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ENGAGING LEARNERS THROUGH MULTIMODALITY: INSIGHTS FROM FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ALBANIA

Abstract: In the dynamic landscape of contemporary education, foreign language teaching needs to adopt innovative practices that resonate with diverse learners and enhance language proficiency. This situation is particularly significant in the Albanian context, where efforts to improve student engagement and learning outcomes must navigate both promising pedagogical approaches and ongoing systemic barriers. By examining the integration of digital technologies and visual and performing arts, the paper aims to fill an empirical gap related to the use of multimodal strategies within the Albanian pre-university education. Drawing from empirical data collected through a self-reported survey of 67 foreign language teachers in different schools in the district of Elbasan, the findings underscore the perceived value of these methods. The paper recommends comprehensive policy reforms, targeted teacher training, and curriculum innovation to support sustainable, multimodal learning environments that reflect Albania's evolving educational needs.

Keywords: multimodality, foreign language teaching, student engagement, Albania, pedagogical strategies.

AKTIVIRANJE UČENIKA KROZ MULTIMODALNOST: UVIDI IZ NASTAVE STRANIH JEZIKA U ALBANIJI

Apstrakt: U dinamičnom kontekstu savremenog obrazovanja nastava stranog jezika mora da usvoji inovativne prakse, koje se prilagođavaju različitim učenicima i poboljšavaju jezičke veštine. To je naročito značajno u albanskom kontekstu, gde rad nastavnika na aktiviranju učenika i poboljšanju ishoda učenja mora da se osloni na perspektivne pedagoške pristupe, ali i da prevaziđe postojeće sistemske prepreke. Ispitivanjem integracije digitalnih tehnologija i vizuelnih i scenskih umetnosti, rad ima za cilj da popuni empirijsku prazninu vezanu za upotrebu multimodalnih strategija u okviru albanskog preduniverzitetskog obrazovanja. Crpeći empirijske podatke prikupljene putem ankete sa 67 nastavnika stranih jezika u različitim školama u okrugu Elbasan, rad ističe percipiranu vrednost tih metoda i na kraju daje preporuke za sveobuhvatnu reformu nastavne politike, ciljanu obuku nastavnika i inovacije kurikuluma kako bi se podržala održiva, multimodalna okruženja za učenje, koja odražavaju promene u obrazovnim potrebama Albanije.

Ključne reči: multimodalnost, nastava stranih jezika, angažovanje učenika, Albanija, pedagoške strategije.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent studies emphasize the increasingly complex and multifaceted responsibilities of English language educators, especially in the context of global educational shifts and specialized learner needs (Kakoulli Constantinou 2023), reinforcing the urgency for dynamic, multimodal approaches in English language teaching (ELT). Early, Kendrick, and Potts (2015: 447) have noted that language education, while previously shaped by linguistics, psychology, and sociology, now also relies on multimodality and literacy studies to better understand how people communicate and learn.

In the Albanian educational context, ongoing efforts to boost student engagement and language acquisition face a unique blend of pedagogical opportunities and systemic challenges. Like many post-communist societies, Albania has faced an urgent demand for qualified English teachers to meet the growing educational needs driven by globalization (Alhasani 2016). Other studies have explored the effectiveness of innovative teaching methods in improving English language proficiency, often drawing comparisons to more traditional approaches. For instance, Kapurani (2016) found that the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method proved more successful than traditional methods in Albanian elementary schools, underscoring the benefits of learner-centered approaches within the local context. Similarly, beyond Albania, Salamanti et al. (2023) reported significant improvements in English proficiency and student engagement through collaborative and multimodal strategies with ESL/EFL learners, while Peng et al. (2024) demonstrated the effectiveness of a multimodal teaching approach in enhancing oral English skills and academic achievement among university students. These findings collectively suggest that while Communicative Language Teaching and multimodal strategies generally yield positive outcomes in ELT, context-specific considerations remain crucial (Kapllani, Çela, Mita & Progri 2025). Indeed, Balliu (2017) noted that some Albanian teachers, particularly in scientific subjects, still prefer traditional methods, citing perceived better results, a perspective that requires further exploration in language education.

