

THE MULTIMODAL APPROACH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract

The multimodal approach in English Language Teaching (ELT) incorporates linguistics, visual, gesture, auditory, and spatial elements to produce meaning and improve learning. The study attempts to examine the trends and major findings of research on the multimodal approach in ELT. The method was a systematic review, with 27 out of 355 publications published within the last ten years. The databases used were Google Scholar and Open Knowledge Maps, which are indexed by SINTA, ERIC, EBSCO, Springer, Elsevier, Scopus, and Taylor & Francis. The selected articles were analyzed using a content analysis method. The data revealed that the multimodal approach in ELT gained popularity among scholars throughout three years (2019-2021). In addition, the most frequently utilized research methodologies in multimodal ELT studies were quantitative and qualitative, and the university was the most common level of education. Reading and writing skills were the most frequently integrated language learning in the research reviewed. Additional research demonstrated both the benefits and challenges of implementing the multimodal approach in ESL and EFL classrooms. Furthermore, studies examined the efficacy of the multimodal approach in ELT. The review generates several recommendations for teacher educators and future research.

Keywords – multimodal approach, ELT, systematic review

Introduction

In recent years, the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has increasingly recognized the importance of integrating various modes of communication to enhance language learning. The multimodal approach, which incorporates several communication modalities such as text, visual, aural, spatial, and kinesthetic elements, is increasingly supporting and transforming traditional ways of ELT (Bisson et al., 2015; Ho & Tai, 2020). Moreover, the multimodal approach is especially crucial in ELT because it gets students ready to understand and react to the various ways of communication they come across every day.

With the beginning of the technological era in the 21st century, the multimodal approach has gained importance in the

educational era, not only to engage students and motivate them but to develop a new form of the literacy. Multimodal texts create authentic and engaging learning materials by combining multiple modes like images, videos, and audio for learners to understand how meaning is generated. This approach motivates students to analyze the connections between various modes and enhance their abilities in reading, writing, and effective communication in different situations (Cárcamo et al., 2016). This change is significant, where instructional practices rely heavily on technological advancements and digital literacy (Kustini et al., 2020; Trisanti et al., 2022). By embracing a multimodal approach, ELT can assist students in understanding the intricate communication methods of the digital era, empowering them to enhance their communication skills and effectively

maneuver through the constantly evolving digital communication landscape.

A range of studies have highlighted the importance of the multimodal approach in understanding language in different contexts Chandu & Geramifard (2022) investigated the integration of multilingual and multimodal flows, emphasizing the necessity for a more inclusive approach to language technologies. (Kusters et al., 2017) expand upon this idea by introducing the notion of semiotic repertoires, which enables a more extensive comprehension of communication involving several languages and modes. (Canet, 2019) extends this by discussing the growth of video as a scholarly communication method, claiming that it can improve the communication of research results. Teachers' experiences with multimodality in teaching and learning have been classified as providing information, facilitating collaborative learning, and preparing students to explore concepts (Papageorgiou & Lamas, 2017). These studies emphasize the value of a multimodal approach in understanding the complex and dynamic nature of language use in different settings.

Integrating a multimodal approach into English Language Teaching (ELT) has become integral to teachers' instruction. This approach involves teachers and students participating in digital and multimodal tasks. Meaning can be obtained by students through various sources such as gestures, images, sounds, actions, and written and spoken words (Kress, 2010; New London Group, 1996). Furthermore, students experience enhanced academic performance when their learning styles and preferences are in harmony with teaching approaches. The multimodal approach prioritizes the customization of learning experiences to cater to individual differences (Ganapathy, 2016). Regarding second and foreign

language teaching methods, certain studies have also focused on multimodality (Choi & Yi, 2016; Van Leeuwen, 2015; Vungthong et al., 2017). Therefore, teachers must recognize the importance of multimodality and integrate a multimodal approach into the educational environment to address academic and social needs.

