

MULTIMODALITY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Resume:

This article closely studies the implementation of the multimodality concept in English Language Teaching (ELT). The author defines what is meant by multimodality and multimodal literacy, discusses the concepts of viewing and representing and how these can be incorporated into the classroom practice. It is emphasized that in recent decades, literacy has shifted from being understood solely by reading and writing printed text to a more expansive concept that includes various semiotic resources: visual, auditory, gestural, spatial, and linguistic. The article examines the pedagogical importance of developing students' representing skills, outlines classroom-based integration strategies, explores how representing can be extended beyond the classroom, and offers practical examples for English language educators. Grounded in current multimodal theory and practice, the article emphasizes representing as both a creative and cognitive process fundamental to contemporary literacy. The article also explores the implications of multimodal literacy for three key educational pillars in English Language Teaching: course materials, curriculum design, and teacher professional development. Drawing on theoretical frameworks and empirical research, it argues that embracing multimodal approaches enhances learner engagement, addresses diverse literacies, and requires systemic change in how language education is conceptualized and delivered.

Key words:

multimodality; ELT; student; multimodal literacy; viewing; representing; assessment.

Анотація:

Зіненко Наталія. Мультимодальність у викладанні англійської мови.

У статті детально досліджується впровадження концепції мультимодальності у викладанні англійської мови. Автор дає визначення термінам «мультимодальність» і «мультимодальна грамотність», розглядає поняття візуалізації та репрезентації, а також способи їх інтеграції в навчальну практику. Наголошується, що в останні десятиліття поняття грамотності вийшло за межі традиційного розуміння, яке передбачає вміння читати і писати друкований текст, і нині охоплює різноманітні семіотичні ресурси: візуальні, аудіальні, жестикуляційні, просторові та лінгвістичні. Стаття аналізує важливість розвитку в учнів умінь репрезентації, окреслює стратегії інтеграції в навчальне середовище, досліджує можливості виходу репрезентативних навичок за межі класної кімнати та пропонує практичні приклади для викладачів англійської мови. Спираючись на сучасну теорію та практику мультимодальності, автор підкреслює, що репрезентація є як творчим, так і когнітивним процесом, що є основою сучасної грамотності. Окрім того, стаття розглядає наслідки мультимодальної грамотності для трьох ключових аспектів викладання англійської мови: навчальні матеріали, проектування навчальних програм і професійний розвиток вчителів. На основі теоретичних засад та емпіричних досліджень висловлюється думка, що впровадження мультимодального підходу сприяє залученню учнів, враховує різноманіття форм грамотності та вимагає системних змін у способі концептуалізації та реалізації мовної освіти.

Ключові слова:

multimodality; English as a second language; student; multimodal literacy; review; representation; assessment.

Setting of the problem. The concept of multimodality in teaching English refers to the integration of multiple modes of communication, such as text, images, gestures, audio, video, and digital tools into language instruction. While this approach enhances student engagement and reflects real-world communication practices, its implementation raises challenges related to pedagogy, accessibility, and assessment. The adoption of multimodality in English Language Teaching (ELT) marks a significant departure from traditional, predominantly text-centric teaching methods. This approach, which integrates various modes of communication, aims to mirror the complexity and diversity of real-world communication more accurately. This shift not only enhances the teaching and learning experience but also prepares students more effectively for the multifaceted nature of contemporary communication (Zirit Carrizo, F.). Multimodality, as defined by Jewitt and Kress (2003), involves the use of multiple semiotic modes in communication, each contributing to the meaning-making process. These modes include linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial elements, all of which play a significant role in how we understand and interact with the world (Kress, G., 2010, p. 87). In ELT, the incorporation of these

