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Criteria for Multimodal Texts in English Language Classrooms

Abstract. *The purpose of this article is to investigate multimodal texts and employ multimodal texts in the curriculum of English classes. Due to the swift development of technology and globalization since the late XX century, the growing multimodality of communication is evident in education. Multimodal texts may be any written text which is followed by a large variety of audio, visual, and other symbolic representations or some information from this text is accompanied by images and sounds. Hence multimodal texts include picture books, textbooks, graphic novels, comics, and posters, conveying meaning to the reader through combinations of visual written language and spatial modes. The article follows a qualitative paradigm. It is referred to primarily two case studies which consist of recorded trailers and created multimodal texts by students. The assessment criteria were also designed for the tasks presented in this article. Thus, the result found in the current study showed that students appeared to accept multimodal texts in English foreign language teaching and this research is useful for teachers and students as a practical guide on how to implement multimodal texts based on the tasks introduced in this article. And finally, we may say that the outcomes of the current article support and reinforce previous research studies regarding multimodality in teaching and criteria for choosing the appropriate pedagogically designed multimodal texts.*
Keywords: *visual; multimodal text; multimodality; multimodal literacy; selection criteria; assessment criteria*

Introduction

Reading skills belong to the language skills in English which give a huge input to learners, and literary texts today are widely exploited in the classroom by English language teachers.

The effectiveness of using literary texts in the classroom mostly depends upon which texts are being used. Therefore, the reasons or criteria for choosing appropriate texts are mostly considered to integrate those texts into the curriculum. This project studies various criteria for choosing suitable literary texts in foreign language classes. The main focus is on multimodality as a criterion. Multimodal texts have become more popular in teaching English due to their effectiveness.

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Multimodal text is text that contains different semiotic modes which cover gestures, visual images, documents, layouts, music, architectural design, etc. Multimodal literature can be a motivating educational resource for learners due to the integration of different modes, their visual appeal, and learner-centered themes. This article is aimed to familiarize students with multimodal texts to enhance their speaking and creative skills through completing several tasks offered in this project. The first task for them is to record a trailer for the story, which will provoke their speaking; and the second task represents a mini project where students need to create multimodal texts on the website using their creativity. Also, this paper offers how multimodal texts as a pedagogical strategy can be implemented through the use of creating multimodal texts via a website.

Almost everyone will agree that using literature in teaching English is beneficial since it provides cultural values and comprises almost accurate grammatical content. The Common European Framework of References to Languages also points out the role played by literature in FLT as a potential means to develop language and interculturality. Although there are many benefits of learning English through literature, there are some challenges for teachers to adapt literature in the curriculum, particularly in countries where the first language is not English. Firstly, literary works are not made directly for pedagogical purposes. Secondly, there is a big probability of a wrong understanding cultural values of literary works since there are real gaps between two different cultures. Thirdly, the curriculum sometimes does not specify what and how literature should be taught in a course [1, p. 7-8].

Thus, there are great challenges for teachers to select literary texts in teaching EFL. To address this issue, this study defines criteria for teaching English.

Selecting the literary texts or materials should not only focus on what materials to use but also on the science that should be taken into account. This requires special criteria that are considered mostly from the types of students and the text-related factors. With the existence of a wide range of possible criteria for selecting texts, like student's checklist from his/her book 'Literature and Language Teaching', there is also a big deal for us which criteria to use. In this work, multimodality is investigated as a leading criterion for selecting texts in FLT.

The driving question of this article can be formulated as follows: 'How multimodality can be used as a criterion for selecting literary texts?'
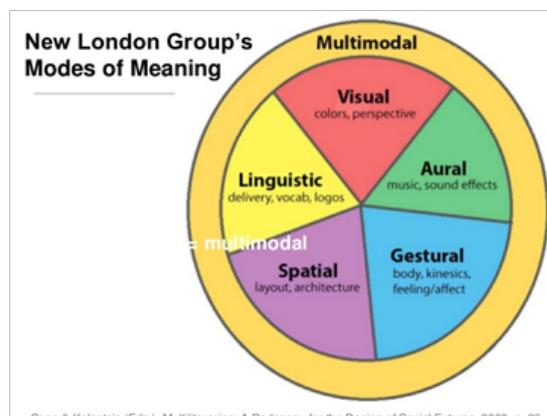
This article is aimed to demonstrate the options of how multimodality is used for selecting multimodal texts in the curriculum to enhance students' speaking skills.

