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Empowering Language Education: Integrating Translanguaging, Multimodality, and Dialogic Teaching in Chinese Private Universities

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Abstract

Background and aims: This study delves into the dynamic landscape of language education in Chinese private universities, specifically focusing on the application of translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching to enhance students' literacy development. With English literacy holding paramount importance in the globalized era, junior students in China's private universities encounter distinct challenges and opportunities. This research investigates the constraints that hinder their literacy competence, examines the efficacy of translanguaging and dialogic pedagogy in bolstering literacy skills, and explores students' perceptions of their literacy competence and experiences with translanguaging practices.

Materials and methods: The study's significance lies in its potential to shape educational practices and curriculum design within China's private university context. By harnessing the power of translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching, this research strives to offer innovative approaches to bolster students' English literacy proficiency.

Results: The findings unravel the intricate interplay between linguistic strategies, instructional techniques, and students' perceptions, thereby contributing to the creation of effective pedagogical interventions in English literacy education.

Conclusion: This research project aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, culminating in actionable insights that resonate with the challenges and aspirations of junior students in Chinese private universities. Through an intricate exploration of language education paradigms, this study ultimately strives to equip students with the linguistic competence and confidence required to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and diverse global society.

Keywords: Dialogic Teaching; Multimodality; Translanguaging

Introduction

English literacy has become a crucial skill in today's globalized world, offering individuals access to international platforms and opportunities (Crystal, 2003). Yet, for junior students in Chinese private universities, mastering English presents challenges in an increasingly interconnected educational landscape (Li & Zhu, 2018). The demand for effective English communication in diverse contexts requires innovative pedagogical approaches.

This research explores language education dynamics in Chinese private universities, focusing on translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching. Translanguaging leverages students' diverse language skills for effective communication (García & Wei, 2014), while multimodality expands expression through visual and spatial elements (Kress, 2010). Dialogic teaching promotes collaboration and critical thinking (Vygotsky, 1978).

The central question driving this study is: How do translanguaging and dialogic teaching impact





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English literacy development among junior students in Chinese private universities? By exploring these approaches and students' perceptions, this research bridges theory and practice, providing actionable insights for educators.

This study's significance lies in its potential to influence educational practices and curricula in Chinese private universities. As global interconnectedness grows, effective English communication becomes increasingly important. This research aims to empower educators to design innovative pedagogical strategies that prepare students for a globally competitive future.

The landscape of English education in China has undergone significant transformations over the years, reflecting the nation's evolving global outlook (Li et al., 2011). Historically rooted in traditional grammar-based approaches, the Chinese educational system has shifted towards embracing communicative and interactive pedagogies (Zheng & Davison, 2008). This shift is exemplified by a move from rote memorization to fostering language skills that cater to real-world communication needs (Mitchell et al., 2019).

While progress has been made, the landscape of English education in China still presents a host of challenges and opportunities. Disparities in language proficiency levels among students continue to persist, partly due to variations in regional resources and the urban-rural divide. Moreover, the increasing emphasis on English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has brought forth the challenge of effectively imparting knowledge in a language that is not the native tongue for many students (Zhang, 2017). This challenge is further compounded by the need for pedagogical approaches that cater to diverse language backgrounds and learning styles (Hu, 2009).

A central issue in Chinese English education revolves around striking a balance between standardized language norms and pragmatic language use (Wang, 2020). The emphasis on "standard English" can sometimes overshadow the practical need for learners to navigate a linguistically diverse world. The dynamics of English as a global lingua franca require students to develop skills that extend beyond monolithic language standards, enabling effective cross-cultural communication (Zhang & Lütge, 2023).

China's rich socio-cultural landscape plays a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes and motivations toward English learning (Li, 2021). These influences not only impact learners' language acquisition but also influence their attitudes towards various language skills, such as listening and speaking.

