

INTEGRATING CRITICAL LITERACY AND MULTIMODAL PEDAGOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

English language learners encounter texts that extend beyond alphabetic modes, navigating advertisements, social media posts, and digital platforms where meaning emerges from linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial resources operating simultaneously. This narrative review synthesizes contemporary research examining the intersection of critical literacy and multimodal pedagogy in English language education, with particular attention to Asian EFL contexts. The review analyzed empirical studies organized thematically to examine how theoretical frameworks inform pedagogical practice, how implementations address contextual challenges, and how teacher education prepares educators for multimodal critical literacy instruction. Findings reveal that project-based, problem-based, digital storytelling, and genre-based approaches effectively develop critical multimodal literacy when combined with explicit metalinguistic instruction and appropriate scaffolding. Implementation challenges in Asian EFL contexts include language proficiency requirements, cultural considerations for critical engagement, gaps in teacher preparedness, and disparities in resource access. Technology integration studies demonstrate that digital platforms and AI tools expand possibilities for multimodal composition while requiring critical digital literacy frameworks. Assessment approaches have evolved from product-focused to process- and genre-based models that acknowledge the complexity of multimodality. Teacher education implications emphasize the need for professional development focused on semiotic awareness, multimodal pedagogical content knowledge, and critical orientations, with localized adaptations tailored to specific educational contexts. These insights underscore the importance of context-responsive pedagogy and sustained teacher learning for effectively implementing multimodal critical literacy across diverse EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *critical literacy, multimodal learning, Asian EFL contexts, digital literacy, teacher education*

INTRODUCTION

English language learners encounter texts that extend far beyond written words. Students navigate advertisements that blend persuasive language with carefully composed visuals (Kusumastuti, 2018), interpret social media posts where meaning emerges from the interplay of emoji, image, and text (Silvhiany et al.,

2021), and engage with digital platforms that demand simultaneous attention to multiple communicative modes (G. L. Liu et al., 2025). These everyday literacy practices reveal a communicative landscape in which meaning-making draws on linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural, and audio resources that operate in concert rather than in isolation.

Critical literacy pedagogy, rooted in Freire's problem-posing education and the Four Resources Model developed by Freebody and Luke, has long emphasized reading as a social practice that involves interrogating power relations and examining how texts position readers (Abednia & Crookes, 2019). The New London Group's multiliteracies framework extended this critical stance by recognizing communication as fundamentally multimodal, arguing that literacy pedagogy must account for diverse modes of meaning-making across cultural and linguistic contexts (Yelland, 2018). While these theoretical traditions developed somewhat independently—critical literacy focusing on ideological critique and multiliteracies addressing semiotic diversity—classroom practice has demonstrated their productive convergence. When students analyse television commercials through multimodal frameworks, they simultaneously develop technical skills in reading visual grammar and critical awareness of persuasive strategies that target consumer behaviour (Hu & Luo, 2016).

The integration of critical literacy principles with multimodal pedagogies has taken distinct forms across educational contexts. Project-based approaches in Asian EFL settings have engaged learners in analyzing and creating multimodal texts that address cultural and social issues, demonstrating how multimodal composition can serve as a vehicle for critical inquiry (Lee et al., 2021). Digital storytelling initiatives have shown how students' use of multiple semiotic resources—image, voice, music, text—can simultaneously develop language proficiency and critical examination of identity and social positioning (Bai & Xian, 2024). Assessment frameworks have evolved to evaluate not only students' orchestration of multiple modes but also their capacity to interrogate the ideological work performed by multimodal texts (Hafner & Ho, 2020).

Literature addressing this pedagogical intersection has examined various dimensions: theoretical frameworks extending Freebody and Luke's resources model to encompass visual and multimodal texts (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014; Serafini, 2012), empirical studies documenting classroom implementations of multimodal critical literacy in diverse EFL/ESL contexts (Grant, 2017; Novianti et al., 2020), analyses of specific text types including advertisements, social media content, and films (Brocca et al., 2024; S. Liu, 2019), and investigations of how digital technologies mediate critical multimodal practices (Bilki et al., 2023). However, this body of work has developed across disciplinary boundaries—applied linguistics, literacy studies, media education, and educational technology—with limited synthesis examining how these strands inform a coherent pedagogical approach for English language teaching.

