

 Research Article

Bridging Language Education's Theory–Practice Divide: The Interplay of Theoretical and Practical Approaches in Language Learning

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Abstract

There have always been discussions about the interplay and persistent gap between theoretical and practical knowledge in teacher training. Although both educational research and practical application are essential, more subjective learning experiences are required to allow teachers to connect theory with practice in meaningful ways. For several decades, scholars in the field of teacher education have suggested integrating approaches to support research from an insider perspective on the effects of teaching strategies and theories. Yet, the existing theories that have traditionally framed the relationship between theory and practice do not fully assist teachers in developing practical education in real-world situations, and there is still a gap between theory and practice. Inspired by the constructivist socio-cultural perspective theory of practical artifacts and guided by a post-positivist paradigm, the authors provided in-service and prospective language teachers in a graduate Applied Linguistics course opportunities to apply relevant theoretical knowledge to their teaching practices in a language learning setting, thereby addressing this gap. The data from this qualitative research are part of the structured journaling assignment in an authentic environment as part of the students' linguistic practice. The participants were instructed to describe their language learning experience during the linguistic course. The study's results provide a holistic perspective on investigating the interplay between theory and practice, drawing on participants' real language learning experiences that shape the development of their teacher identity. The study findings indicate that the participants experienced an increase in their ability to operationalize linguistic theory in applied contexts and link theoretical language teaching concepts to real classroom practices.

Keywords: Language Teaching, Practical Artifacts, Teacher Education, Teacher Identity

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1. INTRODUCTION

The persistent gap between theory and practice in teacher training, particularly in the realm of language learning, continues to challenge educational researchers and practitioners. While theoretical frameworks provide a robust structure for understanding teaching processes and learning outcomes, translating these frameworks into classroom practices is a complex process that involves navigating contextual constraints, learner dynamics, and evolving pedagogical demands.

The gap is especially pronounced in teacher training, where prospective language educators must bridge their academic knowledge with practical teaching competencies in dynamic language environments. This manuscript aims to explore how structured practical experiences grounded in socio-cultural theories can help narrow this gap by offering real-world applications of theoretical knowledge.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Theoretical Perspectives on Teacher Training

Several theoretical frameworks have been advanced to elucidate the complex relationship between theory and practice in teacher education. The research–practice gap in education has multifaceted causes that cannot be resolved simply by more effective research to impact strategies, although experts have different opinions on the application of theory (Cheema & Perry, 2025; Georgiou et al., 2023; Robinson, 1998). Some scholars highlight this gap because of established social patterns in schools. The learning process in teacher education, along with teachers' prior knowledge and preconceptions, may influence how they apply theory in practice (Alexander, 2019; Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Lortie, 1975; Oved & Raichel, 2024; Wubbels, 1992). To link theory to practice, effective learning should utilize active engagement and real-world practice, considering the emotional dimensions of teaching (Lozano & Grewal, 2023; Rodriguez Sandoval et al., 2022). Pedagogy, which is the connection between culture and learning methods, directly relates to interactivity between learners and educators (Li et al., 2024; Muniandy & Abdullah, 2023).

Teacher identity deeply simulates teaching practices, with meaningful learning outcomes often being personal and difficult to measure (Bullough, 1997; Bullough & Kauchak, 1997; Cishe et al., 2015; Groenewald & Arnold, 2025; Lewis & Quinnell, 2024; Marcel, 2024; Vermunt et al., 2023; Xu, 2025). Transition to tech-support inclusive educational settings outlines teachers' beliefs, practices, and professional identities (El-Soussi, 2024; Peretti et al., 2024). One such framework is the constructivist socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes the creation of “practical artifacts” to facilitate the application of theoretical knowledge in real contexts (Clarà & Mauri, 2010; Hevner & vom Brocke, 2023). Sociocultural and socio-constructivist theories play an active role in artifacts in teaching and learning (Cole, 1996/1998; Nithideechaiwarachok & Chano, 2024; Reitan et al., 2022; Vygotsky, 1978/1987/1986; Wertsch, 1991). In this approach, teachers construct meaning and develop professional knowledge through reflective practice, collaboration, and interaction with their environment. Social constructionism suggests that there are no absolute truths or universally defined notions of right and wrong. Instead, each person creates their own reality based on their experiences and perceptions. In this framework, language, communication, and speech are crucial social constructs that help shape understanding of both the world and ourselves as educators. Teachers play a key role by employing collaborative, learner-centered teaching methods to support this understanding (Saleem et al., 2021; Zeinstra et al., 2023).

