

ESP STUDENTS' PREFERENCE FOR MULTIMODAL LEARNING

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Abstract

Learning is always multimodal. Unbeknownst to us, English language learning inherently incorporates multiple modes. However, there is limited study asking students which modes they preferred the best during ESP learning along with their reasons. This study aims to investigate student preferences for multimodal learning in their ESP course. This study involved 117 students enrolling in an ESP course. Using a survey, this study reveals that in terms of multimodal learning preferences, most students showed a preference for a combination of pictures, followed by illustrations. Additionally, a significant portion of students favored audio, while others preferred speech. Facial expressions were found to be effective by a considerable number of students, and some expressed a preference for the use of colors. These findings emphasize the wide variety of modalities that students find beneficial in their learning process. The open-ended survey revealed that students perceive multimodal learning as interesting, non-boring, interactive, and stimulating to their senses.

Keywords: Multimodal learning; English for Specific Purposes; Modes

Introduction

Language alone is no longer the sole form of communication. In today's world, communication encompasses various modes, including text, audiovisual content, speech, and movement. Mode, semiotic resource, materiality, modal affordance, multimodal ensemble, and meaning functions are among the concepts that have been introduced as important to multimodality (Jewitt, 2013). In situations where written words are insufficient to fully convey a concept, a visual representation can effectively address the communication challenge (Suparmi, 2017). Modes are used to construct meaning. A mode is a set of socially and culturally formed tools for generating meaning: a 'channel' of representation or communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). These modes of communication are independent but are brought together in a "multimodal ensemble," as described by Jewitt (2008a) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). The semiotic resource is also important in the description of multimodality. Semiotic resource encompasses the idea of a resource that serves as a material, social, and cultural means for making meaning, wherein it represents the

connection between representational resources and the actions performed with them (Jewitt, 2013).

According to Jewitt and Kress (2010), the combination of text, audio, and images as individual modes can be creatively merged to convey meaning, promote interaction, and facilitate learning in language classrooms. The theory of social semiotics, derived from Halliday (1973), underscores the interconnectedness between language and its context. Halliday's research redirected focus from perceiving language as a fixed linguistic structure to viewing it as a social system, highlighting how language is influenced by its usage and the social purposes for which language resources are employed in specific contexts (Jewitt, 2013). The context of a situation, as interpreted through discourse, is a three-part entity in which each component actively contributes to the production of a text (Hasan, 2004). Multimodality, as explained by Van Leeuwen (2005), explores the diverse ways in which various semiotic resources are used and conceptualized together. Additionally, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) delve into the reasons behind sign-makers' choices of specific modes in particular situations.

Multimodality is an interdisciplinary approach derived from social semiotics that views communication and representation as more than language and pays systematic attention to the social interpretation of a variety of modalities of producing meaning (Jewitt, 2013). The development of this concept took place during the early 2000s (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). It acknowledges that representation and communication extend beyond language, encompassing a wide array of semiotic resources including images, speech, gesture, and writing (Jewitt, 2008b). Jewitt (2008b) further explains that analyzing it in the classroom will show the connection between the utilization of semiotic resources by teachers and students, and the generation of curriculum knowledge, student subjectivity, and pedagogy. In the teaching of English, the scope of communication and representation goes beyond spoken and written language within classrooms. It also includes other modes such as images, gestures, gaze, movement, and the spatial arrangement of the learning environment (Jewitt et al., 2005). Creating a framework for creative learning involves the teacher's careful selection and combination of modes to promote fluid interaction and enhance communication (Marchetti & Cullen, 2015). Thus, to effectively employ multimodality in educational research, a clearer understanding of how various modes contribute to meaning-making is needed, as there is limited knowledge about the semiotic potentials of non-verbal modes like gestures, sounds, and images in classroom and curriculum contexts (Jewitt, 2008b).

This study is a smaller part of a bigger project investigating students' multimodal structure used in the classroom. The study shows students' preferences for multimodal structures for their English language learning. It outlines the diverse modes students have employed within the classroom setting to complete their projects. This research aims to inspire educators regarding the utilization of technological platforms that can assist students in exploring diverse semiotic resources to enhance their learning experiences.

Method

This study employed an electronic survey through Google Forms for data collection. The use of online surveys allows for easier questionnaire preparation, distribution, storage, and analysis (Nayak et al., 2019). It provided a huge help for us in terms of cost and ease of analysis (McPeake et al., 2014). In the survey, students were asked to select modes to combine during language learning, be it for assignment completion or projects. The options provided are pictures, illustrations, audio, speech, music, movement, gesture, facial expression, and colors. Students can choose more than one mode.

