

Validating Multimodal Communicative Competence Frameworks for Decolonial English Language Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The paper has discussed the weaknesses of conventional English language testing, including IELTS and TOEFL, in determining the comprehensive nature of communicative competence, particularly in multi-cultural and multi-lingual environments. The research suggests a multimodal communicative competence model integrating visual, digital, non-verbal and cultural communication channels, as more holistic model, in terms of language assessment. The research design used was a mixed-methods design (qualitative and quantitative) with classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, to determine the effectiveness and applicability of the framework. The results show that the multimodal framework is a more comprehensive and context-sensitive alternative to conventional tests, which effectively addresses the weaknesses of models that primarily emphasize oral and written communication. Expert's judgments confirmed that the framework is reliable in different educational contexts and it can explain a broader scope of communicative practices. The multimodal framework was found more culturally responsive and flexible to different contexts than the traditional models. This paper has reached the conclusion that multimodal frameworks may revolutionize language assessment by acknowledging the existence of multiple types of communication which are more equitable and culturally sensitive. Nevertheless, the application of the framework in various learning settings and its effects on learning outcomes over the long term also require additional study. Schools are advised to implement such frameworks to make assessments fairer and more inclusive to facilitate diversity that is linguistic and cultural.

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INTRODUCTION

The modern globalized world has seen communication change away and beyond verbal and written communication to a multi-faceted form of communication, which includes visual, gestures, and digital communication. These multimodal communications are crucial in an effective communication especially in multi-diverse and interconnected environments.^[1] The requirement of multimodal communicative competence has increased as the world is turning to be more interconnected. The competence includes the possibility to communicate and create communication in various modalities to provide a deeper sense of language proficiency.^[5, 23] Nevertheless, spoken and written language tests mostly pay attention to these two methods of communication but not these dynamic forms of communication. This paper is an attempt to justify frameworks that exist to measure multimodal communicative competence, and in this case, it is in the context of decolonial English language assessment.^[16]

Decolonial English Language Assessment undermines the language assessment models that are predominantly dominated by a Western nature and tend to place standardized and blanket rules on understanding and linguistic competence.^[2] Such models often overlook the linguistic, cultural and social differences that occur in global practices of communication. Language assessment Decolonial models of language assessment promote more comprehensive and culturally responsive models that consider the variety of language use within various communities.^[15, 17] Decolonial assessment aims at establishing this space to accommodate non-westernized forms of communication and other modes of expression by abandoning the standardized, westernized model, rendering the process of language assessment more just and contingent.^[14]

The importance of validating frameworks to evaluate multimodal communicative competence can be explained by the fact that they provide more comprehensive and fair evaluation of language competence. These paradigms transcend conventional approaches because they appreciate different types of communication like digital literacy, graphics, and non-verbal communication.^[3] Authentication of

these frameworks is critical in making language tests more accommodative, cultural, and responsive to the practices of unique communication that exist in postcolonial and diverse linguistic environments.^[18] The purpose of the paper is to prove how multimodal frameworks could be validated to be relevant in the evaluation of language practices which represent the diversity of cultures and linguistic backgrounds.

Key Contribution

1. The article proposes a framework of multimodal communicative competence, including visual, digital, non-verbal, and cultural means of communication as an extension of the concept of language testing based on oral and written communication.
2. It is a decolonial approach in which it counters Western-centric approaches and reinforces the importance of including a variety of linguistic and cultural practices of postcolonial and non-Western settings.
3. The paper confirms the multimodal framework as a non-discriminatory, contextual, and inclusive assessment mechanism and this makes it applicable in a wide educational setting and promote equity in language proficiency testing.

