

## **Visual Narratives and Linguistic Inclusion: Reframing Multimodal Pedagogy in Indian Undergraduate English Classrooms**

Bhagoji, Manisha

International Council for Education Research and Training Pennsylvania USA

### **Abstract**

The difference in the level of English language proficiency among Indian undergraduates is still indicative of larger social/educational inequalities. Specifically, these differences are linked to socio-economic status, language of instruction in lower levels of schooling, and levels of linguistic resources. Students whose first language is not English are more likely to face severe problems with conventional literature, since such texts contain complex syntax. Thus, fair classroom involvement and participation are limited. The paper examines how multimodal texts (especially graphic novels) can be used to create more accommodating and inclusive learning environments in undergraduate English classrooms. A twelve-week training programme was implemented among 50 students with different language backgrounds. The objective was to examine the differences between conventional text-based learning and a multimodal approach. According to the quantitative test outcomes as well as qualitative observations, it was identified that students in the multimodal material conditions demonstrated considerable improvement. The improvements were observed in reading comprehension, vocabulary development, classroom engagement and confidence in learning. These findings suggest that visual and textual information may be used to assist in the process of meaning-making. The combination aids in alleviating linguistic barriers. It also optimizes the involvement of cognition. This paper states that multimodal pedagogy offers a viable method of inclusive education. It also assists in solving language proficiency differences. Implementation of multimodal texts in the English language curriculum can consequently address more fair and effective teaching in multilingual higher education institutions.

*Keywords:* Multimodal pedagogy, graphic narratives, English language teaching, linguistic inclusion, educational accessibility, visual literacy

## 1. Introduction

The spread of English as a language of academic communication worldwide has highlighted its importance in higher education. This is particularly evident in postcolonial and multilingual societies such as India. English proficiency serves as a mode of instruction. It also exists as a form of cultural and linguistic capital. Academic mobility, employability, and social progression depend on this capital (Bourdieu 47). However, access to English language education is not equal. This inequality results in structural gaps among the undergraduates. Students of regional-language-medium schools are often deprived of effective second language acquisition. They experience difficulties in understanding academic material. Participating in classroom discussions is also a challenge for them. This results in poor academic performance. In contrast, students with English as their first language are always privileged. These gaps

show how proficiency in English shapes the academic experiences and opportunities of students of higher education.

The conventional pedagogy of English literature is usually focused on established literature. These readings are made up of complex syntax. They also involve abstract themes and contexts that are far removed. These features, potentially unwittingly, strengthen the existing differences between the students. These learning strategies presuppose a high level of linguistic skills. They also suppose knowledge of literary conventions. Consequently, they also favor those students who have prior experience of being exposed to academic English (Krashen 21). On the contrary, students who have deprived linguistic competence are unable to follow up; they face a cognitive overload. Eventually, they lose motivation. It also harms their academic self-efficacy. According to the recent changes in literacy theory, it has become apparent that literacy is

not restricted to alphabetic decoding. Rather, it entails the capacity to decode multimodal communications. These forms are composed of visual, linguistic, and spatial (Kress 79). Multimodal texts provide several points of entry for meaning-making. This enables the learners to approach the complex content differently. They can employ complementary channels of cognition to back up meaning. This trend is indicative of general trends in communication practice.

Multimodal learning settings stimulate neural networks in the brain through a cognitive neuroscience perspective. These networks relate to language processing, visual perception and integration of memory. Neurocognitive studies indicate that encoding efficiency is enhanced with multimodal application. It is also useful in decreasing cognitive load. Also, it enhances the consolidation of memory (Mayer and Moreno 43). This process is better explained by the Dual Coding Theory. According to it, visual and verbal presentations of information are processed more efficiently. This kind of information also gets memorized better than one that uses single mode merely (Paivio 53). In these regards, graphic

narratives are a powerful multimodal learning tool. Graphic novels are a mix of sound and visuals. Spatial sequencing and symbolic representation are also used by them. These traits enable the learners to create meaning by engaging in combined thought processes. It is possible to build visual and verbal information simultaneously. This process aids in comprehending more. Such elements are particularly beneficial in the case of second-language learners. They assist learners to cope with linguistic and interpretive difficulties in a better way.

The research paper examines the effects of multimodal narrative teaching on reading comprehension, vocabulary learning, learner engagement and classroom participation in a group of undergraduate English language learners in India. Through this study of the pedagogical efficacy of graphic narratives, the study makes contributions to the current body of scholarship on multimodal literacy, inclusive pedagogy, and cognitive strategies toward language learning.