The study involved 117 ESP students of the Early Education Teacher Education Department. Students took an English course for a semester. Their ages are between 18-22 years. In the ESP course, their literacy practice revolves around making presentations using Microsoft PowerPoint, writing essays, making photovoice, games, making advertisements, and generating videos in English. English lesson is highly integrated with technology as all assignment and projects required students to use technology. This study lists students' preference for modes as well as platforms that may be an aid for student English language learning.

Findings and Discussion

In terms of multimodal learning preferences, the majority of students (71.4%) expressed a preference for the combination of pictures, followed by 42.9% who preferred illustrations. Additionally, 50% of the students favored audio, while 28.6% preferred speech. Furthermore, 35.7% found facial expressions to be effective, and 21.4% expressed a preference for the use of colors. These findings highlight the diverse range of modalities that students find beneficial in their learning process.

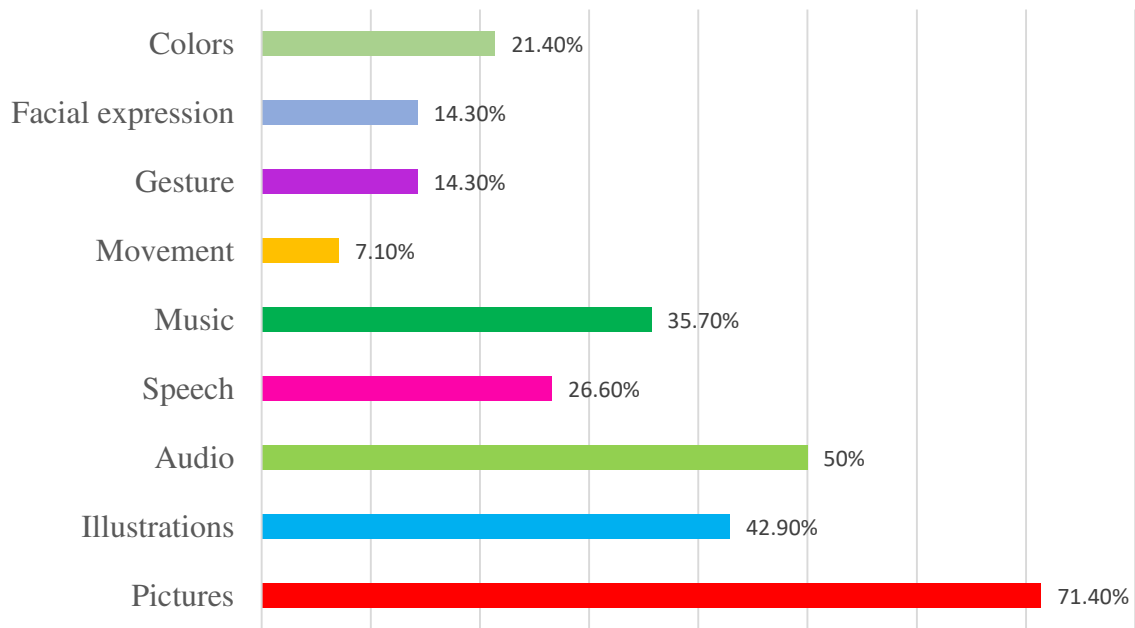


Figure 1. Students' Preferences of Modes in Task Completion

In this study, students used software for assignment completion. Figures 2-5 show students' activities using multiple semiotic resources in learning.

