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Multimodal Writing for Visual Literacy and Engagement: An Intervention Using Story Maps and Video Essays in Indian Higher Education

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Abstract
This study explores the impact of two multimodal writing practices, story maps and video essays, on enhancing visual literacy and student engagement among undergraduate English majors at a government arts and science college in Tamil Nadu, India. Over four weeks, 60 participants engaged in two instructional modules. Module 1 introduced story maps using free, mobile-friendly tools to support spatial organisation and narrative development. Module 2 guided students in creating short video essays and integrating visual, auditory, and textual elements for analytical expression. Data were collected through surveys measuring engagement, visual literacy rubrics, reflective journals, and focus group interviews. The results indicated notable improvements in both engagement and visual literacy, with the qualitative findings highlighting increased creative confidence, cultural expression, and perceived academic relevance. Despite their limited technological resources, students demonstrated the effective use of accessible digital tools to produce high-quality multimodal texts. This study underscores the potential of low-cost, scaffolded multimodal practices in resource-constrained English education contexts and supports the integration of technology-rich, culturally relevant assignments in higher education.

Keywords: Multimodal writing; Visual literacy; Student engagement; TESOL; Indian higher education

INTRODUCTION

In our visual and digital era, higher education institutions are in the challenging position of having to teach students who are coming out of schools that have prioritised calculation skills over those involving textual literacy (Kress 2010), and how to navigate complex information landscapes that go beyond text. In the Indian context, this challenge is especially pronounced for several reasons. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 calls for integrated education and computing abilities among students, which has been well noted in the directive of NEP 2020 (Government of India, 2020). Nevertheless, even with the best of intentions (and policy directives), traditional assessment practices in Indian HE aggressively privilege conventional essay formats that can often be inadequate for dynamic, multimodal communication encountered in performance contexts within broader society (Kumar & Refaei, 2021). Since the New London Group (1996) first articulated multimodal literacy, the ability to recognise, compose, and communicate using written words along with a combination of images, sounds, space, gestures, and so forth, it has been recognised as an essential aspect of learning for 21st-century learners. The inclusion of multimodal writing practices may be especially compelling in areas such as English, humanities, and the social sciences, where communication is pivotal (Alexander, 2013; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012) worthwhile approach for increasing student involvement and improving expression-based learning deficits.To address these gaps, this study explores how two multimodal writing practices, story maps and video essays, form pedagogical interventions designed to improve student engagement, visual literacy, and expressive capacity among undergraduate students in India. Story maps that blend spatial organisation with narrative structures help learners visualise and show the relationships between concepts, events,

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or locations (Jukes et al., 2015). Video essays combine visual, sound, and text to articulate an argument or point at a conference (Vasudevan et al. These approaches align with the principles of Learning and Teaching for Sustainable Employment and Entrepreneurship (LTEST) that NEP 2020 underlines by fostering skill development that traverses academic knowledge to real-world applications.

This research was carried out through the Indian higher education system, which reaches 40+ million students in universities and colleges, and is one of the largest systems on a global scale (AISHE, 2020-21). The system is huge but challenged by problems of quality, infrastructure, and pedagogical innovation (Tilak, 2021). Further, the non-existence of high-grade technological availability in government arts and science colleges, amounting to the majority of socially and economically disadvantaged sectors, affects the applicability of modern pedagogical inputs (Azad & Chandra, 2017). This particular context is valuable from an academic perspective; hence, the findings for such under-resourced academic settings are important across India. Although multimodal pedagogies are well documented in studies from the Western educational landscape (Miller & McVee, 2012; Smith, 2014), similar attention is yet to be paid to their practice and impact within Indian higher education. Earlier studies on digital literacy in the Indian context were more towards computer and Internet usage rather than on multimodal composition and expression (Thomas 2020). In addition, more research is needed on culturally responsive multimodal assignments shaped by the life experiences and sociocultural context of Indian students (Kumar, 2019).

