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## A Thematic Framework for Communication and Mass Media Education: Global Metatheme Literacies



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# A Thematic Framework for Communication and Mass Media Education: Global Metatheme Literacies

## Abstract

This article introduces the Metatheme Framework for Communication and Mass Media Education, a curriculum model that embeds universal yet culturally grounded themes—identity, belonging, alienation, cultural relevance, resilience, and time—at the heart of media pedagogy. Drawing on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1984), Fredric Jameson's concept of the political unconscious (Jameson, 1981), and James A. Banks's principles of culturally responsive education (Banks, 2015), the framework advances beyond existing critical media literacy models by systematically pairing canonical theories (e.g., Hall's encoding/decoding, Herman & Chomsky's propaganda model) with grassroots and community-produced media artefacts.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach that brings together three strands of evidence: surveys charting media literacy gaps, case studies of higher-education curricula, and a bilingual pilot workshop. The results show that learners are especially drawn to the theme of Time, often turning to proverbs and idioms to express cultural meaning across languages. They also reinterpret accent and identity as sources of strength rather than deficit. In addition, the framework situates Africa at the centre of global educational history, highlighting the importance of decolonising curricula that have overlooked African intellectual traditions (Herodotus, Isocrates, Plato, Iamblichus).

Institutional recommendations include embedding thematic modules across programmes, recognising multimodal and translation-based outputs as legitimate scholarship, and supporting faculty through professional development in bilingual and multimodal pedagogy. Ultimately, the Metatheme Framework reconceptualises mass media education as both academically rigorous and socially urgent, equipping learners to resist cultural erasure and participate as reflective citizens in globalised media environments.

**Keywords:** communication and mass media education, critical media literacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, decolonial knowledge, global metatheme literacies, thematic curriculum design.

## 1. Introduction: The Need for Inclusive, Thematic Media Literacy

### 1.1 Challenges in Current Media Curricula

Contemporary communication and mass media programmes often foreground Eurocentric theories and canonical texts—such as Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model and Herman and Chomsky's propaganda framework—while omitting community-produced media artefacts that reflect diverse sociocultural realities. This narrow focus reinforces established hierarchies and risks alienating learners whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds lie outside the Western mainstream (Loomba, 2005; Banks, 2015). For both first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) students, the absence of culturally resonant frameworks can

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diminish critical engagement and stifle creative agency, echoing Paulo Freire's critique of decontextualised pedagogy (Freire, 1970).

Moreover, conventional syllabi frequently segment media studies by genre or historical period, discouraging thematic inquiry and cross-cultural comparison. Such compartmentalisation obscures universal concerns—representation, power, and identity—and limits students' capacity to connect political, social, and technological dimensions of media production in a global context. As Jameson (1981) reminds us, all cultural texts carry a "political unconscious", and when curricula fail to foreground this dimension, students are denied opportunities to interrogate the ideological work of media. Similarly, Pennycook (2010) argues that language and media must be understood as local practices embedded in global flows, a perspective that underscores the urgency of thematic, cross-cultural approaches to media literacy.

### **1.2. The Case for Thematic Pairings in Media Education**

Embedding metathemes—transcultural motifs such as identity, resistance, representation, and belonging—offers a powerful means of bridging the gap between Eurocentric syllabi and the lived realities of students. When canonical media theories, such as Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, are juxtaposed with grassroots narratives like immigrant-produced community radio broadcasts, the enduring concerns of power, voice, and representation become visible across disparate contexts (Hall, 1980). Such pairings illuminate the continuities between theoretical abstraction and everyday communicative practice, enabling learners to see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

Metatheme-centred pedagogy resonates strongly with Paulo Freire's vision of dialogic learning grounded in social realities (Freire, 1970) and with James A. Banks's model of culturally responsive education, which positions students' identities as legitimate sources of knowledge (Banks, 2015). By foregrounding transcultural motifs, educators create dialogic spaces where learners are not passive recipients of theory but active co-constructors of meaning. In these spaces, students develop the capacity to recognise, analyse, and articulate universal concerns across a range of multimodal texts—whether academic essays, micro-documentaries, or social-media narratives.

The cultivation of thematic literacy through such pairings equips future communicators with both critical lenses and creative skills. Learners become adept at tracing how identity, belonging, and resistance are negotiated across media forms, while also acquiring the imaginative capacity to intervene in those negotiations. In an interconnected media landscape marked by cultural hybridity and contested narratives, the ability to navigate and

shape discourse through thematic awareness is not peripheral but central to equitable and transformative communication education.

### **1.3. Research Imperatives and Objectives**

Building on the pedagogical promise of thematic pairings, this study pursues four interrelated objectives. The first is to develop a curriculum model that systematically pairs canonical media theories with grassroots and community-produced artefacts, thereby foregrounding metathemes of identity, resistance, representation, and belonging. The second is to evaluate the model's impact on learner engagement and critical media literacy among both L1 and L2 students through a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative measures of thematic comprehension with qualitative analyses of student artefacts (Cummins, 2001; Deardorff, 2006). The third is to propose multimodal assessment strategies—media portfolios, micro-documentaries, and translation journals—that capture the breadth of learner expression and foster metacognitive reflection (Kramsch, 1993; Walsh, 2010). The fourth is to offer institutional recommendations and continuing professional development (CPD) pathways that can sustain thematic literacies within communication and mass media programmes.

By integrating these strands into a coherent framework, the study advances a model of communication and media education committed to equity, intercultural dialogue, and student agency in an interconnected media landscape.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Empirical Investigations of Media and Information Literacy Deficits**

Empirical studies published between 2013 and 2023 have highlighted the limited and uneven integration of media and information literacy (MIL) into formal education. A systematic review of this period found that fewer than half of the studies reported meaningful classroom implementation. Common challenges included policy resistance, overloaded curricula, and insufficient teacher training and evaluation. As a result, many efforts toward media literacy remained symbolic rather than sustained, lacking the depth and continuity needed for lasting impact.

