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Formulating a Visual Communication Design Competency Framework for Global Creative Competence in English Education Master's Students

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Abstract

Future educators must possess Visual Communication Design (VCD) competencies due to the growing significance of multimodal communication in global educational contexts. The purpose of this study was to explore how master's students in English education perceive the role of VCD competencies in promoting global creative competence and to create a competency framework to encourage this development. The study involved 21 students in an English Education master's program at a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, who participated in the study. The research design used a qualitative exploratory research design. Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were used to gather data, which were then subjected to Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students perceived VCD competencies as essential for effective communication, creativity, audience engagement, and professional development. Four major themes emerged: the meaning of VCD competencies, global visual literacy, cross-cultural visual communication, and the need for VCD competency development. While students demonstrated foundational visual literacy and awareness of audience needs, the global and intercultural dimensions of visual communication remained underdeveloped. Observation data confirmed that VCD elements were integrated into learning activities, particularly through visual presentations, poster analysis, and design discussions. Based on these findings, a VCD competency framework is proposed that encompasses visual literacy, design thinking, digital content creation, cross-cultural visual communication, and global design awareness. The framework guides integrating VCD competencies into English Education master's programs to enhance students' global creative competence In conclusion, VCD competencies are essential for strengthening master's students' global creative competence by enabling them to communicate ideas visually, creatively, and appropriately across diverse cultural contexts. Therefore, English Education master's programs are recommended to systematically integrate VCD competency development into their curricula through interdisciplinary, practice-based, and globally oriented learning activities.

Keywords: visual communication design, competency framework, global creative competency, English, master's students

Abstrak

Pendidik masa depan perlu memiliki kompetensi Desain Komunikasi Visual (VCD) seiring dengan semakin pentingnya komunikasi multimodal dalam konteks pendidikan global. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana mahasiswa magister Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris memaknai peran kompetensi VCD dalam mendukung pengembangan kompetensi kreatif global serta menyusun suatu kerangka kompetensi yang dapat memfasilitasi pengembangan tersebut. Penelitian ini melibatkan 21 mahasiswa Program Magister Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di sebuah universitas di Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif eksploratif . Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan observasi kelas, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik yang dikembangkan oleh Braun dan Clarke (2006). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memandang kompetensi VCD sebagai kemampuan yang esensial untuk

mendukung komunikasi yang efektif, kreativitas, keterlibatan audiens, dan pengembangan profesional. Empat tema utama yang muncul meliputi: makna kompetensi VCD, literasi visual global, komunikasi visual lintas budaya, serta kebutuhan akan pengembangan kompetensi VCD. Meskipun mahasiswa telah menunjukkan kemampuan dasar dalam literasi visual dan kesadaran terhadap kebutuhan audiens, dimensi global dan interkultural dalam komunikasi visual masih belum berkembang secara optimal. Data observasi juga mengonfirmasi bahwa unsur-unsur VCD telah diintegrasikan ke dalam kegiatan pembelajaran, khususnya melalui presentasi visual, analisis poster, dan diskusi terkait desain. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, penelitian ini mengusulkan kerangka kompetensi VCD yang mencakup literasi visual, *design thinking*, pembuatan konten digital, komunikasi visual lintas budaya, dan kesadaran terhadap desain global. Kerangka ini memberikan panduan bagi integrasi kompetensi VCD ke dalam Program Magister Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris guna meningkatkan kompetensi kreatif global mahasiswa. Sebagai kesimpulan, kompetensi VCD sangat penting untuk memperkuat kompetensi kreatif global mahasiswa program magister dengan memungkinkan mereka mengomunikasikan gagasan secara visual, kreatif, dan tepat dalam berbagai konteks budaya. Oleh karena itu, program Magister Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris direkomendasikan untuk mengintegrasikan pengembangan kompetensi VCD secara sistematis ke dalam kurikulum melalui kegiatan pembelajaran yang bersifat interdisipliner, berbasis praktik, dan berorientasi global.

Kata Kunci: desain komunikasi visual, kerangka kompetensi, kompetensi kreatif global, Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, mahasiswa program magister

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INTRODUCTION

The swift advancement of digital communication technology has revolutionised higher education, especially in language education programmes that increasingly require students to demonstrate creativity, multimodal literacy, and global communication proficiency (Creely, 2024; Coolsaet, 2024; Uzorka & Kalabuki, 2024). In this setting, Visual Communication Design (VCD) has become a vital multidisciplinary skill that enables learners to articulate ideas using visual, textual, and digital media (Bian & Ji, 2021; Putra, 2021). For students in English Education master's programmes, the incorporation of VCD competencies is increasingly relevant, as academic and professional communication now transcends conventional textual formats and moves towards visually mediated interaction in global contexts.

