

## Multimodal Resources and Students' Motivation in English for Specific Purposes

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### Abstract

The aim of the research was to analyze and generalize the educational potential of multimodal resources in enhancing students' motivation in learning English for Specific Purposes. The study was conducted following the theories of digital humanities pedagogy and multimodal pedagogy. It had a descriptive cross-sectional quantitative-based (pedagogical experiment; survey; questionnaire) and qualitative-based (observation of the participants in the educational process; comparison and generalization of pedagogical experience on the problem under research; analysis of the data collected in a statistically accurate manner; monographic method – to interpret the results obtained in a coherent, logical approach) design. The significance of the findings can redound, on the one hand, to modernizing the educational processes of English for Specific Purposes based on the adequate integration of multimodal resources and, on the other, contributing to efficiently developing university students' multimodal communicative competence. The data collected can be exploited in further research into the issue of increasing the motivation of non-philological students to learn English for professional use. In the course of the pedagogical experiment, effective ways of perceiving and processing the information by students were identified, as well as the advantage of integrating multimodal resources into teaching English for Special Purposes. The scope for further study lies in the in-depth research into forming multimodal communicative competence of technical students in learning English for Specific Purposes.

*Keywords:* English for Specific Purposes, multimodal communicative competence, multimodal resources, motivation, online classes, pedagogical techniques, technical students

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## Introduction

The forced transition of the entire education system to the online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed and exacerbated the problems associated, on the one hand, with the significant weakening of the emotional, interpersonal interaction between the teacher and students, and on the other, – with the necessity of the search for effective online pedagogical techniques for conducting online classes. The education system, like any living organism, was forced to adapt to the given conditions, which prompted English language teachers to look for new ways to organize active learning and adapt the challenges of online education as the primary medium of the learning process “from the standpoint of students’ mental health concerns” (Kolomiets, Antonenko, Guryeyeva, Fedorenko & Tsepikalo, 2021, p. 153). Although students can more easily tolerate any infections, they are especially vulnerable in terms of potential psychological consequences.

Moreover, in a modern, rapidly changing world, under conditions of uncertainty in different spheres of peoples’ life, the main task of higher education institutions can be formulated as preparing a person for life in an era of crises and challenges through forming the competencies necessary for their successful vital activity, and in the process of learning English for Specific Purposes as well. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 era, the academic community has emphasized the role of higher education institutions in fostering a sense of identity, a digital one in particular, in the young generation. It proposes to consider the formation of democratic values, willingness to cooperate, and share the ideas of the common good among students as one of the mainstreams in the modern world. In addition, “online learning presupposes dealing with a significant amount of information, which demands critical assessment” (Kolomiets et al., 2021, p. 153). And today, significant focus is made on multimodal pedagogical practices, which enable English learners to enhance their content knowledge and critical awareness and to discuss social identities (Danzak, 2011; Edo Marzá & Fortanet Gómez, 2022; Fedorenko, 2018; Fedorenko, Voloshchuk, Sharanova, Glinka & Zhurba, 2021; Harkavy, Bergan, Gallagher & Van’t Land, 2020; Miller, 2007; Skinner & Hagood, 2008).

Given the fact that the ways of constructing knowledge have both different possibilities and limitations due to the challenges of the COVID-19 era, participants of the educational process can choose from more ways than before to build up and represent knowledge based on combining different methods of multimodal learning (Jewitt, 2008; Kolomiets et al., 2021; Lee, 2020). Such a combination implies that organizing English learning has become more complex in design, diversity, and multiplicity. As a consequence, regardless of whether teaching techniques consider and accommodate students’ multimodal learning methods, the process of English teaching has become multiplex and requires even more than it used to be for the development of students’ multimodal communicative competence.

The significance of the findings can redound, on the one hand, to modernizing the educational processes of English for Specific Purposes based on adequate integration of multimodal resources and, on the other, contributing to efficiently developing university students’ multimodal communicative competence. The data collected can be exploited in further research into the issue of increasing the motivation of non-philological students to learn English for professional use.