To address this void, this study is guided by three main aims: first, to examine the pedagogical affordances of story maps and video essays in terms of their contribution to student engagement and creative expression; second, to evaluate visual literacy and multimodal literacy as outcomes of integrated multimodal assessments; and third, to investigate students' views on the transferability of multimodal writing skills across their university learning journey and future professional roles. The study was guided by three primary research questions: How does the use of story maps and video essays impact students' engagement with writing tasks? My point is how they fit into the development of literacy and digital composition skills. In his search for answers, Gleckel spoke with and interviewed undergraduates in India about the cultural significance of multimodal writing exercises and how they experienced them as university students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is theoretically grounded in social semiotics and multimodality theory, which suggests that meaning is not just construed by speakers (or writers) in the form of language but relies on all modes or means of communication, that is, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002). The notion of literacy behind multimodal literacy, the concept that underpins multimodal literacies, breaks from the traditional focus on reading and writing to see these things more holistically (Walsh, 2010). Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) pointed out that even multimodality is an indispensable tool in the palimpsestic nature of contemporary communication landscapes dominated by digital media. The New London Group (1996) first introduced the concept of "multiliteracies" in response to communication environments that exhibit these features, endorsing pedagogical approaches that take account of the diversity as well as multimodality evident in learning. In addition, Kalantzis and Cope (2012) strengthened the argument that educational models must capture all forms of communication multiplicity. In a country like India, where diversity is probably at its maximum and digitalisation has always been in rapid movement, students cannot be well-rounded individuals based only on print-based literacy (Mohanty, 2019). Ditto, when Mehta and Srivastava (2023) and Jain and Prasad (2024), in some of the most recent studies, emphasised that Indian higher education institutions are called upon to adopt multimodal pedagogies to educate learners on globalised environments permeated by digital technologies that increasingly inhabit blended literacy spaces.

Another key dimension of multimodal literacy is visual literacy, which refers to the ability to interpret, analyse, and make meaning from visual content. This is particularly critical in educational environments because learners are expected to interact with pictures, diagrams, infographics, and multimedia materials in a variety of disciplines. As Avgerinou and Pettersson argue, visual literacy fosters critical thinking and enhances reading comprehension, especially when dealing with

abstract or complex phenomena. Serafini further points out that visual literacy demands that the learner be active in the process of making meaning by examining how various elements of a visual text work together to produce plausible narratives or arguments. Various studies conducted worldwide have revealed that implementing visual literacy in education increases students' engagement and learning achievement. In Indian higher education, however, little space is left for this multimodal and creative expression due to the predominant use of rote memorisation and text-intensive instruction.

As Verma, Das, Bose, and Ramanujam have recently argued, India must adjust its higher education curriculum to adapt to the knowledge economy. In other words, story maps have become a great medium for teaching by blending spatial thinking with narrative building. Story maps provide a tool that learners can use to connect events, concepts, and places by integrating geographic or spatial datasets with multimedia elements. Jukes et al. Story maps require students to organise and connect content spatially, which generates both analytical and creative storytelling (Roland et al. 2015). For example, Kerski (2015) and Huynh and Sharpe (2013) demonstrated the usefulness of storymaps in history, environmental studies, and literature. Language and literacy education have been especially helpful for students to understand narrative structures and provide a tool to enhance writing skills (Diem, 2013). A recent report from India (Nambiar & Singh, 2024) demonstrated the potential of story maps to promote engagement within multilingual classrooms and enable students to see their place by mapping local environments and cultural narratives.

Video essays provide another innovative multimodal form, incorporating visual elements and a spoken voice-over (and sometimes music) in presenting analytical or argumentative content. Video essays depart from traditional text-only essays in that they force the student to focus on visual rhetoric, narrative timing, and multimedia sequences. Vasudevan et al. Previous studies by Wheelock (2010) and Good (2013) demonstrated that video essays foster critical thinking, creativity, and digital fluency. The importance of critical thinking about media and popular culture advertising practices, particularly for digitally native students, is highlighted in the work of Burke and Hammett (2020), where similar assignments are found to resonate with the desired theoretical frameworks. The process of making video essays helps students "experience rhetorical strategies and media analysis in a way that was richer than producing text-based composition" (Mills & Kajder, 2014; Anderson, 2013). As highlighted by Hinrichsen and Coombs (2014), video essays enable students to integrate personal stories and references from popular culture into legitimate academic evidence. In the Indian scenario, Sharma and Kulkarni (2024) and Banerjee (2025) studied video essays have brought forth in their recent research the potential of using video essays to nurture student voice, digital literacies, and cultural representation in undergraduate classrooms.