Therefore, global creative competency is the capacity to generate new ideas, communicate across cultures, and creatively solve problems in diverse situations (Braslauskas, 2021). Modern

educational processes highlight the necessity for graduate students to possess not only linguistic and pedagogical skills but also the flexibility to think innovatively in addressing the problems of internationalisation and the digitalisation era. However, many programmes in English Education continue to focus on traditional academic abilities, with little emphasis on visual communication skills that could enhance students' creativity and global participation. Thus, it is necessary to develop a competency framework for English Education learning settings, including VCD.

Many studies have been conducted on creativity, digital literacy and multimodal communication in higher education, but research on the contribution of VCD competencies to the development of global creative competence of graduate students in English Education is limited. Current approaches tend to emphasize technical design skills and fail to adequately consider the pedagogical, communicative, and intercultural factors essential to language-teaching environments. This gap highlights the importance of investigating students' views and classroom practices to better understand the competences required in contemporary English Education programmes.

Edupreneurship is one of the courses in English Education master's programmes in this research setting that aims to enhance students' entrepreneurial attitudes, inventiveness, and ability to develop educational products and services. The implementation of this course makes VCD increasingly significant, as students are required to present ideas, promote educational innovations, and communicate projects through beautiful, effective visual media. Students can communicate information artistically and professionally using visual components, such as digital branding, presentation design, social media content, and promotional materials. Hence, integrating VCD capabilities into Edupreneurship learning is needed to boost students' global creative competency and prepare them for educational and entrepreneurial contexts powered by digital technology (Arga et al., 2024).

The introduction of VCD in Edupreneurship curricula has become increasingly imperative due to the rising demands of the digital and creative economy (Arga et al., 2024). In modern educational entrepreneurship, students must not only cultivate creative business concepts but also articulate them proficiently through visual and digital media. The ability to deliver compelling visual content, branding strategies, promotional materials, and multimodal presentations is crucial to improving audience engagement and market competitiveness. Ginon and Setiawan (2021) highlighted that VCD competencies, developed through project-based learning, can enhance creative thinking, digital communication skills, and global adaptability, which are essential for designing educational products and entrepreneurial ventures in international settings. Consequently, integrating VCD into Edupreneurship education is essential to equip students to meet the demands of technology-driven, visually focused professional landscapes.

While previous studies have primarily examined VCD as a means of enhancing creative thinking and digital communication, this study extends the field by conceptualizing VCD as a multidimensional competency for developing global creative competence, particularly through the inclusion of cross-cultural visual communication and global design awareness. In practice, the proposed framework can serve as a reference for curriculum contributors, lecturers, and educational institutions in developing learning techniques that integrate VCD to foster the development of internationally competitive, creatively competent graduates. Based on the issues identified previously, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of VCD competencies and formulate a competency framework that supports the development of global creative competence in English Education master's programs. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do students perceive the role of Visual

Communication Design competencies in fostering global creative competence in English Education master's programs? and (2) What kind of Visual Communication Design competency framework can support the development of global creative competence among English Education master's students?

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research methodology to examine students' perceptions of VCD and to develop a competency framework to enhance global creative ability in English Education master's programmes. Qualitative exploratory research is suitable for investigating participants' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations within a particular educational setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research examined the perception and implementation of VCD competences within the Edupreneurship course and their role in fostering students' creative development in global and digital learning contexts.

The participants of this study were 21 students enrolled in the Edupreneurship course in the English Education master's program at a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. These students were selected because they actively participated in learning activities involving creativity, educational entrepreneurship, and visual communication practices. Their experiences and perspectives were considered relevant to provide insights into the role of VCD competencies in supporting global creative competence. This study used purposive sampling to select participants who met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling enables researchers to identify participants who possess experiences and knowledge related to the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). The selected participants were students who had taken the Edupreneurship course and were involved in classroom activities during the 2025/2026 academic year that required visual communication and creative project development.

Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews were employed to investigate students' attitudes, experiences, and comprehension of VCD competencies within the Edupreneurship course. The interviews confirmed participants' articulation of their viewpoints and enabled the researchers to investigate new concerns comprehensively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ten teachers were specifically selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews, even though all 21 participants contributed to the dataset. Since no new topics emerged from the subsequent interviews, this number was deemed sufficient to reach data saturation. Participants were selected based on their willingness to engage and ensure diversity in teaching experiences and educational settings. After being told about the study's goals, confidentiality protocols, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time, participants gave written informed consent before each interview. Every interview was done one-on-one and lasted roughly sixty minutes. All interview data is reported using anonymized participant codes (P1–P10) to preserve participant identities.

Furthermore, classroom observations were conducted using observation sheets to monitor the use of VCD competencies during educational activities. In this way, all 21 participants were observed throughout the classroom sessions. The observations focused on students' engagement, visual presentation techniques, collaborative interactions, and the application of visual communication elements in project-based learning activities. The interviews validated the observations and enabled the researchers to obtain thorough, context-rich data on students' experiences and classroom practices.

