

Teaching Design for the Elementary Chinese Comprehensive Course “My Family” Based on Multimodal Theory

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Abstract: With the rapid development of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL), improving teaching quality requires integrating advanced pedagogical concepts. Multimodal teaching, which employs various symbolic modes to engage students’ multiple senses, is a highly effective approach. Introducing multimodal theory into TCFL education can enhance teaching efficiency and improve students’ communication skills. This paper applies multimodal theory to TCFL, using the elementary Chinese comprehensive course “My Family” as a case study to propose a detailed teaching design, followed by evaluation and reflection. The aim of this teaching design is to deepen the understanding of multimodal theory and provide additional reference for the TCFL.

Keywords: Multimodal theory; Elementary Chinese Comprehensive Course; Teaching design

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1. Feasibility of applying multimodal theory to the elementary Chinese comprehensive course

1.1. Learner level

The target audience for elementary Chinese comprehensive courses typically includes beginners or learners with basic proficiency in Chinese. At this stage, most learners are highly motivated to acquire the language. Multimodal teaching methods, which utilize various communication modes, can effectively engage students and foster a relaxed learning environment. However, beginner learners may encounter interference from their native language and may feel apprehensive about tackling a new language^[1]. The application of multimodal theory can significantly enhance students’ comprehension and expressive abilities. Thus, from the perspective of learners, applying multimodal theory to the elementary Chinese comprehensive course is highly feasible^[2].

1.2. Teaching content level

Compared to other skills-based courses, the content of an elementary Chinese comprehensive course is more

diverse and engaging. The primary objective of this course is to develop students' communicative abilities in Chinese. Multimodal teaching offers students more opportunities for contextualized communication, continuously improving their communicative skills in alignment with the communicative nature of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL). By integrating multimodal theory into instruction, teachers can combine various modes with diverse content, making lessons more dynamic and interactive. Therefore, from the perspective of teaching content, the application of multimodal theory is also highly feasible^[3].

2. Teaching design for elementary Chinese comprehensive classes based on multimodal theory

2.1. Teaching material

The teaching content for this session is based on Lesson 3, My Family, from Experiencing Chinese for Primary School Textbook (Book 3). This textbook, developed by the Higher Education Press with the support of Hanban and recommended by the Confucius Institute, is recognized for its credibility and extensive use in TCSL. The textbook adheres to the “structure-function-culture” framework and incorporates an experiential teaching approach^[4].

In Lesson 3, 10 vocabulary items (including seven verb phrases, one adverb, one interrogative pronoun, and one modal particle) and three key language points are introduced, with an emphasis on the topic. The application of multimodal approaches is recommended to enhance the presentation and comprehension of this content, demonstrating the effectiveness and suitability of multimodal theory in TCSL^[5].

2.2. Teaching object

The students for this course are primary school learners whose native language is English and who possess a two-year foundation in Chinese. According to the “Critical Period Hypothesis” of language acquisition, language learning is facilitated before puberty. The students' foundational knowledge of Chinese enables greater use of Chinese rather than English during instruction.

2.3. Class types and teaching arrangement

This session is an elementary Chinese comprehensive course with a duration of 45 minutes.

2.4. Teaching objective

Knowledge objective: Students are expected to master the following vocabulary: “kàn bào” (read newspaper), “xǐ yī fu” (wash clothes), “shuì jiào” (sleep), “shàng wǎng” (surf the Internet), “dǎ diàn huà” (make a phone call), “chī fàn” (have a meal), “zài” (at, in, on), “zuò” (do), “shén me” (what), “ne” (a modal particle). Corresponding sentence patterns should also be mastered^[4].

Ability objective: Students should be able to communicate using sentence patterns such as “zài zuò shén me?” (What is... doing?), “zài kàn bào” (is reading newspaper), and “ne?” (What about...?).

Emotion objective: Through learning, students develop the desire to use “zài zuò shén me?” in daily communication, thereby enhancing their oral communication skills.

2.5. Key and difficult points

Key point: Mastery of the new vocabulary and sentence patterns; Difficult point: The application of sentence patterns for effective communication.

2.6. Teaching methods

- (1) Explanations are provided more comprehensively by utilizing the visual modality to display real objects, combined with the language modality.
- (2) Demonstrations are conducted using body movements and expressions, making full use of the body modality.
- (3) Multimedia-assisted teaching is employed, utilizing videos, audio, pictures, and other resources to elaborate and practice concepts further through visual and auditory modalities^[6].