Even though the National Education Policy holds a vision for education in the 21st century, advocating creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy as its central focus, many structural challenges plague higher education in India. Overcrowded classrooms, poor infrastructure, faculty unwilling to change, and curriculum more attuned to conventional means of assessment (Patel, 2020: p. While there is some attention to digital literacy, this most often involves only low levels of practice: teaching how to use a computer or get online but not the advanced kind of digital composition and multimodal expression (Thomas, 2020). Cs and Ps have had to be maintained at all costs, as a result of which, government arts and science colleges that cater to the SC/ST/OBC sections of society, who are even more disadvantaged than the rest of us in facing these challenges, end up suffering. Nevertheless, there is increasing awareness that some of these institutions might stand to gain a lot from culturally appropriate and cost-effective multimodal methods. In an upcoming contribution by Rajan and Iqbal (2024), Digital Storytelling as a Media-based Assignment to Provide Equitable Inclusive Learning Opportunities, the authors suggest that digital storytelling assignments are guided writing projects that facilitate students' envisioning of diverse experiences, create awareness about different cultures, and generate understanding across borders.

However, it is important to note that several research and practical needs persist in this regard. To the best of the author's knowledge, no research has explored the effectiveness of such a multimodal writing pattern among Indian undergraduate students. At that time, even fewer

studies involved public higher education institutions and at-risk learners. Notably, most studies utilised different multimodal writing patterns and had a limited focus on educational effectiveness, for example, how multimodal writing assignments, such as story maps and video essays, decreased visual literacy, creativity, critical thinking, and other important competencies. Finally, organisations need to promote a more culturally sensitive approach; it is critical to ensure that any learning intervention is appropriate for the local context and rooted in learners' realities. While existing research has begun to work on these issues, little has been published on the use of multimodal approaches, specifically in India. The present study aimed to fill these gaps by exploring how the abovementioned writing pattern affected the writing process and results among Indian undergraduates and its potential to improve engagement, visual literacy, digital competence, and cultural responsiveness. Recent works by Mitra, Joshi, Mukherjee, and Sinha also remind the importance of making curricula more multimodal to make classrooms more inclusive and engaging and better prepare students for future challenges and opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

This study followed a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design to examine the impact of two multimodal writing practice story maps and video essays on undergraduate students' engagement and visual literacy. The research was conducted at a government arts and science college in Tamil Nadu, India, with students enrolled in a BA English program. The intervention lasted four weeks and was divided into two modules:

- ***Module 1: Story Maps (2 weeks)***
  Students used tools such as Canva, MindMup, and Google Slides to create visual-narrative maps on themes such as academic journeys, social issues, and cultural biographies. A 3-hour workshop introduced these tools and concepts. The story maps were assessed for spatial organisation, coherence, visual appeal, and reflection.
- ***Module 2:*** *Video Essays (2 weeks)*
  Students created 2–3-minute video essays using mobile-friendly apps, such as Kinemaster or InShot. Topics include digital identity, hometown heritage, and language and identity. A 4-hour training covered scriptwriting, editing, and ethical content use. The essays were assessed based on argument strength, visual integration, technical quality, and creativity.

DATA COLLECTION

Quantitative Data:

- Engagement was measured using a 10-item Likert scale survey (adapted from Schlechty, 2002) at three points: before, mid, and post-intervention.
- Visual literacy was assessed using a 24-point rubric focusing on composition, clarity, integration, and creativity.
- Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, paired t-tests, and repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA), with Cohen's d used for effect size estimation.

