

Technological Media, Cross-Cultural Encounters, and Learning: Reimagining Western India in English Learning and Education

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Social Media as a Contemporary Site of Cross-Cultural Encounter

Quality education has been at the heart of development of societies, and it is a major component of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 of the United Nations, which focuses on facilitating inclusive and equitable learning to all. The digital technologies have become mighty facilitators of this vision today, and education has become an interactive, personalized, and a globally interconnected process. The use of MOOCs, smart boards, virtual laboratories, and mobile devices has taken the learning process outside of the classroom, whereas social media has become an especially dynamic arena of both collaborative academic and cultural interaction.

Social media is not only a means of sharing knowledge, but also mediator of cross-cultural interaction. It enables learners and teachers to communicate and bargain with each other and develop hybrid identities in an online space where cultural boundaries are being restructured continuously. This role is very reminiscent of the previously held role by English writings on Western India in the colonial and postcolonial eras. Travelogues, memoirs, and literary works by the likes of Rudyard Kipling, Flora Annie Steel, and colonial officials acted as refracting glasses using which India, especially Western India with its unique sceneries, customs, and cultural behaviors, was viewed by the rest of the world. These texts bridged Indian and Western cultures, frequently defining Indian society in terms of the colonizer even as they allowed space of negotiation, adaptation, and assimilation of a culture.

Similarly, social media currently mediates the modern experience by designing virtual tales that determine the ways cultures view one another. As an example, Indian students sharing such platforms as YouTube, Instagram, or MOOCs are not only exposed to Western ideas and the way of teaching but also demonstrate native practices, crafts, and local culture, including the one of Western India, to the international world. Such is the reflection of the previously spread circulation of narratives in the English literature, only with an opposite turn: rather than being manifested only through the voices of others, people and groups have now an opportunity to speak of themselves in the digital space.

In this way, the comparison between the two can be drawn: the English texts about Western India used to be a literary place of cultural negotiation, whereas social media and technological tools nowadays do the same thing in the educational and communicative process. They are both instances of cultural intermediaries, but this time mediating encounters by means of the written word and the digital platform respectively, facilitating assimilation, and redefining the ways of representing and understanding identities across the boundaries (Haddad 2002; Buyukbaykal 2015).

Digital Classrooms as Modern Arenas of Cross-Cultural Exchange

Digital competence, as defined by Ferrari (2013), is the ability to use information and communication technologies in an effective, creative, independent and ethically appropriate manner depending on the variable range of activities, including learning and solving problems, socialization and cultural engagement. This ability has increasingly gained a central place in the education system of the world, especially following the expansion of online classrooms. Even though the benefits of digital education were repeatedly discussed, the true value of this phenomenon became clear during the COVID-19 pandemic. The March 2020 global lockdown caused an abrupt shift to digital teaching and learning, which spawned what organizational scholars Gustafsson, Gillespi, Searle, and Dietz (2020) describe as a disruption, an unanticipated metamorphosis of established orders that had to be adapted to now.

In this crisis scenario, online learning rooms were never just urgent replacements but new innovations that transformed the learning processes. By using the services of wireless technologies, laptops, smartphones, and interactive platforms, teachers and students created new patterns of interaction that went beyond the scope of traditional pedagogy. They enabled real-time communication, quick evaluation, adaptable learning and teamwork across geographies- functions that were not easily provided by the conventional approaches. However, there were still some obstacles, with numerous educators seeing these tools as distractions instead of facilitators of pedagogy (Vakaliuk et al. 2021; Cavas et al. 2009). Although there was resistance at the beginning, the flexibility of digital classrooms made them essential to ongoing educational progress throughout and after the pandemic.

Digital classrooms when analysed in the context of cross-cultural encounters take up a similar role as the previous one of English writings on Western India. Colonial and postcolonial texts, whether they were in the form of a travelogues, memoirs or fictional works, facilitated cultural contact by introducing western readers to Indian landscapes, traditions and people. They were mediums of representation and assimilation, thus creating what is perceived about India in the world. Similarly, through digital classrooms, modern culture serves as a new culture space: digital classrooms allow Indian students to take in new knowledge around the world and expel their own cultural stories to the rest of the world. With the help of MOOCs, webinars, and social-media-integrated services, the voices of Western India, its traditions, crafts, languages, and experiences can no longer be represented by others but are transmitted by the participants themselves.

