

Exploring Multimodal Integration in an ESL Writing Class: Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of multimodal approaches in ESL writing classrooms, focusing on teachers' practices, perceptions, and challenges. Adopting a qualitative phenomenological design, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews with three experienced English instructors from Malaysian tertiary institutions. The findings reveal that teachers employ diverse multimodal strategies—such as visual aids, collaborative tools, and digital platforms—to enhance student engagement and writing skills. Teachers perceive these approaches as beneficial for fostering motivation, participation, and deeper understanding. Despite their potential, challenges such as time constraints, resource limitations, and adapting to diverse student needs hinder implementation. The study underscores the necessity for institutional support, including professional development and access to premium digital tools, to optimize multimodal teaching. These findings offer valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to integrate multimodal strategies effectively in ESL writing education, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes in a digitally evolving educational landscape.

Keywords- multimodal approach, multimodality, ESL writing, English as a Second Language, L2 writing classrooms

INTRODUCTION

The global shift in educational practices has increasingly embraced multimodal approaches, recognising the necessity for diverse communication modes in contemporary education. Technological advancements have significantly influenced teaching methodologies, encouraging the integration of various semiotic modes to enhance learning experiences. The New London Group (1996) emphasised the importance of multimodal literacy, laying the foundation for this pedagogical shift. Post-COVID-19 digitalisation has further accelerated the adoption of multimodal strategies worldwide. Despite the traditional focus on text-based, linear methods in ESL writing instruction, there is a growing need to incorporate visual, auditory, and digital tools to address diverse learning preferences and increase student engagement.

Multimodality refers to the simultaneous use of two or more semiotic modes as resources to make meaning in a learning process (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, as cited in Chien, 2023). Therefore, the multimodal approach in writing suggests the need to incorporate a full range of communication modes. Lim and Polio (2020) define multimodal writing as the use of multiple linguistic and non-linguistic modes in composition. These also refer to semiotic sources which include linguistics, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial modalities (Belcher, 2017; Kress, 2010, as cited in Navila et al., 2023).

This study seeks to make a small yet meaningful contribution to inform practitioners, curriculum developers, and policymakers on things to consider when incorporating multimodal approaches in language learning activities and resources to achieve learning outcomes. This study will provide insights to language teachers to adapt and improve multimodal practices for effective second language (L2) writing lessons. This study also investigates the challenges faced by teachers in using a multimodal approach; thus, it will benefit the decision-

making process of curriculum developers and policymakers when planning and revising syllabi and educational policies that are set to achieve excellence in language learning.

This paper asks three research questions:

- How do teachers apply the multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms?
- What are teacher's perceptions of the multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms?
- What do teachers face the challenges in implementing the multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms?

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 portrays the conceptual framework used in this study to examine the use of the multimodal approach in L2 writing classrooms. The conceptual framework for this study incorporates teaching methods and the six multimodal designs in meaning-making proposed by the New London Group (1996) to understand the teachers' practices, perceptions and challenges faced by them when implementing multimodality as a pedagogical approach. The framework is adapted from Jerome et al. (2023). However, several amendments have been made.

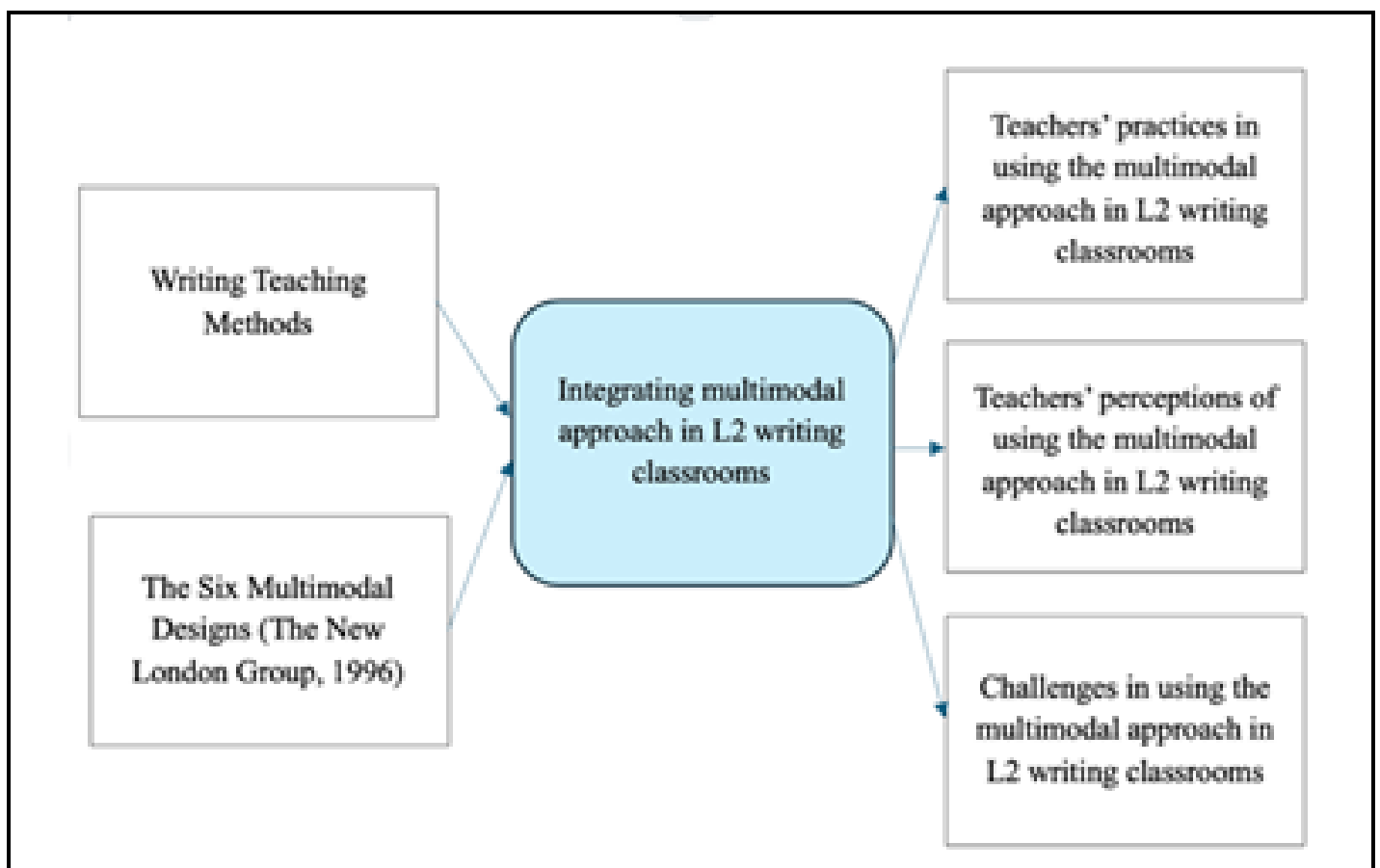


Fig. 1 The conceptual framework to examine the use of the multimodal approach in L2 writing classrooms adapted from Jerome et al. (2023)

