

---

**The Role of Multimodal Texts in Teaching English to Generation Z Learners**

---

**Dr. G. Syed Shamsudeen<sup>1</sup>**

(First and Corresponding Author), Assistant Professor of English  
The New College, [syedshamsudeen@thenewcollege.edu.in](mailto:syedshamsudeen@thenewcollege.edu.in)  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2295-491X>

**Dr. A. Sathikulameen<sup>2</sup>**

Assistant Professor of English, The New College, Chennai-14  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9633-7585>

---

**Article Received:** 08/07/2025**Article Accepted:** 08/08/2025**Published Online:** 09/08/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.18.08.100

---

**Abstract:** This qualitative study explores the pedagogical impact of multimodal texts. The study sample consisted of 30 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the B.Sc. Chemistry program at The New College, Royapettah, Chennai, comprising two equal groups of 15 students each, drawn respectively from Section A and Section B of the I B.Sc. Chemistry cohort. The research employed semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations to examine how multimodal resources, such as digital comics, short films, interactive infographics, and video essays, affect student engagement, comprehension, and creative expression. Thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software and triangulation, revealed that multimodal texts significantly enhanced learner motivation, narrative understanding, and opportunities for differentiated participation. The study identified key challenges faced by educators in implementing multimodal pedagogy, including resource selection and time constraints, underscoring the need for ongoing professional development. These findings contribute to a growing body of evidence advocating for the integration of multimodal literacy within contemporary English curricula to align instruction with students' cognitive and communicative preferences.

**Keywords:** Multimodal texts, Generation Z, English language teaching, literacy pedagogy, student engagement

**1. Introduction:** The landscape of English language education is transforming rapidly in response to the pervasive influence of technology and media on literacy practices. The so-called digital native generation, commonly labelled as Generation Z and defined as those born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s, has grown up saturated with digital tools and multimodal platforms. This cohort habitually navigates multiple forms of media in their daily lives, shifting easily between written text, visual images, audio, and interactive interfaces

---

(Prensky, 2001). Consequently, traditional print-based classroom instruction is often found lacking in meeting their cognitive styles and communicative preferences. Researchers and educators have responded by exploring how a multimodal text category, which encompasses resources integrating visual, auditory, textual, and interactive elements, can support English language teaching and learning that is relevant and engaging for today's students (Jewitt, 2008). This research undertakes a qualitative examination of multimodal texts in secondary school English classrooms, focusing on their impact on student motivation, comprehension, creative expression, and the pedagogical adaptations of students working with Generation Z learners.

**2. Literature Review:** Recent scholarly discourse converges on the observation that Generation Z students, steeped in digital environments since early childhood, develop and deploy multiliteracies distinct from those of previous generations. Unlike learners who matured before the Internet and widely available mobile devices, Gen Z students are adept at using a range of semiotic resources—textual, visual, auditory, and spatial—to make meaning in diverse and concurrent ways (Mills, 2010). Their dependence on interactivity, visuals, and networked communication shapes not only how they learn but also what they expect from educational contexts. Chauhan, Mohammed, and Mishra (2021) argue that educational approaches not attuned to these sociotechnical shifts risk failing to fully engage or develop the communicative competences of these learners. Theoretical frameworks in English language pedagogy have evolved to account for such shifts through concepts like multiliteracies and new literacy studies. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) maintain that the current age demands a broader literacy pedagogy, one that extends far beyond print and embraces the full spectrum of meaning-making modalities present in students' everyday lives. Jewitt and Kress (2003) similarly depict multimodal literacy as central to academic success and social participation, viewing each mode—whether linguistic, visual, or other—as a resource that learners strategically select to communicate and comprehend effectively. Kress's (2010) social semiotic approach reinforces the necessity for students to decode and produce meaning from texts that do not adhere to a single dominant mode, but instead weave together images, sounds, spatial organisation, and gestures.