The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative analytic method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within data. The analysis process involved six phases: (1) familiarizing with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and observation notes, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. This method enabled the researchers to systematically interpret participants' perceptions and classroom experiences in developing a VCD competency framework that supports global creative competence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the study's findings in relation to the two research questions. The first part explores students' perceptions of the role of VCD competencies in fostering global creative competence within an English Education Master's program. It highlights how participants perceive the contribution of VCD competencies within a globalized educational context. The second part presents the proposed VCD competency framework developed from the findings. The framework identifies the key competency dimensions considered essential for supporting the development of global creative competence among English Education Master's students and provides a conceptual foundation for integrating visual communication design into postgraduate English education.

Students' Perceptions of the Role of Visual Communication Design Competencies in Fostering Global Creative Competence

The interview findings reveal that English Education master's students generally perceive VCD competencies as an important component in fostering global creative competence. Four major themes emerged from the analysis, namely: (1) the meaning and role of VCD competencies, (2) global visual literacy, (3) cross-cultural visual communication, and (4) the need for VCD competency development.

Table 1.
Findings of Students' Perceptions of VCD Competencies' Role in Global Creative Competence

Theme	Findings	Representative Excerpts
VCD as a Strategic Competency	Participants consistently perceived VCD competencies as essential for attracting attention, improving message clarity,	*"Kemampuan visual ini penting sekali… mendorong bagaimana*

	strengthening presentations, supporting marketing activities, and increasing audience engagement. Visual communication was viewed not merely as an aesthetic element but as a strategic tool for conveying educational and entrepreneurial ideas effectively.	*audience menangkap secara langsung apa yang kita sampaikan." (P6)* "*Pembelajaran lebih menarik kalau ada visualnya."* (P8) "*Ini salah satu jadi bahan marketing kita… untuk portofolio."* (P10)
Global Visual Literacy Remains Limited but Emerging	Most students demonstrated awareness of global visual resources through platforms such as Pinterest, Canva, Google, and Instagram. But rather than evaluating cultural meanings, involvement was mostly focused on obtaining inspiration. This points to a developing yet underdeveloped visual literacy worldwide.	"*Saya mencari desain yang sesuai dengan topik lalu membandingkan beberapa gaya."* (P6) *"Paling cuma lihat saja bagaimana mereka mencampurkan warna."* (P7) *"Lebih banyak saya mencari referensi dalam negeri aja."* (P8)
Awareness of Cross-Cultural Visual Communication	Students recognized that visual messages need to be adapted to specific cultural audiences. They understood that local cultural elements can increase relevance and audience connection, while unfamiliar cultural symbols may reduce comprehension. However, practical experience in designing for international audiences remained limited.	*"Pemilihan elemen budaya harus disesuaikan dengan siapa audiensnya."* (P6) *"Karena saya di Papua… memasukkan elemen budaya menjadi satu daya tarik."* (P8) *"Aspek budaya belum saya kasih unsur dari hal tersebut."* (P10)
Need for VCD Competency Development	Participants reported significant gaps in design competencies, particularly in layout, color composition, typography, visual creativity, digital promotion, and software utilization. They expressed a strong preference for hands-on workshops, project-based learning, guided practice, and real-world design applications rather than theory-oriented instruction.	*"Kemampuan yang perlu ditingkatkan adalah penggunaan warna, layout, tipografi, serta konsistensi desain."* (P6) *"Saya masih membutuhkan materi bagaimana melakukan promosi secara online."* (P8) "Ide ada, tapi eksekusi visual design-nya tidak bisa." (P9) *"Visual itu butuh kegiatan action-nya."* (P10)
VCD as a Contributor to Global Creative Competence	Across interviews, students linked VCD competencies with creativity, innovation, audience awareness, communication effectiveness, and digital engagement. These competencies were perceived as important for developing globally relevant educational products and communicating ideas across increasingly diverse learning environments.	*"Visual yang tidak hanya menarik bagi audiens lokal, tetapi juga dapat dipahami audiens yang lebih luas."* (P4) *"Membutuhkan kemampuan design thinking, pemahaman tren visual internasional, dan kemampuan menyesuaikan desain dengan audiens lintas budaya."* (P5)

Table 1 describes how participants viewed VCD competencies as strategic skills that enhance the effectiveness of communication, learning, and professional activities. The ability to develop and use visual elements was seen as more than just an aesthetic; it was used to draw the audience's attention, increase engagement, and facilitate message comprehension. Several participants

emphasized that visual communication plays a crucial role in educational presentations, digital content creation, and entrepreneurial activities. This finding suggests that students recognize the practical value of VCD competencies in both academic and professional contexts.

