World Journal of Educational Studies
Print ISSN: 2959-9989
Online ISSN: 2959-9997
DOI: https://doi.org/10.61784/wjes3220

FROM TEXT TO MULTIMODALITY: REDEFINING ENGLISH WRITING PEDAGOGY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract: The teaching of English writing has for long focused on linguistic accuracy and traditional genres like narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. However, with the advent of the digital age, traditional teaching content on longer meets the demands of this age. It is urgent to introduce multimodal writing with images and videos into the teaching of English writing. This paper proposes a teaching reform plan from three aspects: the course system, teaching methods, and evaluation system. The framework has three parts: basic writing, professional writing, and communication writing. The framework is combined with a project-driven workshop. Students have to do real-world multimodal tasks. A three-dimensional assessment model has also been introduced. This model considers three aspects: language quality, multimodal effects, and communicative impact. The preliminary implementation was carried out in two EFL writing classes. During the semester, the students' writing skills improved significantly. This paper proposes a teaching model that others can try in their own classrooms. It brings multimodality into EFL writing instruction in a structured way. Teachers do not need special training to get started.
Keywords: Multimodal writing; English pedagogy; Digital literacy; Project-based learning; EFL; Assessment

1 INTRODUCTION

The essence of writing is undergoing changes. In the digital environment, text is no longer merely composed of words. Instead, it includes elements such as images, hyperlinks, videos, and sounds. However, the English writing teaching in Chinese universities still adheres to a text-centered model, emphasizing language accuracy and text structure. Multimodal expressions also tend to rely mainly on technical applications that are limited to auxiliary functions such as grammar checking. Meanwhile, as the construction of international communication capabilities has been elevated to a national strategy, foreign language education is required to cultivate "communicative talents who can tell Chinese stories well in English". English writing has thus shifted from a simple language skill to a multimodal communication practice aimed at international audiences [1].

Based on this, this paper advocates for a systematic reconfiguration of English writing teaching in the digital age. It is based on multimodal social semiotics as its theoretical foundation and aims at international communication capabilities. It promotes English writing teaching to shift from "producing a single text" to "creating multiple meanings", and explores the implementation paths in curriculum design, classroom practice and evaluation system.

It explores three core questions. First, how do we redesign an EFL writing curriculum to incorporate multimodal text creation? Second, which teaching methods can help students develop multimodal writing skills? Third, how do we assess multimodal writing in a fair and meaningful way? We propose a model with a three-tier course framework. These three tiers form the core of writing instruction. They are basic writing, professional writing, and communication writing. The teaching model uses a project-driven workshop approach. Students work on real tasks in small groups. They learn by doing—not just listening. Assessment also has three dimensions. It's not just about final output. It looks at process, collaboration, and growth over time. They're about linguistic quality. They also cover multimodal effectiveness. And they touch on communicative impact. We conducted the first attempt of two pilot classes. The students actively participated and showed high engagement. The results were also very encouraging.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Multimodality in Education

Multimodality is a theoretical framework. It questions the old idea that language alone—or even mainly—builds meaning. Kress says meaning never comes from just one source. Instead, people combine together several semiotic modes to make sense of things. These include image, sound, gesture, space, and texture. Each mode works in its own way. It gives us different tools for representing ideas and sharing them with others [2]. Social semiotics studies how people choose different modes to communicate. It's not random. Personal interests and the social environment one is in are important. And the resources one actually has are all crucial. This perspective provides profound insights into education. Communication today is naturally multimodal. That's especially true in the digital age. Reading and writing teaching cannot merely focus on written language. It needs to move beyond tradition.

The New London Group came up with the idea of "multiliteracies". It's a major step toward rethinking how literacy is taught in today's world [3]. They point out two main changes happening around us. Those changes forced teachers to rethink what counts as literacy. Digital technology keeps rolling out fresh ways for people to talk with each other. It

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also gives them new tools to exchange ideas. More and more people in society speak different languages. Each of them bring their own cultural background. In the past, schools mostly taught just the official written language of the country. That approach feels outdated now. It simply doesn't meet today's learners' real needs. The New London Group proposed a different idea: multi-literacy teaching. They use symbols they already know. That helps them make sense of things in various ways and settings.

