

The Past & Present of Urdu Typography at SVAD, BNU.

Umair Abbasi | Written Thesis | SUM19-006



01



History & Background

Context and
introduction
of the study.



Context of this Study

2014

Bachelors at BNU – Major in Print with emphasis on Typography. Typography is what introduced me to design.

Throughout my 4 years as an undergrad student, **typography remained my primary field of interest.**

2018

Graduated from BNU and was appointed as the Lead Comm. Designer of Generation.

My interest in typography continued, having been away from BNU, I was finally able to objectively view the field of **Urdu Typography and its place, or lack thereof in Pakistan.**

Following this, I decided to return to SVAD.

2020

Upon returning to BNU in the academic year '18 - '19, I started teaching Typography at SVAD.

After a year of being the primary Typography Instructor (along with Haseeb S. Khan) I was able to **critically reflect on my practice (and the practice of SVAD as a whole) and noticed an alarming trend.**



PoE (Point of Entry) into the research: Problem Orientation.



As a Type Educator, I now had first hand experience that most inclusion of Urdu Typography in SVAD's design curriculum is mainly a product of Tokenism. Its (Urdu Typography) concerns in regards to curriculum design is often superficial (purely aesthetic) one dimensional, and its **full potential unexplored.**

As an educator, I observe that there is little to no dialogue about what students are expected to retain or absorb from the field of Urdu Typography, particularly in the long run.

Due to this proper lack of identification of outcomes and goals, I find myself at a disadvantaged position as a type educator to be able to holistically assess the curriculum that I've designed – in particular its shortcomings.