Qualitative Data:

- Students submitted reflective journals after each module, detailing their experiences and learning.
- Focus group interviews (n=12) were conducted to gain deeper insight into the students' perceptions, challenges, and relevance of the tasks.
- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was carried out to identify patterns of identity, empowerment, cultural relevance, and academic value.

The study followed strict ethical protocols: informed consent was obtained, participation was voluntary, data were anonymised, and students were free to withdraw without penalties. The intervention aimed to offer meaningful educational value to all the participants. In summary, this methodology blends digital tools with reflective and analytical tasks to explore how multimodal writing can enrich student engagement and literacy in a resource-constrained but culturally rich educational setting.

Table 1: *Participant Demographics (N=60)*

Characteristic	Category	Frequency
Gender	Female	38
	Male	22
Age	18-19 years	42
	20-21 years	18
Medium of Instruction in School	Tamil	35
	English	25
Digital Access	Smartphone only	28
	Smartphone + Computer	32

Prior Experience with Digital Creation	None	15
	Basic	32
	Intermediate	13

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Engagement Scores

Engagement scores were measured at three time points: pre-intervention, midpoint (after Module 1), and post-intervention (after Module 2). The descriptive statistics for the engagement scores are presented in Table 2.

Paired sample t-tests revealed statistically significant increases in engagement scores from pre-intervention to mid-point ($t(59) = 7.84$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.01$) and from mid-point to post-intervention ($t(59) = 5.67$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.73$). The overall increase from pre-to post-intervention was also statistically significant ($t(59) = 8.72$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.13$), indicating a large effect size.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics for Engagement Scores (N=60)*

Time Point	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-intervention	2.87	0.68	1.50	4.20
Mid-point (after Module 1)	3.65	0.72	2.10	4.90
Post-intervention (after Module 2)	4.12	0.61	2.80	5.00

Table 3: *Engagement Scores by Dimension (N=60)*

Dimension	Pre-intervention (Mean)	Mid-point (Mean)	Post-intervention (Mean)	F-value	p-value
Emotional Response	2.75	3.48	3.92	45.67	<.001
Interest	2.98	3.82	4.25	52.34	<.001
Involvement	2.85	3.62	4.08	41.28	<.001
Effort	2.92	3.68	4.15	38.95	<.001

A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed significant differences across time points for all five dimensions ($p < .001$). Post-hoc tests with Bonferroni correction indicated that all pairwise comparisons (pre-intervention to mid-point, mid-point to post-intervention, and pre-intervention to post-intervention) were statistically significant ($p < .01$).