This paper investigates multimodality as a transformative pedagogical approach for fostering deeper student engagement in foreign language teaching (FLT). As Chandler and Munday (2011) define multimodality, it refers to "the use of more than one semiotic mode in meaning-making, communication, and representation generally, or in a specific situation. Such modes include all forms of verbal, nonverbal, and contextual communication." In FLT, "[m]ultimodality focuses on understanding how semiotic resources (visual, gestural, spatial, linguistic,

and others) work and are organized" (Lim, Toh & Nguyen 2022: 2). This approach recognizes that learners interpret and express knowledge through various modes, which can enhance engagement and understanding. In educational contexts, multimodality involves the combination of different semiotic resources to construct meaning, extending beyond traditional language-based communication (Jewitt 2008). When thoughtfully incorporated into ELT through practices like Task-Based Learning (TBL), the strategic use of digital technologies and arts integration, multimodality not only diversifies instructional delivery but also has the potential to deepen learners' involvement across behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural domains.

However, despite the suggested benefits of multimodality in FLT, no empirical studies examining the reality of application and the perceived impact of multimodal practice among foreign language teachers in Albania exist. This research bridges this gap by conducting research among Albanian foreign language instructors through a qualitative survey design, where descriptive statistics are used only for contextualizing the findings and for sample definition (Creswell & Creswell 2018). By interpreting teachers' open-ended answers and rich examples, this study seeks to offer localized, in-depth findings into the particular strategies that effectively use multimodality in order to increase student engagement, thus adding tangible evidence to FLT methodology and the emerging body of literature on Albanian education reform.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective FLT practice is supported by a theoretical framework that has evolved from traditional approaches like grammar-translation to focus on communicative and social learning (Howatt & Widdowson 2004). This evolution reflects the understanding that language learning is inherently social, contextual (Widdowson 1978; Larsen-Freeman 2000), and actively constructed by the learner (Nunan 1991). This contemporary framework incorporates a number of approaches, drawing from Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which demands comprehensible input (Widdowson 1978), and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction (Singh & Richards 2006). This combination ensures that comprehensive instruction goes beyond drill and memorization to cater to the cognitive, sociocultural, and constructivist dimensions of language teaching and learning (Richards & Rodgers 2001). The practical implementation of this theoretical foundation enables students to acquire communicative competence, which, according to Canale and Swain's (1980) model, comprises grammatical,

sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences. In practical terms, this means that effective FLT requires the use of authentic materials, provision of meaningful interaction, and scaffolded learning with active learner involvement (Nunan 1991). Moreover, this theoretical basis requires admitting the complexity of learning through the influence of technology, globalization, learner autonomy, and identity (Larsen-Freeman 2000).

Over the past two decades, multimodality has emerged as a significant pedagogical framework within ELT, garnering considerable interest from both researchers and practitioners. Rooted in Halliday's (1978) social semiotic theory, multimodality posits that meaning is constructed not solely through language but through a dynamic interplay of various communicative modes, including linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial elements. Kress (2003) further advanced this perspective, emphasizing that modern literacy extends beyond traditional text to encompass navigating a diverse range of communicative forms, particularly prevalent in digital environments. The integration of multimodality in ELT has become increasingly relevant as academic tasks have evolved to demand multimodal outputs. Tardy (2005) was among the first to observe that assignments such as presentations now routinely require the seamless integration of text, images, sound, and gestures. Consequently, multimodality is no longer merely an optional skill but has transitioned into a necessary component of contemporary language education (Grapin & Llosa 2020).

In practical terms, multimodality manifests in a variety of ELT classroom activities such as picture descriptions, storyboarding, and the development of multimedia projects (Kessler 2022). These practices not only align with students' evolving digital literacy but also foster deeper engagement through diverse avenues of expression. Jewitt (2008) underscored the importance of cultivating multimodal literacy as crucial for preparing learners to navigate complex communicative environments effectively. Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of digital technologies has made multimodal composing a more accessible and common practice in ELT, with teachers leveraging various multimedia tools and activities (Kessler 2022). This approach is particularly effective when incorporating multimodal literature, such as picture books and graphic novels, which can significantly motivate learners and support language acquisition by providing rich, meaningful input (Eisenmann 2020).

Despite its growing presence and apparent benefits, scholarly consensus on the effectiveness of multimodal instruction remains somewhat divided. Qualitative studies have extensively explored learners' and teachers' perceptions, often

highlighting increased motivation and creativity (Jiang & Luk 2016; Li & Akoto 2021). However, quantitative evidence remains limited. For example, Cho and Kim (2021) reported no significant difference between monomodal and multimodal writing tasks concerning content and language quality. However, Vandommele et al. (2017) found that multimodal collaboration positively enhanced lexical diversity and communicative effectiveness among L2 learners.