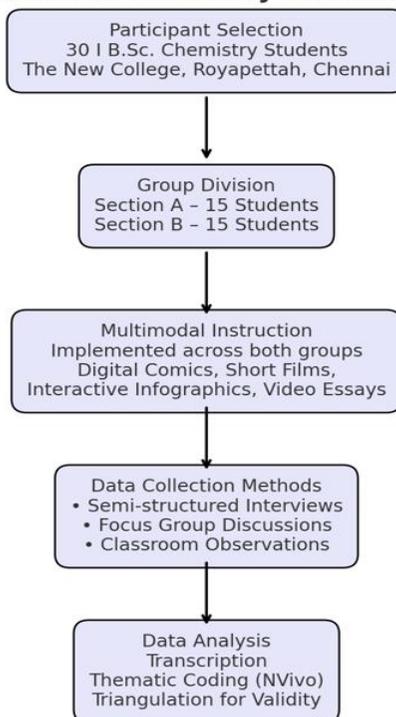
Empirical studies further validate the pedagogical value of multimodal texts. Moreno and Mayer (2007) demonstrated that interactive, multimodal learning environments can promote greater conceptual understanding, retention, and transfer than unimodal instructional materials. Serafini (2014) expanded on this evidence by showing that the integration of visual and multimodal literacy practices can empower students to read more critically and creatively. Walsh (2010) also concluded that classroom multimodal practices support deeper engagement and help bridge the divide between academic and everyday literacies, especially for socially and linguistically diverse learners.

Within this evolving landscape, the role of the teacher is also changing. English educators are called upon not only to curate and create multimodal learning experiences but also to guide students in interpreting, critiquing, and producing new kinds of texts (Bezemer

& Jewitt, 2010; Mills, 2010). This challenge is amplified by persistent gaps in teacher preparation regarding multimodal pedagogy and the pace of technological change in resources available for classroom use. Consequently, understanding both student and teacher experiences with multimodal texts is essential to developing effective, digitally integrated curricula.

**3. Methodology:** The study sample consisted of 30 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the B.Sc. Chemistry program at The New College, Royapettah, Chennai, comprising two equal groups of 15 students each, drawn respectively from Section A and Section B of the I B.Sc. Chemistry cohort. Data collection utilised a suite of qualitative tools: semi-structured interviews with participating students to explore their perspectives, challenges, and classroom strategies; focus group discussions with students to capture attitudes, preferences, and experiences; and detailed classroom observations during lessons specifically designed around multimodal texts. The data collection is shown in Figure 1.

#### Flowchart of the Study Methodology



**Figure-1**

The instructional module implemented during the study introduced students to a deliberate sequence of multimodal resources representative of contemporary youth culture and communication. These included digital comics that combine image and dialogue, short

---

films that develop visual and auditory storytelling conventions, interactive infographics facilitating reader manipulation and synthesis of data, and video essays that blend narrative voiceover with visual evidence. The aim was not only to monitor shifts in student affect, such as motivation and participation, but also to investigate changes in comprehension, interpretive strategies, critical thinking, and modes of creative expression. Data from interviews, focus groups, and lesson observations were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis using NVivo software. The coding process was inductive, allowing for the emergence of key patterns and themes that traverse the perspectives of both students and teachers. Triangulation was used to improve the credibility of findings, ensuring that themes identified from interviews, focus groups, and classroom behaviours were corroborated across participant groups.

**4. Results:** The results of the research strongly suggest that the presence of multimodal texts in the English classroom catalyses a series of positive educational outcomes for Generation Z learners. One of the most prominent findings relates to increased motivation and willingness to engage. Nearly all interviewed students observed a discernible boost in attention and participation during lessons constructed around multimodal resources, an insight echoed by students in focus groups who described such lessons as ‘exciting,’ ‘inclusive,’ and more ‘relevant’ to their everyday lives. These sentiments align with the assertions of Turner (2015) and Henderson and Buskist (2011), whose work underscores the role of technological and media-rich learning environments in sustaining student interest. Beyond surface-level engagement, there were substantial improvements in comprehension and higher-order thinking. Classroom observations revealed that when students worked with digital comics, they were able to integrate visual cues with text to clarify narrative, emotion, and authorial perspective. Lessons utilising video essays fostered sophisticated student discussions about point-of-view, framing, and bias, invoking critical skills transferable across text types. Interactive infographics, in particular, facilitated the synthesis of complex information through both textual and visual avenues, resulting in stronger recall and analytical capabilities. These findings substantiate Walsh’s (2010) observations on the value of multimodal literacy for deeper meaning-making and support Moreno and Mayer’s (2007) conclusions regarding enhanced conceptual understanding in multimodal environments.

Another salient outcome was the increased opportunity for differentiated and creative expression. Assignments requiring collaborative production of video essays or digital stories allowed students with diverse linguistic, cultural, and cognitive backgrounds to leverage their strengths. Students with lower proficiency in written English, for example, could contribute significantly through design, narration, or technical production, which encouraged group members to value different abilities. The learners noted not only improved inclusion, but also richer final products and more equitable classroom participation. Mills (2010) frames such multimodal differentiation as an essential aspect of a responsive, inclusive pedagogy in diverse classrooms. However, the shift toward multimodal teaching also generated challenges for educators. Some participants expressed initial uncertainty over how to select age-appropriate, authentic, and pedagogically meaningful materials from the

vast digital landscape. Others highlighted the additional time required for lesson planning and resource adaptation, and the uneven availability of digital tools across schools. Although most educators described growing confidence after the initial period, the need for further professional development and institutional support was widely emphasised. These findings mirror those presented by Serafini (2014), who discusses the practical and conceptual hurdles educators face in adopting multimodal instructional practices.

