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The use of multimodality in the teaching and learning of writing in English as a second language: A case in Kenya

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Abstract

Various technological, cultural, and social changes continue to shape how communication and meaning are delivered in classrooms. Due to these changes, language is no longer the preferred mode of communication, representation, and meaning-making. Hence, there is an increasing demand for educational content to be delivered using different modes. Further, new ways of learning have compelled education practitioners to rethink their pedagogical choices and practices to cater to the learning needs of all learners in class. As a result, multimodality has attracted considerable scholarship in educational circles. Through this scholarship, many scholars have indicated how multimodality is the new communicational approach in classrooms and they continue to vouch for its use in teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (ESL). This study explores how using multimodality facilitates the teaching and learning of imaginative writing. Drawing on other scholars who conducted similar studies on multimodality as literacy pedagogy, the study adopted an action research design and qualitative data collection methods. As a one-streamed school with a focus on form two learners, the study involved 47 learners and 1 English teacher in a rural public secondary girls' boarding school. Although the sample size was small for drawing general conclusions, the study's findings indicate that multimodality transforms the teaching and learning of imaginative writing. Moreover, through multimodality, learners begin to discover their identities as writers and are motivated to learn in unprecedented ways. However, much as multimodality has its own benefits in educational settings, there are challenges linked with its use. In this regard, education practitioners need to understand these challenges so as to address

them effectively.

Key terms: Multimodality, English as Second Language, Writing

1.0 Introduction

Writing, as one of the English language skills, is an essential component of English language learning, especially for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (Alqurashi, 2015; Ismail, 2011). It is both a mental and a physical process that requires learners to communicate meaningfully. Through writing, learners' English language proficiency is enhanced, thereby facilitating their communicative capacity in the global arena, where communication ability has become essential (Ismail, 2011; Tsou, 2008). This is important because English has dominated many language classrooms (Boraie, 2018), and the Economist Group in London predicts that almost 50% of people worldwide will attain English proficiency by the year 2050 (The Triumph of English, 2011). Furthermore, some scholars, such as Graddol (2004) and McCarthy (2014), predict that the number of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners will exceed that of native speakers by the year 2050. However, writing is a complex activity for many ESL learners (Hedge, 2008); hence, the focus of this study is to provide guidance on how writing can be simplified and made more meaningful for learners. Moreover, the study was necessitated by the positioning of imaginative writing in society. Imaginative writing builds the learner's skills such as imagination, creativity, communication, critical thinking, and problem solving, which are all critical in the contemporary world. The exigencies of contemporary society require learners to master competency in the aforementioned skills. According to Kalantzis and Cope (2012), the more you have the capacity to write, the higher the chances of success in life. Furthermore, the study was influenced by the urgent need to examine intensively and extensively the teachers' pedagogical approaches in the teaching and learning of imaginative compositions. This is because the pedagogical approaches have been identified as a contributing factor to learners' poor performance in imaginative writing. Therefore, the study not only extended teachers' pedagogical knowledge and practice but also contributed to existing knowledge on how writing can be taught through multimodality.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Students are generally expected to be able to write imaginatively, and they are tested for this at the end of their secondary education. To write imaginatively requires a student's cognitive skills, such as creativity, imagination, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Proficiency in the English language is also another prerequisite. However, students' results in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), a national assessment in Kenya, indicate that this is a persistent area of struggle. It is therefore imperative to explore why this is happening. Hence, my study aimed to show how the use of multimodality can help bridge this gap.

3.0 Research Questions

The study was guided by the key research question, "How does multimodality facilitate the teaching and learning of imaginative writing?" To answer the key question, the study addressed the following subsidiary questions:

1. How is imaginative writing currently taught in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms?
2. What are the factors that support or hinder the use of multimodality in teaching and learning imaginative writing?
3. How can the challenges encountered in the use of multimodality in teaching and learning imaginative writing be addressed?

4. What are the participants' views on the use of multimodality in teaching and learning imaginative writing?

4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Social Semiotic Theory

This study is anchored in Social Semiotic Theory advanced by Halliday (1978), which views communication as a process of meaning-making through socially and culturally constructed sign systems. The theory posits that meaning is not communicated through language alone but through multiple semiotic resources such as images, gestures, sounds, texts, and spatial arrangements. Within educational contexts, learners construct understanding by interacting with various modes of representation available in their learning environments. The theory, therefore, provides a useful lens for understanding how multimodal resources can support learners' engagement, comprehension, and meaning-making during the teaching and learning of imaginative writing.

4.2 Multiliteracies Theory

The study is further informed by the Multiliteracies Theory proposed by the New London Group (1996). The theory emerged in response to increasing linguistic, cultural, social, and technological diversity that characterizes contemporary societies. Multiliteracies Theory advocates for literacy pedagogies that move beyond traditional print-based approaches and embrace multiple forms of communication and representation. The theory recognizes that learners engage with meaning through diverse modes, including visual, digital, textual, audio, and spatial resources. Consequently, it supports multimodality as an inclusive pedagogical approach that accommodates diverse learners' needs, experiences, and learning preferences. The theory, therefore, provides a valuable framework for understanding how multimodality can facilitate imaginative writing among English as a Second Language learners.