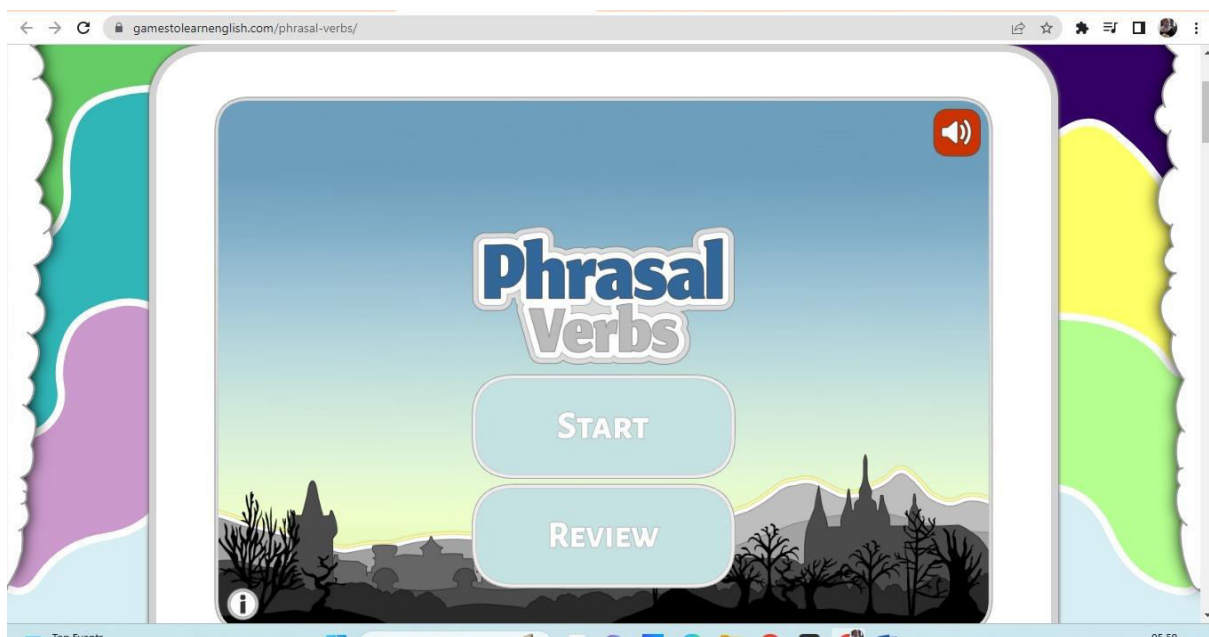


Figure 2. Students' Activities with Wordwall

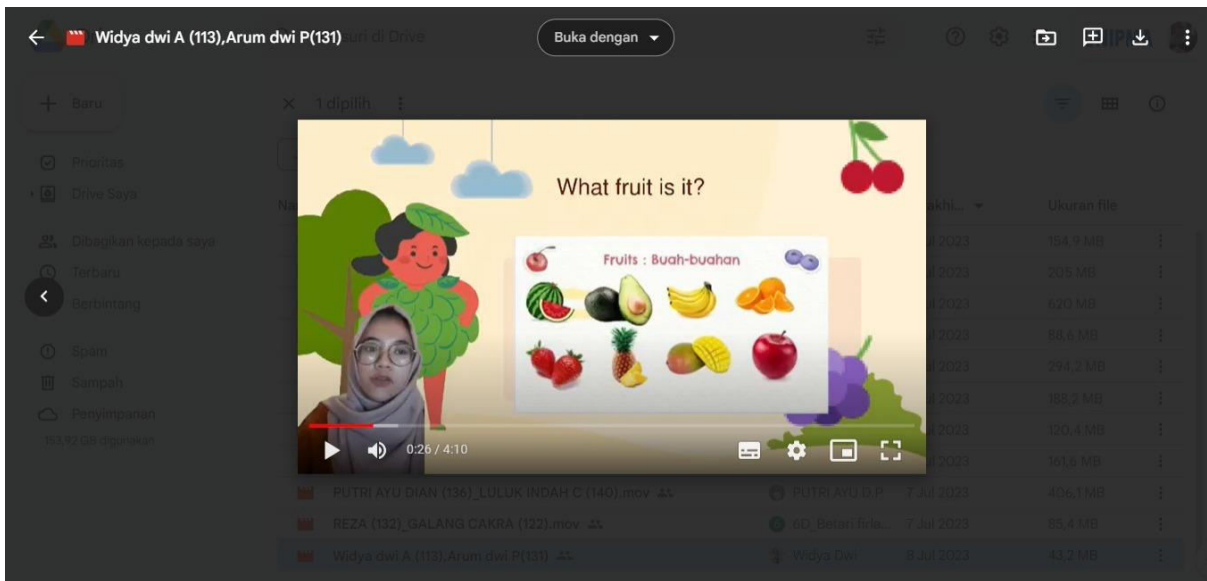


Figure 3. Students' Activities with Video Projects

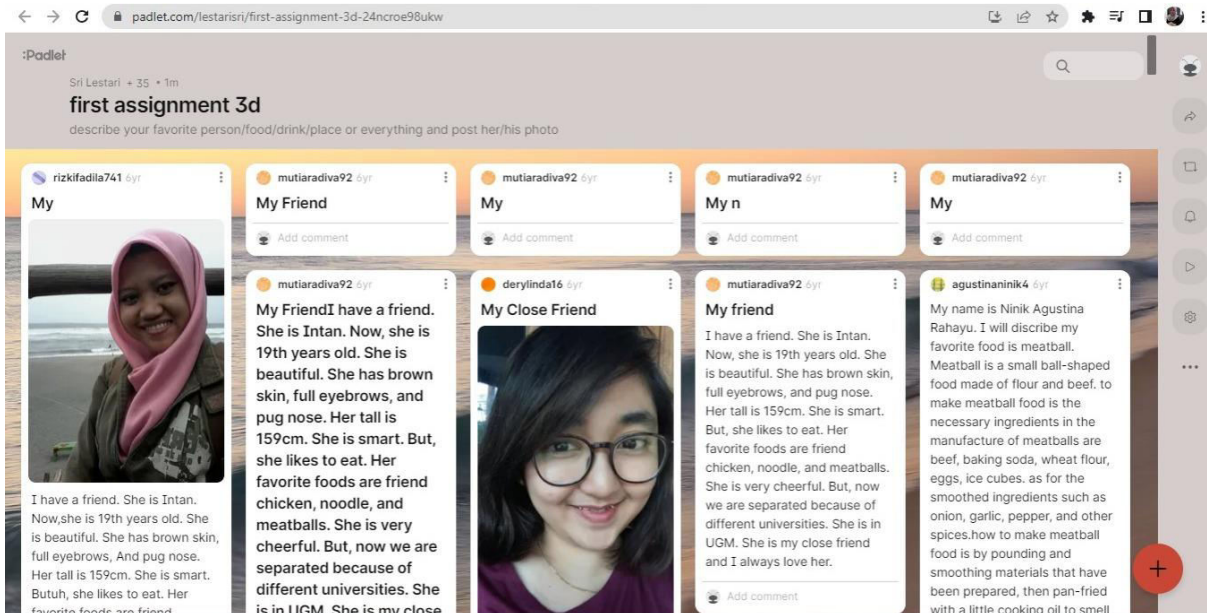


Figure 4. Students' Activities with Padlet

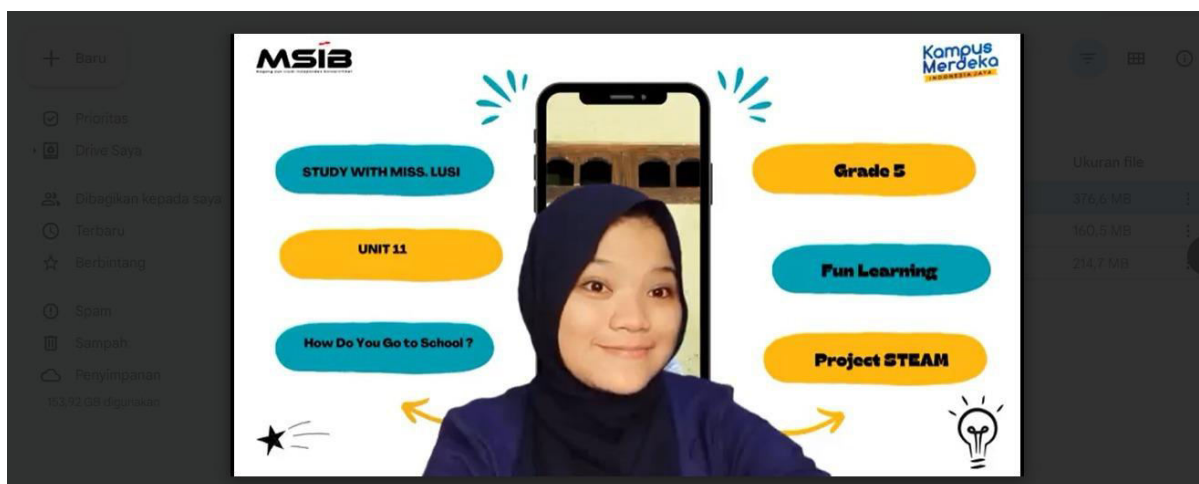


Figure 5. Students' Activities with Video Projects

The study shows that students complete their projects creatively by selecting the most appropriate software applications. It underlines students' initiative and self-regulated learning in terms of planning and executing their projects. As a result, students have the potential to become more self-reliant and actively engage with the different components found within multimodal environments (Guan & Zhang, 2023). It also exhibits students' capability in selecting semiotic resources for their projects. When students participate in design practices, they are essentially creating signs by behaving in a specific manner within a particular context, employing various modes to convey their intended meaning (Kress, 2003). This confirms Pachuashvili (2019) that students in English language classrooms exhibit a notable tendency to rely heavily on semiotic signs, rather than solely relying on language as a means of communication. This corroborates Marchetti & Cullen, (2015) that the utilization of video in the classroom exemplifies the incorporation of multiple modes, particularly visual elements, with the flexibility for the teacher to include or exclude text based on their preference, along with various options for audio or speech modes, and the presence of movement within the video.