In Chinese classrooms, educators grapple with diverse student abilities, large class sizes, and varying learning motivations (Sun et al., 2022). The rote-learning culture of the past has made way for more interactive and learner-centered approaches. However, challenges remain, particularly in providing individualized attention and fostering an environment conducive to language practice.

Despite these challenges, the recent push for education reform in China highlights a growing recognition of the importance of multilingual competence (Zhang, 2016). Reforms seek to address the gaps between language instruction and practical application, emphasizing the acquisition of language skills that extend beyond academic settings (Gao et al., 2022).

Objectives



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This research investigates the constraints that hinder their literacy competence, examines the efficacy of translanguaging and dialogic pedagogy in bolstering literacy skills, and explores students' perceptions of their literacy competence and experiences with translanguaging practices. The study's significance lies in its potential to shape educational practices and curriculum design within China's private university context. By harnessing the power of translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching, this research strives to offer innovative approaches to bolster students' English literacy proficiency. The findings unravel the intricate interplay between linguistic strategies, instructional techniques, and students' perceptions, thereby contributing to the creation of effective pedagogical interventions in English literacy education. This research project aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, culminating in actionable insights that resonate with the challenges and aspirations of junior students in Chinese private universities. Through an intricate exploration of language education paradigms, this study ultimately strives to equip students with the linguistic competence and confidence required to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and diverse global society.

Literature Review

The dynamic changes in Chinese private university language education demand a targeted theoretical framework to address the unique challenges and opportunities junior students face while enhancing English literacy (Smith & Johnson, 2019). This framework integrates three vital perspectives—translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching—to reveal the intricate interplay among linguistic tactics, teaching methods, and student perceptions (García & Wei, 2014; Kress, 2010; Mercer, 1995). These perspectives collectively provide a promising foundation for guiding impactful pedagogical interventions in English literacy education within Chinese private universities.

Translanguaging, rooted in sociocultural theory, values multilingual individuals' linguistic richness, asserting communication beyond language barriers (García & Wei, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). In Chinese private universities, diverse language backgrounds prompt translanguaging to leverage students' linguistic repertoires. Employing multiple languages as resources aids comprehension, expressing complex ideas, and engaging deeply (García & Li Wei, 2014). Encouraging seamless transitions between native languages and English fosters inclusivity and aligns with globalized English literacy acquisition.

Multimodality acknowledges communication beyond words (Kress, 2010). In the digital era, visual and nonverbal modes are widespread, exposing students to diverse resources (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2008). In classrooms, diverse channels—visual aids, gestures, and digital tools—enhance learning (Kress, 2010). Essential for tech-savvy Chinese private university students, integrating visuals, digital media, and cues nurtures holistic English literacy.

Dialogic teaching, rooted in sociocultural theory, emphasizes collaborative dialogue as effective pedagogy (Mercer, 1995). In diverse settings like Chinese private universities, where students have varied backgrounds, dialogic interactions foster shared problem-solving, meaning negotiation, and cocreation of knowledge (Mercer, 1995; Wertsch, 1991). Dialogic teaching encourages critical thinking, diverse viewpoints, and participatory classrooms (Mercer, 1995; Wells, 2000). Engaging in discourse beyond monologues empowers students to own learning, delve deeper, and contribute to literacy growth.

The fusion of translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching in this framework addresses



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challenges and opportunities for junior students in Chinese private universities. Integrating these perspectives recognizes diversity, technology, and collaboration (García & Wei, 2014; Kress, 2010; Mercer, 1995). Guiding educators to design interventions using linguistic resources, diverse communication, and collaborative discourse, this framework equips students for English literacy development intricacies (García & Wei, 2014; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Mercer, 1995).

Translanguaging, rooted in sociocultural theory, celebrates the linguistic diversity of multilingual individuals, asserting that effective communication transcends language barriers (García & Wei, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). In Chinese private universities, where students have diverse language backgrounds, translanguaging is a powerful framework that recognizes and utilizes their linguistic repertoires. By tapping into multiple languages as valuable resources, students bridge gaps, convey intricate ideas, and engage deeply with academic content (García & Li Wei, 2014). Encouraging seamless transitions between native languages and English fosters inclusivity, aligning with the global nature of English literacy acquisition.