1.1.2. Practical Applications in Teacher Education

As education continues to evolve, it is essential to adapt teaching methods to meet the changing needs of students. Traditional lecture-based instruction is being replaced by more interactive and engaging strategies that rely on an understanding of the variety of learning styles, highlighting the importance of personalizing education to accommodate individual learning preferences (Bakker et al., 2024; Dixit et al., 2024; Rigopouli et al., 2025). The challenge of translating theoretical knowledge into practical skills remains a core focus of teacher education research. Educators want students not only to understand theoretical concepts but also to know how to apply them in real-world situations. However, many students struggle to confidently bridge the gap between theory and practice within courses. Teaching candidates walk into classrooms with little or no previous teaching experience, where they naturally face a sharp difference between their theoretical observations and real classroom practices (Barnes & Franceschini, 2026; Beshah & Anshu, 2024; Douglas, 2022). Pre-service and in-service training should enable teachers to bridge the theories they practice in schools.

Integrating theory and practice in meaningful ways can help students see the practical value of what they learn (Wrenn & Wrenn, 2009). The active learning model stands out by prioritizing hands-on experience over passive listening as a method of gaining knowledge (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Coulshed, 1993; Felder & Brent, 2003; Fink, 2013; Freeman et al., 2014; Kandra & Vennam, 2025; Lombardi et al., 2021; Miller & Boud, 1996; Rezai et al., 2025). Scholars have identified structured practice opportunities, such as internships, practicum courses, and collaborative reflective journals, as key methods to help prospective teachers integrate theory into their daily instructional routines (Engeström & Sannino, 2020; Rigopouli et al., 2025; Rosa & Valsiner, 2018).

Learning is deeply influenced by real-life experiences. When instructors teach a concept in theory, they can enhance understanding by sharing real-life experiences and examples. For instance, if a teacher is introducing Vygotsky's theory of social interaction for social learning and cognitive growth, real-life examples can make the topic more relatable and meaningful for students. Practicing cultural norms and social beliefs also shape how people learn a language. Engaging culturally and socially with the target language helps individuals gain diverse linguistic knowledge and experience (Hossain, 2024; Puspita Ratri et al., 2024).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design situated within a classroom-based intervention. The design integrated elements of design-based research to examine how graduate students integrated linguistic theory with foreign language practice within a single course structure. The course served as a bounded instructional system in which theory and practice were deliberately sequenced within each weekly session. The participants in this study were selected using a convenience sampling strategy from a graduate applied linguistics course that was readily accessible over a five-year period, where the participants who were easily available to researchers were selected. The study aimed to explore the processes through which students transferred theoretical knowledge into applied pedagogical and linguistic performance contexts.

2.2. Participants

The study involved a cohort of graduate-level students enrolled in a course of Applied Linguistics in Second Language Acquisition. The participants were pre-service and in-service teachers at the College of Education. The participants were from various backgrounds, including both international and native English speakers, with 78% female and 22% male, in the age range of 25 to 50 years old. Some of the international participants were multilinguals practicing an additional language through this study. The prospective teachers were exposed to a variety of teaching and learning scenarios that allowed for the practical application of theoretical concepts.