This narrative literature review synthesizes research at the intersection of critical literacy and multimodal learning in English language education, with particular attention to Asian EFL contexts. The literature review first establishes theoretical foundations in critical pedagogy and multiliteracies traditions, then traces their pedagogical convergence in classroom practice, examines extensions of digital literacy, and contextualizes implementation in Asian EFL settings. The review pursues three objectives: first, to examine how theoretical frameworks from critical pedagogy, multiliteracies, and multimodal discourse analysis inform instructional approaches that develop both semiotic awareness and critical consciousness; second, to analyze empirical evidence regarding pedagogical strategies, assessment methods, and technology integration in diverse educational settings; and third, to identify how teacher education programs prepare educators to implement multimodal critical literacy practices. By bringing these strands into conversation, this review addresses a gap in the existing literature, which has essentially treated critical literacy and multimodal pedagogy as parallel rather than integrated concerns in English language teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy emerged from Freire's (1970) liberatory pedagogy, which positioned literacy as a dialogic practice of reading both the word and the world. Freire viewed literacy as praxis, linking reflection and action to transform social realities. This tradition conceptualises texts as carriers of ideological meanings that position readers in particular ways, requiring learners to move beyond comprehension to interrogate the power relations embedded in discourse. Freebody & Luke's (1990) Four Resources Model later operationalized critical literacy through four interrelated roles—code breaker, meaning maker, text user, and text analyst. Although initially designed for print-based literacy, subsequent scholars extended this framework to accommodate multimodal and digital texts across educational settings. Abednia & Crookes (2019) observed that critical literacy has been adopted and adapted across Asian EFL contexts in varied ways, shaped by cultural traditions, institutional constraints, and pedagogical orientations.

The relevance of critical literacy has expanded in response to the proliferation of digital communication. Social media posts, advertisements, and multimedia texts combine linguistic, visual, and affective cues, requiring learners to determine credibility, evaluate ideological positioning, and interpret multimodal features simultaneously (Hu & Luo, 2016; Silvhiyany et al., 2021). Hinrichsen & Coombs (2014) extended the Four Resources Model into a framework for critical digital literacy, highlighting how online participation, identity, and information navigation constitute essential literacy practices. These developments underscore the need for learners to critique how digital platforms structure interpretation and interaction.

In Asian EFL settings, critical literacy intersects with language proficiency demands. Learners often need support to engage in ideological critique while also developing linguistic accuracy and fluency (Novianti et al., 2020). Cultural expectations around politeness and deference may shape how critique is expressed, requiring teachers to adapt Western-origin frameworks thoughtfully (Grant, 2017). Teacher preparedness also plays a significant role; implementing critical literacy requires grounding in pedagogy, discourse analysis, and reflective practice

(Mahapatra & Koltovskaia, 2025). Although challenges vary across regions, studies from Indonesia, China, Taiwan, and South Korea show that when critical literacy is locally adapted and scaffolded, it can foster both linguistic and critical development.

Multimodal Pedagogy

Parallel to the development of critical literacy, the multiliteracies framework introduced by the New London Group (1996) highlighted linguistic diversity and the multimodal nature of meaning-making. While multiliteracies foregrounds cultural and modal plurality, multimodal literacy emphasizes learners' ability to interpret and produce texts using linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial modes. Design is central in this framework, as learners orchestrate semiotic resources to construct meaning.

Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2020) work in social semiotics advanced understanding of multimodal communication by demonstrating how visual features—representational structures, interpersonal cues, and compositional arrangements—operate analogously to linguistic grammar. Systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis, drawing on Halliday's metafunctions (Z. Liu, 2022), provides tools for examining how semiotic modes interact to produce ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Yelland (2018) further illustrated how digital learning environments expand the role of multimodality as students engage with tablets and digital media.

Empirical studies demonstrate how multimodal pedagogy develops learners' semiotic and communicative awareness. Project-based multimodal learning enables students to explore cultural themes, incorporate multiple semiotic resources, and generate reflective, purposeful meaning-making (Lee et al., 2021). Digital storytelling promotes language development while critically examining identity and representation, drawing on images, voice, music, and narrative (Bai & Xian, 2024). Other multimodal tasks, such as infographic design, support students in organizing information, expressing viewpoints, and engaging with content visually and verbally (Carcamo & Pino, 2025).

