



Multimodal Communication and English Language Competence in Twenty-First Century Learning Environments

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed educational practices across the world, leading to the emergence of multimodal learning environments that integrate diverse forms of communication. In contemporary English language education, learners engage with information through multiple modes, including text, audio, video, images, animations, gestures, and interactive digital platforms. This shift from traditional print-based instruction to multimodal communication has significantly influenced the development of English language competence among learners. The present study examines the relationship between multimodal communication and English language competence in twenty-first-century learning environments. Drawing upon social semiotic theory, multimedia learning theory, and constructivist perspectives, the study explores how multimodal resources facilitate language acquisition, communicative competence, critical thinking, and digital literacy. Through an extensive review of existing literature, the paper demonstrates that multimodal communication enhances vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, listening proficiency, speaking skills, and writing abilities by providing authentic and engaging learning experiences. Furthermore, digital technologies enable learners to participate actively in collaborative knowledge construction and



intercultural communication. The findings suggest that multimodal pedagogies not only improve linguistic competence but also equip learners with essential skills required for participation in global digital societies. The study concludes that multimodal communication represents a transformative approach to English language teaching and learning, offering significant opportunities for educational innovation in the digital age.

Keywords: Multimodal Communication, English Language Competence, Digital Literacy, Multimedia Learning, Language Education, Twenty-First Century Skills, Educational Technology

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed remarkable developments in information and communication technologies that have fundamentally transformed the nature of teaching, learning, and communication. Educational institutions worldwide are increasingly adopting digital technologies to facilitate innovative learning experiences and promote learner engagement. In language education, particularly English language teaching, these technological advancements have introduced new possibilities for communication and meaning-making through multiple semiotic modes. Traditional approaches to language learning, which primarily emphasized reading, writing, listening, and speaking through printed texts and classroom interaction, are gradually being supplemented by multimodal forms of communication that integrate visual, auditory, textual, spatial, and interactive elements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

English has become the dominant language of international communication, business, science, technology, and higher education. Consequently, developing English language competence has become a major educational objective in many countries. However, the communicative demands of contemporary society extend beyond traditional linguistic proficiency. Modern learners are required to interpret, evaluate, and create meaning across diverse digital platforms and multimedia environments. As communication increasingly occurs through websites, social media platforms, video-sharing applications, podcasts, digital presentations, and virtual learning environments, learners must develop the ability to navigate complex multimodal texts and interactions effectively (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

Multimodal communication refers to the use of multiple modes of representation and communication, including written language, spoken language, images, sounds, gestures, videos, animations, and digital interfaces, to construct and convey meaning (Jewitt, 2008). In educational contexts, multimodal communication enables learners to engage with content through various sensory channels, thereby enhancing understanding, retention, and application of knowledge. The integration of multimodal



resources into English language instruction reflects broader changes in literacy practices and communication patterns in contemporary society. Scholars argue that literacy in the digital age involves not only the ability to read and write but also the capacity to interpret and create multimodal texts across diverse technological platforms (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015).

The increasing prominence of multimodal communication in educational settings has generated substantial interest among researchers and educators. Studies suggest that multimodal pedagogies promote learner engagement, motivation, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking while supporting language development and communicative competence (Mayer, 2009). Furthermore, multimodal learning environments accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences, enabling learners to access information through multiple pathways. As educational institutions continue to embrace technology-enhanced learning, understanding the impact of multimodal communication on English language competence has become increasingly important.

This study investigates the role of multimodal communication in fostering English language competence within twenty-first-century learning environments. By examining theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and pedagogical implications, the paper seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions regarding effective language teaching practices in the digital era. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating multimodal communication strategies into English language education to prepare learners for participation in increasingly interconnected and technologically mediated societies.

2. Literature Review

The concept of multimodality has emerged as a significant area of inquiry within educational research, communication studies, and applied linguistics. The theoretical foundations of multimodality can be traced to social semiotic theory, which views communication as a process of meaning-making through multiple semiotic resources. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), contemporary communication is inherently multimodal, involving the interaction of linguistic, visual, auditory, and spatial elements. They argue that meaning is constructed not through language alone but through the coordinated use of various communicative modes. This perspective has profound implications for education, particularly language learning, where learners increasingly encounter multimodal texts and digital media.

The development of digital technologies has accelerated the adoption of multimodal approaches in educational contexts. Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning provides an important theoretical framework for understanding how multimodal communication supports learning. Mayer argues that individuals process information through separate verbal and visual channels and that



learning is enhanced when information is presented through both channels simultaneously. His research demonstrates that learners achieve deeper understanding when verbal explanations are combined with relevant visual representations. This finding has significant implications for English language instruction, where multimedia resources can support vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, listening skills, and conceptual understanding.