This shift is a pivotal continuum: as English-language texts had previously been the mediators of the cross-cultural presence ability of India, now digital classrooms create the spaces of intercultural dialogue where the representation becomes more interactive, multidirectional, participatory. In the example of Udaipur students, it is possible to discuss the simultaneous use of international learning materials and the participation in the world cognition of Indian culture, which makes local and global

demarcations disappear. In that respect, online classrooms do not only serve as tools of academic education but are powerful mechanisms of cultural negotiation, assimilation and identity construction in the twenty-first century (Emmanuel and Sife 2008; Kostopoulos and Kotsiantis 2022; Altun 2006; Perraton 2000).

AI and Engaging Classrooms as Mediators of Cross-Cultural Learning

With the recent increase in the development of the Artificial Intelligence (AI), the environment of higher education is experiencing a drastic change, transforming the way pedagogy is conducted and the trends of student learning. AI-based tools personalize learning by dynamically modifying content to match student needs, identifying areas of knowledge deficiency, and implementing specific interventions on a real-time basis (Hennekeuser et al. 2024; Baker 2021). These systems do not only boost academic success but also develop self-efficacy and grow positive attitudes toward learning (Johnson and Smith 2019). Providing learners with adaptive learning routes, real-time feedback, and advanced tutoring tools, AI platforms establish new and flexible channels that help students to interact with their curriculum effectively (Luckin et al. 2016; Zawacki-Richter *et al.* 2019).

No less important is the role of engaging classrooms whereby incorporation of technology, through projectors, computers, simulation, and collaborative participation, transforms the learning space into an interactive and dynamic space. Digital devices are already familiar to contemporary students; integrating these resources into the educational process draws their interest, improves retention and increases involvement beyond traditional forms of verbal communications. Notably, the effectiveness of these tools depends on the form of digital content: inclusivity, accessibility, and cultural relevance are the key factors. The materials that consider the unique learning capabilities, disabilities, and the socio-cultural backgrounds of the learners will be seen as more impactful and will bridge the gaps between them and become a sense of belonging (Yenduri *et al.* 2023; Braga and Elliott 2018).

Placed in the larger context of cross-cultural interactions, AI and classrooms that are interactive are part of an old tradition that once led to the spread of English literature about Western India. Similar to the colonial and post-colonial texts, which enhanced exposure to the culture, landscapes, and traditions of the Indian people to a worldwide audience, mediating the encounters, shaping the perceptions, and facilitating the assimilation, the current AI-based and technology-rich classrooms allow students not only to learn but also to project the culture narrative to the outside world. As an example, adaptive platforms can include the use of culturally specific instances of Western India so that local traditions, handicrafts, and histories are present alongside other content. Through this, students not only receive but also give out cultural knowledge, thus, in a two-way exchange, which replicates, but improves the relation of literary representation to the past.

Therefore, AI and interesting classrooms can be considered modern facilitators of cross-cultural knowledge. Where British texts on Western India once produced cultural identities in the eyes of the rest of the world, the digital technologies are now allowing students to create, distribute, and redefine their cultural realities in the context of global learning networks.

Mediating Culture: From English Writings to Digital Learning-Cross-Cultural Encounters in Contemporary Learning

During the colonial and postcolonial periods, English literature works about Western India (including travelogues, memoirs, and other literary genres) played a central role in the mediation of intercultural experiences. These records brought the Indian lands, traditions, and social structure to the Western audiences, thus influencing the image and facilitating cultural absorption. The authorial gaze placed Indian society in the position of the readers and created a one-way form of interaction where India was presented to the world audience. Though the representations were always refracted through the colonial epistemologies, they still opened

a cultural dialogue, highlighting the unique identity of India and bringing about more general intercultural awareness.

Digital technologies and media have become the contemporary means of cultural transmission into the modern educational world, providing spaces that reverberate the previous role of literature but with participatory and interactive aspects. Artificial intelligence (AI)-based adaptive learning systems, MOOCs, simulations, and social media give learners the ability to acquire knowledge on a global scale, in addition to working with locally relevant cultural materials. In contrast to the more passive form of interaction that characterized the reading of literatures, these online platforms allow the students to actively interpret, disseminate, and negotiate the meaning. As an example, the language-learning software and multimedia story-telling tools may include the cultural references to the Western part of India and allow students not only to gain English-language proficiency but also to relate to and express their own cultural heritage to the rest of the world.