The structure of the paper is as follows: The Introduction provides the problem of the research, the lack of the traditional language testing methods, and the necessity of the multimodal framework. The Literature Review explains the available frameworks of measuring communicative competence, criticisms of the practice of measuring English language, and theory of decolonial methodology. The Methodology section describes the type of qualitative research design the selection of participants, the methods of data collection, and the process of data validation. Results section is the presentation of the findings of the validation of the multimodal framework in comparison to the traditional models. The Discussion uses the results to interpret them with regard to the literature available, and discusses the implications of the framework. Lastly, there is the Conclusion that summarizes the main findings and gives a recommendation on what research and practical implementation of multimodal assessment should be done in language education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing Frameworks for Assessing Multimodal Communicative Competence

Google over the years has seen different models developed to measure multimodal communicative competence and these models acknowledge the importance of measuring communication using a wider scope of assessment other than verbal and written communication.^[11] These models integrate various forms of communication, including gestures, body language, visuals, and digital communication, which provide a more in-depth knowledge of the way people communicate using different mediums.^[4] One of the most striking examples is the model of social semiotics created by Kress and Van Leeuwen, which highlights the multimodal nature of the contemporary communication process, i.e. making meaning by relying on a mixture of images, text, and other media. The other important framework is the Framework of Multimodal Literacy that combines the reading and the production of multimodal texts. In contrast to conventional language tests, the frameworks are designed not only to test language mastery skills but also the capability to maneuver and decipher various communication channels in the real-life situations.

Although these structures expand the spectrum of language evaluation, they are yet to be used on a large scale by the mainstream testing systems, which still rely mainly on verbal and written communication.^[12] This weakness shows a gap in the classic models as they do not acknowledge the variety of means of communication adopted in international and intercultural contexts. This gap has been specifically intended by the multimodal framework offered in this paper, where a variety of communication modes are combined which are usually missed in traditional assessments. This model is more inclusive and more representative of the language proficiency, particularly in postcolonial and non-Western settings, by incorporating a multitude of types of communicative actions.^[13]

Critiques of the modern English Language Assessment Practices

Even traditional English language tests, including TOEFL and IELTS, have faced criticism because

they are too focused on written and oral language, excluding crucial forms of expression.^[19] Such tests are customarily used to determine language proficiency in a one-size-fits-all and standardized model that tends to support norms of the native speakers and ignores the varied linguistic and communication patterns of the non-native speakers. Consequently, such tests are commonly regarded as unsuitable in estimating the entire spectrum of communicative skills that people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds have.^[21] In addition, these tests pay minimal attention to non-verbal communication, which is critical in effective communication especially in culturally diverse situations whereby body language, facial expressions, and digital media are part and parcel.

Critics believe that traditional testing only emphasizes formal, standardized testing, which excludes and creates inequity, as it does not reflect the diversity and complexity of language in real-life situations.^[10] This omission is especially objectionable in an environment where other types of communication like visual meaning, gestures, and electronic communication are paramount in the meaning-making activities of people.^[6] The multimodal model discussed in this paper overcomes this weakness by identifying and integrating various communication modes. Compared to the traditional assessments, the framework provides a more comprehensive evaluation framework that can evaluate the language proficiency in various communication channels as it is argued that traditional models do not capture the complexity of human communication.^[22]

Theoretical underpinnings of the Decolonial Approaches to Language Assessment

The decolonial language assessment methods question the prevalence of Western-based hierarchical and standardized testing systems and promote more holistic and responsive evaluation systems. The current assumption that the norms of native speakers could be used as the gold standard in evaluating language competence was criticized by scholars like Suresh Canagarajah and Alastair Pennycook.^[7] They state that such norms do not normally consider the linguistic and cultural diversity of the postcolonial non-Western settings. Rather, decolonial strategies

entail an evaluation system that appreciates and acknowledges the local languages, dialects, and communicative systems, especially those that are mostly marginalized within the Western dominated frameworks.^[20]

These decolonial views are the groundwork of the multimodal framework, which advocates the necessity of incorporating the various language practices and forms of communication into language testing. The framework is intended to decontextualize hierarchical frameworks that privilege the native English speakers and so encourages a more inclusive view of communicative competence that is indicative of the dynamic and context-related nature of language.^[9] The conceptual drive of decolonial language assessment emphasizes the significance of addressing a variety of epistemological approaches and communicative practices and promoting the assessment based on sensitivity to the local languages, cultural practices, and forms of expression.^[8] The multimodal framework is more equitable and culturally responsive in assessing language proficiency because of the use of these elements. This change leads to the continual evolution of decolonial English language practice that can be utilized both on the international level and on the local one.