Pedagogical integration of multimodality recognizes communication's expansion beyond words (Kress, 2010). In today's digital age, visual and nonverbal modes are pervasive, exposing students to varied semiotic resources (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2008). In classrooms, diverse channels like visual aids, gestures, and digital tools enrich learning experiences (Kress, 2010). For junior students in technology-driven Chinese private universities, multimodality becomes a potent tool for comprehension and engagement. By strategically incorporating visual elements, digital media, and nonverbal cues, educators access students' holistic cognitive processes, fostering multi-dimensional English literacy understanding.

Dialogic teaching, based on sociocultural theory, emphasizes collaborative dialogue as a key pedagogical element (Mercer, 2019). In Chinese private universities, with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, dialogic interactions facilitate shared problem-solving, meaning negotiation, and collective knowledge construction (Mercer, 1995; Wertsch, 1991). This approach fosters critical thinking, encourages exploration of multiple perspectives, and cultivates a participatory classroom environment (Mercer, 1995; Wells, 2000). Engaging in discourse beyond monologues empowers students to own their learning, inquire deeply, and actively contribute to their literacy competence development.

The merging of translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching within this framework provides a comprehensive strategy to address challenges and opportunities for junior students in Chinese private universities. By combining these perspectives, the framework recognizes cultural diversity, technological adeptness, and collaborative learning at the core of modern education (García & Wei, 2014; Kress, 2010; Mercer, 1995). As students navigate the complexities of English literacy development, this theoretical structure guides educators in crafting interventions that capitalize on linguistic assets, incorporate diverse communication methods, and foster collaborative discussions (García & Wei, 2014; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Mercer, 1995).

Essentially, this theoretical framework embodies the harmonious blend of theoretical principles and practical applications, effectively bridging the divide between theory and pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1978; Mercer, 1995). By embracing the nuances of translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching, educators hold the key to unleashing the potential for transformative English literacy





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education. This education equips students with linguistic proficiency and the communicative assurance essential for thriving in an interconnected global society (Canagarajah, 2011; Kress, 2010; Nystrand et al., 2003).

Methodology

This study's research design utilizes Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) anchored in Scollon and Scollon's (2004) framework. MDA examines mediated discourse across contexts, online and in classrooms. By adopting MDA, this study delves into socio-cultural dynamics and communication modes, illuminating the evolving language education landscape in Chinese private universities.

MDA's theoretical foundations align with post-pandemic communication complexities. It considers socio-cultural factors, power dynamics, and technology's impact on discourse. Scollon and Scollon emphasize context's role in communication, facilitating nuanced analysis of socio-cultural intricacies in mediated and in-person interactions.

In response to post-pandemic changes, this research adopts a comprehensive approach that spans virtual and physical spaces. It examines digital and face-to-face interactions to uncover similarities and differences.

Data collection captures verbal interactions in both contexts, preserving virtual nuances with recordings and documenting classroom discussions. This method ensures a thorough exploration of language use, interaction patterns, and meaning negotiation across communication mediums.

While the investigation of visual cues and multimodal elements is a salient aspect of analyzing mediated discourse, this research extends its purview to encompass visual elements in traditional classroom interactions. Beyond verbal exchanges, the study captures the significance of nonverbal cues, body language, and visual aids employed in face-to-face communication. This recognition of multimodal communication's importance spans both mediated and traditional contexts, enriching the depth of the analysis.

Central to the research process are the socio-cultural considerations that underpin both mediated and face-to-face interactions. A comprehensive exploration of participants' backgrounds, roles, and the socio-cultural dimensions shaping their communication behaviors is integral to understanding the intersection of technology and tradition in shaping discourse. By weaving these socio-cultural threads into the analysis, the study aims to unveil the intricate interplay that informs communication within the contemporary educational landscape.

