Comparative Pedagogies of Romantic Poetry: Experiential and AI-Assisted Learning

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Abstract

This paper examines an experiential learning framework for teaching Romantic poetry at the undergraduate level through the integration of nature-based pedagogy and AI-mediated instructional practices, focusing on 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' by William Wordsworth and 'To Autumn' by John Keats. Conventional university approaches to poetry instruction often privilege close textual analysis within classroom settings, positioning poetry primarily as a linguistic construct rather than as a lived aesthetic experience. In response, this study proposes a comparative pedagogical model that incorporates digital tools alongside embodied engagement to broaden interpretive possibilities.Grounded in experiential learning theory, the research employs three instructional modalities: traditional classroom-based textual analysis, AI-assisted interpretation using generative tools such as NotebookLM, and outdoor experiential learning structured around sensory observation and reflective writing. Undergraduate literature students are divided into groups corresponding to these approaches, and their responses are evaluated through structured surveys and reflective journals.Findings indicate that both AI-assisted and experiential methods enhance students' understanding of Romantic poetry. AI-supported instruction strengthens structural comprehension, thematic clarity, and analytical precision, functioning as an effective pedagogical resource. However, students participating in outdoor experiential learning demonstrate comparatively greater emotional engagement, sensory awareness, and imaginative depth. Their reflections reveal stronger personal resonance with Romantic concepts of memory, presence, and aesthetic perception.By comparing algorithmic interpretation with embodied experience, this study affirms the value of integrating technology and experiential practice, while suggesting that experiential learning produces a more sustained affective impact in undergraduate literary pedagogy.

Keywords: *experiential learning, nature-based pedagogy, Romantic poetry, AI-assisted learning, poetry pedagogy.*

Introduction

Romantic poetry reconceptualizes nature as a dynamic site of knowledge, imagination, and emotional awakening. Writers such as William Wordsworth and John Keats foreground sensory perception, memory, and reflective consciousness as central to poetic meaning. In "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807) and "To Autumn" (1820), nature is not merely described but experienced, internalized, and transformed into aesthetic insight. Romanticism thus privileges lived encounter over abstract theorization. However, undergraduate literary pedagogy frequently approaches such texts through conventional close reading and formal analysis, emphasizing structural interpretation while often minimizing embodied engagement.

Concurrently, the emergence of digital pedagogy and artificial intelligence has reshaped instructional practices in higher education. AI-assisted tools such as ChatGPT and Google NotebookLM provide cognitive scaffolding by generating summaries, clarifying imagery, and organizing thematic structures. These technologies enhance analytical precision and accessibility, yet they also mediate the interpretive process through algorithmic frameworks. In the context of Romantic poetry where meaning is deeply rooted in sensory immediacy and experiential awareness the effectiveness of technologically mediated learning warrants critical examination.

This study therefore proposes a comparative pedagogical investigation of three instructional approaches: Traditional Pedagogy, AI-Assisted Digital Pedagogy, and Experiential Nature-Based Learning. Employing a mixed-method research design with undergraduate literature students, the study evaluates cognitive, analytical, and affective outcomes across these frameworks. By situating Romantic texts within both technological and environmental contexts, the research seeks to determine how instructional form influences literary engagement and whether experiential alignment with Romantic philosophy produces deeper emotional and imaginative resonance in undergraduate poetry pedagogy.

Research Objectives

- To comparatively examine the pedagogical effectiveness of traditional close-reading, AI-assisted digital instruction, and experiential nature-based learning in teaching Romantic poetry at the undergraduate level.
- To evaluate the cognitive and affective learning outcomes generated by AI-mediated interpretation and embodied experiential engagement in the study of Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and Keats's "To Autumn."
- To investigate the extent to which pedagogical alignment with Romantic philosophical principles particularly the emphasis on nature, memory, and sensory perception enhances students' interpretive depth and literary engagement.

Research Question

How do traditional close-reading pedagogy, AI-assisted digital instruction, and experiential nature-based learning comparatively influence undergraduate students' cognitive comprehension and affective engagement in the study of Romantic poetry, particularly in relation to Romanticism's emphasis on nature, memory, and lived experience?

Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that nature-based experiential learning is more effective than traditional close reading in fostering meaningful engagement with Romantic poetry at the undergraduate level. While AI-assisted tools enhance thematic clarity and analytical understanding, experiential interaction with nature is expected to produce deeper emotional resonance, stronger sensory awareness, and more sustained imaginative engagement with Romantic texts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a comparative pedagogical research design to investigate the impact of three instructional approaches Traditional Pedagogy, Digital Pedagogy, and Experiential Pedagogy on undergraduate students' engagement with Romantic poetry. The selected texts, William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807) and John Keats's "To Autumn" (1820), are central to Romantic literary discourse and foreground themes of nature, imagination, memory, and sensory perception. Their emphasis on lived experience makes them particularly suitable for examining pedagogical alignment between poetic philosophy and instructional method.