Fedorov, Dubinsky, and Filippov's (2016) cross-national survey of 25 countries underscored the systemic nature of these challenges: administrative resistance was reported in 60 per cent of cases, overcrowded syllabi in 72 per cent, and insufficient continuing professional development opportunities for educators in 85 per cent. Hartai's (2013) analysis of the European Media Literacy Education Study (EMEDUS) further revealed that only 30 per cent of EU member-state curricula treated media literacy as a core component, while fewer than

20 per cent offered structured professional development for teachers. This lack of institutional support produced fragmented and uneven coverage of media themes across subjects.

The OECD's (2020) review of curriculum reform efforts across 40 countries confirmed a persistent "implementation gap" between policy vision and classroom reality. Weak stakeholder engagement and limited teacher autonomy to adapt content to local cultural contexts were identified as key factors in this gap. Collectively, these investigations point to the urgent need for an evidence-based curricular framework that addresses both policy-level and classroom-level impediments to meaningful media literacy education.

## **2.2. Thematic and Culturally Responsive Curriculum Reform**

James A. Banks's (2015) model of culturally responsive education provides a theoretical foundation for such reforms, arguing that curricula must validate students' cultural identities and integrate community knowledge into academic discourse. Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy similarly emphasises dialogic learning grounded in learners' social realities, advocating thematic inquiry as a vehicle for cultivating critical consciousness. Taken together, these perspectives confirm that a metatheme-driven approach—pairing canonical theories with grassroots narratives under shared thematic umbrellas—can effectively bridge policy directives and classroom practice, enhancing both equity and pedagogical rigour. Yet curricular exclusion is embedded in the very genealogies of knowledge that European frameworks continue to privilege. The Bologna Process, Erasmus, and the Socrates Programme are celebrated as milestones of educational integration, but they reproduce a Eurocentric narrative that sidelines Africa. Greek philosophers themselves acknowledged their debt to Egyptian teachers: Herodotus described Greek medicine as derived from Egypt; Isocrates credited Egypt with the origins of philosophy and astronomy; Iamblichus recorded that Pythagoras studied for over twenty years with Egyptian priests; and Plato situated Egyptian priests as custodians of ancient wisdom. These testimonies confirm that Africa—specifically ancient Kemet—was foundational to the traditions Europe now claims as its own. To ignore this genealogy is to perpetuate the same cultural erasure that contemporary learners experience when their identities and repertoires are excluded from curricula.

## **2.3. Multimodal and Multilingual Pedagogies**

Scholarship highlights the importance of multimodal and multilingual pedagogies in supporting diverse learners. Rasi, Suoranta, and Teräs (2022) demonstrated that integrating visual, oral, and digital artefacts alongside traditional texts improved students' thematic

comprehension and engagement. The OECD (2020) has similarly advocated embedding digital literacy and multilingual resources within core curricula.

Claire Kramsch (1993) and Alastair Pennycook (2010) reinforce this integration, showing that language learning flourishes in authentic multimodal contexts. These practices are not modern inventions but inheritances from African intellectual traditions, as outlined in Section 2.2. To omit this genealogy is to reproduce Eurocentric erasures that present Europe as the sole origin of integrative education.

Although the pilot survey was conducted with a small English–Turkish bilingual sample, the inclusion of African genealogies of literacy is not intended as a direct cultural comparison but as a theoretical anchor. Ancient Kemet’s multimodal and multilingual traditions exemplify how literacy has historically been integrative, combining visual, oral, and textual registers. By situating the pilot within this broader genealogy, the study underscores that bilingual engagement in contemporary classrooms is part of a much longer lineage of integrative literacy practices. The Turkish learners’ negotiation of meaning across English and Turkish thus resonates with Africa’s historical precedent for multilingual, multimodal education, demonstrating that the Metatheme Framework is both locally adaptable and globally grounded.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The study adopts an explanatory mixed-methods design that triangulates three complementary data streams: published empirical research on media and information literacy deficits; higher-education case studies of culturally responsive curriculum reform; and primary data generated through the Metatheme Research Fellowship pilot. By weaving these sources together, the research compares systemic findings with classroom-level interventions and learner feedback. This design enables iterative validation of emerging patterns across different scales and contexts, ensuring that the framework is both theoretically grounded and practically tested.

#### **3.2. Data Sources**

The analysis draws on three categories of evidence:

- Published empirical studies and large-scale surveys (Altaş, B., & Ünal, S. 2022; Fedorov, Dubinsky, & Filippov, 2016; Hartai, 2013; OECD, 2020).

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- Higher-education case studies, including the University of Lapland's MA in Media Education redesign and Rasi, Suoranta, and Teräs's (2022) multimodal curriculum project.
- Primary materials from the Metatheme Research Fellowship pilot, comprising the bilingual feedback form and three worksheets (Quotation Analysis, Grammar & Cultural Insight, and Language Families & Ancestry).

Together, these sources provide a comprehensive view of thematic resonance, multilingual engagement, and pedagogical impact.

### 3.3. The Metatheme Research Fellowship Pilot

The pilot was conducted with English learners in Turkey during a bilingual engagement session co-hosted by Prof. Dr. Paul Ade Silva and Doç. Dr. Hüseyin Ateş. Participants completed an anonymous feedback form and engaged with three bilingual worksheets: a quotation-analysis activity, a grammar-insight script on English articles, and a language-ancestry script tracing English and Turkish to Proto-Indo-European. The pilot explored how thematic reflection and visible linguistic differences could foster learner confidence, cultural awareness, and deeper connection to language learning.