The end product was represented as recorded trailers to a multimodal story and self-created multimodal texts.

Literature review

Due to the swift development of technology and globalization since the late XX century, the growing multimodality of communication is evident in education. Multimodal literature incorporates a large variety of audio, visual, and other symbolic representations. A multimodal text is often a digital text but can be a book, such as a pia culture book, information text, or graphic novel. Different from the linear reading of monomodal texts, multimodal materials require the processing of more than one mode and the recognition of the interconnections between these modes [2, p. 9-14].

Defining Multimodality by New London Group's Modes of Meaning [3, p. 9-37]

New London Group's Modes of Meaning

Multimodal
Visual — colors, perspective
Aural — music, sound effects
Linguistic — delivery, vocab, logos
Gestural — body, kinesics, feeling/affect
Spatial — layout, architecture
= multimodal

Cope & Kalantzis (Eds), Multiliteracies: A Pedagogy for the Design of Social Futures, 2000, p. 26.

Reading multimodal literature in FLT changes the act of reading substantially because the

reading process is focused on the combination of verbal text, audio, and image and how these can be creatively combined to produce meaning. In comparison to a traditional word-based text, where only letters and sentences have to be decoded, deciphering multimodal literature becomes 'a multiliterate act in which all sorts of codes, "languages" and their respective literacies are involved [4, p. 283-298]. To integrate multimodal texts in FLT most effectively and to provide a theoretical grounding for integrating these texts, pedagogical principles are presented in the table below that can set the basis for planning a lesson sequence focusing on multimodal literature. Also, this model can serve as the theoretical grounding for integrating other text formats [5, p. 56-63].

Pedagogical principles for integrating multimodal texts in FLT

Principles	Features
1. Integrating a variety of text formats	→ learner-centeredness → relevant topics → relevant modes
2. Authenticity & authentication	→ textual authenticity / genuine texts → learner authentication / engaging authentically with texts
3. Competence-based teaching	→ integrating communicative skills → outcome-oriented
4. Integrating multiple literacies	→ analyzing verbal narration → analyzing other modes
5. Task focus	→ integrating tasks → scaffolding → variety of outcomes

So, the suitable criteria for text selection firstly are the syllabus demanding requirements in terms of content when selecting a text. In addition, it is vital to focus on the learner group and their readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Factors such as learners' age, level of proficiency, abilities, and background knowledge should also be considered. Additionally, texts should ideally be meaningful to learners in that they can relate the plot to their life experiences, emotions, and expectations. Moreover, reading provides a beneficial and lasting effect on the learners' development of communicative and intercultural competencies. Moreover, competencies are easily achieved if a text is chosen that is enjoyable and thematically motivating to learners. Selecting a suitable text for a class is a very individual process. To stay up-to-date, it is important to engage students with multimodal texts which helps them develop vital multimodal literacy skills. Integrating multimodal literature in FLT can help students understand the potential of different modes, particularly the relationship between words and images, in reading, writing, and producing multimodal texts [6, p. 62-68]. The competencies gained from dealing with multimodal texts in FLT are transferable to other literacy practices. To further this discussion, the outline of task examples illustrates how multimodal narratives are integrated into practice. If teachers train learners in the process of multiliterate reading and choose suitable texts, this can potentially motivate learners to read multimodal texts in and outside the classroom as well.

Methodology

This paper was triggered by field observation and experience in the classroom situation as outlined in the statement of the problem. The paper was thus based on what authors experienced and observed as background to the study (laying the foundation for the study), theoretical literature review, and needs analysis. The preliminary stages of the paper are viewed as empirical experience observation, and qualitative analysis of what happened in the English classrooms.

The project relies primarily on two *case studies* which consist of recorded trailers and created multimodal texts by students. The *method* of this project is *action research*. Tripp defines it as a method used in education when teachers want "to improve their teaching and thus their students' learning" [7].