2.7. Teaching procedures

2.7.1. Pre-class preparation

The classroom is entered five minutes in advance to ensure that the teaching equipment functions properly. Teaching aids, such as newspapers, flashcards, magnets, etc., are prepared, and the cardboard is affixed to the blackboard. Audio, pictures, and videos in the PPT are checked to ensure they can be played without issues.

2.7.2. Classroom introduction

Organizing the lesson: Students' physical conditions are inquired about to demonstrate concern. Questions are asked to determine whether students have reviewed the previous lesson and previewed the new one. Verbal communication is used as the primary mode, supported by facial expressions (e.g., smiling) and gestures (e.g., greetings) to enhance interaction. The cartoon image displayed on the first page creates a relaxed and engaging atmosphere, enhancing the overall teaching experience.

Reviewing the previous lesson: The previous lesson, *The Road to Knowledge*, is reviewed using multimedia to display visuals that aid students in recalling vocabulary. A panoramic image is shown, and a student is invited to use “zhèr” and “nàr” with body movements to reinforce memory through kinesthetic and visual modalities.

2.7.3. Learning the new lesson

Lead-in: Pictures are displayed to lead students in a quick review of the kinship terms previously learned, which are incorporated into the current lesson. Through visual modality, students' attention is effectively captured^[7].

Explaining vocabulary: Vocabulary explanation is implemented using methods such as displaying real objects, creating action-based scenarios, and utilizing dialogue contexts. These strategies are designed to fully engage students' various senses, allowing teaching modalities to be selected based on lesson requirements, thereby making instruction more targeted and effective.

The new vocabulary is initially presented by the teacher through a PPT slide. To demonstrate the word “kàn bào,” the teacher simulates the action of reading using a newspaper, combining real objects with visual modalities to engage students and foster a lively learning atmosphere. Since the students are primary school children whose native language is English, exaggerated body movements are employed to capture their attention effectively.

- (1) “zài”: The question “What is the teacher doing?” is asked while demonstrating the act of reading a newspaper. This is followed by “What are you doing?”
- (2) “zuò”: The teacher enacts the action of cooking while asking “Can you cook?”
- (3) “shén me”: A picture of a snack bar is shown with questions like “What place is this?” or “What is in the park?” for consolidation and review.
- (4) “né”: Using pictures of countries and convenience stores, the teacher reviews prior knowledge by asking “The teacher is from China. What about you?” and “I like to go to convenience stores. What about you?”

- (5) “kàn bào”: The action of reading a newspaper is demonstrated with the question “What is the teacher doing?” followed by “Have you all read newspapers?”
- (6) “shuì jiào”: The teacher mimics sleeping and asks “What do you do at night?” or introduces a picture of a younger brother sleeping with “What is the younger brother doing?”
- (7) “dǎ diàn huà”: The teacher demonstrates making a phone call while asking “What am I doing?” and “Do you often make phone calls?”
- (8) “chī fàn”: Eating is represented with hand gestures while asking “What is the teacher doing?”
- (9) “shàng wǎng”: A classroom computer is pointed at with the question “What is this?” After students identify it as a computer, the teacher follows up with “What is the teacher doing?” while mimicking typing and asking “What do you do when you surf the Internet?”
- (10) “xǐ yī fu”: The teacher demonstrates rubbing clothes while asking “What is the teacher doing?” and follows with “Can you wash clothes by yourself?”

Practicing new words: The practice phase incorporates visual, body, and language modalities. This multimodal approach effectively stimulates students’ enthusiasm for learning and deepens their understanding of the vocabulary.

- (1) Students are guided by the teacher to read each word aloud twice, accompanied by tone gestures and verb actions.
- (2) A collective reading session follows, with students incorporating tone gestures and verb actions simultaneously.
- (3) Several students are randomly selected to read aloud and recognize words, with the inclusion of hand movements for emphasis.
- (4) Cards corresponding to the new words are shown by the teacher, and students identify the matching vocabulary.
- (5) Words displayed on the PPT are matched by students through line connections, reinforcing their understanding.

Language point explanation and practice: This section primarily integrates example sentences from the textbook with teacher-student interactions, utilizing both written and spoken language. Visual, auditory, and body language modalities are also incorporated, enhancing student participation ^[8].

