


## Through Texts and Textures: Towards an Interdisciplinary History Pedagogy in Indian Classrooms

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**Abstract:** Rooted in the investigation and interpretation of the past, History is what defines the present and shapes the future, offering critical socio-cultural and political insights. However, the methods of teaching history in Indian classrooms often remain conventional and rigid, lacking learner engagement. Drawing from the qualitative responses collected through a survey questionnaire designed to understand the experiences, perceptions, methods, and limitations associated with the teaching and learning of history in Indian classrooms, this article proposes an interdisciplinary pedagogical framework that integrates literature and visual art forms, supported by appropriate technological and digital tools, aiming to rethink history pedagogy. Further, by focusing on the Swadeshi Movement as a pedagogical example, the study examines how the proposed interdisciplinary pedagogical framework can enhance learner engagement, encouraging both critical and analytical thinking. Through the proposed interdisciplinary pedagogical approach, it also explores the scope for improving the learners' academic English proficiency, particularly English for Academic Purposes [EAP].

**Keywords:** EAP, ELT, ESL, Interdisciplinary Pedagogy, Literature, Pedagogical Approaches, Visual Arts

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### 1. Introduction

Teaching in the twenty-first century has become undeniably complex. The role of the teacher is no longer limited to imparting knowledge or delivering information. It has become essential for teachers to effectively upskill their learners, responding to their social and emotional needs, and adapting to rapidly evolving technologies and emerging digital tools. One of the key factors that accelerated the adoption and application of digital tools in education, for both teaching and learning, was the COVID-19 pandemic, during which such tools emerged as the only viable option. The teaching practices and learning methods in the post-pandemic era continue to utilize appropriate digital tools powered by Artificial Intelligence, popularly known as AI. However, it is significant to examine whether the use of digital tools is both strictly necessary and effective across all pedagogical contexts. In the context of teaching English as a second language, diverse AI-driven digital tools, which include apps, software programs, and online platforms, play a significant role in supporting both teachers and students.

The digital tools such as ChatGPT, Wordwall, Diffit, TeacherServer, Curipod and Twee help teachers in mapping course syllabi, creating lesson plans, and facilitating interactive and engaging activities ("English Language Learners," 2026), aiming for enhanced learner experiences. On the other hand, tools such as SuperNova AI, ELSA Speak, Mizou, and GetPronounce are utilized by students in improving their language proficiency, focusing on accuracy and fluency, contributing to self-paced learning ("Top 7 AI tools," 2024; India Today Education Desk, 2025). It is therefore evident that the integration of AI-driven digital tools in English Language Teaching or ELT pedagogies has become highly effective and essential (Torres & Kahveci, 2025). While digital tools are evidently effective in ELT pedagogical approaches, their effectiveness in teaching academic disciplines such as History must be examined.

Although history is an interpretive and evidence-based academic discipline, learners, particularly in India, often perceive it merely as a means of scoring marks due to current pedagogical practices that emphasize rote

memorization rather than critical analysis (Dhar, 2025). Michel Danino, a former visiting professor at the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar, highlights the limitations of conventional history teaching by recounting two experiences in Tamil Nadu. During a workshop for students of matriculation schools in Chennai, he observed that many students perceived history classes as a ‘sleeping pill’ because of traditional and rigid pedagogical approaches (2019). Similarly, while addressing teachers at a leading school in Coimbatore, he found that even educators viewed history as uninteresting, with a computer science teacher remarking that it was the first time she had found history exciting, admitting that she had always disliked the subject (2019). The negative perception of history classes among both learners and educators is due to the emphasis on rote learning and memorization of the past, rather than on the interpretation of the past.

## 2. Materials, Methods & Findings

To further investigate such concerns, the study draws on qualitative data collected through an online questionnaire created to understand the experiences, perceptions, pedagogical methods, and limitations associated with the teaching and learning of history in Indian classrooms. The survey was also designed to explore the possibilities and potential scope of developing an interdisciplinary approach to history pedagogy through the integration of literature and visual arts as primary modes of engagement, supported by necessary technological and digital tools. The questionnaire included structured sections on respondents’ academic designation and prior exposure to teaching or learning history formally, their general perceptions of history as an academic discipline in Indian classrooms, factors influencing learners’ engagement, and attitudes towards the use of literary texts, visual art forms, and digital tools and resources in history education. It further sought responses on historical topics or contexts applicable for interdisciplinary instruction alongside appropriate technological tools, and potential limitations and challenges in implementing such interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches in Indian classrooms.