Different aspects of the multimodal pedagogical practices have already been under scrutiny, but the specifics of their integration with the help of various multimodal learning resources into the educational process of English for Specific Purposes at technical universities to increase students’ motivation remains relevant. Therefore, the research aimed at analyzing and

generalizing the potential of multimodal learning resources in enhancing students' motivation to study English for professional use. The purpose-related objectives were as follows:

- 1) to carry out a pedagogical experiment to study the influence of the integration of multimodal resources on students' motivation to learn English for specific purposes;
- 2) to analyze the efficiency of exploiting multimodal resources as a means of multicultural education aimed at forming students' foreign language communicative competence and multimodal literacy;
- 3) to determine the level of student's motivation in learning English for Specific Purposes through integrating multimodal learning resources into the educational process.

### Literature Review

The analysis of scholarly literature demonstrated that the problem of a multimodal approach in education is rather complex, although it has developed for a long time. Among those who laid the foundations of the theory of multimodality were Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001). Theoretical concepts of multimodality in pedagogical settings have been covered quite widely by various scholars, among which are the following: Abdulrahman (2020), Campoy-Cubillo and Querol-Julián (2015), Lankshear and Knobel (2006), Lea and Jones (2011), Moreno and Mayer (2007), Querol-Julián (2023), Sanders and Albers (2010), Stein (2008), Thesen (2001) and many others. Multimodal representations relate to the sociocultural contexts in which different modes are exploited in the communication process (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). The above mentioned is especially true in the modern digital age, when the focus on mere language literacy is no longer enough for different spheres of life, as a redefined concept of competence is required (Dooly & Hauck, 2012; Palsa & Mertala, 2019).

When it comes to English as a foreign language, Sanders and Albers (2010) have stated that developing multimodal communicative competence is of paramount importance. As a student who lacks this competence can be at a disadvantage in various educational and professional contexts. Therefore, Pinar (2019) has argued the English language teacher should keep this in mind to develop multimodal competence. Only then will the student be able to determine the most suitable method for specific purposes of representation and communication. Multimodality provides more opportunities for interactive activities, where learners are not passive recipients of linguistic information (Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2015; Shuman & Scherer, 2014). This new communicative landscape is causing a reevaluation, providing students with the optimal opportunities that allow them to interact with texts that are increasingly multimodal (Fedorenko et al., 2021; Pinar, 2019).

Multimodal didactics encompasses how English teachers can create an efficient educational environment by exploiting a wide range of multimodal learning resources (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). And English for Specific Purposes is not an exception. Nowadays, more and more scholars, such as Danzak (2011), Edo Marzá and Fortanet Gómez (2022), Hellwig (2022), Jiang (2017), Lee (2014), Plastina (2013), Prior (2013), are turning to the issue of multimodality in the educational settings of English for Specific Purposes. But notwithstanding this fact, Prior (2013) has maintained that "multimodality seems to have remained a somewhat peripheral area of English for Specific Purposes" (p. 520).

To sum up, we have observed a considerable research interest in the topic of multimodality in terms of higher education in general and English for Specific Purposes in particular. Presently,

a research gap is evident in studying the potential of the multimodal resources in enhancing the technical students' motivation to learn English for Specific Purposes.

### **Method**

The study was a mixed methods research. It had a descriptive cross-sectional quantitative-based (pedagogical experiment; survey; questionnaire) and qualitative-based (observation of the participants in the educational process; comparison and generalization of pedagogical experience on the problem under research; analysis of the data collected in a statistically valid manner, e.g., via the method of mathematical statistics to establish quantitative values of the level of student's motivation to learn English for specific purposes through the integrating multimodal resources into the educational process; monographic method – to interpret the results obtained in a coherent, logical approach) design.

The theory of digital humanities pedagogy underpinned the study. This theory considers the idea that digitalization of the educational environment creates favorable conditions for developing digital citizenship and contributes to the digital socialization of students (Hirsch, 2012). The novelty of this phenomenon is the consistent movement of the educational process towards developing an independent, self-learning, self-regulating personality, ready to acquire the knowledge necessary to select and regulate educational and cognitive activities in the flow of constantly changing information. Additionally, the study employed the significant potential of multimodal pedagogy to make English online classes more democratic and inclusive. The use of different modes in online “classrooms” is like the effect of the work of culture, history, and power in shaping materials into resources for meaning-making in various social practices (Stein, 2008; Thesen, 2001).