### 3.4. Instruments and Measures

A range of instruments was employed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of learner engagement:

- **Bilingual feedback form:** elicited learners' first memories of English, public-speaking confidence, perceptions of accent, theme selection, and reflections on bilingual delivery.
- **Worksheet 1: Quotation analysis:** paired canonical and grassroots quotations under thematic umbrellas, prompting open-ended reflections in English, Turkish, or mixed language.
- **Worksheet 3: Grammar & cultural insight (bilingual script):** presented a dual-language lecture on the cultural logic of English articles versus Turkish suffixation, followed by a Mini-Metatheme activity and written/discussion-based reflections.
- **Worksheet 4: Language families and ancestry (bilingual script):** introduced Indo-European and Anatolian language roots, prompting reflections on surprising connections, confidence effects, and ancestral insights.

- **Observation notes and instructor logs:** documented code-switching dynamics, emergent questions, and moments of conceptual breakthrough.
- **Professional development survey:** gathered instructors' feedback on the usability and pedagogical impact of the bilingual worksheets and scripts.

Quantitative measures included frequencies and proportions of theme selections, confidence ratings, and future-participation intent. Qualitative data encompassed open-response items, discussion transcripts, and observation notes, which were coded for thematic depth, code-switching patterns, and affective engagement (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### 3.5. Data Collection Procedures

Participants were recruited through conference workshops, institutional mailing lists, and social-media channels. The bilingual feedback form and worksheets were distributed digitally, with reminders sent at regular intervals to maximise completion. All activities were conducted within a single session, with an emphasis on reflective feedback rather than longitudinal tracking.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to profile learners' thematic preferences, confidence levels, and perceptions of engagement. Qualitative responses were subjected to thematic coding following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, enabling the identification of patterns in language awareness, cultural resonance, and pedagogical impact. Comparative analysis then juxtaposed pilot findings with case-study and survey data to highlight convergences and divergences across scales.

### 3.7. Ethical Considerations

All participants received an explanatory statement in English and Turkish outlining the study's purpose, the guarantee of anonymity, and the voluntary nature of participation. No personal identifiers were collected, and data storage complied with institutional review-board protocols, ensuring secure, encrypted access restricted to the research team. Participation was entirely voluntary, and learners retained the right to withdraw at any point without penalty.

### 3.8. Limitations

The pilot study involved a relatively small sample of sixteen learners. While the findings provide valuable insights into thematic resonance and bilingual engagement, they cannot be generalised across all contexts. Future research should expand the sample size, include longitudinal tracking, and test the framework across diverse cultural and linguistic settings to strengthen external validity.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Respondent Overview

A total of sixteen English learners in Turkey completed the survey. All responses were anonymous, and participants were free to answer in English, Turkish, or a mixture of both. This bilingual flexibility reflected the linguistic realities of the learners and provided insight into how participants navigated identity and expression across languages.

### 4.2. Language Identity and Confidence

Participants' first memories of learning English were anchored in formal educational contexts. Several recalled beginning their studies in preparation for examinations, while others remembered classroom anecdotes, such as a teacher gesturing to a pillow to illustrate vocabulary or early lessons on the verb forms *am*, *is*, *are*. For some, English was introduced as a compulsory subject in secondary school, while a small number could not recall a distinct first encounter. These recollections suggest that English often entered learners' lives as an institutional requirement rather than through playful or organic exposure.

When asked about confidence in speaking English publicly, eleven of the sixteen respondents reported feeling comfortable. Their reasons included enjoyment of speaking, a lack of fear of making mistakes, habitual use, and a generally sociable disposition. The remaining five expressed hesitation, citing limited fluency, self-consciousness when speaking in front of Turkish peers, and the constraints of grammar-focused curricula that left little room for communicative practice.

Perceptions of accent revealed a nuanced picture. Most participants regarded their accent as neutral or unproblematic, emphasising that intelligibility mattered more than conformity to native-speaker norms: *"If they understand you, your accent doesn't matter."* A smaller group, however, described negative experiences in native-speaker contexts, where they felt

patronised or spoken down to. A few respondents expressed pride in their accent, treating it as a marker of identity rather than a deficit.

### 4.3. Metatheme Reflection

Learners were invited to select a metatheme and reflect on related proverbs or idioms. Of the sixteen respondents, seven (43.8%) chose **Time**, five (31.3%) selected **Identity**, three (18.8%) opted for **Belonging**, and one (6.3%) chose **Resilience**. Learners' selections are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1. Proverbs and idioms selected by learners, with translations and reflections**

Theme	Turkish proverb/idiom	English translation	Learner reflection
Time	<i>Damlaya damlaya göl olur</i>	"Drop by drop, a lake is formed"	Emphasised patience and accumulation
Time	<i>Zaman her şeyin ilacıdır</i>	"Time heals everything"	Linked to resilience and healing
Time	<i>Sakla zamanı, gelir zamanı</i>	"Save time, its time will come"	Highlighted foresight and planning
Identity	<i>Bana arkadaşını söyle, sana kim olduğunu söyleyeyim</i>	"Tell me who your friend is, and I will tell you who you are"	Reflected social identity
Identity	<i>Üzüm üzüme baka baka kararır</i>	"Grapes ripen by looking at each other"	Suggested identity shaped by community
Belonging	<i>Where your belly is full, where you belong</i>	Literal translation	Linked belonging to sustenance and place
Resilience	<i>Yıkılmadım ama ayakta da değilim</i>	"I am not collapsed, but I am not standing either"	Expressed vulnerability yet persistence
Resilience	<i>Demir tavında dövülür</i>	"Iron is forged while hot"	Highlighted strength through timely action

Thirteen of the sixteen participants (81.3%) produced English translations of their chosen proverb. The translations ranged from literal equivalents ("*Time heals all wounds*") to creative paraphrases ("*Every drop makes an ocean*"), demonstrating both linguistic resourcefulness and willingness to experiment with cross-cultural expression.