Jewitt works from this idea. He digs deep into multimodal analysis. It serves both as a research model and a teaching tool [4]. Multimodal educational research focuses a few main ideas. Technology is of vital importance, and the presentation platform is equally significant. Both shape how learning happens. Identity construction ties closely to multimodality. He came up with the idea himself. Multimodal teaching can tackle power imbalances and social justice issues. Language teachers start seeing how meaning gets built in today's communication. It gives teachers a practical way to plan teaching activities. Students get real practice with reading and writing. They face these tasks the way people do outside school.

2.2 Multimodal Writing in EFL Contexts

Hyland took a close look at how EFL writing has been taught. He went through the main teaching models one by one. At first, instruction was all about final products like grammar, spelling, sentence structure. Later on, things changed. Teachers started caring more about how students write. They also began focusing on genre features. And they paid attention to who's reading the text. But its theoretical framework still focuses on making and judging linear texts. That's the "text-centered" traditional paradigm. Nowadays, it is in trouble. In the digital age, people are writing more and more through various media, such as social media and digital platforms. Paper-based texts are still used for creating and grading writing. But this kind of teaching system doesn't fit how learners actually write today. Therefore, writing teaching urgently needs to redefine the connotation of "writing". It is necessary to achieve a paradigm shift from a single text ability to a comprehensive digital writing ability [5].

Mahmudah et al. tried something new with college freshmen. They used multimodal task-based teaching methods to build up students' English writing skills. Students' writing scores went up after that. It showed these tasks really helped. The structure gave students support as they moved from middle school to university writing [6]. Other studies looked at particular multimodal genres and tasks. Tanrıkulu studied collaborative digital storytelling. He watched how it shaped students' writing skills. It boosted their engagement. It also sharpened their narrative competence [7]. Lim and Polio focused on multimodal assignments in higher education. They saw obvious benefits—greater creativity and more flexible expression. However, second language learners also faced difficulties. Transitioning from traditional writing to multimodal creation was not smooth for everyone. Uneven digital literacy became a hindrance [8].

However, there are still some shortcomings. Most of the current intervention measures are isolated. They are additional activities and do not integrate into a unified teaching plan. It is not common to change the English writing course to be centered on a multimodal text creation system at present. Right now, not many studies have been done on this topic. We still don't know exactly which teaching strategies work best. Which ones actually help students build multimodal writing skills? That's still unclear. One big problem stands out. It's about helping students shift from text-only writing. They need to move into a more creative process. This process brings together multiple ways of expressing ideas. This is far more than simply inserting pictures or audio clips. The key lies in helping students truly achieve this transformation. And it is in a practical and effective manner.

2.3 Project-Based Learning and Writing

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method. Students learn by doing extended projects. These projects tackle actual problems people face outside school. PBL works especially well in writing classes. It makes writing useful, not just something done for a grade. Students need to work together. They also need to go over their drafts again and again. They pick up skills that stretch past the classroom, such as digging into sources, weighing ideas carefully, and managing their own learning.

Project-based learning (PBL) works well with multimodal writing. These multimodal projects like making short videos or building web pages, are basically project-based. Students independently choose the projects, first determine a theme, then conduct in-depth research, collect or create various multimodal resources, such as pictures, audio, text, videos, etc. Then they create, revise, and finally publish or display their works. Students have the opportunity to complete tasks independently at each stage. At the same time, they also learn with others during these stages.

Some researchers have looked into how well PBL works for EFL writing. One team—Tusino and colleagues—ran a study on this. They tested a hybrid task-based language teaching method. It boosted students' writing performance [9]. Sari et al. demonstrated that problem-based learning improved both problem-solving and scientific writing skills [10]. The multimodal task-based approach adopted by Mahmudah et al. also indicates that how structured project task can provide scaffolding for students' writing development [6]. These findings suggest that project-based design is an appropriate framework for multimodal writing instruction.