This mixed evidence has fueled ongoing debates between proponents of "strong" versus "weak" multimodal approaches. Advocates of the strong version argue for an equal emphasis on linguistic and non-linguistic modes, particularly in STEM contexts where communication through graphs and charts is vital (Grapin 2019; Lemke 1998). On the other hand, the weak version, as supported by Qu (2017) and echoed by Choi and Yi (2016), views multimodality as a temporary scaffold intended to support learners until they achieve linguistic proficiency. Choi and Yi (2016) observed that many teachers, in practice, continue to prioritize traditional forms of literacy.

Some skepticism toward multimodality also stems from its alignment, or perceived lack thereof, with established theories of second language acquisition. Manchón (2017), for example, has questioned whether multimodal tasks consistently promote authentic language use and interaction, suggesting that they might occasionally hinder rather than enhance language development. To address such concerns and clarify multimodality's precise role in supporting L2 acquisition, Lim and Kessler (2022) have called for further rigorous research, particularly studies employing quantitative or mixed-method designs. It is also worth noting that teachers may encounter challenges in implementing multimodal approaches, including technological limitations and insufficient administrative support (Choi & Yi 2016). To mitigate these issues, ELT pedagogy should consider a more systematic incorporation of digital multimodality to better cater to the diverse needs of learners in our increasingly digital age (Hafner 2020).

While multimodality offers promising avenues for enriching ELT practice and enhancing learner engagement and comprehension, its successful implementation requires thoughtful integration. Teachers must remain critically aware of how multimodal elements are utilized in their classrooms, striving to balance them in ways that genuinely support learners' holistic linguistic and communicative growth. In Albania, the FLT educational environment is marked by two ongoing realities: the ambitious national policy intentions and the persistent practical challenges in the classroom.

While Albania aspires EU accession and wants to align with the vision of a European future, FLT has been accorded top priority by the Ministry of Education and Sports through the adoption of a new competency-based curriculum from 2014 with the whole implementation completed by 2019 (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement [IEA] 2021). This curriculum aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) since it aims to equip students with the competences necessary for international and intercultural communication (Bushi & Neçaj 2024).

On the other hand, despite progressive policy goals, there remains a significant gap between classroom practice and the communicative aims of the curriculum. Research reveals a persistence of conservative, grammar-translation methods, whereby written accuracy and grammar exercises hold priority over communicative, interactive practice (Kromidha & Tabaku 2013; Naqo 2025). This overemphasis on linguistic formalities is commonly attributed to exam culture and insufficient teacher training in alternative methods (Naqo 2025; Koca, Stavre, & Kacani 2024). Consequently, pre-university students have enormous performance gaps in listening and speaking skills, despite declared intentions to build communicative competence (Naqo 2025). Furthermore, the majority of Albanian schools also lack access to up-to-date, good-quality learning materials, audio-visual resources, and consistent Internet access, which are crucial for implementing the communicative and tech-oriented methods promoted by the reformed curriculum (Kromidha & Tabaku 2013; Naqo 2025). Therefore, the study of multimodality in FLT in Albania indirectly addresses the relationship between policy intention and classroom capability.

Building upon the growing body of research on effective FLT methodologies and acknowledging the specificities of the Albanian educational environment, this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do Albanian FLT teachers report to perceive and practice multimodal strategies to engage students?
- What multimodal tools are most effective in promoting sustained engagement?
- What institutional factors support or hinder multimodality in FLT settings?

Through an empirical investigation grounded in teacher perceptions, this research aims to shed light on how multimodal practices can elevate FLT in Albania, contributing to the ongoing dialogue about effective and engaging foreign language education.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design, the participants' profile, the data collection instrument, and the analysis strategy that was used to investigate the role of multimodality in enhancing student participation in FLT in Albania. This study uses a qualitative survey design that is supported by descriptive background statistics. This approach integrates data collected from a questionnaire with two objectives in mind: qualitative depth and descriptive context. The most significant contribution of the study is the in-depth, rich understanding of teachers' long, qualitative responses to how they understand and utilize some multimodal strategies in their FLT practices in the classroom. The answers to the closed-ended questions are probed using simple descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies, and they are used only to describe the sample of participants and provide contextual information about the general direction of the trend for the prevalence of some practices, not for inferential quantitative analysis.

By providing qualitative data with descriptive context, this approach makes it possible to have a coherent analysis of multimodality in the Albanian FLT setting. The quantitative data, gathered from closed-ended questions (e.g., Likert scale, multiple-choice) within the survey, identify general trends in how Albanian FLT teachers report their perceptions and practices of multimodal strategies, and which tools they deem most effective. This data also helps to address the institutional factors that support or hinder multimodality. The qualitative data, derived from teachers' open-ended responses, provides in-depth insights into the complexities they report to have encountered while implementing multimodal practices. This allows for a richer understanding of how and why certain strategies are effective or challenging, illuminating the behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of learner involvement through specific examples and detailed perspectives. By combining these approaches, we gain a holistic view of multimodality and its contextual factors within Albanian FLT.