However, implementing multimodal pedagogy requires substantial pedagogical expertise. Teachers must integrate technology, scaffold semiotic analysis, and balance creative freedom with linguistic development (Mahapatra & Koltovskaia, 2025). Many educators report uncertainty about evaluating multimodal texts, especially when lacking training in visual grammar or media literacy (Aghabarari & Rahimi, 2020). Institutional factors, such as limited digital resources, high-stakes assessments, and curriculum rigidity, shape how multimodal pedagogy unfolds in practice (Burke, 2024; Silvhiany et al., 2021). These findings indicate that multimodal literacy is not merely a set of technical skills but a pedagogical approach that requires structural and instructional support.

The Intersection of Critical Literacy and Multimodal Pedagogy

Although the two traditions developed separately, classroom studies show that they intersect in productive ways. When students analyze advertisements combining language, image, color, and layout to construct consumer desire, they engage in both multimodal interpretation and ideological critique (Hu & Luo, 2016). Project-based learning incorporating multimodal texts on social issues enables students to develop semiotic awareness while questioning representations and perspectives (Lee et al., 2021). Serafini (2012) reconceptualized the Four Resources Model for multimodal contexts, arguing that critical reading must examine not only what texts say but also how multimodal designs position viewers. Hinrichsen & Coombs (2014) similarly proposed a framework for critical digital literacy that integrates multimodal navigation, online identity, and critical judgment.

Digital technologies further intensify this intersection. Learners interpret how narration, imagery, sound, and editing shape meaning in video and social media content while also evaluating ideological positioning and credibility (G. L. Liu et al., 2025; Silvhiany et al., 2021). Studies on AI-mediated learning show that multimodal analysis must consider not only semiotic resources but also algorithmic mediation (G. L. Liu et al., 2025). Assessment frameworks have evolved accordingly, incorporating multimodal design choices, critical awareness, and

reflective processes (Hafner & Ho, 2020; L. Jiang et al., 2022). These studies demonstrate that multimodal pedagogy strengthens critical literacy when learners are guided to interrogate how texts communicate and persuade through multiple modes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a narrative literature review to synthesize research on integrating critical literacy and multimodal pedagogy in English language education. Guided by the methodological principles outlined by Ferrari (2015), Gregory & Denniss (2018), and Chaney (2021), the review emphasized interpretive synthesis rather than procedural standardization. The narrative approach was selected because it allows for analytical depth and theoretical linkage across diverse frameworks, connecting critical literacy, multiliteracies, and multimodal discourse analysis to pedagogical practices in EFL/ESL contexts. In contrast to systematic reviews that rely on rigid inclusion protocols and meta-analytic procedures, the narrative method prioritizes conceptual integration, allowing the researcher to trace developments, contradictions, and convergences in a rapidly evolving interdisciplinary field.

Sources were identified through purposive selection based on conceptual relevance and contextual fit. Searches were conducted across Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, and reputable journals, including the Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, TESOL Quarterly, and ReCALL. Search terms combined variations of "critical literacy," "multimodal learning," "multiliteracies," and "EFL/ESL education." Studies were included if they explicitly addressed both critical and multimodal dimensions of literacy in language education and were situated in Asian contexts. At the same time, theoretical works or reports unrelated to pedagogy were excluded. This purposive approach follows Gregory & Denniss (2018) suggestion that narrative reviews should prioritize conceptual contribution over exhaustive comprehensiveness.

Analysis proceeded through an iterative process of reading, coding, and thematic synthesis, following the interpretive logic described by Chaney (2021) and

Naeem et al. (2025). Articles were grouped thematically around pedagogical strategies, theoretical frameworks, implementation challenges, technology integration, and teacher education. Patterns and contradictions were examined to construct a coherent narrative about how critical and multimodal pedagogies interact in English language teaching. Interpretations were cross-checked against established frameworks in Freirean critical pedagogy, the multiliteracies model, and multimodal discourse analysis to maintain theoretical consistency. While the narrative design privileges interpretive insight over replicability, reflexivity was maintained throughout the synthesis process, acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in qualitative integration and the central aim of narrative review: to build theoretically informed understanding rather than procedural uniformity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The reviewed studies highlight how critical literacy and multimodal pedagogy intersect in Asian EFL classrooms, revealing five recurring dimensions that shape their implementation: pedagogical design, contextual challenges, technology use, assessment practices, and teacher learning. The discussion that follows examines these themes not as separate categories but as interrelated aspects of how literacy is taught and experienced. Together, they illustrate both the promise and the tension of translating critical and multimodal principles into everyday educational practice.