In synthesizing these elements, this journal article harnesses the Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework to unravel the multi-dimensional nature of communication in the post-pandemic era. By embracing an integrative data collection approach spanning virtual and physical settings, the research delves into the complexities of mediated discourse while acknowledging the enduring significance of face-to-face interactions. The study places equal emphasis on verbal and visual cues, recognizing the intricate interplay of sociocultural factors across diverse communication contexts. Through this nuanced and comprehensive approach, the research contributes to a deeper comprehension of the evolving dynamics of communication within an interconnected global society.

The data analysis phase of this study is conducted using the Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2004). This framework involves a comprehensive





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exploration of both online and traditional classroom interactions to understand the dynamics of translingual reading. The research focuses on an "Elite Class" within a private Chinese institution and considers the impact of shifting from face-to-face to online classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Initial data collection involves installing cameras to capture classroom interactions from a 360-degree perspective. These recordings offer insights into face-to-face interactions, verbal and nonverbal communication, and physical space utilization. The historical context and intentionality of social actors' actions are explored. This involves analyzing historical data to determine whether actions are customary or innovative, as well as examining primary sources to understand the intentions behind these actions.

The analysis dives into multimodal discourses within the classroom, understanding how physical space, objects, and interaction orders shape interactions. Furniture, equipment, and decor are assessed to understand their contribution to discourse. Visible discourses, including signage, texts, graphics, and the environment, are examined for their role in supporting actions. Objects as mediational means are systematically examined, including their design, presence, repair, and transformative potential.

The analysis process integrates both online and traditional classroom interactions, guided by the MDA framework. The interplay between mediated and face-to-face discourse is explored to offer a comprehensive understanding of translingual reading. This approach considers socio-cultural and technological factors in communication, resulting in a holistic view of communication dynamics.

The MDA framework extends beyond analysis, aiming to reshape practice. Collaboration with participants and community leaders is key to transforming analytical insights into actionable changes. Discourses are translated into new actions and mediational means through the development of tools, resources, and innovative interventions.

The unit of analysis within MDA centers around social actions, and observable behaviors in social contexts. This approach involves meticulous observation, documentation, and interpretation of these actions through interviews and observations.

Classroom observation analysis systematically dissects mediated actions using mediational means, aligning with MDA's core principles that emphasize the interaction between discourse and action.

The analysis process focuses on identifying patterns and themes linked to mediated actions and mediational means. These insights contribute to a comprehensive view of how discourse and action intertwine within the classroom context.

In conclusion, the data analysis phase employs the MDA framework to explore both online and traditional classroom interactions. By examining mediated and face-to-face discourse, this study provides a nuanced understanding of translingual reading and communication dynamics. The organized and comprehensive approach contributes to a holistic comprehension of how discourse and action interact to convey meaning.



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Empirical Results and Analysis

The classroom observations provided valuable insights into students' language use and interactions within the context of an advanced English class at a private university in China. The course encompassed various topics, including cultural perspectives on happiness and well-being, which served as meaningful subjects to engage the students and promote critical thinking.

During classroom discussions, students demonstrated the practice of translanguaging by seamlessly switching between English and Chinese. This pedagogical choice, as supported by García and Wei (2014), encouraged students to draw on their linguistic resources and cultural backgrounds. For instance, Student 1 expressed their belief in Chinese that happiness originates from a supportive and loving family. The teacher's acknowledgment in Chinese affirmed the student's contribution, creating an inclusive atmosphere.

The observed dialogic teaching strategies were evident in the open-ended questions posed by the teacher, encouraging students to share their perspectives on achieving happiness. Student 2's response in Chinese highlighted the significance of contentment and gratitude for life's simple joys, which the teacher validated, fostering an environment of open communication (García & Wei, 2014). Student 3's statement in Chinese about pursuing dreams and striving for them was met with a bilingual response from the teacher, exemplifying strategic translanguaging and ensuring comprehension for all students.

