



The Dynamics of Multi-modal Practice and Pedagogy in EFL Instruction: A Theoretical Exploration

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Abstract

This study explores the intricate relationship between multi-modal practice and pedagogy within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. It investigates the influence of key theoretical frameworks—such as Multiliteracies Theory, Social Semiotics, Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, and Embodied Cognition—on the adoption and effectiveness of multi-modal approaches in EFL teaching. The research advocates for a reflective and context-sensitive pedagogical approach, highlighting the dynamic interplay between theory and practice. Through integrating various semiotic resources, multi-modal pedagogy is viewed as instrumental in enhancing learners’ engagement, comprehension, and language acquisition. This paper argues that by incorporating visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and digital literacies into instruction, educators can address the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of EFL learners more holistically. The study also emphasizes the broader sociocultural implications of multi-modal teaching methods, underscoring their potential to foster inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive learning environments.

Keywords

Multi-modal Practice; Multi-modal Pedagogy; EFL Instruction; Theoretical Exploration

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent decades, EFL instruction has seen substantial changes, mostly because of the increasing acknowledgement of the need for multi-modal teaching methods (Custodio-Espinar & López-Hernández, 2023; Lei & Zhang, 2024; Salamanti et al., 2023). Historically, EFL teaching has focused on text-based approaches, giving priority to written and spoken language as the main forms of communication. Nevertheless, the emergence of digital tools and the growing impact of visual culture have compelled educators to reassess these traditional methods. By incorporating visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and digital literacies, multi-modal pedagogy provides a comprehensive method of language instruction that acknowledges the intricate ways in which learners interact with language in modern culture.

Multi-modal pedagogy has a relevance that goes beyond simple involvement. It recognizes the diversified methods by which learners assimilate information and build understanding. In the context of EFL, where students often have varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the use of multi-modal approaches can be especially successful in closing gaps in understanding and promoting far more profound and significant learning experiences.

1.2 Inquiry and Goals of the Study

The primary research aim driving this paper is: how can theoretical frameworks influence the connection between multi-modal practice and pedagogy in the context of EFL instruction? The primary goals of this research are three-fold: firstly, to examine fundamental theoretical frameworks that are pertinent to multi-modal pedagogy; secondly, to investigate the interaction between these theories and their educational practice; and thirdly, to provide insight into the consequences of these findings for EFL instruction.

2. Formulating the Concept of Multi-modal Pedagogy

2.1 Defining Multimodal Pedagogy

Multi-modal pedagogy is an instructional method that leverages several forms of communication, including text, image, sound, and gesture, to enhance the process of learning. By acknowledging that meaning is formed through a range of semiotic resources, this idea questions the conventional supremacy of verbal modes in education. A multi-modal approach in EFL instruction refers to the deliberate incorporation of several resources to improve learners' understanding, involvement, and language learning.

The justification for multi-modal pedagogy is based on the acknowledgement that learners interact with and understand text in many ways. Specifically, Romiszowski (2024) contends that various modes provide unique possibilities for creating meaning, and educators should take these possibilities into account in developing instruction. According to this perspective, language is not the exclusive medium for conveying meaning; visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities make equally important contributions to the process of learning. The consequences of this conception are significant for EFL instruction, as learners frequently encounter the simultaneous obstacles of acquiring proficiency in a new language and adjusting to diverse cultural forms of communication.

Furthermore, multi-modal teaching is in line with current educational objectives that prioritize critical thinking, creativity, and adaptation. Serafini (2020) emphasizes the significance of visual literacy in multi-modal pedagogy, contending that the capacity to critically evaluate and create visual material is a fundamental achievement in the contemporary media-saturated society. By incorporating visual and other non-linguistic modalities into their instruction, EFL teachers can facilitate the development of a wider range of skills that go beyond conventional literacy.

2.2 Multi-modal Practice as an Extension of Pedagogy

A multi-modal practice is the implementation of multi-modal pedagogical ideas in classroom environments. Instructional pedagogy is the intentional use of different semiotic modes in teaching activities, including the integration of videos, images, and interactive digital software into lessons (Lim, 2024). These practices are not mere enhancements to traditional methods; rather, they represent a fundamental shift in how educators conceive and deliver instruction.