First, Jerome et al. (2023) framework was originally designed to examine multimodal approaches in literature classroom; however, the researcher of this study feels that it is also applicable to the context of writing classroom. Second, the original framework included VARK model (visual, aural, reading/writing and kinesthetics) of students' learning styles and preferences by Fleming (1987). Since this study is not looking at students' perspectives, that construct was omitted for this framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching ESL Writing

Teaching writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms is a critical component of language education, aiming to equip learners with the ability to communicate effectively. However, this task is complex, hindered by challenges related to learner diversity, pedagogical practices, and contextual barriers.

Globally, ESL writing classrooms face several common challenges. One prominent issue is the diversity in learners' proficiency levels, making it challenging to design writing tasks that are suitable for all students. Many learners lack exposure to authentic writing contexts, which diminishes their ability to develop practical and applicable writing skills. Traditional teaching methods often prioritise grammar and syntax over creative or communicative writing. This, in return, restricts students' ability to articulate their ideas freely. Moreover, writing in a second language can cause anxiety, resulting in low motivation and confidence among learners (Bhowmik & Kim, 2022).

In response to these challenges, innovative practices are gaining traction worldwide. The process writing approach, emphasising iterative drafting, peer feedback, and revisions, has become widely adopted to refine learners' writing skills (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). Technology integration is another significant advancement where educators utilise tools such as blogs and collaborative platforms to enhance engagement and provide instant feedback (Lin, 2014). In addition, Bhowmik (2023) highlights that genre-based instruction has also proven effective in helping learners understand and replicate stylistic conventions. Approaches such as process writing, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), project-based learning, task-based language teaching, and genre approaches have been examined for their effectiveness (Hai-yan, 2014; Hermansson et al., 2019; Sari et al., 2021). These approaches deal with several challenges of ESL writing classrooms. Traditional methods often fail to meet the needs of students, leading to low engagement and motivation (Albeshier, 2022). Another study found that teachers sometimes resist adopting new methods (Yunus et al., 2023), and balancing communicative skills with content knowledge presents additional challenges (Bowen et al., 2023).

In Malaysia, the ESL context is shaped by unique challenges, including the dual-language policy in schools, which often results in uneven language proficiency. This disparity is particularly pronounced in rural areas with limited English exposure (Ghabool et al., 2012). Furthermore, many Malaysian teachers report inadequate training in modern pedagogical approaches, hindering their ability to employ effective strategies (Jalaluddin, 2019). The national curriculum often prioritises exam-oriented tasks over fostering authentic writing skills, leaving little room for creativity (Kaur et al., 2012).

Despite these constraints, emerging efforts to innovate within Malaysian ESL classrooms exist. For instance, pilot programmes integrating creative writing and digital tools have shown promise (Lee et al., 2022). Additionally, collaborative initiatives, such as teacher workshops and communities of practice, aim to share effective strategies and resources among educators (Bhowmik & Kim, 2021).

In conclusion, teaching writing in ESL classrooms involves navigating diverse challenges while adapting to learners' needs. Globally, there is a shift toward student-centred, technology-enhanced approaches. However, systemic barriers like exam-focused education and limited teacher training continue to hinder progress in Malaysia.

The Multimodal Approach

The New London Group consists of 10 educators who met in New London in 1994 to discuss matters on pedagogies in literacy. The term multimodality was coined by The New London Group (1996) which refers to the use of diverse modes or resources in meaning-making. This design is also referred to as metalanguages or grammars of meaning-making. Multimodal designs popularised by The New London Group (1996) comprise six primary modes: linguistic design, visual design, audio design, gestural design, spatial design, and multimodal design.