5.0 Literature Review

5.1 Multimodality as a Literacy Pedagogy

Multimodality traces its roots to 1996, when a group of ten educators and scholars, dubbed the New London Group, whose members were drawn from Europe, the USA, and Asia, came together to discuss the state and future of literacy pedagogy. The members were from different professional fields, including language, literacy, pedagogy, and culture. The emergence of the group was spurred by the demand for new ways of learning in the wake of increasing modes of communication and technologies, and by learners from different linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds (Penuel & O'Connor, 2018; The New London Group, 1996). Further, this was to ensure that the learners are not locked out of academic success. In addition, the formation of the group arose from the need to examine the position and future of literacy pedagogy amid the foregoing technological changes and socio-cultural and linguistic diversity (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Multimodality stems from the social semiotic theory, which was propagated by Michael Halliday in 1978 (Jewitt, 2008). This theory states that meaning is communicated, transferred, and delivered through socially, culturally, and technologically accepted systems or modes of meaning available in a given society (ibid). In addition, multimodality is part of multiliteracies theory, which also recognizes the use of various modes of meaning-making (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Jewitt, 2008). This is what Cope and Kalantzis refer to as "a holistic approach to literacy pedagogy" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 167). The conception and development of multimodality are the result of social, cultural, and technological changes that are shaping diverse communicative and educational contexts (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Kendrick et al., 2006; Kress, 2000). As part of literacy practices, multimodality has been

experiencing tremendous growth each day and therefore, it needs a lot of educational scholarship, input, and attention (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012)

Since its inception, multimodality has continued to evolve in its definition and understanding (Jewitt, 2008; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), for instance, view multimodality as a way of making and remaking meaning through multiple modes, with language as one of them. From his perspective, however, Jewitt (2008) views it as a contextualized practice in which meaning is remade across a number of modes, such as image, gesture, writing, speech, gaze, sound, and music. Although this definition by Jewitt (ibid) concurs with that of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) on the fact that multimodality involves the remaking of meaning, Jewitt considers it as a practice in a given setting or context. This setting may, therefore, be inductively viewed as a classroom, as it has been situated in this study as a form two classroom.

On the other hand, Jewitt and Mills (2010) view multimodality as the combination of various modes in the design of a semiotic (social, contextual, and cultural) product, resource, or event together with the particular way in which these modes are combined through reading, writing, talking, listening, and viewing. Undoubtedly, Mills' perspective on multimodality is quite elaborate. Unlike other scholars, Mills adds an element of the design of modes and an aspect of how these modes are combined across various literacies, such as viewing. This means that during product design, the designer needs to consider how these various modes can be combined, since they will affect how meaning is generated. Though Mills' definition of multimodality acknowledges that various literacies may be developed through the design of a semiotic product, it arguably overlooks how this design appeals to learners' different senses in a classroom context. Therefore, in a bid to examine learners' senses in the learning context, O'Halloran (2011) defines multimodality as "the modes or resources that integrate across sensory modalities" (p. 121). He further uses "multimodality" interchangeably with "multimodal discourse analysis (MDA)," "multimodal studies," and "multimodal semiotics" (p. 120). O'Halloran's understanding of multimodality puts learners in a classroom setting and examines how these modes appeal to the learners' senses as teaching and learning is taking place. Unlike Mills, whose focus is on design, O'Halloran examines multimodality as an approach to learning in which all learners' senses are catered for. Indeed, learners normally experience various modes at their disposal differently (Ntelioglou, Fannin, Montanera, & Cummins, 2014). In addition, learners have different ways of learning; teaching and learning should be tailored to cater to their different sensory needs and learning styles (Gardner, 2006). This implies that when teaching, one has to consider the different ways that learners learn best and cater to these approaches appropriately. According to Kendrick et al. (2006), pedagogical approaches and assessment practices should focus on individual learning differences.