2.4 Research Gap and Questions

The literature review reveals that although multimodality theory has gained recognition in applied linguistics, and PBL has been proven effective in writing instruction, research on systematically integrating the two into a coherent teaching

model for EFL writing courses is still limited. Few studies have proposed multi-tier courses that can gradually develop multimodal writing competence. There is also a lack of detailed descriptions of pedagogical strategies on how to build scaffolds for students' multimodal creation. The assessment frameworks for multimodal writing remain underdeveloped. Most of the existing rubrics still prioritize linguistic features over the multimodal effect and communicative impact.

3 PEDAGOGICAL DESIGN

3.1 Three-Tier Course Framework

We want to help students get enhanced at multimodal writing step by step. So we build a three-tier course framework. It starts with basic skills and moves up to advanced multimodal output. This framework fits right into a 16-week university semester. Teachers can adjust it for different proficiency levels.

3.1.1 Tier 1: Basic writing (Weeks 1-5)

This tier focuses on building basic language skills. It also brings in the idea of multimodality. Students start by learning to spot how different modes work together. These modes include images, text, sound, and layout. They see how each one helps shape meaning. Then they try simple multimodal tasks. They help students notice what's going on behind the scenes. With actually practical examples, they show how meaning isn't carried by words alone. Students have to look closely at how pictures and words team up in social media posts. They might also take photos themselves and write clear, descriptive captions for them. Other similar tasks are part of this work too. The goal of this stage is not to take the place of traditional writing instruction but to help students realize that effective communication in the digital age does not solely depend on correct grammar and vocabulary.

3.1.2 Tier 2: Professional writing (Weeks 6-11)

At this stage, students study exemplary multimodal texts like promotional videos, and social media campaigns. After that, they analyze the linguistic and multimodal features, inter-model relationship, the target audience, and communication purpose. They should write a script for a 60-second promotional video and design a social media campaign as the major tasks.

3.1.3 Tier 3: Communication practice (Weeks 12-16)

The third tier requires genuine multimodal outputs. Students work in groups to complete a multimodal project. The team starts from topic selecting. They choose topics related to cultural interaction or international communication, and do background research. Then they write creative briefs, plan out multimodal content, draft scripts, and design storyboard. Production follows right away. The team finishes the multimodal works using appropriate tools. Then they check for clarity, flow, and consistency and make changes as needed. Later, the works get published on the appropriate platform. They are also presented in the classroom.

3.2 Project-Driven Workshop

This teaching method mixes project-based learning with regular workshop sessions. Class time doesn't depend on traditional lecturing anymore. Instead, it's built around three kinds of activities. One is mini lectures. Another is workshop sessions. The third is presentation and peer review sessions. Mini lectures run for 15 to 20 minutes. They give short, clear explanations on particular topics. Examples include visual design principles, video editing basics, or social media writing. These sessions happen right before students start using that knowledge. Workshop sessions take 40 to 50 minutes. The teacher runs them herself. She gives one-on-one help during these times. Students also review each other's work. Technical problems will also be resolved on-site. The presentation and peer review session lasts 20 to 30 minutes. Students share their ongoing work regularly during this time. They get constructive feedback—not just from the instructor, but from classmates too. This helps build a supportive classroom community. Revision becomes routine, not something done only at the very end.

3.3 Supporting Resources

We built two key resources to support the implementation. One is a multimodal case library. The other is a tool library. The multimodal case library pulls together multimodal texts. These include promotional materials from international organizations. They also include cultural promotion videos. Student works from the pilot implementation are in there too. The tool library includes creative tools that handle different types of media. Canva is there for graphic design. CapCut supports video editing. Each tool comes with a short tutorial. These tutorials help new users get started more easily.

3.4 Sample Task: Telling Local Stories in English Short Video

To show how the pedagogical design works, we'll describe one task from the third tier. It's called the "Telling Local Stories in English" short video task. Students form small groups—usually three or four people. Each group makes a 3 to 5 minute English video. The goal is to introduce some part of local culture to people overseas. Past themes covered traditional festivals, local food, historic places, and today's new ideas. The whole process lasts for four weeks. Week 1 starts with picking a topic and digging into research. Teams turn in a project proposal. It specifies their topic and indicates the target audience of the content. Furthermore, it also outlined the initial visual concept, rough but clear.