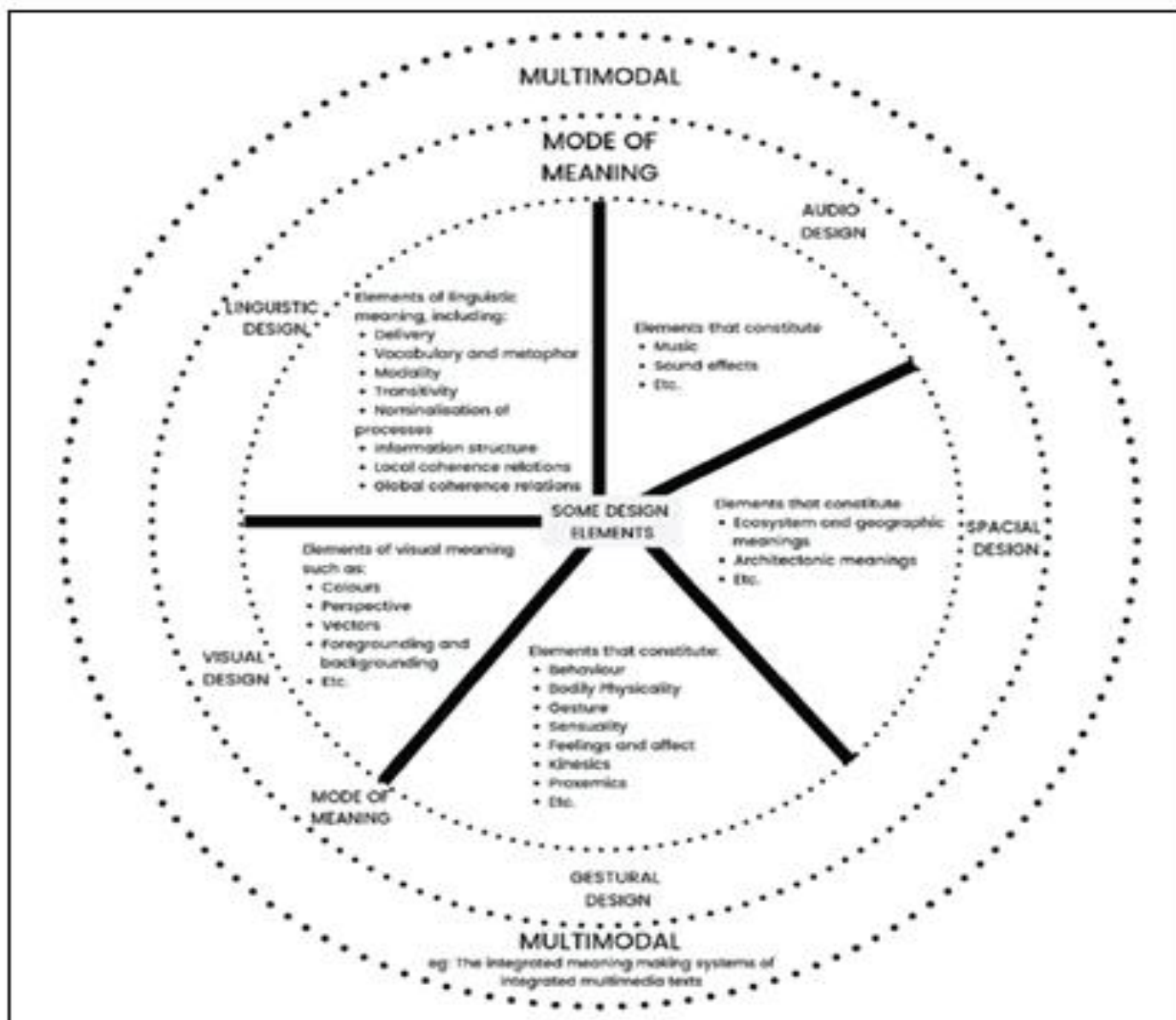


Fig. 2 Design elements of different modes of meaning-making (The New London Group, 1996)

Figure 2 depicts the design elements of different modes of meaning-making derived by The New London Group (1996). Linguistic design facilitates meaning-making through elements such as vocabulary, modality, transitivity, coherence, and structure within texts. Similarly, visual design achieves this through colour, perspective, and vectors, while audio design does so through music and sound effects. Gestural design, on the other hand, involves creating meaning through gestures, physicality, sensuality, and behaviour. Spatial design incorporates ecosystemic, geographic, and architectonic elements into meaning construction. Finally, multimodal design involves utilising different modes simultaneously to create meaning. Another prominent model is the VARK model proposed by Fleming (2001). This model categorises learners' multimodal learning styles and preferences into four types: visual, aural, kinaesthetic, and read/write. Visual learners prefer learning through visual materials like graphs, charts, diagrams, and maps. Aural learners, conversely, prefer learning through audio materials such as recordings, discussions, and lectures. Kinaesthetic learners thrive when engaging in simulations, demonstrations, applications, and practice, whereas read/write learners strongly prefer processing information through written texts.

Multimodal Approach to Teach ESL Writing

The multimodal approach has been increasingly prevalent due to the shift in the educational landscape especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Living life online has become the new normal where people are forced to utilise online technology to complete daily tasks like learning, working, meeting friends and family,

and even shopping. However, Kim et al. (2023) reported several studies have found lingering digital hesitancy among language teachers (Belcher, 2017; Casanave, 2017; Hafner, 2019; Zhang et al. 2021). Other than factors such as digital literacy, technological equipment, and integrating technology into the existing traditional curricula, there are concerns about the deviation to aspects other than language itself. Polio (2019) claims factors that exist in writing classes such as composing strategies and essay structure reduce the attention given to the language component, and incorporating multimodality might further worsen the situation. In other words, there is a possibility of weakened attention to language due to the incorporation of multiple modes of semiotic resources in writing classes (Qu, 2017, as cited in Kim 2023). However, there is no empirical evidence that suggests the use of multimodal approaches hamper language learning, specifically in L2 writing classes (Kim, 2023). On the contrary, studies suggest multimodality in L2 writing classes facilitates learning. Kim et al. (2023) found that digital multimodal composing (DMC) supports language learning and writing development by encouraging more text generation than traditional learning. The study also found no evidence suggesting disadvantages of DMC to the writing task. On the other hand, a study by Kim (2020) discovered collaborative writing facilitates students' attention to language along with creating meaning.

Past studies suggest positive implications of a multimodal approach in writing classrooms. Kim and Kang (2020) on collaborative multimodal composing (MMC) reported that applying collaborative writing in the form of MMC is a promising strategy as a part of the course curriculum. This suggests that the multimodal approach can be at the centre stage of language learning instead of only serving as a supplementary strategy. Chien (2023) reported two major findings on the impacts of multimodal writing portfolios on novice researcher's academic writing. First, novice researchers performed better in intrapersonal and linguistic aspects of their academic writing, and they understood the structure of academic writing better through the completion of multimodal writing portfolios. Secondly, the novice researchers displayed a positive attitude towards the process of multimodal writing portfolios as they believe it prepares them for their future academic writing. Another study by Kim et al. (2023) that compared monomodal traditional writing to digital multimodal composing (DMC) discovered that students write longer texts for DMC tasks. Similarly, a study by Cunningham (2019) also yielded positive results on the use of the multimodal approach. Cunningham (2019) investigates the effectiveness of technology-mediated text and screencast feedback in ESL writing. The study highlighted that although both strategies were effective, video feedback was more efficient compared to traditional text feedback as video feedback was easier to access and understand by the students, took less time for instructors to prepare, and was efficient to be used as revision. It could be concluded that these multimodal-based strategies benefited the writing classroom despite the difference in success level.

In addition, the growing need to adapt to the digitalisation of the educational landscape has brought to the attention of increasing the multimodal approach in teaching. The multimodal approach has gained popularity in various fields, specifically education, due to the rise of social media and technology (Jerome et al., 2023). As a result of technological advancement and the vast range of multimodal applications, writing pedagogy has also explored innovative multimodal approaches. According to Belcher (2017), there has been an increase in L2 writing to consider the meaning-making process by employing a process-based approach in writing tasks (as cited in Kim & Kang, 2020).

Research on multimodal approach in ESL classrooms has grown rapidly these past five years and more rampant development is expected in the future (Jelani, 2023). However, many of the studies only focused on the effects of multimodal instructions on students in L2 writing. The studies investigated the effects of specific multimodal-based strategies in regard to writing classrooms. The current study believes that there is an urgency to report on the multimodal approach from the teachers' perspectives. This study would add to the existing body of knowledge in the exploration of teachers' practices and perceptions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a phenomenological approach of a qualitative research design. Phenomenological research design aims to investigate the nature of a phenomenon through the people who experienced it. It seeks to understand the participant's feelings, perceptions, and beliefs to explain a certain phenomenon. The

researcher's preconceived ideas and beliefs do not affect the research data gained. The phenomenological design focuses on understanding universal experience through the lens of individuals living the phenomenon being studied.