### **Participants**

The experimental study during the 2021-2022 academic year covered the sample group of 168 third-year undergraduate students of the Institute of Energy Saving and Energy Management and Faculty of Instrumentation Engineering of the National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute” (after this, officially abbreviated name – Igor Sikorsky KPI). All the students voluntarily accepted to participate in the research at all stages.

The authors involved in the study five teachers of the course “English for Professional Purposes” from the university mentioned above. All the participants gave their informed consent. And all the procedures were approved by the Ethics Committee of Igor Sikorsky KPI.

### **Research Instruments**

To study the possibilities of a multimodal learning environment, we chose classes of English for Specific Purposes. The pedagogical experiment was aimed at investigating the influence of the integration of multimodal resources on students' motivation to learn English for Specific Purposes. At the ascertaining stage of the pedagogical experiment, a survey among the teachers of English for Specific Purposes was carried out. The teachers were asked to dwell on their attitudes to using multimodal learning resources in the online classroom and their role in enhancing students' motivation. Also, to determine students' awareness of the essence of the concept of “multimodality” and the efficient ways of learning during online classes, we surveyed the following questions:

1. What is an easy way for you to perceive educational information (listening, seeing, etc.)?

2. What do you understand by “multimodality”?
3. What functions do websites, podcasts, videos, etc., perform in the educational process, from your point of view?

Additionally, a Likert scale questionnaire, an adapted version of the Questionnaire on Learner Use of Technology by Das and Mishra (2016) (see Appendix A) was emailed to the students to be completed at their convenience.

The surveys and the questionnaire mentioned above were aimed at coming up with the efficient pedagogical techniques for creating a multimodal learning environment in the online classes of English for Specific Purposes. That environment was favorable, on the one hand, for the development of students' multimodal communicative competence and, on the other, for contributing to successful emotional interaction.

At the formative stage, the pedagogical experiment was carried out synchronously (e.g., studying the topic “Managing stress and anxiety in professional activity” in online classes of English for Specific Purposes and processing multimodal educational materials through multimodal listening tasks and team techniques) and asynchronously (e.g., home reading done by the students) modes. The teachers introduced the new vocabulary input on the topics in the course of English for Specific Purposes during the online classes. The students exercised learning materials with the support of multimodal resources, such as podcasts and video materials.

### ***Research Procedures***

As warm-up activities enhanced the emotional interaction and students' motivation in online English classes, we exploited videos followed by different comprehension tasks (e.g., answering the teacher's set questions followed by short discussions, doing quizzes or exercises on vocabulary, etc.) (see Appendix B).

When selecting video texts for educational purposes, we focused on the following principles:

- the communicative and informational value of an authentic video product;
- the sociocultural value of the video material as a means of introducing a non-native speaker into the world of the English linguistic community;
- the didactic expediency of exploiting the English language authentic video materials for the development of a culture of perception of audiovisual materials that contribute to students' psychological well-being;
- students' communicative and intellectual potential.

The video materials exploited not only contribute to building up students' active vocabulary and developing their communicative competence, but they also provide them with the vital psychological knowledge of how to be mindful, how to be more conscious of their thoughts and actions to decide what to focus on consciously, etc. And we must admit that analyzing and understanding the multimodal nature of listening to such videos is a complex task that demands a great deal of effort from both students and teachers. The latter's mastery even plays more significant role in instructing and directing the comprehension process of such multimodal activities. A multimodal listening task is designed to assess students' ability to identify, interpret, and evaluate verbal and nonverbal information in multimodal texts by answering questions or solving problems posed by an English teacher. However, interpreting non-verbal communication



is not always an easy task, as often the context must be taken into account (Campoy-Cubillo & Querol-Julián, 2015; Goh & Vandergrift, 2011).