Week 2 focuses on script writing. It also covers storyboard design. Groups hand in their full script and storyboard. The teacher then reviews them. She checks the language, looks at the structure, and pays attention to how well words, images, and sounds work together. Week 3 is when production happens. Students actually film or build their project. Groups make their short videos. They handle both filming and editing themselves. Workshop time focuses on helping with tech issues. Peers also give feedback during these sessions. In week 4, the final version is completed and short videos are presented. Groups submit final videos and they are shown in class. If the students give their written consent, videos will be released on the school's official channels. The initial implementation of this task in the pilot class has achieved positive results. Student feedback indicates a high level of participation and a great enjoyment of writing. The quality of the final works exceeded the teacher's expectations for the first multimodal project.

4 IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Pilot Implementation Context

The proposed pedagogical model was piloted in two undergraduate English writing classes at a university during the spring semester of the 2025-2026 academic year. A total of 58 second-year English major students participated. They had completed two-semester basic English writing course. The curriculum runs for 16 weeks. It is built in three tiers. Tier one goes from week 1 to week 5. Tier two covers week 6 through week 11. Tier three covers the final five weeks, namely from week 12 to week 16. Students made videos telling local stories in English.

4.2 Teaching Process in Practice

Here's the classroom teaching schedule for one week. It includes two 40-minute sessions. That's 80 minutes total. The first 20 minutes is a mini lecture. The teacher introduces key ideas or skills. They are related to this week's learning objectives. For instance, visual design principles, or how to effectively utilize transition effects in videos. Additionally, there is script writing, maintaining a concise and compelling content. Ethical issues in multimodal production also need to be addressed. These materials come from the internet such as MOOCs or online tutorials. The workshop runs for 40 minutes. Students tackle group projects on their own or with others. The teacher moves around the classroom. She watches how students are doing, gives each one tailored advice and answers questions as they arise. She encourages students to review each other's work. That helps with script revision. It supports storyboard development, strengthens how shooting techniques get applied. It also supports editing work. The final 20 minutes focus on presentation and reflection. One or two groups get invited to share their ongoing projects with the whole class. Other students listen closely. Then they offer feedback on both content and techniques. The teacher makes a summary. She lists what went well, and points out the problems that occur. Then she puts forward some suggestions for improvement.

4.3 Preliminary Observations

The initial pilot implementation has yielded several positive results. First, the student engagement has increased. The semester attendance rate has remained above 95%. Students have reported that the multimodal tasks are more motivating than traditional writing assignments. Many students voluntarily spent extra time making videos outside of class. Second, students develop a multimodal awareness. By the end of the second tier, students are able to explain why specific modes are suitable for specific audiences and purposes. In written reflections, students increasingly confidently use terms such as "mode", "symbol resources", and other meta-language. Thirdly, the final short video products not only exceeded the teachers' expectations in terms of technical execution but also in terms of communication effectiveness. Several works demonstrated a proficient use of visual metaphors, strategic selection of background music, and meticulous consideration of the subtitles.

At the same time, there are several major challenges. We will further discuss them and the corresponding strategies in section 6.

5 ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

5.1 Limitations of Traditional Writing Assessment

Traditional ways of judging writing just don't work for multimodal works. They were built for plain text only. Videos, images, and interactive elements weren't part of the picture. Early evaluation criteria mostly looked at whether the language was correct. Grammar, vocabulary selection, sentence structure, and the overall structure of the text were equally important. Ideas needed to flow smoothly. Paragraphs had to be organized well. The work also had to fit the expected writing style [5]. These standards remain important. But they can't capture everything that makes multimodal texts special. Multimodal texts need careful examination. How do the different modes work together? Why were certain design choices made? Do these choices achieve the communication goals? Another thing worth mentioning is the audience question. Did this piece of writing touch the hearts of the people? Traditional assessment usually happens behind closed doors. The teacher sits as the only judge. This setup doesn't match how writing actually works today. Writing now happens online. It's open. It's interactive. Readers jump in with comments, likes, shares. That's where

feedback comes from. The real audience is the one doing the evaluating. It also tracks how well communication actually works. Do people understand the message? Do they remember it later? Do they act on it after hearing it?

