



The Role of Historical Films in Creating Awareness of Indian History among Students of Gujarat

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Abstract

Historical films are among the most widely watched sources of information about the past, and they shape how students picture Indian history long before and beside the textbook. This study examined the role of historical films in creating awareness of Indian history among secondary and higher secondary students of Gujarat. A descriptive survey was carried out on 300 students of Standards 9 to 12 from five districts, using a self-constructed Film Exposure Scale and a Historical Awareness Test (maximum score 50). Students were grouped as low, moderate or high in film exposure. Historical awareness rose with exposure (low $M = 21.40$, moderate $M = 26.80$, high $M = 31.20$), $F(2, 297) = 86.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .37$. Students also reported that films raised their interest in history and helped them remember events, while a large majority felt that films should be used together with teacher discussion and source checking. The paper concludes that historical films can be a strong supporting resource in history classrooms when they are used critically, in line with the experiential and multimedia learning emphasis of NEP 2020.

Keywords: historical films, Indian history, historical awareness, students, Gujarat, NEP 2020, media literacy

1. Introduction

History is learned in school mainly through textbooks and lectures, yet many students first meet historical figures and events on screen. Films such as *Gandhi* (1982), *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002), *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) and *Sardar* (1993), which portrays Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, reach audiences far larger than any classroom. For students in Gujarat, where the freedom movement, the Salt March and the integration of princely states are part of everyday regional memory, such films can make distant events feel close and personal.



Film gives history a face, a voice and an emotional setting. Writers on history and film argue that the screen does not simply copy the past but builds an interpretation of it (Rosenstone, 1995). Dramatic licence, selective storytelling and commercial pressure can therefore distort facts even while they raise interest. The classroom question is not whether students watch historical films, but what they take from them and how teachers can guide that learning (Marcus et al., 2010). The National Education Policy 2020 calls for experiential, competency-based and technology-supported learning, and for pride in India's heritage and knowledge traditions (Ministry of Education, 2020). Historical films fit this vision as a resource that can link knowledge, emotion and discussion. Yet there is little local evidence on how far film viewing is related to students' awareness of Indian history in Gujarat. This study addresses that gap.

1.1 Objectives

1. To find the level of film exposure of secondary and higher secondary students of Gujarat.
2. To study the relationship between exposure to historical films and awareness of Indian history.
3. To compare historical awareness among students with low, moderate and high film exposure.
4. To study students' perceptions of the role of historical films in learning history.

1.2 Hypotheses

- **H₀1:** There is no significant difference in awareness of Indian history among students with low, moderate and high exposure to historical films.
- **H₀2:** There is no significant relationship between film exposure and awareness of Indian history.

1.3 Delimitations

The study is limited to students of Standards 9 to 12 in five districts of Gujarat (Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Surat, Vadodara and Rajkot) and to feature films with an Indian historical theme.



2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Films as historical texts

Burke (2001) treats images, including moving images, as evidence that tells us about how a society sees the past, not only about the past itself. Rosenstone (1995) argues that historical films should be judged as a different way of doing history, one that uses drama, condensation and invention to convey meaning. For teachers this means that a film is best used as an interpretation to be examined, not as a record to be memorised.

2.2 Films in the history classroom

Marcus (2005) and Marcus et al. (2010) describe how feature films can open classroom discussion on sources, perspective and accuracy, provided students are taught to compare film scenes with documents and textbook accounts. Metzger (2007) shows that film work supports historical literacy when students are asked to analyse and question what they see. Wineburg (2001) warns that students often read the past through present-day assumptions, which is why guided questioning matters when films are shown.

2.3 Learning theories

Three frameworks explain why films can build awareness. Dual coding theory holds that information stored in both verbal and visual form is remembered better (Paivio, 1986). The cognitive theory of multimedia learning adds that well-designed words and pictures together support understanding (Mayer, 2009). Social learning theory explains how learners identify with models, such as freedom fighters and rulers, and take on their values (Bandura, 1977). Seixas (2004) links such learning to historical consciousness, the way people relate past, present and future.