modes seeks to engage learners in a more holistic and interactive learning experience, recognizing that language learning extends beyond mere textual comprehension (Jewitt, C., & Kress, G., 2003). There are certain challenges in using multimodality in ELT. First, it is complexity in implementation. Teachers may find it difficult to design lessons that balance various modes effectively. Over-reliance on digital tools might overshadow the linguistic aspects of learning. Second, it is the problem of equity and accessibility. Not all students have equal access to technology, and some may struggle with certain modes (e.g., those with hearing or visual impairments). Another problem is assessment issues. Traditional assessment models are not well-suited to measure multimodal skills, making it hard to evaluate students' progress comprehensively.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. It should be noted that the issue of multimodality in ELT is broadly studied by foreign authors. As for Ukrainian researchers, this issue seems to be quite new in the domestic science. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen explore the theory of multimodal communication, emphasizing the interplay between different semiotic resources in meaning-making. In their work *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and*

Media of Contemporary Communication (2001), they argue that traditional language teaching often neglects the full range of communicative tools available in contemporary contexts. They highlight the need for educators to recognize non-linguistic modes (e.g., images and layout) as integral to communication, encouraging a broader approach to literacy. Carey Jewitt (2008) examines the role of technology in multimodal learning, particularly in classrooms. Her research emphasizes how multimodality can enhance engagement but requires a paradigm shift in teaching practices. She proposes that teachers need to view communication as multimodal by default, integrating visual, auditory, and digital elements seamlessly into their pedagogy. In works like *Visible Learning*, John Hattie (2009) evaluates the impact of multimodal approaches on student achievement. He underscores the importance of clarity in multimodal instruction to ensure that additional modes do not distract but enhance learning. Hattie's analysis of effective teaching strategies reveals that multimodality is impactful when aligned with clear learning objectives. In her influential article *Multimodal literacy: What does it mean for classroom practice?* Maureen Walsh (2010) explores the concept of *multimodal literacy* and its implications for classroom practice, particularly in the context of evolving digital technologies. Her work is grounded in the need for literacy education to adapt to the multimodal nature of contemporary communication, which increasingly integrates text, images, sound, and interactivity. She insists that teachers should integrate multimodal texts (e.g., videos, websites, digital storytelling) into their lessons to mirror the multimodal nature of real-world communication. Walsh emphasizes the importance of scaffolding students' ability to analyze and create multimodal texts, developing both critical thinking and technical skills. Evaluating multimodal literacy requires new approaches that consider the interplay of modes rather than isolating them. Walsh highlights how digital tools enable the creation and sharing of multimodal texts but also require educators to rethink pedagogy. The rise of multimedia platforms calls for both teacher training and student engagement with digital media literacy. While her insights are globally relevant, Walsh grounds her analysis in the Australian education system, making it particularly useful for educators and policymakers in similar contexts. However, while grounded in the Australian context, Walsh's recommendations may not fully account for cultural and educational differences in other regions. Although Walsh identifies the need for new assessment strategies, her article offers limited guidance on practical implementation.

The purpose of the article is to define what is meant by multimodality and multimodal literacy, to discuss the concepts of viewing and representing and

how these can be incorporated into the classroom practice. Also, we will consider implications of multimodal literacy for course materials, professional development and assessment.

Presentation of the main research material. The nature of communication in the 21st century is fundamentally multimodal. Learners encounter and produce meaning through a wide range of semiotic resources beyond print, i.e., images, gestures, music, spatial design, and digital elements. As a result, educational paradigms are shifting toward multimodal literacy, which involves the ability to interpret and construct meaning using multiple modes of communication (Kress, G., 2010, p. 79). In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), fostering multimodal literacy is crucial, as it equips learners to navigate and engage with the complex communicative landscapes, which they encounter both within and beyond the classroom (Walsh, M., 2010, p. 211). In the context of the modern educational environment, it is essential that teachers should develop the skill of viewing together with listening, speaking and writing skills. Viewing can be defined as the active and critical engagement with visual and audio-visual texts. Unlike passive watching, viewing requires learners to decode, interpret, and evaluate meaning across visual elements, contributing to broader comprehension and language acquisition (Walsh, M., 2010, p. 214). Viewing as a literacy skill supports students in navigating today's visually rich environments, both educational and social. Research emphasizes several reasons why developing viewing should be integral to English language teaching. First, it supports comprehension and language development, since viewing visual narratives enhances students' understanding of plot, tone, and cultural context, providing visual scaffolding to support vocabulary acquisition and inferencing (Serafini, F., 2014, p. 19). Second, it develops critical media literacy, since learners become aware of bias, framing, and persuasion techniques used in media, fostering autonomy and skepticism in digital contexts (Hobbs, R., 2011, p. 74). Also, it reflects real-world communication. As communication is increasingly visual through social media, advertising, and infotainment, students must be prepared to interpret meaning beyond traditional texts (Jewitt, C., 2008, p. 243). Thus, viewing is not merely an auxiliary skill but central to meaning-making in modern education.