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The *assessment criteria* for the first task are:

1. Participation in discussion on comprehension questions – 20

2. Teamwork/Cooperation during group work – 20

3. Content/Storyline Key (scenes or themes from the book have been creatively presented, the content of the book is clear to the viewer) – 20

4. The voice track is clean and fully understandable – 20

5. The trailer flows very smoothly and captivates the attention of the audience. It compels the viewer to read the book – 20

The *assessment criteria* for the second task are:

1. Attractive layout for the readers – 25

2. Incorporation of Visuals/Audio – 25

3. Website navigation – 25

4. Presentation – 25

Discussion

Criteria for text selection

The appropriateness of using literary texts mostly depends on how the teacher selects materials. This study will help the readers to provoke interest in using multimodal texts in FLT as well as to understand which criteria should be considered to select an appropriate literary piece. Choosing literature as a learning material is very crucial to provide appropriate materials. Therefore, teachers always accompany the process of selecting materials with some criteria.

Possible criteria for text selection, for classroom and extensive reading, could include some of the principles advanced by Prowse for the selection of extensive reading material [8, p. 142-145]:

Choice: as far as possible, let your students choose the text they want to read. There is plenty of English language learner literature, also called graded readers, available from international ELT publishers – from adaptations of classics to original stories (http://www.erfoundation.org/erf/). If your school library is limited, offering students a shortlist at least gives them a certain degree of choice. Also, there is plenty of free copyright material available on the Internet. Deciding for others what they would read is hardly ever something we would do in real life to our family and friends, and the same should

apply to our learners. What we should do is suggest and recommend reading material based on what is available to us and what we consider culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Ease: finding a text with the right language level is crucial. The text should be neither too difficult so that students cannot infer the meaning of particular lexical items and are forced to look up words too frequently; nor too easy so that there is no challenge and no vocabulary gain. Teachers' awareness of their students' language proficiency and knowledge levels are ultimately the best guides in making a decision.

Texts to engage with and react to: texts should engage readers cognitively and effectively [9, p. 191-198]. Nothing is more effective in killing the joy of reading than a boring text. However, what teachers see as interesting (or boring) may not necessarily be the same for their students – the choice is again an important element.

No tests and no comprehension questions: this is a quite controversial issue and demands a far more extensive and serious discussion than the one permitted by the limits of this article. There are other ways of assessing students' response to texts, as well as the language development they achieved by reading them than formal tests and comprehension questions. Some options may include follow-up writing, classroom presentations, and face-to-face or online discussions.

Teachers' participation: Teachers, as parents and politicians, should lead others by example. Asking your students to read literature when you do not read it yourself can not only undermine your reputation and authority but also create some quite embarrassing situations. Students would probably feel much more motivated if they can engage with the teacher in a real and meaningful discussion about the texts they are reading.

Besides the list above, we should also consider Brumfit's criteria for text selection which relates to suitable linguistic level, 'cultural and social expectations of different groups of learners,' and length of the text [10, p. 101-107]. Imagination and creativity should also be our concerns. Literary texts, and the tasks based on them,

should help learners to activate and exercise their imagination.

The theory of multimodality is exposed to a number of these questions related to the tools for analyzing non-textual components because it denotes the application of multiple literacies within one medium.

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen introduced the term multimodality into psycholinguistics and denoted it as the description of general laws and rules of interaction in the communicative act of verbal and non-verbal signs, the combination of various codes of information presentation [11, p. 76-77].

G. Kress considered multimodal phenomena of interaction between verbal texts and images, speech and gestures, and size and color of the text. The use of multiple means or channels of information transmission in discourse analysis is called multimodal. Multimodal communication is characterized by textual, audiovisual, linguistic, and spatial modes that are involved in creating and sending messages [12, p. 123].

A multimodal text is a text in which a communicative situation is presented using several modes of perception, specifically, vision and hearing (Kress). For research purposes, audio-visual material is accompanied by transcriptions and annotations. The transcription of a video sequence's communication is its visual representation and must be synchronized with it.

Multimodal texts are adapted to any learning style according to the VARK model by N.Flemming [13, p. 6-18].

Visual arts: paintings and photographs are used as both warm-up or follow-up activities. They can provide memorable material with strong visual appeal and impact [14, p. 233-237].

Dramatic arts and music: kinesthetic and auditory learners benefit a lot from activities that include classroom or recordings and performances of short scenes of a play, songs, or poems [15, p. 50-56]. These activities also provide good opportunities for collaborative learning and for working on pronunciation.