2.4 Research gap

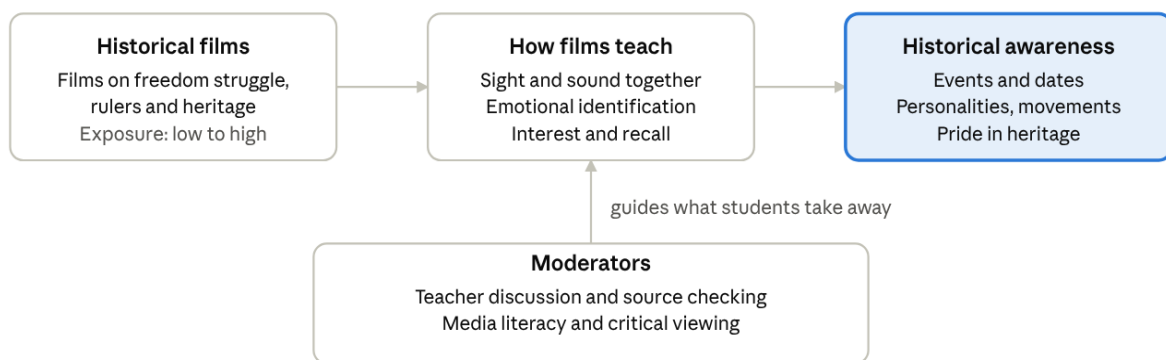
Most of the available work comes from Western classrooms. Local evidence on how Indian students, and especially students in Gujarat, use historical films to build awareness of Indian history is limited. This study offers a school-level survey for Gujarat.



3. Conceptual Framework

The study assumes that exposure to historical films raises awareness of Indian history through three routes: words and pictures working together (Paivio, 1986; Mayer, 2009), emotional identification with historical figures (Bandura, 1977), and renewed interest that leads students to read and ask more. Teacher discussion and source checking decide whether this exposure becomes accurate understanding or only a vivid but loose impression (Marcus et al., 2010; Rosenstone, 1995).

Films build awareness when guided learning turns viewing into understanding



conceptual framework · 3 stages and one moderating factor

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

4. Methodology

4.1 Design and sample

A descriptive survey design was used (Kothari, 2004). The sample was 300 students of Standards 9 to 12 drawn by stratified random sampling from schools in Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Surat, Vadodara and Rajkot, with 60 students from each district.

Standard	Boys	Girls	Total
9	40	35	75
10	38	37	75
11	37	38	75
12	36	39	75



Standard	Boys	Girls	Total
Total	151	149	300

4.2 Tools

1. **Film Exposure Scale:** 15 items on a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) on how often and how attentively students watch Indian historical films. Scores range from 15 to 75. Students were classed as low ($n = 90$), moderate ($n = 120$) or high ($n = 90$) exposure.
2. **Historical Awareness Test:** 50 multiple-choice items on events, personalities and movements of Indian history, one mark each. Maximum score 50.
3. **Student Perception Questionnaire:** 10 statements on the role of films in learning history, answered as agree, undecided or disagree.

4.3 Procedure and analysis

Tools were administered in school with permission from heads and consent from students and parents. Data were analysed with mean and standard deviation, one-way ANOVA with Tukey-type pairwise comparisons for H_01 , Pearson's correlation for H_02 , and percentages for student perceptions. Effect sizes were reported as eta squared and Cohen's d (Cohen, 1988). Significance was set at .05.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Awareness of Indian history by level of film exposure (Objectives 1 and 3; H_01)