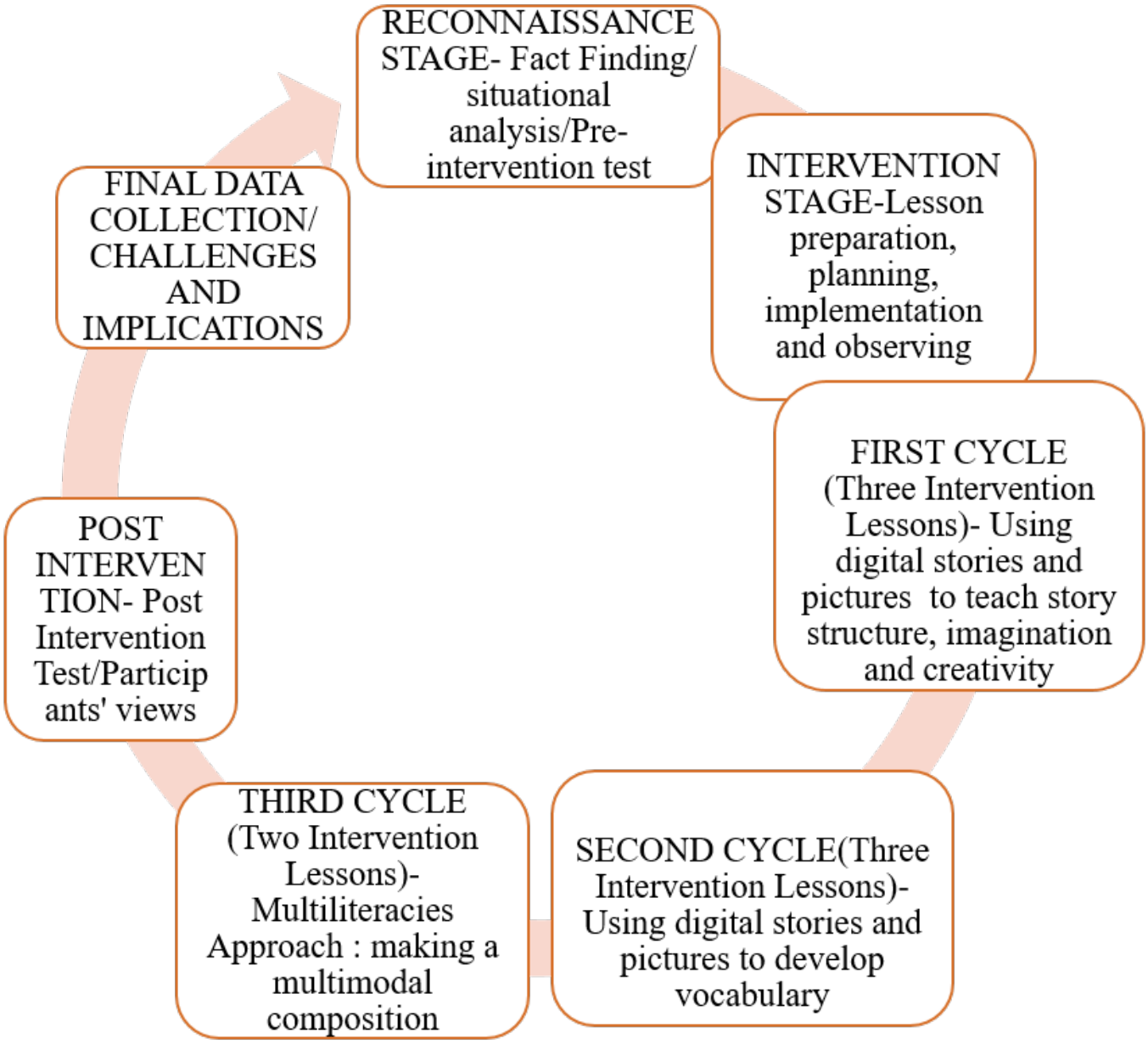
Whilst most of these scholars' definitions and understandings of multimodality center on a combination of modes of meaning-making, Kalantzis and Cope (2012) view it as a process in which different modes of meaning are interlinked in the way they represent and make meaning. Further, this combination of modes will use different media, which encompass materials, tools, and practices used to represent and communicate meaning. In addition, they note that multimodality can serve as pedagogical support for learning to read and write. However, Kress (2013), who is regarded as the strongest proponent of multimodality, negates this view and understanding by arguing that multimodality cannot only be explained as a process but also as a combination of modes of meaning making and communication without focusing on language as the sole mode of meaning making and communication. Kress' central stance is ostensibly about the combination of modes of communication and meaning-making and does not change his initial position on and understanding of multimodality. However, I feel that Kress' argument does not change the fact that a number of scholars view multimodality as a scaffold for the development and acquisition of various literacies among learners.

Therefore, owing to these evolving and varied understandings, in this study, I adopted Kress' (2000) conception that multimodality involves the simultaneous use of multiple modes, which may make meanings that may be complementary, extensive, and contradictory. However, the study was limited to two modes: pictures and digital stories. Furthermore, I came to understand that multimodality is a potential literacy pedagogy for second-language learning (Cazden et al., 2012; Grapin, 2019; Jewitt, 2008; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Kress, 2008). I adopted the two conceptualizations because they enable a connection between the theory of multimodality and the practice of teaching and learning imaginative compositions. However, though studies such as Cazden et al. (2012), Cope and Kalantzis (2009) and Kendrick et al. (2006), have made a correlation between multimodality and writing in various contexts, the strategy may not be a common practice among teachers and in educational contexts. Just as Kendrick et al. (2006) points out, due to teachers' focus on examination, loyalty to the curriculum, inadequate resources and training, the capacity of teachers in rural areas to recognize and explore multiple modes of meaning making is often limited. Further, most of the English curricula, including ESL and educational settings, have not fully embraced the use of multimodality (Ryu & Boggs, 2016; Godhe & Mugnusson, 2017), yet as Grapin (2019) states, multimodality transforms English language learners' understanding of new concepts because learners have a chance to construct meaning from different resources at their disposal. However, this may arguably not be the case in all rural educational contexts. Similarly, there are some urban schools where the use of multimodality is yet to be embraced. In addition, the affordances of multimodality in teaching and learning of imaginative writing may vary from context to context. This is because understanding of writing is both social and contextual (Street & Lefstein, 2007). The implication of this is that there are other underlying factors that may facilitate or even hinder the development of writing. Furthermore, mastery of the writing skill, and particularly imaginative writing, is dependent on the social, linguistic and cultural factors. In addition, excellent performance in imaginative writing is dependent on learner characteristics such as entry level, prior experience, motivation, engagement, learner's expectations and attitude towards imaginative writing.

6.0 Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach. This is because the approach made it possible to get intricate views of the participants-both the learners and the teacher. The study also used action research design to not only reflect on every action that took place in class but also what modification or intervention leads to better learning outcomes. Through action research, a critical, self-questioning, reflective stance and systematic approach can be taken as a classroom teacher examines their pedagogy, experiences, and practice (Burns, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). In addition, through action research, the teacher is able to understand what is happening in class (Mertler, 2019).Purposively, forty seven (47) learners and one teacher of English, Mr. Bonface (pseudonym) were selected. Though there were 47 learners in the class where the study was conducted, 11 learners were actively involved in order to specifically monitor the progress of the intervention. Further, three methods of data collection, namely, observation, document analysis and interviews were employed. These diverse methods helped to triangulate the data. As McNiff and Whitehead (2010) suggests, data triangulation helps a researcher to look at data from "a range of perspectives" (p.169). The figure below shows the action research conceptual framework that was adopted during the study. The framework borrowed from Burns' (2010) and McNiff and Whitehead's (2002) framework of action research which comprises four steps, namely, planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The four processes are interconnected and share one objective: the improvement of practice.