In this particular context, the interaction between practice and teaching is characterized by its dynamic and reciprocal nature. The selection and integration of formats are guided by educational principles, and the practical results of these decisions contribute to the improvement of instructional tactics. For instance, an EFL educator might first incorporate video material to facilitate vocabulary learning, motivated by the pedagogical rationale that visual aids improve understanding. Nevertheless, as they scrutinize the reactions of students – perhaps noticing heightened involvement or enhanced memory – they may further enhance their methodology, integrating more intricate multi-modal materials or adjusting their approach to visuals to suit various learning environments.

The iterative process described here exemplifies a fundamental principle of reflective teaching practice, in which educators consistently assess and modify their approaches according to learner achievements and progressive educational objectives. Moreover, it emphasizes the need to include contextual sensitivity in multi-modal teaching. Implementing effective strategies in one classroom may not be effective in another, requiring a versatile and adaptable teaching approach that considers the individual requirements, backgrounds, and learning preferences of learners.

3. Theoretical Basis

3.1 Multiliteracies Theory

The Multiliteracies Theory, which was first proposed by the New London Group in 1996, has had a significant impact on current perspectives on literacy and curriculum. This proposal broadens the notion of literacy to encompass various communication forms, especially those facilitated by digital technologies, in addition to the

conventional reading and writing disciplines. The framework of Multiliteracies places significant emphasis on two fundamental aspects: linguistic diversity and multi-modal forms of literacy. Within the realm of EFL instruction, this theory emphasizes the need to provide learners with the ability to effectively negotiate and generate significance in diverse media and cultural environments.

The applicability of Multiliteracies Theory to multi-modal pedagogy is evident. Cope and Kalantzis (2015) contend that literacy in the 21st century encompasses more than mere text decoding; it necessitates the capacity to comprehend and generate significance through many modalities, such as visual, auditory, and digital. In the case of EFL learners, who frequently acquire both language and cultural literacy at the same time, this multi-modal approach is especially advantageous. It allows them to draw on their existing semiotic resources while developing new ones, thereby facilitating a more holistic and integrated learning experience.

In practice, Multiliteracies Theory supports the integration of diverse communicative modes into EFL instruction. For example, an educator could use digital storytelling to integrate text, image, and sound, enabling students to articulate intricate concepts in manners that surpass the constraints of any individual medium. This strategy not only corresponds to the theory's focus on multi-modal literacy but also demonstrates its dedication to nurturing learners' faculties of critical thinking and creativity.

3.2 Social Semiotics

Social Semiotics, specifically as formulated by Hodge and Kress, offers a comprehensive structure for appreciating the mechanism by which various modes convey and create meaning. In contrast to conventional semiotics, which typically concentrates on immutable connections between signs and meanings, Social Semiotics highlights the dynamic and situation-dependent aspect of meaning formation. This approach is especially beneficial in multi-modal pedagogy, where the interaction among various modes – such as text, image, and gesture—generates rich and multifaceted meanings that surpass the capabilities of any individual mode to communicate independently.

Social Semiotics in EFL teaching provides valuable insights on how instructors can effectively integrate the distinct capabilities of different modes to improve communication and learning. In the context of vocabulary instruction, an EFL educator may employ the visual mode to strengthen linguistic material by associating words with images that effectively depict their meaning. This method is in accordance with the semiotic principle that various modes possess distinct communicative capacities and that successful teaching entails the careful selection and integration of modes to augment comprehension.

Furthermore, Social Semiotics promotes the incorporation of cultural and social environments into the analysis of communication. This holds particular significance in EFL classrooms, where learners frequently originate from different cultures. By recognizing and understanding the semiotic practices that students use in the classroom, educators can create multi-modal practices that are more culturally sensitive and inclusive.

3.3 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

The Sociocultural Theory (1978) proposed by Vygotsky has extensively influenced the field of educational psychology, namely due to its focus on the social aspects of learning and the significance of cultural instruments in cognitive development. Vygotsky proposed that the process of learning is intrinsically social, manifesting through engagements with people and facilitated by cultural instruments such as language, symbols, and artifacts. This concept is particularly relevant to multi-modal teaching, which depends on a range of semiotic resources as mediators of learning.

Vygotsky's theory in the EFL classroom affirms the use of multi-modal methods as effective instruments for scaffolding learning. Scaffolding is the provision of assistance by the instructor or more experienced peers, which enables learners to carry out activities that they would be unable to execute on their own. For instance, an educator may employ a blend of visual aids, interactive exercises, and cooperative assignments to facilitate learners' understanding of intricate grammatical constructions. These multi-modal tools function as cultural intermediaries, enabling students to navigate the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the gap between learners' independent abilities and their potential with assistance.