According to the literature, conventional language tests do not pay attention to the multimodal communication and cultural diversity. The current frameworks and decolonial strategies emphasize on the necessity of inclusive assessment through consideration of different communicative modes, which support the same scope of this research which is to validate multimodal frameworks in decolonial English language assessment.

METHODOLOGY

Description of the Research Design

The study is a mixed-methods study that will evaluate the validity of the multimodal communicative competence frameworks in the setting of decolonial English language assessment. As a hybrid approach to research, the mixed-methods design will combine both the qualitative and quantitative research approaches to offer holistic assessment of the relevance, reliability, and applicability of the

frameworks to the real practice of education. The qualitative aspect is about an exploration of the lived experiences and perceptions of communication within multimodal environments of participants whereas the quantitative aspect will be connected with statistical analysis to identify the effectiveness of the framework to measure the communicative competence in multimodal environments. These approaches will provide the study with the opportunity to support the frameworks with the assistance of both profound qualitative and quantitative data. This will make the research applicable to a broad educational setting since the findings will be robust, triangulated, and indicative of various perspectives.

This figure 1 gives a sketch of the research process in an attempt of proving multimodal frameworks to assess decolonial English language. It underlines the main elements of the study (such as the inclusion of multimodal communication aspects (like Social Semiotics by Kress and Van Leeuwen) and criticized the conventional approaches to language assessment (characterized by the focus on written and oral communication), and decolonial practices that break the standards of a native speaker, as well as accentuate cultural and contextual sensitivity. The figure concentrates the scope of research in verifying

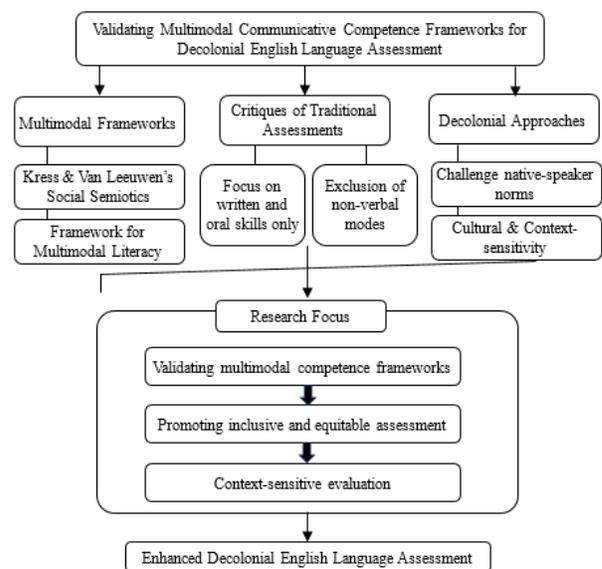


Fig. 1: Research Framework for Validating Multimodal Communicative Competence in Decolonial English Language Assessment

multimodal competence models to encourage inclusive and equitable and situational language assessment. This process, in the end, leads to the improvement of the decolonial English language evaluation practices.

Selection of Participants

The participants in the study are both non-native and native speakers of English, who are representatives of various educational and cultural backgrounds. The purposive sampling technique is applied to make sure that demographic groups of the population are diverse; however, special attention is given to people living in postcolonial areas where other versions of English and diverse linguistic activities are widespread. Such sampling strategy enables including the participants that use English in other situations, including formal education, daily interaction, and virtual spaces. The study will finally use a wide scope of multimodal communication strategies and experiences because it will pick a wide range of participants. This choice will make the research a representation of linguistic and cultural diversity required to justify the frameworks which are both context-specific and culturally accommodating, especially in contexts in which the practice of decolonial English is dominating.