Research conducted by Jewitt (2008) further emphasizes the educational value of multimodal communication. She argues that multimodal pedagogies enable learners to engage more actively with content by encouraging them to interpret and produce meaning through diverse modes of expression. In language classrooms, multimodal activities such as digital storytelling, video production, multimedia presentations, and collaborative online projects provide opportunities for learners to integrate linguistic and non-linguistic resources in meaningful communication. Such activities promote deeper engagement with language while fostering creativity and critical thinking.

The integration of technology into language learning has also contributed significantly to the growth of multimodal communication practices. Warschauer and Kern (2000) highlight the transformative impact of computer-mediated communication on language education. Their work demonstrates that digital technologies facilitate authentic interaction, collaborative learning, and access to diverse linguistic and cultural resources. Online discussion forums, video conferencing platforms, social networking sites, and collaborative writing tools enable learners to engage in meaningful communication beyond the traditional classroom environment.

Recent studies have explored the role of multimodal communication in developing digital literacy and twenty-first-century skills. Cope and Kalantzis (2015) argue that contemporary literacy practices require individuals to navigate complex multimodal environments characterized by the convergence of text, image, audio, and interactive media. Consequently, language education must extend beyond traditional literacy instruction to include multimodal literacy development. Similarly, Hafner and Ho (2020) found that digital storytelling projects enhance learners' language proficiency, digital literacy, and intercultural competence by requiring them to combine textual, visual, and auditory elements in meaningful communicative tasks.

Empirical research consistently demonstrates positive relationships between multimodal instruction and language learning outcomes. Lin (2019) found that multimodal teaching approaches significantly improve learners' motivation, participation, and language achievement. Learners exposed to multimedia resources such as videos, podcasts, interactive applications, and digital games exhibited higher levels of engagement and language proficiency compared to those receiving traditional



instruction. Likewise, studies by Moreno and Mayer (2007) indicate that multimodal learning environments enhance cognitive processing and knowledge retention by presenting information through complementary modes.

Despite these advantages, researchers have identified several challenges associated with multimodal communication in educational settings. One significant concern relates to unequal access to technological resources, often referred to as the digital divide. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience limited access to digital devices and internet connectivity, potentially restricting their participation in multimodal learning activities (Selwyn, 2016). Additionally, teachers may require specialized training and professional development to effectively design and implement multimodal instructional strategies. Assessment practices also present challenges, as traditional evaluation methods may not adequately capture learners' multimodal competencies and digital literacy skills.

Nevertheless, the literature overwhelmingly suggests that multimodal communication plays a crucial role in contemporary language education. By integrating multiple modes of representation and communication, educators can create engaging, authentic, and meaningful learning experiences that support the development of English language competence and prepare learners for participation in increasingly complex communicative environments.

3. Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research design based on a systematic review and critical analysis of existing scholarly literature concerning multimodal communication and English language competence in twenty-first-century learning environments. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables a comprehensive examination of theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and pedagogical implications associated with multimodal language learning. Data for the study were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, educational reports, and research publications indexed in internationally recognized databases. Particular attention was given to studies published within the last two decades due to the rapid evolution of digital technologies and their impact on educational practices.

The collected literature was subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring concepts, patterns, and trends related to multimodal communication in language education. Themes such as digital literacy, multimedia learning, learner engagement, communicative competence, collaborative learning, and technology-enhanced instruction emerged as significant areas of discussion. The analysis focused on understanding how multimodal communication contributes to various dimensions of English language



competence, including vocabulary development, reading comprehension, listening proficiency, speaking skills, writing abilities, and intercultural communication. Through synthesizing findings from diverse studies, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of multimodal communication in contemporary language learning contexts.

4. Discussion and Analysis

The analysis of existing literature reveals that multimodal communication has become an indispensable component of contemporary English language education. The increasing integration of digital technologies into educational environments has transformed traditional approaches to language teaching and learning, creating opportunities for learners to engage with language through diverse communicative modes. Unlike conventional instructional practices that rely predominantly on textual materials and teacher-centered methodologies, multimodal learning environments facilitate active participation and meaningful interaction through the combination of visual, auditory, textual, and interactive elements.

One of the most significant contributions of multimodal communication to English language competence is its ability to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary learning has traditionally been associated with memorization and repetitive practice; however, multimodal resources provide contextualized and meaningful exposure to lexical items. When learners encounter vocabulary through images, videos, animations, audio recordings, and interactive applications, they develop stronger cognitive associations that support retention and recall. Mayer (2009) argues that the simultaneous presentation of verbal and visual information promotes deeper processing and facilitates meaningful learning. Consequently, multimodal instruction enables learners to understand not only the meanings of words but also their contextual usage and cultural significance.