Second, the findings indicate that students possess an emerging awareness of global visual literacy. Most participants reported using digital platforms such as Pinterest, Canva, Instagram, and Google to seek design inspiration and examples. However, their engagement with global visual resources tended to focus on imitation and inspiration rather than critical analysis of visual conventions, cultural meanings, and international design trends. This shows that while students are exposed to global visual content, their ability to critically interpret and evaluate global visual communication remains limited.

Third, participants demonstrated awareness of the importance of cross-cultural visual communication. They acknowledged that visual messages should be adapted to the cultural backgrounds and expectations of different audiences. In this way, several participants highlighted the significance of incorporating local cultural elements to make visual products more meaningful and relatable. They also recognized that cultural symbols may be interpreted differently across contexts and that effective visual communication requires sensitivity to audience diversity. Nevertheless, many participants reported limited experience designing visual materials specifically for multicultural audiences.

Finally, the findings reveal a strong need for systematic development of VCD competencies among English Education master's students. Participants identified several areas for improvement, including typography, color composition, layout design, visual storytelling, digital content creation, and use of design software. They also expressed a preference for practical, project-based learning experiences that offer opportunities to apply design principles in authentic contexts. Rather than relying solely on theoretical instruction, students emphasized the importance of hands-on workshops, guided practice, and real-world projects to strengthen their visual communication skills.

Taken together, these findings suggest that students perceive VCD competencies as contributing significantly to global creative competence. Participants associated these competencies with creativity, innovation, audience awareness, digital engagement, and the ability to communicate ideas effectively across diverse contexts. As global communication increasingly relies on multimodal and visual forms of expression, VCD competences appear to play a crucial role in preparing English Education master's students to participate successfully in global academic and professional contexts.

The interview findings were further validated through classroom observations conducted in the Edupreneurship course. Overall, the observational data support students' perceptions of VCD competencies' role in fostering global creative competence. The findings from both data sources strengthen the study's credibility and provide a more comprehensive understanding of how VCD competencies are perceived and enacted in practice.

First, students perceived VCD competencies as essential for effective communication, creativity, audience engagement, and professional development. This perception was evident in the observation data, which showed that VCD elements were actively integrated into learning activities. During the first observation, students analyzed posters, discussed typography, color schemes, branding, and visual layouts, and provided recommendations for design improvement. The lecturer also emphasized the importance of visual principles in creating effective communication materials. These observations confirm that VCD was not merely used as a supporting medium but functioned as a core component of learning activities.

Second, the interview data revealed that students had begun developing global visual literacy through exposure to digital platforms such as Canva, Pinterest, Instagram, and Google. However, their engagement was primarily limited to seeking inspiration rather than critically analyzing visual conventions and cultural meanings. Similar patterns emerged in the observations. Students demonstrated the ability to interpret visual messages, evaluate design effectiveness, and explain the communicative function of visual elements. Nevertheless, no classroom activities explicitly encouraged students to compare visual designs across cultures or to examine how visual meanings vary across international contexts. This finding suggests that students' visual literacy remains largely functional and has not yet evolved into critical global visual literacy.

Third, both the interviews and observations highlighted the limited development of cross-cultural visual communication competence. Interview participants acknowledged the importance of adapting visual messages to specific audiences and recognized the value of incorporating cultural elements into visual designs. However, they also admitted having limited experience in designing for multicultural or international audiences. The observation data supported this finding. Although classroom discussions usually focused on target audiences and the effectiveness of visual messaging, they mostly ignored cultural diversity, intercultural interpretation, and cross-cultural audience demands. As a result, students appeared to be aware of their audience but lacked a deeper level of intercultural visual sensitivity.

Finally, the strong need for VCD competency development expressed by students was also reflected in the observation findings. Participants reported challenges with typography, layout, color composition, visual storytelling, and design software. They emphasized the importance of hands-on learning experiences and authentic projects. The observations demonstrated that student engagement was highest when learning activities involved direct interaction with visual materials, such as poster analysis and visual design tasks. On the other hand, there were fewer opportunities for students to use visual communication skills in sessions that focused primarily on verbal communication. These results show that VCD abilities among master's students in English education must be strengthened through hands-on, project-based learning experiences.

Table 2 shows the triangulation of interview and observation findings of this study.