### 4.4. Bilingual Engagement Experience

Reflections on the bilingual delivery of the pilot session revealed a spectrum of responses.

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Five participants found the bilingual format clearly beneficial, while three reported it as distracting or unnecessary, particularly when they already understood one of the languages. The majority—eight respondents—expressed conditional or mixed views, preferring subtitles, fast-forwarding through one language, or noting that native-English listeners did not require translation.

When asked about the most meaningful aspects of the session, participants highlighted several elements: the emphasis on language awareness, the contrast between English articles and Turkish suffixation, the experience of listening in both languages, and personal teaching anecdotes that linked accent and identity.

Interest in future Metatheme events was strong: six respondents (37.5%) expressed definite interest, eight (50%) indicated “maybe,” and only two (12.5%) said no. Additional comments included requests for English subtitles during Turkish segments, suggestions for varied language-learning exercises, reflections on the connection between culture and thought, and affirmations of the pilot’s relevance for Turkish learners.

### 4.5. Emerging Insights

Several key insights emerge from the pilot data:

- Learners’ earliest memories of English were exam-oriented, underscoring the need for more playful entry points.
- While many reported confidence in speaking English, this confidence coexisted with social-affective barriers, particularly the fear of peer judgement in Turkish contexts.
- Accent was not seen as a barrier, though native-speaker settings sometimes undermined confidence through patronising dynamics.
- The strong engagement with Time as a metatheme indicates that temporal metaphors resonate deeply with learners in Turkey, offering a culturally meaningful entry point for thematic exploration.
- The high willingness to translate proverbs demonstrates readiness for cross-linguistic reflection tasks.
- Responses to bilingual delivery highlight the need for flexible options, such as subtitles or toggleable tracks.

Viewed in combination, these findings show that the Metatheme Framework resonates with learners while also surfacing critical tensions around identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation. By foregrounding these dynamics, the framework provides a pathway for more inclusive, reflective, and culturally grounded approaches to communication and media education.

## 5. Cross-Case Synthesis

Overlaying systematic reviews, case studies, and pilot feedback reveals both barriers and opportunities. Empirical studies highlight persistent implementation gaps; case studies show the transformative potential of thematic curricula; and pilot data provide granular evidence of learner engagement. Together, these streams validate a unified, evidence-based curriculum framework that is both rigorous and learner-centred.

### 5.1. Triangulating Data Streams

Empirical studies highlight persistent implementation gaps in media literacy education (Fedorov, Dubinsky, & Filippov, 2016; Hartai, 2013; OECD, 2020). Case studies illustrate the transformative potential of thematic and culturally responsive curricula (Banks, 2015; Freire, 1970; Rasi, Suoranta, & Teräs, 2022). The pilot provides granular evidence of learner engagement with metathemes. Viewed in combination, these streams form a triangulated model in which each perspective informs and validates the others, pointing toward a unified curriculum framework that is both evidence-based and learner-centred.

**Figure 1. Triangulation model of data sources**

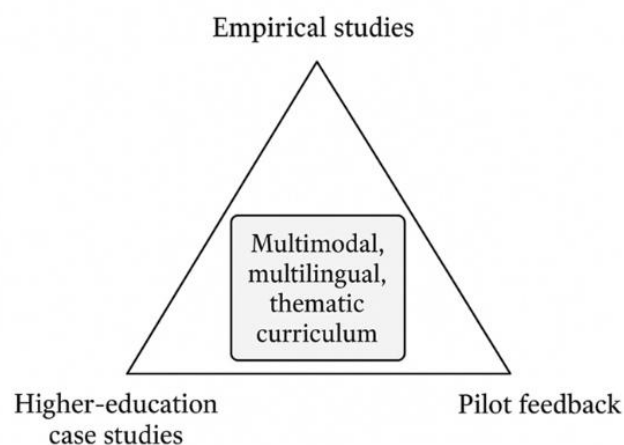


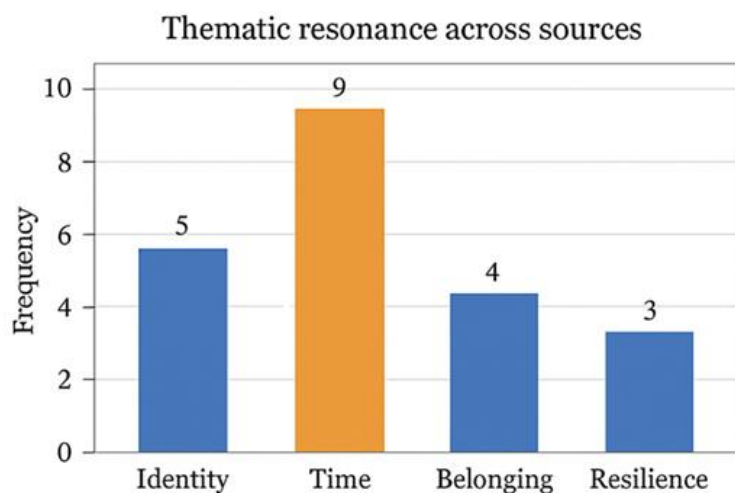
Figure 1. Triangulation model of data sources

A triangular diagram illustrating the convergence of three data streams: empirical studies (top), higher-education case studies (left), and pilot feedback (right). At the centre, their overlap produces the unified model of a multimodal, multilingual, thematic curriculum.