An in-depth review of the literature is essential to understand fully the trends, advantages, challenges, and effectiveness of the rising trend of using the multimodal approach in English Language Teaching (ELT). Despite numerous studies on various aspects of multimodal education, further research is needed to evaluate and analyze the existing findings thoroughly. This research seeks to bridge the void by performing a comprehensive Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to assess the effectiveness of the multimodal method in ELT. This study investigates how a multimodal approach is utilized in ELT, exploring its trends and main findings. The following research questions as follows:

1. What are the current trends in the multimodal approach to ELT?
2. What were the main findings from the existing literature?

Methodology

The present investigation implemented a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The distinguishing element of SLR is a methodology that specifies identifying, selecting, assessing, and synthesizing evidence from the literature. It is argued that by following such a procedure, SLRs provide a standardized method for literature reviews that is duplicatable, straightforward, unbiased, neutral, and comprehensive (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). In addition, SLRs can assess previous studies for consistency and generalizability to various fields or samples (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020).

Data Collection

Google Scholar and Open Knowledge Maps—indexed by SINTA (Science and Technology Index), ERIC, EBSCO, Springer, Elsevier, Scopus, and Taylor & Francis—provided the databases. The selected databases were those with the most important concentration of studies concerning English language teaching (ELT). The databases from Google Scholar were manually processed, whereas Open-Knowledge Maps were systematically searched for on May 18, 2024, with the search phrases "multimodal approach," "multimodal teaching," and "multimodal approach in English Language Teaching." The only outcomes taken into account were those from studies.

Data Analysis

The researcher coded and analyzed all of the studies examined in this paper. The researcher employed the content analysis method, a widely used approach for textual analyses that enables data comparison, contrast, and categorization. Elicit (<https://elicit.com/>), an AI research assistant application, was initially set up to

gather analysis results. The categories associated with specific subcategories of research questions include methodology, study design, region, primary findings, and outcomes measured. After an in-depth reading of each article, the form was completed with relevant data, as Elicit could not adequately address all research questions. Microsoft Excel was employed to analyze the data by organizing codes and categories after completing the form for each study. Descriptive information was explicitly stated in the reviewed articles, as shown by Table 1, which includes the first Research Question (RQ1) and related subcategories. On the other hand, the second Research Question (RQ2) and its associated subcategories examined the reviewed articles in greater detail. The initial step was to review all the studies to identify the classifications and categories, which were then used to define the benefits and challenges. The table below describes the subcategories of research questions.

Table 1. Subcategories of Research Questions

Research Question	Subcategories
RQ1. What are the trends in the multimodal approach to ELT?	<p>Distribution of the studies by year: The reviewed articles were examined based on their publication dates over the last ten years to estimate the number of studies conducted each year and identify the year with the highest published articles.</p> <p>The research methodology employed in articles: The reviewed articles were examined to identify the research methodology. The articles' research method sections were analyzed, and their methods were categorized as qualitative, quantitative, R&D, mixed-method, and literature review.</p> <p>Education levels of samples: The articles were found to be categorised as primary, junior, senior, undergraduates, graduate students, and teachers.</p> <p>Sample education levels: The articles were classified into several education levels: primary, junior high school, senior high</p>

	<p>school, undergraduate, graduate, and teacher.</p> <p>Countries of articles: The country of each article was determined after an intensive review of the abstract and methodology parts. The authors' workplace and the location of the research treatment were also considered.</p>
RQ2. What were the main findings from the existing literature?	<p>Integrated language learning: The reviewed articles were examined to emphasize basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), English language skills, ELT, literacy, vocabulary, grammar, and textbooks. Each article was read from beginning to end, and the abstracts, research questions, and results sections were thoroughly analyzed.</p> <p>Benefits and challenges of the multimodal approach in ELT: The results, discussions, and conclusion sections were carefully analyzed to identify the benefits and challenges. An open coding technique was implemented, and the codes identified in the reviewed articles were analyzed using content analysis.</p> <p>The efficacy of the multimodal approach in ELT: The effectiveness of the multimodal approach in ELT was examined by analyzing the abstract, results, and discussion sections in detail. The criterion was whether or not the results were statistically significant.</p>