The new word “zài” is taken from the board by the teacher and combined with the words “zuò,” “shénme,” and “ne” to form questions. These questions are then used to elicit responses, with the nouns “kàn bào” and “chī fàn” forming possible answers. Using images, questions are posed by the teacher, requiring students to respond while performing corresponding actions. Finally, the entire class reads the sentence together.

Text analysis: This section focuses on the text content and dialogue practice, with an emphasis on language modality. Both the teacher and students use gestures and body language to reinforce language knowledge and enhance speaking skills.

The text content has been previously practiced through grammar exercises. The teacher reads aloud, and students repeat. The class is then divided into two groups for role-playing, followed by the teacher selecting students to retell the content.

Images are presented, and a dialogue exercise is first conducted by the teacher with the students. Students then practice the dialogue with each other, focusing on the characters and verbs depicted in the images ^[9].

Summary: The knowledge learned today is summarized on a complete PPT slide. Students are encouraged to take notes and gain a systematic understanding of the content covered in class. This section primarily utilizes

language modality.

2.7.4. Consolidation and review

Listening practice: This section primarily utilizes the auditory modality. Classmates are used as examples, and students engage in listening practice. The inclusion of familiar characters in the content sparks the curiosity of primary school students, increasing their interest and focus on the lesson.

Game activity: Building upon the body language used to explain new words, students participate in the “act and guess” game. Flashcards are demonstrated by the teacher, who then invites a group of students to act out and display the language. The use of body and visual modalities deepens students’ understanding of the content.

Extension activities: Verb words learned previously are combined, and students are encouraged to practice dialogues, such as writing, playing ball, running, and other related words. Through video display, the visual modality is used to facilitate quick understanding and enhance students’ oral communication skills.

2.7.5. Homework

Students are tasked with describing what family members do at home on weekends using learned sentence patterns. Presentations will be made in the next class.

3. Reflection and suggestions

3.1. Highlights

This class applies multimodal theory to the elementary comprehensive course by fully utilizing various modalities for teaching, transforming the traditional single-modal approach. When new knowledge is introduced, actions or physical objects are incorporated. Although the language used is simple, highly effective results are achieved with minimal effort^[9]. On one hand, auditory and visual modalities are integrated through PPT presentations, along with various forms of body language. Additionally, language modalities such as the teacher’s guidance and teacher-student dialogue work together to enhance multimodal interaction. On the other hand, multimodality is employed to create a real communicative environment, encouraging greater interaction between the teacher and students, as well as among students themselves.

3.2. Disadvantages

Firstly, the teacher may lack sufficient teaching experience and may not yet be fully adept at using multimodal approaches flexibly. Teachers often rely heavily on PowerPoint presentations, which incorporate numerous modalities that require careful selection, potentially resulting in information overload for students. Secondly, issues with time management may arise. While body language modalities are effectively used to explain verbs, other parts of speech may receive less attention. Furthermore, multimodal activities can lead to class time overruns. Finally, this lesson relies heavily on multimodal teaching, which limits the implementation of student-centered teaching principles. As a result, the lesson focuses more on modality displays and teacher explanations, leaving less time for students’ autonomous learning.

3.3. Suggestions for improvement

Firstly, time should be allocated effectively by reviewing the key points and challenges of the lesson before class. Simple concepts should not be overly repeated, and modal symbols should be carefully chosen to ensure the content is both practical and foundational, thereby maximizing the use of students’ sensory modalities.

Secondly, a student-centered approach must be emphasized. During the lesson, the chosen modalities should be clear and accessible, enabling students to grasp the material quickly. The teacher should also avoid overwhelming students with excessive information through an overuse of modalities. After class, student feedback should be gathered to make necessary adjustments to improve teaching methods.

Lastly, multimodal teaching should be applied flexibly. Given its adaptability, teachers must be prepared for unforeseen situations. The selected modalities should align with teaching objectives while meeting the students' actual needs.

4. Conclusion

The application of multimodal theory to elementary comprehensive Chinese courses has demonstrated a high degree of adaptability. The teaching design is based on the characteristics of these courses and the principles of multimodal theory. In this lesson, various modalities are employed to enrich information input, enhance students' communicative abilities, and complement the teacher's language input, thereby ensuring high instructional effectiveness. However, due to the author's limited teaching experience, there remain areas that require improvement and ongoing refinement. It is hoped that this paper can provide valuable insights for TCFL.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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