## 5.2. Thematic Resonance Across Contexts

Across all sources, certain metathemes recur with striking consistency. Identity, Time, Belonging, and Resilience emerge as central motifs. Among these, Time proves especially salient—dominant in the pilot data and echoed in higher-education case studies such as the Lapland MA in Media Education and the multimodal curriculum project by Rasi, Suoranta, and Teräs (2022). These recurring themes function as cultural anchors, enabling learners to connect abstract media theories with lived experience and linguistic expression.

**Figure 2. Thematic resonance across sources**



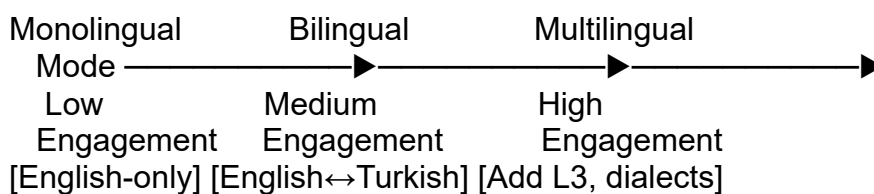
A bar chart illustrating the relative emphasis of four metathemes—Identity, Time, Belonging, and Resilience—across data streams, with **Time** occupying the strongest position in both frequency and learner resonance.

## 5.3. Multilingual Engagement Spectrum

The synthesis also highlights the role of multilingual engagement in sustaining learner motivation and comprehension. Feedback from the pilot, alongside case-study evidence, suggests that flexible language options—from bilingual scaffolds to mixed-language tasks—significantly enhance engagement. Learners reported that bilingual delivery affirmed their cultural identities and facilitated deeper reflection, while case studies demonstrated that multilingual strategies broadened access and inclusivity. This progression can be conceptualised as a spectrum: monolingual delivery tends to yield lower engagement,

bilingual scaffolding produces moderate gains, and multilingual integration—including additional languages or dialects—generates the highest levels of learner investment (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Spectrum of multilingual engagement**

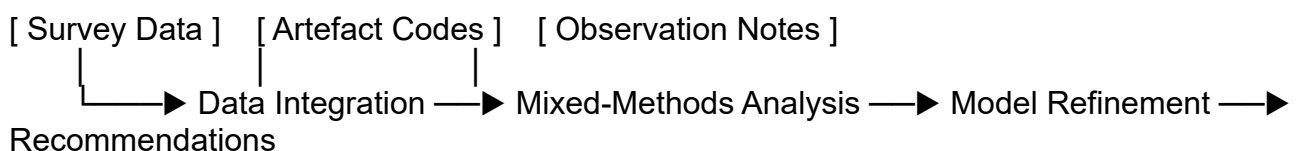


A horizontal continuum moving from monolingual delivery (English-only) through bilingual scaffolding (English↔Turkish) to multilingual integration (adding a third language or dialects). Engagement levels increase progressively along the spectrum, with multilingual approaches producing the highest learner investment.

#### 5.4. Methodological Convergence

The mixed-methods design of this study aligns quantitative measures of thematic comprehension with qualitative codes drawn from learner artefacts, reflections, and observation notes. This integration creates a feedback loop in which statistical profiles of learner confidence and thematic preference are enriched by narrative accounts of cultural resonance and affective engagement. The result is a dynamic process of model refinement, where empirical breadth and qualitative depth inform one another to produce actionable recommendations (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Methodological convergence flowchart**

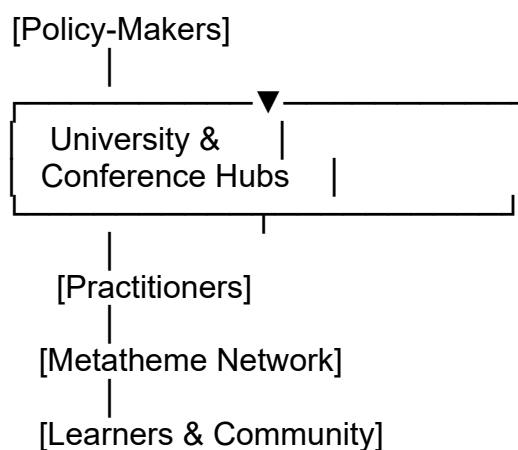


A flow diagram showing how survey data, artefact coding, and observation notes feed into an integrated mixed-methods analysis. This process generates iterative model refinement, which in turn informs curricular recommendations.

## 5.5. Institutional and Partnership Model

Finally, the synthesis underscores the importance of institutional and cross-sector collaboration in embedding thematic literacies. Sustainable integration requires coordinated action among policymakers, universities, professional communities, and learners themselves. Policymakers provide the enabling frameworks, universities and conference hubs serve as incubators of innovation, practitioners adapt and implement materials, and learners anchor the process through lived engagement. The Metatheme Network, situated at the centre of this model, functions as a conduit linking these stakeholders and ensuring that thematic literacy is scaled equitably and effectively (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Institutional and partnership network model**



A network diagram positioning policymakers at the top, universities and conference hubs at the centre, practitioners as intermediaries, and learners/communities at the base. The Metatheme Network sits at the centre, linking all stakeholders and enabling the scaling of thematic literacy initiatives.

## 6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Metatheme Framework offers a distinctive contribution to communication and media education by integrating thematic inquiry, multilingual engagement, and multimodal assessment into a coherent model. This integration responds directly to the implementation gaps identified in empirical studies (Fedorov, Dubinsky, & Filippov, 2016; Hartai, 2013; OECD, 2020) and builds on case-study evidence of culturally responsive curricula (Banks, 2015; Freire, 1970; Rasi, Suoranta, & Teräs, 2022).

