

Enhancing English Language Education in China Through Multimodal Literacy: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract: The integration of technology into education has led to new opportunities for language learning and teaching, with the application of multimodal literacy in foreign language education gaining more attention. Multimodal literacy, combining different modes of meaning such as sounds and images, has become crucial for contemporary literacy development and learning. In China, where English proficiency is highly valued, implementing multimodal literacy in English language education has the potential to enhance students' language learning experiences. This paper explores the development and impact of multimodal literacy in English language education within the Chinese mainland, focusing on the challenges and opportunities it presents to the educational system. The advantages of using multimodal literacy in English Language Teaching (ELT) are discussed, including its ability to improve students' understanding, engagement, cross-cultural communication skills, and academic performance. However, challenges like the lack of multimodal resources and the possibility of neglecting higher-level thinking must be addressed. The paper suggests various countermeasures, such as enhancing the development and integration of multimodal resources, improving teacher training in multimodal teaching strategies, and implementing a multimodal teaching evaluation system. Embracing multimodal literacy in English language education can better prepare students to adapt to the digital era's advancements and contribute to enhancing the quality of education and teaching in China.

Keywords: Multiliteracy, multimodal literacy, English language education, China, Digital era

1. Introduction

In today's digital age, the integration of technology into educational practices has opened up new possibilities for language learning and teaching. One approach that has gained considerable attention is the application of multimodal literacy in foreign language education. Over time, there has been a growing consensus among international literacy educators, researchers, and curriculum management organizations that literacy development is no longer limited to the recognition and learning of textual content in books. The interaction between language, images, and other modes within multimodal texts is crucial to the essence of multiliteracy. Gaining meaning from images and language and engaging in extensive interactions within multimodal texts are important and ever-growing requirements in contemporary literacy learning [1-4]. "Multimodal literacy" originated in social semiotics and refers to "the study of language that combines two or more modes of meaning [5]".

While computers and new media are increasingly central to people's life nowadays, many students draw on multiple semiotic modes and resources (e.g., text, image, and sound) for meaning-making in their daily lives [6]. Contemporary school education should also recognize the importance of providing students with multiliteracy language education to help them better adapt to societal advancements and developments. In China, where there is a high emphasis on English proficiency, the application of the multimodal literacy method has the potential to further improve foreign language education by enhancing the language learning experience of second language learning students. This paper aims to explore the development and impact of the multimodal literacy method in English language education within the Chinese mainland, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities it brings to the Chinese educational system.

2. Background

2.1. Term explanation

The term 'multiliteracy' or 'multiple literacies' was first devised by the New London Group as a response to the increasing forms of meaning-making [7]. Multiliteracy focuses on multi-modal communication as well as the multi-sensory approach that is necessary to master a language, and this approach involves a direct impact on language learning. Therefore, for language learning, students need to integrate multi-modal communication styles and meaning representations, using their own experiences and symbolic literacy practices to convey information [7]. 'Multimodal literacy' is similar to the above approach but covers almost all the different ways of creating and conveying meaning [8].

2.2. The trend of the new digital era

Nowadays, we are still experiencing an unprecedented ICT revolution that is changing the nature of language by imposing new practices on how we use language to communicate [9,10]. The Internet has created new possibilities for language learning and practice, such as social networks, online learning cooperation platforms, and collaborative knowledge construction, which is significant for non-native English speakers to learn English. They extend the traditional language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and communicating that people have long been familiar with.

At the same time, the vast majority of texts we encounter in all areas of life increasingly require multimodal literacy to understand. More and more texts require us to use multimodal literacy, whether in personal, social, civic, academic, professional, or career areas. For students, as computers and new media become more and more central to people's lives, they also need to use a variety of symbolic patterns and resources (such as text, images, and sounds) to construct meaning in their daily lives. Therefore, today's school education system should also be aware of the importance of multi-modal literacy education for students to help them better adapt to the progress and development of this digital society.