The study included thirty participants from diverse educational and professional backgrounds in India, including undergraduate and postgraduate students, research scholars, school teachers, and IT professionals. The diversity of the sample was intended to examine and ensure whether individuals, regardless of their age factors and educational backgrounds, perceive the current history pedagogy in Indian classrooms as rigid and lacking engagement. Drawing from the responses, the majority of respondents perceive history as ‘interesting’, primarily because of the rich knowledge and insights it offers. However, when reduced to a classroom subject, the respondents find history less engaging, thereby justifying the limitations of existing pedagogical approaches and practices. The following factors were identified by the respondents as contributing to the lack of engagement in history teaching and learning:

Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Demanding Rote Memorization	9	30.0%
Textbook-centered Teaching	7	23.3%
Teacher-centered Instruction	4	13.3%
Lack of Storytelling/Contextual Teaching	9	30.0%
Insufficient Use of Technology	8	26.7%

Table 1: Factors Contributing to the Perception of History Pedagogy as Less Engaging

**Note.** Participants were allowed to select more than one option; therefore, the total frequency exceeds the number of participants (N = 30), and the total percentage exceeds 100%.

In light of the factors identified by the respondents, lack of storytelling or contextual teaching, rote memorization, and textbook-centered instruction contribute significantly to making History teaching and learning in Indian classrooms less engaging and challenging, respectively. It is therefore crucial to rethink and reshape History education, adopting more effective pedagogical approaches that align with the understanding outcome-based education model as emphasized in the National Education Policy 2020 (Sheth, 2025). The paradigmatic shift from traditional rote memorization to understanding-based model of learning history with heightened emphasis on “critical thinking, experiential learning, and holistic development” (Thankachan, 140)

can be achieved through reshaping the pedagogical methods adopting interdisciplinary approaches, which requires integration of interlinked concepts, methods, and theoretical perspectives across diverse disciplines, facilitating analytical and critical thinking (“Interdisciplinary learning?,” 2025).

To determine whether literature, encompassing diverse forms such as novels, poems, and memoirs, could constitute a highly relevant and effective pedagogical approach for integration into history pedagogy in order to make it interdisciplinary, respondents’ perceptions were collected using a five-point Likert scale, as follows:

Likert Scale Response	No. of Respondents (N)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	7	23.3%
Agree	16	53.3%
Neutral	5	16.7%
Disagree	2	6.7%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

Table 2: Respondents’ Perceptions on whether Literature Helps in Understanding History Better

Note. N=30.

In addition to literature, respondents were asked whether visual art forms which include historical artworks, paintings, and posters, could be integrated into history pedagogy to enhance its effectiveness. Their responses as collected using the five-point Likert scale are presented as follows:

Likert Scale Response	No. of Respondents (N)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	8	26.7%
Agree	20	66.6%
Neutral	2	6.7%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

Table 3: Respondents’ Perceptions on whether Visual Art Forms Help in Understanding History Better

Note. N=30.

To further ascertain whether literature and visual art forms are appropriate for integration into history pedagogy, respondents were asked whether literary or visual materials had ever helped them understand a historical theme, topic or context more comprehensively. Among the responses obtained, 90% of the respondents answered ‘Yes’ while the remaining 10% selected ‘Maybe’. Based on the responses obtained, the next section of the questionnaire listed key historical topics and contexts, out of which respondents identified those they considered highly relevant and suitable for interdisciplinary instruction. The results are presented below:

Historical Theme/Topic	Frequency	Percentage
Colonialism, Nationalism, & Freedom Struggle	15	50%
Social Reform Movements & Caste/Identity	10	33.3%
Partition & Modern Political History	10	33.3%

Table 4: Historical Topics Best Suited for Teaching through Visual Arts and Literature

*Note.* Participants were allowed to select more than one option; therefore, the sum of frequencies exceeds the number of participants [N = 30], and the total percentage exceeds 100%.

Given that Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Freedom Struggle were selected by the majority of respondents as the most relevant historical topic for interdisciplinary instruction, this study has chosen the nationalist Swadeshi Movement as a focal context to be examined and discussed through the proposed pedagogical framework integrating literature, visual arts, and appropriate digital and technological tools, aiming for effective teaching and enhanced learning engagement.

### 3. Towards an Interdisciplinary Pedagogical Framework: A Discussion

Promulgated in 1905 at Calcutta in the form of a mass protest against Lord Curzon’s Partition of Bengal Act, the Swadeshi movement emerged as one of the crucial nationalist revolts against the British colonial rule, sparking a

cultural renaissance in art, literature, and education (“Mains marathon,” 2023; Kushaaal, 2025). Primarily known for its call for boycotting British goods and popularization of *Khadi*, this nationalist movement is largely responsible for incorporating anticolonial sentiments, emphasizing the need to attain a unified sense of ‘Indianness’ (Warrier, 2026; Tomar, 1). The Swadeshi Movement is applicable for interdisciplinary instruction if taught as a cultural renaissance, rather than one of the Indian nationalist movements of political resistance.