02

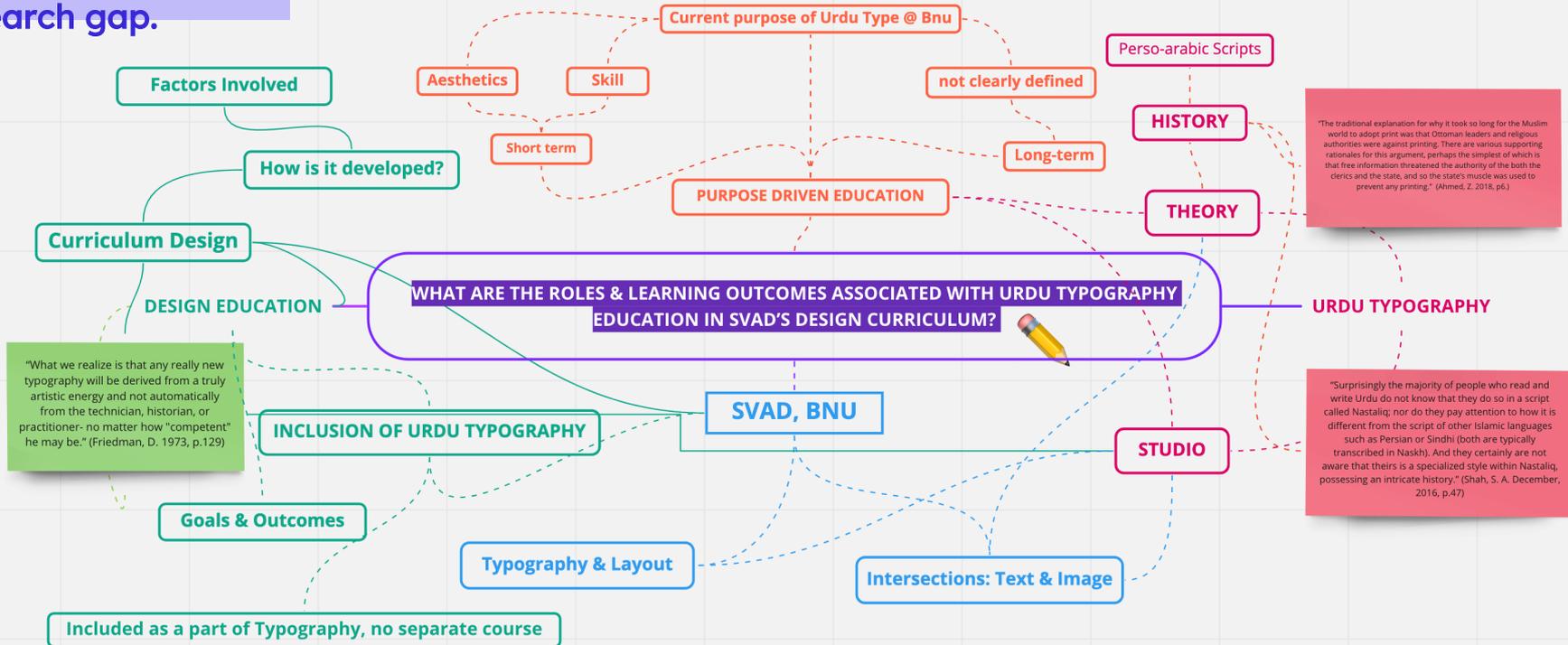


Problem Orientation.

Research Gap
& Purpose of
the Study.



Week 9 Infographic to articulate the research gap.



Research Gap Statement

Due to this aforementioned lack of clarity that I have observed in the design curriculum, the role of Urdu Typography remains murky.

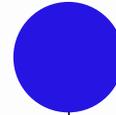
Is it taught purely from an aesthetic stand-point, are its inclinations solely visual? What are students expected to retain moving forwards? Is the history and development of Urdu Typography a consideration? Are students required to look forward into the field or remain in touch to its past?

This gap remains unaddressed: What is the role of Urdu Typography in SVAD's Design Curriculum?

Purpose of this Study

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the goals (short-term and long-term) of Urdu Typography within SVAD, BNU in order to utilise the full potential that the field has to offer: historically, critically and theoretically.

Secondary purpose: The study will aim to bring a more holistic approach to Urdu Typography Education as it will not only focus on its visual development, but also the dialogue that ensues from it, as very little discourse exists on the subject of Urdu Typography within Pakistan.



03

**Research
Questions.**

Thesis
Statement.



Research Questions

Main Q: What is the role and learning outcome associated with Urdu Typography module in the design curriculum of SVAD, BNU?

-
- **Sub-Q:** How has the learning outcome and goal of Urdu Typography Education evolved over the years in the VCD Department at SVAD, BNU?
- **Sub-Q:** How may we learn from the established English Typography Curriculum to better inform and enhance the goals of Urdu Typography Education at SVAD?
-
- **Proposed:** How can the Urdu Typography Module at VCD, SVAD BNU be redesigned keeping in mind the full potential of the field: its history, evolution, theory and criticism?



Thesis Statement

This thesis will provide an **essential and critical understanding of the state of Urdu Typography Education** at SVAD, BNU.

It is only through critically assessing its goals and outcomes that we will be better positioned to assess its success and shortcomings.

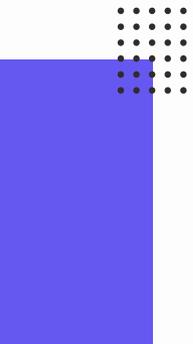
04



Theoretical Framework.

Clustering,
Infographic
& Literature Review.





Brief:

My chosen literature aims to inform and shed light upon:

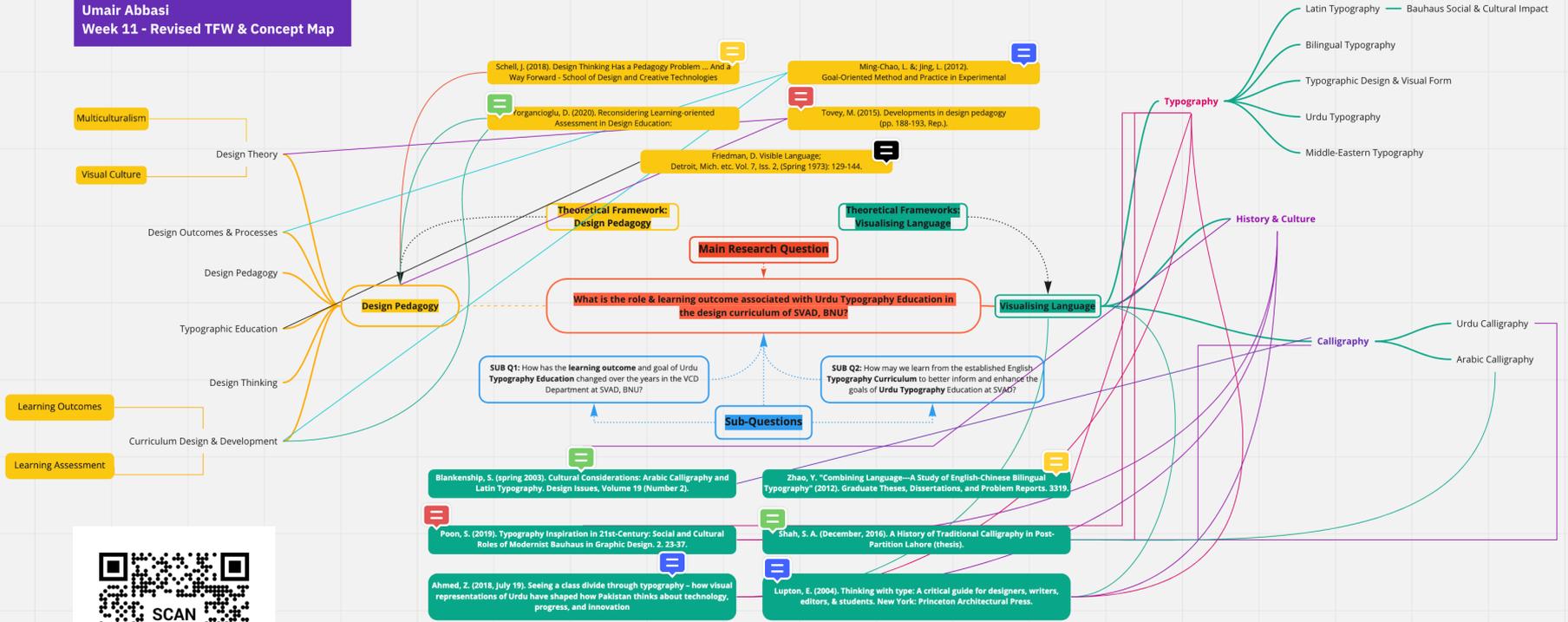
- 1) **The subject of the visualization and design of language** (calligraphy, typography)
- 2) **The field of design pedagogy** (design thinking, typographic education, etc.)

The articles chosen aim to provide a theoretical framework to my primary research question.

The clustering of themes (upon which the chosen literature has been reviewed) has also been shared on the following slides.