## **2. Conceptual Background**

### 2.1 Multimodal Communication and Learning

In modern multimodal communication, it is not only written words that are used, but it also contains graphic pictures, space arrangement and forms. The various forms collaborate to bring meaning. According to the multimodal theory, language is not the sole source of meaning; it is the formation of verbal and visual interaction between multiple forms of representation (Kress 79). According to Gunther Kress, modern literacy presupposes the possibility of perceiving both visual and textual information. He states that contemporary communication spaces attribute more implication to the integrated visual and verbal messages instead of the spoken ones (Kress and van Leeuwen 15).

Multimodal materials can be used in the education sector to enable students to break down information in a better manner. Such materials facilitate language by contributing visual information. The visuals can be used to elicit the meaning and simplify the information. The cognitive study indicates that both visual and verbal information is processed by the visual and verbal mental

systems in different but related ways (Paivio 53). The togetherness of these two channels through this process assists learners to encode and remember information at a more important level. The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning by Mayer describes significant learning as the active fusion between visual and verbal information by the learner. This combination assists them to develop clear and structured mental knowledge images (Mayer 84).

### 2.2 Visual Narratives as Educational Resources

Graphic novels are the presentation of long stories in the form of a series of graphic panels and textual dialogues called sequential art. They blend text and images to get the meaning. There is no dependency on language for comprehension as in traditional prose. Meaning is conveyed by both visual and textual communication simultaneously. It is observed that graphic texts have semiotic intricacies. Those who read have to understand visual symbols, a series of spaces and link images to a written work (Chute 3). This method comprises higher-order thinking skills like making inferences, synthesizing

information and conceptualizing a symbolic meaning. This bi-structure can accommodate experimental learners. Visual context assists the learners in deriving meaning in cases where some words are not known. It decreases cognitive load and facilitates understanding. The pictures allow the learners to interpret the text with the help of the image. The second language acquisition research indicates that contextual support enhances vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension.

### 2.3 Linguistic Inequality and Classroom Participation

In multilingual classes, language proficiency influences student involvement in class activities or in learning. Students, fluent in English incline to be more active than the other students. Others are anxious to speak because they are not sure of their language proficiency. This leads to unequal classroom participation. According to socio-cultural learning theory, learning occurs through exchange with other individuals. This interaction is influenced by social and cultural context (Vygotsky 86). Language is important in this process.

Critical pedagogical theory also highlights the importance of educational structures. It suggests that teaching practice can support the status quo. This happens when teaching methods favor dominant languages like English (Freire 72). Other students may feel excluded or less confident. This gap can be reduced by teaching techniques that provide alternative ways of understanding content. These strategies can increase learner confidence and encourage participation.

## **3. Methodology**

### 3.1 Research Design

The research design utilized in this study is a quasi-experimental mixed research design, a study that entailed both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. Mixed-method designs offer methodological triangulation that contributes to better reliability and validity of research results of the combination of statistical measurement and interpretive analysis (Creswell 14). The research experiment was based on a twelve-week teaching period in a normal semester of study.

### 3.2 Participants

The sample population consisted of fifty undergraduate students studying a mandatory national English course in an Indian institution of higher education learning. The participants were aged 18 to 21 years old and had diverse linguistic, social-economic and educational backgrounds. Twenty-eight respondents (56%) had attended education in previous schools, which followed the medium of instruction in regional languages, whereas twenty-two respondents (44%) attended institutions which followed English language as the instructional medium. It was the diversity that offered a proper background in studying the connection between the modality of instruction and linguistic accessibility. The two groups of instruction were randomly chosen to reduce selection bias and bring about internal validity.

Control Group (n=25): The participants received the traditional instruction based on the traditional literary sources and the lecture-oriented teaching techniques.

Experimental (n=25): This group was provided with a multimodal intervention in which graphics narratives were used in conjunction with standard literary resources.

### 3.3 Instructional Intervention

The instructional intervention was carried out in a period of twelve weeks, and both groups had the same instructional time and objectives in their curriculum. The experimental group was urged to work with the multimodal texts with visual and textual materials, and the control group was taught to work with the texts only. Teaching activities were guided reading, interpretative discussion, and analysis of words and written response. Both groups were evaluated based on the same evaluation criteria.

### 3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Methodological rigor has been ensured by a few data collection tools:

*Reading Comprehension Assessment:* Reading comprehension tests in the pre- and post-instructional intervention were placed in order to assess the changes in reading comprehension skill.

*Vocabulary Assessment:* Lexical evaluation was done through vocabulary recognition and context inference.

*Student Engagement Survey:* Surveys were offered in a structured form that also included learner motivation measures, engagement and perception of comprehension.

*Classroom Observation Protocol:* detailing of systematic observation took place in terms of frequency of participation, discussion, and patterns of interaction.