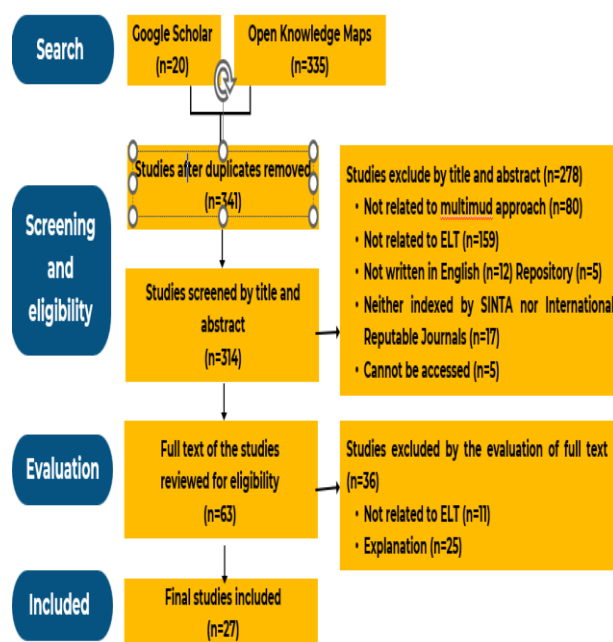


Figure 1. The figure illustrates the diagram of systematic review process (modified from (Liberati et al., 2009).

The search results for the articles to be reviewed resulted in 355 articles from two distinct databases (Figure 1)—the 321 articles needed to be reviewed after the duplicates were removed. After reviewing the titles and abstracts, 294 out of 321 articles were eliminated due to their inaccessibility, non-relevance to the multimodal approach, ELT, and repository, and non-indexation by SINTA or reputable international journals. The remaining 63 articles were reviewed for eligibility. The results showed that 11

articles were irrelevant to ELT, and 25 articles were removed from the present study due to the multimodal approach as the main focus of the research. A total of 27 articles remained to be reviewed after the previously mentioned procedure.

Finding and Discussion

Trends in Multimodal Approach and ELT Literature

In response to RQ1, the researchers examined the subcategories, which included the distribution of the studies by year, research methodology employed in articles, education levels of the participants, and the distribution of the countries where the studies were conducted. The following section describes each category.

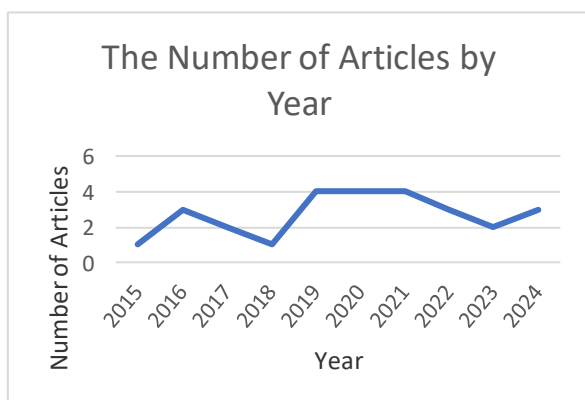


Figure 2. The Number of Articles by Year

Distribution of the Studies by Year

Figure 2 shows the distribution of studies referring to the multimodal approach in ELT by year. The first research into this area was published in 2015 (n=1), and research publications increased significantly from 2019 to 2021 (n=4). They are ongoing even though the number is smaller than in the previous three years.

Research Methodology Employed in the Reviewed Articles

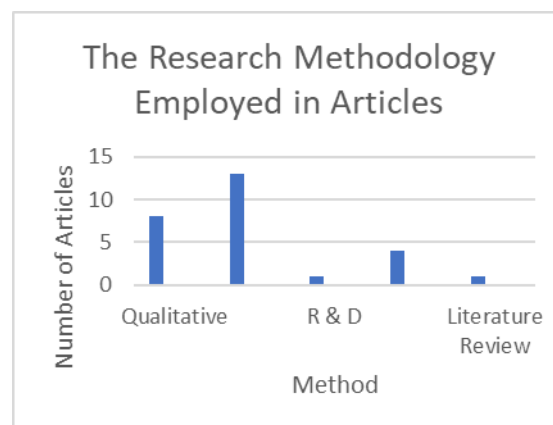


Figure 3. Research Methodology Employed in Articles

As shown in Figure 3, the most commonly used research methods were quantitative (n=13) and qualitative (n=8), closely followed by mixed-method (n=4). The least frequently used methods were R&D and literature review (n=1).

