Multiliteracies-translanguaging conceptual model framework for student agency in English as foreign language contexts

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## Article Info

ABSTRACT

Developing student agency in formal education leads to favorable impacts on cognitive development as well as learning experiences that culminate in a strong foundation for lifelong learning, which is crucial for employability. However, theoretical grounded pedagogical approaches for student agency are still at the nascent level of conception. Assuming that student agency can be developed in the English classroom, this article aims to propose a conceptual model framework based on multiliteracies and translanguaging to address the pedagogical gaps in student agency with examples from the English as foreign language educational contexts. The first objective is to identify pedagogical guidelines for student agency from multiliteracies and the second objective is to identify pedagogical guidelines for student agency from translanguaging. Jaakola's model approach guided the analytical review of literature to address the knowledge gap in pedagogy. Findings underline the affordances of multiliteracies for scaffolding multimodal meaning-making and the affordances of translanguaging for motivating active participation and expanding linguistic repertoire of students. These affordances can guide the developments of context-bound resources and relational resources of student agency. The proposed framework can be a reference point for curriculum designers or teachers to develop approaches for student agency.
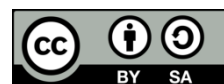
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1. INTRODUCTION

Student agency is not a new concept in the education field, but the concept has evolved in various disciplines. Student agency, a concept that has evolved from human agency, refers to the use of resources for purposeful and meaningful action in educational contexts as experienced and interpreted by students. Theoretical evocations of agency have been discussed in various disciplines, including social-cognitive psychology [1], [2], sociocultural approach [3], and critical realism [4], to name a few. In learning English as foreign language (EFL) context, the context that defines the sociocultural backgrounds of our students, agency has been recognized as a core dimension in language learning processes in research on foreign/second language teaching and learning [5].

In this article, we adopted the multidimensional view of student agency by Jääskelä *et al.* [6]. Research by Jääskelä *et al.* [6] conceptualized agency as a student's access to having (and using of) individual, relational (i.e., interactional), and context-bound participatory resources to engage in intentional and

meaningful action and learning. Individual resources may refer to "efficacy and competence beliefs, intrinsic motivation and participation tendencies" [6]. Relational resources encompass power relations between the teacher and students, manifesting as students' experiences of trust and emotional support from the teacher as well as experiences of being treated as equals with other students in the course. Context-bound participatory resources refer to a set of factors that enables active and engaged participation, particularly students' self-assessed interest and opportunities for peer support as well as opportunities to make choices, influence, and actively contribute to learning situations. While the contextual resources of agency (including the social, spatial, material, cultural, temporal, relational, and structural resources) are embedded and highly diverse in distribution, students can be supported in education to adopt and adapt to these unpredictable, and possibly unequal distributions [7].

Publications by stakeholders in education such as international organizations, academicians and national governments highlight the necessity of transformation in education to support the development of student agency in classrooms. Student agency and/for lifelong learning is crucial for students to develop as sustainable employability skills [8]. With the accelerated pace of changes in the global 21st century, student agency as well as lifelong learning attitudes and skills are viewed as necessary, yet unable to be promoted by traditional educational systems [9]. Hence, in fast-paced developing economies such as in China for example, national policies such as China Education Modernization 2035 underline the urgency of establishing a lifelong learning system nationwide with more flexible teaching methods and more open channels of learning [10]. In specific, the Double Reduction policy intends to reduce the inefficiencies of the education system ultimately to create equal opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone in China [11].