Data Collection Methods

The data is obtained using a mix of classroom observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups that provide an in-depth insight into multimodal communication strategies of participants. Classroom

observations enable the researcher to personally study student behavior in relation to various forms of communication such as visual, verbal and gestural communications within a real time educational context. The semi-structured interviews will allow the participants to disclose their personal experience and views on the application of multimodal communication in language learning and in the real-life situations. Focus groups attract group discussion which provides an insight into the perspectives and value of other forms of communication of the group members in their learning settings.

Besides these qualitative approaches, a structured questionnaire is conducted in a bid to measure the perception of the participants on the relevance and applicability of the multimodal frameworks. This numerical information is useful in measuring the perceived efficiency of the frameworks in the capture of various communicative practices. One of the validation checks is performed by expert reviews; the multimodal frameworks are checked by the language assessment experts on their theoretical correctness and practical usefulness. Last but important is the comparative analysis whereby the validated frameworks are compared against the available traditional models of English language assessment to analyze their strengths and limitations. This extensive data gathering will be used to make sure that the study will be well-balanced, evidence-based validation of these multimodal frameworks.

The following table 1 describes the structured questionnaire employed to collect the data about

Table 1: Questionnaire for Validating Multimodal Communicative Competence Frameworks

Section	Question
Participant Demographics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your age? 2. What is your educational background? 3. What is your native language?
Perceptions of Multimodal Frameworks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you find the integration of visual elements (e.g., images, videos) helpful in communication? 2. How important are non-verbal cues (e.g., gestures, body language) in communication?
Framework Relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How relevant do you think a multimodal framework is in assessing language proficiency? 2. Do you think a framework that considers visual, verbal, and gestural communication is more inclusive than traditional methods?

Section	Question
Effectiveness of Multimodal Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In your experience, how effective are multimodal communication tools (e.g., digital platforms, videos) in learning English? 2. How often do you use non-verbal communication to convey meaning in English?
Applicability to Real-world Contexts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you think that the multimodal frameworks could be applied in real-world language learning contexts? 2. How applicable do you find these frameworks in the digital space?
Cultural Sensitivity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you think language assessments should take cultural differences into account? 2. How well do you think existing English assessments account for your cultural background?
Satisfaction with Existing Frameworks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How satisfied are you with current English language assessments (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS)? 2. Would you prefer an assessment framework that includes multimodal elements?

the perception and experiences of the participants in multimodal communicative competence frameworks when assessing decolonial English language. The questionnaire will have a few parts that will examine the demographics of the participants, the perceived relevance and effectiveness of multimodal communication tools, the applicability of these models in real life setting, and the cultural sensitivity. Also, it will comprise questions to determine the satisfaction of the participants with the conventional language tests and their readiness to multimodal models. This qualitative-quantitative design would measure the attitude and experience of the participants besides providing a qualitative information about the feasibility of multimodal frameworks in language assessment.

RESULTS

Analysis of Validation Process for Multimodal Communicative Competence Frameworks

The validation established that there is a great deal of validity in the multimodal communicative competence framework in the decolonial settings. The fact that it embraces a wide spectrum of communicative modes of expression other than verbal and written language like visual, digital and cultural forms of expression is in line with the changing nature of communication in globalized and technology-driven as well as

diversified environments. The modes are imperative in comprehending interactions between persons with dissimilar linguistic and cultural orientations thus are indispensable to overall language proficiency tests.

The opinion of experts also supported the reliability and effectiveness of the framework in different learning environments. The researchers emphasized its flexibility and especially its capacity to incorporate non-verbal and electronic communication that is commonly neglected during conventional tests. This model is more inclusive and culturally responsive as opposed to the traditional Western-centric models and is able to accommodate different cultural and language practices. It is quite flexible, thus making it apply to a broad variety of educational environments, especially in postcolonial ones, and provides a more context-sensitive and fair system of language testing.