The application of Vygotsky's theory to multi-modal pedagogy also highlights the significance of social interaction in the process of learning. Through the implementation of activities that incorporate various forms of communication among learners, such as collaborative assignments that integrate written content, visual elements, and

digital resources. Instructors can establish immersive and cooperative learning settings in which learners actively build knowledge together.

3.4 Cognitive Load

Cognitive Load theory, developed by John Sweller in 1988, offers a cognitive framework for understanding how information is processed by the human brain. The theory suggests that learners possess a finite ability to process information, and consequently, instructional design should strive to control cognitive load in order to enhance learning. Cognitive load can be categorized into three distinct dimensions: intrinsic load, which pertains to the complexity of the material; extraneous load, which pertains to the manner in which information is conveyed; and germane load, which pertains to the cognitive processing that facilitates learning.

The strategic implementation of multi-modal pedagogy can effectively reduce cognitive load by disseminating information through several modes. For instance, the use of visual aids to enhance verbal explanations can alleviate the inherent burden on learners by rendering complicated material more easily understandable. This is especially pertinent in the field of EFL instruction, as students inevitably face the dual challenges of learning new knowledge and a new language. By delivering information through various modalities, such as combining vocabulary with visual representations, or employing gestures to strengthen verbal communication, teachers can facilitate students in enhancing their cognitive processing and memory retention of information.

On the other hand, what is crucial to acknowledge is that not all multi-modal practice yield advantageous outcomes. Inadequately planned multi-modal instruction can amplify extraneous load, inundating students with an excessive amount of information delivered in contradictory modes. Therefore, it is necessary to synchronize multi-modal techniques with Cognitive Load theory to guarantee that they facilitate, rather than impede, the learning process.

3.5 Embodied Cognition

Embodied Cognition is a theoretical framework that questions conventional ideas of cognition as a solely mental phenomenon, highlighting instead the influence of the physical body on cognitive processes. Under this hypothesis, cognition is grounded in human's physical engagements with the environment, and bodily experiences are essential in shaping our comprehension and acquisition of knowledge. This viewpoint has important consequences for multi-modal pedagogy, especially in the setting of EFL instruction.

The integration of Embodied Cognition principles into EFL teaching entails the active involvement of students in activities that require physical movement and sensory experiences. For instance, engaging students in role-playing activities that involve them performing scenarios in the target language can enhance their internalization of linguistic structures more efficiently compared to relying only on abstract, decontextualized practice. Similarly, engaging in practical exercises, such as using tangible items to symbolize vocabulary, can enhance the concreteness and memorability of abstract ideas.

Additionally, Embodied Cognition facilitates the incorporation of sensory modalities, including touch, sight, and sound, into language teaching. Through the implementation of multi-modal activities that actively involve several senses, educators have the ability to generate more comprehensive and immersive learning experiences that correspond to the innate cognitive processes of the brain. This approach not only enhances language acquisition but also makes learning more engaging and enjoyable for learners.

4. Theoretical Interconnections: Practice and Pedagogy

4.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice presents the notion of habitus, which refers to a set of behavioral and practice-related dispositions that are influenced by social and cultural circumstances. Within the realm of education, pedagogical habitus pertains to the inclinations that educators manifest in their teaching methodologies, encompassing their beliefs, values, and expertise. In addition to the individual experiences of educators, these dispositions are influenced by wider cultural and societal frameworks.

In multi-modal pedagogy, Bourdieu's notion of habitus offers a perspective to understand the manner in which educators embrace and execute multi-modal interventions. Teachers' pedagogical habitus shapes their method of

incorporating various learning modalities into their teaching. For example, an educator who prioritizes visual literacy may be more inclined to incorporate images and videos into their courses, whereas one who emphasizes linguistic precision may shift their focus towards text-based approaches.

Moreover, Bourdieu's theory posits that the connection between habitus and practice is both dynamic and mutually influential. As teachers engage in multi-modal practice, their habitus evolves, resulting in an enhancement of their teaching techniques. This evolution is shaped by the results of their teaching practice, as well as by wider societal and cultural shifts. For instance, the growing ubiquity of digital media in society has prompted some instructors to integrate more digital methods into their instruction, indicating a change in pedagogical habits.

The application of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice to multi-modal pedagogy highlights the importance of reflective practice. Educators must be aware of the dispositions that inform their teaching and be open to adapting their practice in response to the needs of their students and the changing educational landscape.