Figure 1: Action Research Conceptual Framework for the study



7.0 Findings and Discussion

7.1 The Reconnaissance Stage/Pre-intervention

This stage helped me to appraise the situation and position of multimodality in teaching and learning of imaginative writing at the research site and setting- the school and the English classroom. I was guided by the research subsidiary question one: - How is imaginative writing currently taught in English as Second Language ESL classroom?

7.2 Limited Use of Multimodality in Classroom

The analysis of the situation at the reconnaissance stage indicated clearly that the use of multimodality in

the teaching and learning of imaginative compositions had not been explored in the school. These findings confirmed my rationale for the study and resonated with Godhe and Mugnusson (2017) who point out that multimodality has not been fully embraced in educational institutions and even in the curriculum, especially as a pedagogical approach for teaching and learning the skill of writing. I was also able to assess the learning needs of the Form Two learners through their views in the focus group discussions and their performance on the pre-intervention test. In their pre-test, I preferred qualitative feedback to quantitative feedback. This is because I felt that giving quantitative feedback needed a standard criterion which I could not find at that moment. Additionally, from my observation and experience, marking imaginative composition may sometimes be subjective especially when there is no standard criterion to serve as a performance standard. Apparently, pedagogical approaches and choices by the respective teacher of English, took no cognisance of multimodality as a potential pedagogy for teaching of imaginative writing. This finding resonates with Ryu and Boggs' (2016) study which found that most teachers do not engage in multimodal pedagogies. What this implied, therefore, was that teachers of English as Second Language need to constantly question their practice and adopt pedagogies that foster language learning such as multimodality as pedagogical. Consequently, I was prompted to take the necessary action by adopting a multimodal pedagogical approach. This is indicated in my personal reflection below:-

This therefore compelled me to plan my first lesson (intervention lesson) in a way that the various modes will be used and combined during the lesson. This would increase learners' motivation and engagement during the lessons on imaginative writing. In addition, there was a need to help learners in composing stories that are action packed and have twists and turns instead of the linear stories that learners were used to writing (Reflective Journal, 7/9/2019)

7.2 Intervention Stage

This stage targeted answers to the two subsidiary questions; "What are the factors that support or hinder the use of multimodality in teaching and learning imaginative writing" and "How can the challenges encountered in the use of multimodality in teaching and learning imaginative writing be addressed?" The stage comprised three cycles. The stage also had a series of intervention lessons that culminated in various reflections. This helped me identify multimodal strategies I used in teaching and learning imaginative compositions during the intervention lessons. The phase had at least three lessons in each cycle. The single lessons were allocated forty minutes while the double lessons were given eighty minutes.

7.2.1 Factors supporting the use of multimodality in teaching and learning imaginative writing

7.2.1.1 Teacher's Ability to Reflect

Study findings indicate that the use of multimodality is greatly dependent on the teacher's capacity to reflect and even question their everyday classroom practice. For example, the respective teacher of English did not use a multimodal approach to teaching and neither did he show any inclination towards reflection on how differently imaginative writing can be taught. Though he claimed that the product approach helped the form two learners, he did not take a critical stance of his pedagogical approaches and choices so as to achieve the best out of his learners and to further pursue his individual and professional growth. As Lodico et al. (2010) state, the act of reflection in one's teaching practice is important. His responses to questions indicated undue satisfaction with practices that do not yield optimal results. However, he did not reflect on what should be done to improve his practice. For example,

he stated:

So I have not incorporated that in writing imaginative compositions so I may say that is something that maybe I have failed but it is a very good thing that can also be incorporated (Entrant Interview, 5/9/2019).

7.2.2.2 Teacher's Disposition

The use of multimodality requires a teacher's readiness to adapt and adopt a new pedagogical repertoire. This readiness develops when a teacher maintains a positive mindset towards a pedagogy that demands significant input and attention while yielding optimal learning outcomes (Stockwell, 2010). For example, at the end of the study, in discussing how he could work with his colleagues to use multimodal approaches to teaching the respective teacher of English stated:

First of all, the first support is the teachers to embrace it first of all, I know sometimes human beings can be a bit tricky, there those who will as well accept such proposal, there are those who maybe might ignore it, but I believe with the co-operation that we have in our school and because team work, good team work, it is a matter of talking to them and showing them benefits of these things. (Post Intervention Interview (PII), 30/9/2019)

7.2.1.3 Availability of Semiotic Resources

As in Guichon and Cohen (2016), the study's findings indicate that the availability of semiotic resources facilitates the use of multimodal pedagogy. Otherwise, it can really be a challenging endeavour when resources are inadequate or not available. Although the English teacher indicated that the school had resources, he pointed out that they were insufficient to support the use of multimodality. He stated the following:

And the issue of maybe taking those videos, that is a bit tricky because the only thing you can use is maybe our phones, teachers' phones. I know this one also has that application but may not auger well when a student goes outside there with this as the property of the school so maybe there is, maybe it might be a request that the school has a camera, a digital camera that would as well assist so that sometimes they could go and pick pictures from the environment, attach them and then we look at which are suitable based on what maybe you want them to write. So the issue of those tools is a, can be problematic (Post Intervention Interview (PII), 30/9/2019)