When developing materials for classroom activities, we considered a multimodal approach, i.e., the inclusion of audio material with the combination of other modes of communication. In this regard, we should stress that the modes, which students encountered in the video texts, had an impact on their emotional state.

An asset to the emotional, interpersonal interaction was our, i.e., English teachers, stories about our emotional difficulties in conducting English classes online. And one day, that was facilitated by listening to the song “I will survive, coronavirus version for teachers going online” by Bruening (2020), an associate professor of history and political science at Missouri University of Science and Technology (USA), to the music of the famous hit “I will survive,” performed by Tina Turner. The song is about the unshakable determination of teachers to bring the light of knowledge to the student masses, even if this means enhancing their digital skills on their own in two days.

Today, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a new term, “BANI world”, was coined to describe the collective challenges of modern humanity to substitute for the VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) world (Cascio, 2020). The fragile BANI (brittle, anxious, nonlinear, incomprehensible) world with its high level of anxiety has become a reality. Since we have found a resource that is stable and meaningful for most students, despite any challenges in life, those were family photo archives, family stories, and memories, things that there was not enough time for before the COVID-19 pandemic and which acquired great value in current conditions. Therefore, during every English class, we asked two to three students to present three to five pictures, meaningful to them, from their family archive, and prepare a 5-7-minute report with a presentation about the people and events in the pictures. At the same time, they had to explain why those photos were significant to them. Quite interesting to us was the fact that most students prepared multimodal presentations with musical soundtracks. Such a multimodal task contributed to not only enhancing students' multimodal literacy and communicative competence as well. To a certain extent, it had an impact on their psychological health. As, while going through the photos of their family, they physically felt the energy of their relatives, their inner confidence grew and anxieties disappeared.

Another multimodal pedagogical practice dealt with creating a “group page” in Google Classroom where we accepted students' proposals on various everyday issues, photos, videos, and notes on multiple spheres of human life and society as well. Those issues were discussed in our online classes. For instance, on that page, students posted the following: photos (“Beautiful and unusual in nature,” “Different emotions of people,” “Quarantine relationships”); notes (“My ideal day and online study,” “My bad quarantine day,” “A memorable day during quarantine”); and proposals on issues for covering during online English classes.

The fact that technical students expressed their interest in the essence of happiness contributed to our assigning book readings on that phenomenon for most weeks of the semester. A book on happiness, “Authentic Happiness; Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment” by Martin Seligman, was offered to students as additional home reading. We check reading comprehension through short oral reports or the “jigsaw” method. As for the former, we asked each student to give a brief oral account – up to two minutes – about the reading, relating it to their own observations. We recorded whether each student gave an account, but did not evaluate its quality. Because each student was required to speak weekly, and in most

cases, after the report a short discussion arose. The “jigsaw” method, in turn, as a collaborative team technique, was an interactive activity on the material read, which presupposed the division of the group of students into smaller subgroups (three to five individuals), “fragments.” Each group consists of students (called “experts”) working on one of the pieces of a common theme. For example, the common topic was “The analysis of happiness based on three different elements: positive emotions, engagement and meaning,” which was subdivided into three fragments: “The analysis of happiness based on the positive emotions,” “The analysis of happiness based on the engagement” and “The analysis of happiness based on the meaning”). Having found information on their fragment, “experts” from different groups studying the same issue met and exchanged information. Returning to their groups, the “experts” took turns “teaching” the new material to other group members, and in this way, the material was fully mastered by all students in the group.

Given the aforementioned pedagogical techniques, the students should be prepared not only for professional communication in English, but they are also supposed to develop their ability to perceive, understand and relay information from various spheres of human life and society (Kharb, Samanta, Jindal & Singh., 2013; Lea & Jones, 2011; Moreno & Mayer, 2007).