Web 2.0 tools: due to access to the Internet the use of wikis, blogs, websites, and discussion forums have broadened the experience of a text and are used to promote collaborative writing, creative writing, and exchange range of ideas and contextualization of literature works.

Results

Implementing Multimodal Texts in the Classroom

Using such criteria *(no tests and no comprehension questions, but using texts with lots of visual arts, texts to engage and react to)* and principles as mentioned above *(authenticity, competence-based teaching, integrating multiple literacies, task focus)* multimodal texts in our classroom with 15 students were integrated into the teaching process. Students are 1st-year bachelor's students with a major in mathematics, and their English level is Intermediate. One of the stories chosen was 'Story of an Hour by Kate Chopin', where students are engaged in the drama and offered to discuss a social dilemma that exists in our country too. For the tasks in this story, discussion questions have been prepared to activate students' speaking and discussion skills. Also, the site of the story with visuals and audio prepared by us, allowed students either to listen to the story or to read, according to their preferences.

Two more activities have been created as an example of how multimodal texts can be interwoven in the process of language learning. For Task 1, students are offered to shoot the trailer to the story after reading or listening. While Task 2 is a project-based activity, which requires students to make more effort into creating their own multimodal story with instructions given.

Task 1. 'Trailer to the story'

Aim: to provoke students' speaking by recording a trailer to the story based on a multimodal text.

Language level: Intermediate and above

Age: Adults

Before class:

1.   Choose an appropriate story;

2.   Prepare a list of comprehension questions;

3.   Create a multimodal text (from a chosen story) using the wix.com website;

4.   Upload to the site a video version of the story;

5.   Divide students into groups of 4 to starring in the trailer;

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6. Send a list of unfamiliar words to the group mail.

In class:

1. Demonstrate the story (*'Story of an Hour by Kate Chopin'*) through https://inkarbekovazhanara.wixsite.com/mysite;

2. Ask for any predictions according to the name of the story;

3. Play a video from https://inkarbekovazhanara.wixsite.com/mysite/listen-to-the-story;

4. After listening to the story ask some comprehension questions;

5. Divide students into groups of 4 according to the list (1 student for each character from the story *'Story of an Hour'*);

6. Tell them to work in groups of 4 and record themselves for the trailer to the story (it can be any part of the story, not the whole story);

7. Students send their videos to your email;

8. Upload those trailers to your website.

Monitoring:

1. Prepare all necessary materials before class;

2. Make sure the chairs are arranged to allow you to easily see your students from your table;

3. Ask students questions after listening to the story to check their understanding of the story;

4. Ask different students (to get each student involved) and ask them to comment on their classmates' answers if all questions from your list were discussed;

5. Slowly move around the room while the students are working in groups;

6. Remind them of the time limit if necessary;

7. Give praise whenever necessary to your students.

List of words from the 'Story of an Hour':

Abandonment: an act or instance of leaving a person or thing permanently and completely;

To sob: the act of sobbing; a convulsive catching of the breath in weeping;

Subtle: thin, tenuous, or rarefied, as a fluid or an odor;

Exalted: raised or elevated, as in rank or character; of the high station;

Riot: a noisy, violent public disorder caused by a group or crowd of persons, as by a crowd protesting against another group, a government policy, etc., in the streets;

Shudder: a convulsive movement of the body, as from horror, fear, or cold;

Gripsack: a small suitcase, or traveling bag;

Piercing: loud or shrill, as the quality of a voice.

Comprehension questions:

1. Which emotions do you have after reading? Why?

2. What do you know about harassment and violence towards women in Kazakhstan? Are there any laws to protect them?

3. Have you got any ideas why women are silent when suffering from their spouses?

4. Share your ideas on how this can be changed.

Assessment Criteria for Task 1:

1. Participation in discussion to comprehension questions – 20

2. Teamwork/Cooperation during group work – 20

3. Content/Storyline Key (scenes or themes from the book have been creatively presented, the content of the book is clear to the viewer) – 20