In light of its cultural significance, the Swadeshi Movement can be pedagogically approached through an interdisciplinary framework, integrating history, literature, and visual arts and incorporating mythological and folk elements, thereby aiming to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of Indian nationalism. The Swadeshi movement in most Indian classrooms is typically taught as one of the many nationalist movements shaping the Indian freedom struggle, offering only historical and political context. Such a rigid pedagogical approach, which neglects the cultural, literary, and aesthetic dimensions of the movement, fails to highlight its key idea of nationhood attributed to the notion of ‘Indianness’. Ashok Vohra (2018) views Indianness as a “question about the traditional, cultural values, the total form of lived life and philosophy that an Indian adheres to, whether living within the territory of India or outside it” (1). In light of Vohra’s view, the pluralistic notion of Indianness can be defined as likened to Abraham Lincoln’s definition of democracy as ‘of India, by Indians, and for the Indians’, embracing cultural and religious diversity. The Swadeshi Movement can be taught effectively and engagingly, elucidating its key ideas and cultural significance through a comprehensive interdisciplinary pedagogical framework that incorporates literary texts and visual art forms, allowing no scope for confusions and misinterpretation. The teaching of the movement may begin with an introduction to its central ideological objective, which is to achieve financial self-sufficiency through the boycott of British goods, thereby sparking national pride (“Swadeshi Movement (1905),” 2025).

Prior to the integration of literary and artistic elements and representations, it is crucial to ensure that learners are well-informed about the socio-political atmosphere centered on the 1905 Partition of Bengal, which acted as a catalyst contributing significantly to the intensity of nationalism (Vajiram Editor, 2026). Within this context, the etymology of the term Swadeshi can be introduced. The term ‘Swadeshi’ is a Hindi word derived from the conjunction of two Sanskrit words, ‘swa’, meaning ‘self’ or ‘one’s own’, and ‘desh’, meaning ‘country’, thereby contributing to the literal meaning of ‘Swadesh’ as ‘own country’ and further ‘Swadeshi’ as ‘one’s own country’ (Tasneem, 25). The Swadeshi movement must not be primarily understood as a form of economic patriotism promoting the use of indigenous goods (Velkar, 2020), but as a broader cultural philosophy that advocated and achieved a unified nationalist spirit through economic means. At this juncture, literature becomes a crucial pedagogic medium through which the emotional, cultural and symbolic dimensions of nationalism can be explored.

The literary discussion may begin with *Anandamath*, translated into English as *The Sacred Brotherhood*, a seminal work of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, a foundational figure in Indian nationalism. Originally published in 1882 in Bengali, the novel is notable for its position in nationalist discourse, owing to the coining of the hymn ‘*Bande Mataram*’, or ‘*Vande Mataram*’, meaning “I bow to thee, Mother” in Sanskrit (“Vande Mataram,” 2024), which later emerged as the nationalist slogan defining the purpose of the Swadeshi Movement. Through discussion of the novel’s plot, characters, and central themes, the learners can be encouraged to examine how literary imagination contributed to the transformation of territorial, regional or sectarian nationalism into an emotionally and culturally charged and shared experience.

Published twenty-three years before the Swadeshi Movement, *Anandamath* is a fictionalized historical novel centered on the late eighteenth-century Sannyasi Rebellion led by Hindu monks against the British East India Company (Roychowdhury, 2026; “Anand Math: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay,” n.d.). Although the novel embodies a nationalist spirit, it is not entirely secular, as its personified depiction of India as ‘*Bharat Mata*’, meaning ‘Mother India’, is rooted in Hindu iconography, featuring the motherly figure in an aggressive posture, seated on or riding a lion or tiger, and holding a saffron flag. The nation is symbolized through the images of three Hindu deities, *Jagaddhatri*, *Kali*, and *Durga*, each representing its past, the present, and the future,

respectively (Banerji, 2016; Desai, 2-4). In light of the non-secular aspects of this fictional personified symbolic representation of India, it becomes essential to examine how the representational shift of *Bharat Mata* from a radical sectarian deity to a unified national symbol is facilitated by Abanindranath Tagore of the Bengal School of Art, thereby enabling a seamless transition from literature to pedagogic visual arts.