PARTICIPANTS' NATIVE LANGUAGE

■ English ■ Spanish ■ Chinese ■ Others

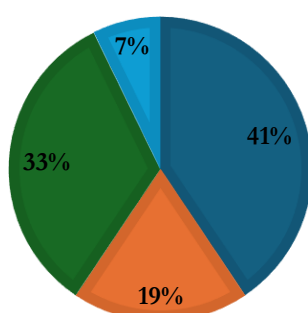


Figure 1. Participants' Native Languages

2.3. Research Instruments

During the first portion of each session, students engaged with foundational and applied linguistic theories through lectures, guided discussions, case analyses, and conceptual mapping tasks. Instruction emphasized discourse analysis, language acquisition principles, pedagogical linguistics, and related frameworks relevant to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

The final 45 minutes of each session were conducted in the target foreign language and centered on applying the same theoretical principles introduced earlier. Instruction during this segment included mini-lectures delivered in the foreign language, structured discussion board interactions, online interactive language activities, pre-recorded video assignments, and guided speaking tasks.

Multiple technological tools were used to support methodological triangulation and simultaneous content and language instruction, including a learning management system for activities and submissions, video-recording platforms for speaking demonstrations, pre-recorded conversational videos for listening practices, reflective journaling, online discussion interactions, instructional artifacts, and instructor field notes. The design aligned with principles of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), emphasizing concurrent development of conceptual understanding and language proficiency.

Structured reflective journals served as the primary qualitative instrument. Students completed periodic monthly reflective entries throughout the semester in response to guided prompts designed to elicit connections between theory and practice. Prompts encouraged students to articulate how linguistic theories were manifested in foreign language activities, identify challenges in implementation, and reflect on professional growth.

Students submitted assignments based on recorded video tasks demonstrating the application of linguistic theories in simulated teaching tasks and foreign language speaking activities. These artifacts provided evidence of theoretical integration, pedagogical reasoning, and language performance. Discussion posts and online collaborative interactions were collected through the course learning management system. These data captured peer dialogue, conceptual conversation, and evidence of theory-informed discourse in written form.

Additional course artifacts included written assignments, practice exercises, activity submissions, and conceptual maps. These materials provided supplementary evidence of theoretical understanding and practical application. The researchers retained field notes that documented classroom dynamics, transitions between theoretical and practical segments, observed student engagement, and emerging instructional patterns.

2.4. Procedures

Data were collected across the full 15-week semester for five consecutive years. Reflective journals were submitted electronically at scheduled intervals. Video submissions were uploaded through secure course platforms. Discussion board interactions were archived through the learning management system. All data were anonymized prior to analysis, and identifying information was removed. The participants were exposed to the discourse of linguistics and practices of the course for the first two hours of each class session once a week. The last forty-five minutes of the same session were taught in a foreign language, around the same theories in practice. The foreign language lessons were delivered in different formats, including lectures, discussion boards, online practices, pre-recorded videos, and speaking activities. Various technological tools were used to teach content and language together. The students wrote several reflective journals throughout the semester, in which they could reflect on their progress and revisit the theories in practical experiences. Journals were analyzed to identify themes related to the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical teaching tasks. Data were collected from various assignments, such as their submissions to pre-recorded videos, interactions on online applications, class activities, and structured journaling assignments.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative and inductive process. Findings were triangulated across journals, videos, online discussions, artifacts, and field notes to enhance credibility; Converging patterns across multiple data sources were prioritized in theme development. Reflective journals were analyzed using thematic analysis procedures. Initial open coding was conducted to identify recurring concepts related to theory–practice integration, metacognitive awareness, pedagogical transfer, and language-mediated learning. The qualitative data were coded by the principal investigator to maintain in-depth, iterative engagement with the data, enhancing analytic coherence and interpretive depth (Saldaña, 2021). Codes were then

organized into broader categories through axial coding; Selective coding was subsequently used to identify overarching themes that captured patterns across participants. To ensure rigor and consistency in coding, the principal investigator employed systematic coding procedures, including the development of a codebook, ongoing refinement of codes through constant comparison, and repeated review of the data to ensure stability and alignment of themes (Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, analytic memos were maintained throughout the coding process to document decision-making and enhance transparency.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Bridging Theory and Practice