4. The voice track is clean and fully understandable – 20

5. The trailer flows very smoothly and captivates the attention of the audience. It compels the viewer to read book – 20

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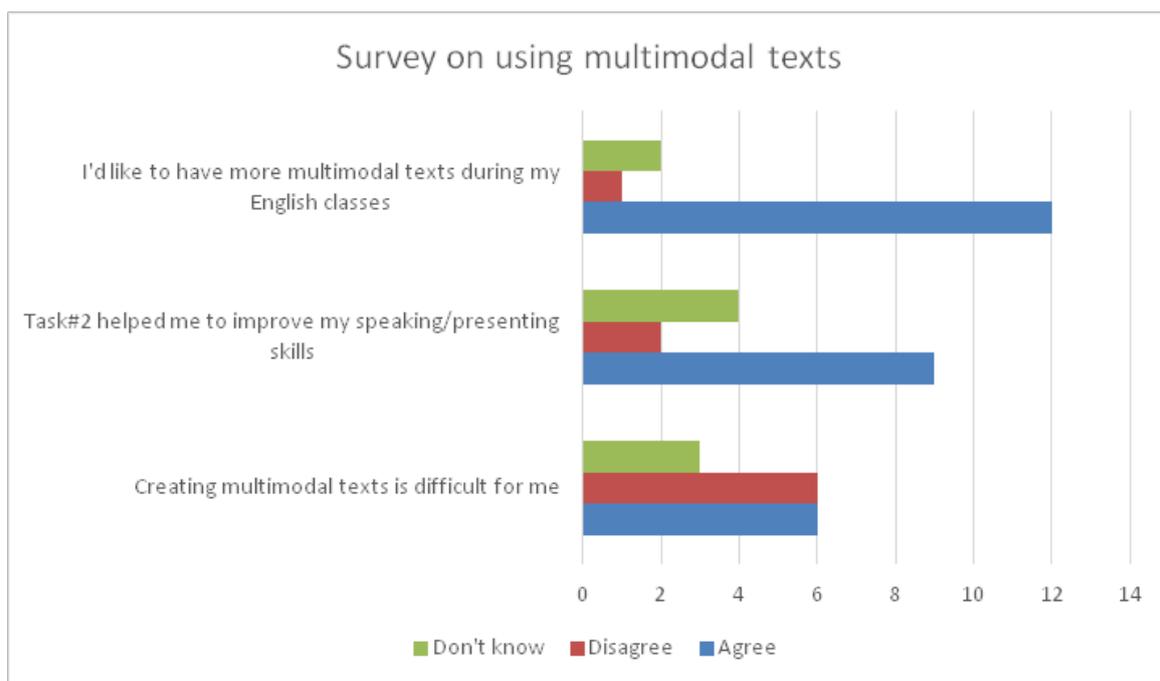
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3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fc7nNjjPinc

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Diagram 1 – Multimodal texts in FLT

Task 2. Project 'Create your Multimodal Text'

Aim: to improve learners' creative skills through creating a multimodal text; to enhance their Web 2.0 skills by making their website with the story.

Language level: Intermediate and above

Age: Adults

1. *Task 2* is project work for students which is assigned as homework;
2. Students should create their multimodal text using http://wix.com/;
3. They are not limited to the story selection or its design;
4. The criteria they should follow is keeping the story multimodal;
5. Students are provided with a tutorial on YouTube to help them with creating the story on their website https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Q4737kSSzA.

Assessment criteria for Task 2

5. Attractive layout for the readers – 25
6. Incorporation of Visuals/Audio – 25
7. Website navigation – 25
8. Presentation – 25

Sources:

1. http://wix.com/
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Q4737kSSzA
3. mailto:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQPPZx8WJpQ

After accomplishing these tasks, we conducted a survey on using multimodal texts with three questions:

1. Do you find still images and animated images in multimodal texts useful?
2. What Task improve your speaking/presenting skills?
3. Was it easy or difficult for you to create multimodal texts?

The survey was anonymous and was conducted on the platform surveymonkey.com.

The results are illustrated in the diagram below:

According to the survey, half of the students found creating multimodal texts difficult. However, most of them stated that Task 2 gained more confidence in presenting their ideas and

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speaking skills. Also, they were happy to have the freedom to choose the literary piece they liked Task 2 and had stronger motivation to present the material. 12 out of 15 students confirmed they would like to have multimodal texts in their English course syllabus.