It should be mentioned that integrating viewing into English language instruction requires pedagogical intentionality. The following steps provide a scaffolded approach for teachers. First of all, it is important to introduce the concept of viewing. Teachers should help students understand what "viewing" entails, namely that it engages with images and video for meaning, not simply

entertainment. Critical questioning such as “What message is this image sending?” or “How does the filmmaker use colour or sound to influence us?” invites deeper interaction (Callow, J., 2013, p. 66). Also, students should be explicitly taught how visual techniques function, including:

- composition, framing, and layout in still images;
- cinematic devices such as camera angles, lighting, sound, and editing in moving images (Burn, A., & Parker, D., 2003, p. 92).

In order to develop the skill of viewing a range of texts should be used, including film and video clips, advertisements and political posters, infographics and memes, picture books and comics. These expose students to different genres, audiences, and rhetorical strategies (Walsh, M., 2010, p. 221). Teachers can model active viewing by “thinking aloud” their interpretations, and students can work in groups to share perspectives. This builds interpretive communities and helps learners become aware of how different viewers read the same image differently (Callow, J., 2008, p. 61).

It is important to remember that viewing is not limited to school settings. In fact, most students interact with multimodal content more frequently outside the classroom than within. Teachers can harness this engagement through structured extensions. These can be media journals. Students reflect on visual texts they encounter daily, such as YouTube videos, Instagram stories, news, and advertising, and analyze their design and message (Serafini, F., 2014, p. 93). Students’ homework can also be multimodal. Assigning short films or video blogs followed by written or oral responses strengthens comprehension and critical awareness. Out of doubt, parental involvement is important. Encouraging family discussions around media (e.g., “What do you think the ad was trying to do?”) nurtures lifelong media literacy. Viewing thus becomes a bridge between formal and informal learning.

There is also such a concept as intensive viewing. It refers to the focused, repeated analysis of short visual or audio-visual texts. It is a core technique in the language classroom for developing both linguistic and multimodal competencies (Field, J., 2008, p. 112). The key features of intensive viewing include:

- repetition: watching a short clip several times with different focus points (general meaning, language use, visual techniques);
- annotation and discussion: students note how sound, camera work, or color supports the story or tone;
- language integration: activities such as vocabulary extraction, dialogue gap-filling, or script rewriting enhance language practice (Canning-Wilson, C., 2000, p. 3).

This method is especially powerful when teaching learners to connect form and meaning across modes, and to engage with the intentions of multimodal authors.

Another important skill which is essential for the development of multimodal literacy and for developing learners’ multimodal communicative competence is the skill of representing. It has emerged as a critical component of English language teaching and learning. Representing encompasses the ability to create, design, and present meaning visually, digitally, orally, and spatially, alongside traditional written modes.