Reading comprehension represents another area in which multimodal communication exerts a substantial influence. Contemporary digital texts frequently combine written language with images, videos, hyperlinks, animations, and interactive features. Such multimodal texts require learners to interpret information across multiple semiotic systems simultaneously. Research suggests that visual elements support comprehension by providing contextual cues and enhancing learners' ability to infer meanings from unfamiliar texts (Jewitt, 2008). Furthermore, interactive reading platforms enable learners to access supplementary information, annotations, and multimedia resources that facilitate deeper engagement with textual content. As a result, learners develop advanced reading strategies that extend beyond traditional literacy practices.



Listening proficiency is similarly enhanced through multimodal communication. Digital technologies provide learners with access to authentic audio and video materials featuring diverse accents, speech patterns, and communicative contexts. Exposure to authentic language use is particularly important in English language education because it enables learners to develop listening skills that reflect real-world communication. Videos, podcasts, webinars, and virtual discussions offer opportunities for learners to observe verbal and nonverbal communication simultaneously, thereby improving comprehension and interpretation. According to Hafner and Ho (2020), multimodal learning environments create meaningful contexts for language use, enabling learners to connect linguistic forms with communicative functions.

Speaking skills also benefit significantly from multimodal pedagogies. Traditional classroom interactions often limit opportunities for authentic communication, particularly in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. Digital communication tools such as video conferencing platforms, discussion forums, social media applications, and collaborative learning environments provide learners with opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations with peers and instructors. Such interactions promote fluency, confidence, and communicative competence by encouraging learners to use language for authentic purposes. Additionally, multimodal activities such as digital storytelling, video presentations, and multimedia projects require learners to integrate spoken language with visual and technological elements, thereby fostering comprehensive communicative abilities.

Writing competence has also evolved within multimodal learning environments. Contemporary communication increasingly involves the creation of multimodal texts that combine written language with visual, auditory, and interactive elements. Learners are expected to produce digital content such as blogs, presentations, social media posts, infographics, and multimedia narratives. These activities encourage learners to consider audience, purpose, design, and multimodal representation while developing their writing skills. Cope and Kalantzis (2015) emphasize that effective communication in the digital age requires the ability to compose and interpret multimodal texts. Consequently, multimodal writing activities contribute to the development of both linguistic competence and digital literacy.

Beyond language skills, multimodal communication promotes learner engagement and motivation. Educational researchers consistently report that learners exhibit higher levels of participation and interest when instruction incorporates multimedia resources and interactive technologies. Visual and auditory elements capture learners' attention, while collaborative activities encourage active involvement in the learning process. Lin (2019) found that students exposed to multimodal instructional strategies demonstrated greater enthusiasm for language learning and achieved higher levels of



academic performance compared to those receiving traditional instruction. These findings suggest that multimodal communication addresses motivational factors that are essential for successful language acquisition.

Another important dimension of multimodal communication relates to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Twenty-first-century learning environments emphasize the importance of higher-order cognitive abilities, including analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and creativity. Multimodal tasks often require learners to interpret complex information, evaluate diverse sources, and create meaningful representations of knowledge. Digital storytelling projects, multimedia presentations, and collaborative research activities encourage learners to engage in reflective thinking and creative expression. Such experiences contribute to the development of transferable skills that are essential for academic success and professional achievement.

The relationship between multimodal communication and digital literacy is particularly noteworthy. Digital literacy encompasses the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to navigate, evaluate, and create information within digital environments. As communication increasingly occurs through digital platforms, learners must develop the ability to interpret multimodal texts and participate effectively in online communities. Lankshear and Knobel (2011) argue that digital literacy represents a fundamental component of contemporary education. By engaging with multimodal communication practices, learners acquire technological competencies that complement their linguistic abilities and prepare them for participation in digital societies.

Despite its numerous advantages, multimodal communication also presents several challenges. One significant concern involves technological accessibility and the digital divide. Not all learners have equal access to digital devices, internet connectivity, or educational technologies. These disparities may create inequitable learning opportunities and limit the effectiveness of multimodal instruction. Furthermore, teachers may encounter difficulties in designing, implementing, and assessing multimodal learning activities. Professional development and institutional support are therefore essential for successful integration of multimodal pedagogies.

