

Using Multimodal Materials In The History Course For 5th And 6th Grades Of Primary School

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Abstract:

Multimodality is a concept that has been around for a long time, but it has begun to be systematically researched in recent years as it is increasingly involved in human communication through rapid technological development. For this reason, many studies have been conducted and many theories have been developed related to it. In education, in addition to linguistic communication, other techniques such as gestures, expressions, voice coloring, pacing, and explicit pauses are used to help in semiotics and enhance interaction. In addition to the above traditional methods, modern digital media are now used in all subjects, such as digital images and videos. The present research focuses on the use of multimodal materials by teachers in the History course for 5th and 6th grades of primary school.

Key Word: *multimodality, material, history, primary*

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I. Introduction

Although in the Western world written language still holds a central position and special power, it is now a fact that there is a pluralism in the way of expression and communication (Grigkos, 2017). The concept of multimodality is not new, but it has taken a central place in the research landscape as the "age of the image" is now actively and daily involved in human communication through rapid technological development. Moreover, the new theories developed in the fields of literature and linguistics during the 20th century have created the appropriate conceptual background for further exploration of the term and have challenged the primacy of written language (Chondolidou, 2000).

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2010), multimodality refers to the ways/modes through which a cultural product is presented through a combination of monomodal products, such as images (moving and non-moving), sketches, and photographs, written and spoken language, colors, diagrams, fonts, punctuation marks, music, sound, video material, gestures, and others. All these tools that help in understanding the space interact with each other and intertwine, ultimately leading to the creation of a multimodal product (Dimitra, 2009). Although humans have used a combination of modes since ancient times to communicate with their environment and express themselves, the term multimodality now indicates a fundamental communication medium that highlights the variety of information received, trying to manage the volume of it through the synthesis, entanglement, synergy, and complementarity of them (Dimitra, 2009).

II. Theoretical Framework

Multimodality in Education

Although linguistic communication seems to dominate in school, it cannot be denied that non-verbal communication methods of the teacher with his students are equally important. Gestures, expressions, voice coloring, pacing, explicit pauses, and others intertwine with words and come to complement the semiotics and enhance interaction (Chondolidou, 2000).

Parallel to the above, which are commonly used by educators (Bretton, 2003), the significant influx of images and digital media into the daily lives of people has generated the need, or better yet, the demand to re-adjust and re-examine the educational process in a different logic. The educational community has begun to realize that traditional teaching methods are largely outdated and ineffective. Through the questioning of the dominance of written language on the one hand and the highlighting of the analysis and non-verbal elements of texts, such as those encountered in everyday life in posters, advertisements, written messages accompanied by images, sounds, and special fonts - on the other, the cultivation of polyvocality and multilingualism could prove extremely beneficial as they can act as a reinforcement in preparing the student to become the future citizen who will be able to respond to the "demands of the Information Society" (Chondolidou, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2023; Kouneli, 2008).

Additionally, the development of the new pedagogy gives the opportunity for the active participation of students in the learning process, as knowledge will be structured and shaped after critical investigation by the student himself. The student-centered model requires the student to interact directly with the information and with the group of peers, not to be a passive recipient, to collaborate and benefit not only cognitively and academically but also socially (Kantarakis, 2012; Cope & Kalantzis, 2023).

Equally notable is the use of polyvocality in the classroom for reasons of social justice, as Cope and Kalantzis recently supported in 2023. Through different communication methods, the reduction of students' social inequalities is promoted. Inequalities that may arise from gender, social background, class stratification, or other causes stand as a communication barrier in the learning process of traditional models. Multimodal material can provide opportunities and access to quality education for all students through highlighting the existence of multiple signifiers and the different reception of information.

Polymodality in the History Lesson

The main objectives of integrating polymodality into the history lesson are to assist and facilitate the learning process, making it more attractive and accessible to students, and of course, the need to cultivate the skill of critical approach and interpretation - through multiple filters - of the flood of information -visual and auditory and others- that students encounter and will encounter in their lives (Lemonidou, 2020).

Furthermore, the New Pedagogy developed at the beginning of the 20th century and was directly influenced by the radical changes in the historical scientific landscape, advocated for the investigation of multiple and conflicting historical sources of all forms, as well as alternative historical texts through the introduction to the scientific method of the historian, not only aiming at accessing the real but also understanding from the students' perspective the uniqueness and historicity of the historical knowledge itself (Kokkinos, 2020; Kouneli, 2008). With the active learning method as the main tool, as in a "historical laboratory" (Kokkinos, 2020), students are called to become co-creators in the production of historical knowledge, reaching their own conclusions and producing personal signifiers (Kouneli, 2008). Thus, the use of polymodality can provide various sources to students that will answer the questions posed in the classroom, making it clearer that historical narration is a representation and reconstruction of the past through a series of documents and that historical knowledge is dynamic and multiply mediated. Additionally, the study of multimodal sources allows students to connect more experientially with history, while especially through videos, images, and other visual and auditory representations, the multimodal engagement with historical knowledge increases for students with difficulties in reading comprehension (Chalaza, 2020). With the use of multimodal material, students have the opportunity to use the entire arsenal of their senses, as more intellectual reception capabilities are utilized (Kavvura, 2011).