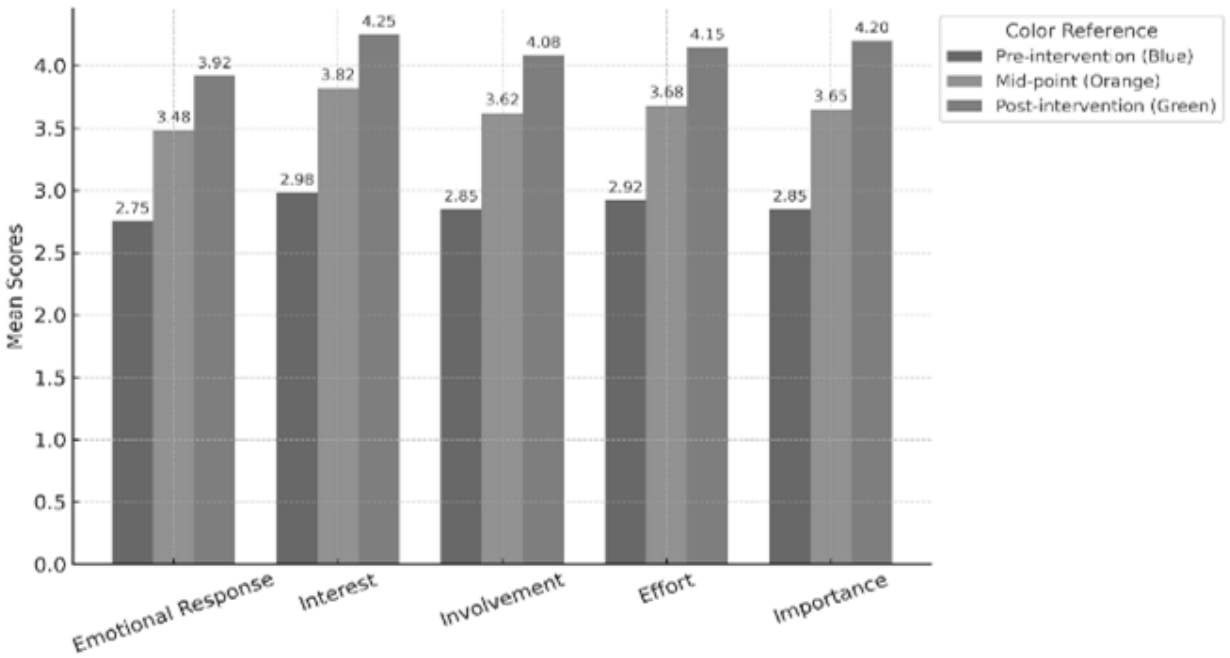

Figure 1. Comparison of Mean Scores Across Intervention Stages

Visual Literacy Scores

Visual literacy was assessed using a researcher-developed rubric at three time points. The descriptive statistics for the visual literacy scores are presented in Table 4.

Paired-sample t-tests revealed statistically significant increases in visual literacy scores from pre-intervention to mid-point ($t(59) = 9.23$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.19$) and from mid-point to post-intervention ($t(59) = 7.86$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.01$). The overall increase from pre-to post-intervention was also statistically significant ($t(59) = 10.24$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.32$), indicating a large effect size. Changes in visual literacy scores across the four rubric criteria are presented in Table 5.

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics for Visual Literacy Scores (N=60)*

Time Point	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-intervention	12.45	2.87	6.00	18.00
Mid-point (after Module 1)	16.82	2.95	10.00	22.00
Post-intervention (after Module 2)	19.73	2.43	14.00	24.00

Table 5: *Visual Literacy Scores by Rubric Criteria (N=60)*

Criterion	Pre-intervention (Mean)	Mid-point (Mean)	Post-intervention (Mean)	F-value	p-value
Composition	3.12	4.25	4.95	78.45	<.001
Clarity	3.08	4.18	4.88	72.36	<.001
Integration	3.15	4.22	4.92	69.87	<.001
Creativity	3.10	4.17	4.98	81.24	<.001

A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed significant differences across time points for all four criteria ($p < .001$). Post hoc tests with Bonferroni correction indicated that all pairwise comparisons were statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Comparative Analysis of Modules

To compare the effectiveness of the two modules, scores from the visual literacy rubric were analysed using a repeated-measures ANOVA with time (mid-point versus post-intervention) as the within-subjects factor. Table 6 presents the results. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the two modules, with video essays yielding higher visual literacy scores than story maps ($F(1,118) = 15.67$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.21$). This indicates a medium-to-large effect size. Further analysis of the individual rubric criteria revealed that the difference was most pronounced in the creativity ($F(1,118) = 22.45$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.28$) and integration criteria ($F(1,118) = 18.92$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.24$).

Table 6: *Comparison of Visual Literacy Scores Between Modules (N=60)*

Module	Mean	Standard Deviation	F-value	p-value
Story Maps (Module 1)	16.82	2.95	15.67	<.001
Video Essays (Module 2)	19.73	2.43		

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between engagement and visual literacy scores at each time point. Table 7 presents the results. The analysis revealed statistically significant positive correlations between engagement and visual literacy scores at all three time points, with the strength of the correlations increasing over time.