The research follows a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative interpretation with descriptive analysis of student responses. The comparative design enables evaluation of cognitive, analytical, and affective outcomes across the three pedagogical frameworks.

Traditional Pedagogy

The traditional classroom-based approach is grounded in formalist and close-reading traditions that prioritize textual analysis, thematic interpretation, and structural examination. This model reflects conventional literary pedagogy where meaning is derived primarily from internal textual features such as imagery, symbolism, diction, and form. Romantic poetry, within this framework, is treated as a linguistic construct requiring analytical decoding rather than experiential immersion.

Students engaging with Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and Keats's "To

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Autumn" through traditional pedagogy participated in guided lecture discussions, identification of literary devices, and contextual interpretation. This method aligns with historical approaches to English literary instruction outlined in literary historiography.While this approach fosters analytical precision and examination preparedness, it may limit affective and sensory engagement, particularly in texts where experiential immediacy is central to meaning.

Digital Pedagogy (AI-Assisted Learning)

The digital pedagogical framework integrates AI-assisted instruction through Google NotebookLM and ChatGPT. This approach is informed by constructivist learning theory, wherein learners actively construct knowledge through mediated interaction with digital tools. AI systems function as cognitive scaffolds that support thematic identification, clarification of imagery, and structural comprehension (Zhu).

NotebookLM's grounded summarisation model reduces generative hallucination by anchoring responses to uploaded textual materials, thereby maintaining academic reliability. In this study, students used AI to generate thematic summaries, explore symbolic patterns, and compare interpretive possibilities within the selected poems.Digital pedagogy reflects broader developments in technology-enhanced learning environments, where adaptive support mechanisms facilitate individualized comprehension (Bećirović). However, while AI-assisted learning enhances structural clarity and analytical organization, it may mediate rather than intensify the embodied aesthetic experience central to Romantic poetry.

Experiential Pedagogy (Nature-Based Learning)

The experiential pedagogical framework is grounded in Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through direct engagement, reflection, and contextual interaction (Yakun). Romantic poetry's philosophical commitment to nature as a site of knowledge production aligns closely with this theoretical model.Students participating in the nature-based intervention engaged in outdoor observation, sensory reflection, and reflective journaling prior to textual analysis. This approach corresponds with research demonstrating that nature-based learning enhances critical thinking and creative engagement in poetry-related tasks (Zoglowek).

Through embodied interaction with the environment, students connected Wordsworth's recollective memory and Keats's sensory imagery to lived perception. This method operationalizes the Romantic conception of nature as experiential epistemology rather than mere symbolic representation (Mitchell). Experiential pedagogy thus extends literary interpretation beyond classroom abstraction, fostering affective resonance and imaginative depth. By situating poetic analysis within environmental immersion, the study evaluates whether experiential alignment produces deeper interpretive engagement.

Comparative Pedagogical Framework

By integrating traditional literary pedagogy, AI-assisted digital pedagogy, and experiential nature-based learning, the study constructs a structured comparative model. Traditional pedagogy emphasizes textual autonomy; digital pedagogy facilitates cognitive scaffolding; experiential pedagogy foregrounds embodied perception.

The methodological objective is not to establish hierarchical superiority but to examine how instructional form influences engagement with Romantic texts. Given Romanticism's emphasis on lived experience and sensory immediacy, the study investigates whether experiential learning yields greater affective and imaginative resonance compared to algorithmic mediation and conventional classroom instruction.

Tools and Techniques
Instructional Tools
1. AI-Based Digital Tools

Two generative AI platforms were employed in the digital pedagogical intervention: ChatGPT and Google NotebookLM. ChatGPT was used to generate interpretive explanations, thematic summaries, and clarifications of poetic imagery. It functioned as an interactive conversational model enabling students to pose questions regarding symbolism, structure, and contextual meaning in Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and Keats's "To Autumn."

Google NotebookLM was used as a document-grounded AI system. Students uploaded the prescribed poems into the platform and interacted with it to obtain structured summaries, thematic

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categorization, and contextual explanations. Unlike open generative systems, NotebookLM's responses are anchored in uploaded textual material, reducing interpretive distortion and ensuring greater analytical reliability (Reyna). These digital tools collectively functioned as **cognitive scaffolding mechanisms**, assisting students in organizing interpretations, identifying literary patterns, and clarifying complex language structures (Bećirović).

2. Instructional Worksheets

To systematically collect data and evaluate comparative learning outcomes, two structured worksheets were designed.