To sum up the discussion, although there has been extensive literature on what is student agency and why it is important for learning and the learner, the guidelines on how student agency can be developed in the classroom appears to be lacking. There have been sufficient studies that raise the importance of student agency [12]–[16] and examine the factors that contribute to agency [17]–[20]. Nonetheless, pedagogical approaches for student agency should be developed [21], [22]. Thus, with the assumption that conceptual papers can connect existing theories across disciplines, offer multi-level insights that captivate interest and broaden our thinking scope [23], this conceptual paper will develop pedagogical suggestions from two different strands-multiliteracies and translanguaging-to propose a conceptual model framework which can address the knowledge gaps in student agency pertaining to pedagogy. The specific objectives are: i) to identify pedagogical guidelines for student agency from multiliteracies; ii) to identify pedagogical guidelines for student agency from translanguaging. The following research questions guided the achievement of the aim: i) What are the pedagogical guidelines for student agency from multiliteracies?; ii) What are the pedagogical guidelines for student agency from translanguaging? The scope of applicability of multiliteracies and translanguaging will be focused on examples from EFL educational contexts that represent heterogeneous cultures due to the professional interests of the authors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The overall trend of empirical research illustrates the importance of student agency by showing complementary relationships between student agency and lifelong learning skills. Focusing on student agency may develop self-efficacy and capability, as well as cognitive and metacognitive skills – with the underlying goal of developing reflective practitioners and autonomous lifelong learners [12]. An undergraduate program that scaffolded student agency in South Africa benefitted even the marginalized students [13]. Other forms of cognitive development associated with improved student agency which can support lifelong learning include creative thinking, problem solving, and self-regulation [14]. Providing the student autonomy in choosing their own learning route helps to foster critical thinking and reflection, as well as independent learning and the development of the learner's self-efficacy and competence via problem-solving and exploration [15]. In their Delphi study, Lock *et al.* [16] found that, when taught through an approach focused on learner agency, students demonstrated development of important lifelong learning skills such as autonomy, critical thinking, reflection, self-directedness, self-management, and self-regulation.

Research gaps can be found in the contexts of study despite the high number of publications on student agency. Currently, the wide range of studies mostly focus on children or primary and secondary school students [18]. Moreover, contexts of studies on student agency are mostly in the socio-economically advanced areas, such as a relatively elite university in South Africa [13] and educational institutions in USA [15]. Therefore, future research needs to explore more diverse contexts beyond the West or advanced socio-economic contexts.

In terms of factors that contribute student agency, there are some salient findings. Existing research indicates that students from more developed regions have higher levels of student agency [17]. One influential factor of student agency may reside in the social mediation of cultural artifacts, others and self [18]. Current research also draws attention to factors beyond the individual student that may contribute to student agency, including language games [19], the teacher factor [20], [22], and the use of case studies with problem-based learning [24].

The knowledge gap in pedagogy surfaces as a research problem that needs attention. There have been sufficient studies that raise the importance of student agency [12]–[16] and examine the factors that contribute to agency [17]–[20], [24]. Suggestions for future study now lean towards exploring how student agency and lifelong learning can be fostered by pedagogical approaches [21], [22] and warn against relying on technological tools to promote student agency [25].

3. METHOD

We inferred the findings through an analytical review of literature under the guidance of the model approach of Jaakola [23]. We began reviewing student agency as the focal theory [23] to identify the key elements of the concept that needed to be explained and the problems that needed to be addressed pedagogically. Then we reviewed multiliteracies and translanguaging as two method theories [23] that enabled us to advance a conceptual model framework which can address the pedagogical gaps in student agency. Due to the professional contexts of the authors in the paper, we have limited the scope of studies related to the method theories to English as foreign language educational contexts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analytical review of literature which was guided by the model approach of Jaakola [23] suggested that explorations with pedagogy for student agency can begin with multiliteracies and translanguaging to theoretically guide the developments of participatory resources and relational sources of student agency [6]. A strong rationale for highlighting these two approaches would be the increasing research developments that indicate their affordances for developing student agency, both as individual approaches and as complementary approaches. Table 1 depicts in summary how multiliteracies and translanguaging can serve as conceptual references for transforming pedagogy for student agency, which will be elaborated in the sections that follow. Figure 1 illustrates in summary how multiliteracies and translanguaging can provide the theoretical guidelines for pedagogical approaches for student agency.

4.1. Pedagogy of multiliteracies for student agency

Although pedagogy of multiliteracies was not designed to specifically develop student agency, the basic principles and recent studies based on multiliteracies indicate that it can be engaged to promote student agency. The landmark study by the New London Group [26], which emphasized that literacy is multimodal rather than language dominated, theorized that pedagogy of multiliteracies, or multimodal pedagogies, can improve students' multiple literacies and empower them to act on challenges, therefore promoting student agency. Multiliteracies highlight the critical role of instructors in designing for student agency in multimodal meaning-making, which includes scaffolding through overt instruction and developing opportunities for students to analyze and create multimodal texts [22], [27], [28]. Specifically, multiliteracies "acknowledges the significance of student agency in the meaning-making process and considers learners as active designers of meaning" [29].