The study employs purposive homogeneous sampling. In a homogeneous sampling, the respondents that possessed certain defining characteristics are selected. This study involves three language instructors from tertiary education as respondents. The respondents were selected based on pre-determined criteria to obtain an in-depth understanding of the teachers' practices and perceptions of the use of a multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms. As the study uses a non-probability sampling method, the respondents should meet three criteria to be considered credible respondents. The identified respondents should have (1) a minimum of three years of experience teaching English language writing courses, (2) use a multimodal approach as part of learning activities and resources in the writing classrooms, and (3) teach in tertiary education. The third criterion is necessary to eliminate possible confounding factors that could affect the results of the study if the respondents teach at different levels of education.

The small sample size of three participants in this study was primarily due to the challenges associated with securing voluntary participation from teachers. The study required participants to implement a curated multimodal material specifically designed for the research in their classrooms, which demanded additional time, effort, and a willingness to adopt new pedagogical approaches. This level of commitment limited the pool of willing participants. Additionally, identifying teachers who actively integrate multimodal approaches into their writing instruction proved challenging, as many writing teachers prefer to rely on traditional, text-based materials provided by their courses. These factors underscore the practical constraints influencing participant recruitment and justify the small sample size in this context.

Although the study involved a small sample size, their experiences provide valuable insights into the broader teaching community. The participants were carefully selected to represent diverse teaching contexts, including varying institutional settings, student demographics, and levels of experience with multimodal approaches. A more detailed background of the participants is provided in the Findings section. By examining their practices, challenges, and reflections, the study uncovers themes and patterns that may resonate with other educators exploring similar pedagogical methods. Rather than aiming for generalisability, the study focuses on depth and richness, offering understandings that can inform and inspire a wider audience of writing instructors interested in integrating multimodality into their teaching.

Data Collection Method

A semi-structured interview was used as the instrument for this study. In a semi-structured interview, respondents have more freedom to share their opinions without being restricted to previous studies and the researcher's beliefs (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2021). Open-ended questions also allow in-depth exploration of the respondents' experiences, thoughts, and reflections as they have the flexibility to express expected and unanticipated responses (Ruslin et al., 2020).

Interview sessions were conducted online to provide convenience for the respondents to fit the session into their schedule. The use of an interview protocol, as recommended by Creswell and Gutterman (2021), was designed to obtain data on the respondents' practices and perceptions of the use of the multimodal approach in writing classrooms. Pre-planned questions were prepared before the interview sessions, and additional open-ended questions were included, when necessary, to probe further responses. The interviews were recorded upon consent from the respondents. The transcriptions of the interviews were sent to each respondent. This procedure gives authority to the respondents to check on the transcript, hence maintaining the study's ethical standards (Zainuddin & Bukhari, 2023). As a result, this procedure would improve the overall quality of this study as it ensures the validity and reliability of the study.

As part of data triangulation, relevant documents have been collected from the respondents to study the types of multimodal approaches implemented in writing classrooms. Documents could be a valuable source of information in qualitative research because they provide insights from the respondents' perspectives, sometimes in their own words (obtained from private documents like personal teaching plans), and documents

save the researcher's time as they do not require transcription (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021). Documents like classroom materials, samples of online activities and teaching plans were obtained with the respondents' consent to substantiate the interview data, hence providing rich findings for the study.

The research instrument consists of three sections: background information, Perceived Usefulness (PU) of the multimodal approach, and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) of the multimodal approach. The questions were designed to answer the research questions of this study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework was utilised in the analysis process. The steps involved familiarising oneself with the data, generating codes, identifying themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and establishing themes, and writing the final report.

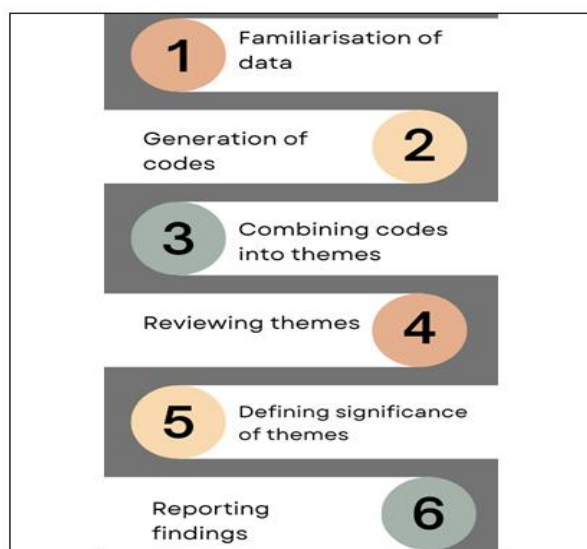


Fig. 3 Braun and Clarke thematic analysis framework (2006)

Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a six-phase framework for conducting thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. The first step involves familiarising oneself with the data, which entails reading and immersing oneself in the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content and context. Next, the researcher generates initial codes by systematically labelling and categorising segments of data that are relevant to the research question or topic of interest. Following this, the researcher will identify potential themes by clustering related codes and exploring patterns or connections within the data. In the fourth phase, the researcher will review and refine the identified themes, ensuring coherence and consistency across the dataset. The fifth phase involves defining and clearly establishing the final themes, which involves refining their definitions, boundaries, and relationships. The next section will discuss in detailed on the process of coding and refining themes. Finally, the researcher will write the final report, where they present the findings, supported by quotations or examples from the data, and provide a coherent narrative that captures the essence of the identified themes. Braun and Clarke's framework provides a systematic and iterative process for conducting thematic analysis to produce rich and meaningful insights. The raw data will be analysed thematically by adapting to the constructs of the study conceptual framework discuss in the previous section. Using these frameworks, the researcher will then independently analyse the data and compare and discuss the findings through intercoder agreement. The intercoder agreement process is crucial to ensure the reliability and credibility of the final data before findings are reported.

The analysis used NVIVO as a preliminary coding strategy to categorise the analysis in different coding. The interview data was then analysed using a mix of deductive and inductive thematic analysis. A deductive thematic analysis was applied to address Research Questions 1 and 2, which focus on how teachers apply multimodal strategies in ESL writing classrooms and their perceptions of these strategies. This approach was guided by existing frameworks related to multimodal designs and perceptions. The themes for these questions

were identified based on predetermined categories and theories, ensuring that the analysis was aligned with the relevant theoretical constructs in the field of multimodal language teaching.

Research Question 1 seeks to investigate teacher practices in using multimodal approaches in ESL writing classrooms. The Six Multimodal Designs by The New London Group (1996) is the framework used to derive codes from the interviews. The Six Multimodal Designs includes six designs multimodal elements which are visual, spatial, audio, gestural, linguistic and multimodal as the modes of meaning-making.