7.2.1.4 Supportive School Leadership

Findings show that the active use of multimodality in a school requires support from the leader of the institution such as a school principal. For instance, the English teacher noted that for multimodality to flourish, leadership support is needed. Specifically, he pointed out that the principal of the school should be ready to support teachers' potential pedagogical pursuits and choices that may transform learning. He stated:

So first of all, the support from the principal and the teachers to embrace it and then from there, that will be a good start (Post Intervention Interview (PII), 30/9/2019)

7.2.1.5 Teacher Development Support

Findings indicate that providing a teacher with professional development opportunities is likely to enable

him/her to embrace alternative pedagogies, including one that is supportive of multimodal teaching. For example, the teacher of English, pointed out that the development of a teacher's pedagogical skills through training, mentorship and peer coaching are key factors that should be considered if multimodality is to be embraced by teachers. He stated:

there is a programme in this school whereby teachers go out for mentorship programmes, they also go out to get some of this knowledge on how to use these tools such as the computers and even the projectors. We also had some sessions with the coordinators of this organization, they used to come here and they would like teachers to prepare a lesson and then they would assess. So I think the teachers first of all, they have that knowledge so when also I introduce to them this, I think it would also enhance their way of teaching and learning in their classrooms (Post intervention interview (PII),30/9/2019)

7.2.1.6 Learners' Ways of Learning

Findings from the study established that adopting multimodal pedagogy affords a teacher with an opportunity to use a number of strategies hence making it possible to cater for the learners' diverse ways of learning. The following extract of the discussion indicates how different modalities were able to meet the learners' different ways of learning:

Researcher: Now, I just want to know what did you like about those lessons?

Student A: The use of pictures. Because they will give me ideas to write the composition

Researcher: An example? Any picture that made you get ideas?

Student B: the village well, the well

Student C: My life as a paramedic

Student D: When the paramedics were struggling to help the victim, you could get an idea of how life of a paramedic is difficult. (Focus Group Discussion, 30/9/2019)

The above finding resonates with Ntelioglou et al. (2014) who notes that learners learn differently when different modes are used.

7.2.2 Factors Impeding the Use of Multimodality in Teaching Writing

7.2.2.1 Time Constraints

Study findings reveal that it is challenging to complete multimodality tasks because they take a lot of time to plan and deliver successfully. Consequently, the time may be insufficient. As stated by Ryu and Boggs (2016) multimodality requires a lot of input and time from both the learners and teachers. Though the teacher of English pointed out that he could continue with the use of multimodality and further support his colleagues, I noted with concern that he was still uncertain about the whole idea. That uncertainty was arguably an indicator of the fact, in the use of multimodality, teachers are constrained by time. For instance, in discussing whether he would continue with the use of multimodality, the teacher of English stated the following:

So I said the issue of time, creating that time span to do such things or to introduce sometimes it might be very tricky, but id sometimes they are, if they have known at least they can do for themselves but that start can be tricky, like I said, "nitajaribu" (I will try). (Post Intervention Interview (PII), 30/9/2019)

I also experienced similar challenge of time when I used videos, pictures, texts and guided group discussion. It was not easy to complete a given task within the time allocated of forty minutes in a lesson. This made me feel that I did not accomplish the set objective. I had recorded this in my reflective journal

as follows:

However, there was inadequate time to go through the writing process. The activity was thus given as homework. I felt that the lesson did not really meet the objectives I had stated. I had to share this with my critical friend. (Reflective Journal, 24/9/2019)

7.2.2.2**Inadequate Pedagogical Skills**

Findings indicate that inadequate pedagogical skills are a hindrance to the use of multimodality in teaching and learning of imaginative writing. This results in the dismal performance in imaginative compositions by learners. The form two learners at Committed Secondary School (pseudonym), for instance, performed unsatisfactorily in the imaginative writing tasks as evidenced in the learners' composition notebooks. This finding resonates with Kendrick et al (2006) that teachers of language especially in rural contexts have not embraced multimodal strategies and other participatory learning approaches yet they are associated with improving the learners' outcomes. Based on the discussions with the students, I noted that the teacher of English had a bias for product and subtly genre approaches when teaching imaginative writing. However, he seemed not be aware of the fact that the two approaches have their limitations and may thus not be wholly adequate in teaching imaginative writing. The practice was teacher-centred and detached learners from experiencing the real process of imaginative writing and learning in general. That indicated why the learners felt they had never been taught imaginative writing before by the teacher of English. The discussion with learners revealed their teacher pedagogical inadequacy and learners' dissatisfaction with his pedagogical choices. Below is an extract of the discussion:

Researcher: Can you share with me briefly how you were previously taught imaginative writing?

Student A: We have never been taught.

Student B: We were just taught how to use similies, vocabulary

Student C: We were not taught

Student D: We were not taught. We were told to write just like that

Student E: We were never taught

Researcher: Are you telling me you were just given a composition to write just like that? There was no lesson on imaginative composition?

