

Fostering Cultural Awareness and Identity Through Multimodal Approaches: An Action Research Study

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Abstract: This action research study explores how multimodal approaches, particularly digital infographics, foster cultural awareness and self-identity among sixth-grade minority students. Using Schmidt's ABC's model of cultural understanding and communication, students engaged in autobiographical writing, peer interviews, and cross-cultural comparisons. The findings highlight how these activities and digital storytelling encourage self-expression, empathy, and connection. This study emphasizes integrating culturally responsive, creative practices to promote equity, belonging, and student empowerment in educational settings.

This research study examines how multimodal approaches, particularly digital infographics, foster cultural awareness and self-identity among sixth-grade minority students. Utilizing Schmidt's ABC's model of cultural understanding and communication (1998), the study explores how engaging students in reflective and creative tasks can deepen their understanding of their cultural values, personal histories, and linguistic skills. Through this process, students not only showcased their identities but also recognized their personal experiences and explored their sense of belonging to their culture, language, and home country (Zammit, 2018).

The study involved three phases aligned with Schmidt's (1998) model: autobiographical writing (A), biography creation through peer interviews (B), and cross-cultural comparison using Venn diagrams (C). In the autobiographical phase, students reflected on their names, language, childhood stories, special person and special place and articulated how their cultural journeys form their identity. The biography phase allowed students to develop interviewing skills, fostering interpersonal connections and enhancing their ability to engage with others' experiences. The Venn diagram phase highlighted shared human experiences across cultural differences, encouraging students to recognize both commonalities and unique perspectives.

By creating digital infographics, students were given a multimodal platform to represent their identities creatively. This approach not only allowed them to visually express their cultural narratives but also facilitated deeper engagement with their peers' stories (Fehling, 2014). The multimodal aspect of the project provided opportunities for creativity, enabling students to convey complex ideas through both textual and visual means (Rowse & Walsh, 2011). Through this process, students were able to form lasting connections with their own experiences and with their classmates, fostering a collaborative and inclusive classroom environment.

The participatory nature of the action research methodology ensured that diverse voices were recognized and valued throughout the project (Takahashi & Yu, 2016). The collaborative activities encouraged students to engage in critical reflection, deepening their understanding of cultural diversity and the importance of empathy. As a result, the classroom became a space where multiple cultural perspectives were honored, and students developed a stronger sense of community and belonging.

The findings from this study underscore the potential of multimodal strategies to promote cultural awareness, self-confidence, and equity in education. By integrating personal narratives with interactive tasks, students not only gained a deeper understanding of their identities but also developed essential communication skills and fostered relationships across cultural boundaries (Finkbeiner & Lazar, 2014). This study highlights the importance of providing students with creative outlets to explore and share their identities and calls on educators to implement innovative, culturally responsive practices that nurture inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Overall, this research demonstrates how multimodal approaches, when combined with culturally responsive pedagogy, can empower students to express themselves confidently, appreciate cultural differences, and build lasting relationships (Golneshan & Morina, 2025). It advocates for an educational future where diverse identities are celebrated and where all students feel seen, heard, and valued.

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