.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of film-based learning in enhancing language skills, emotional engagement, critical thinking, and moral reasoning, and others have applied psychoanalytic approaches to analyze character development in films, these areas have largely been examined separately. Limited research has integrated Freud's psychoanalytic theory with character education in English language learning contexts, and few studies have provided a structured pedagogical framework that translates psychoanalytic character analysis into classroom practice. Furthermore, contemporary multicultural films such as *Road's End in Taiwan* (Nicollier, 2025), which explore issues of identity, family relationships, and intercultural encounters, remain underexplored in educational research. Addressing these gaps, this study offers a novel interdisciplinary approach by integrating Freud's concepts of id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms with character education analysis and applying them to a contemporary transnational film. In addition, the study proposes a film-based Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model that systematically incorporates psychoanalytic character analysis into English language instruction. The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of psychoanalytic theory to EFL and character education, practically by providing educators with an innovative instructional model for fostering language proficiency, critical thinking, and character development, and methodologically by demonstrating how psychological film analysis can be transformed into meaningful classroom learning activities.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the main characters in *Road's End in Taiwan*—Damien, Steven, and Yishang—using Freud's psychoanalytic theory and to identify the character values emerging from their psychological development. Furthermore, this study aims to propose a film-based Problem-Based Learning model for integrating character education into English language learning. Ultimately, this research seeks to demonstrate how film can function as an effective pedagogical tool for developing students' linguistic competence, critical thinking, and character formation.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design (Chu, PH. and Chang, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to examine the potential of Road’s End in Taiwan (Nicollier, 2025) as a medium for character education in English language learning. The study utilized a film analysis approach by applying Freud’s psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1987) as the primary analytical framework. Qualitative film analysis was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to explore the psychological dimensions of characters, their behaviors, motivations, and interpersonal relationships as represented in cinematic narratives. Through this approach, the study aimed to identify the psychological characteristics of the main characters and the character values that emerge from their development throughout the film.

The primary data source of this study was the film Road’s End in Taiwan directed by Maria Nicollier and produced in 2024. The film was selected because it presents complex family relationships, identity struggles, emotional conflicts, and moral dilemmas that are relevant to character education. The analysis focused on the three main characters—Damien, Steven, and Yishang—whose interactions and personal journeys constitute the central narrative of the film.

The data consisted of verbal and non-verbal elements extracted from the film, including dialogues, monologues, character interactions, actions, facial expressions, emotional reactions, and significant scenes that reflected psychological conflicts and character development.

The study adopted Freud’s psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1987), particularly the concepts of id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms, as the analytical framework. According to Freud, the id represents instinctual desires and unconscious drives, the ego functions as a mediator between desires and reality, and the superego embodies moral standards and social values. In addition, defense mechanisms refer to unconscious psychological strategies used to reduce anxiety and manage internal conflicts.

The psychoanalytic framework was employed to examine how the three brothers responded to family-related challenges, identity issues, and emotional struggles throughout the film. Furthermore, the findings were interpreted from the perspective of character education to identify values that could be integrated into English language learning.

Data were collected through document analysis and repeated film observation. The researcher watched the film several times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, character development, and psychological conflicts. During the viewing process, important scenes, dialogues, and character behaviors related to Freud’s psychoanalytic concepts were identified and documented.

Table 1. Data collection precdedures

Step	Data Collection Procedure	Purpose
1	Watching the film repeatedly to obtain a holistic understanding of the narrative.	To gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, themes, and character development.
2	Identifying the major characters and their psychological conflicts.	To determine which characters and conflicts are relevant for psychoanalytic analysis.

Step	Data Collection Procedure	Purpose
3	Recording significant dialogues, actions, and interactions related to id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms.	To collect textual and behavioral evidence that reflects Freud's psychoanalytic concepts.
4	Classifying the collected data according to Freud's psychoanalytic categories.	To organize the data systematically based on the constructs of id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms.
5	Identifying character values reflected in the characters' psychological development.	To explore the moral and character values emerging from the characters' growth and experiences.
6	Examining the educational implications of the findings for English language learning and character education.	To determine how the findings can be applied in educational contexts, particularly in language learning and character development.

The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The analysis began with the identification of scenes and dialogues that represented the psychoanalytic components of id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms. These data were then categorized according to the psychological characteristics exhibited by each character.