The participants in this study were 67 foreign language teachers from pre-university schools in Elbasan, Albania, who participated voluntarily in the research by completing a Google Form distributed through online teacher networks. This diverse group included 47 teachers of both primary and lower secondary schools (9-year schools), and 20 respondents who teach in upper secondary levels (grades 10-12). Their teaching experience ranges from less than 5 years to over 20 years, and their academic qualifications vary from university teaching degrees to master's and doctoral degrees, providing a teacher sample that represents the FLT landscape in

the district of Elbasan. A structured questionnaire was developed for teachers and administered via Google Forms to gather empirical data on their perceptions and practices of multimodal strategies in FLT. This instrument was designed within the purpose of this study to capture insights into the five dimensions of student engagement: behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural, as well as the supporting and hindering institutional factors.

The questionnaire consisted of four distinct sections:

- Section A: Demographic Information. This section collected basic professional data to provide context for the participants' responses.
- Section B: Teachers' Perceptions and Classroom Practices. This section explored teachers' current use of various multimodal pedagogical strategies, including Task-Based Learning, digital technologies, and arts integration, and their perceived purposes in the ELT classroom.
- Section C: Evaluation of Multimodal Strategy Use. This section assessed the perceived effectiveness and challenges associated with implementing multimodal strategies, including resource limitations and institutional support.
- Section D: Impact on Student Engagement. This final section investigated the influence of multimodal activities on the diverse dimensions of student engagement, assessing their role in fostering motivation, critical thinking, and active involvement.

4. FINDINGS

This section presents the empirical findings deriving from the teacher survey, addressing the study's research questions on the reported perception and experiences of multimodal strategies used by teachers, their effectiveness in promoting engagement, and the institutional factors influencing their adoption in FLT settings across Albania.

4.1. Perceptions and practices of multimodal strategies by Albanian foreign language teachers

The quantitative data reveal a nuanced landscape regarding how Albanian foreign language teachers report their perceptions and experiences of multimodal strategies in their classrooms. A substantial part of the teachers of foreign languages reported incorporating art-related multimodal activities with varying frequencies. Specifically, 74.6% of the teachers reported using them with a frequency ranging

from "sometimes" to "very often". This percentage is as follows: 37.31% of the total number of teachers reported incorporating art-related multimodal activities sometimes, 22.39% of teachers use them often, and 14.93% of the teachers who use them very often.

This widespread reported use of multimodality consisting of nearly three-quarters of the sample is an important finding, especially taking into account the systemic challenges in the Albanian pre-university education system. This high rate suggests that art-based activities are an accessible and valued form of multimodality in classrooms where other digital alternatives that demand resources may be constrained. As the literature suggests, the use of multiple modes of communication, including visual, aural, and gestural, is widely recognized to increase learner comprehension and engagement (Choi & Yi 2016). The reported practices of these Albanian FLT teachers indicate that they actively employ these specific non-digital multimodal resources to differentiate instruction and enhance FLT.

On the other hand, 25.4% of the foreign language teachers reported rarely or never incorporating art-related activities into their lessons. This group consists of 20.9% of teachers who never use them and 4.5% of teachers who use them rarely. This significant group of teachers marks a territory where current multimodal practices are weak or not strongly incorporated within the local context, highlighting an obvious need for more awareness and methodological orientation. The fact that over one-quarter of the sample of foreign language teachers in the survey report not currently using art and multimodal practices to increase student engagement highlights a significant gap. This percentage can specifically emphasize one or two potential issues related to a conceptual or teacher training gap, as well as a contextual or resource gap. The first explanation may be related to teachers' possible lack of methodological knowledge regarding the extent to which non-digital, accessible multimodal resources, such as art and visual materials, can be intentionally integrated into language instruction to enhance specific dimensions of student engagement (e.g. emotional or cultural). The second potential explanation may indicate the fact that even though art and multimodal practices may be generally low on resources needed, rarely or never using them may also reflect institutional constraints. These constraints that make even creative, non-digital multimodal activity difficult to achieve may vary from a tight curriculum design or time pressure, to a shortage of basic physical resources, such as availability of colored materials or space. These findings not only identify an area of insufficient multimodal practices, but also recognize a target area for professional development towards a broader, more accessible notion of multimodality.