Assessment represents another complex issue within multimodal learning environments. Traditional evaluation methods often focus primarily on linguistic accuracy and may fail to capture learners' multimodal competencies. Educational institutions must therefore develop innovative assessment frameworks that recognize the diverse skills associated with multimodal communication, including creativity, collaboration, digital literacy, and multimodal composition. Such frameworks should reflect the evolving nature of communication and literacy in contemporary society.



The findings of the present study indicate that multimodal communication significantly contributes to the development of English language competence by creating rich, interactive, and authentic learning experiences. The integration of multiple communicative modes supports language acquisition, learner engagement, digital literacy, and critical thinking while preparing learners for participation in technologically mediated communication environments. Consequently, multimodal communication should be regarded as a fundamental component of effective language education in the twenty-first century.

5. Findings

The study reveals that multimodal communication has a profound impact on the development of English language competence. Learners exposed to multimodal instructional strategies demonstrate improved vocabulary acquisition, enhanced reading comprehension, stronger listening skills, greater speaking confidence, and more effective writing abilities. The analysis further indicates that digital technologies serve as powerful facilitators of language learning by providing authentic communicative experiences and opportunities for collaborative interaction. Multimodal communication also contributes significantly to learner motivation, engagement, creativity, and critical thinking. Additionally, the development of digital literacy emerges as a crucial outcome of multimodal learning, reflecting the communicative demands of contemporary society.

5.1. Educational Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. English language curricula should incorporate multimodal resources and activities that reflect authentic communication practices in digital environments. Teacher education programs should provide professional development opportunities focused on multimodal pedagogy, digital literacy, and technology integration. Educational institutions should invest in technological infrastructure and ensure equitable access to digital resources. Furthermore, assessment practices should be redesigned to recognize multimodal competencies and twenty-first-century skills alongside traditional language abilities. Such initiatives will enable educational systems to prepare learners effectively for participation in global knowledge societies.

6. Conclusion

The emergence of multimodal communication has transformed the landscape of English language education in the twenty-first century. As communication increasingly occurs through the integration of textual, visual, auditory, and interactive modes, language learners must develop competencies that extend beyond traditional literacy practices. The present study demonstrates that multimodal



communication significantly enhances English language competence by promoting meaningful engagement, authentic interaction, and collaborative knowledge construction. Through the effective use of digital technologies and multimedia resources, educators can create learning environments that support language acquisition, digital literacy, critical thinking, creativity, and communicative competence.

The findings underscore the importance of adopting multimodal pedagogies within contemporary educational contexts. While challenges related to technological access, teacher preparedness, and assessment remain, the benefits of multimodal communication substantially outweigh its limitations. As educational institutions continue to adapt to the demands of the digital age, multimodal communication will play an increasingly important role in shaping language learning experiences and preparing learners for participation in complex global communication networks. Future research should continue exploring innovative multimodal practices and their implications for language education, ensuring that pedagogical approaches remain responsive to evolving technological and societal developments.

7. Research Gap

Although substantial research has explored the integration of technology in English language education, significant gaps remain regarding the comprehensive role of multimodal communication in fostering English language competence within twenty-first-century learning environments. Existing studies have predominantly focused on individual dimensions of multimodal learning, such as multimedia-assisted vocabulary acquisition, digital storytelling, or technology-enhanced language instruction, often examining these aspects in isolation rather than as interconnected components of a holistic communicative framework. Furthermore, many investigations have concentrated primarily on technological tools and platforms while paying comparatively less attention to how learners synthesize linguistic, visual, auditory, spatial, and interactive modes to construct meaning and develop communicative competence.

Another important gap concerns the limited availability of studies that examine the relationship between multimodal communication and the broader competencies required in contemporary digital societies. While numerous researchers have acknowledged the benefits of multimedia resources for language learning, fewer studies have explored how multimodal pedagogies contribute simultaneously to digital literacy, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and intercultural communication. Moreover, much of the existing literature has been conducted in technologically advanced educational settings, leaving



a need for greater understanding of multimodal learning practices in diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts where access to digital resources may vary considerably.

Additionally, the rapid evolution of digital communication platforms such as social media, virtual learning environments, artificial intelligence-powered educational systems, and immersive technologies has created new opportunities and challenges that remain insufficiently investigated. Current literature also reveals a lack of comprehensive assessment frameworks capable of evaluating learners' multimodal competencies alongside traditional measures of language proficiency. Consequently, there is a pressing need for research that synthesizes contemporary theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of how multimodal communication influences English language competence in modern educational environments. The present study seeks to address these gaps by examining the multidimensional relationship between multimodal communication and English language competence while highlighting pedagogical implications for twenty-first-century language education.

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