The qualitative data yielded four broad themes: enhanced student engagement; improved comprehension and critical thinking; increased opportunities for differentiation and creative expression; and teacher adaptation and challenges. These themes were supported by consistent evidence from interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations. Cumulatively, the results point to the transformative, if at times demanding, impact of multimodal texts on the learning culture of English classrooms oriented toward Generation Z. The Summary of Key Themes is shown in Table 1.

**Table-1**  
**Summary of Key Themes:**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Supporting Evidence</b>
Engagement	Increased participation, attention, and willingness to collaborate
Comprehension	Improved narrative understanding, critical thinking, and analytical discussion
Creative Expression	Multimodal projects facilitate differentiation and broad participation
Teacher Adaptation	Initial challenges with resources and planning, overcome through practice

The analysis of the role of multimodal texts in English language teaching for Generation Z learners revealed several important findings clustered around key thematic areas. First, enhanced engagement emerged as a significant outcome, with multimodal texts fostering greater student participation, sustained attention, and a heightened willingness to collaborate. The incorporation of visuals, audio, and interactive elements resonated with Generation Z's media-rich experiences, making lessons more relatable and stimulating. This alignment with students' cognitive preferences subsequently increased intrinsic motivation and fostered a more dynamic classroom environment. Second, multimodal approaches significantly improved comprehension among learners. The integration of visual and auditory cues alongside traditional text enriched students' narrative understanding, enabling them to decode meaning in more nuanced ways. Moreover, these texts promoted critical thinking and analytical discussions, as learners were encouraged to interpret layers of meaning across modes, question perspectives, and engage in deeper reflection. This

multidimensional engagement with content not only enhanced retention but also cultivated higher-order cognitive skills essential for advanced literacy. Third, multimodal projects expanded opportunities for creative expression and supported differentiated learning. By enabling students to utilise a variety of communicative modes, such as visual design, narration, and digital storytelling, these tasks accommodated diverse strengths and learning styles. This inclusivity was particularly beneficial for students who might struggle with conventional text-based tasks, thereby promoting broader participation and equitable contribution across the classroom community. Creative multimodal assignments empowered learners to construct meaning actively and collaboratively, reflecting contemporary literacy practices. Finally, the transition to multimodal teaching prompted a process of teacher adaptation characterised by initial challenges and subsequent growth. Educators reported difficulties related to selecting appropriate multimodal resources, allocating sufficient time for lesson planning, and integrating unfamiliar technologies. Nonetheless, with ongoing practice and exposure, educators developed greater confidence and proficiency in deploying multimodal texts effectively. This trajectory underscores the necessity of sustained professional development and institutional support to maximise the pedagogical benefits of multimodality in English language classrooms. Collectively, these findings illustrate the multifaceted potential of multimodal texts to transform English teaching and learning by enhancing engagement, comprehension, creative participation, and pedagogical practice, particularly for the digitally fluent Generation Z cohort.

**Table 2** categorises the various types of multimodal texts employed within the English language teaching (ELT) context for Generation Z learners, detailing their specific characteristics alongside the educational benefits they offer. The table highlights four prominent forms—digital comics, short films, interactive infographics, and video essays—that effectively integrate multiple semiotic modes, such as visual imagery, written language, sound, and interactive elements. These multimodal resources align with Gen Z’s digital literacy practices and cognitive preferences, providing diverse entry points for engaging with English texts beyond the traditional print-based format.

**Table -2**

Type of Multimodal Text	Description and Educational Benefits
Digital Comics	Combine visual images and written dialogue to support narrative understanding and convey emotional tone, aiding comprehension.

---

Short Films	Use visual and auditory storytelling to develop critical viewing skills and engage multiple senses for deeper learning.
Interactive Infographics	Allow interactive engagement with data and complex information, supporting synthesis, analysis, and retention.
Video Essays	Blend narrated voiceover with visual evidence to foster analytical discussion, perspective-taking, and critical thinking.