The qualitative insights from teachers who reported using multimodal strategies offer concrete examples of their implementation, demonstrating how they influence various communicative modes:

- Aural mode: almost 55% of the teachers mentioned using songs and singing in the foreign language to improve pronunciation and active listening. Examples included "children's songs" in particular and general "songs in English," directly linking to the aural dimension of multimodality as described by Halliday (1978).

- Gestural and spatial modes: the integration of acting, dramatization of dialogues, and theatrical activities performed by students was cited as a dynamic way to practice language in context. This aligns with Tardy's (2005) observation that modern academic tasks increasingly demand multimodal outputs that integrate gestures and spatial arrangements.

- Visual mode: 60% of the teachers also reported using drawings, posters, illustrations, and audiovisual aids to clarify vocabulary, depict teaching topics, and facilitate the interpretation of various art forms. These practices directly increase the value of the visual mode, which is central to digital multimodal composing (Kessler 2022). One teacher specifically mentioned using the visual mode "[t]hrough the design of various pieces of art and their subsequent interpretation by the students themselves," emphasizing the student-centered visual engagement.

- Multimodal literature: The use of poems and poetic texts in the foreign language was also noted, reflecting Eisenmann's (2020) perspective on the motivational and language acquisition benefits of incorporating multimodal literature like picture books and graphic novels.

These diverse practices underscore how teachers are aligning with students' digital literacy development and fostering engagement through varied means of expression, which Jewitt (2008) emphasizes as crucial for preparing learners to navigate complex communicative environments.

4.2. Perceived benefits and effectiveness of multimodal tools in promoting sustained engagement

The empirical data strongly suggest that multimodal tools are widely perceived by foreign language teachers as effective in promoting student engagement across various dimensions. The fact that the majority of foreign language teachers use art-related multimodal activities indicates a strong belief in

their positive impact on student motivation and involvement. The qualitative responses provide further evidence of these perceived benefits:

- Increased motivation and attractiveness: teachers explicitly stated that activities like songs and theatrical pieces make learning "more attractive and engaging". One teacher noted, "Because when I teach songs, I also teach them in a foreign language". This aligns with findings from qualitative studies that highlight increased learner motivation and creativity as key outcomes of multimodal instruction (Jiang & Luk 2016; Li & Akoto 2021).

- Enhanced communication and creativity: the diverse multimodal practices, from singing to dramatization and drawing, were seen as directly improving students' communication and fostering creativity. One of the teachers noted, "These practices not only help to strengthen language skills, but also make learning more attractive and engaging, improving students' communication and creativity".

- Deeper understanding and linguistic reinforcement: by illustrating vocabulary ("The word is related to drawing"), interpreting art forms, and using contextualized activities, teachers inherently use multimodality to facilitate a deeper understanding of linguistic content. The use of "audiovisual aids in English language classes... For the clearest pronunciation and diction" further emphasizes the direct linguistic benefits, supporting the pedagogical aim of helping L2 learners grasp subject matter more profoundly (Choi & Yi 2016). The finding that multimodal collaboration can enhance lexical diversity and communicative effectiveness among L2 learners (Vandommele et al. 2017) finds resonance in these teacher perceptions.

While direct quantitative measures of "sustained engagement" across all its behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions are not detailed here, the consistent emphasis on increased motivation and active involvement points to a positive impact across these areas. Teachers' specific examples of how they use multimodal tools suggest an intuitive understanding of their effectiveness in creating a more dynamic and interactive learning environment.

4.3. Institutional factors influencing multimodality

Despite the evident willingness and perceived benefits of multimodal integration, the findings also shed light on persistent challenges that hinder its widespread implementation, reinforcing existing concerns in the literature (Choi &

Yi 2016). Among foreign language teachers, the ones who rarely or never use art in their classes point to specific barriers. The qualitative data highlights several key institutional obstacles:

- Lack of preparation and professional development: the data indicate a clear "need for further awareness and methodological support with the arts". Statements like "No comment," or "I do not have one [method]" from teachers who rarely/never use art or multimodal practices, alongside the general call for support, suggest a gap in specialized training. This absence of targeted professional development appears to prevent some teachers from confidently integrating multimodal approaches, aligning with Hafner's (2020) argument for systematic incorporation of digital multimodal composing supported by adequate teacher preparation.

- Limited resources: the quantitative summary explicitly points to "challenges related to the lack of preparation or resources". While not extensively detailed in the qualitative responses provided, this is a common barrier to integrating multimedia tools and varied art forms, as highlighted in broader discussions on multimodal instruction (Choi & Yi 2016). The need for "Information on art is found in foreign languages" also hints at a resource challenge.