Table 2.
Triangulation of Interview and Observation Findings

Theme	Interview Findings	Observation Findings	Integrated Interpretation
Meaning of VCD Competencies	Students viewed VCD as important for communication, engagement, presentation, and professional purposes.	Students analyzed posters, discussed visual elements, and used visual presentations in class.	Both data sources indicate that VCD is perceived and practiced as a strategic communication competency rather than merely an aesthetic skill.
Global Visual Literacy	Students frequently used global digital platforms for design inspiration but rarely engaged in critical analysis of global visual practices.	Students could interpret visual meanings, but no activities involved a systematic comparison of cross-cultural designs.	Students possess foundational visual literacy, but their global visual literacy remains in its early stages of development.
Cross-Cultural Visual Communication	Students recognized the need to adapt visual messages to audiences and cultural contexts.	Discussions focused on audience and marketing effectiveness rather than intercultural communication.	Audience awareness is emerging, but intercultural visual communication competence remains limited.
Need for VCD Competency Development	Students expressed the need for stronger competencies in typography, layout, color, design software, and visual storytelling.	Greater engagement occurred when students participated in visual analysis and design-related tasks.	Practical and project-based learning experiences are necessary to strengthen VCD competencies.
Global Creative Competence	Students associated VCD competencies with creativity, innovation, communication, and global relevance.	Learning activities promoted problem-solving, audience analysis, and real-world applications through Edupreneurship tasks.	VCD competencies contribute to global creative competence, although their intercultural and global dimensions require further enhancement.

The combination of interview and observation data indicates that VCD abilities help develop global creative competence by enhancing creativity, communication effectiveness, audience awareness, and digital engagement. Both data sources also suggest that the global and intercultural components of these competences are yet underdeveloped. In this regard, a more structured competency framework is needed to support the systematic integration of visual communication design, global visual literacy, and cross-cultural communication within the master's programs in English Education.

The findings indicate that Visual Communication Design (VCD) competencies are perceived by English Education Master's students as strategic tools for communication, engagement, presentation, and professional purposes rather than merely aesthetic skills. This perception reflects contemporary perspectives on multimodality, which view communication as the integration of multiple semiotic resources, including language, images, spatial arrangements, and digital media (Kessler, 2022). The observation data further revealed that students actively analyzed visual elements and utilized visual presentations to convey meaning, suggesting that they already recognize the communicative function of visual design. Such findings support the argument that multimodal communication has become an essential component of meaning-making in contemporary educational contexts, where learners are expected to communicate through diverse representational modes (Klimanova & Lomicka, 2023; Kessler, 2022). Furthermore, Lim (2023) argues that meaning construction increasingly occurs through the interaction of multiple modes rather than through language alone. Therefore, VCD competencies can be understood as essential communicative resources that support academic and professional communication in increasingly digital and visually oriented environments.

Furthermore, the findings concerning global visual literacy suggest that students possess basic abilities to interpret visual messages and frequently use global digital platforms as sources of design inspiration. However, they rarely engage in critical examination of visual practices across cultural contexts. This result aligns with contemporary conceptualizations of visual literacy that extend beyond image interpretation to include critical awareness of how visual representations construct cultural meanings and influence audiences (Méndez-García & Cores-Bilbao, 2023). According to Méndez-García and Cores-Bilbao (2023), visual literacy involves understanding not only what images communicate but also the cultural assumptions and perspectives embedded within them. Although students demonstrated foundational visual literacy, the lack of systematic cross-cultural analysis suggests that their global visual literacy remains in its early stages. From a global competence perspective, the OECD (2020) emphasizes that learners should be able to critically examine issues from multiple cultural viewpoints and understand how communication practices differ across contexts. Consequently, English education programs should provide opportunities for students to analyze visual communication practices from different regions and cultures to strengthen their global visual literacy.

The theme of cross-cultural visual communication reveals that students recognize the need to adapt visual messages to different audiences and contexts. Nevertheless, classroom discussions focused primarily on audience effectiveness and marketing considerations rather than intercultural communication. Recent scholarship suggests that intercultural communicative competence should be understood as the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds across multiple modes of communication (Gorham & Amgott, 2024). Similarly, Mootoosamy and Aryadoust (2024) argue that contemporary communication requires integrating intercultural, multimodal, and digital competencies, as it increasingly occurs across cultural and technological boundaries. The findings, therefore, indicate that students are beginning to develop audience awareness but have not yet fully considered how cultural values, symbols, and visual conventions influence the interpretation of visual messages. This suggests a need to incorporate intercultural communication tasks that require students to compare, evaluate, and redesign visual materials for diverse cultural audiences.

The findings also reveal a strong need for VCD competency development, particularly in typography, layout design, color application, visual storytelling, and digital design software. Observation data showed that students were more engaged during visual analysis and design-related activities, underscoring the value of active and authentic learning experiences. This finding is consistent with multiliteracies theory, which emphasizes that learners develop communication competencies most effectively when they engage in the design and redesign of meaning through authentic multimodal tasks (Lim, 2023). Likewise, Chen (2023) found that visual languaging promotes deeper learning by encouraging learners to construct knowledge through visual representation and reflection. The students' expressed need for practical design skills, therefore, highlights the importance of project-based and experiential learning environments that allow them to apply VCD principles to real-world communication challenges. Such experiences can facilitate the development of both technical design skills and higher-order communication competencies (Chen, 2023; Lim, 2023).