Studies on multiliteracies demonstrated that students can be scaffolded to exercise agency in different ways to provide the relational resources and participatory resources which contribute to student agency. High school students of migrant and refugee families took ownership of a Claymation movie project by leading different stages of production, and negotiating choices in the storyline and composition to achieve their personalized interpretations [30]. According to Atsani and Damayanti [31], the teacher requested that the students make connections between the narrative text and the world setting, another text, and their personal experiences to extend student agency. Critical framing must be involved in attempts to develop student agency while creating and producing multimodal texts can help students develop a sense of agency [32]. A study in Finnish early childhood showed how student agency can be relationally constructed through cultural resources which can be found in the children themselves, the teachers, the activities which draw on the materials in the surrounding environment, and rules and goals that are put in place [33]. Having worked with students with basic English proficiency in a Saudi Arabian university, Marissa and Hamid [34] proposed multiliteracies afforded student agency through three bridging practices, "where the students skillfully navigated through different reading sources and digital tools when they composed their multimodal texts (technological bridging), thus affording the opportunities for them to express themselves authentically (identity bridging) and to engage with the text that they composed meaningfully (semiotic bridging)". In Singaporean primary schools, Lim and Nguyen [35] showed that multiliteracies scaffold student agency by guiding learning design which "includes providing conceptual and technical resources, planning with guidance, creating action space, and offering feedback to the students." All these interventions which demonstrated positive contributions to student agency through multiliteracies can be planned and managed by trained teachers.

Table 1. Relating multiliteracies and translanguaging to student agency

Theoretical underpinnings	Affordances of theory	Guidelines for teacher classroom practices	Student agency dimensions
Multiliteracies (or multimodal pedagogies)	Multimodal meaning-making	Scaffolding through overt instruction	Relational resources such as teacher support
		Developing opportunities for students to analyze and create multimodal texts	Participatory resources
Translanguaging	Active participation and expanding linguistic repertoire	Providing opportunities to students to exercise or expand their linguistic repertoire	Participatory resources
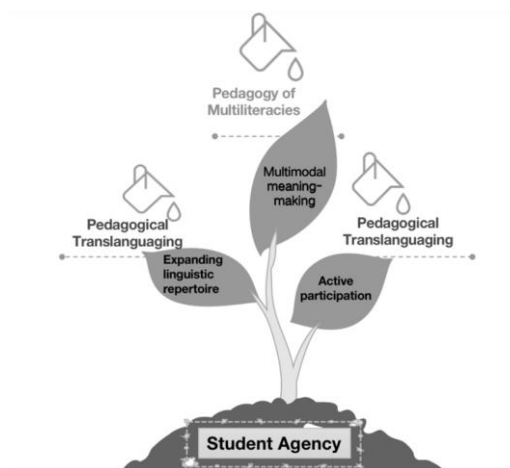
Figure 1. Multiliteracies and translanguaging for student agency

4.2. Pedagogical translanguaging for student agency

The promotion of engaging all the resources in a student's linguistic repertoire is key to the development of student agency under pedagogical translanguaging. According to Cenoz and Gorter [36], [37], translanguaging is a pedagogical theory and practice that refers to instructional strategies that incorporate two or more languages. Allowing for flexible language practices to scaffold the transition to the use of majority language at school has frequently been regarded one of the key roles of translanguaging in the context of language acquisition and multilingual education. Translanguaging (the simplified form of pedagogical translanguaging) can be used as scaffold [38]–[42]; and scaffolding is linked to students' agency and autonomy since students are active participants who are expected to take responsibility for their own learning [37], [43]. Translanguaging encourages learner agency so that he or she plays an active part and learns to be independent in the use of his or her own multilingual resources.