The analysis of the structured journals revealed that prospective teachers often revisited theoretical principles in authentic classroom settings. Table 1 represents the references to theorists mentioned in participant reflections. Learners consistently reported being able to directly connect theories from the applied linguistics course to their language learning experience. Full immersion in the target foreign language was initially overwhelming, but scaffolded with gestures, visuals, and selective translation, aligning with Krashen's theory. Cultural and social understanding were other key takeaways from this language practice experience; being a language student in the target socio-cultural setting helped participants build relationships with native speakers of the target language and deepen their pedagogical understanding of learners' needs. The participants expressed cultural integration through this linguistic journey. Learning about food, songs, traditional events, and norms made the experience more engaging and holistic, aligning with CLT and Sociocultural Theory.

Table 1. Data From Reflective Journals

Linguistic Theory	Participants' Experience	Course Practice Alignment
Input Hypothesis & Affective Filter (Krashen, 1982, 1985)	Multiple participants mentioned the importance of comprehensible input (spoken, written, visuals, gestures) and a low-stress environment that encourages participation.	Language immersion, visual aids, gestures, occasional code-switching to English, and a supportive classroom atmosphere.
Sociocultural Theory ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978)	Participants emphasized learning through interaction with more knowledgeable speakers (teacher/classmates) and dialogue practice.	Use of peer dialogues, collaborative tasks, and scaffolding by the teacher during complex topics.
Skill Acquisition Theory (Dekeyser, 2007)	Emphasis on practice and automatization, with repetition of greetings, grammar, and morphology.	Activities focused on repetition, dialogue drills, and practical usage, reinforcing that language is a skill learned through use.
Behaviorism (Skinner, 1974)	Linking their experience to memorization and repetition, especially for vocabulary and pronunciation.	Frequent repetition exercises, choral repetition, and structured practice of forms (e.g., demonstrative adjectives, personal pronouns).
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Richards & Rodgers, 2014)	Support for real-life communication, fluency, and authentic materials like food, songs, and poems.	Use of Culture, food, dialogue practices, authentic tasks, songs/poems, and cultural discussions to encourage real-world communication.
Grammar-Based Teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2003)	Participants noted that their language learning went beyond grammar to include pragmatics, culture, sounds, and orthography. Some stated that though the communicative method was the predominant method of teaching, the traditional grammar-based method, at some points of the class, for explanation, has been very useful to learn basic grammar to create sentences.	Lessons incorporated multiple dimensions of language, not just grammar, including cultural immersion, language in use, and pragmatic awareness.
Output Hypothesis (Swain, 2005)	Some reflections mentioned active production (e.g., repeating, doing dialogues), which helps consolidate learning.	Teachers encouraged student output via speaking activities and structured dialogues, giving learners the chance to test their knowledge and receive feedback.

3.2. Impact of Practical Artifacts on Learning

The socio-cultural approach, emphasizing practical artifacts, enabled participants to contextualize theoretical concepts and reflect on their teaching experiences. This reflective practice helped shape their teaching positionalities and provided a more integrated understanding of theory and practice.