The strategic use of translanguaging and dialogic teaching positively impacted students' language development, critical thinking skills, and engagement. By allowing students to express themselves in their native language and encouraging active participation, the classroom interactions facilitated a more comprehensive and confident response (Li, 2011).

Furthermore, the classroom discussions showcased multimodal communication patterns, where students employed both verbal and nonverbal cues to convey their ideas. The teacher's affirming feedback and use of translanguaging created a supportive environment for students to utilize various semiotic resources, enhancing their overall communication competence.

The utilization of these pedagogical approaches fostered an inclusive and dynamic learning environment. Students felt empowered to share their viewpoints comfortably while engaging in critical thinking and collaborative discourse. The observation findings demonstrated that the application of translanguaging, dialogic teaching, and multimodal communication not only promoted language proficiency but also nurtured holistic literacy competence.

The observed classroom interactions align closely with the theoretical framework proposed in this study. Translanguaging, as suggested by García and Wei (2014), was employed effectively to enhance communication by incorporating students' native language alongside English. The dialogic teaching strategies implemented by the teacher resonated with Mercer's (1995) principles, promoting collaborative discourse and critical thinking. These findings underscore the relevance and effectiveness of the theoretical concepts in fostering students' literacy competence within the context of the private university in China.

The Functions of Literature and Student Engagement: A Multimodal Analysis

The intricate relationship between students' engagement with literature and its various functions can be understood through a multimodal lens, where cognitive and emotional responses are encapsulated as frozen actions within a dynamic context (Norris & Makboon, 2015). The visual





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representation of students' cognitive and emotional engagement, captured in a mind map, offers insights into their interpretations of literature's functions and their impact on literacy competence.

In the mind map, the utilization of colors can be viewed as frozen actions that symbolize students' emotional and cognitive reactions to literature's functions. According to Norris and Makboon (2015), frozen actions are embodied in material objects, and the choice of blue, green, and purple colors reflects students' emotional connections with literature. Blue, representing trust, stability, and depth, could encapsulate the frozen action of their profound emotional attachment to literature's functions. The use of green, symbolizing growth, harmony, and renewal, may capture the frozen action of their expanding knowledge and understanding through literary exploration. Furthermore, the purple color, associated with creativity, wisdom, and spirituality, might encapsulate the frozen action of their inspired imagination and exploration of profound themes within literature.

The icons and symbols integrated into the mind map can be interpreted as frozen actions encapsulating students' cognitive associations and interpretations of literature's functions. Aligned with Norris and Makboon's (2015) concept of multimodal (inter)action analysis, these symbols function as cultural tools embodying embedded actions. For instance, the book icon symbolizing the educational function may freeze the action of learning and knowledge acquisition through reading literary works. The use of hearts or expressive icons for the emotional function might capture the frozen action of students' emotional engagement and empathy towards literary characters and themes.

The radial layout of the mind map serves as a frozen action reflecting students' cognitive connections among different aspects of literature's functions. Drawing from Norris's (2004) idea of frozen actions within objects and environments, the central topic "Functions of Literature" represents the core frozen action anchoring their comprehension. As the main branches radiate outward, such as "Aesthetic Function," "Emotional Function," "Cognitive Function," etc., they signify interconnected frozen actions illustrating how different functions of literature are interrelated and expanded within students' cognition. The extension of sub-branches associated with each function captures frozen actions of specific aspects and examples related to the literature's functions.

The hierarchical structure of text within the mind map can be interpreted as frozen actions representing students' cognitive organization of information about literature's functions. The use of font styles, such as bold or italic, may capture frozen actions of emphasis and importance, guiding readers' attention to specific aspects of literature's functions. In line with Norris and Makboon's (2015) perspective that mediated actions are the unit of analysis, each piece of text within the mind map reflects a frozen action representing students' thoughts and interpretations of literature's functions.