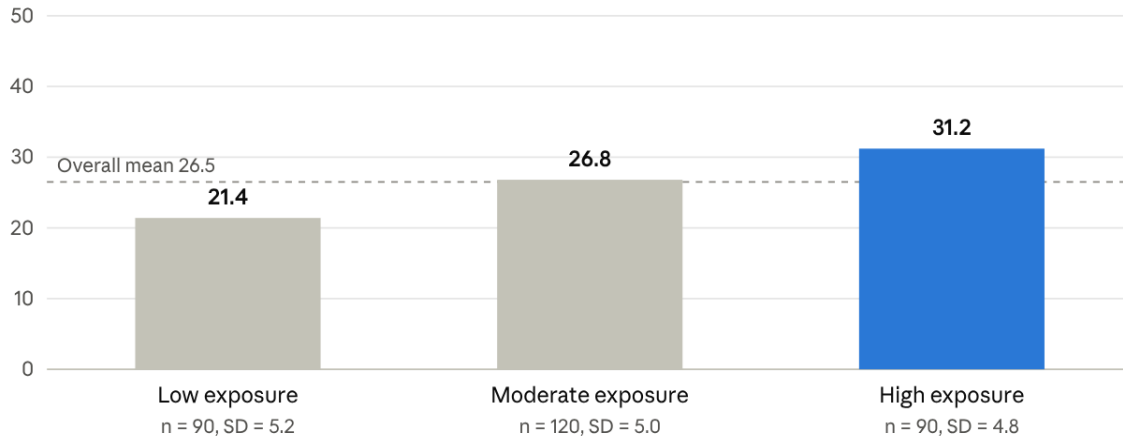
Students with higher film exposure scored higher on the Historical Awareness Test. Figure 2 shows the group means.



Historical awareness rises with film exposure, from 21.4 (low) to 31.2 (high)

One-way ANOVA: $F(2, 297) = 86.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .37$

Mean awareness score (maximum 50)



N = 300 students, Standards 9–12, Gujarat

Figure 2. Mean historical awareness score by level of film exposure.

Table 1

One-way ANOVA of historical awareness by film exposure

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Between groups	4,339.80	2	2,169.90	86.71	< .001	.37
Within groups	7,432.12	297	25.02			
Total	11,771.92	299				

The difference among the three groups was significant, so H_{01} is rejected. Pairwise comparisons showed that every pair differed at $p < .001$: low vs moderate ($d = 1.08$), moderate vs high ($d = 0.88$) and low vs high ($d = 1.96$), all large effects.

5.2 Film exposure and historical awareness (Objective 2; H_{02})

Film exposure and historical awareness were positively related, $r(298) = .61, p < .001$, so H_{02} is rejected. Exposure accounted for about 37 per cent of the variance in awareness. As the design is



correlational, the result shows association and not cause: students who like history may also choose to watch more historical films.

5.3 Students' perceptions (Objective 4)

Table 2

Percentage of students agreeing with statements on historical films (N = 300)

Statement	Agree (%)
Films make Indian history more interesting	88
Films should be shown in class with teacher discussion	85
Films help me remember events and personalities	82
Films make me want to read more about history	76
Films sometimes show events differently from textbooks	71
Films give a clearer picture of a period than the textbook alone	64

5.4 Discussion

The rise in awareness with exposure agrees with dual coding and multimedia learning accounts, which hold that combined pictures and words support memory (Paivio, 1986; Mayer, 2009). The high agreement that films make history interesting and help recall matches the argument that films give the past a face and an emotional setting. At the same time, 71 per cent of students noticed that films can differ from textbooks, and 85 per cent wanted films used with teacher discussion. This supports the view that films work best as interpretations to be questioned, not as records to be accepted (Rosenstone, 1995; Marcus et al., 2010).



6. Conclusion

6.1 Major findings

1. Awareness of Indian history differed significantly among students with low, moderate and high film exposure, and rose with each level (H_0 1 rejected).
2. Film exposure and historical awareness were positively correlated, $r = .61$ (H_0 2 rejected).
3. Most students said films make history interesting (88%) and help recall (82%), and a large majority (85%) wanted films used with teacher discussion.

6.2 Educational implications

- Teachers can use short film clips as a starting point, followed by questions that compare the film with the textbook and with primary sources.
- Schools can build a list of age-suitable Indian historical films linked to units in the Gujarat State Board history syllabus.
- Teacher education programmes can include film analysis and media literacy, in line with the experiential learning aims of NEP 2020.
- Teachers should name dramatic licence openly so that students learn to separate story from evidence.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

The survey is correlational and relies on self-reported exposure, so it cannot show that films cause higher awareness. Future studies can use a pre-test and post-test design with a film-based and a textbook-only group, include rural and urban comparisons, and examine how films shape misconceptions as well as awareness.

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