Digital classrooms expand these cross-cultural experiences even further as they offer flexibility, access and collaborative opportunities. Students can now use learning resources at their convenience and anywhere, share with students outside their region, and get real-time feedback, thus creating an active knowledge sharing environment. Since English texts used to facilitate cross-cultural knowledge in the past, digital classrooms do the same today by forming cross-geographical, cross-linguistic, and cross-social links. Besides, the structure of the digital content, making it inclusive, accessible, and culturally relevant, facilitates a fairer assimilation of knowledge, allowing students with different backgrounds to be immensely integrated into the global learning networks.

In this way, an evident continuum arises between the past and the present: when English texts on Western India were being created they served as ancient brokers of cross-cultural knowledge, introducing the Indian traditions and society to the rest of the world, and when modern digital technologies are involved, they work as contemporary brokers of cultural mediation where students can actively engage, re-read, and

disseminate their cultural realities. These two processes prefigure the core nature of mediated learning, be it textual or technological, in creating cross-cultural experiences and creating assimilation and intercultural competence in the learners.

Digital Learning as a Modern Mediator of Cross-Cultural Encounters: Challenges and Opportunities

Digital learning has certainly changed the face of education and it has provided a new level of flexibility, accessibility and individualization of education like never before. However, there is a series of complicated issues that accompany the fast adoption of technology in the classroom. The digital preparedness of teachers can be mentioned as one of the priority issues. Most educators, who are used to face-to-face learning, struggle to accommodate online and blended learning (Efremova and Huseynova 2023). Without the required technical resources or experience in the field of digital pedagogy, the teachers can find it difficult to connect with students, which will result in frustration and a lack of professional self-confidence (Solo *et al.* 2024). Software-hardware incompatibility, LMS malfunctions, and connectivity are such factors even in the well-equipped institutions that disrupt the learning process, impacting student motivation and engagement (Raffi *et al.* 2025; Ordaya-Gonzales *et al.* 2024). Also, there is the issue of the development of inclusive and culturally relevant content which is another challenge. In contrast to traditional texts, the digital platforms will have to serve a wide range of students with varying learning abilities, languages and socio-cultural aspects to consider. Development of adaptive and meaningful content that can be understood in all cultures needs the cooperation of educators, technology developers, and curriculum specialists (Fernandez *et al.* 2024; Yenduri *et al.* 2023). Otherwise, digital learning can easily be transformed into a one-size-fits-all approach, as it is unlikely to support the diversity of local knowledge and identity. Nevertheless, learning through digital means has amazing transformative potential. AI-powered adaptive platforms, virtual reality, interactive multimedia, and collaborative online resources enable students to immerse themselves in the academic knowledge and in the culturally-

specific content (Hennekeuser *et al.* 2024; Braga and Elliott, 2018). Some gamified and interactive learning platforms like Khan Academy, Coursera, and edX make education interesting, personalized, and accessible worldwide (Tenorio *et al.* 2018; Mamgain *et al.* 2014). Students are able to have high-quality content regardless of the geographic location or the socio-economic status and, in the process, democratic education and enable students in previously underserved areas to join in the global knowledge networks. In terms of cross-cultural experience, digital education could be seen as the contemporary incarnation of the cultural mediation previously undertaken by the English writings about Western India. Colonial and postcolonial writings made sense of Indian traditions, landscapes and societal practices in the eyes of the world and created a mediated conversation between India and the West. Although those writings had mostly provided one-directional communication, digital learning platforms are now forming interactive and two-way communications. Students do not just absorb knowledge, they also add cultural value, they tell stories about their localities and take part in global projects. In this regard, digital platforms enable learners to negotiate actively cultural identity, assimilation and representation, both repeating and extending the mediatory purpose of historical texts. To sum up, despite the various technical infrastructure, educator preparation, and content formulation challenges associated with digital learning, digital learning is an effective education and cultural change power agent.

Digital technologies provide a flexible, accessible, and interactive learning experience and provide a bridge between the local and global knowledge systems. They help the learners to interact with both learning content and cultural setting in a meaningful way as well as making education a space of cross-cultural interaction, assimilation and representation. Similarly, to English texts about Western India in the past that mediate intercultural dialogue and communication, the digital classroom, AI-powered software, and media technology are now playing the same type of role in the 21st century, as they create an interactive, dynamic, and global learning environment that unites culture, knowledge, and identity in harmony.

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