



The Influence of Multimodality in the Digital Era for Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language

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Abstract. The global proliferation of technology is rapidly changing the form of instruction and the way content is delivered, inspiring educators to innovate their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students. Today's students are increasingly engaged with multimodal texts through social media and are able to learn from different sources on the Internet. However, they also need guidance in the critical use of technology. Teachers of English face challenges in integrating educational applications and embedding multimodal texts in the language classroom. They also face difficulties in using digital devices or creating multimodal products themselves, making it difficult to explain them well to students. Based on the articles related to multimodality or multimodal pedagogy in recent years, the authors analyse the importance and benefits of promoting multimodal texts and improving digital literacy for students and teachers. After comparison, the authors find that the use of technology to enhance the learning experience of students in a diverse society is an inevitable trend that educators must adapt to. On the one hand, students are willing to use technological devices such as the Ipad to facilitate their learning through instant communication and efficient reception of information; on the other hand, teachers can use audio, visual or written texts to connect with students from different backgrounds and learning levels. This paper has implications for evaluating the effectiveness of multimodality or digital multimodal composing in English education.

Keywords: Technology, digital age, multimodality, multiliteracies, Second Language Learning

1 Introduction

In the midst of the digital age, people's connectedness with electronic devices and social networking platforms is deepening, resulting in the blurring of boundaries between the virtual and physical worlds. The way people perceive and engage with the world has correspondingly changed in a technologically immersed environment that expands opportunities for meaning-making, interactivity, and collaboration ^[1]. For example, a

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sea of information is accessible on the Internet, and it is translatable with proper tools like Google Translate, Bing Translator, and DeepL. People can interact and build relationships with strangers from all around the world by commenting or retweeting on social media, posting photos and short videos with captions, and livestreaming. Through language apps like Preply and Cambly, language learners can easily connect with different tutors around the world to gain confidence and improve their speaking skills.

In the field of education, many researchers have recognised the need to promote multimodality and develop multimodal literacy for English teachers and learners in the 21st century [2,3]. More importantly, the emphasis on digital multimodal integration in English Language Teaching (ELT) has been widely accepted due to the changing needs of the times. In this article, the authors review the articles from 2017 to 2023, synthesising the results of different studies and examples given by teachers from basic education to higher education. The article first presents the definition of multimodality, multiliteracies and digital multimodal composing. Secondly, the authors analyse the influences of multimodality in second language teaching from the perspectives of students and teachers. To further prove that multimodal pedagogy is effective in the digital age, a variety of examples from English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) countries are provided, identifying the roles of teachers and students in constructing multimodal texts. In addition to the advantages, there are also some shortcomings in the use of digital multimodal composing (DMC). Thirdly, the authors mention various influences of technology in modern English classrooms and the challenges teachers face in using it spontaneously in English classrooms. Overall, the authors provide an overview of what multimodality is, how it works in the modern English classroom, and what it means for English teachers and learners.

2 Multimodality

Multimodality refers to the use of synthesized modes to realize meaning-making, that is, the use of verbal, visual, gestural, aural, and spatial elements to convey messages, receive knowledge, and produce learning outcomes, which enables English language learners to interact and construct with specific linguistic contexts [4]. In modern times, multimodality can exert its influence via digital media, including computer programs, online game platforms, video-sharing platforms, digital portfolios, blogs, and websites, which facilitate educators and learners to interact with authentic language texts. In other words, texts are multimodal, not only in written and printed form, but also in the form of graphics, videos, audio clips, e-posters, and advertisements. In short, the ways students receive information and create content are multi-faceted.

3 Multiliteracies

Multiliteracies is a term highly related to multimodal teaching and literacy development, which is the ability of students to comprehend different forms of texts and create meaningful products of the language learning process. In addition, digital literacy

becomes a part of multiliteracies in the technological age. Learning can only be achieved through a reciprocal cycle of input and output, suggesting that students need to understand content delivered through various medias and create an integrated multimedia product with technology tools, using them to promote language skills ^[5]. For example, the e-MiniMagazine is a project to design a magazine-like picture text on a particular topic in a digital format, where students work in groups to choose a topic and divide it into subtopics that interest them ^[5]. Students are encouraged to use a variety of modes to enrich the text and make it creative and meaningful. They can share their final product with the class and even post it on the Internet, giving them a sense of ownership.

In English language teaching, DMC means moving beyond traditional forms of writing to include other modes made available by digital media, including student production of podcasts, videos, posters, comic strips and the combination of visuals and writing in academic genres, which has been shown to bring a range of benefits to language teaching and learning ^[6].