Sample Education Levels in the Articles

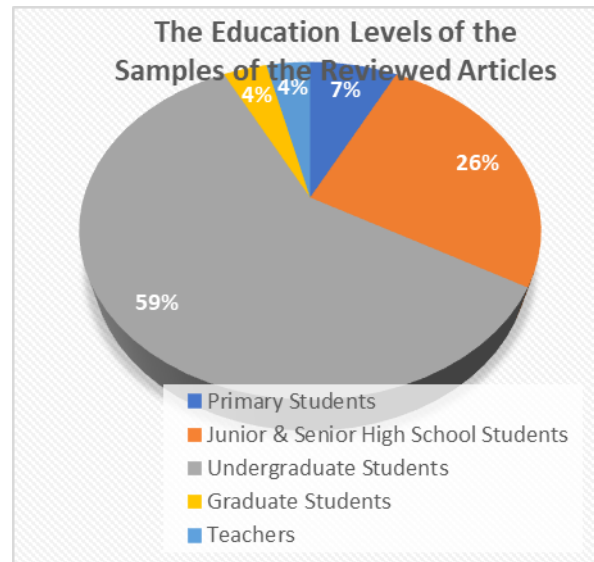


Figure 4. The Education Levels of the Samples of the Reviewed Articles

Figure 4 shows that the vast majority of articles (59%) selected university students as the samples, followed by junior and senior high school students (26%) and primary students (7%), and the remaining

groups were graduate students and teachers (4%).

Countries of the Reviewed Articles

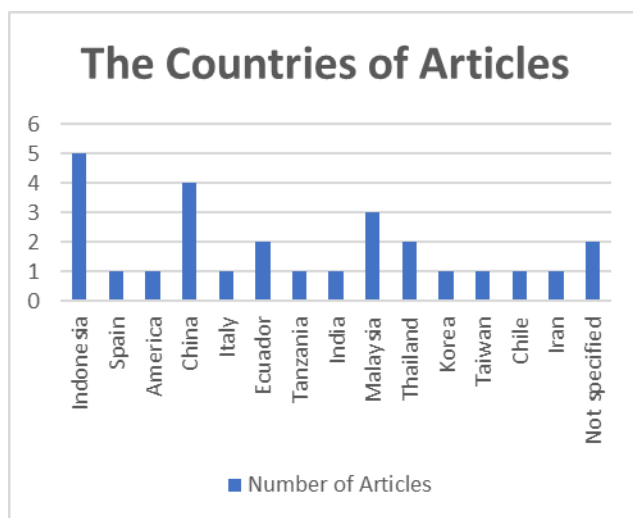


Figure 5. Countries of the Reviewed Articles

The majority of research studying the multimodal approach in ELT was undertaken in Indonesia (n=5) and China (n=4), with the remaining studies conducted in Malaysia (n=3), Ecuador (n=2), Thailand (n=2), and unspecified countries (n=2). In short, there was a good distribution of nations where studies on the multimodal approach in ELT were conducted.

The Main Findings of the Multimodal Approach and ELT

To answer RQ2, the researchers defined and examined subcategories, such as integrated language learning, benefits and challenges, and the efficacy of the multimodal approach in ELT. The subcategories are described in detail in the following section.