- Inadequate institutional support: the identified "need for institutional support" is a crucial hindering factor. The finding that "the inclusion of art in this subject is a weak practice, not essentially consolidated" strongly suggests a systemic lack of prioritization, structural encouragement, or a clear framework for multimodal integration. This situation implies that many teachers may operate within an environment that, implicitly or explicitly, prioritizes traditional, monomodal instruction, a view echoed by Choi and Yi (2016), who observed many teachers prioritizing traditional forms of literacy.

These findings collectively suggest that while a substantial number of Albanian foreign language teachers recognize and actively utilize the benefits of multimodality for student engagement, systemic issues related to insufficient training, limited resources, and inadequate institutional support act as significant obstacles to its more pervasive and effective integration across FLT classrooms.

5. DISCUSSION

This paper investigated the role of multimodality in fostering student engagement within FLT in Albania, examining teachers' perceptions and practices of multimodal strategies, their perceived effectiveness, and the influencing institutional factors. The findings offer valuable insights that resonate with, and occasionally diverge from, existing literature on multimodality in language education.

5.1. Perceptions and implementation of multimodal strategies

The survey results reveal a significant, though not universal, embrace of multimodal practices among Albanian teachers of foreign languages, with a notable number who actively integrate art-related multimodal activities (ranging from "sometimes" to "very often"). This positive inclination aligns with the growing recognition in ELT that meaning is co-constructed through various communicative modes beyond just the linguistic (Halliday 1978; Kress 2003). Teachers' qualitative examples, such as employing songs for pronunciation in English language classes, dramatization for contextual practice, and visual aids for vocabulary, directly demonstrate the integration of aural, gestural, spatial, and visual modes into their pedagogy. These practices echo Kessler's (2022) observations about the increasing prevalence of multimedia tools in ELT classrooms and reinforce Choi and Yi's (2016) assertion that multiple modes of communication can deepen learners' understanding.

However, the number of foreign language teachers who rarely or never use these activities suggests that multimodal integration is not yet a fully consolidated practice across the schools in Albania. This finding resonates with Choi and Yi's (2016) observation that many teachers still prioritize traditional forms of literacy, potentially viewing multimodality as supplementary rather than central. The mixed implementation also brings to mind the ongoing debate between "strong" and "weak" multimodal approaches. While many teachers seem to intuitively adopt elements of a "strong" approach by integrating diverse modes to enhance meaning, the presence of a non-adopting group suggests the lingering influence of a "weak" approach, where multimodality might be seen as a temporary scaffold rather than an essential component of L2 acquisition (Qu 2017).

5.2. Perceived benefits and effectiveness in promoting engagement

The empirical data strongly support the notion that multimodal tools are perceived as highly effective in promoting student engagement among Albanian teachers of foreign languages in general and English language teachers in particular. The foreign language teachers who regularly integrate multimodal activities implicitly endorse their benefits, directly stating that these approaches increase student motivation and engagement. This perception is powerfully backed by qualitative data, where teachers cited examples like using songs to make English language learning "more attractive and engaging" and theatrical activities to improve "communication and creativity". These findings are consistent with a body of qualitative research highlighting increased learner motivation and creativity as key benefits of multimodal instruction (Jiang & Luk 2016; Li & Akoto 2021).

Furthermore, teachers' explicit mention of multimodal activities aiding "clearest pronunciation and diction," "strengthening language skills," and improving "communication and creativity" indicates a belief that multimodality contributes directly to linguistic and communicative competence. This aligns with Vandommele et al.'s (2017) finding that multimodal collaboration can enhance lexical diversity and communicative effectiveness in L2 learners. The use of drawings and illustrations for vocabulary also reflects the idea that multimodality provides "rich, meaningful input" that supports language acquisition and comprehension (Eisenmann 2020; Choi & Yi 2016). Ultimately, these perceived benefits underscore multimodality's role in cultivating multiliteracies, a crucial skill for learners navigating contemporary communicative environments (Jewitt 2008).

5.3. Institutional factors influencing multimodality

Despite the clear perceived benefits and a general willingness to adopt multimodal practices, the study identified significant institutional factors that hinder their widespread and consistent implementation in Albanian FLT settings. The data explicitly pointed to "challenges related to the lack of preparation or resources" and a pronounced "need for institutional support and specific training". This finding strongly corroborates existing literature that identifies technological constraints, limited resources, and inadequate administrative support as major impediments to multimodal implementation (Choi & Yi 2016). The observation that "the inclusion of art in this subject is a weak practice, not essentially consolidated" further suggests that, despite individual teacher efforts, there may be a lack of a clear, supportive framework from the educational system. This absence of systematic integration

stands in contrast to Hafner's (2020) call for ELT pedagogy to systematically incorporate digital multimodal composing to cater to learners' needs in the digital age. Without targeted professional development and adequate resources teachers may find it challenging to move beyond sporadic implementation to truly embed multimodal practices across their curriculum.