4 The Influence of Multimodality

4.1 Students in Multimodality Classrooms

With the development of information and communication technologies, students from elementary school to university inevitably get accustomed to digital media that provide a variety of information related to culture, music, sports, cosmetics, and fashion. They are the dominant users of the Internet. If language teaching is to make its content relevant and attractive, it should incorporate multimodal texts to enhance students' learning experiences and help them thrive in the technologically mediated world. From the students' perspectives, language learning can be made fun by combining captivating content and novel modes of learning. Multimodal tasks can engage and motivate their content and language learning as a whole by encouraging them to practice with others, produce language products in groups, and evaluate each other's work. In traditional classrooms, teachers can still achieve this, but with more effort and less efficiency. To some extent, multimodality increases the opportunities for group work. For example, Sally, an English teacher in an EFL country, said that she scaffolds her students in a writing task by creating the multimodal presentation herself using PowerPoint and YouTube to demonstrate what students are expected to do in their own presentations in groups ^[7]. From her narrative, students are willing to share their identities by working on a project that relates to a culturally reflective idea or cultural event from their ethnicity and connecting it to authentic language use ^[7].

4.2 Teachers under the Context of Multimodality

The modern world of multimodal information requires not only students but also teachers to deal with audio, visual or written texts. Many students may have rich media experiences in their daily lives, but they still need guidance in second language instruction, where teachers should monitor and provide feedback on their progress and

participation [8]. Teachers are the conductors, organizers, and facilitators in the classroom who can guide students to gain social awareness and develop the ability to interact in a diverse global society [9]. Teachers' readiness with technology and the Internet is important in e-learning, multimodal pedagogy, and multiliteracies pedagogy because they are all connected to new forms of message delivery and meaning making. For instance, teachers use zoom to present the lecture content, record the lecture, and send students into breakout rooms to discuss questions. Or teachers ask students to research a topic online during the class and present the ideas on Google Slides, which allows multiple people to work at the same time. Hence, it is important to promote the digital literacy of teachers to use the digital devices appropriately and navigate the digital platforms to better guide the students in their ways of searching information and exploring their social identities online. English teachers are expected to be more professional and open in the field of technology because it provides so many possibilities to make teaching interesting [2]. The role of the teacher is irreplaceable in English teaching from a broad perspective and technology is not an enemy against students' academic success but a bridge to connect knowledge and learners.

4.3 Benefits and Challenges of Implementing Multimodality

According to Hafner, the implementation of digital multimodality can increase students' learning autonomy [6]. Taking recording sessions as an example, the formal lesson can be recorded and replayed, and students can review the content that they do not fully understand during the class. On the other hand, students can record their performance in video form and spend a considerable amount of time rehearsing individually or with group members before uploading it to a public platform. Because the Internet has the characteristics of being inclusive and extensive, digital multimodality allows creativity for students to choose an appropriate way to express themselves, almost without limitations. Kim and Lee also found that DMC helped students to develop better audience awareness [10]. Thus, students may be more engaged and motivated to immerse themselves in the language world and explore novelties to excite the audience, which may be their peers, teachers and network users. The next benefit relates to identity construction. Engaging with popular texts that students encounter outside the classroom legitimises a wide range of identities, empowering students to exercise their creativity, enhancing their ability to search for information more widely and to think critically [11].

The use of multimodal texts can better activate students' prior knowledge about certain topics, as students' lives are intertwined with a wide range of media. Based on common knowledge, people are more likely to be interested in things that are related to their real lives. Language learning is a similar process, the choice of topic is crucial to encourage students to talk and share their opinions. Finally, it promotes genre awareness, which means that students can transform written texts into a multimodal one and vice versa, for example, re-presenting an argumentative essay in the form of a video or giving an oral presentation instead of a written report [12]. The linguistic content is the key, the form can be changed to meet different audiences or individual preferences. By constantly switching between different media to produce a final product, students can

improve their ability to cope with affordances in different contexts and know that an audience would expect the same or similar material in a different medium.

As far as the challenges of integrating multimodality in the classroom are concerned, the reasons are manifold. From a broad perspective, in many EFL countries, English learning is usually associated with high-stakes examinations, which include print-based exam papers that require students to write formally. If English teaching is based on grammar drills and fill-in-the-blank questions, it is unrealistic for teachers to have confidence in DMC. Teachers may not be sure of the extent to which it can help students develop their English skills, which can be reflected in their grades. Therefore, the effectiveness of DMC is questioned by some teachers due to the lack of successful examples to refer to and its incompatibility with the existing exam-dominated culture. Another issue is that ESL/EFL countries have students from different social backgrounds and language levels, so they may have different levels of mastery of digital literacy, so it may be unfair to include all kinds of multimodal texts for students who are not empowered by digital devices.

For teachers who are receptive to DMC and believe that it can improve teaching quality and learning efficiency, difficulties may lie in their lack of digital literacy to implement multimodal practice ^[13]. A broad knowledge of multimodal semiotics, including visual and linguistic modes, as well as the full range of digital grammars for multimodal practices is required for a teacher to be competent in using DMC in the classroom ^[13]. For example, when teacher assigned students to create video in the school computer labs, students might have question in the font, the selection of images, the subtitles, and the compatibility issues among different media. However, teachers might not know the answer because it is not a “language” question but a digital challenge.