Pedagogical Approaches for Developing Critical Literacy through Multimodal Tasks

Recent studies in English language education show that multimodal learning tasks provide a meaningful avenue for linking literacy development with critical inquiry. Instead of focusing only on linguistic form, these tasks guide learners to create meaning through visual, textual, spatial, and auditory modes while examining how these modes represent ideas and social perspectives. In Taiwan, project-based multimodal learning encouraged students to explore cultural themes through writing and digital production, which led to richer language use and more

reflective thinking about representation (Lee et al., 2021). In Thailand, the use of genre-based critical pedagogy allowed students to question familiar narratives and to construct multimodal texts that addressed social issues in their own communities (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025). The findings from both contexts highlight how inquiry-oriented multimodal tasks can promote creativity, reflection, and a deeper awareness of how meaning is constructed in social life.

Other research highlights the affective and interpretive potential of multimodal pedagogy. Tasks such as digital storytelling and infographic design have been found to help students organize information, express viewpoints, and communicate perspectives through visual and verbal modes that invite analysis rather than repetition (Bai & Xian, 2024; Carcamo & Pino, 2025). Z. Liu (2022) shows that when students learn through a multimodal framework informed by systemic functional theory, they become more aware of how visual and embodied expressions convey stance and emotion. These studies point to the value of instruction that encourages both analysis and empathy, helping students connect personal expression with broader ethical and social understanding.

The role of teachers is central in shaping these learning experiences. Teaching that integrates multimodal and critical literacy requires an expanded form of pedagogical knowledge that combines digital competence, linguistic awareness, and reflective understanding of learning design. L. G. Jiang & Hafner (2025) refer to this as digital multimodal composing pedagogical content knowledge, a capacity that allows teachers to balance creative experimentation with structured guidance. Professional development programs that provide opportunities for reflection and peer collaboration have been shown to strengthen this expertise (Aghabarari & Rahimi, 2020; Mahapatra & Koltovskaia, 2025). Despite these developments, many teachers remain uncertain about how to evaluate multimodal work or connect technology use with critical inquiry, underscoring the need for pedagogical clarity and institutional support.

Recent discussions in literacy education extend the idea of multimodal pedagogy toward social and ethical dimensions of learning. Yap & Gurney (2023) emphasize that transformed practice —the stage in which learners apply their

understanding in new and socially responsive ways —emerges when multimodal learning is supported by critical framing and explicit reflection. In classroom contexts, this approach encourages students to consider why specific representations matter, whose voices are heard, and how digital texts influence perspectives. Research in Indonesia and other EFL contexts has also found that students often need explicit support to evaluate the credibility of online information and to identify bias in digital communication (Brocca et al., 2024; Silvhiany et al., 2021). Incorporating these elements into multimodal learning can help students interpret information more critically and engage with digital media more responsibly and socially aware.

When viewed together, these studies show that successful pedagogical approaches to critical literacy combine multimodal creation with reflection, dialogue, and social awareness. Learners benefit most when multimodal tasks are designed as opportunities to explore ideas, question representations, and construct meaning collaboratively. In such learning environments, literacy extends beyond linguistic mastery and becomes an active and ethical process of making sense of the world through multiple forms of communication.

Challenges and Tensions in Implementing Multimodal Critical Literacy

While the pedagogical approaches discussed above demonstrate how multimodal tasks can effectively develop critical literacy, their implementation in EFL classrooms encounters significant practical and conceptual challenges that mediate effectiveness. One persistent difficulty concerns the balance between language-focused instruction and open-ended multimodal work. Teachers may find it difficult to maintain attention to linguistic accuracy while giving students freedom to explore creative meaning-making. In many contexts, curriculum expectations and assessment systems still prioritize traditional written products, leaving limited space for experimentation with multimodal forms (Hafner & Ho, 2020; L. Jiang et al., 2022). Even when teachers recognize the pedagogical value of multimodal and critical literacy, they often adapt these approaches only partially, in ways that fit existing institutional routines.