4.2 Schatzki's Theory of Practice

Developed by scientists such as Theodore Schatzki (2002), this theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding the structure of social practice, including educational practice. Schatzki defined the practice as structured activities influenced by material arrangements and the behaviors of individuals. Within the framework of multi-modal pedagogy, Schatzki's Theory of Practice elucidates the manner in which pedagogical principles direct the organization of classroom activities.

An example of a multi-modal EFL lesson is one that incorporates reading, listening, and interactive tasks, all structured to accomplish particular learning goals. Pedagogy establishes the structure for these activities, defining the integration of various modalities and their contribution to the overall learning process. The theory highlights the need to understand the interaction between pedagogical concepts and practical activity in the classroom.

Moreover, Schatzki's Theory of Practice underscores the significance of material arrangements, including technology, classroom layout, and instructional resources in the implementation of educational methodologies. Within a multi-modal EFL classroom, the availability and accessibility of use of digital resources can greatly impact the implementation of multi-modal practice. For example, a well-equipped classroom with interactive whiteboards and tablets could effectively support the use of digital methods, but a conventional classroom with minimal technology may require a different strategy for multi-modal instruction.

Through the application of Schatzki's Theory of Practice to multi-modal pedagogy, educators can acquire a more profound comprehension of how their instructional practices are influenced by both pedagogical principles and the material circumstances of their teaching environment. This understanding can guide the deliberate and efficient implementation of multi-modal interventions in the educational setting.

4.3 Situated Learning Theory

Situated Learning theory, formulated by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991, asserts that learning is a social activity that occurs within a community of practice. According to this idea, knowledge is not gained in isolation but is formed by involvement in social behaviors. In the context of multi-modal pedagogy, Situated Learning theory highlights the significance of locating multi-modal practice within the broader educational community.

For instance, EFL teachers might collaborate to design multi-modal teaching strategies that are adapted to the individual needs of students. These tactics are informed by the collective knowledge and experience of the teaching community, as well as by the social and cultural context in which learning occurs. Situated Learning theory underlines the necessity of perceiving multi-modal activities as part of a greater social process, rather than as isolated strategies.

Moreover, the Situated Learning Theory believes that learning is most successful when it is realistic and located in real-world circumstances. In the EFL classroom, this can involve planning multi-modal activities that represent the kinds of communicative tasks students will encounter outside the classroom. For example, a project-based learning exercise that entails making a multimedia presentation in the target language might offer students with an authentic environment for employing their language skills in a meaningful way.

The application of Situated Learning theory to multi-modal pedagogy also underscores the relevance of community and collaboration in the learning process. By engaging students in activities that incorporate many forms of communication—such as group projects that integrate text, image, and digital media—educators may create rich,

collaborative learning environments where students co-construct knowledge.

4.4 Engeström's Activity Theory

Engeström's Activity Theory provides a conceptual structure for understanding the dynamic interplay among various elements of an educational activity system. Engeström's Activity Theory posits that learning takes place within an activity system comprising tools, community, rules, and the division of labor. Within the framework of multi-modal pedagogy, it clarifies the manner in which many components of the educational system interact to influence instructional methodologies.

Specifically, the usage of digital tools in a multi-modal EFL classroom is determined by the accessibility of technology, the endorsement of colleagues and administrators, educational policies, and the roles of teachers and students. Pedagogy serves as the guiding framework that cohesively incorporates these components into a unified teaching approach.

In addition, the dynamic character of educational practice is emphasized by Engeström's Activity Theory, since modifications in one component of the activity system can impact the entire system. For example, the implementation of novel digital technologies could result in modifications in the way educators create multi-modal instructional sessions, therefore influencing how students participate and achieve learning objectives. The significance of taking into account the wider context in which multi-modal pedagogy is applied is highlighted by this dynamic interaction.

The application of Engeström's Activity Theory to multi-modal pedagogy enables educators to acquire a more profound comprehension of the impact of the wider educational system on their instructional practice. Such knowledge can enhance more effective and sustainable use of multi-modal approaches in the classroom.

4.5 Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy, as proposed by Paulo Freire (1970), highlights the significance of education in advancing social justice and empowerment. Freire contends that education should serve as a means to emancipate individuals from repressive systems and empower them to actively engage in society. Critical education offers a conceptual framework for understanding how multi-modal practice might function as instruments for empowerment within the paradigm of multi-modal pedagogy.