Conclusion

Having discussed all the criteria for selecting multimodal texts, we believe that teachers and students find this paper useful as a practical instrument for implementing some strategies in their classrooms. There is no doubt that the experience of using multimodal texts in teaching and learning has positive effects not only on students but on teachers as well.

Creating multimodal texts is an increasingly common practice in contemporary classrooms. Easy to produce multimodal texts include posters, storyboards, oral presentations, picture books, brochures, slide shows (PowerPoint), blogs, and podcasts. More complex digital multimodal text productions include web pages, digital stories, interactive stories, animation, and film.

Thus, using multimodality in Foreign Language Teaching enables learners to find a more accessible and usable environment, as it allows for adaptability to the environment taking into account the user's cognitive abilities or limitations in acquiring a second language.

For FLT teachers it is important to consider the levels of learners when creating teaching resources as well as their psychological peculiarities of age. In constructing a multimodal text, a teacher should also suit the range and style of the text and its attributes to the learners' needs and interests.

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Критерии отбора мультимодальных текстов на уроках английского языка

Аннотация. Целью данной статьи является исследование мультимодальных текстов и их использование в учебной программе на уроках английского языка. В связи с быстрым развитием технологий и глобализацией с конца XX столетия в образовательной среде заметна растущая потребность использования мультимодальности в коммуникации. Мультимодальные тексты представляют собой любой письменный текст, который сопровождается большим разнообразием аудио-, визуальных и других средств коммуникации, или некоторая информация из этого текста спрятана в изображениях, картинках и видео. Следовательно, к мультимодальным текстам относятся книги с картинками, учебники, графические романы, комиксы и плакаты, где смысл передается читателю посредством различных комбинаций визуального письменного языка и пространственных режимов. Авторы статьи нацелены на качественную парадигму. В работе опирались в основном на два тематических исследования, которые состоят из записанных трейлеров и мультимодальных текстов, созданных студентами. Для задач, представленных в данной статье, были разработаны критерии оценивания. Таким образом, результат, полученный в текущем исследовании, показал, что студенты, по-видимому, принимают мультимодальные тексты при обучении английскому языку, и данное исследование может быть полезно для преподавателей и студентов в качестве практического руководства по внедрению мультимодальных текстов на основе заданий, представ-

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ленных в этой статье. И, наконец, мы можем сказать, что результаты настоящей статьи поддерживают и подкрепляют предыдущие исследования, касающиеся мультимодальности в обучении и критериев выбора соответствующих педагогически разработанных мультимодальных текстов.

Ключевые слова: визуальный, мультимодальный текст, мультимодальность, мультимодальная грамотность, критерии выбора, критерии оценивания.

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Ағылшын тілі сабақтарындағы мәтіндердің мультимодальдылығының критерийлері

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақаланың мақсаты-мультимодальды мәтіндерді зерттеу және мультимодальды мәтіндерді ағылшын тілі сабақтарының оқу бағдарламасында қолдану. ХХ ғасырдың аяғынан бастап технологияның қарқынды дамуы мен жаһандануына байланысты білім беруде коммуникацияның өсіп келе жатқан мультимодальділігі айқын. Мультимодальды мәтіндер кез-келген жазбаша мәтін бола алады. Сонымен қатар көптеген аудио, визуалды және басқа да символдық көріністер болуы мүмкін немесе осы мәтіннен алынған кейбір ақпарат суреттер мен дыбыстармен бірге жүреді. Демек, мультимодальды мәтіндерге суретті кітаптар, оқулықтар, графикалық шығармалар, комикстер мен плакаттар кіреді, олар оқырманға визуалды жазбаша тіл мен кеңістіктік тәсілдердің тіркесімі арқылы мағына береді. Мақала сапалы парадигманы ұстанады. Бағалау критерийлері де осы мақалада берілген тапсырмалар үшін әзірленді. Бұл зерттеу оқытушылар мен студенттерге осы мақалада берілген тапсырмаларға негізделген мультимодальды мәтіндерді енгізу бойынша практикалық нұсқаулық ретінде пайдалы.

Түйін сөздер: көрнекі, мультимодальды мәтіндер, мультимодалдылық, мультимодальды сауаттылық, таңдау критерийлері, бағалау критерийлері.

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