The constructs from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989) were used to refine the themes related to answering Research Question 2. Teachers' perceptions towards the use of multimodal strategies were investigated through two factors which are Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). PU refers to how useful the multimodal approach is in a writing classroom. This includes the benefits of the approach in language learning and teaching experience. On the other hand, PEOU examines how easy it is to apply the multimodal approach in writing classrooms. According to the model, PU and PEOU will influence the users' behavioural intention to continue using the approach in future. Figure 4 illustrates the TAM constructs used for the study thematic analysis.

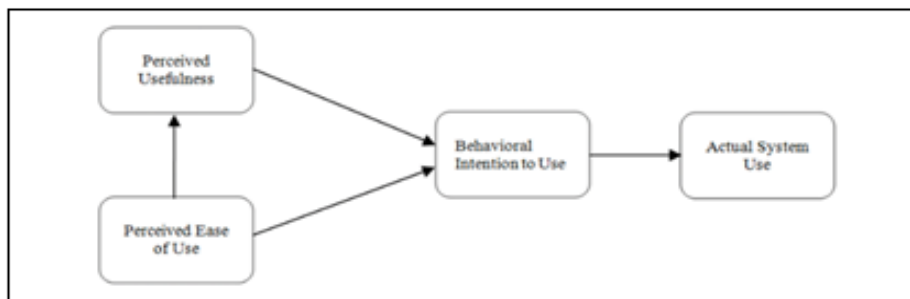


Fig. 4 Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989)

For Research Question 3, which explores the challenges teachers face when implementing the multimodal approach, an inductive thematic analysis was used. No specific theoretical framework was applied to this question; instead, the analysis was driven by the data itself. Emerging themes were identified through careful reading and coding of the responses, allowing for an open exploration of the challenges without preconceived categories or assumptions.

By combining these two approaches, the study was able to address both the established frameworks (for the first two research questions) and the new insights drawn directly from participants' experiences (for the third question), offering a comprehensive understanding of the application of multimodal strategies in ESL classrooms.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Background

Three English language instructors teaching at tertiary education were identified purposely and recruited as participants for interviews. The participants were recruited from a public university in Malaysia who are experienced educators teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). The participants' ages ranged from 32 to 42 years old, representing a mid-career demographic within the teaching profession. Table 1 summarises the demographic background of the participants.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Participants

Participant	(P1) Miss N	(P2) Miss H	(P3) Miss B
Gender	Female	Female	Female

Years of teaching experience	9 years	12 years	15 years
Highest qualification	Master of Arts in English Language Studies	Master in Education (TESL)	Bachelor of Education (TESL)

In terms of professional experience, the participants have been teaching English for nine to 15 years, demonstrating a substantial level of expertise and familiarity with classroom practices, especially in ESL context. All of them have been teaching writing courses throughout their years of service. Their diverse years of experience contribute valuable insights into the application of multimodal strategies in ESL writing classrooms, as well as the challenges faced in implementing such approaches. This demographic composition ensures a robust understanding of the study's objectives from seasoned professionals in the field.

The participants collectively define their role as educators in English writing classes as versatile, encompassing teaching, facilitating, guiding, and supporting students. They emphasise their responsibility to help students navigate academic writing tasks, such as crafting portfolios or improving their writing skills while fostering confidence in expressing ideas effectively. Beyond delivering lessons and adhering to structured plans, the participants also highlighted the importance of clear explanations, engaging in practices with students, and assessing their progress. Additionally, creating a positive and supportive learning environment is seen as essential, particularly for university-level learners. This holistic approach underscores their dedication to creating an effective yet valuable learning experience for the students. It is relevant to say that this drives the participants to incorporate multiple modes of teaching into their practices to achieve that goal.

The findings of this study will be discussed by answering the research questions of the study.

Research Question 1: How do teachers apply the multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms?

The data highlights a diverse range of multimodal strategies employed by teachers to enhance student engagement and improve writing skills. By using the Six Multimodal Designs proposed by The New London Group (1996), several themes were constructed based on the codes identified from the interview. The framework presents six design elements of multiliteracies: visual, audio, spatial, gestural, linguistic and multimodal. Based on the interviews conducted, the study found that the participants have incorporated most modes in the framework except for the audio element. Figure 5 represents the different types of multimodal strategies used by the participants in the ESL writing classrooms.

Visual strategies, such as the use of videos and infographics, are pivotal in explaining complex concepts. Videos are utilised to provide contextual examples of language use, while infographics simplify intricate ideas into visually appealing formats, aiding comprehension. Presentation slides serve as an effective tool to guide lessons systematically and maintain students' focus.

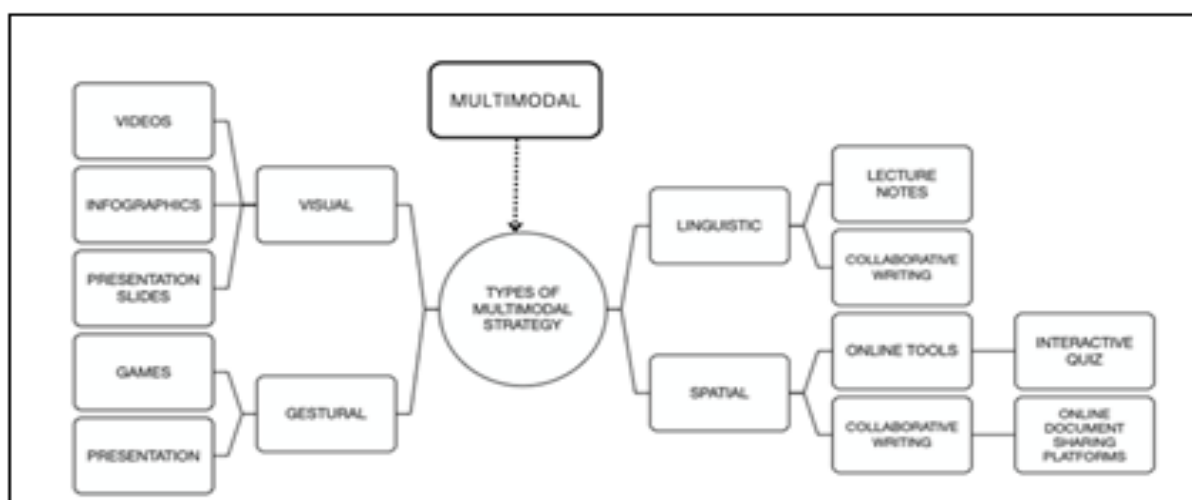


Fig. 5 The types of multimodal strategies used in ESL writing classrooms

Gestural strategies also play a significant role, with teachers incorporating games and interactive presentations. Games not only make lessons enjoyable but also encourage participation, particularly among students who might be reluctant to engage in traditional classroom activities. Presentations allow students to practice their communication skills while reinforcing their understanding of content.