It is important for educators to also focus on shaping an appropriate learning environment that will provide students with experiences that can be connected to their real lives, keeping in mind that many forms of experience of contemporary children from the beginning of their lives come through the screen and the Internet. The latter are clearly a point of attraction for students as they are connected to various forms of entertainment. These are generations that consider the Internet as part of the "natural order of things" and have an impressive familiarity with its functions, often to the point of addiction. Communication, information search, categorization, writing, transactions, and the elimination of distances are just some of the aspects of the lived reality of students related to the Internet and the creation of a global social network. With this logic, the variety that can be offered in the history lesson has multiple value, as it supports, strengthens, and possibly enhances teaching when the above means are combined and used with wisdom. Furthermore, the student not only has the ability to develop significant skills in evaluating historical information but can also cultivate the ability to perceive historical reality and develop a more qualitative historical thinking by coming into contact with many and different elements (Kouneli, 2008).

III. Research

Objective and Research Questions

The research focuses on the use of multilingual materials by teachers in the History course for 5th and 6th grades of Primary Schools in the Attica and Peloponnese regions. The research questions are as follows:

- How do teachers perceive the use of multilingual materials?
- Do the demographic characteristics of teachers, such as age, gender, school location, years of experience, and level of education as well as further education, influence the use of multilingual materials?
- How often do teachers use multilingual materials in the History course?
- What types of multilingual materials do primary education teachers use in the History course?
- How important do teachers of 5th and 6th grades consider the use of multilingual materials and why?
- Do the teaching instructions and the History curriculum facilitate the use of multilingual materials in the History course?

- How do teachers motivate students in the History course?

Methodology and Data Collection

Quantitative research method was initially used for the research, with a questionnaire as the tool, and a complementary qualitative method with an interview tool to explore the use of multimedia material by teachers in the History course for the 5th and 6th grades of Primary Schools in the Attica and Peloponnese regions.

Research Tools

The methodological tool chosen for the conduct of this research is the structured written questionnaire associated with survey research (Robson, 2010). It is a type of structured interview that achieves the collection of a multitude of observations and information in a short period of time with minimal cost. Additionally, the objectivity of the answers is achieved through the anonymity of the researcher. The questionnaire is divided into three sections. Specifically, the first section of the questionnaire includes the accompanying letter, in the second part, seven questions were used that include the demographic characteristics of the sample (gender, age, experience, service status, school region, school capacity, level of education). In the specific questions, options were given to the respondent from which they could choose. The second section includes five statements in a five-point Likert scale (Never, Little, Often, Very often, Always // Never, Little, Much, Very much, Always) and two open-ended questions of short answer type concerning the use of multimedia material in the History course in the last two grades of Primary School. The interview is structured (directed) and includes two questions.

The questionnaire was piloted on two teachers before distribution, who had characteristics similar to those of the individuals who would participate in the final sample, in order to determine, if necessary, any modifications where deemed necessary (Blaxter et al., 2004). The teachers completed the questionnaire and stated that it was understandable. The pilot phase was conducted in March 2024 and lasted three working days.

The questions for the interview were submitted to two teachers in April 2024 as a pilot, before the regular interview, in order to identify any potential gaps or possible ambiguities in the questions. The interview included the same individuals who completed the questionnaires.

Research Conduct

The research was conducted from March 2024 to April 2024. The participants were 23 PE70 teachers in primary education in Attica and Peloponnese. The method used in this work for the selection of the sample is convenience sampling. Permission was requested from the school units where the teachers of the sample served. The directors of the school units were informed about the research electronically and accordingly informed the teachers of their unit.

The collection of the questionnaires was done four days after their distribution to the schools via electronic means. The teachers participated voluntarily, after previously ensuring the anonymity of the research. Moreover, the participants were informed that they could stop filling out the questionnaire at any time they wished, it was clarified that all information would be confidential, and the duration of filling out the questionnaire was between fifteen to twenty minutes.

The interview followed the questionnaire and was conducted by phone with the teachers who completed the questionnaire within two days.

Demographic data

Twenty-three educators participated in the research, all of whom were women (100%). Regarding age, it was found that educators in the age group of 36-40 constitute the majority of the sample (30.4%). A large number (26.7%) of educators belong to the age category over 50 (26.1%) and 41-45 years (21.7%), while in the fourth place (13%) come educators aged 25-30. The age category (46-50 years) shows the smallest percentage (8.7%), and finally, the age category 31-35 was not encountered.