Students (all): Yes (Focus Group Discussion, 30/9/2019)

7.2.2.3 Inadequate Resources

Similar to findings by Kendrick et al.(2006), this study established that inadequate resources limit the use of multimodality in teaching and learning. I noted that in order for multimodality to be used, resources need to be available. It would really pose a challenge for the teacher to teach and the learners to benefit if the resources are limited or inadequate. On discussing the facilitating factors for multimodality, the teacher of English pointed out that, "So the issue of those tools is er…can be problematic." (Post Intervention Interview (PII), 30/9/2019). He also insinuates this when he said, "Resources are there, so I might say that is not a challenge for no…"(Entrant interview, 5/9/2019). He further pointed out this challenge when he stated the following:

Maybe one is to get the pictures which are in line with you want to, you want the students to write about, maybe it can be a bit tricky because truly speaking, we don't have an internet facility here and even if it is there, but it is not functioning as we had expected as teachers. (Post Intervention Interview (PII),

30/9/2019)

7.2.2.4 Cognitive Inaccuracy and Contradiction

Study findings showed that the learners experienced difficulty in discerning information that demands the attention of many of their senses. I noted that the use of pictures in teaching and learning imaginative writing may result in varied interpretations from the learners because of the learner's disability to interpret meanings communicated through a particular mode. This may cause meaning distortion. Just like Kress (2000), the teacher of English pointed out how meaning may be contradicted through some modes. The teacher noted the following:

So I think sometimes we have different perceptions as human beings. Sometimes you can see a picture then sometimes it becomes difficult for you to interpret what is there. A good example, you can be given a picture. Or may be let just give this example, maybe you are given a glass that is half full of water and then you can (sic) two different people to give or interpret let's say an explanation for that, you might get a very different answers. So sometimes it might be tricky because I might see it this way, another one might see it in a different perspective(Entrant interview, 5/9/2019)

Similarly, Student "I" shares her challenge of processing information and generating meaning out of particular mode used. She explained, "Maybe I may see the picture and not understand what is going on." This is despite the fact that the picture used is familiar with in the sense that it transferred meaning that the learner was previously exposed to. This implied that though the sensory modalities or modes may appeal to different senses, the meaning generated may vary greatly differently depending on the learner's cognition. Consequently, the meaning intended may not be adequately and clearly delivered.

7.2.2.5 Division of Attention

Study findings show that presenting a lot of information using several modes makes the multimodal lesson challenging as the learners' attention can be distracted. Multimodality requires the learners to simultaneously understand the information that is communicated through various modes. However, chances of divided attention are usually high (Guichon & Cohen, 2016). This is because a learner may be more interested in a particular mode than it may be necessary at that given time. For instance, the teacher of English shared his concerns about the danger of using various modes by pointing out that the learner may be carried away. He stated the following:

maybe student was interested much in that video in terms but not connected to that I should write something similar to what is happening over there, so maybe some of them were carried away (Post Intervention Interview (PII), 30/9/2019)

7.2.3 Addressing Challenges of Using Multimodality

This section permitted response to the subsidiary research question: -How can the challenges encountered in the use of multimodality in teaching and learning imaginative writing be addressed? The study revealed different ways to address the challenges as follows:

7.2.3.1 Balancing of Modes

Study findings indicate that when learners struggle with different artefacts such the text and the video clip as experienced during the first lesson of cycle two, it is critically imperative that no individual mode overrides the other in meaning generation. As part of teaching and classroom research, it was noted how the interplay between the modes in the multimodal ensemble is critical in meaning making. It is therefore important for a teacher to design a lesson in such a way that the interaction between the modes

enhances the learner's understanding. Student G, for instance, suggested this by saying, "May be you put a video, then no voice, then you explain about the story." (Post Intervention Discussion, 30/9/2019)

7.2.3.2**Scaffolding and Negotiating of Meaning**

Findings also indicate that it is important for a teacher to negotiate meaning especially when learners have poor cognition. This negotiation occurs when individual modes may not deliver the meaning appropriately and adequately. For instance, the spatial mode, where learners were engaged in group discussions and there was feedback from both the teacher and the learners, made it possible for learning to take place. As Student H puts it, "You gave us meanings of some words which we have never known." (Post Intervention Focus Group Discussion, 30/9/2019). Further, student 6 indicated need for support and mediation of meaning when asked how different should the next lesson be. She explained the following:

To keep for us another video (sic) and after that to explain for us slowly by slowly (sic). And even to ask us question and last one to make sure that every one (sic) have understand us well as possible. (sic) (Exit Slip, 16/9/2019)

7.3 Post Intervention Stage

This stage helped me to respond the final subsidiary question (What are the participants' views on the use of multimodality in teaching and learning imaginative writing?) as well as the main research question (How does multimodality facilitate the teaching and learning of imaginative writing?)

7.3.1 **Participants' Views about the Use of Multimodality in the Teaching and Learning of Imaginative Writing**

7.3.1.1 Increased motivation and engagement in Imaginative Writing

Using multimodality increases learners' motivation and engagement. Just like Ryu and Boggs (2016) and Chien Lee (2014) who linked multimodality with learners' motivation and engagement with writing tasks, this study also found that using multimodality in teaching and learning increases students' motivation to write. For instance, the learners at Committed Secondary School (pseudonym) pointed out how their engagement with multimodality boosted their morale of writing imaginative compositions. Student 3 pointed this out, for example, and stated that, "I really felt so good and exciting to me. It has really made me have a positive attitude towards it."(Exit slip, 20/9/2019). In addition, the teacher of English was able to observe this and also explained it as follows:

In fact, to me, I know they enjoyed, they were interested, and if I could have a session with them, to ask them whether they have to continue with the same or, I believe the answer will be yes. Because I could see, just from their faces (Post Intervention Interview (PII), 30/9/2019)

7.3.1.2**Fostering Higher Order Language Sub-skills**

Study findings also show that the use of multimodality fosters skills such as creativity, imagination, critical thinking, communication, problem solving and collaboration. This resonates with Ryu and Boggs (2016) who found that using multimodality improves learners' imagination. The aforementioned skills are the 21st century skills that are needed in the contemporary world (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). These skills are further enhanced when multimodality is used in teaching and learning of imaginative compositions. As noted in the exit slips during the interventions and student reflections, the same is noted by the learners during our discussions:

Researcher: During the lessons, I used pictures and digital stories. Did these help you to write imaginatively?