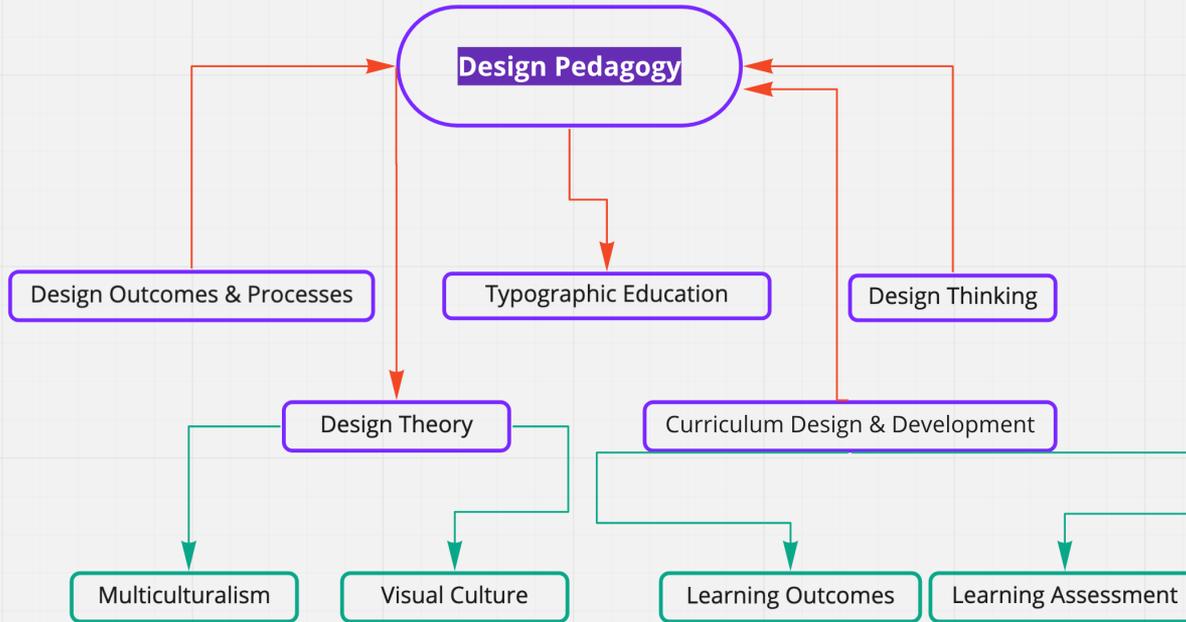


Umair Abbasi
Week 11 - Revised TFW & Concept Map





Theoretical Framework No. 1





Key Theoretical Takeaways: Design Pedagogy



Friedman (1973, page 129) talks about the future of typography itself and comments that it will be born from the creative energy of the future, essentially freeing it from the constraints set on it by 'technicians or historians.'

He further goes on to provide an opposition for technical knowledge and historical convention (p.129) which he states essentially serve as limitations to students.

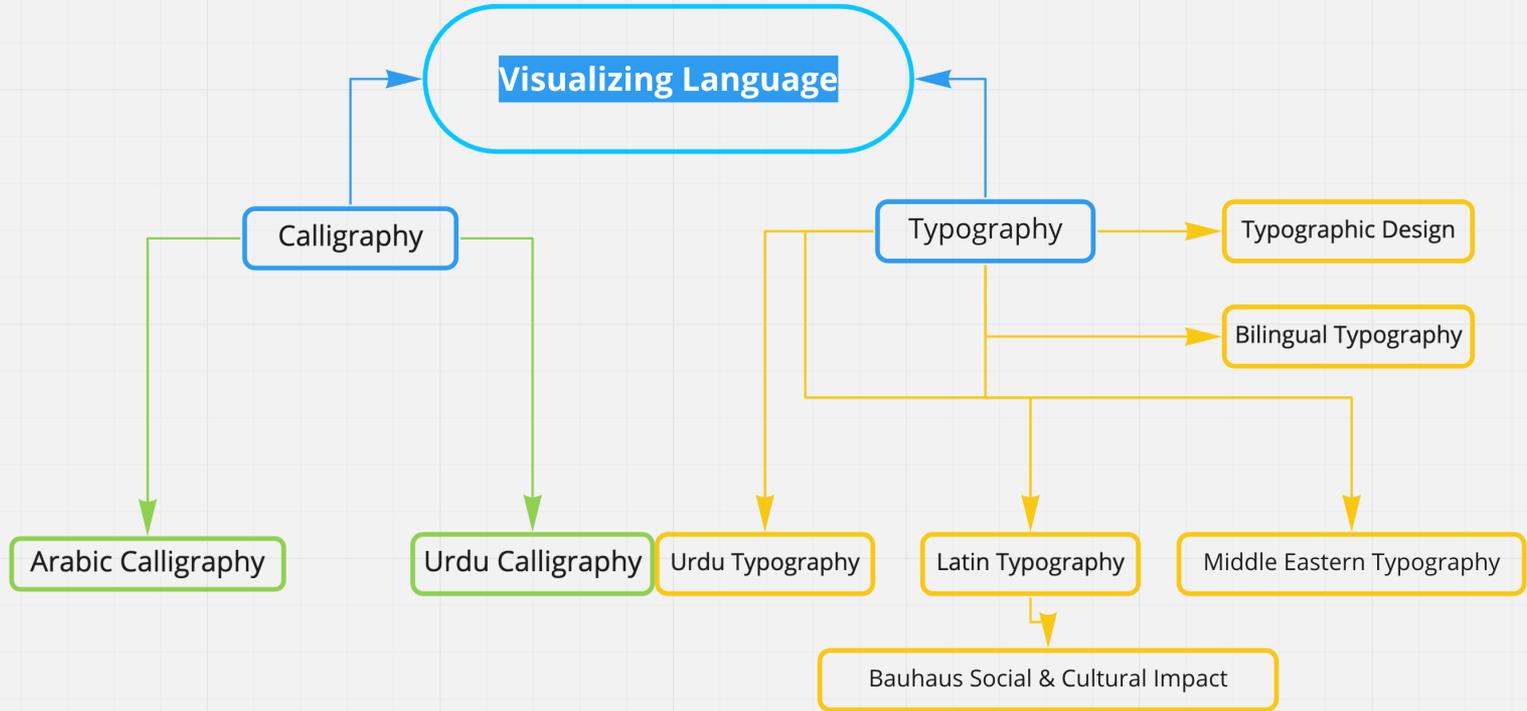
Tovey (2015, p188. Para 2) explains how student's equate their success in design learning in comparison to designers in the field. Hence, when a student-centric model of pedagogy is applied to design, it caters to technical proficiency or skill more than it does to design research.