The table reveals that digital comics play a crucial role in enhancing narrative comprehension by combining visual images with written dialogue; this multimodal integration aids students in decoding plot developments and interpreting emotional nuances. Short films leverage both visual and auditory storytelling techniques, supporting the development of critical viewing skills while catering to learners who benefit from multisensory engagement. Interactive infographics extend beyond passive reception by enabling learners to actively manipulate and explore complex data, which facilitates higher-order cognitive processes such as synthesis, analysis, and improved information retention. Video essays, by blending narrated voiceover with rich visual evidence, provide a platform for students to engage in sophisticated analytical discussions and foster critical thinking through perspective-taking and multimodal interpretation. Collectively, Table 2 underscores how the strategic use of varied multimodal texts in ELT not only accommodates diverse learning styles but also cultivates essential 21st-century literacies. By incorporating these formats, educators can promote deeper comprehension, foster creativity, and encourage critical engagement, thereby addressing key educational goals for Generation Z students.

**5. Discussion:** The implications of these findings are significant for both classroom practice and curricular design. First and foremost, the study substantiates the view that multimodal texts constitute a powerful tool for aligning English language instruction with the learning profiles of Generation Z. Through the integration of texts that mirror students' everyday digital communication forms, educators are better able to foster attention, investment, and deeper engagement (Jewitt, 2008; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010). The success of multimodal interventions lies not merely in their novelty or entertainment value, but in their capacity to scaffold complex comprehension processes and promote active, collaborative meaning-making. For example, video essays and digital comics do more than motivate; they encourage students to interrogate multiple perspectives, decode implicit meaning, and articulate sophisticated responses across modes.

---

The study further illuminates the pedagogical value of multimodal texts for differentiation and inclusivity. As English classrooms become more linguistically and culturally diverse, the opportunity for students to harness multiple expressive modalities ensures broader participation and facilitates the recognition of a wider range of abilities and identities. This dynamic accords with the sociocultural orientation of new literacy studies, which insists that effective literacy pedagogy must be fundamentally responsive to the lived realities and communicative repertoires of learners (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Street, 2003; Mills, 2010).

In addition, the role of the English teacher is both expanding and evolving. The integration of multimodal texts compels educators not only to act as transmitters of knowledge or textual authorities but also as facilitators, curators, and co-learners navigating a rapidly changing resource environment. Educators' ability to adapt, experiment, and collaborate with students in sourcing or producing multimodal content is critical to sustaining effective implementation. The study's findings, therefore, highlight the vital importance of professional development focused on multimodal literacy, resource adaptation, and digital pedagogy (Ajayi, 2012). Supporting educators through targeted training, collegial networks, and institutional infrastructure will be essential to translating the promise of multimodal texts into widespread, sustainable classroom practice. At the policy and curricular levels, the research recommends the systematic embedding of multimodal literacy across the English curriculum. Rather than foregrounding print literacy as the sole route to meaning-making, curricula should integrate digital comics, short films, infographics, podcasts, and other modalities as legitimate and valued text types for both receptive and productive tasks. Assessment frameworks should also evolve to recognise and reward student achievements in multimodal composition and interpretation, reflecting the complex forms of literacy demanded by higher education, the workplace, and civic life. Future research in this domain should continue to address both breadth and depth. While this qualitative study provides rich insights into the experiences of a select cohort, larger-scale research incorporating different educational contexts, longer intervention periods, and comparative analysis across generations would be valuable for ensuring external validity and informing policy at regional or national levels.

**6. Conclusion:** In sum, the incorporation of multimodal texts into English language teaching is particularly effective for Generation Z learners, supporting their engagement, comprehension, and creative potential in ways that traditional text-based instruction often fails to achieve. As literacies continue to evolve in tandem with technological change, teacher expertise, curriculum design, and institutional priorities must adjust to fully harness the pedagogical opportunities opened up by multimodal, digital, and collaborative approaches to English education. Only then can English teaching remain responsive, inclusive, and empowering for the learners of today and tomorrow. Despite the promising outcomes associated with the integration of multimodal texts in English language teaching for Generation Z learners, this research is marked by several noteworthy limitations that warrant consideration. The qualitative design and relatively limited sample size, comprising 30

---

students from a single college, mean that participants may not represent the full spectrum of socio-economic, cultural, or technological diversity encountered in broader or international settings. The duration of the intervention, spanning only six weeks, also limits the ability to observe long-term effects, sustained changes in literacy practices, or potential challenges that may arise with prolonged exposure to multimodal pedagogy.