All Students: Yes

Researcher: How?

Student D: I am more creative

Student E: They help to have ideas and think more. Like when you are given the picture you can think

Student F: They made me to write my own story using pictures and videos

Student G: They gave me ideas. Maybe you have been given a heading and I have been shown some pictures they will make me think and write a good composition (Post Intervention Focus Group Discussion (FGD), 30/9/2019)

7.3.1.3 Creating Learner Agency

Findings further show that multimodality transforms learners to become independent writers. Consequently, they are able to own their stories or compositions. This was noted by the learners as follows:

Student F: They made me to write my own story using pictures and videos

Student A: They enabled me to write my own story (Post intervention Focus Group Discussion, 30/9/2019)

The above finding is similar to Chien Lee (2014) who engaged two junior college learners in story writing within various modes and Vasudevan et al. (2010) who also involved fifth-grade learners in an urban classroom setting in composing stories using multiple. Just like this study, findings from the two aforementioned studies show that learners become actively involved in writing when multimodality is used. This active involvement further enables learners to create their identities as writers.

7.3.1.4**Improved Fluency in Writing**

The findings of the study show that the use of multimodality enables the learners to improve on how they express themselves and how they aptly use vocabulary. This is especially through the use of pictures and images (visual), sounds (auditory), objects (aural) and texts. This was observed this during one of the intervention lessons. When the learners were asked whether the use of various modes have influenced their imaginative writing, the learners pointed out the following:

Student 8: Yes, because I didn't know to use the words well but now I have the knowledge to write some words (Lesson exit slip on 12/9/2019)

Student 1: Yes. Because I didn't know how to express myself when using some new words but now I am okay with that. (Lesson exit slip on 13/9/2019)

Student 2: Yes. Because one is able to get new words from them (Lesson exit slip on 13/9/2019)

Student 3: Yes, because I have learnt a lot of vocabularies which I was unconscious about then (Lesson Exit slips on 13/9/2019)

Student 5: I find myself knowing new vocabularies and words to use in composition

Student 6: It is the better option because it has helped me learn new vocabularies and how to replace some sentences and words

The learners further explained how the use of multimodality enhanced their English language proficiency. They noted the following in the discussion:

Student G: They have enabled me to improve my language

Student H: It has enabled me to be more creative and expand my language

Student I: I have learnt new vocabulary

Student F: Instead of saying to admire you say to adore (Post intervention Focus Group Discussion, 30/9/2019)

The preceding finding resonates with Kendrick et al's (2006) findings that using multimodality enhances the learner's writing. Similarly, the teacher of English shares the same views that the learners' English language was enhanced. His summarised report on the whole study, for instance, stated, in part, "The students used vocabulary well" (the teacher of English Report, 30/9/2019). Moreover, he noted the following during the post intervention interview:

Some of those compositions, I took some samples, read them, also marked, looked at the way they are using the language and to me I think that is what has also boosted them because the language use is very good as opposed to earlier where they were not seeing such things (Post intervention interview,30/9/2019)

8.0 DISCUSSION

8.1 Multimodality and Learner Engagement

The findings demonstrate that multimodality significantly enhanced learner engagement and motivation during imaginative writing lessons. Learners reported increased enthusiasm for writing activities when pictures, videos, digital stories, and collaborative discussions were incorporated into classroom instruction. This finding supports previous studies that associate multimodal pedagogies with improved learner participation, engagement, and motivation. The use of diverse modes of communication appears to create learning environments that are more interactive and appealing to learners, thereby increasing their willingness to participate actively in writing activities.

8.2 Multimodality as an Inclusive Pedagogy

The study further demonstrates that multimodality promotes inclusive education by accommodating diverse learning preferences and abilities. Different learners responded positively to different modes of representation, including visual images, videos, discussions, and textual resources. The availability of multiple pathways for meaning-making enabled learners to access content through approaches that matched their individual strengths and learning styles. This finding suggests that multimodal pedagogy can enhance equitable participation in classroom learning by reducing barriers associated with traditional language-dominant instructional approaches.

8.3 Multimodality and Learner Agency

A notable finding of the study was the emergence of learner agency. Learners reported increased confidence in generating their own ideas and composing original stories. Rather than relying solely on teacher-generated content, learners became active creators of meaning and knowledge. This finding aligns with contemporary learner-centred pedagogical approaches that position learners as active participants in the learning process. Through multimodality, learners appeared to develop ownership of their writing and confidence in their ability to express themselves creatively and imaginatively.

8.4 Theoretical Implications

The findings support Social Semiotic Theory by demonstrating that learners construct meaning through multiple semiotic resources rather than through language alone. The use of pictures, digital stories,

discussion, and text enabled learners to engage with content through varied forms of meaning-making. The findings further validate the Multiliteracies Framework, which advocates for literacy pedagogies that embrace multiple modes of communication to accommodate learner diversity. The enhanced learner engagement, creativity, agency, and writing fluency observed during the study suggest that multimodal pedagogies provide practical opportunities for implementing inclusive and learner-centred educational practices. Consequently, the study contributes to emerging scholarship on multimodality by demonstrating its potential as a transformative literacy pedagogy in English as a Second Language classrooms.