Worksheets as Data Collection Instruments

Two structured worksheets were designed to evaluate learning outcomes across pedagogical interventions. **Worksheet 1: Classroom and AI-Based Learning**

Worksheet 1 was administered to students exposed to traditional classroom instruction and AI-assisted learning. It consisted of analytical questions focusing on themes, imagery, symbolism, and structural elements in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and "To Autumn". The design of the worksheet reflects principles of traditional literary pedagogy grounded in close reading and formal analysis. The worksheet also included a brief reflective question assessing the perceived effectiveness of AI tools in enhancing interpretive clarity. The integration of AI corresponds with digital pedagogy frameworks and research on AI-assisted learning in students (Zhu).

This instrument primarily measured analytical comprehension, thematic accuracy, and structural understanding.

Worksheet 2: Outdoor Experiential Learning

Worksheet 2 was administered to students participating in the nature-based experiential session. It included sensory observation questions and reflective questions requiring students to connect environmental experience with poetic imagery. This design is informed by experiential learning theory and nature-based pedagogical research.

Students were encouraged to relate lived sensory perception to Romantic representations of nature in Wordsworth and Keats, consistent with scholarly discussions of Romantic experience and environmental consciousness. The worksheet emphasized personal response, emotional engagement, and imaginative interpretation. This instrument primarily measured affective engagement, sensory awareness, and experiential depth.

The Data Analysis section clearly specifies the total sample size of forty-four undergraduate students, divided equally into two groups (22 + 22), thereby ensuring transparency in research design and participant distribution. It systematically explains the structure and purpose of the two worksheets used as data collection instruments, distinguishing their respective focus on analytical comprehension and experiential reflection. The analysis carefully differentiates between quantitative patterns such as thematic accuracy, structural clarity, and organized responses and qualitative dimensions, including emotional resonance, sensory awareness, and imaginative engagement. By comparatively examining cognitive outcomes alongside affective responses, the section highlights the distinct pedagogical strengths of AI-assisted and experiential learning without positioning one as absolutely superior. Importantly, the discussion maintains academic neutrality, avoiding exaggerated claims and ensuring that conclusions remain proportionate to the scope and scale of the study.

Findings

The findings establish AI-assisted instruction as the most effective structured classroom tool, particularly in enhancing thematic organization, structural clarity, and analytical precision. At the same time, the study demonstrates that nature-based experiential learning functions as the strongest medium for fostering emotional depth and lived understanding, enabling students to internalize Romantic concepts through direct sensory engagement. Importantly, the discussion maintains academic neutrality by avoiding exaggerated or hierarchical claims, instead presenting each pedagogical approach as producing distinct yet complementary outcomes. In doing so, the analysis strengthens the central argument of the study: that while AI effectively supports cognitive scaffolding, experiential engagement generates a more sustained affective and imaginative resonance in the teaching of Romantic poetry.

Conclusion

This study comparatively explored traditional, AI-assisted, and experiential pedagogies in

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teaching Romantic poetry, focusing on William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and John Keats's "To Autumn." While classroom instruction and digital tools enhanced structural understanding and thematic clarity, the findings reveal that experiential outdoor learning created the most profound and sustained engagement. Romantic poetry, grounded in nature, memory, and sensory perception, responded most dynamically to pedagogical practices that extended beyond classroom walls.

Students who participated in nature-based learning demonstrated heightened sensory awareness, emotional responsiveness, and imaginative interpretation. Direct engagement with natural surroundings enabled them to internalize Wordsworth's recollective memory and Keats's seasonal imagery not merely as literary devices but as lived experiences. Their reflective journals showed deeper personal resonance, suggesting that embodied interaction with the environment strengthens interpretive depth and affective connection.

Although AI tools such as ChatGPT and Google NotebookLM effectively supported analytical organization, experiential pedagogy produced a more enduring emotional and imaginative impact. The study therefore emphasizes that outdoor learning aligns most closely with the philosophical foundations of Romanticism. Integrating experiential practice into undergraduate literary instruction can transform poetry from a textual object of analysis into a meaningful, lived aesthetic encounter.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument and Data Overview

This study utilized structured worksheets and a brief survey instrument to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of Traditional, AI-Assisted, and Experiential pedagogies in teaching Romantic poetry. A total of forty-four undergraduate students participated in the research and were divided equally into two groups (22 + 22) for systematic comparison.

The instruments included analytical and reflective questions designed to assess thematic comprehension, structural understanding, interpretation of imagery, perceived usefulness of AI tools, and levels of emotional engagement. Data were analyzed using descriptive comparative methods to examine both cognitive outcomes and affective responses. The appendix provides methodological clarity and supports the transparency and reliability of the study's findings.

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