Another limitation relates to the reliance on self-reported data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions, which are inherently subject to participant bias and social desirability effects. While thematic analysis and triangulation were employed to enhance the credibility of findings, the absence of quantitative measures or objective assessments means that improvements in engagement, comprehension, or creative expression are based primarily on subjective impressions rather than standardised metrics. Furthermore, the study did not systematically account for students' prior experience with technology or multimodal resources, which may have impacted their levels of comfort, participation, and learning gains. Variations in teacher proficiency with digital tools and differences in institutional technological infrastructure may have further influenced the fidelity and outcomes of the multimodal interventions. Scope for future research in this area is substantial and multi-faceted. Studies with larger and more diverse participant groups, perhaps spanning multiple schools, regions, or countries, would help to clarify the broader applicability of these findings and allow for comparative analysis across cultural and linguistic contexts. Longitudinal research designs can provide insights into the sustainability and evolving impacts of multimodal text integration over entire academic years or stages of schooling. Incorporating mixed methods approaches that blend qualitative insights with quantitative data, such as pre- and post-intervention assessments of literacy achievement, digital skills, or student attitudes, would yield more robust and objectively verifiable evidence of impact.

Further exploration of how specific variables shape the effectiveness of multimodal texts is also warranted. Investigating the roles of student digital literacy, access to devices, and differing learning preferences would deepen understanding of who benefits most from these approaches and under what conditions. Studies could examine the professional development needs of educators and identify effective models for equipping them with the confidence and skills necessary to design and assess multimodal learning experiences. Research might also address curricular and policy implications by evaluating how multimodal literacy can be systematically integrated into existing educational frameworks and assessment regimes. Finally, given the rapidly evolving digital landscape, future investigations should remain attentive to emerging multimodal formats, such as virtual or augmented reality, social media genres, and artificial intelligence-driven platforms, along with their pedagogical affordances. Continued attention to issues of equity and access, particularly for learners or schools with limited technological resources, will be key to ensuring that the benefits of multimodal English language teaching are shared broadly and inclusively.

**Works Cited:**

- Ajayi, L. (2012). How ESL Students' Sociocultural Identities Mediate Their Multimodal Literacy Practices. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 11(5), 326–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2012.723583>
- Bezemer, J., & Jewitt, C. (2010). Multimodal Analysis: Key Issues. In L. Litosseliti (Ed.), *Research Methods in Linguistics* (pp. 180–197). London: Continuum.
- Chauhan, N., Mohammed, S., & Mishra, U. (2021). Multimodal learning approach for Gen Z: Analysis and perspectives. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26, 1639–1655. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-020-10353-1>
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2009). Multiliteracies: New Literacies, New Learning. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 4(3), 164–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15544800903076044>
- Gee, J. P. (2007). *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (3rd Ed.). London: Routledge.
- Henderson, B., & Buskist, W. (2011). Engaging Gen Y Students in the Classroom. *Teaching of Psychology*, 38(3), 215–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628311410327>
- Jewitt, C. (2008). Multimodality and Literacy in School Classrooms. *Review of Research in Education*, 32(1), 241–267. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X07310586>
- Jewitt, C., & Kress, G. (2003). *Multimodal Literacy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold.
- Mills, K. A. (2010). A Review of the “Digital Turn” in the New Literacy Studies. *Review of Educational Research*, 80(2), 246–271. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654310364401>
- Moreno, R., & Mayer, R. (2007). Interactive Multimodal Learning Environments. *Educational Psychology Review*, 19, 309–326. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-007-9047-2>
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6.
- Serafini, F. (2012). Expanding the Four Resources Model: Reading Visual and Multimodal Texts. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 7(2), 150–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2012.656347>
- Serafini, F. (2014). *Reading the Visual: An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy*. Teachers College Press.
- Street, B. V. (2003). What’s “New” in New Literacy Studies? Critical Approaches to Literacy in Theory and Practice. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 5(2), 77–91.
- Turner, K. (2015). Generation Z in the Classroom. In P. Allen & H. Rowe (Eds.), *Teaching the Next Generation* (pp. 45–57). Boston: Cengage.
- Walsh, M. (2010). Multimodal Literacy: What Does It Mean for Classroom Practice? *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 33(3), 211–239.
- Yamanaka, T., & Ye, Q. (2018). Impact of Digital Storytelling on EFL Learners’

Engagement and Learning Outcomes. *CALICO Journal*, 35(3), 355–377.

<https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.34268>

Rowell, J., & Walsh, M. (2011). Rethinking Literacy Education in New Times:

Multimodality, Multiliteracies, & New Literacies. *Brock Education Journal*, 21(1), 53–62.