5.2 A Three-Dimensional Assessment Model

We want to fix these problems. So we come up with a three-dimensional assessment model. It brings together language, multimodality, and communication. We turn it into something measurable. That means building a scoring scale. The scale has three dimensions.

5.2.1 Dimension 1: Linguistic quality (40% weight)

This part looks at how well someone writes in traditional ways. It checks whether the grammar is correct, that is, whether the sentence structure is reasonable, and also pays attention to the diversity of sentence structures. The use of vocabulary is equally important. We see how wide a person's word choices are. We also check whether those words fit the situation. Cohesion and coherence get attention at the whole-text level. That means ideas link up clearly across paragraphs. The flow feels natural, not jumpy. The writer's tone and register need to match who they're writing for. It helps prevent students from skipping the core language skills. They are busy creating multimodal works. That doesn't mean the fundamental content gets overlooked.

5.2.2 Dimension 2: Multimodal effectiveness (30% weight)

This part looks at how students choose different ways to express themselves. They mix those ways together like words, images, or sounds. It's not just about using lots of modes. It's about matching each one to what they actually want to say. Is this selection appropriate? We also need to check how well these expression methods fit together. Take words and images as an example. Do they actually reinforce each other's meaning? Layout matters. Color matters. Font choice matters too. Rhythm plays a big role. Are these design choices reasonable? Do they grab attention? Are they actually useful too? That's the real question.

5.2.3 Dimension 3: Communicative impact (30% weight)

This part explores the connection effect between multimodal texts and the audience. It also examines whether the information has actually been received—not just seen, but truly left a clear impression. The clarity of the message is of crucial importance, the accessibility of the target readers or audiences is equally important. The emotional appeal cannot be ignored, and persuasiveness is also a key factor. We will track actual participation signs, such as peer evaluations, or teachers' feedback on the audience's reaction. Cultural compatibility is an unnegotiable element, and the adaptability of the content in different cultural backgrounds also needs to be considered. Online projects make their influence visible in several ways. Page views count how many people actually opened the content. That's one clear signal. Likes and positive comments add another layer of evidence. They show real engagement, not just passive viewing.

5.3 Multiple Assessors

This model checks student work in a few different ways. Teachers get involved. Peers give feedback too. Even the audience shares their thoughts. Each student's performance gets close attention from teachers. They stick to the official evaluation criteria. They check things from three angles. That keeps judgments steady. It also helps keep things professional across the board. Students use the simplified scoring criteria. They give feedback on each other's works. They focus on how well multimodal expressions work. They also look closely at how clearly those expressions get ideas across. This kind of focus sharpens their critical evaluation skills gradually. Finally, students get raw interaction data: clicks, pauses, shares. This helps them see real people's reactions. They begin to notice how their communication methods affect the world around them.

5.4 Preliminary Implementation

The three-dimensional rubric went through testing in the pilot classes. Students made short videos in groups. Teachers watched and scored them. Students also rated the same videos. From the results of both the teacher and the students, the evaluations were basically consistent. Students gave positive feedback on the assessment criteria. Many expressed that the assessment could recognize their creativity and technical efforts without deducting points for minor language errors. They were appreciated about that. Some students pointed out that peer assessment enables them to have a clearer understanding of the standards, thus allowing them to carry out their creative work more clearly when completing the tasks.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Key Findings

There are several beneficial findings through the pilot implementation. They could better express how to integrate multimodality into EFL writing instruction. Firstly, the three-tier progressive framework is of crucial importance. It successfully helped students to make the transition from traditional text-based writing to multimodal writing by gradually increasing the complexity. Those who struggled to complete basic multimodal analysis in the early stages in the course were able to create more complex multimodal texts by the end of the semester. This finding indicates that a

multi-tier course system is more advantageous than a single one-time multimodal assignment. Secondly, authentic audiences become the key to enhancing students' engagement. As a member of society, students care about the attention, comments and feedback they receive for the works they post on the platform. This encouraged them to devote a great deal of effort to acquiring knowledge, mastering skills and refining their works. Thirdly, assessment promotes learning. Before starting the multimodal task, the teacher provided a detailed explanation of the assessment criteria to the students, which gave them a clear direction for their learning. Students said since they knew what would be evaluated, they would pay special attention to multimodal choices, and consider how to enhance audience appeal from all aspects during their doing task process.