Approaching the mind map through a multimodal (inter)action analytical framework, it emerges as a visual representation of students' cognitive and emotional engagement with literature's functions. Drawing from the concept of frozen action, the mind map becomes a frozen snapshot of students' cognitive processes and emotional connections, with each element capturing their interpretations, emotions, and understanding of literature's significance. This multimodal representation fosters a comprehensive understanding of literature's functions as internalized and perceived by the students.

The interpretation of the mind map through the lens of frozen action provides valuable insights into students' literacy competence and their engagement with literature. The analysis underscores the multimodal nature of their understanding and emphasizes the interconnectedness of various elements



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in their cognitive and emotional responses. By employing the concept of frozen action, the interpretation aligns with the theoretical framework presented, thereby enriching the academic rigor and depth of the analysis.

This integrated analysis illuminates the intricate interplay between students' cognitive and emotional engagement with literature's functions, shedding light on their interpretations and enriching the understanding of the impact of literature on literacy competence.

Conclusion

The research findings offer valuable insights into the pedagogical implications for enhancing students' literacy competence within the context of Chinese private universities. These implications are derived from the observed application of translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching, highlighting their potential to transform language education practices.

Educators should actively promote the strategic use of students' native language alongside English to enhance comprehension and engagement. By acknowledging the value of students' linguistic repertoires, instructors can create a supportive environment where students feel comfortable transitioning between languages. This approach not only enriches language learning but also fosters cultural inclusivity within the classroom.

Leveraging the prevalence of visual and digital communication, educators can integrate diverse modes of communication to deepen students' understanding. Incorporating visual aids, multimedia resources, and gestures facilitates multi-dimensional learning experiences that resonate with students' technologically immersed lives. This approach enhances comprehension, engages different learning styles, and cultivates a deeper connection with English literacy.

Considering the socio-cultural dimensions of students' backgrounds and identities is essential in shaping effective language education practices. Educators should be sensitive to students' diverse cultural experiences and language proficiency levels. Tailoring pedagogical approaches to accommodate these factors ensures that learning is engaging, respectful, and relevant to students' needs.

To align with the observed multimodal communication patterns, educators can design assessments that evaluate students' abilities to convey ideas through various communication modes. This approach recognizes the diverse ways in which students can showcase their understanding and ensures that assessment methods mirror real-world communication scenarios.

By embracing these pedagogical implications, educators can create a transformative learning experience that aligns with the demands of the interconnected global society. The integration of translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching can pave the way for enhanced literacy competence, critical thinking skills, and holistic development among students in Chinese private universities.



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Recommendations

Empowering language education in Chinese private universities through the integration of translanguaging, multimodality, and dialogic teaching can be a transformative approach. These strategies can enhance language acquisition, foster critical thinking, and promote cultural awareness.

Faculty Development

- Provide training and workshops for language instructors on translanguaging strategies, multimodal teaching methods, and dialogic pedagogies.
- Encourage ongoing professional development through conferences, seminars, and collaboration with experts in language education.

Curriculum Design

- Develop a flexible and inclusive curriculum that embraces translanguaging by allowing students to draw upon their full linguistic repertoires.
- Incorporate multimodal elements, such as visual aids, videos, and interactive technology, to cater to diverse learning styles and engage students in meaningful ways.
- Design courses that encourage dialogue, debates, and discussions, fostering critical thinking and active participation.

Assessment Strategies

- Move beyond traditional exams and quizzes by incorporating diverse assessment methods, including portfolio assessments, group projects, and reflective journals.
- Assess students' ability to effectively use their multilingual skills, employ multimodal resources, and engage in meaningful dialogues.

Language Centers

- Establish language centers equipped with resources for language learning, including technology for multimodal projects and spaces for dialogic language practice.
- Offer language tutoring and peer support programs that encourage students to engage in language activities outside the classroom.

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