Table 7: *Correlation Between Engagement and Visual Literacy Scores (N=60)*

Time Point	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Pre-intervention	0.42	.001
Mid-point (after Module 1)	0.68	<.001
Post-intervention (after Module 2)	0.75	<.001

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis of reflective journals and focus group interviews uncovered a spectrum of valuable insights from students who underwent multimodal writing assignments. One of the most prominent themes that permeated most responses was empowerment through digital creation. In other words, a considerable number of students expressed a newfound sense of confidence in their capabilities afforded through digital tools; many expressed security in producing a video essay or story map, both formats they had never before attempted. For example, one student writes, "Before this assignment, I had never even come close to making something like a video essay. I always thought that these things were only doable by people good with technology. But now I feel proud of having made this because it looks so professional." This sentiment was also present in several focus groups. Another participant said,' When I showed my video essay to my family, they were all open-mouthed. My dad told me that he had no idea that I could do so. It made me feel more empowered than any plain essay ever did." Indeed, the shift from mere consumers to active generators of digital content proved especially transformative for students who felt entirely unfamiliar with digital media. Importantly, multimodal assignments allow for cultural expression and identity work.

Many students were grateful for the space available to engage with their own traditions and languages, because it pertained to activism. One student shared his experience of writing a story map as a process of self-discovery: "When my own cultural biography came out, I realised traditional things that I had never really considered. I interviewed my grandmother about festivals and used her amazing story to create a map. It inspired me to embrace my culture further and realise where some of these traditions fall into who I am. Students also pondered over the video essay project, with one student saying, "Making a video essay on my hometown made me realise that there are so many things that tourists never see. I could tell them about the history of the old buildings or touch on some of the real social problems left unspoken. It was as if I was speaking for my people." We structured a series of assignments that helped students pursue academic work through personal and cultural narratives, creating a combination of research and reflection needed to heighten engagement while maintaining relevance.

As many of the experiences were, the students also faced some hurdles. This included some early teething problems related to new digital platforms and the challenge of combining different ways of communication. As one student admitted, "I had a rough start with video editing software. I spent hours trying to implement transitions and improve the audio sound. I looked up tutorials on YouTube or asked friends for their help. In the end, I felt like I had been taught a new technique that would surely be helpful later in life. Although these learning curves were extremely frustrating, they were still beneficial. A user identified problems with the concept of multimodal composition: "This is a whole different thing from writing an essay where you are typing words. I also had to assign readymade images and placement. With the same type of thought process that I explained about a story map. I first had a real hard time with it, but it made me think more about my subject. The trial-and-error process dovetailed with peer support, and self-directed learning was key in nurturing students' confidence and resilience."

What might have been the most notable, however, was participants' conviction of the academic and professional value of their new abilities. Students repeatedly expressed that the multimodal assignments followed much more closely what they believed was expected in the real world than essay writing. As one student noted, "practical generator-acquisition and artery-mending skills are more applicable to the real world than essays. You need to know how to make presentations, use digital tools, and communicate in many other ways today, regardless of your job. It gave me practical skills that I could put on my resume. "Planning to do a master's degree or further studies in the future, I think these skills will be beneficial and come in handy for research presentations, and maybe even creating digital components to submit as part of my thesis. Now, I am better prepared for advanced academic work. In addition to specific technical skills, students pointed to developing soft skills, including project management, time management, collaboration, and visual storytelling. Broader skill sets were seen as valuable not only to aid performance in the academy but also to improve employability and future career prospects.

Qualitative feedback as a whole is further evidence that multimodal assignment creates more agency, creativity, confidence, and practical skills

regarding creating methods for students: before colonialism around the globe, writing! In the process of integrating story maps and video essays, students not only enhanced their digital and visual literacy but also reclaimed academic writing, turning it into a personal / experiential / expressive / relevant experience for them (as writers).

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings in Context

These findings highlight the promise of multimodal writing interventions as tools to improve engagement and visual literacy in Indian undergraduate higher education, especially in story maps and video essays. The changes in engagement scores were statistically significant, and there was a noticeable statistical improvement in visual literacy competencies that further tested the effectiveness of multimodal tasks. The large effect sizes found for both engagement (d = 1.13) and visual literacy (d = 1.32) further indicate that the intervention not only enhanced student experiences in higher education, but it did so significantly and reliably. The findings are significant, especially as these students primarily belong to government arts and science colleges with a limited technological infrastructure. The results of this study showed that integration of multimodal pedagogies is possible even in a resource-poor environment, as they were quite successful within limited ethics and institutional capacity.