Table 2. Analysis process

Stage	Analysis Process	Description/Purpose
1	Data Reduction	Selecting, focusing, and organizing relevant scenes, dialogues, and character behaviors that correspond to the research objectives and Freud's psychoanalytic concepts.
2	Data Display	Categorizing the findings into psychoanalytic dimensions (id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms) and presenting them systematically in analytical tables to facilitate interpretation.
3	Conclusion Drawing and Interpretation	Interpreting the psychological meanings of the findings, explaining the relationships among psychoanalytic elements, and identifying the character values reflected in the characters' development.

Following the psychoanalytic analysis, the identified character values were further examined to explore their relevance to character education. Based on these findings, a film-based Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model was proposed as a pedagogical framework for integrating film analysis into English language learning.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher conducted repeated observations of the film and employed theoretical triangulation through the use of psychoanalytic theory and character education perspectives. Repeated viewing allowed for a more accurate interpretation of character behaviors and psychological motivations, while theoretical triangulation helped strengthen the validity of the analysis by connecting psychological findings with educational implications.

Table 3. Proposed Research Framework

Stage	Component	Description
1	Film	<i>Road's End in Taiwan</i> serves as the primary source of data for analysis.
2	Character Analysis	Analysis focuses on the major characters: Damien, Steven, and Yishang.
3	Psychoanalytic Analysis	Characters are examined using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, including the concepts of Id, Ego, Superego, and Defense Mechanisms.
4	Identification of Character Values	Character values emerging from the analysis are identified, including empathy, responsibility, resilience, self-awareness, cooperation, and perseverance.
5	Educational Implications	Findings are interpreted in relation to character education and English language learning.
6	Proposed Learning Model	Development of a Film-Based Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model based on the psychoanalytic and character-value findings.

This framework illustrates how psychoanalytic film analysis can be utilized to identify educational values and transform cinematic narratives into meaningful learning resources for English language education.

Results and Discussion

Results

This section presents a psychoanalytic analysis of the three main characters in *Road's End in Taiwan*—Damien, Steven, and Yishang—using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, which consists of the id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms. The analysis focuses on the characters' dialogues, behaviors, decisions, and interpersonal interactions throughout the film. By examining the psychological dynamics underlying their actions, this study aims to reveal how each character responds to family conflict, unresolved trauma, and personal aspirations. The findings also provide insights into the character values embedded in the film, which can serve as a foundation for character education in English language learning.

Table 4. Psychoanalytic Analysis of Damien

Theory	Scene in the Film	Analysis
Id	Damien travels from Switzerland to Taiwan after learning about his father's inheritance.	Damien's desire to uncover his origins and claim his place within the family reflects an unconscious need for belonging, identity, and emotional fulfillment.
Ego	Throughout the journey, Damien carefully observes family dynamics and attempts to understand the situations before making judgments.	The ego mediates between Damien's emotional curiosity and the reality of meeting family members he has never known. He acts rationally to adapt to unfamiliar circumstances.

Theory	Scene in the Film	Analysis
Superego	Damien demonstrates empathy toward his brothers despite differences in upbringing and experiences.	His moral awareness encourages him to maintain respectful relationships and seek reconciliation rather than conflict.
Defense Mechanism	Damien often suppresses feelings of abandonment caused by his father's absence and focuses on practical goals during the journey.	This behavior reflects repression, where painful childhood emotions are unconsciously pushed aside to maintain psychological stability.

Damien's psychological development illustrates a strong search for identity and self-understanding. His actions are initially driven by emotional needs associated with his absent father, yet he gradually adopts a more balanced and mature perspective through interactions with his brothers. The coexistence of id-driven desires, ego-mediated adaptation, and superego-guided empathy demonstrates his transformation from a curious outsider into a family member capable of understanding complex interpersonal relationships.

Table 5. Psychoanalytic Analysis of Steven

Theory	Scene in the Film	Analysis
Id	Steven expresses frustration with the family business and dreams of opening his own restaurant.	His desire for independence and personal fulfillment reflects instinctive needs for autonomy and self-satisfaction.
Ego	Steven continues managing family responsibilities despite his dissatisfaction.	The ego enables him to balance personal ambitions with practical obligations and social expectations.
Superego	Steven assumes responsibility for guiding his brothers during their journey.	His sense of duty and commitment reflects internalized moral values regarding family responsibility and care.
Defense Mechanism	Steven often uses sarcasm and emotional distance when discussing his father.	This behavior may indicate displacement and rationalization, allowing him to redirect unresolved anger into less threatening expressions.