Simultaneously, Tovey also states that in the field of Design Pedagogy, Design Research is often left to the academic and not the practitioner.

These ideas put together show a very evident gap that is persistent in Typographic Education.

From 1973, up until 2015, we remain bound in conventional methods and practices in regards to Typographic and Design Education.

Legibility in Typography and visual skill proficiency in design, albeit important elements in their own right, have held Typographic education down from moving forwards into a more free-form, intuitive practice of design education, and is clearly not exploring its full potential.





Key Theoretical Takeaways: Visualizing Language



Ahmed, Z. in his information rich article on visualizing Urdu Language states that one of the reasons that a nascent Pakistan did not develop an Urdu Typographic the government was inclined towards the Arabic script.

The article clearly states that the nascent state of Pakistan was seriously disadvantaged because of the arrival of Arabic Typography – due to which Urdu Typography could never be developed properly.

Blankenship, on the other hand, maintains that the visuality of each of these written word systems (Latin or perso-arabic) depicts the respective societies that they're a part of.

On the other hand, the writer mentions that Arabic Calligraphy failed to evolve into Typography due to its tradition of repetition, hence most modern Arabic Typography looks “as a mechanized version of calligraphy” (Blankenship referencing Abifarcs, 2003, 8-13)

I conclude that a country which fails to develop its own typographic identity – a country which is unable to consistently, over a number of years be able to understand how to visualize its own language, will continue to struggle with its design identity, till it is able to break this cycle.

As a Typographer, reading the aforementioned resources very clearly articulates why in developing countries such as Pakistan, the field of Typography is still highly under-explored and often misunderstood.

05



Research Design.

Data Collection
Methodology
& Strategy



Research Design: Broader Framework



Setting



Department: Visual Communication Design
School: School of Visual Arts & Design
Institute: Beaconhouse National University



Sampling



Purposive Sampling is suitable for this study, as it narrows down my participants in their relationship and importance to my study.



Domain



CRQ: Critical Qualitative Research

As CQR studies aims to **identify**, articulate and critique the social, cultural and societal standards and power dynamics in place,



Research Design: Participants



- 3 Curriculum Designers/Instructors of Typography from VCD
- 2 Students of Typography Design at SVAD, BNU.
- o Participants chosen from the **past 6 years.**

Ayesha Sohail

Typography **Student** at
VCD 2015 – Letterer,
Typographer.