Teacher preparedness also remains a significant concern. Research shows that many teachers appreciate the potential of multimodal literacies but lack the theoretical grounding or confidence to use digital tools for inquiry and reflection (Aghabarari & Rahimi, 2020; Mahapatra & Koltovskaia, 2025). Some regard technology mainly as a tool for presentation or motivation rather than a resource for critical meaning-making (Deng et al., 2023). This pattern echoes recent reviews indicating that digital literacy initiatives in schools often remain confined to technical competence, with limited attention to pedagogical design and critical awareness (Ilomäki et al., 2023). Without structured reflection and collaboration, multimodal literacy can easily become an exercise in technology use rather than a framework for transformative learning.

Institutional conditions further influence how these pedagogies are enacted. Teachers often work within rigid curricula, limited access to digital infrastructure, and high-stakes testing environments that discourage experimentation. Studies in Indonesia and other Southeast Asian contexts note that inadequate connectivity, limited administrative support, and cultural sensitivity around critical issues all hinder the integration of critical literacy into classroom practice (Burke, 2024; Silvhianny et al., 2021). When such pressures persist, teachers may retain the multimodal form of instruction but avoid the critical dimension, focusing instead on visual or creative outcomes. These compromises show how systemic and cultural constraints can shape classroom practice and narrow the possibilities for critical engagement.

Students' expectations also contribute to the difficulty of implementation. While many learners are enthusiastic about visual and digital media, they are often less familiar with tasks that demand interpretation and critique. Research suggests that some students view multimodal projects as creative assignments but not as opportunities to question perspectives or evaluate sources (Bilki et al., 2023; G. L. Liu et al., 2025). Moving learners from descriptive production toward critical engagement requires careful scaffolding and sustained dialogue. Teachers who connect multimodal work to personal experience, identity, and community concerns tend to foster a deeper and more socially aware engagement with texts.

The studies reviewed here show that the challenges of multimodal critical literacy extend beyond classroom technique. They involve broader institutional expectations and cultural habits that shape how teachers and students understand teaching itself. Recognizing these structural limitations is important, not to diminish the value of multimodal pedagogy, but to clarify the conditions under which it can thrive. Supportive professional learning, flexible curriculum design, and recognition of diverse literacies can create the space needed for inquiry and reflection to coexist with assessment and accountability. When such support is in place, multimodal critical literacy becomes more than a pedagogical innovation; it becomes a realistic part of language education that encourages both teachers and learners to think critically about the texts and technologies they encounter.

Technology Integration and Digital Practice

Technology has become an inseparable part of literacy instruction, yet the ways it is used in classrooms vary widely in purpose and depth. In many EFL programs, digital tools are introduced to support engagement or to display information rather than to enhance critical understanding. Studies show that when technology is primarily used for presentation, students' participation may increase superficially, but their opportunities for inquiry and reflection remain limited (Brocca et al., 2024; Deng et al., 2023). Effective integration of technology requires more than access to devices; it depends on how teachers frame digital tasks as spaces for exploration, evaluation, and meaning-making. Research on digital multimodal composing shows that when online platforms are structured to support collaboration and reflection, learners begin to view technology as a space for dialogue rather than as a tool for submission (L. G. Jiang & Hafner, 2025; Y. Jiang et al., 2021).

Recent research also points to the need for integrating critical digital literacy into everyday classroom practice. Critical engagement with online texts involves questioning the reliability of sources, identifying ideological positions, and recognizing the multimodal strategies used to shape readers' perceptions. Studies in Indonesia, Korea, and China reveal that many students can navigate digital media

fluently but still struggle to evaluate credibility or detect bias (Z. Liu, 2022; Silvhianny et al., 2021; Sutrisno et al., 2024). These findings suggest that digital fluency does not automatically lead to critical literacy. To address this gap, teachers are encouraged to combine digital production tasks with explicit instruction in source analysis, multimodal interpretation, and audience awareness. Such approaches allow learners to see technology not only as an instrument of convenience but also as a social and rhetorical space where meanings are created and contested.