In relation to global creative competence, the findings demonstrate that students associate VCD competencies with creativity, innovation, communication, and global relevance, while classroom activities encouraged problem-solving and real-world application through Edupreneurship projects.

These findings support contemporary views that global competence involves not only intercultural understanding but also the capacity to communicate ideas creatively and collaboratively in diverse contexts (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, Mootoosamy and Aryadoust (2024) argued that successful participation in global environments requires individuals to integrate multimodal communication skills, intercultural awareness, and creative problem-solving abilities. The ability to design effective visual messages, solve communication problems, and adapt ideas for global audiences, therefore, represents an important dimension of global creative competence. However, the findings also suggest that students' intercultural and global awareness have not developed to the same extent as their technical and communicative abilities. Accordingly, a comprehensive VCD competency framework for English Education Master's students should integrate visual literacy, multimodal communication, intercultural competence, digital design proficiency, and creative problem-solving to prepare graduates for participation in global professional and educational environments (Chen, 2023; Lim, 2023; Mootoosamy & Aryadoust, 2024).

Visual Communication Design Competency Framework for English Education Master's students

This section presents a visual representation of the VCD Competency Framework (see Figure 1), developed from the findings in the preceding section. The framework synthesizes the identified competencies into an integrated model that illustrates the relationships among the core competency domains and their key components.

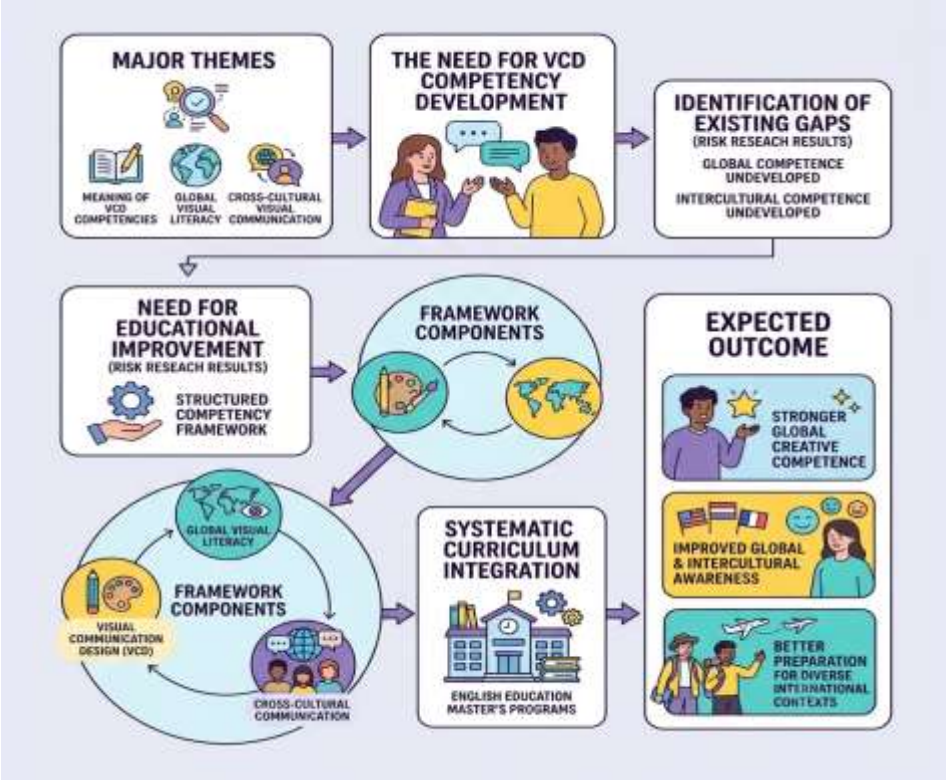


Figure 1. VCD Competency Framework for English Education Master's Students

Based on Figure 1, students perceive VCD as a strategic competency, indicating that VCD is regarded not merely as a medium for presenting information but as a pedagogical approach that

facilitates knowledge construction through multimodal learning environments integrating visual, textual, and interactive elements. This perception aligns with contemporary perspectives on design education, which emphasize studio-based learning, design thinking, and interdisciplinary collaboration as mechanisms for fostering higher-order thinking, creativity, and authentic problem-solving, thereby positioning VCD as an active process of knowledge construction rather than aesthetic production alone (Kazemian, 2026; Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022). In increasingly digital learning environments, multimodality further strengthens learner engagement by enabling students to actively construct meaning through diverse semiotic resources and digital media (Kazemian, 2026; Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023).