Sadaf Chughtai

Former Typography
Educator at VCD
2015

Tahreem Nawaz

Typography **Student**
& Designer at VCD
2019



Feeza Mumtaz

Former Typography &
Layout **Educator** at
VCD 2018

Aarish Sardar

Typography / Print
Educator at VCD
2013



01

**Document
Analysis:**

03

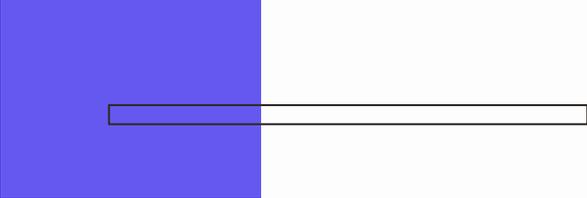
**Researchers
Journal /
Observation**

02

**Structured
Interviews
(Pre & Primary)**

04

Surveys



Document Analysis

The document analysis would **consist of**:

- **Students' visual or written work** produced as a part of the typography course, or external typographic work being produced by them.
- Past & Present **Curriculum/Course Outlines**
- **Teacher Handouts**/Workshop Plans/
Documents



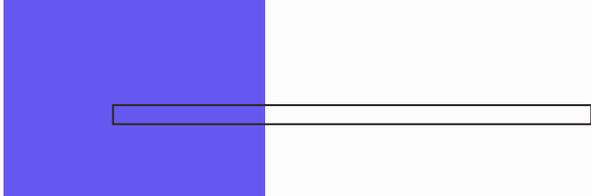
Structured Interviews

Interviews – **Twice with each participant.**

Pre-interview: Semi-Structured to be able to assess their inclinations regarding the subject matter. This format would allow them to warm up to the idea of the study.

Primary-interview: Structured, Specific, aimed at getting to the crux of the problem statement and more focused.

COVID Measures: Due to the ongoing pandemic, all interviews to be conducted remotely.



Researchers Journal: Observations



I will maintain a journal documenting all my observation. To encompass as much qualitative research as I can, my observational methods would include:

Observer as Participant (aim to be as neutral as possible)

Complete Participant (fully embedded researcher – interacting with the participants)



Survey:

One survey conducted to gain a quantitative understanding of what the Typography Goals and outcomes are (as **understood by my student-body, currently consisting of 100+ students over 4 semesters**) – a survey would be sent to them.

The survey would contain directed questions pertaining to their understanding of the course + their learning from the course: (long and short term).

Validity of the Study



Triangulation

Data collected through all research methods to be **validated through two or more resources**



Peer Review/ Examination

To be conducted sporadically with the **Head of Department** Mr. Omair Faizullah.



Member Checks

Respondent validation: returning collected data to participants to check for accuracy.



Rich Thick Descriptions

Narrative technique to be used as a part of the my **observations and analysis (including context, situation and interpretation).**



Reflexivity

Researcher's reflexivity statements to be maintained as a part of the **researchers journal and observation.**



Ethical Considerations

①

Consent Forms: Disclosure of Identity

All participants will be required to give written and audio/visual consent to being a part of my research. Consent forms to be taken from SVAD, BNU. Due to their relevance to the study, the participants' names would also be disclosed.



Data Collection

Once data is collected, all data would be shared with the participants involved and only be taken into the final research with their consent, also to be taken in written form.



Implications & Significance

Generate **critical dialogue** regarding our relationship with Urdu Typography

Open room for there to be an in-depth understanding as to how the **state of Urdu Typography** depicts hidden biases in Design Education



Shed light upon typography education at BNU and its **past/present state.**

Aid in introducing a more **intuitive and holistic** Urdu typography practice and education.

Lastly, aims to explore the full potential of the history, criticism, development and practice for the **field of Urdu Typography**

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Thank you! 😊

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