Teacher expertise plays a decisive role in determining how digital practice develops in classrooms. Educators who are confident in designing technology-supported tasks tend to move beyond tool-based instruction and focus on the relationships among the linguistic, visual, and ethical dimensions of learning (Mahapatra & Koltovskaia, 2025; Yap & Gurney, 2023). When teachers create opportunities for students to compose, critique, and redesign digital texts, they foster a more reflective and participatory learning culture. However, studies also indicate that teachers often receive inconsistent training in this area. Professional development programs frequently focus on digital tools and learning management systems rather than on pedagogical design that promotes critical awareness (Ilomäki et al., 2023). Without a clear understanding of technology as a means of inquiry, digital practice may reinforce rather than challenge conventional classroom hierarchies.

Technology integration also raises questions about equity and inclusion. Access to devices and stable internet connectivity remains uneven across schools, particularly in remote or under-resourced regions. These disparities influence how students experience digital learning and the extent to which they can engage in multimodal projects. Research on digital literacies in Asian contexts shows that unequal access often shapes teachers' expectations, leading them to simplify tasks or avoid technology altogether (Bai & Xian, 2024; Burke, 2024). Creating more inclusive conditions requires institutional commitment to infrastructure, but it also calls for sensitivity to students' linguistic, cultural, and material realities. Digital practice becomes meaningful when it allows learners to draw on their own

experiences and to connect classroom tasks with the communicative practices they use beyond school.

Recent studies suggest that technology integration is most effective when guided by principles of design, reflection, and collaboration. Digital learning environments that invite feedback, peer interaction, and self-evaluation tend to nurture more critical engagement than those that emphasize efficiency or control (Carcamo & Pino, 2025; Y. Jiang et al., 2021). Teachers who use technology as a space for shared inquiry rather than simple content delivery can promote both linguistic development and social awareness. As schools continue to adopt digital platforms, the main challenge is to ensure that technology supports pedagogical relationships and human judgment instead of replacing them. Digital practice becomes meaningful when technological tools serve as mediators of thought, collaboration, and interpretation, helping students engage critically with texts and the wider world.

Assessment and Feedback in Multimodal Critical Literacy

Assessment remains one of the most debated areas in multimodal critical literacy, as teachers often struggle to align creative and interpretive learning with institutional evaluation standards. In many EFL contexts, grading practices are still based on linguistic accuracy, coherence, and vocabulary use, which do not fully capture the multimodal or critical dimensions of student work (L. Jiang et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2021). When multimodal tasks are evaluated using conventional rubrics, the visual, spatial, and reflective elements that express meaning are frequently overlooked. Studies have shown that this mismatch can discourage students from experimenting with design and representation, limiting the potential of multimodal projects to promote deeper literacy engagement (Hafner & Ho, 2020; Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025).

Recent work has begun to explore alternative assessment approaches more compatible with multimodal learning. Research on digital multimodal composing proposes frameworks that combine linguistic, visual, and critical elements under shared criteria for meaning-making (Y. Jiang et al., 2021). These frameworks

emphasize how design choices communicate stance and perspective, encouraging students to reflect on their communicative intent. Peer feedback and self-assessment also play an important role in this process. Studies have found that when learners exchange feedback through digital platforms, they begin to recognize multimodal features as part of a broader rhetorical act rather than isolated artistic choices (Deng et al., 2023; G. L. Liu et al., 2025). Feedback, in this sense, becomes a dialogic space where students learn to justify their design decisions, respond to critique, and negotiate meaning collaboratively.

However, challenges remain in implementing fair and valid multimodal assessment. Teachers often report uncertainty about how to evaluate visual or design-based elements, especially when they are not trained in media or semiotics (Aghabarari & Rahimi, 2020). Some teachers also express concern that multimodal tasks can make grading subjective, leading them to revert to linguistic criteria that feel more measurable. L. G. Jiang & Hafner (2025) highlight the need for teacher education programs that explicitly address digital multimodal composing pedagogical content knowledge, enabling teachers to design rubrics that integrate technical, creative, and critical aspects of learning. This form of knowledge helps teachers maintain a balance between structured evaluation and interpretive openness, a crucial aspect of multimodal literacy pedagogy.