Steven represents the psychological struggle between personal aspirations and family obligations. While his instinctive desires encourage him to pursue a different life path, his moral sense and social responsibilities frequently restrain those impulses. His defense mechanisms reveal unresolved emotional wounds associated with his father, yet they also demonstrate his effort to maintain stability and fulfill his role within the family structure.

Table 6. Psychoanalytic Analysis of Yishang

Theory	Scene in the Film	Analysis
Id	Yishang expresses his wish to improve his physical condition and achieve a better quality of life.	His desires reflect basic needs for security, health, comfort, and personal well-being.
Ego	Yishang remains realistic about his limitations and financial circumstances.	The ego helps him evaluate possibilities and adapt his expectations to reality.
Superego	He maintains loyalty toward his family despite experiencing hardship and disappointment.	His behavior reflects internalized values of familial commitment, perseverance, and mutual support.

Theory	Scene in the Film	Analysis
Defense Mechanism	Yishang often downplays his personal struggles and emotional pain.	This behavior may indicate denial and suppression, which help him cope with difficult realities while preserving hope.

Yishang's character portrays resilience in the face of adversity. His psychological responses are largely shaped by socioeconomic challenges and personal limitations. Although he experiences frustration and vulnerability, his ability to maintain optimism and family loyalty reflects the influence of a strong superego. His coping mechanisms enable him to endure hardship while continuing to pursue a meaningful future.

Table 7. Comparative Analysis of the Three Brothers

Aspect	Evidence from the Film	Analysis
Similarities	All three brothers participate in the journey to uncover family truths and confront their father's legacy.	Their shared experiences reveal common psychological needs for belonging, acceptance, and closure regarding unresolved family issues.
Differences	Damien seeks identity, Steven seeks independence, and Yishang seeks security and personal well-being.	These differences reflect varying dominant motivations and psychological conflicts shaped by their unique life experiences.
Character Values Emerging from Psychological Development	Throughout the journey, the brothers gradually build mutual understanding and cooperation despite conflict and misunderstandings.	The film promotes values such as empathy, responsibility, perseverance, self-awareness, family solidarity, and respect for diversity in life experiences.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that although Damien, Steven, and Yishang possess distinct psychological motivations and coping strategies, they share a common desire to understand their family history and establish meaningful relationships. Their different responses to similar family circumstances illustrate how personal experiences shape psychological development. Importantly, the characters' growth throughout the film highlights several educational values, including empathy, resilience, responsibility, cooperation, and self-reflection. These values support the use of *Roads End in Taiwan* as a meaningful resource for character education within English language learning contexts.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research highlighting the pedagogical value of films in English language learning. Almansour (Almansour, 2024) found that film-based instruction enhances learners' comprehension and promotes deeper engagement with authentic language use by exposing students to meaningful social interactions and contextualized communication. Similarly, the present study demonstrates that **Road's End in Taiwan** provides authentic situations through which students can simultaneously develop English proficiency and character values. While Almansour primarily emphasized linguistic outcomes, the current study extends this perspective by

showing how psychoanalytic character analysis can facilitate moral reflection and character education.

The findings also support the work of Omar and Razi (Omar & Razi, 2022), who argued that films serve as effective tools for developing critical thinking and intercultural understanding in language classrooms. Their study revealed that learners become more actively engaged when analyzing characters, social issues, and cultural perspectives presented in films. In line with these findings, the present study shows that the experiences of Damien, Steven, and Yishang encourage students to examine complex issues such as identity formation, family relationships, emotional regulation, and moral decision-making. However, this study contributes a more structured analytical approach by integrating Freud's psychoanalytic theory into film analysis, enabling students to explore the psychological motivations underlying characters' actions.

Furthermore, the results are in agreement with Hadjiconstantinou (Hadjiconstantinou, 2021), who emphasized that character-centered literary and media analysis can promote empathy, self-awareness, and ethical reasoning among learners. The psychological conflicts experienced by the three brothers in *Road's End in Taiwan* provide opportunities for students to understand diverse emotional responses and moral dilemmas, thereby fostering empathy and reflective thinking. The present study further advances this argument by proposing a film-based Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model that systematically guides students from problem identification to reflection and character internalization.