A central insight is the salience of Time as a metatheme. Learners consistently gravitated towards temporal metaphors, using proverbs and idioms to negotiate meaning across languages. This finding validates the framework's emphasis on transcultural motifs as cultural anchors, showing how abstract theories can be grounded in lived linguistic and cultural practices. It also highlights the pedagogical value of encouraging students to draw on their own repertoires of metaphor and proverb when engaging with media texts.

Equally significant is the reclamation of Africa's intellectual genealogy. By foregrounding the multimodal and multilingual traditions of ancient Egypt (Kemet), the framework challenges Eurocentric narratives that position integrative education as a European innovation. This historical intervention is not merely corrective; it has direct pedagogical implications. Linking African genealogies of literacy to contemporary classroom practice demonstrates that decolonial curriculum reform can both recover erased histories and equip learners with thematic literacies rooted in diverse intellectual lineages. In this way, the framework situates communication education within a truly global history of knowledge.

The pilot study further underscores the importance of bilingual and multilingual strategies. Learners reported that bilingual scaffolding affirmed their identities and enhanced confidence, while flexible delivery options accommodated diverse preferences. These findings suggest that multilingual engagement is not an optional supplement but a core requirement for equitable pedagogy in globalised media environments.

Finally, the framework's emphasis on multimodal assessment—portfolios, micro-documentaries, and translation journals—responds to calls for recognising diverse outputs as legitimate scholarship (Kramsch, 1993; Walsh, 2010). These strategies capture the breadth of learner expression while fostering metacognitive reflection, enabling students to articulate how identity, belonging, and resilience are negotiated across media forms.

In synthesis, the Metatheme Framework reconceptualises communication and media education as both academically rigorous and socially urgent. It bridges theory and practice, recovers erased genealogies, and equips learners to resist cultural erasure while participating as reflective citizens in globalised media environments.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

While the findings of this study are promising, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the pilot was conducted with a relatively small sample (n=16) in a single national context (Turkey), which limits the generalisability of the results. Second, the study relied on self-reported reflections and short-term engagement within a single session, rather than

longitudinal tracking of learner outcomes. Third, while the triangulation of empirical surveys, case studies, and pilot data strengthens validity, further research is needed to test the framework across diverse linguistic, cultural, and institutional settings.

These limitations, however, are not fatal. Instead, they highlight opportunities for future research: scaling the pilot to larger cohorts, conducting longitudinal studies to track learner development over time, and adapting the framework to multilingual contexts beyond English-Turkish. Such extensions would deepen understanding of how thematic literacy functions across varied educational landscapes and further refine the Metatheme Framework as a global model.

**Table 2. Limitations of the study and proposed future directions**

Limitation	Implication	Future Research Direction
Small sample size (n=16)	Limits generalisability	Scale to larger cohorts across institutions
Single national context (Turkey)	Restricts cross-cultural validity	Test in diverse linguistic and cultural settings
Short-term engagement (single session)	No longitudinal tracking	Conduct semester-long or multi-year studies
Reliance on self-reported reflections	Potential bias in learner accounts	Triangulate with performance data and independent observation
Focus on English–Turkish bilingualism	Narrow multilingual scope	Extend to additional languages and dialects

### 6.1. Contribution of the Framework

The findings demonstrate that the Metatheme Framework offers a distinctive contribution to communication and media education by integrating thematic inquiry, multilingual engagement, and multimodal assessment into a coherent model. This integration responds directly to implementation gaps identified in empirical studies (Fedorov, Dubinsky, & Filippov, 2016; Hartai, 2013; OECD, 2020) and builds on case-study evidence of culturally responsive curricula (Banks, 2015; Freire, 1970; Rasi, Suoranta, & Teräs, 2022).

### 6.2. Salience of Time as a Metatheme

Learners consistently gravitated towards temporal metaphors, using proverbs and idioms to negotiate meaning across languages. This validates the framework's emphasis on

transcultural motifs as cultural anchors, showing how abstract theories can be grounded in lived linguistic and cultural practices. It also demonstrates the pedagogical value of encouraging students to draw on their own repertoires of metaphor and proverb when engaging with media texts.

### **6.3. Reclaiming Africa's Intellectual Genealogy**

By foregrounding the multimodal and multilingual traditions of ancient Egypt (Kemet), the framework challenges Eurocentric narratives that position integrative education as a European innovation. This historical intervention is not merely corrective; it has direct pedagogical implications. Linking African genealogies of literacy to contemporary classroom practice shows that decolonial curriculum reform can both recover erased histories and equip learners with thematic literacies rooted in diverse intellectual lineages. In this way, the framework situates communication education within a truly global history of knowledge.

### **6.4. Importance of Multilingual Strategies**

The pilot study further underscores the importance of bilingual and multilingual strategies. Learners reported that bilingual scaffolding affirmed their identities and enhanced confidence, while flexible delivery options accommodated diverse preferences. These findings suggest that multilingual engagement is not an optional supplement but a core requirement for equitable pedagogy in globalised media environments.

### **6.5. Multimodal Assessment Practices**

The framework's emphasis on multimodal assessment—portfolios, micro-documentaries, and translation journals—responds to calls for recognising diverse outputs as legitimate scholarship (Kramsch, 1993; Walsh, 2010). These strategies capture the breadth of learner expression while fostering metacognitive reflection, enabling students to articulate how identity, belonging, and resilience are negotiated across media forms.

### **6.6. Overall Synthesis**

Overall, the Metatheme Framework reconceptualises communication and media education as both academically rigorous and socially urgent. It bridges theory and practice, recovers erased genealogies, and equips learners to resist cultural erasure while participating as reflective citizens in globalised media environments.