This interpretation is further supported by multimodal communication and visual literacy theories, which argue that meaning is generated through the interaction of multiple representational modes, including images, typography, colour, spatial organization, animation, and interactivity. Consequently, VCD provides an instructional framework through which learners interpret, negotiate, and communicate complex information using integrated visual and textual representations, thereby enhancing their capacity to analyse, synthesize, and communicate knowledge within contemporary digital ecosystems (Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022). Such findings also reinforce constructivist perspectives, whereby knowledge is actively constructed through exploration, collaboration, and social negotiation rather than passively transmitted. In VCD education, project-based studios, iterative design processes, prototype development, critique sessions, and reflective practice collectively create authentic learning experiences that enable students to develop both explicit and tacit knowledge while continuously refining their understanding through feedback and collaborative interaction (Kazemian, 2026; Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023).

From a sociocultural perspective, the application of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) further demonstrates that learning in VCD is mediated by artefacts, technological tools, and cultural contexts, allowing knowledge construction to emerge through interactions among learners, instructors, and digital technologies within collaborative design ecosystems (Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022). Likewise, studies on virtual studios and transnational design education suggest that effective VCD learning depends on distributed collaboration supported by digital infrastructures that encourage continuous cognitive, social, and professional engagement across geographical boundaries (Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022). From the perspective of digital communication theory, VCD also functions as a strategic communication competency because visual artefacts designed for multiple digital platforms facilitate information dissemination, audience engagement, contextual adaptation, and knowledge reconstruction within networked environments (Kazemian, 2026; Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023).

However, the successful implementation of these pedagogical benefits remains contingent upon institutional readiness, including supportive policies, adequate technological infrastructure, and continuous professional development for educators, as resistance to technological innovation and limited institutional support may reduce the educational potential of multimodal digital communication (Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023). Furthermore, evidence from design education demonstrates that design thinking, iterative prototyping, portfolio-based assessment, and project-based learning not only cultivate visual communication skills but also promote higher-order cognitive processes, interdisciplinary knowledge transfer, and professional competence across diverse educational contexts, including STEAM-oriented learning environments (Kazemian, 2026; Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022). Similar conclusions are drawn from studies investigating virtual

exhibitions, smartphone-based learning media, and digital design studios, which reveal that visual artefacts facilitate reflective evaluation, collaborative discussion, and sustained learning through authentic design tasks (Limantara, 2022; Puspitasari et al., 2022; Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023).

Nevertheless, despite the growing recognition of VCD as a strategic educational competency, several challenges remain, including unequal technological access, inconsistent curriculum implementation, institutional policy constraints, and insufficient alignment between higher education curricula and industry expectations, all of which may reinforce the misconception of VCD as merely an aesthetic discipline rather than a vehicle for knowledge construction (Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022). Therefore, strengthening curriculum design through systematic integration of design thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, authentic project-based learning, and partnerships with industry, alongside investment in digital infrastructure such as learning management systems, virtual studios, and immersive technologies, is essential for maximizing the pedagogical value of VCD and preparing graduates with the visual, digital, and collaborative competencies required in twenty-first century education and professional practice (Wang & Liu, 2025; Yu et al., 2022; Mhungu, 2023; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2024; Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023).

These findings suggest that students perceive VCD as a strategic competency because it integrates multimodal communication, visual literacy, constructivist learning, sociocultural interaction, and digital communication into an authentic knowledge-building process that extends beyond aesthetic production, thereby positioning VCD as an essential pedagogical foundation for developing creativity, digital literacy, interdisciplinary collaboration, and future-ready professional competencies.

The findings indicate that students have begun to develop global visual literacy through exposure to diverse digital visual resources; however, their engagement with platforms such as Pinterest, Canva, Instagram, and Google Images remains largely oriented toward seeking inspiration rather than conducting systematic critical visual analysis. This pattern is consistent with contemporary perspectives on visual and digital literacy, which emphasize that the ability to interpret, negotiate, evaluate, and create meaning from visual information is fundamental to navigating the increasingly multimodal global information ecosystem (Scolere, 2023; Tooley, 2025; López-Carril et al., 2025; Kolyvas & Κωσταγιόλας, 2023; Huilcapi-Collantes, 2023; Morrison, 2021; Davis & Yi, 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Although these digital platforms provide abundant opportunities for creativity, collaboration, and intercultural connectivity, students generally employ them as repositories of design references rather than as resources for critically examining visual conventions, cultural meanings, and communication strategies. This finding supports the multiliteracies framework, which argues that learners must move beyond accessing multimodal resources toward developing critical analytical abilities that enable them to transform visual inspiration into meaningful academic and professional knowledge production (Morrison, 2021; Lim et al., 2023). Previous studies further suggest that platforms such as Pinterest can effectively support visual literacy development when integrated within curricula grounded in critical literacy and structured pedagogical guidance, thereby enabling students to critically evaluate visual content rather than merely replicate existing designs (Scolere, 2023; Tooley, 2025; López-Carril et al., 2025; Schroeder & Curcio, 2022; Morrison, 2021).