In the era of digital and visual media, literacy no longer pertains solely to reading and writing. Multimodal literacy, as defined by scholars such as Kress (2010), involves the ability to interpret and produce meaning across multiple modes: visual, spatial, aural, gestural, and linguistic. Within this framework, the skill of representing refers to learners’ capacity to express ideas, tell stories, and construct arguments using combinations of these modes (Callow, J., 2008, p. 64). The importance of representing lies in its ability to engage learners as *designers of meaning*, rather than passive receivers. It empowers them to participate actively in contemporary communication, both inside and beyond educational contexts (Jewitt, C., 2008, p. 252). Thus, representing is essential to multimodal literacy for several reasons. First, it supports diverse expression. It allows students to communicate complex ideas using visuals, gestures, audio, and digital tools, accommodating diverse learning styles and proficiencies (Serafini, F., 2014, p. 56). Second, it promotes higher-order thinking. Representing requires planning, organizing, designing, and reflecting on communication choices, these are skills associated with creativity and critical thinking (Walsh, M., 2010, p. 217). Also, it connects language with other modes. When students create infographics, storyboards, or video blogs, they are integrating written, spoken, and visual language in meaningful ways (Burn, A., & Durran, J., 2007, p. 43). As such, representing is central to preparing students for real-world communication that extends beyond traditional writing. To support the development of representing, teachers need structured pedagogical strategies that foster creativity, semiotic awareness, and communicative clarity. It is also important that teachers should help students become aware of the different modes available for meaning-making, such as colour, layout, movement, sound, and typography, and how these influence communication (Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T., 2006, p. 17). Activities might include analyzing magazine covers, advertisements, or website homepages, discussing how meaning changes across different platforms (e.g., a print poem vs. a video poem). Teachers can model how to plan

and execute a multimodal composition, thinking aloud to demonstrate choices about visuals, structure, and sequencing. For example, in creating a digital poster, the teacher might ask: “What image best represents this theme?” or “How does this font influence tone?” Assignments should offer students varied opportunities to represent knowledge. Examples include creating infographics to summarize texts, producing photo essays or video reflections, designing digital narratives or visual journals (Callow, J., 2013, p. 72). Importantly, criteria for assessment should include both content understanding and semiotic design, that is how effectively the student uses modes to communicate meaning (New London Group, 2000, p. 29).

We completely agree with (Donaghy, K., 2023) that teachers need to understand that when they teach writing, they can also teach representing, since the two processes are similar. A common form of multimodal composition which can illustrate the similarities between the two is ‘digital storytelling’. Digital storytelling is the concept of using digital media (photos, audio, video, animation, etc.) to create a story which can be fiction or non-fiction. So, digital storytelling can be seen as a use of technology with the purpose of enhancing learners’ digital and multimodal literacy skills. It is a pedagogical approach that acts as a bridge between the traditional literacies of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and 21st century digital and multimodal skills (Donaghy, K., 2023). The research (Donaghy, K., 2023) offers a 10-step digital storytelling process in which many similarities to the traditional writing process can be observed. The steps include: coming up with a topic or idea, learning about the topic, making a script, receiving feedback on the script, revising the script, creating a storyboard, gathering or creating images, audio, and video, putting it all together, sharing with others, reflecting on the experience. It can be clearly visible that this representing process shares many of the features of the writing process.

It is worth noting that representing is not confined to formal instruction. Students are already immersed in multimodal expression via social media, gaming, and digital storytelling platforms. Teachers can leverage this in the following way:

- encouraging creative expression in digital environments: they can assign students to produce TikToks or Instagram posts that reflect language learning or respond to texts;
- involving families or communities: students can document local stories through photos and interviews, creating multimedia presentations that blend linguistic and cultural representation (Mills, K., 2010, p. 39);
- maintaining digital portfolios: students curate their multimodal works (slideshows, videos, blogs) and reflect on their communicative choices over time.

This approach validates learner lived multimodal experiences and encourages authentic representation outside academic contexts.