These institutional challenges may also contribute to the mixed scholarly consensus on multimodality's effectiveness (Lim & Kessler 2022). If implementation is inconsistent due to a lack of support, it becomes difficult to fully realize and measure the potential benefits in real-world classroom settings. Moreover, the skepticism raised by scholars like Manchón (2017), who questioned whether multimodal tasks always promote authentic language use, might be exacerbated in contexts where multimodal integration is not well-supported or thoughtfully balanced, potentially leading to superficial rather than deeply integrated applications.

6. CONCLUSION

This study embarked on an investigation into the role of multimodality in fostering student engagement within FLT in Albania, based on teachers' reported perceptions and practices. By examining how diverse pedagogical strategies serve as multimodal tools and analyzing influencing institutional factors, this research offers valuable insights into the current landscape of FLT in the Elbasan district, Albania.

6.1. Synthesis of findings

The findings in this paper reveal a diverse reality concerning the reported perceptions and practices of multimodality among Albanian FLT teachers, with a majority reporting high perceived effectiveness and frequent use of accessible strategies, despite significant systemic barriers related to resources and training. In response to the first research question, "How do Albanian FLT teachers report to perceive and practice multimodal strategies to engage students?", the findings reveal a dichotomous picture. While a significant number of foreign language teachers actively integrate various multimodal activities, such as songs, dramatization, and visual aids into their lessons, reflecting a positive perception of their value, a notable percentage rarely or never utilize these approaches. This suggests that while many educators acknowledge multimodality's potential, its adoption is not yet universal or consistently consolidated across Albanian FLT classrooms. Teachers' qualitative

responses provided rich examples of how they intuitively leverage aural, visual, gestural, and spatial modes, aligning with theories that emphasize multimodal meaning-making (Halliday 1978; Kress 2003).

Addressing the second research question: "What multimodal tools are most effective in promoting sustained engagement?", the study found a strong consensus among teachers who reported using multimodal activities, regarding the perceived benefits of these tools. Amongst the most effective tools to promote student engagement they mentioned activities such as dramatization, role-playing, audiovisual tools and visual aids such as posters, drawings and infographics, in addition to activities like using songs for pronunciation and memory. Teachers reported that multimodal activities in FLT significantly increase student motivation, make learning more attractive, enhance communication, foster creativity, and strengthen core language skills like pronunciation and comprehension. These findings offer empirical support to the qualitative literature that exists in having highlighted increased motivation and creativity as effective outcomes of multimodal instruction (Jiang & Luk 2016; Li & Akoto 2021), and they are consistent with research on how multimodal input contributes to language learning (Eisenmann 2020).

Finally, regarding the third question, "What institutional factors support or hinder multimodality in FLT settings?", the research identified considerable systemic barriers, while identifying teacher agency as the strongest supporting factor. As teachers reported, the fundamental supporting factors that enable multimodality in foreign language classrooms are not policy or funds, but the teachers' choices and teacher agency. The self-reported common use of art and multimodal tools by nearly three-quarters of the teachers' sample reflects their internal motivation, which somehow compensates for the lack of institutional support as needed. Another supporting factor is the efficacy of teaching practices like songs, dramatization, and visual aids, which shows that low-cost multimodal practices may be the functional, non-systemic forces enabling the continuance of these teaching practices in FLT. The most important support for teachers is the positive student response, as they reported. The majority of teachers who used arts and multimodal tools in FLT reported consistent, strong feedback that multimodal activities significantly increase student motivation and active participation. This direct success with students encourages teachers to continue doing and refining those specific, effective strategies in foreign language classes. Therefore, where institutional infrastructures fail to provide the adequate support, teacher creativity

and their self-reported perceptions and experiences of student engagement are the real supporting factors that make multimodality work in Albanian FLT.

However, despite the enthusiasm expressed by the teachers who reported using arts and multimodal tools in their FLT practices, using multimodality is hindered by the lack of targeted professional development, the shortage of pedagogical materials, and the lack of administrative support. These findings also resonate with existing literature that points to technological constraints, resource limitations, and administrative barriers as common obstacles to integrating multimodal approaches (Choi & Yi 2016). The data suggest that without targeted professional development and a more systemic framework, the full potential of multimodality in Albanian FLT remains underexplored.