Moreover, the substantial increases in engagement for all five dimensions of emotional response, interest, involvement, effort, and perceived importance indicate that students were not simply doing the work but were becoming emotionally and cognitively engaged with their learning. Impress the growing ability of students to communicate meaning using a range of semiotic modes and careful composition, clarity, integration, and creativity work on their visual literacy. The findings of these two featured studies are in line with the global research literature, but they are set afresh due to the international prevalence of teacher-dominated, traditional, and rote-based pedagogic models in the Indian context. Hence, the findings of this study are relevant for those who wish to reimagine literacy education as per the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Comparative Effectiveness of Story Maps and Video Essays

This comparison indicated a larger positive impact on visual literacy development from video essays than on story maps. While following both formats yielded participants significant gains in learning, video essays showed some advantages in creating more creative and multimodal responses. There are several reasons for this finding. Video essays allow a greater degree of self-expression and narrative voice, allowing students to make their case or present their viewpoint through a combination of audio-visual storytelling and scripting. Second, it is student-friendly based on students' normal behaviour with digital resources (e.g., social media and videos). This type of familiarity removes many cognitive loads and makes them more willing to experiment. Finally, students experienced editing, sequencing, and producing content in Adobe Premiere Pro, a truly hands-on digital storytelling tool. That said, story maps were a crucial pedagogical scaffold. The story maps helped students practice basic spatial organisation and narrative coherence, and built a foundation on which to begin building other multimodal skills. Story mapping for video production is a pedagogically fitting task sequence. This allowed the students an opportunity to learn the core concepts of multimodal design in a less complicated medium before moving to much harder work. Therefore, the comparative results shed light on the benefits of video essays and the importance of scaffolded learning in multimodal environments (p. 247).

Engagement and Visual Literacy: A Reinforcing Relationship

The most significant result of this study was that the relationship between engagement and visual literacy became more pronounced during the intervention. This was due to a moderate correlation in the pre-intervention phase (r = 0.42) to a strong correlation post-intervention (r = 0.75), suggesting that such a relationship would be self-augmenting. As students became more involved in the multimodal assignments, they became more sophisticated at articulating challenging ideas visually and digitally. In other words, as students increased their visual literacy, they enjoyed and valued the creative process, leading to growing engagement in the art classroom. This dynamic, in turn, supports the underpinnings of the theoretical perspectives that closely link motivation and

literacy development. This is significant: if students do not see why what they are reading and doing has anything to do with them, why should we expect them to keep up the work, or even be interested in it? People keep on keeping on when they see what they are working towards. Multimodal approaches could be a powerful remedy, especially in the Indian context, where student disengagement occurs due to rigid traditional instructional formats. These effects were amplified through culturally relevant and personally meaningful content that provided an inclusive and empowering learning experience.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study make substantive theoretical contributions to the multimodal literacy literature. The results offer evidence of the work by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), suggesting that meaning is not located in a few modalities but only across modalities, recommending similar pedagogical procedures. This study contributes by expanding the relevance of multimodal theory beyond Western, technologically advanced classrooms and demonstrates that particular types of multimodal tasks can be effectively engaged in under-resourced Indian classrooms. How students' reflections highlighted their cultural expression and identity are consistent with a "funds of knowledge" perspective (Moll et al., 1992), which argues for connecting home and community-based experiences to academic learning. Students reported feeling more of a stake in and connection to their work when they were able to infuse academic inquiry with stories about the family, community, tradition, and language. These insights highlight the importance of contextually embedded pedagogies that value students' lived experiences in multicultural and multilingual countries, such as India.