Integrated Language Learning

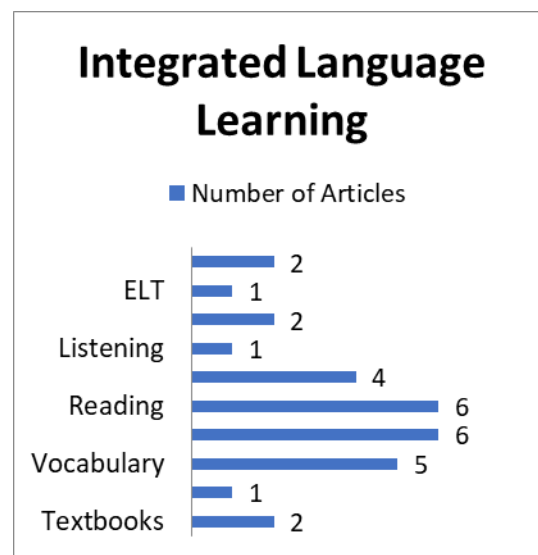


Figure 6. Integrated Language Learning

Figure 6 reveals that the multimodal approach mainly investigated basic language skills such as reading and writing (n=6), followed by vocabulary (n=5), speaking (n=4), general English language skills (n=2), literacy (n=2), and textbooks (n=2).

Benefits of the Multimodal Approach in ELT

Table 2. Benefits of the Multimodal Approach in ELT

Benefits	f	Samples of Articles
Helping students develop three dimensions of literacy	3	Reyes-Torres & Raga (2020), Q. Wang (2015) Sinar et al., (2023)
Improving students' English language skills	2	Djamdjuri et al., (2021), Sakulprasertsri (2020)
Increasing students' motivation and interest in learning	3	Djamdjuri et al. (2021), Li et al., (2022), Ganapathy (2016)
Providing interactive	1	Djamdjuri et al., (2021)

opportunities between lecturers and students		
Enhancing students' academic writing skills	5	Djamdjuri et al., (2021), Rajendra & Kaur (2022) Lim & Polio (2020), (Xie et al., (2021), Kim & Kang (2020)
Having positive attitudes	5	Li et al., (2022), Freyn (2017), Lee (2019), Sakulprasertsri (2020), Kim & Kang (2020)
Improving students' vocabulary	5	Li et al., (2022), Cárcamo et al., (2016), Mohamad Ali & Jabar (2016), Freyn & Gross (2017), Tabley Amos & Hermilinda Abas (2021)
Providing multimodal resources	1	Yana et al., (2024)
Enhancement students' oral English skills	3	Peng et al., (2024), Lee (2019) (Sidabutar, 2021)
Introducing multimodal techniques into EFL teacher education	1	Yunus (2022)
Improving students English reading ability	2	W. Wang et al., (2024), Moreno & Woodruff (2023)
Improving teachers' teaching performance	2	W. Wang et al., (2024), Sidabutar (2021)
Developing creativity and critical thinking	3	Freyn (2017), Elmiana (2019), (Varaporn &

		Sitthitikul, 2019)
Enhancing teachers' and students' ICT skills	2	Sinar et al., (2023), Mohamad Ali & Jabar (2016)
Facilitating various learning styles	1	Ganapathy (2016)
Promoting students' autonomy in learning	2	Ganapathy (2016), Varaporn & Sitthitikul (2019)

Table 2 shows the benefits of the multimodal approach in ELT. The most commonly mentioned include enhancing students' academic writing skills (n=5), improving students' vocabulary (n=5), and having positive attitudes toward technology-supported multimodal activities (n=5).

Challenges of Implementing the Multimodal Approach in ELT

Table 3. Challenges of Implementing the Multimodal Approach in ELT

Challenges	f	Samples of Articles
Having negative attitudes due to time consuming and distract students' attention	1	Li et al., (2022)
Psychological and technological challenge when producing multimodal assignments	2	Lee (2019), Sinar et al., (2023)
Awareness in selecting visual images	1	Elmiana (2019)

As shown in Table 3, although numerous benefits were attributed to using the multimodal approach in ELT, the process might need smoother. The most commonly reported challenges were psychological and technological challenges when

producing multimodal assignments (n=2), followed by negative attitudes due to time-consuming and distracting students' attention (n=1) and awareness in selecting visual images (n=1).

Findings of the Articles about the Efficacy of the Multimodal Approach in ELT

Table 4. The Efficacy of the Multimodal Approach in ELT

Findings	f	Samples of Articles
Multimodal approach is more effective	6	Djamdjuri et al., (2021), Rajendra & Kaur (2022) Cárcamo et al., (2016), Anari et al., (2019), Mohamad Ali & Jabar (2016), Sakulprasertsri (2020)
Multimodal approach makes no difference	1	Kim & Kang (2020)

As shown in Table 4, 7 articles measured the effectiveness of implementing the multimodal approach in ELT. 6 out of 7 studies found that the multimodal approach is practical in ELT. One study revealed no significant relationship between students' collaborative discussion and the quality of multimodal composing in English writing.