The control stage of the experiment employed a repeated survey among the teachers of English for Specific Purposes to find out quantitative and qualitative changes in the students' motivation to learn English online with the support of multimodal resources. The dynamics of the student's motivation to learn English for professional use based on multimodal resources were analyzed and generalized. The quantitative values were determined with the help of the method of mathematical statistics,

## Results

At the ascertaining stage of the experiment, almost unanimously, the surveyed students associated the concept of multimodality with the distinction between human senses, primarily visual and auditory channels, indicating its connection with the various internet resources, websites in particular. That was a prominent and explicable result. Modern students are active, agile users of the Internet and different social networks, the concept of multimodality is familiar to them. As far as the functions performed in the educational process by websites, podcasts, videos, etc. are concerned, we obtained the following responses: entertaining (52%), enlightening (43%), affective (32%), thought-provoking (49%), other (9%). Furthermore, the students collectively argued that the primary purpose of the digital resources lay in attracting the learners' attention and enhancing their motivation to study. Besides, most students still pointed to the insufficient use of Internet resources in teaching English for professional use (78%).

Also, we used the Likert scale for the questionnaire, in which the students expressed their vision of the importance of different multimodal resources in the educational process from strongly agree, neither agree nor disagree up to disagree strongly. The respondents showed virtual unanimity in their strong agreement with all the points of the questionnaire.

During the ascertaining stage of the pedagogical experiment, it was found that about a quarter of the surveyed students (24%) considered listening as an easy way of perceiving educational information (i.e., auditory learners); 35% of the respondents were visuals, i.e., they perceived better information containing different images; 41% of the students preferred to combine visual images with sounds. Given that, it is advisable to resort to blending different modes in introducing and practicing educational material.

In addition, we also conducted individual interviews with the teachers. The interviews aimed to find out the level of the student's motivation to learn English for Specific Purposes. We processed the responses of the surveyed teachers. The findings were as follows: according to the teachers' observations, 58 students (34.5%) had a low level of motivation, i.e., they were not interested in the course, and their language and speech competence was at a relatively low level (level A2); 54 students (32.1%) demonstrated a medium level of motivation, i.e., they eagerly participated in the class activities, but very often they didn't make efforts in doing homework thoroughly, and had a sufficient level of language and speech competence (level B1); 56 students (33.4%) were characterized by a high level of motivation, i.e., students were engrossed in all the class activities, and regularly did homework thoroughly, had an outstanding level of language and speech competence (level B2). This survey of the teachers was conducted to choose efficient methods for integrating multimodal resources in the educational process of English for Specific Purposes and determining the tools appropriate for the implementation at the formative stage

During the control stage of the experiment, the results of the replicate survey among the teachers gave evidence of the quantitative and qualitative changes in the student's motivation to learn the course under study. The dynamics of the student's motivation to learn English for specific purposes through integrating multimodal resources in the educational process were generalized. The quantitative values were determined by exploiting the method of mathematical statistics (Table 1).

Table 1. *The dynamics of the student's motivation to learn English for Specific Purposes through integrating multimodal resources in the educational process*

Levels	The ascertaining stage		The control stage		Dynamics
	students (quantity)	students (%)	students (quantity)	students (%)	%
Low	58	34.5	41	24.3	-10.2
Medium	54	32.1	65	38.7	+6.6
High	56	33.4	62	37	+3.6

The analysis of the data, provided in Table 1, demonstrated positive dynamics in the levels of the student's motivation to learn English for Specific Purposes. It can be explained by the fact that we tried to provide students with an opportunity not only to interact using the English language as a tool, but also to gain understanding and skills that were not easily assessed. Furthermore, on the one hand, the students brought to the English online classroom experience with technology platforms and the multimodal (narrative or persuasive) tasks. On the other hand, the students' willingness to use their occasions in technology assist English teachers in exploring the possibilities of utilizing multimodal learning resources.