Practical Implications for Teaching and Curriculum Design

The study provides a range of policy and practical recommendations for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers interested in embedding multimodal pedagogies within higher education. One-story maps, video essays, and other multimodal writing practices can be easily incorporated into current undergraduate curricula without trying to rebuild what we have now from scratch. You can provide a more diverse and inclusive form of assessment to students when you include them in traditional essays. Next, this paper argues that faculty development should provide training on how to create multimodal assignments and evaluate these forms of work. Despite positive attitudes towards digital solutions, teachers are often not exposed to these methods and may benefit from workshops and peer-led sessions in which the use of digital tools is made accessible. We cannot understate the importance of a scaffolded implementation, as demonstrated by this intervention, where the number-first Canva and MindMup are followed by video editing platforms. This type of model provides a path for students to build gradual confidence regardless of their digital skill levels. Finally, students seemed to appreciate culturally themed assignments, so multimodal activity (in the broadest sense of the word) should align with local interests and identity (reaching all multiplicities: gender, race, etc.). This helps to increase engagement and deepen critical and reflective capacity. Lastly, given that top-of-the-line infrastructure is not required to achieve significant digital learning, the use of freely available and mobile-friendly tools such as InShot and Kinemaster makes this intervention truly effective. This is especially true for public institutions in rural or economically challenged areas, which have an ongoing problem with funding and access to technology.

Limitations and Considerations

Despite these promising results, several limitations of this study need to be addressed. There were a few limitations, as the sample size used in this chapter was relatively small (N=60) and the study focused only on a single-discipline English study within an institutional context in Tamil Nadu. Therefore, the results of this study are not generalizable. Finally, future studies should recruit participants from a broader spectrum of disciplines and institutions. Because the intervention was only four weeks long, it is also not clear what the long-term effects of multimodal learning may be. Sustained engagement and the scale of skills could change over a longer period. In addition, delivery by only one leader means that there is a risk of bias; other facilitators might be able to achieve such effects more or less effectively, depending on their comfort and expertise in digital pedagogy. The assessment limitations also merit consideration. Although the rubric for visual literacy has been designed and refined systematically, it needs to be validated in

diverse learning environments before it can ensure reliability and fairness. Finally, the qualitative data gathered from volunteers could have selection bias towards the more enthusiastic students, who were much more likely to engage in reflective tasks and interviews.

Future Research Directions

Based on this study, several possible directions for future research are discussed. To this end, more cross-disciplinary comparative research is needed in which researchers examine how multimodal pedagogies function in content-intensive areas. Second, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the durability of multimodal learning outcomes and into the extent to which they are generalizable to other academic or professional contexts. A third type of analysis would be cross-institutional, rural, urban public, and private institutions, and how contextual variables influence the design and effectiveness of multimodal instruction. Finally, more research is needed on how to implement these interventions successfully in low-resource settings, ideally with a mobile-first strategy. Finally, having more universal practices for shaping and validating evaluation measures around multimodal competencies would benefit educators by establishing an acceptable degree of consistency, equitable standards, and quality assurance over student work.

CONCLUSION

In Indian undergraduate classes, this research shows how story maps and video essays, as a multisensory theoretical design, better engaged with students' visual literacy than traditional writing approaches. These statistically significant improvements in engagement and visual literacy test scores, along with the common positive emergent themes from the semi-structured interview data, back these pedagogies as being beneficial to the Indian higher education sector. The results also indicate that multimodal writing practices can serve as a link between conventional academic writing and the current communication needs of the 21st century. Such interventions are crucial for developing critical digital literacies that not only align with NEP 2020 but also meet the demands of the world today, where visual, spatial, and text can be mobilised in a single academic work. Crucially, this study demonstrated that potentially transformative multimodal learning could be rolled out even in a low-resource environment using free open-access digital tools and culturally appropriate content. In the Indian context, as in many others where social inequality is extreme, this could have important implications for educational equity; new forms of engaging pedagogical practices can be accessible even beyond resource-rich institutions. As Indian higher education grapples with developments in a globalised context and responds to national policy directives, multimodal pedagogies could provide a means of engaging students, fostering critical literacies, and preparing students for the complex communication challenges they will face. Indian higher education institutions can practice these methodologies to achieve their primary objective of setting up students for involvement in the multimodal world.

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