## 7. Institutional Recommendations for Media and Communication Departments

The evidence presented across Sections 2–6 makes clear that the challenges of alienation, cultural erasure, and misinformation in new media cannot be addressed solely at the level of individual classrooms. They require institutional responses that embed thematic, multilingual, and multimodal literacy into the very fabric of communication and media education. The Metatheme Framework provides a blueprint for such transformation, offering a model that is both pedagogically rigorous and socially responsive.

### 7.1. Policy-Level Actions

Departments of communication and media studies should move beyond curricula organised around chronological surveys of theory or narrow technical skills. Instead, they should adopt thematic units that foreground identity, belonging, alienation, cultural relevance, and time as cross-cutting concerns. For example, a module on *Media and Resilience* could integrate canonical theories of framing with case studies of disaster reporting and grassroots citizen journalism. Similarly, a course on *Media and Identity* might juxtapose Hall's encoding/decoding model with contemporary debates on cancel culture and digital self-presentation. Policies should also mandate the inclusion of grassroots and community-based media texts alongside canonical readings. Such integration affirms that media literacy is not only about interpreting elite or global texts but also about recognising the communicative traditions of marginalised communities. This shift helps students see themselves not as outsiders to media discourse but as participants in a global conversation.

### 7.2. Professional Development and Research Fellowships

For curricular reforms to succeed, faculty must be supported through sustained professional development. Workshops on bilingual script design, multimodal pedagogy, and equitable assessment practices can equip educators with the tools to implement thematic curricula effectively. The Metatheme Research Fellowship itself can serve as a hub for such training, offering collaborative spaces where faculty experiment with new materials, share best practices, and co-author research on thematic pedagogy. Research fellowships should also encourage cross-institutional collaboration, linking departments of media studies, linguistics, and cultural studies. Such partnerships not only enrich curricula but also model the interdisciplinary ethos that the Metatheme Framework embodies.

### 7.3. Departmental Collaboration and Governance

Institutional transformation requires governance structures that value thematic and multilingual approaches. Departments should establish curriculum committees tasked with

integrating thematic units across courses, ensuring coherence and progression. Collaborative teaching models—where faculty from different disciplines co-design and co-teach thematic modules—can further break down silos and expose students to multiple perspectives. Departments should also recognise creative and translation-based projects as legitimate scholarly outputs. Multimedia portfolios, podcasts, and translation journals should be valued alongside traditional essays and exams, both in student assessment and in faculty evaluation. Such recognition signals a commitment to equity, acknowledging the diverse ways in which knowledge can be produced and shared.

#### **7.4. Towards Cross-Cultural Media Citizenship**

Ultimately, the goal of these institutional reforms is to cultivate what might be called *cross-cultural media citizenship*. In an era where misinformation, cultural cancellation, and alienation are pervasive, students must be equipped not only with critical tools but also with a sense of belonging to a global communicative community. By embedding the Metatheme Framework into curricula, institutions can prepare learners to navigate media environments with confidence, empathy, and resilience.

#### **7.5. Reclaiming Imhotep: Decolonising the Genealogy of Knowledge**

The privileging of European frameworks such as the *Bologna Process* (Council of Europe, 1999), the *Erasmus Programme* (European Commission, 2020), and the *Socrates Programme* (European Commission, 1995) reflects a broader pattern of historical amnesia: Africa is left out of the story of higher education, even though Europe's own intellectual traditions were profoundly shaped by African knowledge systems. Nowhere is this clearer than in the field of medicine.

Imhotep (c. 2650–2600 BCE), vizier to Pharaoh Djoser, architect of the Step Pyramid at Saqqara, and high priest of Heliopolis, is also recognised as the earliest recorded physician in history. The *Edwin Smith Papyrus*, attributed to him, is the world's oldest surgical treatise, presenting 48 case studies of injuries, fractures, and wounds with systematic diagnoses, prognoses, and treatments. Unlike magical incantations common in other ancient medical texts, Imhotep's papyrus demonstrates a rational, empirical approach to medicine—anticipating the scientific method by millennia (Breasted, 1930).

Greek testimonies confirm this debt. Herodotus (*Histories* II.84–90) observed that Greek medicine was derived from Egypt. Isocrates (*Busiris*) explicitly stated that philosophy and astronomy originated in Egypt. Iamblichus, in *Life of Pythagoras*, records that Pythagoras studied for over twenty years with Egyptian priests. Hippocrates himself, often hailed as the

“Father of Medicine,” travelled to Egypt and consulted the libraries of Imhotep’s temples. Indeed, the Hippocratic Oath begins with an invocation not only to Apollo but also to Asclepius—the Greek name for Imhotep, whom the Greeks deified as a god of healing.

To continue to swear by Hippocrates while ignoring Imhotep is to perpetuate a false genealogy. As Sir William Osler, the 19th-century British physician, remarked: *“Imhotep is the first figure of a physician to stand out clearly from the mists of antiquity”* (Osler, 1909). Modern medicine, then, owes its origins not to Hippocrates alone but to Imhotep, the African polymath whose contributions predate Greek medicine by two millennia.

Recognising Imhotep is not merely a matter of historical accuracy; it is an act of epistemic justice. Just as the Metatheme Framework insists on validating learners’ cultural repertoires, so too must institutions acknowledge the African roots of disciplines they claim as their own. To invoke Socrates or Hippocrates without acknowledging their Egyptian teachers is to reproduce the very cultural erasure that thematic literacy seeks to resist.