The data obtained from assignments and reflective journals focused on primary, secondary, and tertiary artifacts, where primary artifacts led to the development of secondary and tertiary artifacts. The participants' reflections were represented as artifacts that were created and resulted from real activities and language practices. As mentioned in their research, Reitan and her colleagues had a simple example of the speed bump as a primary artifact, where the secondary artifact is a traffic sign representing the bump, and consequently a tertiary artifact as more careful driving (Reitan et al., 2022). Based on this interpretation, the pre-service teachers experienced what it feels like to be linguistically vulnerable, as their future multilingual students would face every day. Experiencing stress and the anxiety of being in a completely foreign language environment were the primary artifacts reflected in their journals that led to awareness of learners' struggles in language learning. Understanding mediation through scaffolding and providing a support system was reflected in secondary artifacts that could lead to their tertiary artifacts, with the growth mindset and changes in teaching behaviors toward more culturally responsive practices in language teaching. In summary, in this context, the "speed bump" example illustrates how direct linguistic struggle (primary artifact), mediated supports (secondary artifact), and reflective transformation (tertiary artifact) work together to shape culturally responsive teacher identity. Engagement with practical artifacts allows learners to revisit their roles as both language learners and emerging educators. They could review their teacher identity in engaged, emotionally mediated ways, shaped through engagement with pedagogical practices and experiences, as earlier cited in research (Mekheimer, 2025; Xu, 2025).

The students' reflections on learning a foreign language reveal that practical artifacts, such as culturally authentic materials, classroom experiences, and teaching strategies, play a crucial role in bridging theory and practice in second language acquisition (SLA). These artifacts helped solidify linguistic concepts, deepen cultural understanding, and support learner motivation and engagement. Authentic materials situate language within relevant social and cultural contexts, which enhances learners' ability to internalize both linguistic forms and pragmatic use, as was also implied in recent empirical research (Latifah et al., 2025).

Students consistently described cultural experiences, especially food, poetry, songs, and cultural traditions, as powerful tools that made language learning more meaningful and memorable and as a gateway to deeper learning. For instance, the sharing of a traditional dish of the target language was seen as "*a bridge that connects words with experiences*," allowing students to practice vocabulary in an authentic context while developing cultural empathy. The participants reflected their linguistic experience through music and could make a connection between language and the music of the language they were practicing:

"I had never heard about Mohsen Yeganeh before, and I have just checked his music on YouTube, and I love it; it is so relaxing".

"Learning something different from my own culture is quite fun! I want to try cooking their food while listening to their music."

These examples align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes learning through culturally embedded practices and social interaction.

3.2.1. Primary Artifacts

The participants mentioned several primary artifacts that they applied in their learning practices during the language learning process. The most mentioned primary artifacts included online modules, recorded mini-lessons, digital applications, and virtual resources. The participants expressed that applying authentic and immersive materials would support theoretical Learning. Authentic materials expose learners to language as it is naturally used, thereby enhancing their communicative competence and helping them internalize linguistic forms within meaningful contexts, as supported by recent research in this area (Ibrahim Mohamed & Al-Jadaan, 2024).

The reflections reveal that authentic materials such as foods, songs, poems, and shows reinforced students. They also recognized the role of repetition and practice, key components of Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser) and Behaviorism (Skinner), remarking that repetition, imitation, and consistent exposure helped build fluency.

“When I looked for their songs and poems, I realized how engaging authentic materials are”. “Sharing a meal, talking about our preferences, or following a recipe in another language are opportunities to practice and learn in an authentic way, immersing ourselves in the everyday life of a new linguistic environment.”

“The constant exposure has built my listening skills and helped me recognize patterns in their language.”

The participants could see the effectiveness of these artifacts in enhancing their ability to support continuous and flexible learning beyond the classroom. Unlike traditional materials, language learners could experience how these digital tools enabled them to revisit content, practice repeatedly, and engage with language in diverse contexts. This extended exposure increases both the quantity and quality of language input, which is essential for acquisition and supported by research (Mihaylova et al., 2022).

“This has influenced my thoughts on language teaching as it has shown me how important it is to use repetition when teaching language.”

“Repetition and exposure in class have been so helpful. As with anything, practice makes perfect progress, so making myself try again and again at getting the pronunciation and written letters correct has been great at improving my skills.”