2.3. Social context

China's education sector has implemented the 'Double Reduction' policy in recent years, which aims to reduce students' academic burden and promote all-round development. The policy emphasizes reducing the amount of homework and out-of-school tutoring, giving schools and teachers more responsibility for higher-quality teaching during regular classroom hours. In this context, teaching methods of high quality are essential for optimizing classroom learning.

Under the 'Double Reduction' policy context, multimodal literacy can play an active role in English teaching. By integrating multiple modes such as visual AIDS, audio recordings, and

interactive activities, teachers can create fun and interactive learning environments that facilitate students' language acquisition and enhance their motivation to learn. The adoption of multimodal literacy is consistent with the goals of the 'double reduction' policy and can support teachers in providing high-quality English teaching.

3. Advantages of using multiliteracy in ELT

Contemporary literacy practices require schoolteachers and students to be aware of the cultural and linguistic diversity existing in nowadays international society, and the multiliteracy approach can meet such needs in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) [11].

Multimodal literacy has many advantages in learning English.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen, integrating different patterns in communication enables individuals to construct meaning in more diverse and interesting ways [12]. In the context of language learning, this means that integrating multiple modes can promote a deeper understanding of language content and improve students' communicative competence. Multimodal literacy can therefore be an innovative approach in English language education that takes advantage of technology and meets the changing needs of learners in the digital age.

Various researchers have found that multimodal literacy helps with students' English learning. It can enrich students' learning experiences and increase students' interest and engagement in language learning [13,14]; help students better understand and respect different cultural differences and develop their international vision and cross-cultural communication skills [15,16]; improve students' learning outcomes and academic performance by improving their memory and promoting knowledge transformation and application ability [17,18]; help to construct knowledge critically and have a transformative learning experience by eliciting students' life experiences through situational exercises and open instruction[14].

Multimodal literacy has not only positive effects on students' English learning but also has a positive impact on improving teachers' teaching ability, including teaching methods, teaching resources, and teaching effects. Multimodal reading and writing not only expand teachers' teaching resources but also put forward new requirements for teachers' teaching methods. By using various modes, such as visual, auditory, and tactile, teachers can design more colorful teaching activities to meet the needs of different students. Applying multi-modal technology can help teachers better understand teaching strategies and improve teachers teaching ability [19,20]. Moreover, multimodal literacy also has the potential to support teachers' professional learning and development. Research has found that multimodal texts can help teachers better understand teaching content and can improve teachers' reflective and critical thinking skills [21].

4. Challenges and countermeasures

Although multimodal literacy has a wide range of application prospects in school education, there are still some challenges in practical application. The main challenge is the lack of multimodal resources. There is an invisible 'net wall' between China and the other world, so teachers in China cannot use many mature and effective websites or apps within the wall easily. Moreover, some backward regions have fewer resources both in hardware and software. Secondly, the possibility of ignoring high-level thinking can be caused by too much concentration on task or activity completion and teachers' established discourse patterns [22]. Moreover, the lack of emphasis on pre-service and on-the-job training can cause immaturity of multimodal teaching strategies.

To address these challenges, some countermeasures can be taken, such as strengthening the development and integration of multimodal resources and improving their quality and quantity, strengthening teachers' research and application of multimodal teaching strategies, flexibly selecting

different teaching strategies according to different teaching objectives and students' characteristics, and preventing learners from having cognitive overload problems. Moreover, a multimodal teaching evaluation system to evaluate the effect of multimodal teaching is also necessary to optimize the teaching quality constantly.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the digital era and globalization have changed the traditional literacy mode and the way of learning English. China's new policy also requires higher teaching quality for English teachers. Multimodal literacy not only has a positive effect on students' language learning but can also improve teachers' teaching ability. In the future education and teaching practice, it's recommended that China strengthen the development and integration of multi-modal resources, improve the research and application of multimodal teaching strategies, and also establish a sound multimodal teaching evaluation system to improve the quality of education and teaching further.

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