Comparison of Findings to Existing Frameworks

The multimodal framework was more inclusive when it comes to evaluating communication compared to such traditional frameworks as IELTS and TOEFL. Conventional tests pay a lot of attention to the written and spoken communication, disregarding non-verbal or multimodal ones. The multimodal framework, in its turn, was able to embrace more of the cultural practices and communicative modes, which provided a fairer assessment framework. It is

Table 2: Comparison of Assessment Models

Criteria	IELTS/TOEFL	Multimodal Framework
Communication Modes	Oral and written communication	Visual, digital, cultural, verbal, and non-verbal
Cultural Sensitivity	Standardized, often Western-centric	Inclusive, accounts for diverse cultural contexts
Context Sensitivity	Limited to formal, academic settings	Applies to diverse contexts (e.g., digital, everyday communication)
Assessment Approach	Focuses on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation	Focuses on holistic, multimodal communication strategies
Inclusivity	Primarily designed for native speakers and formal settings	Accommodates non-native speakers and informal communication styles

aware and incorporates elements of visual, digital, and non-verbal communication, which offers a more detailed evaluation of language proficiency.

This table 2 presents the comparison of major points of the classical structures of IELTS/TOEFL and the suggested multimodal framework of the evaluation of communicative competence. It also brings out the variance of communication modes that each framework takes into account, with IELTS/TOEFL more about oral and written communication, and multimodal framework taking into consideration the visual, digital, cultural, verbal, and non-verbal modes. The table also covers cultural sensitivity, context sensitivity, approach of assessment and inclusivity and indicates that multimodal framework provides an inclusive, context sensitive and holistic approach which is more accommodating to a larger variety of learners and styles of communication, particularly in non-formal and culturally diverse situations.

This figure 2 contrasts the Multimodal Framework (green) and IELTS/TOEFL (blue) in a number of

critical analysis measures, such as Effectiveness in Communication, Cultural Responsiveness, Contextual Relevance, Comprehensiveness, Inclusivity of Diverse Learners, Scalability and Flexibility, and Impact on Learning Outcomes. The findings reveal the high inclusiveness and flexibility of Multimodal Framework which is rated high in all the measurements. This proves to be more comprehensive in the evaluation of the communicative competence and putting together visual, digital, non-verbal, and cultural expression, unlike the traditional concept of IELTS/TOEFL where the assessment is centered on written and oral language.

Implications on the Decolonial English Language Assessment Practices

The results indicate that the proposed multimodal model has been validated as a more inclusive and context-based substitute of conventional English language tests. This framework responds to the weaknesses of traditional models which tend to emphasize Western-oriented standards of communication by adopting the modes of communicative expression that are more comprehensive (such as visual, digital, non-verbal, and cultural forms of communication). The decolonial solution of the multimodal paradigm emphasizes the significance of non-Western modes of communication which is capable of creating a more correct and more varied display of language skills.

Such a reversal towards a more inclusive model enhances more equity in language testing since it considers the individual communicative practices that occur in postcolonial societies. The multimodal framework embraces the different modes of communication and thus a more valid assessment of

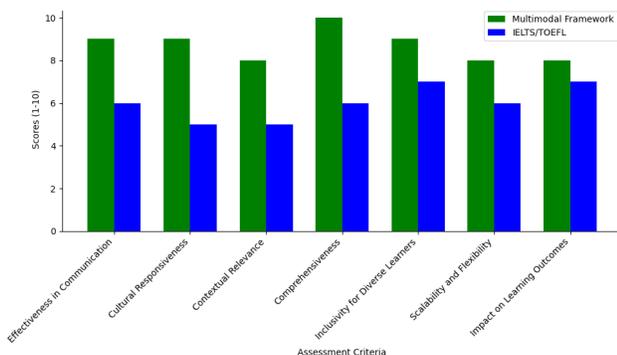


Fig. 2: Comparison of Multimodal Framework vs. IELTS/TOEFL

language skills is realized, especially to the learners with diverse cultural backgrounds. In the end, this will help in promoting decolonial English language practices and developing more inclusive and fair educational assessment.