To maximize its educational potential, this study proposes the integration of *Road's End in Taiwan* into a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) framework. PBL is particularly suitable because it encourages students to investigate real-life problems, evaluate multiple perspectives, engage in collaborative discussion, and construct evidence-based solutions. The psychological conflicts experienced by the three brothers provide meaningful cases that students can analyze using critical thinking and reflective inquiry. Through problem-solving activities, students are encouraged to connect the characters' experiences with broader issues such as family relationships, identity formation, emotional management, and moral decision-making. Such activities align with the objectives of character education while promoting English communication skills.

Within this proposed model, students are not positioned as passive viewers but as active problem solvers. The film serves as the primary stimulus for learning, while the psychoanalytic framework functions as an analytical tool for understanding character behavior. Students examine the problems faced by the characters, identify underlying psychological factors, discuss possible solutions, and reflect on the character values demonstrated throughout the story. This approach encourages higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), collaborative learning, and reflective practice, all of which are essential competencies for twenty-first-century learners.

Table 8. Proposed Film-Based Problem-Based Learning Model for Character Education

PBL Phase		Learning Activities	Expected Character Values
1.	Problem Orientation	The teacher introduces the film and presents essential questions related to family conflict, identity,	Curiosity, empathy, openness

PBL Phase	Learning Activities	Expected Character Values
	responsibility, and emotional challenges experienced by the three brothers. Students watch selected scenes from the film.	
2. Problem Identification	Students work in groups to identify the major problems faced by Damien, Steven, and Yishang. They discuss the causes and consequences of each problem.	Critical thinking, cooperation, respect for different opinions
3. Investigation and Analysis	Students analyze the characters using Freud's psychoanalytic theory (id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms). They collect evidence from dialogues and actions shown in the film.	Analytical thinking, self-awareness, responsibility
4. Development of Solutions	Students propose alternative solutions or actions that the characters could take to resolve their conflicts more effectively.	Problem-solving, decision-making, empathy
5. Presentation and Discussion	Each group presents its analysis and proposed solutions in English. Other groups provide feedback and alternative viewpoints.	Communication skills, confidence, respect, collaboration
6. Reflection and Character Internalization	Students reflect on lessons learned from the film and relate them to their own experiences and social contexts through reflective writing or discussion.	Self-reflection, resilience, moral awareness, responsibility

The proposed model demonstrates how films can function as meaningful pedagogical tools for integrating language learning and character education. Through the PBL process, students engage in authentic communication, collaborative inquiry, and reflective thinking while exploring complex psychological and social issues. The use of psychoanalytic analysis further encourages deeper understanding of human behavior, allowing students to move beyond surface-level comprehension of the film. Consequently, the integration of *Road's End* in Taiwan into a film-based PBL model provides a comprehensive learning experience that promotes English proficiency, critical thinking, and character development simultaneously.

The proposed model offers several implications for English language educators. First, films can serve as authentic multimodal texts that enhance students' engagement and comprehension. Second, integrating psychoanalytic character analysis encourages students to practice higher-order thinking skills through interpretation, evaluation, and reflection. Third, Problem-Based Learning provides a structured framework for transforming film viewing into meaningful learning experiences rather than passive entertainment. Finally, the combination of film analysis and PBL creates opportunities for fostering essential character values such as empathy, responsibility, resilience, cooperation, and self-awareness, which are increasingly important in the context of twenty-first-century education.

Therefore, the integration of *Road's End* in Taiwan into a film-based Problem-Based Learning model can be considered a promising instructional approach for promoting both English language competence and character education in secondary and higher education contexts.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significant potential of *Road's End in Taiwan* as an effective medium for integrating character education into English language learning. Through the psychoanalytic analysis of Damien, Steven, and Yishang, the film demonstrates how psychological conflicts, personal growth, and interpersonal relationships can foster students' understanding of essential character values, including empathy, responsibility, resilience, self-awareness, perseverance, and family solidarity. These findings imply that film-based learning can move beyond language acquisition by promoting critical reflection on human behavior, moral decision-making, and socio-emotional development. Therefore, English educators are encouraged to incorporate films into classroom instruction through structured activities such as character analysis, reflective discussions, and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) projects to enhance both linguistic and character outcomes. Furthermore, future research is recommended to empirically examine the effectiveness of the proposed film-based PBL model in improving students' language proficiency, critical thinking, and character development across different educational contexts and learner populations.

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