Trends in Multimodal Approach and ELT

In this study, 27 articles retrieved from Google Scholar and Open Knowledge Maps were analyzed for trends and main findings. The analysis showed a rapid increase in the number of articles on implementing the multimodal approach in ELT from 2019 to 2021, and research publications started to increase in 2024. The rising number of studies might be attributed to this approach's growing

popularity and the advantages it offers ELT.

The most commonly utilized methods of study were quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative method, in the form of experimental research, was used to investigate the effects of implementing the multimodal approach; however, the qualitative method was used to explore students' perceptions, observe multimodal resources, and introduce multimodal techniques into EFL teacher education. Furthermore, the combination of quantitative and qualitative or mixed-method was ranked third. In short, the research methods that showed the most significant effects of implementing a multimodal approach in ELT were quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

In the examined studies, the most common sample consisted of undergraduate students who implemented the multimodal approach at the university level due to several factors. Firstly, universities focus on higher education, where students must develop advanced communication skills, including multimodal literacy (Fatwassani et al., 2022; Prodanović Stankić & Jakovljević, 2022) Secondly, universities are places where students are exposed to a wide range of texts, including multimodal texts such as videos, images, and audio, which are increasingly common in contemporary communication; therefore, educators need to incorporate multimodal literacy into their teaching practices (Sakulprasertsri, 2020; Yunus, 2022) Lastly, the university level is where students are expected to develop critical thinking and analytical skills, essential for understanding and interpreting multimodal texts (Freyn, 2017; Lewis & Lewis, 2021) These reasons highlight the importance of a multimodal approach in university-level ELT, emphasizing the need for teacher educators to adapt their teaching methods

to meet the changing needs of students in the digital age.

The systematic review showed several studies into the multimodal approach in ELT in many countries, with Indonesia and China hosting the highest number of studies. The implementation of the multimodal approach in ELT is particularly prominent in countries like Indonesia and China due to educational reforms and policies, technological advancement, cultural adaptation, and positive outcomes and feedback (Chen, 2018; Djamdjuri et al., 2021; Han et al., 2023; Julinar, 2019; Prihatiningsih et al., 2021; Zamzamy, 2021). In conclusion, the systematic review demonstrates that Indonesia and China are at the top of the multimodal approach in English Language Teaching (ELT) due to educational changes, technological advancements, cultural adjustments, and positive outcomes and responses.

The Main Findings of the Multimodal Approach and ELT

The most commonly investigated integrated language skills covered reading, writing, vocabulary, and speaking. The particular integrated language learning is fundamental to developing literacy and communication skills in the English language (Purba et al., 2023). Regarding vocabulary, there are still few studies in higher education, especially in the Indonesian context. Further research may provide valuable insight into the impact of the multimodal approach in teaching vocabulary at the university level, especially in Indonesia.

The most commonly reported benefits of the multimodal approach in ELT were enhancing students' academic writing skills and improving students' vocabulary. Previous studies showed that the benefits of the multimodal approach in integrated language skills such as writing and vocabulary are parts of multimodal literacy

strategies. Multimodal literacy refers to the ability to comprehend and create meaning using multiple modes of communication, such as visuals, auditory elements, and digital technologies (Ganapathy, 2016; Sutrisno et al., 2024). Furthermore, having positive attitudes toward the multimodal approach in ELT is no surprise. The reviewed articles confirmed that it boosted students' interest and motivation, deepened their impression of the words, and promoted word memories (Djamdjuri et al., 2021; Freyn & Gross, 2017; Li et al., 2022). As a result, the main findings indicate that the multimodal approach in ELT helps students to improve their writing skills and vocabulary mastery and show positive perspectives.