6.2. Contribution and research limitations

This research paper provides descriptive background statistics alongside detailed reported teacher perceptions and experiences. Despite the relatively high degree of effectiveness that was reported by teachers, it is necessary to note the methodological limitations related to using self-reported perceptions and practices. The primary contribution of this study is the fact that it provides context-specific, qualitative data illuminating the perceived benefits and specific implementation strategies of multimodality in the largely unexplored Albanian FLT environment. However, conclusions must be within the limitations of the qualitative survey research design. Specifically, results are based on a convenience sample in the district of Elbasan and are self-report data on practices and perceptions. Therefore, these results do not allow for statistical generalization to the entire national population of FLT teachers in Albania, nor can the study define a causal link between multimodal approaches and long-term student outcomes. The reported high effectiveness is a measure of perceived value on the part of the foreign language teachers, not an external validation of long-term learning effect.

6.3. Implications for future research

In conclusion, this research paper shows that while multimodality is a highly valued and intuitively incorporated pedagogical tool for most Albanian FLT educators, its large-scale and systematic application is hindered by systemic shortages. As a result, this study suggests further professional development for teachers, in particular creating special training modules on the methodological application of digital and non-digital multimodal approaches to specifically address

the aspects of student engagement. In addition to this, resource allocation is needed for higher access to available resources, which might involve utilizing low-cost or non-digital creative tools like art-based activities in combination with progressively improving basic technological infrastructure. Another suggestion is to provide curriculum restructuring support by analyzing, reflecting and verifying communicative and creative outcomes of multimodal learning, and to provide teachers with all the necessary forms of institutional support.

In conclusion, this paper underscores the role of multimodality in enriching FLT practice and enhancing learner engagement in Albania. Teachers actively, and often creatively, integrate various multimodal strategies, perceiving them as powerful tools for motivation, linguistic development, and fostering creativity. However, the pervasive challenges of limited resources, insufficient training, and a lack of strong institutional support act as significant barriers to wider and more consistent implementation. This research, therefore, advocates for targeted policy reform, dedicated professional development programs, and curriculum restructuring to cultivate an interdisciplinary learning environment that fully embraces a holistic, multimodal framework.

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AKTIVIRANJE UČENIKA KROZ MULTIMODALNOST:
UVIDI IZ NASTAVE STRANIH JEZIKA U ALBANIJI

Sažetak

Rad istražuje ulogu i uticaj multimodalnosti u aktiviranju učenika u nastavi stranih jezika u Albaniji. Istraživanje je nastojalo da premosti empirijski jaz u vezi sa efikasnošću multimodalnih strategija u specifičnom socio-obrazovnom kontekstu albanskog preduniverzitetskog sistema. Oslanjajući se na kvalitativni dizajn, podaci su prikupljeni anketom koja je distribuirana među 67 nastavnika stranih jezika u okrugu Elbasan, a potom analizirana deskriptivnom statistikom. Nalazi otkrivaju dvojaku sliku o tome kako nastavnici prijavljuju da vide i koriste multimodalnost u nastavi. Što se tiče prakse, značajna većina anketiranih nastavnika (74,6%) izveštava o čestom korišćenju pristupačnih, nedigitalnih multimodalnih aktivnosti kao što su pesme, dramatizacija i vizuelna pomagala. Visoka prijavljena učestalost naglašava to da nastavnici veruju da ti alati poboljšavaju motivaciju i interesovanje učenika. Tačnije, nastavnici su dosledno odgovarali da smatraju da su te aktivnosti veoma efikasne u podsticanju motivacije, kreativnosti i dubljeg uključivanja učenika u bihejvioralnim i kognitivnim domenima. Međutim, istraživanje je otkrilo i značajna sistemska ograničenja, koja ometaju potpunu i doslednu primenu multimodalnosti u svim učionicama. Nedostatak adekvatnih tehnoloških resursa, nedovoljan profesionalni razvoj i odsustvo snažne administrativne podrške su sveprisutne institucionalne barijere koje ograničavaju nastavnike na pristupačna rešenja sa niskim resursima. U zaključku, ovo istraživanje potvrđuje da je multimodalnost visoko cenjen i intuitivno integrisan pedagoški alat za mnoge albanske nastavnike. U radu se preporučuje ciljana reforma obrazovne politike, posvećena obuka nastavnika i restrukturiranje kurikuluma usmereno na uključivanje i digitalnog i nedigitalnog multimodalnog potencijala kako bi se osiguralo održivo, visokokvalitetno aktiviranje učenika u nastavi stranih jezika u Albaniji.

Ključne reči: multimodalnost, nastava stranih jezika, angažovanje učenika, Albanija, pedagoške strategije.