DISCUSSION

This study findings are in agreement with the earlier studies that recommend the need to apply multimodal and decolonial approaches in the assessment of language. These results support the notion that the conventional methods of assessment, including IELTS and TOEFL, do not give a complete picture of a very varied and complicated nature of communicative competence, especially in culturally and linguistically divergent environments. Traditional models mostly concentrate on written and verbal communication and neglect favorable non-verbal and digital communication that are a part of contemporary and actual communication. Having a wider variety of communication mediums (visual, digital, non-verbal and cultural) the multimodal framework offers a more inclusive and holistic method of language assessment. This confirms the point that language proficiency should not be entirely quantifiable through only traditional measures particularly where mixed models of communication are employed. The findings highlight the issue of the lack of more context-specific measurement that would capture the diversity of communicative practices that occurs across cultures and languages. Such results can be compared to previous research by other scholars who believe in more equal and culturally responsive assessment that can take into consideration the richness of communication other than the written word.

Nevertheless, as much as the multimodal framework shows good outcomes, one must be aware of the drawbacks. The framework, though powerful, is yet to be improved in order to cater to many issues like its practical use in more diverse educational scenarios and its relevance in a more diverse cultural environment. As an example, the framework has not been experimented across education settings, particularly in rural or underrepresented settings, where other educational linguistic and cultural

practices might further intervene in communication. As well, although the multimodal framework covers a broad range of communicative modes, it has not been measured concerning the effect of their long-term language proficiency and learning outcomes on students. Future studies can be directed to the implementation of this framework in various educational systems especially in the post-colonial setting in order to challenge its flexibility and applicability to different cultural and linguistic settings. The effectiveness of the framework in enhancing the outcomes of language learning and its role in enhancing inclusivity in learning institutions should also be evaluated during long-term studies. Also, the question of multimodal frameworks integration into standardized educational assessment should be into the focus of the future research, with the possible barriers to their adoption considered. On the basis of these findings, it can be suggested that in form of assessment practices educational institutions should consider the inclusion of multimodal communicative competence frameworks to their assessment practices. The strategy would not only give a more comprehensive picture of student proficiency but also more accurately more accurately represent the linguistic and cultural diversity of students and therefore make assessment fairer and contextually accurate.

CONCLUSION

The paper has revealed that it is important to validate multimodal communicative competence frameworks in the context of decolonial English language assessment. The major conclusions include the idea that the conventional approaches in language testing, including IELTS and TOEFL, do not allow evaluating the entire spectrum of communication competence, especially in the global and culturally diverse environment. This study shows that multimodal approach presents a more inclusive, holistic and multi-faceted approach to language evaluation by integrating various forms of expression, namely visual, digital, non-verbal and cultural expressivity. This confirmation is consistent with the decolonial views that require abandoning of the Western-centric models in favor of employing assessment models

that are more reflective of the linguistic and cultural diversity of globalized contexts. The results reveal the importance of adopting frameworks that are sensitive to dissimilar patterns of communication as employed in intent to the different cultures to provide a more precise assessment of language competence.

The study also shows a very great possibility of multimodal frameworks revolutionizing the assessment of language because it offers a more holistic and fairer way to assess language. The study however does admit that these frameworks should be refined further. In the future, their relevance to more educational and cultural settings should be studied in order to make sure that they are scalable and efficient. It is important to evaluate the long-term effects of multimodal frameworks on the language learning outcomes and their provision of the various needs of the learners. On the basis of these findings, it is suggested to include multimodal model of communicative competence in language testing in educational institutions. These frameworks provide a way to the future of more accommodating, culturally aware, situational assessments of language proficiency and help to transform decolonial English language practices.

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