Feedback practices are equally important in fostering critical awareness. Studies in Indonesian and Southeast Asian classrooms show that when teachers provide feedback focusing not only on grammar or layout but also on the underlying message and social context, students demonstrate greater capacity for reflection and revision (Silvhiany et al., 2021; Sutrisno et al., 2024). Constructive dialogue between teachers and students allows learners to see multimodal texts as evolving representations of thought, rather than fixed products to be corrected. Feedback that invites justification, questioning, and redesign helps students connect linguistic and visual modes with social meaning, reinforcing the goal of critical literacy.

A growing body of research points to the value of collaborative and formative assessment in supporting critical engagement. When assessment is framed as an ongoing process of meaning negotiation rather than a final judgment, it promotes

metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy (Y. Jiang et al., 2021; Lai, 2024). Digital environments that allow iterative drafting, peer response, and reflective commentary have been shown to nurture both linguistic accuracy and critical interpretation (Brocca et al., 2024). The convergence of feedback, collaboration, and reflection aligns with the broader principles of multiliteracies pedagogy, in which learning is viewed as design, transformation, and social participation (Yap & Gurney, 2023).

Assessment in multimodal critical literacy thus requires a shift from measuring performance to interpreting meaning. Teachers play a central role in guiding students to articulate the intentions behind their design choices and to link those choices with social and ethical considerations. When assessment and feedback are used not simply to evaluate but to inquire, they become tools for critical growth. Through reflective dialogue and collaborative evaluation, multimodal literacy can develop into a practice of interpretation, critique, and ethical communication that extends beyond the classroom.

Teacher Expertise and Professional Learning

Teacher expertise is at the centre of successful multimodal and critical literacy pedagogy. Research consistently shows that teachers' ability to integrate linguistic, visual, and digital modes depends on the depth of their pedagogical knowledge and their confidence in designing inquiry-oriented learning (L. G. Jiang & Hafner, 2025; Mahapatra & Koltovskaia, 2025). Teachers who understand multimodal composition not merely as a creative task but as a process of meaning negotiation tend to design activities that invite reflection, collaboration, and critical engagement. However, many educators in EFL contexts still struggle to adapt their instructional practices, mainly when their professional training has focused primarily on language form and accuracy rather than on design, discourse, and social meaning (Aghabarari & Rahimi, 2020).

Studies in teacher education reveal that professional learning opportunities play a decisive role in helping teachers develop digital multimodal composing pedagogical content knowledge. This form of expertise enables teachers to combine

technological competence with linguistic awareness and critical reflection (Ilomäki et al., 2023; L. G. Jiang & Hafner, 2025). When teachers are given structured opportunities to experiment with digital tools, analyze examples of student multimodal work, and discuss pedagogical challenges collaboratively, they begin to see technology as a resource for inquiry rather than a source of anxiety. Such professional development programs foster both technical and reflective confidence, helping teachers recognize how to integrate multimodal and critical literacy into existing curricula.

Research in diverse contexts also highlights the importance of peer collaboration and mentoring in sustaining teacher growth. Collaborative professional learning environments encourage teachers to exchange experiences, reflect on teaching dilemmas, and co-design multimodal tasks (G. L. Liu et al., 2025; Sutrisno et al., 2024). These collegial interactions create spaces where teachers can examine how their own beliefs about language, text, and power shape classroom practice. Professional communities that promote open dialogue and reflection are shown to increase teachers' willingness to experiment with new pedagogical approaches and to explore critical literacy as an ethical and transformative practice.

Institutional support remains a crucial factor. Many teachers report that the lack of time, administrative recognition, or infrastructure limits their ability to sustain multimodal projects. Studies from Indonesia and Southeast Asia indicate that teachers who receive encouragement from school leadership and have access to adequate digital resources are more likely to implement multimodal and critical literacy tasks successfully (Burke, 2024; Silvhianny et al., 2021). Institutional cultures that value innovation and reflective practice create conditions for teachers to link their pedagogical creativity with broader educational goals. Conversely, environments that prioritize standardization and testing tend to discourage risk-taking and reduce critical engagement.

Professional learning for multimodal critical literacy, therefore, extends beyond technical training. It involves cultivating reflective habits, ethical awareness, and a sense of agency in navigating the relationship between pedagogy,

technology, and social change. Teachers who engage in such learning begin to view themselves not only as transmitters of knowledge but as designers of learning experiences that shape how students interpret and represent the world. As Mahapatra & Koltovskaia (2025) argue, sustained professional inquiry helps teachers move from procedural use of technology to a more principled practice that integrates creativity, criticality, and care. When professional learning supports this integration, teacher expertise becomes the foundation of a pedagogy that is both innovative and socially responsive.