As time goes by, China is gradually entering a technological society where people can do their daily needs through electronic devices and the Internet. Such as slowly eliminating the need to go to the water station to pay the water bill, not spending a lot of time at the mall to buy clothes, buying everything through shopping apps such as Taobao, and even buying items from abroad through a proxy.

It must be said that electronic devices also prevent students from concentrating on their studies, as they are always tempted by electronic devices to think about games and video software during classes or breaks, resulting in a negative influence on students.

Put another way, for teachers, a diversified society gives them more opportunities to survive - simply put, there are more convenient and faster ways to earn money. By using the Internet to deliver lessons, teachers can impart knowledge without leaving home, and with the use of cameras, they can observe the learning status of each student within a limited range. In addition, some Internet software involves the mode of meeting records. The knowledge imparted by the teacher will be recorded intact, and whenever students meet problems in class, they can repeatedly watch the video for self-learning.

Things are divided into positive and negative aspects, and some older teachers lose this convenience. Technology is becoming more and more cumbersome, and many older teachers are unable to master the use of the software. It leads to many problems

in the classroom because of the equipment and technology. Especially makes them unable to play their true teaching level, which is more than worth the loss.

5 The Influence of Technology

Students' attitudes toward learning determine their absorption in knowledge. Some students believe that face-to-face teaching allows them to concentrate more on the lesson, to understand more directly the content of the teacher's lecture, and that if they encounter points, they do not understand during the lesson, they can ask the teacher in time and get an answer in the shortest possible time. The stability of offline teaching is greater than that of Internet teaching, but it is far less flexible and creative. However, the use of the Internet and electronic devices for teaching is relatively free. It saves a lot of wasted time on commuting, and the teacher is free to agree with the students on class times without worrying about being late due to traffic jams. In addition, the flexibility of using electronic devices is much higher than that of face-to-face teaching. Teachers can use technology to present their lessons and use colorful pens to highlight the key points so that students can understand the content of the lesson more clearly and distinctly. In a diverse society, social networking software is becoming more and more available, giving students and teachers more choices and avoiding wasted money or time.

According to interviews, 70% of the OSSD students at Tianjin Ying Hua Experimental School believe that with the help of technology, their lives and learning have become more convenient, and the online world has become more attractive to them. Some students found it fun to write on the tablet, they became willing to take notes, and their enthusiasm for learning gradually increased. Some apps are designed to be interactive, and many students can send their questions in the comments section or send emojis to liven up the atmosphere.

Talking about the Internet, English can be learned through many platforms and one of the those is Internet. The Internet can be interpreted as a large global computer network connecting computer users from one country to another, with a variety of information in various form, from static to dynamic. The Internet is widely used in almost every aspect of human life to offer convenience for individuals to search and get information promptly. In other words, the Internet acts as a connection for people around the world through social networks for exchanging ideas, making new friends, sending electronic messages, and exchanging data to benefit language learners^[14].

Using technology allows people to fully immerse themselves in a second language environment. By using technology and online platforms, students can work in groups and discuss synchronously. For example, for constructing online essays, where partners are in other countries or regions, using zoom and Google Slides they do not have to worry about the lack of face-to-face communication due to distance and the delay of receiving information, though there are chances of off-lines due to the bad connection.

In a diverse society, English learners can read news and articles on websites knowing about national or international events, read web novels or webtoon on streaming networks, and watch videos from YouTube to gain knowledge or simply entertain

themselves with authentic exposure of language. For young people, scrolling social media feeds can be a good way to kill time or to learn. For instance, Tik Tok contains all sorts of short videos like teaching people tricks to cook, imitating celebrities, and commenting on hit show where one can learn today's expressions.

Educational technology can foster collaboration. Not only can teachers engage with students during lessons, but students can also communicate with each other. Through online lessons and learning games, students get to work together to solve problems. In collaborative activities, students can share their thoughts and ideas and support each other. At the same time, technology enables one-on-one interaction with teachers. Students can ask classroom-related questions and seek additional help on difficult-to-understand subject matter. At home, students can upload their homework, and teachers can access and view completed assignments using their laptops [15].

6 Conclusion

The use of diverse teaching methods in a diverse world can bring different teaching experiences to students. In the present era, if teachers can properly and effectively use multimedia teaching using online teaching technology to bring students a different classroom experience, the knowledge they get is higher than the general education for students.

The appropriate use of online technology not only leads to the normal development of modern society, but also attracts the interest of students. The purpose of the teachers teaching is to make it better for the students, that is, to make them learn the knowledge taught faster. For students for the new age, they are also more willing to accept different ways of teaching so that they can improve their attention and put more effort in their studies.

However, for teachers who are older, using new technology brings teaching styles. This is a stumbling block on their way to 90. They should be firm in their teaching philosophy, teaching style, and teach their students more of what they need to know in the way they are good at.

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