VISUAL ART AS A RESOURCE FOR MULTIMODAL MEANING-MAKING IN EFL INSTRUCTION: A CEFR-ALIGNED PEDAGOGICAL MODEL FOR UZBEK HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *The thesis examines the potential of visual art as a resource for multimodal meaning-making in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Uzbekistan. Drawing on social semiotic multimodality and the pedagogy of multiliteracies, it proposes a five-stage model (Observe – Describe – Interpret – Create – Reflect) that links work with artworks to the communicative descriptors of the CEFR Companion Volume, and outlines a design for its experimental verification.*

Keywords: *multimodality, meaning-making, visual art, EFL, learner creativity, CEFR, mediation, multiliteracies.*

Introduction

Reforms of foreign language education in Uzbekistan, launched by Presidential Resolution No. PQ-1875 (2012) and developed further by Resolution No. PQ-5117 (2021), have aligned English teaching with the

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and made communicative competence the central outcome of instruction. At the same time, today's learners grow up in a predominantly visual information environment: they constantly read and produce meaning through images, colour, layout and video as well as through words. Classroom practice, however, often remains text-centred, and visual materials are used mainly as illustrations rather than as full carriers of meaning.

The CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) partly addresses this gap. Its descriptors for mediation explicitly include “expressing a personal response to creative texts” and “analysis and criticism of creative texts”, and visual works of art can serve as such texts. This creates a solid normative basis for integrating visual art into EFL teaching, yet methodological models adapted to Uzbek classrooms are still scarce. The aim of this thesis is to substantiate theoretically a model of multimodal meaning-making based on visual art and to outline its experimental verification.

The study rests on three complementary approaches. First, social semiotic multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010) treats language as only one of several semiotic modes; images have their own “grammar” of composition, colour and salience, and meaning arises from the interaction of modes. Second, the pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996) views learners as designers of meaning who move between modes in the process of “transformed practice”. Third, Paivio's (1986) dual coding theory explains why information encoded both verbally and visually is retained better than information encoded in one channel only.

From these positions, a work of art in the EFL classroom is not decoration but a meaningful text: interpreting it requires the learner to notice details, formulate hypotheses, argue and negotiate meaning with peers – that is,

to perform exactly the kinds of language activity described by the CEFR at the B1–C1 levels.

Methods

To achieve this aim, a set of theoretical methods was applied: analysis and synthesis of scientific, methodological and normative literature on multimodality, multiliteracies and the CEFR; comparative analysis of the CEFR Companion Volume descriptors for mediation and for responding to creative texts; pedagogical modelling for constructing the instructional model; and design of a pedagogical experiment for its subsequent empirical verification.

Results and discussion

The main outcome of the study is a pedagogical model of multimodal meaning-making based on visual art, which comprises five interrelated stages. (1) Observe: learners examine a work of art (Uzbek miniature, a painting by a national or world artist, a contemporary poster) using guided “slow looking” questions. (2) Describe: they verbalise what they see, activating vocabulary of colour, form, space and emotion. (3) Interpret: in pairs or groups they put forward and defend interpretations, using functional language of opinion, hedging and argument. (4) Create: learners produce their own multimodal product – a drawing with an artist's statement, a digital poster, a short audio guide or an ekphrastic poem. (5) Reflect: they comment on their choices of image and word and evaluate their peers' work against agreed criteria.

Each stage is mapped onto CEFR descriptors (spoken production, interaction, mediation of creative texts), which allows the teacher to plan outcomes and assess them transparently. Particular attention is paid to the national cultural component: Uzbek decorative and fine art becomes a source of content through which learners present their culture in English.

The effectiveness of the model will be tested experimentally with undergraduate students majoring in English (B1–B2). The experimental group will work according to the model for one semester; the control group will follow the standard programme. Data will include pre- and post-tests of spoken production assessed with CEFR-based rubrics, analysis of learners' multimodal products, questionnaires on motivation and creative self-efficacy, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data will be processed statistically, and qualitative data will be analysed thematically.

Conclusion and recommendations

Systematic work with visual art is expected to increase the fluency, lexical richness and argumentation of learners' oral speech, strengthen their ability to mediate meaning across modes, and raise motivation and creative confidence. The practical value of the study lies in a set of lesson scenarios and assessment rubrics that can be used in schools and universities of Uzbekistan. Multimodal meaning-making based on visual art thus appears to be a promising direction for modernising EFL teaching in line with the CEFR and with the needs of a visually oriented generation.

EFL teachers are advised to include at least one art-based multimodal task in each thematic unit, select artworks that also represent Uzbek national culture, and assess learners' outcomes with CEFR-based rubrics.

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