## **8. Conclusion: From Framework to Fellowship for Communication Education**

The Metatheme Research Fellowship (MRF) demonstrates that language and media education can be reimagined when the individual is placed at the centre of learning. By foregrounding themes such as identity, belonging, alienation, cultural relevance, and time, the Fellowship has shown that learners are not passive recipients of grammar rules or media theories but active participants in the construction of meaning. The triangulation of evidence across large-scale surveys, higher-education case studies, and the pilot workshops confirms that thematic, multilingual, and multimodal approaches are not only effective but necessary in an era marked by alienation, cultural erasure, and misinformation.

### **8.1. Pedagogical Implications**

Learners’ engagement with proverbs, idioms, and bilingual scripts demonstrates that thematic inquiry fosters not only linguistic competence but also cultural reflexivity. When students translate sayings such as *“Damlaya damlaya göl olur”* into English equivalents, they are negotiating cultural meaning, testing the elasticity of language, and situating themselves within a global communicative space. This process cultivates metacognitive awareness, encouraging reflection on how language encodes values, histories, and identities.

### **8.2. Institutional Transformation**

The resonance of the metathemes within the pilot mirrors the pressures of the contemporary

media environment. In digital spaces, identity is constantly negotiated, belonging is fragile, and alienation is widespread. Cancel culture, influencer economies, and misinformation campaigns all reveal the precariousness of authenticity and the volatility of cultural legitimacy. By equipping learners with thematic literacy, the Metatheme Framework provides tools to decode these dynamics, resist cultural erasure, and reclaim agency in global communication.

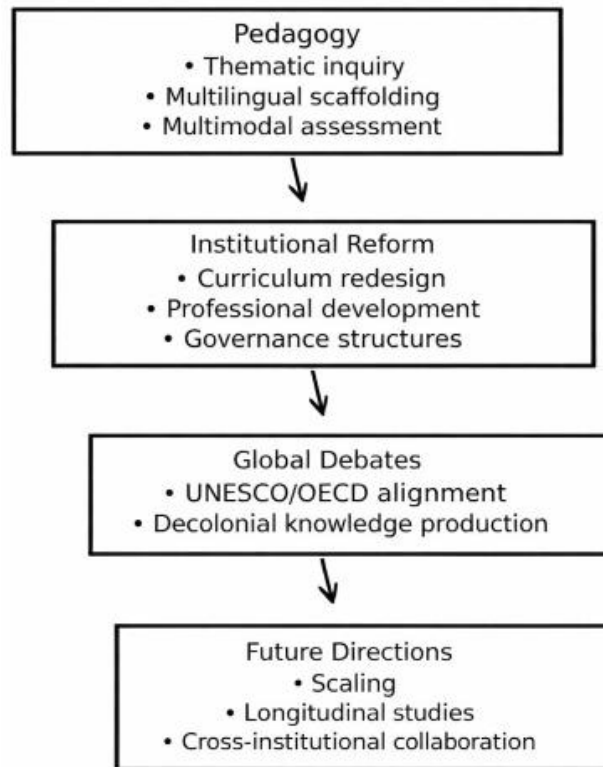
### **8.3. Contribution to Global Debates**

The theme of *Time* is particularly instructive. Learners' engagement with temporal metaphors parallels the ways in which media discourse mobilises urgency, novelty, and historicity. From the "breaking news" cycle to the rhetoric of technological futures, temporal framings shape public perception and political action. By critically engaging with Time as a metatheme, students learn to interrogate the ideological work of temporal language, recognising how it can both inform and manipulate.

### **8.4. Looking Forward: Institutional Pathways**

At the institutional level, the Fellowship offers a model for systemic change. Departments of communication and media studies can embed thematic units into curricula, balance canonical theories with grassroots practices, and adopt multilingual and multimodal assessments that reflect contemporary realities. Such reforms require not only curricular redesign but also structural support: professional development for faculty, recognition of creative and translation-based outputs as legitimate scholarship, and governance structures that prioritise equity and interdisciplinarity.

**Figure 6. Pathways of transformation in communication and media education**



### **8.5. Fellowship as a Hub for Transformation**

The Metatheme Research Fellowship itself can serve as a hub for these transformations. By convening educators, researchers, and learners across institutions and cultural contexts, the Fellowship models the collaborative ethos it seeks to instil. Its bilingual worksheets, multimodal activities, and reflective surveys provide replicable tools that can be adapted to diverse settings, ensuring that thematic literacy is not confined to a single classroom but scaled across networks of practice.

### **8.6. Extending Global Significance**

The significance of the Metatheme Framework extends beyond pedagogy and institutional reform. It contributes to global debates on the future of education in an interconnected world. UNESCO and the OECD have repeatedly emphasised the need for curricula that foster global competence, intercultural dialogue, and resilience in the face of misinformation.

The Metatheme Framework operationalises these goals by embedding them in concrete pedagogical practices that are both culturally grounded and universally resonant.

### **8.7. Future Research Directions**

Looking forward, the Fellowship's contribution is twofold. Pedagogically, it provides a replicable framework for fostering confidence, empathy, and critical literacy among learners. Institutionally, it offers a pathway for departments to reorient curricula around themes that matter most to students' lived experiences. Scaling the framework across different cultural and linguistic contexts will test its adaptability and reveal new thematic resonances. Longitudinal studies can track how learners' engagement evolves over semesters or programmes, while cross-institutional collaborations can generate comparative insights and foster a global network of thematic pedagogy.

### **8.8. Final Synthesis**

As media environments continue to evolve, the need for such approaches will intensify. The Metatheme Framework equips learners not only to critique media but to inhabit it as reflective, resilient, and culturally grounded citizens. The Fellowship therefore anticipates future demands while addressing present challenges, offering a model of education that is both humane and rigorous.

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