Established by Abanindranath Tagore, the nephew of Rabindranath Tagore, around 1905, the Bengal School of Art, also known as the Neo-Bengal School, may be introduced as a significant art revivalist movement that emphasized the need to ‘Indianize’ art education (“Bengal School of Art Paintings Collections,” n.d.; Wong, 2024). Its primary objective was to attain an Indian identity through the rejection of European academic realism, while reinforcing and revitalizing subjects and elements of Indian mythology, folklore, and history (ArtZolo, 2024). Abanindranath Tagore incorporated traditional Indian aesthetics in his paintings centered on Indian mythology, Mughal-Rajput history, literary epics, and allegorical nationalism (“Abanindranath Tagore,” n.d.). One of his seminal paintings, *Bharat Mata*, can be discussed as an allegorical nationalist work through which he successfully reimagined and re-established the figure of *Bharat Mata* as a secular and unified national symbol through conceptual modifications. In this context, students must be encouraged to observe how he modified the radical sectarian depiction of *Bharat Mata*, which is through removal and replacement of weapons, lions, and aggressive battlefield postures and elements with a calm four-armed figure holding the Vedas, sheaves of rice, a mala, and a white cloth, symbolizing knowledge, food, spiritual faith, and cotton *Khadi* clothing, respectively (“*Bharat Mata* [Mother India],” n.d.; Rana, 2020). The reimagined and modified secular representation of *Bharat Mata* can be understood as promoting a unified nationalist spirit by transcending religious boundaries.

The interdisciplinary pedagogy can be further enhanced through the utilization of appropriate and necessary digital tools. In light of the responses collected through the survey questionnaire, the following tools were identified by respondents as the most preferred for interdisciplinary instruction:

Tools	Frequency	Percentage
Audiobooks	4	13.3%
Visual learning tools	14	46.7%
Interactive timelines	4	13.3%
Virtual museum tours	5	16.7%
AI-assisted learning [chatbots, AI tutors, summaries]	4	13.3%

Table 5: Tools Identified by Respondents as Appropriate for Interdisciplinary Instruction

**Note.** Participants were allowed to select more than one response option; therefore, the sum of frequencies exceeds the number of participants ( $N = 30$ ), and the total percentage exceeds 100%.

In light of the responses, the tools chosen by the majority of the participants as effective for an interdisciplinary history pedagogy are visual learning tools and virtual museum tours. Visual learning tools, which include quizzes and presentations incorporated with images and videos, digital illustrations, and other comprehensive visual resources, can enhance learners’ engagement. However, the implementation of virtual museum tours, particularly in the Indian context, presents certain challenges in terms of cost-efficiency, infrastructural requirements, and accessibility-related practical constraints.

It is evident that the adoption of a rich interdisciplinary pedagogical framework in history education holds the potential to foster both critical and analytical thinking among learners, enabling them to move beyond rote memorization. However, in light of the shift towards an interdisciplinary pedagogical approach, existing curricula and assessment methods should be revised, redesigned and reformed, aiming to evaluate learners’ abilities to analyse the historical contexts, socio-political conditions, and ideological environments that contributed to the emergence of particular movements or events rather than merely recalling dates and facts.

Although the primary aim of the proposed interdisciplinary pedagogical framework is to teach and learn history effectively and engagingly in Indian classrooms, it also provides opportunities to enhance learners’ academic proficiency in English, particularly English for Academic Purposes or EAP at a higher education level. EAP

skills in the history classrooms can be developed through simple yet effective task-based activities, such as simulated seminars in which learners are encouraged to participate in structured academic discussions and debates based on the perspectives they gain from analysing and interpreting specific historical themes, topics, or contexts. For instance, teachers or instructors may encourage students to observe, interpret, and describe art forms, historical artifacts, and archived historical documents associated with nationalist movements, thereby gradually strengthening their academic vocabulary, analytical thinking and writing, communicative and argumentative skills, driving them toward a research-oriented level. It is therefore fair to assert that the proposed interdisciplinary framework not only makes history teaching and learning effective and engaging, but also contributes to enhancing the learners' EAP skills.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study, based on responses collected through survey questionnaire, highlights the need for a shift in history pedagogy and proposes an interdisciplinary pedagogical framework for teaching and learning history as a lived cultural experience mediated through texts, the arts, and appropriate digital tools. This framework, which emphasizes the integration of literature and visual art forms, is further illustrated through a pedagogical application with the Swadeshi Movement as the focal context. The study also explores the use of appropriate technological and digital tools in enhancing learner engagement, with visual resources identified by participants as the most effective tools supporting interdisciplinary approaches in history pedagogy. It further suggests that interdisciplinary history pedagogy can strengthen learners' English for Academic Purposes [EAP], build capacity, and support the development of research-level competencies. It also notes that the existing curricula must be modified and revised to align with the potential of interdisciplinary instruction, followed by assessments and evaluations that focus on learners' comprehensive and critical understanding rather than mere memorization of dates and facts. However, the study holds certain limitations, as the interdisciplinary framework is more suitable for higher education, beginning from the pre-university level, and therefore requires careful refinement for application at the school level, where such complexity is not essential

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