6.2 Challenges and Strategies

Based on the implementation of this pilot project, we identified three major challenges. At the same time, corresponding solutions were proposed to support future implementation.

First, there are significant differences in students' existing digital literacy levels. Some students are highly skilled while some others require a lot of technical support. It requires personalized and targeted guidance and dynamic adjustment in the pedagogy. We suggest self-assessment surveys conducted as semester starts to identify students who need additional help. We may also set up a peer tutoring system to allow the skilled students help those with less experience. Finally, a set of video tutorials gets selected. Students use them for independent study.

The second challenge is teachers' workload going up. Grading multimodal projects takes more time than marking traditional essays. Teachers have to watch closely for several kinds of expression at once. They also need to think about how the work lands with its audience. The following are some helpful methods: Firstly, narrow down the evaluation criteria. Provide them with concise and clear explanations, without using technical terms or lengthy descriptions. One more point to emphasize: Peer assessment should play a more significant role. It provides students with practical and real-time feedback while reducing their burden. The recommended duration for the video should be between 3 and 5 minutes. This range is just right—it's neither too short to fail to convey depth, nor too long to be difficult to manage.

The third challenge is the "combination of text and image" mindset. Some students first saw the pictures as just decoration. They treated them as extra material, not as central to meaning-making. That mindset led to multimodal texts where text and image ran side by side. Each modality remains independent and does not truly interact with each other. The solution is as follows: Firstly, we analyze typical cases. These help clarify how multimodal integration works. Then, students complete structured analysis tasks. They have to explain how each mode works together. Subsequently, peer evaluations are conducted, with a focus on examining the interactions between the various modes.

6.3 Implications for EFL Writing Pedagogy

The findings point to some important ideas for teaching writing to EFL learners. Writing instruction needs to rethink what "writing" even means. It shouldn't just be about producing text anymore. Instead, it should involve building meaning across different modes. That shift from text-only output to cross-modal meaning construction is key. This shift calls for fresh kinds of assignments. It also needs a new way of talking about multimodal choices. Teachers' professional development has to zero in on multimodal literacy. They need to get how multimodal theories work. They also have to pick up hands-on creative tool skills—with actually practical ones. Finally, schools need to take another look at how they grade students. Most current assessments focus heavily on written essays and traditional papers. That's understandable—but it leaves little room for other kinds of academic work. Multimodal projects, like videos, podcasts, or interactive presentations, should count as real academic output. They're not just "fun extras." They're serious work—with actually practical skills built in.

7 CONCLUSION

This paper introduces a pedagogical model. It brings multimodal text creation into English writing teaching. Traditional text-based writing teaching doesn't quite match today's digital communication needs. So the model steps in to bridge that gap. It uses a three-tier curriculum framework. The framework starts with basic writing. Then it moves to professional writing. After that, it shifts to communication practice. It uses a project-driven workshop format. It also sets up a three-dimensional assessment system. Evaluators look at language quality first. They check how well multimodal elements work next. Then they measure the actual communicative impact. Two pilot classes were the first to try. The students actively participated. Their learning outcomes seemed good. Subsequent checks showed that significant progress had actually been made.

The study has two contributions. At the theoretical level, multimodality theory has been applied to EFL writing teaching, providing a structured framework with multimodal activities. At the practical level, it provides a replicable guideline for other types of English writing teaching, in order to better meet the learners' needs in the digital age.

Since this pilot teaching was conducted for the first time in two classes of sophomore English majors in a comprehensive university, research is needed to verify its adaptability to students with other various backgrounds. In the future, it also needs further research on the long-term impact of multimodal writing experiences on the development of writing skills. There are many research questions that still need to be further explored, such as whether the multimodal writing experience can be transferred to traditional writing tasks? What are the differences in the effects

produced by the creative paths of different modalities? It is hoped that the subsequent research will have a meaningful impact on both the teaching of English writing and the improvement of learners' communication skills.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

FUNDING

This paper is a research achievement of the Educational Research and Reform Project of South China Agricultural University titled “Multimodal English Writing: An Integrated Model of ‘Ideological and Political Education & International Communication’” (JG2025096).

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