CONCLUSION

This narrative review examined how critical literacy and multimodal pedagogy intersect in English language education, pursuing three stated objectives through a synthesis of contemporary empirical research from Asian EFL contexts and comparative international studies. First, the review examined how theoretical frameworks from critical pedagogy, multiliteracies, and multimodal discourse analysis inform instructional approaches that develop both semiotic awareness and critical consciousness. Second, it analyzed empirical evidence regarding pedagogical strategies, assessment methods, and technology integration across diverse educational settings. Third, it identified how teacher education programs can prepare educators to implement multimodal critical literacy practices. Five cross-cutting findings emerged: (1) successful implementations consistently provided explicit metalinguistic instruction in visual grammar and multimodal discourse analysis rather than assuming students would develop semiotic awareness through exposure alone; (2) effectiveness depended on balancing creative freedom with scaffolding appropriate to learners' language proficiency and developmental levels; (3) authentic purposes and audiences motivated higher quality multimodal composition; (4) cultural contexts profoundly shaped appropriate critical engagement, requiring localization of Western-origin frameworks rather than direct transplantation; and (5) teacher education emerged as crucial, requiring integrated expertise across semiotic analysis, critical pedagogy, and technology integration rarely addressed in traditional EFL preparation programs. Evidence demonstrated

that project-based, problem-based, digital storytelling, and genre-based approaches effectively develop critical multimodal literacy when supported by explicit instruction. At the same time, implementation challenges included language proficiency demands, cultural constraints on critique, teacher preparedness gaps, and disparities in resource access. Technology integration studies revealed that digital platforms expand compositional possibilities when structured for collaborative meaning-making and critical inquiry. However, students' digital fluency did not automatically translate to critical evaluation of sources or ideological positioning. Assessment frameworks evolved from product-focused to process-based models and genre-based approaches that evaluate design choices, semiotic orchestration, and critical awareness alongside linguistic accuracy. For practitioners, findings suggest designing multimodal tasks with explicit scaffolding, adapting critical literacy frameworks to local cultural contexts, pursuing professional development in digital multimodal composing pedagogical content knowledge, implementing assessments that address multiple modes and critical dimensions, and securing institutional support to enable pedagogical innovation.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The review prioritized open-access articles, potentially excluding relevant research behind paywalls, and emphasized Asian EFL contexts, limiting generalizability to other regions with different educational traditions. The synthesis focused primarily on recent empirical work, which captured contemporary developments but limited engagement with earlier foundational studies that provided a longitudinal perspective. Narrative review methodology enabled interpretive synthesis but lacked systematic protocols and replicability, and was inherently subjective in its thematic organization. Future research should address identified gaps, including elementary-level implementations, translanguaging in multimodal contexts, Southeast Asian archipelagic settings with unique connectivity challenges, and AI tools that support critical analysis rather than merely production. Longitudinal studies examining sustained effects beyond short-term implementations would strengthen the evidence base, while research investigating assessment frameworks in under-resourced contexts could provide practical guidance for constrained settings.

Studies examining how institutional structures enable or constrain implementation, how cultural traditions shape critical literacy practices across contexts, and how multimodal critical literacy intersects with other pedagogical priorities would illuminate productive directions. Student perspective research examining learners' perceptions of value, challenges, and transfer beyond school contexts would enhance understanding of how these pedagogical approaches are experienced and internalized. Despite limitations, the review demonstrates that integrating critical literacy with multimodal pedagogy offers productive pathways for English language education when thoughtfully designed and locally adapted. Effective implementation requires coordinated attention to explicit semiotic instruction, scaffolded critical analysis and creative production, culturally responsive adaptations of the framework, robust teacher education, and supportive institutional conditions. When these elements align, multimodal critical literacy pedagogy prepares learners not only to comprehend texts drawing on multiple modes but also to interrogate power relations embedded within them and to compose multimodal texts serving transformative rather than merely reproductive purposes, positioning English language education as preparation for active, informed, and ethical participation in increasingly multimodal communicative landscapes.

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