As expected, based on the age distribution of the respondents, the largest part has experience of over 20 years (39.1%), while 11-20 years of experience accounts for an equally large proportion of the surveyed educators (34.8%). On the other hand, experience of up to 5 years is noted by 8.7% of the respondents, while a satisfactory percentage (17.4%) has 6-10 years of educational service.

The overwhelming majority of the surveyed educators (91.3%) are employed on a permanent basis. This means that only 2 out of the 23 surveyed educators are substitutes.

It was then observed that the surveyed educators are employed in urban (65.2%), rural (26.1%), and semi-urban areas (8.7%). At the same time, the majority of the surveyed educators are employed in multi-schools (91.3%). Finally, the majority of the surveyed educators (2.2%) hold a postgraduate degree, while 47.8% have not received further education beyond the first degree. It is worth noting that no educator holds a doctoral degree, and only one has a second degree and a postgraduate degree.

Use of Multimodal Material in the History Course for 5th and 6th Grades of Primary School

In this section, various factors related to the use of multimodal material in the History course for 5th and 6th grades of primary school were investigated. Thus, in the question of how educators perceive the use of multimodal material, the answers were satisfactory, as they were well aware of the significance of the concept.

43.5% answered very frequently in terms of how often they use multimodal material in the history lesson. Another 52.2% answered frequently, and 4.3% answered little.

Images are the first multimodal material used by educators in the History lesson, with a percentage of 100%. Second, with a percentage of 65.2%, is the documentary video, and third, with a percentage of 60.9%, are objects (e.g., maps, models, etc.).

In the question of how often they use teaching visits to historical and memory sites (e.g., museums), the overwhelming majority, at a percentage of 60.9%, answered frequently, 30.4% answered little, and 8.7% answered very frequently.

65.2% of educators answered that they consider the use of multimodal material to be very important, and 26.1% considered it very important. There were no negative responses.

Most teachers, in response to the question "Why is the use of multimedia material important in the teaching of History?" make statements that it is important because the subject becomes more interesting, more attractive, and more understandable to students. A small part answered that it cultivates the critical thinking of students. Also, another small part answered that students are given the opportunity to understand the subject matter through different means, beyond reading written text, while another 5% answered that memory retains facts better in this way. Finally, a satisfactory number of responses emphasize that this promotes active/experiential learning.

Regarding whether the teaching instructions and the History curriculum facilitate the use of multimedia material in the History class, 60.9% answered a little, 26.1% a lot, and 13% none.

Therefore, it is observed that a very large part of the respondents answered that they use multimedia material in the History class, with images being the first choice. Also, teachers state that they visit historical and memory sites as part of teaching visits. Finally, teachers recognize the importance of multimedia, believing that most of them make the subject more attractive.

Engagement of students in the History class in the 4th and 6th grades of primary school

In the follow-up telephone interview, two questions were asked to the teachers who completed the questionnaire. The first question concerned the questionnaire they completed and whether they would like to add or clarify anything. All teachers answered that there is nothing to add or clarify. The second question asked them to briefly explain how they motivate the interest of students in the History class. The answers were as expected, considering the answers to the questionnaires. Therefore, their answers revolved around the use of multimedia material and other "active learning methods," such as field visits (teaching visits to museums or monuments), dramatization, battle simulations, digital games, interactive applications, diagrams, maps, videos, audiovisual material, and film material to make the subject more experiential.

IV. Conclusion

From the analysis of the data, it is concluded that teachers, regardless of age, experience, dynamism, and school area, level of study, know about multimedia and use it frequently in the History class, recognizing how important it is. However, they believe that the teaching instructions and the curriculum do not function as a support to their work. Overall, teachers declare that they know how to motivate students' interest in the History class.

Through the comparative comparison of the conclusions of the present research with the general conclusions that were drawn in the doctoral thesis of Potamia (2015), it is important to note that in the decade between the two studies, teachers seem to be more educated about multimedia, but also more familiar with its use in the History class.

In the sample of the present research, there were no male teachers, which could be a significant statistical data point regarding the presence or absence of both genders in schools. Additionally, it was not possible to extract results related to multimedia based on gender, which was studied in Potamia's research in 2015.

Based on the questionnaire and the answers to the interviews, despite the extensive use of multimedia material and the common assumption of its usefulness in the subject, the main goal of teachers seemed to be the embedding of the school textbook texts (they spoke about video lessons, diagrams, and PowerPoint presentations), a fact that is also confirmed in both studies.

Given the small number of participants in the research, as well as the limitations regarding gender and non-urban areas, it is proposed that the present research be expanded to a national level.

Additionally, during the research, through interaction with the educators of the school units participating in it, the question arose as to whether the plurality, as presented in the New Pedagogy (Red, 2020), can be applied to the current educational reality in Greece, taking into account the specific scope of content, the current school textbooks, the available hours for the History lesson in the school timetable, as well as the general perception of the History subject by the entire school community, including the parents. Based on the above, fruitful questions for future exploration could arise.

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