Translanguaging can be used to create the participatory resources for student agency in the EFL context by encouraging active participation and inclusive education from the perspective of multilingualism over the 'English-only' environment. Translanguaging, as interpreted by Garcia and Wei [42], represents the shared assumptions in this field-the affixing in the term underlines the view that language is fluid and the prefix trans- indicates the conceptualization of language as transcending boundaries of national languages and semiotic resources [44]. Theoretically, translanguaging shifts the language teacher's role from developing linguistic knowledge and skills in students to learner agency and their identities [44]. At the very least, translanguaging promotes student agency by establishing an environment in which students are not silenced because they are able to utilize all of their linguistic resources in the classroom [7] and are inadvertently active [33]. The diverse cultural contexts of studies that explored translanguaging in EFL contexts indicate its adaptability and inclusivity. The EFL contexts include migrant learners in South Korea [45], EFL classrooms in Taiwanese high schools [44] and Poland [46], and content and language integrated learning in China [47]. Although the utilization of linguistic repertoire in a translanguaging classroom may be self-initiated by students [45] or intuitive to the teacher [44], designs of formal learning may deepen the connections between translanguaging and student agency by respecting the first language of students, including multilingual play and involving multiple modalities [44]. Different languages can be engaged at the same time to deal with academic challenges, as demonstrated by Uzbek learners in Korean-dominated classrooms who strategically negotiated meanings across Korean, English, and Russian [45]. Therefore, translanguaging supports the development of student agency by providing opportunities to students to exercise or expand their linguistic repertoire. When translanguaging is used for scaffolding and differentiating instruction, meaning-making and deep cognitive engagement can be facilitated by allowing student agency in language choice and use [47], [48].

4.3. Attempts of combining multiliteracies and translanguaging

There have been attempts to combine multiliteracies and translanguaging to complement each framework's strengths. Chen *et al.* [47] developed the phrase "translanguaging multimodal pedagogy" to replace "translanguaging pedagogy" in order to combine translanguaging with multiliteracies to create a technology-enhanced learning experience. Translanguaging embraces the notion of multimodality in multiliteracies; thus multimodality is placed under a unified translanguaging umbrella [47], because multimodality looks beyond language and examines how multiple modes are assembled, designed, and evaluated for different kinds of semiotic work [49]. Another study shows that when adopting translanguaging multimodal pedagogy with advanced electronic teaching technologies in French pronunciation instruction, students can exercise their agency by strategically and spontaneously translanguaging [50]. More personalized student agency can be achieved in language learning when teachers design the learning environment in a way that expose bilingual students to extended resources including print, video/audio, new media and digital technologies, and their own bodies, which are useful in literacy development and in a way that students are guided to individually and collaboratively use these resources to create meaning by fully utilizing their linguistic repertoire [51]. The benefits of a translanguaging multimodal pedagogy includes engaging multilingual students as active learners assembling the different forms of semiosis that make up their entire repertoire and therefore opening the way to more student agency to interrogate traditional language practices and ideologies that impede their education [52].

In summary, in applications in language classrooms, we observe two main points of convergence which draw multiliteracies and translanguaging together although there is still at least one critical point of distinction between these two theories. The converging points are: i) viewing social interactions as multilingual and multi semiotic; and ii) assuming teachers as designers. In terms of points of distinction, in studies informed by multiliteracies, teachers very often involve technology in their multimodal designs of lessons [34], [35], while in translanguaging, teachers recognize linguistic and cultural capital of their own, and the students [53].

5.   CONCLUSION

In this article, we have tried to propose a conceptual model framework which can address the knowledge gaps in student agency pertaining to pedagogy. Since there are no empirically justified approaches for student agency, we propose that multiliteracies and translanguaging can be adopted or adapted to provide the necessary theoretical grounding in the attempts to design pedagogy because they can provide the participatory and relational resources required by attempts to develop student agency. The affordances of multiliteracies for scaffolding multimodal meaning-making provide the relational and participatory resources of student agency while the affordances of translanguaging for motivating active participation and expanding linguistic repertoire of students sustain the participatory resources.

In the implementation of multiliteracies and translanguaging in pedagogy, there will be challenges such as teacher skepticism towards translanguaging, and the necessity to develop competence of teachers in differentiating and deploying multi semiotic resources. Nonetheless, the way forward is collaboration among teachers, researchers and students. After all, existing studies have empirically shown that multiliteracies and translanguaging are applicable for student agency in heterogeneous contexts such as English as foreign language classrooms. We hope that this conceptual model framework can guide teachers in designing and developing pedagogical approaches for student agency, a fundamental bridge to lifelong learning skills which are essential for current and future employability.

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