3.2.2. Secondary Artifacts: Scaffolding and Mediated Supports

Several applications were introduced during the semester that language learners found useful throughout their language learning process. Some online group chat applications were introduced that students found useful for practicing their four language skills, including ‘Telegram’ and ‘WhatsApp’. In group chat applications, learners leave messages in the target language for each other, record their voices or videos created for language learning purposes, and instructors can provide immediate feedback for their linguistic development. They found visual and auditory activities helpful in practicing vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation of words simultaneously. The online platforms facilitated continuous, authentic, and multimodal interaction, which extends language learning beyond the traditional classroom. The participants indicated that creating these environments enabled them to engage in real-time and asynchronous communication, thereby increasing opportunities for meaningful language use, sustained practice, and immediate feedback, as supported by research (Alexiadou & Sougari, 2025; Sari, 2024).

“Using online resources, like YouTube tutorials and the language modules, has provided structured support that I find very helpful.”

“The media that helps me in these few weeks in learning language are the Telegram group and videos about daily conversation.”

“It is a particularly innovative idea to practice through Telegram. I feel like it really helps a lot if you practice a language every day.”

“It’s been helpful to watch the videos that are posted in the Telegram chat. I think they help confirm things I understand, and they help me solidify the ideas in my head.”

Language learners noted the value of being self-disciplined, practice-oriented, and having the freedom to use their own learning style at a reasonable pace and extent. Multiple students reflected on the role of interaction and application, and how interactive classroom activities such as simple dialogues, peer practice, and responding to real-life scenarios aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). They emphasized that practicing language with classmates or following along in a full-immersion environment helped them internalize structures and vocabulary more effectively than abstract instruction alone.

“Being a student puts you in the position of processing input... motivating the students can be the best cure to this.”

“I think the part of talking with peers in that language in a special situation does good to me mostly.”

The study presented how artifact-based learning promotes reflection and theoretical alignment. Importantly, students frequently connected their practical learning to theoretical frameworks, as many cited Krashen's Input Hypothesis (benefits of comprehensible input and immersion), Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (learning through social interaction and cultural tools), Skill Acquisition Theory (language learning as a gradual, practiced skill), and Affective Filter Hypothesis (emotional comfort enhances acquisition).

“This experience has helped me take the more abstract information about theories and turn it into something more practical.”

“Krashen's theory of comprehensible input has definitely influenced this experience for me.”

“I see many theories going on here. I can see Krashen always present, with his affective filter and how the snacks and the friendly conversation help lower this filter.”

“Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is reflected in how I improve through interactions with more knowledgeable speakers, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) aligns with my desire to use this new language in real-life conversations.”

3.2.3. Tertiary Artifact: Teacher Identity Development

The results highlight the importance of creating experiential learning opportunities that blend theory with practical application. By engaging with both theoretical knowledge and real-world classroom dynamics, teacher-students developed more nuanced and flexible teaching identities. Student teachers experienced empathy and role reversal through this linguistic journey, in which practical experience would shape pedagogical vision. Engagement in collaborative, practice-based activities encouraged student teachers to challenge prior assumptions, negotiate meaning, and develop more adaptive pedagogical approaches, as supported by Magill et al. (2026).

The findings can be further understood through the lens of experiential learning theory and teacher identity development, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between theory, practice, and reflective engagement. The observed development of more nuanced and flexible teaching identities among student teachers is likely attributable to the high levels of learning engagement and adaptability fostered through experiential activities. Active engagement in authentic learning contexts strengthens pre-service teachers' self-concept and adaptability, which in turn significantly enhances their professional identity formation, as reinforced by scholars (Li, 2025; Ye et al., 2025). The finding revealed that the practical experience of being a language learner shaped students' identities as future teachers. Many described how this immersive and artifact-rich classroom experience allowed them to see language from their future students' perspectives. The emotional impact of engaging with real language in meaningful contexts reinforced the value of low affective filters, a key component of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis.

“The class atmosphere is friendly and enjoyable... I am able to speak a new language, knowing that I will not be judged.”

“But when you become a student again, you can feel the difficulties and mental changes that students will encounter in acquiring a new language from a first perspective, which is a great reference for teaching.”