Linguistic designs are integral in the form of lecture notes, collaborative writing, and online tools. Lecture notes provide structured guidance and serve as a reference for students during independent study. Collaborative writing, both in-person and digital, encourages teamwork and facilitates the sharing of ideas, fostering an interactive learning environment. Online tools, such as interactive quizzes, provide immediate feedback, helping students track their progress and identify areas for improvement. Among the online tools mentioned were Quizziz, Padlet, Canva, Google Docs and Heyzine.

Next, spatial elements are employed through the use of online document-sharing platforms and collaborative writing spaces such as Google Docs, Canva and Padlet. These digital platforms enable students to work together on writing projects regardless of their physical location, promoting inclusivity and flexibility in the learning process. The combination of physical and virtual spatial design ensures a supportive and dynamic environment conducive to language learning.

The New London Group (1996) claims that multimodal design is the most significant mode of all the modes of meaning in the framework. It associates all the other modes in dynamic relationships. For instance, multimodal texts are related to digital technologies as meanings are produced by combining many digital texts, visual, gestural, spatial and linguistic modalities (Mhd Fadzil, 2023). Another example could be observed in classroom presentations that relate linguistic to the visual (infographics or images) to gestural (body language) designs.

Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions of the multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms?

The teacher's perceptions of the multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms were examined based on Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989). The multimodal Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) were investigated to answer the research question.

Perceived Usefulness

Teachers generally perceived the multimodal approach as highly beneficial for both students and the teaching process. All three participants highlighted that the use of multimodal strategies improves language learning experience. The language learning experience is enhanced because the lessons are more attractive, exciting and dynamic. This, in turn, increased student motivation as the classroom environment is more interactive and less prone to boredom.

"So when we try this Quizziz inside the class, because there's the interactive activity, students find it more interesting". (P1)

"Because everything is on one page and it's very interactive and they were very excited they tried all the activities involved...". (P2)

"Overall, when utilising the multimodal strategies, of course, the classroom will not be bored". (P2)

"I think they're more enthusiastic about the lesson because they see there's a lot of activities, different kinds of activities...". (P3)

Next, all three participants mentioned that the multimodal approach prompts better engagement and participation from the students. Students are more responsive during the lesson. Tsymbal (2019) asserts that the integration of digital game-based learning tools has shown significant enhancement in classroom engagement and motivation; this in return helps students become more active participants in the learning process.

Other findings for the benefits of the multimodal approach include it enhances writing skills. Incorporating the multimodal approach in the writing classrooms could provide students with a deeper understanding of the writing process. It can also help in improving the organisation and clarity of their work.

"I mean they are able to improve the organisation and clarity of their work. For example, when they post their answers in the Padlet, we are able to see the answers, meaning that they will try their best to come out with the best. If they just simply post and then, they look at their friends' answers, 'my god, this is not a good one'. So they would edit and try to redo again. So I think it can lead to better answers". (P2)

Besides, the findings show that using the multimodal approach allows better monitoring of students' work. The findings reveal that participants have utilised various online tools that allow document sharing. This allows for collaborative writing and knowledge sharing. Students are able to work together in completing writing tasks while teachers are able to monitor the students' work and progress better. For example, P2 emphasised that through Padlet and Google Docs, students can compare their work with the work of others when the answers are projected on screen or when they access the tasks on their devices. This enables the students to see mistakes clearly and, thus, learn the correct way of writing through the bad and good writing samples.

"I mean in the sense that 'Okay at least you can look at your friends work and then you can copy or you try to apply or write your own statement or topic sentences and supporting sentence'. So, that's why I apply Padlet because everyone can see others' work as well". (P2)

"It's also easy because normally the students can just share the Google document, Google Jamboard, maybe, and they can express out their ideas on the same document. So, it's easier that way. It's definitely more time-saving and more effective, especially if I need them to present the idea because it's there. Simply just have to project it on the screen". (P3)

One of the questions in the interview seeks to understand the participants' opinion on the most feasible mode to be used in ESL writing class. Unanimously, the participants feel that visual mode is the most feasible one. The examples of visual mode include presentation slides and infographics. Multimodal design that combines visual, spatial and linguistic was also mentioned particularly with the use of interactive online tools and collaborative writing.

"Because first I think they (infographics and interactive online tools) are more tech-savvy and plus, all these features inside of these interactive quizzes - this one can attract their attention. That is what I find. And same goes to the infographic as well with the colours and with the sounds. So that is how you can actually attract them (students) to participate in the class learning experience". (P1)

Perceived Ease of Use

The findings of this study discovered that the participants found using the multimodal approach in class as easy. There were three factors mentioned by the participants that contributed to the ease of use of the multimodal approach: 1) familiarity with technology, 2) availability and accessibility of resources and 3) facilities. Considering the demographic of the participants, in terms of age (midlife adults) and location (urban area), it could be assumed that the participants are somewhat digital literate. Therefore, they do not find incorporating multimodal or digital technology in writing classrooms as a very challenging process. Furthermore, the participants felt that it is easy to apply multimodality because teaching resources are widely available online. The resources are also easily accessible as many online tools are user-friendly. Not only teachers, but students also find it easy to navigate through the lessons whenever multimodal digital resources are used. The last factor for multimodal ease of use is the available facilities. The participants teach at a public university located in an urban area. Most classrooms in public universities in Malaysia are equipped with equipment like computers, projectors, speakers and wireless Internet connections that make teaching with multiple modes feasible.

Behavioural Intention to Use

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains that behavioural intention to adopt a particular technology

is influenced by two key factors: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). One of the items in the instrument explored the participants' view on the future of multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms. From the participants' responses, it suggests that the multimodal approach should be used more widely in the future; this aligns with TAM's behavioural intention construct. Their positive outlook on future implementation indicates that they perceive the multimodal approach as beneficial for improving teaching and learning outcomes (PU). Furthermore, their willingness to advocate for broader adoption suggests that they find the approach manageable and not overly complex to implement in ESL classrooms (PEOU). Together, these factors strongly correlate with their intention to integrate and promote the multimodal approach in their teaching practices.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms?