Practical classroom tasks can range from low-tech to high-tech and should align with language goals and learner levels (Table 1):

Table 1

Task	Modes Involved	Language Focus
Comic strip creation	Visual, linguistic	Dialogue writing, sequencing
Video diary (vlog)	Visual, aural, linguistic	Narrative tenses, pronunciation
Infographic on climate change	Visual, spatial, linguistic	Lexis, summarizing
Podcast episode	Aural, linguistic	Fluency, cohesion
Poster campaign	Visual, spatial, linguistic	Persuasive language

Each task encourages students to make intentional choices about how they construct and convey meaning, reinforcing their representational competence (Hobbs, R., 2011, p. 81). While integrating representing is rich in benefits, it also poses challenges. First, it is assessment. Evaluating multimodal compositions fairly requires clear rubrics that address both content and design (Callow, J., 2008, p. 70). Second, it is teacher training. Many teachers lack confidence in teaching visual or digital literacy; ongoing professional development is essential (Walsh, M., 2010, p. 234). In addition, it is access and equity. Ensuring all students have access to tools and opportunities for multimodal expression remains critical (Mills, K., 2010, p. 41). Addressing these issues is vital for embedding representing into equitable, effective pedagogy. Thus, representing is a foundational skill within multimodal English language education, enabling learners to craft and convey meaning across diverse modes. Through scaffolded classroom practices, supportive assessment, and engagement beyond school boundaries, students can grow as confident, creative, and critical communicators. For language teachers, embracing representing not only enriches instruction but aligns literacy education with the demands and opportunities of the modern communicative landscape.

In order to develop learners’ multimodal communicative competence, teachers need to consciously design multimodal learning experiences. This involves selecting appropriate multimodal texts to use with their learners and exploiting these texts in the classroom. Victor Lim and Lynda Tan-Chia

propose four learning processes that teachers should consider: encountering, exploring, evaluating, and expressing (Lim, V. & Tan-Chia, L., 2022, pp. 23–26). The learning process of encountering focuses on emotional engagement. During the learners' encounter with a multimodal text, they are encouraged to describe it, share their emotional response, and reflect on their emotional engagement. Here are some questions learners could consider while encountering a short film: "What is happening in the film?", "What is your immediate reaction to it?", "How does it make you feel? Why?", "Which memories or experiences does it stir in you?" In the exploring stage there is a focus on cognitive understanding. Learners explore the meanings in the multimodal text amongst themselves before the teacher summarizes their understandings. Here are some questions learners could consider while exploring a short film: "What happens in the beginning, middle, and at the end of the story?", "Which character interests you the most? Why?", "What clues are there to tell us whether the film is set now or in the past?", "Which characters speak and which don't? What do the speaking characters sound like?" The next stage is evaluating; this is mainly defined by critical perspectives. During this stage, learners are encouraged to adopt a critical approach in their analysis of the multimodal text and to question the messages represented in it. Here are some questions learners could consider while evaluating a short film: "What values or opinions are being suggested by the creator of the film?", "How would you summarize its message?", "Who do you think the intended audience is? Why?", "Who would you recommend it to? Why?" The final learning process is expressing, which focuses on multimodal composition. The learning process of expressing gives learners the power to be active makers of meaning through doing this. After responding to, interpreting, and evaluating a short film learners can be asked to write a multimodal review which includes a summary of the film's plot, screenshots and descriptions of the main characters, screenshots and descriptions of the main settings, the performances of the main actors, the film's message. They can write a multimodal analysis of a key scene including a screenshot of a video scene and a link to it. Or they can make a short video (3–4 minutes) of themselves giving a review. According to (Donaghy, K., 2023), through these processes, teachers are able to design more well-rounded multimodal learning experiences. These reflect the importance not only of thinking but also of feeling and doing in learning.

The implications of multimodal literacy are urgently required for course materials, curricula, and professional development. Some teachers already use different modes as an everyday part of their current teaching, for example flashcards, audio, video, and other forms of multimedia, while others do not.

However, multimodal literacy demands course materials that reflect the realities of contemporary communication. Traditional ELT textbooks often rely on linear written texts. Multimodal pedagogy necessitates materials that include digital videos, infographics, podcasts, graphic narratives, and social media content (Serafini, F., 2014, p. 23). Such materials expose learners to real-world, authentic language use across modes. For example: instead of reading an article on climate change, students might analyze a short documentary, a digital infographic, and a tweet on the same topic to explore how modes work together to shape meaning. Learners must be encouraged to both consume and produce multimodal texts. Course materials should provide guided tasks involving video creation, digital storytelling, and image-text combinations (Callow, J., 2013, p. 78). These tasks require students to make deliberate semiotic choices and engage in creative problem-solving. Material developers face the challenge of ensuring multimodal inclusivity while aligning with curricular standards. Moreover, there is a need for dynamic, regularly updated materials that respond to the fast-changing nature of digital texts (Walsh, M., 2010, p. 219).