## Discussion

This study is a contribution to the continuing discussions on the efficiency of multimodal resources in instructing English for Specific Purposes. The exploited pedagogical techniques had an impact on student-centered active learning. Those techniques encouraged the students' engagement in the relevant to their lives subject-matters, where multimedia technologies improve



interpersonal interaction (Abdulrahman et al., 2020; Harkavy et al., 2020). Moreover, the use of interactive tasks based on multimodal resources also helped students to communicate and acquire important meta-skills – universal competencies that serve as the basis for developing students' professional skills (Miller, 2007). We intended to encourage students to think about the issues in their surroundings and link them to relevant discussions during online classes. Their observations were related to the behavior of other people or their own experiences and feelings. Exploring, understanding, and interpreting various sociocultural events, situations, etc., encouraged students to reflect on the meaning of existence, their role in the world through generalizing their own experiences (Fedorenko, 2018). The authors fully share the view expressed by Edo Marzá and Fortanet Gómez (2022) that the utilization of authentic materials makes a main contribution to meaningful practice. We consider English classes as an ongoing process of the identity-building where feelings, values, and attitudes are of great priority. These results are consistent with other studies, among which are the findings by Danzak (2011) and Fedorenko (2018).

The results obtained are in good agreement with other studies (Dooly & Hauck, 2012; Fedorenko et al., 2021; Palsa & Mertala, 2019; Plastina, 2013) which have shown that assignments based on multimodal resources instruction can substantially raise the level of the student's motivation in learning English for Specific Purposes in particular and enhance the quality and efficiency of the educational process in general. Additionally, the research suggests that emotions also have a particular impact on students' motivation to learn English for Specific Purposes. This is justified by the findings of Boekaerts and Pekrun (2015), Shuman and Scherer (2014), providing data on how the students' self-efficacy beliefs develop by increasing the positive interpretations of different sociocultural situations.

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge some limitations in the research. Firstly, the study did not show a more comprehensive picture of improving the students' communicative competence as the experimental period was relatively short. Implementing this study during more extended period would also be beneficial. Secondly, the experiment was limited to instructing third-year undergraduate technical students. Hence, similar studies can be carried out in other vocational domains (e.g., medical students) and other age groups of students. Despite the limitations mentioned, the students were satisfied with performing multimodal assignments to master English for Specific Purposes, as their motivation increased through integrating multimodal learning resources into the educational process.

## Conclusion

Summing up, it can be concluded that using multimodal resources in teaching English for Specific Purposes arouses students' interest and encourages communication. During the pedagogical experiment, the effective ways of students' perception and processing the information were elucidated, and the advantage of integrating multimodal resources into teaching English was revealed. The positive dynamics of the student's motivation to learn English for Specific Purposes were experimentally identified: quantitative values of the levels were determined by the method of mathematical statistics. However, while emphasizing the advisability of integrating multimodal learning resources, the balance between entertainment content and educational content should be maintained. We do not exclude the possibility of irrational use of multimodal resources in educational activities. And it is essential to take into consideration the psychological characteristics of students and the level of their communicative competence. In addition, English teachers should

clearly formulate educational objectives and outcomes of learning, avoid ambiguous or provocative situations, and shift the focus from entertainment to learning.

In our opinion, the scope for further study lies in the in-depth research into forming multimodal communicative competence of technical students in the educational process of learning English for specific purposes.

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## Appendix

### Students' questionnaire

- In your studies, how useful do you think it would be to:
- use the Web to share digital files related to your course (e.g., sharing photos, audio files, movies, digital documents, websites, etc.)?
  - use an ePortfolio system to record your achievements?
  - design and build Web pages as part of your course?
  - create and present multimedia shows as part of your course requirements (e.g., PowerPoint)?

- create and present audio/video as part of your use of a social networking platform (e.g., Facebook) on the Web to communicate / collaborate with other students on the course?
- use microblogging (such as Twitter) to share information about class-related activities?
- keep your own blog as part of your course requirements?

**Appendix B: Video texts**

- educational video texts on mindfulness (e.g.,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4>;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSaA6ft4NVE>);
- educational video texts on managing stress and anxiety (e.g.,  
<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/general-english/audio-zone/beating-stress>;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk2-dKH2Ta4>;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojF0QrXtQnA>);
- educational video texts on happiness (e.g.,  
<https://www.bbc.com/learningenglish/korean/features/6-minute-english/ep-210311>;  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaJ\\_Yk6u3ko](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaJ_Yk6u3ko);  
[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/what\\_makes\\_us\\_happier\\_than\\_mone](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/what_makes_us_happier_than_mone)).