For instance, an EFL teacher may employ multi-modal techniques to empower students from marginalized communities, enabling them to articulate themselves via several modes of communication. This approach aligns with the ideals of Critical Pedagogy, which promotes inclusive and participatory educational practice.

What's more, multi-modal pedagogy has the potential to question conventional, monomodal methods of instruction, which frequently favor text-based literacy above alternative modes of communication. By integrating many modalities into the curriculum, educators can establish a more comprehensive learning environment that acknowledges and appreciates the myriad ways in which learners construct meaning.

Critical Pedagogy also emphasizes the significance of dialogue and reflection in the process of learning. By involving students in educational activities that encompass several forms of communication, such as generating digital narratives or taking part in multimedia projects. In order to promote a more dialogical and reflective approach to learning, instructors can cultivate it. This method not only improves learners' comprehension of the material but also motivates them to systematically analyze the social and cultural environments in which their learning takes place.

5. Synthesis of Theoretical Insights

5.1 Integration of Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks discussed in this paper offer complementary perspectives on the relationship between multi-modal practice and pedagogy. Multiliteracies Theory and Social Semiotics provide a foundation for understanding the importance of integrating multiple modalities into teaching. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Cognitive Load theory highlight the significance of multi-modal techniques in facilitating cognitive development and effectively regulating cognitive load. Embodied Cognition theory emphasizes the need to include both the physical and cognitive aspects in the process of learning.

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and Schatzki's Theory of Practice provide valuable insights into the

implementation of pedagogical principles in classroom practices. On the other hand, the Situated Learning Theory and Engeström's Activity Theory highlight the significance of context and community in shaping educational practice. Crucially, Critical Pedagogy underscores the potential of multi-modal pedagogy to advance social justice and empower learners.

Collectively, these frameworks provide a thorough comprehension of multi-modal practice and instruction. Their emphasis is on the dynamic interaction between theory and practice, wherein each exerts influence and molds the other. A comprehensive grasp of this correlation is crucial for educators who aspire to successfully include multi-modal approaches in their teaching.

5.2 Implications for EFL Teaching

The conceptual analysis provides valuable findings that have important consequences for the field of EFL instruction. Firstly, it is recommended that educators should deliberately incorporate several modes into their teaching, acknowledging the distinct contributions of each mode to the process of learning. Meanwhile, the analysis emphasizes the significance of the contextual factors and the community in influencing multi-modal practice. Educational practitioners should take into account the individual requirements and cultural backgrounds of their learners, together with the wider cultural and institutional environment in which they provide instruction. Such contextual awareness can assist educators in adjusting their multi-modal approaches to more effectively cater to the requirements of their learners. Ultimately, the paper emphasizes the potential of multi-modal pedagogy to advance principles of inclusiveness and social justice. By adopting a variety of communication methods, educators can establish a fair and just learning environment that acknowledges and appreciates the many ways in which students construct meaning.

6. Conclusion

This work has examined the correlation between multi-modal practice and pedagogy in EFL instruction using different theoretical frameworks. The text has explored the ways in which educational multi-modal approaches are informed and shaped by Multiliteracies Theory, Social Semiotics, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Cognitive Load theory, Embodied Cognition theory, as well as Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, Schatzki's Theory of Practice, Situated Learning Theory, Engeström's Activity Theory, and Critical Pedagogy. The analysis has emphasized the dynamic interaction between theory and practice, whereby each exerts influence and molds the other. Furthermore, it has underscored the significance of the environment and society in shaping multi-modal practice, as well as the potential of multi-modal pedagogy to advance inclusiveness and social equity.

The theoretical study presented here offers useful insights that enhance the field of EFL pedagogy by providing a thorough comprehension of the correlation between multi-modal practice and pedagogy. This framework provides educators with a systematic approach to incorporating various modes into their teaching, guided by theoretical knowledge and tailored to meet the specific requirements of learners. These perspectives can assist educators in creating more efficient and comprehensive language learning opportunities for their students.

Although this work has presented a comprehensive theoretical examination of multi-modal pedagogy, there remains a great deal of uncharted territory. Future research could focus on empirical studies that examine the effectiveness of different multi-modal strategies in EFL instruction. Additionally, research could explore how multi-modal pedagogy can be adapted to different cultural and institutional contexts, as well as how it can be used to promote social justice and empowerment in diverse educational settings.

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