Multimodal literacy transforms not only materials but also the overarching curriculum structures within which they function. Curricula must shift from focusing solely on language forms and functions to also including semiotic awareness and digital communication competencies (Mills, K., 2010, p. 38). Objectives should reflect learners' ability to navigate, analyze, and construct multimodal texts for academic, social, and personal purposes. Multimodal curricula support project-based and cross-disciplinary learning, promoting collaboration and critical inquiry. For example, a unit on media bias might involve linguistic analysis, visual rhetoric, and historical context – drawing from multiple subjects and literacy modes (New London Group, 2000, p. 17).

To teach multimodal literacy effectively, teachers must be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and mindsets. Many educators feel unprepared to teach multimodal composition or assess visual and digital texts (Callow, J., 2008, p. 62). Professional development must include: training in visual and digital semiotics, exploration of multimodal tools and platforms (e.g., Canva, Padlet, video editing apps), engagement with theory and practice of multiliteracies. Besides, multimodal teaching repositions teachers not only as language experts but as designers of learning experiences (Burn, A., & Durran, J., 2007, p. 29). This requires confidence in managing creative, student-led tasks and in facilitating discussions about form, purpose, and design. Also, peer collaboration and ongoing inquiry are essential for sustaining multimodal practice.

Professional learning communities (PLCs), workshops, and online forums provide spaces where educators can share strategies, co-create resources, and reflect critically (Hobbs, R., 2011, p. 83). Implementing multimodal literacy must address digital divide issues. Teachers and students need equitable access to devices, software, and internet connectivity to participate in multimodal practices (Mills, K., 2010, p. 41).

As for assessment practices, it should be said that standardized assessments often fail to capture the complexity of multimodal learning. Teachers are often uncertain how to do this because current assessment practices do not acknowledge multimodality in their frameworks (Diamantopoulou, S., & Ørevik, S., 2021). Alternatives such as portfolios, rubrics for multimodal texts, and self-assessment tools can provide more holistic evaluations (Callow, J., 2008, p. 69). In reading examinations learners could be asked to read paper-based multimodal texts such as posters, restaurant menus, and illustrated instructions or online digital multimodal texts such as emails, blog articles, and social media posts. It is important that the examination designer or the teacher reproduces the original multimodal layout (typeface, images, colours, etc.) of the text used in the examination. In writing examinations learners could be asked to create a print multimodal text such as a leaflet, brochure, poster, or a multimodal text for a digital environment such as a blog, website, or social media site.

The integration of viewing and representing into English language teaching has significant implications for assessment. There is a need to develop assessment frameworks to assess communicative modes beyond the linguistic mode which is currently the only communicative mode taken into account in assessment criteria. A stronger connection between curriculum and assessment goals is essential to ensure that students, teachers, and other stake holders recognize the importance of multimodal literacy (Donaghy, K., 2023).

Conclusions. Integrating multimodality into English Language Teaching enriches the learning experience by reflecting the multifaceted nature of communication in the modern world. It requires thoughtful adjustments in teaching methods, curriculum design, material development, and assessment practices. By embracing multimodal literacy, educators can better prepare students for the diverse communicative demands they will encounter. Multimodal literacy represents a transformative shift in English language education. To respond effectively, educators must rethink the nature of course materials, curricula, and professional roles. By embedding multimodal principles into the very fabric of teaching and learning, educators empower students to become agile communicators and critical consumers of 21st-century texts. This shift requires commitment at every level, from material developers to curriculum planners to teacher educators to ensure that multimodal literacy becomes not an add-on, but a cornerstone of meaningful language education.

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