“Exploring the food of a foreign culture invites us to see the world from a different perspective, to open our minds and to develop an empathy that transcends words.”

“Thanks to this experience, I am changing my perspective, which is allowing me to speak the target language most of the time to my students.”

4. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how pre-service and in-service teachers integrated linguistic theory with foreign language practice within a structured, theory-to-practice instructional model. Findings indicate that the deliberate sequencing of theoretical discourse followed by immediate foreign language application supported meaningful conceptual transfer, increased metacognitive awareness, and

fostered professional language development. The results suggest that embedding applied linguistic practice within theoretical coursework may strengthen the coherence between knowledge acquisition and pedagogical implementation. The journal reflections clearly demonstrate that practical artifacts, cultural experiences, immersive teaching practices, and authentic materials, will enhance language learning by making theoretical knowledge concrete as supported by previous research (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Coulshed, 1993; Felder & Brent, 2003; Fink, 2013; Freeman et al., 2014; Kandra & Vennam, 2025; Lombardi et al., 2021; Miller & Boud, 1996; Rezai et al., 2025). These artifacts promote deeper engagement, reinforce linguistic concepts, and foster a greater sense of empathy and self-awareness in learners. For language educators, integrating such artifacts is not only beneficial but essential for creating rich, theory-informed, and student-centered learning environments.

4.1. Theory-to-Practice Transfer

One of the central findings of this study was the emergence of explicit connections between theoretical concepts and practical implementation. Across reflective journals, video submissions, and online discussions, participants increasingly referenced theoretical knowledge when describing instructional decisions and language performance. This progression suggests that the immediate application of theoretical concepts in a foreign language context facilitated deeper cognitive processing.

The structured alignment of the weekly instructional segments appeared to reduce the abstraction often associated with linguistic theory. Rather than perceiving theory as separate from practice, students demonstrated growing ability to operationalize concepts such as discourse features, language acquisition principles, and pedagogical scaffolding in concrete tasks. This finding supports the argument that proximity between theoretical instruction and experiential performance enhances transfer of learning (Lozano & Grewal, 2023; Rodriguez Sandoval et al., 2022).

4.2. Metacognitive Development and Reflective Awareness

The reflective journals revealed substantial growth in metacognitive awareness over the semester. Early notes often focused on surface-level descriptions of activities, whereas later reflections demonstrated analytical depth, including identification of theoretical traces within practical tasks. Participants articulated tensions between conceptual understanding and implementation challenges, indicating an increased professional self-awareness.

This developmental trajectory suggests that structured reflection functioned as a mediational tool, enabling students to internalize theoretical knowledge through connected practice. The iterative journaling process appeared to promote not only recognition of theory–practice connections but also to evolve pedagogical identity, as mentioned earlier (Clarà & Mauri, 2010; Hevner & vom Brocke, 2023; Nithideechaiwarachok & Chano, 2024; Reitan et al., 2022).

4.3. Professional Discourse and Language-Mediated Cognition

Discourse analysis of reflective journals and assignments indicated a shift in participants' professional language use over time. Students increasingly integrated discipline-specific language with greater accuracy and contextual appropriateness. This shift suggests that engagement in foreign language practice around theoretical concepts may have reinforced both linguistic proficiency and conceptual precision.

The simultaneous use of content knowledge and foreign language expression appeared to create a cognitively demanding yet productive learning space. Participants demonstrated evidence of language-mediated cognition, as theoretical concepts were rehearsed, exchanged, and reformulated in the target language. This dual processing may have strengthened conceptual consolidation.

4.4. Technology as a Mediation Tool

The integration of technological tools, including pre-recorded videos, online practice platforms, and interactive language applications, played a significant role in supporting theory-practice training. Asynchronous discussion boards extended conceptual dialogue beyond class time, while recorded speaking tasks encouraged deliberate articulation of theoretical reasoning.