9.0 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The study was conducted in a single rural girls' secondary boarding school involving one teacher of English and forty-seven Form Two learners. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study and may not be generalized to all secondary school settings in Kenya. Furthermore, action research emphasizes contextual understanding and improvement of practice rather than broad generalization. To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation through observations, interviews, document analysis, reflective journals, learner reflections, and action research cycles. These multiple sources of evidence helped strengthen credibility and confirmability of the findings. Future studies could involve multiple schools, diverse learner populations, and different educational contexts to generate broader insights into the use of multimodality in English language teaching.

10.0 Implications for Teaching and Learning

10.1 Teacher Development

Findings indicate that teachers need to be supported in developing appropriate pedagogical innovations that promote learner's understanding of the concepts. I strongly feel that just because a particular pedagogical choice aids in achieving arguably better learning outcomes, it should not be adapted and adopted without question. It is equally important for teachers of English to be inward looking and have the capacity to interrogate that pedagogical choice or approach. They need to be inquiry-oriented about their teaching practices so that they are in a position to critic their pedagogical choices and repertoires. Findings clearly show that teachers of English as Second Language need an understanding of pedagogy in order for them to deliver imaginative writing content effectively. However, this demands teacher's own initiative to create a classroom environment that actively engages learners in subject content and various classroom tasks. Further, this calls for innovativeness and creativity in pedagogy. In relation to this, teacher's choice and knowledge of pedagogy need to be ground in theory and empirical research. This is because, as findings show in this study, theoretical and research base generates classroom findings which gives true insights into the real goings-on in a learning context. Therefore, this will constantly enhance the teacher's understanding on how learning occurs in any classroom context.

10.2 Learners' Ways of Learning

Just like Gardner (2006) points out, it was found that in order for the learners to comprehend the language concepts (including writing) and be able to apply them, it is imperative that multiple modes of communication, meaning making and representation are used. We also concur with Cook and Sams (2018) that teachers should use different modalities when teaching and that using a single mode may limit the learner's understanding of the content. Learners at Committed Secondary School found imaginative writing engaging and easy when they were exposed to multiple modes that appeal to their

diverse ways and styles of learning. They were thus able to write imaginatively. In addition, findings show that presenting information to the learners in various modes fosters learning. However, some modes may be redundant thus putting undue information overload on learners. In addition, some modes may demand a lot from the learners especially at-risk learners. The form two learners at Committed Secondary School were not an exception to this. They seemingly struggled with different modes during the first lesson of the second cycle.

10.3 Teacher's Classroom Practice

For the learners to write imaginatively, a teacher needs to come up with creative pedagogical approaches and strategies that would foster skills such as creativity, imagination, critical thinking and communication. In addition, they need to adopt multimodal approaches that enable the learners to exploit their potential as writers. In this regard, the use of multimodality together with process-genre approach in teaching and learning of imaginative writing has proved helpful to the learners in the sense that they are able to write creatively and imaginatively. Further, the learners are able to engage in cognitive processes of learning which are critical in the writing process. These processes include critical and logical thinking, problem solving, creativity and imagination.

Finally, from the study, it is explicit that attention needs to be given to reflective practice. Reflective practice is arguably a critical area that will effectively guide any pedagogical choice and move that a teacher makes. Moreover, reflective practice allows the teacher to design appropriate pedagogical interventions that cater for learners' diverse ways of learning.

11.0 Conclusion

This study explored how multimodality facilitates the teaching and learning of imaginative writing among English as a Second Language learners in a Kenyan secondary school. The findings demonstrate that multimodal pedagogy enhances learner engagement, creativity, imagination, learner agency, vocabulary acquisition, and writing fluency. The integration of pictures, digital stories, discussions, and other multimodal resources created opportunities for learners to construct meaning actively and participate more effectively in writing activities.

The study further revealed that successful implementation of multimodal pedagogies depends on several enabling factors, including teacher reflection, positive teacher disposition, supportive school leadership, availability of resources, and continuous professional development. At the same time, challenges such as limited instructional time, inadequate pedagogical skills, resource constraints, cognitive overload, and divided learner attention may constrain implementation if not appropriately addressed.

Importantly, the findings suggest that multimodality promotes inclusive education by accommodating diverse learning needs and preferences while simultaneously fostering critical competencies such as creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. These competencies are essential for sustainable education and for preparing learners to participate effectively in contemporary knowledge societies. The study therefore concludes that multimodality is not merely an instructional strategy but a transformative pedagogical approach that can support sustainable and inclusive English language teaching in Kenyan secondary schools.

12.0 Recommendations

12.1 For Further Research

This study recommends that action research needs to be carried out on a bigger sample where schools both rural and urban and with varying learner entry levels are involved in the study. This is because the

current study is based on a single educational context, which may be different from other educational contexts facing similar problems. Therefore, this will make it possible to generalize the findings on the potential of multimodality as literacy pedagogy.

12.2 For Practice

This study recommends that teachers and education practitioners need to question their practice. It is not enough to just teach using inadequate pedagogical approaches which do not support student learning. In order to achieve that, teachers ought to always engage in self- reflections during teaching. This will enable them to make the right pedagogical choices. Similarly, this study recommends the use of process-genre approach in teaching and learning of imaginative compositions. This process provides the learners with an opportunity to engage in the process of writing. This engagement fosters their imaginative writing skills.

Finally, the study recommends that language teachers should regularly participate in professional development to enhance their pedagogical knowledge and skills.This is because, as the study findings explicitly indicate, the learning needs of the learners are diverse and they keep on changing all the time. Further, the learning contexts are rapidly changing in the wake of social, cultural and technological changes as indicated in the background of this study. Therefore, by equipping themselves with the requisite pedagogical knowledge and skills teachers will have the capacity to for the learners' diverse ways of learning.

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