Despite the benefits, the participants faced several challenges in implementing the multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms. Four challenges were identified from the study: 1) time constraints, 2) adapting to students' needs, 3) unsatisfactory facilities, 4) disorganisation of information. A significant issue was time constraints. Teachers found it difficult to manage their time effectively while integrating multimodal strategies into their lessons. P3 highlighted that even though resources are abundant, finding time to prepare for multimodal lessons could be hindered by other professional and personal commitments.

"But yeah I think maybe more time but okay even if the institution provides a sufficient resources but we ourself also need to dedicate more times to plan what we need to do in the classroom". (P2)

"But then again, we can only do so much with a lot of responsibilities on our plates. I do wish to improve on that- using and integrating more multimodal strategies in the future... I think there also needs to be a consideration in terms of KPI- what we have to do as a teacher as a whole because we don't just have to do the teaching but other things as well. So, all of these resources, it's there, but we also have to have time to work on them and provide them to the students. (P3)

Time constraints in lesson planning and execution are a persistent challenge in multimodal ESL classrooms. Utilising pre-designed templates and resources, available on platforms like Canva, Quizizz and Padlet, can significantly streamline lesson preparation. These ready-made materials reduce the time spent on creating content from scratch while maintaining quality and engagement. For example, digital tools such as Canva and Padlet have been shown to provide efficient resources for teachers, reducing preparation time and enhancing lesson delivery (Rocha & Casanova, 2023). Additionally, batch planning emerges as a practical solution. Teachers can design lessons in sets, reusing adaptable components such as infographics or quizzes across multiple topics, thereby optimising their efforts. Siumarlata (2024) proposes batch lesson planning with reusable components, such as templates for interactive multimedia lessons, has proven to be a time-saver in ESL classrooms.

Another consequential challenge is adapting to the diverse needs of students. Teachers struggled to address different learning styles and proficiency levels, as well as to ensure active participation from all students. While most students enjoyed interactive activities like online quizzes on Kahoot and Quizizz, the participants also noticed there were students who were less responsive. The participants assumed that this group of students found the questions or tasks were a bit too easy or boring for them. These challenges underscored the complexity of catering to a heterogeneous group of learners. These findings correlate to several studies that highlight the challenges of making multimodal approaches appealing to ESL students. Howell (2018) suggests that while multimodal approaches can motivate struggling students, they may fail to engage advanced learners who find such activities simplistic or unchallenging. Howell (2016) found that simplistic activities often lead to disengagement among students who prefer tasks requiring higher-order thinking skills. This challenge is also mentioned in Darrington and Dousay (2015), where they state that students might view multimodal tools, particularly those with gamified elements, as juvenile or not academically rigorous, potentially reducing their responsiveness. Other than that, Wiseman et al. (2017) identify some students resist multimodal writing tasks, especially the tasks that prioritise creativity over rigorous academic content or if they feel the tools do not align with traditional writing standards.

Addressing the diverse needs of students in ESL writing classrooms requires the adoption of personalised and inclusive strategies. One effective approach is the creation of personalised learning paths using digital tools such as Google Classroom or learning management systems (LMS). These platforms enable teachers to design tasks of varying complexity tailored to students' proficiency levels and learning styles, ensuring equitable access to content and skill development. the effectiveness of personalized learning paths using digital tools like Google Classroom has been demonstrated to improve writing skills, enabling students to work autonomously while accessing tailored content (Ramamuthie & Abdul Aziz, 2022). Additionally, implementing robust feedback mechanisms is crucial. Collecting input from students through surveys or classroom discussions provides educators with insights into learners' preferences and challenges. Robinson et al. (2019) suggest utilising feedback tools like surveys or collaborative apps has proven effective in enhancing inclusivity and teaching strategies. This data can inform instructional adjustments, fostering a more participatory and inclusive learning environment.

Additionally, the findings indicated limited availability of necessary facilities and resources posed practical challenges, further complicating the implementation process. While the participants acknowledged that technology contributes to the Perceived ease of Use in multimodal teaching, they also highlighted that some classrooms may lack adequate maintenance of essential equipment. This situation necessitates that teachers remain well-prepared to manage unforeseen challenges, such as equipment malfunctions, to ensure the smooth delivery of lessons.

To survive this challenge, innovative use of accessible and mobile-friendly technologies could be the solution. Tools that operate seamlessly on personal devices, such as smartphones or tablets, minimise reliance on institutional equipment and enhance learning flexibility. For instance, Mobile learning tools like Google Docs and apps designed for smartphones enable students to engage in writing activities despite limited classroom resources (Musthaffa Kamal, 2021). Moreover, leveraging universally accessible tools ensures that all students can participate in multimodal lessons without being hindered by hardware constraints. Simplified and user-friendly digital solutions can thus bridge resource gaps, enabling educators to implement effective multimodal strategies even in resource-limited settings.

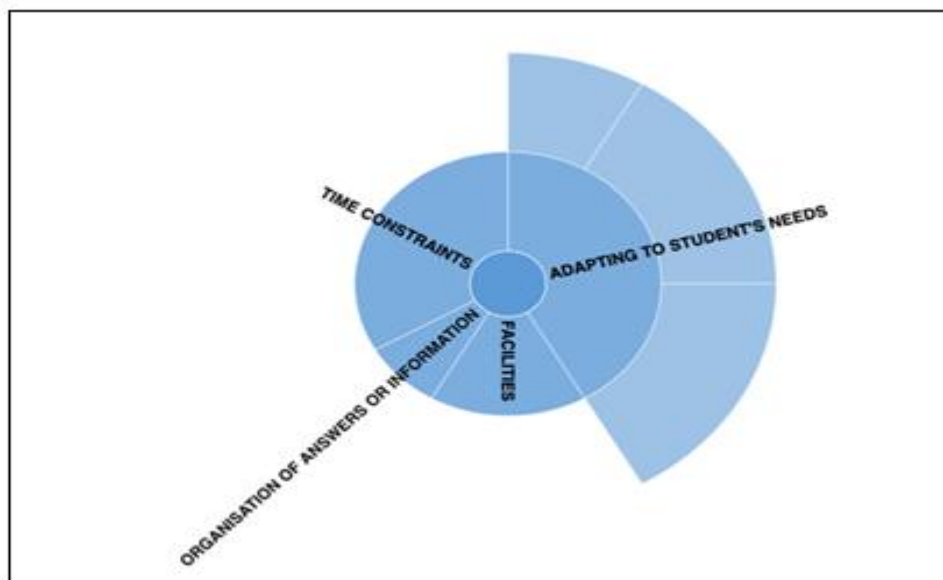


Fig. 6 The challenges of multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms

One participant, P2, reported difficulties in organising information and answers during lessons, which affected the flow and clarity of their teaching. Using Padlet as an example, the participant expressed her concern about how it could be confusing and overwhelming for students to find their answers in the pool of responses. Hence, P2 had to improvise her instructions to make sure better organisation of responses could be achieved. From this event, it could be inferred that the challenges could drive teachers to be more creative and resourceful in their instructional practices. Figure 6 displays the challenges of multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms. The size of each segment corresponds to its coverage found in the interview transcripts.