However, implementing the multimodal approach faces psychological and technological challenges, time-consuming distractions, and a need for more awareness in selecting visual images related to the contexts. Previous studies found that the multimodal input approach also required participants to manage more visual information quickly, increasing their cognitive load. Using pictures combined with textual information to explain the meaning of new words may reduce students' attention to the word itself, especially for junior high school students (Boers et al., 2017), whose cognitive abilities are still developing (Plass et al., 2003 cited in Li et al., 2022). In addition, using videos in class instruction reduced the amount of attention. Junior middle school pupils are easily distracted by videos, which might make it challenging to integrate visual and verbal information regarding target words mentally. Furthermore, when selecting relevant pictures from EFL textbooks, developers and illustrators must be conscious of their choice of visual images and their role as informational, illustrative, or ornamental information (Elmiana, 2019). Consequently, further research should overcome these challenges so that using the multimodal approach in ELT can be

more engaging and enjoyable for teachers and students.

Using the multimodal approach substantially impacts ELT. A review of studies comparing the multimodal and monomodal approaches found that the multimodal strategy was superior. The research examines the impact of the multimodal approach on students' and teachers' perceptions and attitudes. This study described qualitatively the effect of the multimodal approach in ELT. Additionally, the multimodal approach employs a quantitative or experimental study design to evaluate students' learning using pre-and post-tests. Some relevant measurements also assess the influence of the multimodal approach in ELT using mixed methods. Further R&D and extensive literature reviews should be conducted to produce more precise findings.

As previously indicated, the trends and main findings can help teachers and scholars generate ideas for employing a multimodal approach in ELT. There is also a need for curricula more customized to multimodal approaches, learning objectives, and student needs and interests. The implication is that curriculum reconstruction is crucial for matching changing requirements and technologies in English teaching and learning, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is an ongoing progression toward increasing the quality of ELT (Yana et al., 2024). Teachers and practitioners should consider the benefits and challenges when developing curricula and instructional methodologies. Future studies should focus on developing the multimodal approach to ensure it effectively addresses students' changing demands in the digital age. This continual investigation and adaption will assist in establishing the multimodal approach as a pillar of modern ELT, resulting in more effective learning experiences and outcomes.

Conclusions

The systematic review investigates the use of the multimodal approach in English Language Teaching (ELT) throughout the last decade, examining 27 studies out of 355 research publications. The multimodal approach gained popularity in ELT, especially between 2019 and 2021. This approach has been investigated chiefly using quantitative and qualitative methodologies, emphasizing university students. The benefits discovered were improved academic writing skills, increased vocabulary, and positive attitudes toward the impact of the multimodal method in ELT. However, issues such as time constraints, distraction, technological difficulties, and a lack of awareness in selecting acceptable images were identified. The review indicates that the multimodal approach is typically beneficial in ELT, indicating the need for curriculum change to incorporate this approach and overcome the identified challenges. This study can also guide researchers who want to conduct similar research into integrating the multimodal approach, especially in EFL classrooms. Finally, the following recommendations are provided based on the results and discussion.

Recommendations for the Further Studies

1. Further research should explore the implementation of the multimodal approach in a variety of educational settings, including primary and secondary levels, to better understand their relevance and effectiveness across age groups and learning environments. Furthermore, researchers should investigate the impact of the multimodal approach in the Indonesian setting, specifically on teaching vocabulary in higher education, as there have been few studies on this topic to date.
2. Further studies are required to enhance advancements in technologies, specifically Artificial

Intelligence (AI), with the goal of improving multimodal learning experiences.

3. Further studies are needed to create and assess training programs for educators, equipping them with the necessary abilities and understanding to effectively employ multimodal strategies.

Recommendation for Practitioners

1. Teachers should actively pursue and engage in professional development programs that specifically address multimodal literacy and the proficient utilization of technology within the educational setting.
2. Teachers include diverse multimodal resources into their teaching methods and incorporate local cultural resources and contexts into multimodal teaching materials to make learning more applicable and improve student involvement and learning outcomes.
3. Teachers should promote collaborative projects that incorporate several modes of communication, enabling students to collaborate in creating and analyzing texts that use various forms of media. This will enhance their abilities in communication and teamwork.

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