*Written Analytical Responses:* The student essays were assessed with the help of standardized rubrics, such as interpretive depth evaluation, critical analysis evaluation, and conceptual understanding.

### 3.5 Statistical Analysis

Paired sample t-tests were used to compare the difference in the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores of quantitative data analysis. Differences between the results were used to establish the effect size, which was calculated using Cohen's d. The thematic coding procedures were used to analyse qualitative data, to draw patterns of learner

engagement, confidence and interpretive development. With this multi-layered method of analysis, statistical reliability and interpretive validity were ensured.

## **4. Findings**

### 4.1 Reading Comprehension

Students who were subjected to multimodal instructional materials showed a greater improvement in their comprehension scores as compared to students who had been taught with traditional methods. Such results confirm cognitive theories that propose that multimodal input boosts the process of information processing because it has the effect of spreading out cognitive load among a variety of processing systems (Paivio 53). The interpretation was aided by visual context and minimized the reliance on linguistic familiarity, and enabled learners to build meaning based on inferential logical thinking, prone to visual scaffolding. This observation is consistent with multimedia learning studies that indicate that visual-verbal integration helps to increase understanding and recollection (Mayer, 84).

#### 4.2 Student Engagement

In the multimodal group, students stated that they felt more interested and motivated. According to classroom observations, there was more voluntary participation and interpretive conversation. It has been detected that emotional and visual presence can promote better attention and more profound thinking in the thought process, which leads to better learning results (Kress 79). Graphic texts utilize both the affective and cognitive systems in parallel and facilitate both emotional involvement and intellectual evaluation.

#### 4.3 Vocabulary Development

By establishing a contextual reinforcement, the multimodal materials helped vocabulary acquisition. Students could deduce meaning based on pictures and contextual elements, which supported theories of contextual learning as a process in language acquisition (Richards and Rodgers 45). Dual coding studies indicate that the vocabulary that has undergone both the visual and verbal encodings has a higher probability of being stored in the long-term memory (Paivio 53).

#### 4.4 Participation and Confidence

The improvement in participation was exceptional among students of non-English-medium background. The use of visual messages also seemed to ease anxiety over language-challenging socio-cultural theories that highlight the role of scaffolding in learning (Vygotsky 86). Linguistic barriers were minimized, which allowed learners to become more active in the interpretive discussion. These results indicate that multimodal pedagogy might serve as a levelling instructional strategy that would open up participation opportunities.

### **5. Discussion**

The findings of this paper present empirical evidence of the hypothesis that multimodal instructional techniques improve the learning outcomes in the language and enhance inclusion in education. Students who were exposed to multimodal instruction showed statistically significant results. The results imply that multimodal teaching methods can increase the interpretive through decreasing the use of linguistic decoding. Visual context gives cognitive assistance, which improves



understanding and interest. This increased access facilitates inclusive enclosure. Learners can contribute to classroom discussions if they can count on visual interpretation as well as linguistic processing. Multimodal pedagogy does not make the academic content any easier. It instead establishes more avenues through which learners can interact with complex concepts. These results draw our attention to the need for flexibility of pedagogy in multilingual teaching and learning.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper illustrates that undergraduate-level English classrooms can be greatly enhanced by altering perception, engagement, vocabulary acquisition and interpretive involvement using multimodal expounded material. These results align with the cognitive and educational research, which confirms the usefulness of the multimodal learning setting to aid both the acquisition and retention of knowledge (Mayer 84; Paivio 53). The visual narratives have the cognitive scaffolding that assists in the building of meaning, especially for those less proficient in language. Through the

disproportionate use of linguistic decoding, multimodal pedagogy is characterized by increased access to interpretation and enhances the relative inclusivity. Such evidence also works to the advantage of the socio-cultural theories, which lay stress on the importance of mediated learning in cognitive development (Vygotsky 86). Multimodal texts can be viewed as mediational devices that can help learners bridge the gap between the previously acquired knowledge and the new linguistic formations.

The application of multimodal pedagogy in teaching the English language can alleviate the issue of structural inequality that comes up with the discrepancy in language proficiency. These strategies correspond to the new literacy practices of the modern communication setting (Kress 79). Multimodal literacy should be built into future educational systems as part of an inclusive pedagogical system. Multimodal pedagogy is not just an additional instructional resource, but a radical change of more just and efficient educational practice in multilingual academic schools.

## Declaration

This paper is connected to the study carried out within the author's research for the dissertation. It has been revised, rewritten, and reorganized considerably to constitute a complete scholarly contribution which could qualify to be published in journals. Although the article is based on the larger doctoral research framework, the current one is a narrow and specific version suited to be published. Everywhere, appropriate due credit and all references have been given as per the rules of MLA 9th edition. The paper has never been published before in this form, and is not under consideration in another journal.

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