The multimodal design appeared to provide varied entry points for engagement, accommodating different communicative strengths while reinforcing consistent conceptual goals. Technology functioned not merely as a delivery mechanism but as a scaffold for reflective and applied learning.

4.5. Implications for Teacher Education

The findings have several implications for teacher preparation programs. First, the structured pairing of theory and practice within a single session may address longstanding concerns regarding fragmentation in teacher education curricula, as noted by some scholars earlier (Li et al., 2024; Muniandy & Abdullah, 2023). Integrating language practice directly after theoretical instruction may enhance transfer and reduce the perceived gap between academic coursework and classroom application, which was also mentioned earlier by several researchers (Saleem et al., 2021; Zeinstra et al., 2023).

Teachers can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes by designing tasks that combine theoretical input with practice-based, multimodal activities, such as collaborative group chats, recorded mini-lessons, and real-world communicative tasks. These approaches foster not only linguistic development but also learner autonomy, reflective practice, and identity formation, which are critical in both language learning and teacher preparation contexts.

Second, reflective journaling emerged as a powerful mechanism for professional growth. Programs seeking to cultivate pedagogical reasoning may benefit from embedding systematic, theory-focused reflective assignments across coursework. These practices will deepen teaching theories with meaningful and measurable instructional outcomes, as suggested by some scholars earlier (Groenewald & Arnold, 2025; Marcel, 2024; Vermunt et al., 2023). Incorporating content instruction within real-life practices would develop both conceptual mastery and instructional awareness, particularly for educators preparing to work with culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

Third, the findings carry implications for curriculum developers, practitioners, and program designers. Language and teacher education curricula should be structured to intentionally integrate authentic, practice-oriented components alongside theoretical instruction. This may include embedding digital platforms, multimodal resources, and reflective tasks into course design to promote continuous engagement and applied learning. Curriculum frameworks should also emphasize the development of 21st-century teaching competencies, such as digital literacy, adaptability, and culturally responsive pedagogy, supported by various learning artifacts.

Ultimately, at the policy and institutional decision-making level, the results support the need for sustained investment in technology-enhanced learning environments and teacher training initiatives. Policymakers should consider supporting professional development programs that equip educators with the skills to effectively integrate digital tools and experiential pedagogies into their teaching. In addition, institutional policies should encourage flexible, learner-centered approaches that extend beyond traditional classroom boundaries, recognizing the role of informal and digitally mediated learning spaces in language acquisition.

In summary, the study highlights that effective language learning and teacher development are best supported through integrated, experiential, and technology-enhanced approaches, offering actionable insights for educators, researchers, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to align theory with practice in contemporary educational contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

The interplay between theory and practice remains a fundamental aspect of effective teacher training. By embedding structured practical experiences within a socio-cultural theoretical framework, it is possible to bridge the gap between these two domains. Future research should continue to explore innovative approaches for fostering meaningful connections between educational theory and classroom practice.

This study demonstrates that intentional practices of theoretical instruction with immediate foreign language application would foster meaningful integration of knowledge and practice. Through reflective journaling, discourse engagement, and multimodal technological supports, participants demonstrated increasing capacity to operationalize linguistic theory in applied contexts. The findings contribute to ongoing conversations about coherence in teacher education and suggest that structured, language-mediated enactment of theory may enhance both conceptual understanding and professional formation.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a single department at a single institution, with limited generalizability. The instructors also served as researchers, introducing potential bias despite reflective and peer-debriefing processes. Additionally, while qualitative findings suggest conceptual growth, quantitative measures of learning outcomes were not included.

Future research may integrate comparative designs, longitudinal tracking, or quantitative assessments of theoretical retention and pedagogical transfer. Future studies might examine whether similar theory-to-practice sequencing yields comparable outcomes in different disciplinary contexts or with undergraduate populations. Research could also explore how varying the duration or intensity of foreign language integration influences conceptual development. Finally, examining student outcomes in subsequent teaching placements would provide insight into the durability of theory-practice transfer.

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