Thus, our study proposes activities that may be helpful for educators in maximizing the use of semiotic resources in English language classrooms. This study encourages educators to explore different media for learning. With the advancement of technology, burgeoning new software's waiting to be used in the classroom. Educators should identify students' preferences by offering options and examples of authentic materials, which can serve as a source of inspiration. Educators should not solely rely on students' creativity to utilize these tools effectively; they need to provide guidance and instruction regarding multimodal usage. While using various modes is common, students may face challenges when it comes to

assignments as they must carefully select and arrange modes to align with the intended context. Furthermore, fostering collaboration among students in group settings encourages them to discuss ideas and work together as a team. Their monitoring the assignment is essential for students to keep on track. Lastly, feedback plays a crucial role in instructional design, allowing students to evaluate and revise their work. Constructive feedback enables students to identify mistakes and make necessary improvements, leading to the enhancement of their work.

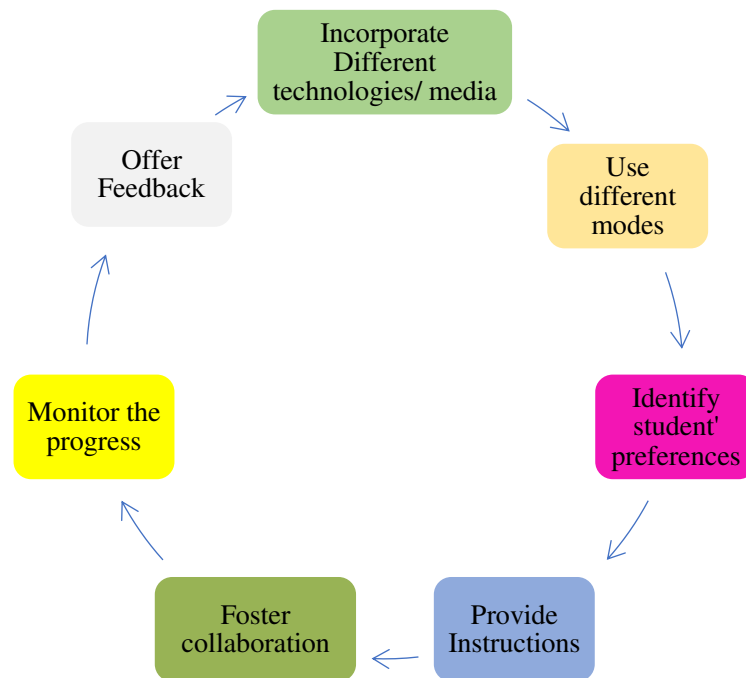


Figure 5. Step to Harness Multimodal Learning in Language Classroom

Multimodality provides resources to support a complex fine-grained analysis of artifacts and interactions in which meaning is understood as being realized through the iterative connection between the meaning potential of a material-semiotic artifact, the meaning potential of the social and cultural environment in which it is encountered, and the resources, intentions, and knowledge that people bring to that encounter (Jewitt, 2013). Students are more motivated if they can connect with authentic learning (Girón-García et al., 2021). By adopting a multimodal approach, the classroom experience can be enhanced through increased interaction between teachers and learners, learners and instructional materials, and overall improvement in classroom communication (Marchetti & Cullen, 2015). When learning materials are presented using a diverse range of presentation modes, learners, especially those with lower academic performance, may perceive the learning process as easier, leading to increased attention

and ultimately improved learning performance (Girón-García et al., 2021). Hence, there is no reason not to use the multimodal approach in the English language classroom.

Conclusion

This study employed a survey to investigate students' preferences in multimodal learning, and the findings revealed that a majority of students preferred a combination of pictures, followed by illustrations. Additionally, a significant portion of students showed a preference for audio, while others favored speech. Facial expressions were also found to be effective according to a considerable number of students, and some expressed a preference for the incorporation of colors. In this study, a set of recommendations is proposed for achieving optimal multimodal learning in English language classrooms. These steps involve incorporating various technologies and media, utilizing different modes of communication, identifying students' preferences, providing instructional guidance, fostering collaboration among students, monitoring their progress, and offering constructive feedback

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