Two items from the instrument sought the participants' responses on the institutional support they received to implement the multimodal approach. All participants agreed that the institutions have provided trainings; however, they expressed the need for greater support from their institutions, particularly in terms of resources and professional development opportunities. For instance, they hoped that the institutions would allocate funds for premium subscriptions for online resources. This approach would allow teachers to explore more innovative methods for incorporating multimodality into their lessons. Furthermore, it eliminates the need for teachers to use personal funds to access premium features, which can significantly enhance teaching efficiency and effectiveness.

"I would say that some parts, it will be for now, it (support from the institution) is sufficient. But I hope that in the future they can actually provide more. Because these days we have lot of applications, quizzes especially or any other interactive activities or applications that are premium where you need to subscribe. I wish that we can actually have more of this. The institution can provide free subscription for the staffs so that we can use more of this AI or even other applications". (P1)

"I believe there could be more ongoing support maybe in term of trainings for the teachers". (P2)

These findings indicate that while teachers value the potential of the multimodal approach to transform ESL writing classrooms, they require adequate support and resources to overcome the challenges they face.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION OF STUDY

This study seeks to report on the variety of teaching strategies that employ a multimodal approach that would benefit the students' performance in writing classroom based on the instructors' perspectives. The findings reveal that teachers effectively utilise a variety of multimodal strategies to enrich student engagement and improve writing skills. By employing the framework of Six Multimodal Designs, most modes—except for audio—are incorporated, showcasing a balance of visual, gestural, linguistic, spatial, and multimodal elements. These approaches, such as using videos, infographics, collaborative tools, and interactive presentations, facilitate deeper comprehension and encourage active participation.

Despite its benefits, teachers face significant challenges, including time constraints, adapting to diverse student needs and issues with facilities and resource organisation. These barriers, such as limited preparation time and equipment maintenance, highlight the need for institutional support through additional resources, premium subscriptions, and professional training. Nonetheless, these challenges have encouraged teachers to be more innovative and resourceful, finding creative solutions to ensure effective multimodal integration. Addressing these hurdles through enhanced support and training can unlock the full potential of the multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study offer significant implications for the integration of a multimodal approach in ESL writing classrooms. First, the incorporation of multimodal strategies is demonstrated to enhance student engagement, motivation, and the overall learning experience. Teachers reported that the use of tools such as videos, infographics, and interactive platforms like Quizziz and Padlet creates a dynamic and interactive classroom environment. They emphasised multimodal approach's usefulness in enhancing writing skills, fostering collaboration, and providing opportunities for better feedback through tools like Padlet and Google Docs. Moreover, the ease of use due to digital literacy, accessible resources and adequate facilities further support its application. With strong alignment to the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), teachers expressed enthusiasm for broader implementation, underlining the multimodal approach's potential to transform ESL writing classrooms into more engaging and effective learning spaces. This findings suggest that educational institutions should encourage and support the broader adoption of these tools to foster a more engaging and effective learning atmosphere.

Second, the study underscores the importance of accessibility and inclusivity in multimodal teaching. Teachers successfully utilised spatial and linguistic designs through collaborative platforms like Google Docs and

Canva, allowing students to participate irrespective of their physical location. These findings highlight the necessity for institutions to ensure equitable access to digital tools and to bridge technological divides by providing adequate infrastructure and training.

Moreover, the perceived ease of use of multimodal approaches emphasizes the importance of professional development. While teachers in this study demonstrated digital literacy and adaptability, they expressed a need for more comprehensive institutional support, including access to premium digital tools and ongoing training. Addressing this need can empower educators to integrate multimodal strategies more effectively, ensuring that the teaching process remains manageable and aligned with contemporary pedagogical demands.

Lastly, the challenges identified, such as time constraints and the disorganization of digital responses, suggest areas where further innovations are necessary. For example, educational technology developers could focus on creating tools with better organizational features and time-saving functionalities. Additionally, institutions might consider revising workload expectations or incorporating collaborative lesson-planning opportunities to alleviate teachers' time constraints.

In the Malaysian educational context, the integration of multimodal teaching practices in ESL classrooms is shaped by socio-cultural and institutional factors. Malaysia's multilingual environment and emphasis on English as a second language highlight the need for innovative teaching methods that resonate with diverse student backgrounds. Besides improving learning outcomes, multimodal approaches align well with the Malaysian Education Blueprint, which advocates for the integration of ICT and 21st-century skills in teaching and learning (Ganapathy et al., 2016). However, socio-cultural factors, such as varying levels of digital literacy among teachers and students, disparities in access to technology, and institutional readiness, influence the effectiveness of multimodal strategies (Choi & Yi, 2016). Furthermore, cultural attitudes toward traditional teaching methods may create resistance to adopting new approaches, requiring targeted professional development and change management initiatives (Kiang & Md Yunus, 2021). By addressing these contextual challenges, Malaysian institutions can better support the adoption of multimodal approaches to enhance ESL writing education.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of multimodal teaching strategies on students' writing outcomes in ESL classrooms. Longitudinal studies could investigate how sustained use of multimodal materials influences student motivation, writing proficiency, and critical thinking skills over time. Additionally, as the demand for hybrid and fully online learning grows, research could focus on adapting multimodal approaches for these environments. For instance, studies could examine how collaborative tools like Google Docs and Padlet perform in virtual classrooms, or how spatial and visual modes can be leveraged to maintain engagement in online settings. Exploring these areas would provide valuable insights into optimising multimodal approaches across various learning contexts and preparing educators to meet the evolving demands of modern education.

In conclusion, this study implies that the successful implementation of multimodal approaches in ESL writing classrooms requires multiple strategies. This includes institutional investment in resources, continuous professional development, and the creation of supportive infrastructures. By addressing these factors, educators can overcome existing challenges and optimise the benefits of multimodal teaching for ESL learners. This study could be a promising source to assist educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in integrating multimodal approaches in language classrooms, especially in writing tasks. Factors like digitalisation and inclusivity in learning drive the need for educational practitioners to incorporate the multimodal approach to provide a better language learning environment for students. It is recommended for future studies to explore other aspects of multimodality such as factors that affect the success or failure of multimodal approaches in language classrooms to contribute a wholesome view of this approach.

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