The present findings also demonstrate that students recognize the importance of adapting visual communication to different audiences, reflecting an emerging awareness of cross-cultural communication despite their limited ability to design visual materials for multicultural contexts. This observation aligns with Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence framework and the OECD

Global Competence framework, both of which emphasize that intercultural sensitivity develops progressively through authentic international experiences, collaborative learning, and meaningful interaction across cultural contexts rather than through formal instruction alone (Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022; Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; López-Carril et al., 2025; Hanifa et al., 2024; Morrison, 2021; Lim et al., 2023).

Consequently, although students conceptually acknowledge audience diversity, they continue to encounter practical challenges in interpreting cultural symbols, aesthetic preferences, communication norms, and media practices across different societies. Existing literature suggests that carefully designed international learning experiences and culturally responsive visual literacy instruction can facilitate the transformation of cultural awareness into inclusive and culturally sensitive design practices (Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022; Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; Morrison, 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, students expressed a strong need to strengthen their VCD competencies through project-based learning, workshops, authentic design experiences, and continuous practical engagement. This finding is consistent with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which proposes that meaningful learning emerges through iterative cycles of concrete experience, reflective observation, conceptualization, and active experimentation. Likewise, project-based learning, design thinking, and constructivist approaches demonstrate that authentic learning environments characterized by iterative design, prototyping, collaboration, and continuous feedback foster higher-order thinking, creativity, professional competence, and knowledge transfer across diverse professional contexts (Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022; Kazemian, 2026; Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; Wang & Liu, 2025; Ulita & Hananto, 2022).

Previous research similarly indicates that authentic industry-oriented projects, case studies, simulations, and interdisciplinary collaboration significantly enhance students' analytical capabilities, innovation, and career readiness by engaging them with real-world design challenges (Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022; Ulita & Hananto, 2022; Wang & Liu, 2025). Collectively, these findings advance a broader theoretical argument that VCD competencies contribute to the development of Global Creative Competence through the dynamic interaction of visual literacy, multimodal communication, intercultural awareness, creativity, digital literacy, audience sensitivity, and design thinking. The proposed competency framework therefore extends previous scholarship by positioning VCD not merely as an aesthetic discipline but as a comprehensive pedagogical approach that integrates global visual literacy, intercultural communication, digital competence, and creative problem-solving within English Education and Edupreneurship curricula.

By systematically embedding authentic project-based learning, critical visual literacy, and intercultural design experiences into curriculum development, higher education institutions can better prepare graduates to communicate effectively, innovate responsibly, and participate successfully in increasingly interconnected global professional environments (Huilcapi-Collantes, 2023; Lim et al., 2023; López-Carril et al., 2025; Morrison, 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2023 Lazou & Tsınakos, 2023; Scolere, 2023; Sherwani & Harchegani, 2022; Tooley, 2025).

Overall, these findings suggest that the development of Visual Communication Design (VCD) competencies extends beyond enhancing students' technical design abilities, serving instead as a catalyst for the development of global creative competence by integrating multimodal literacy, visual literacy, intercultural communication, digital competence, and design thinking. Although students have demonstrated emerging awareness of global visual resources and audience diversity, their capacity

for critical visual analysis and culturally responsive design remains underdeveloped, indicating the need for more structured pedagogical interventions. Consequently, integrating authentic project-based learning, experiential learning, and cross-cultural design experiences into English Education curricula is essential to foster students' ability to communicate creatively and effectively across diverse global contexts. In this regard, the proposed VCD competency framework contributes to the growing body of literature by positioning visual communication not merely as an aesthetic practice but as a strategic pedagogical competency that supports knowledge construction, innovation, and global professional readiness in higher education.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that VCD abilities contribute significantly to the development of global creative competence by fostering creativity, effective communication, audience awareness, and digital engagement among students in Master's programs in English Education. However, the study also reveals that the global and intercultural dimensions of these competences remain insufficiently developed. Therefore, there is a need for a more structured competency framework that systematically integrates VCD, global visual literacy, and cross-cultural communication into the curriculum. The integration would better prepare students to navigate diverse cultural contexts and meet the demands of communication and collaboration in an increasingly interconnected world. This study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single master's program, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. In addition, the study relied primarily on students' perceptions and classroom observations, which may not fully capture the actual level of their VCD competencies or their development over time. Future studies should involve more diverse participants, multiple institutions, and performance-based assessments to validate and further refine the proposed VCD competency framework.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Master's programs in English Education develop a more structured competency framework that systematically integrates VCD, global visual literacy, and cross-cultural communication into the curriculum. Such a framework should not only strengthen students' creativity, communication effectiveness, audience awareness, and digital engagement areas that have been positively influenced by VCD competencies but also address the currently underdeveloped global and intercultural dimensions of creative competence. By doing so, graduates will be better equipped with comprehensive global creative competence that aligns with the demands of professional engagement in an increasingly interconnected world.

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