MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A PARADIGM SHIFT

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ABSTRACT

The use of digital technologies for pedagogical purposes worldwide has augmented the need for radical and urgent changes in academic literacy education at tertiary institutions. In this article, multimodal composition alternatives to traditional written academic assessments are proposed as a platform for transformation in academic literacy modules. The literature framework highlights the hindrances and affordances of multimodal composition pedagogy. A qualitative research approach was followed in the empirical research. An online questionnaire was used in this interpretivist research design. The opinions of academic literacy lecturers at a South African university were sought to gauge how they felt about incorporating alternative multimodal assessments instead of traditional methods such as text-based compositions only. The inclusion of student voice and agency regarding multimodal academic literacy pedagogy was also investigated. The findings revealed that many lecturers did incorporate formative multimodal teaching and learning strategies to scaffold academic writing. However, with regards to summative assessment of academic literacy skills, most lecturers still preferred the traditional essay. Most of the lecturers were also not in favour of student contribution to multimodal content and assessment. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure that multimodal composition transformation is implemented to support students' academic literacy needs, not their own, in an ever-changing digital landscape in higher education.

Keywords

Academic literacy, composition, multimodal, paradigm shift, student agency and voice, writing

INTRODUCTION

Traditional ways of teaching and assessment still mainly focus on reading and writing (Kress, 2010; Lim, Towndrow & Min Tan, 2021: 2) that do not necessarily help students with their studies in an ever-changing digital educational landscape nor prepare them for their future professional lives (Weeks, 2018). Gulecoglu (2018: 112) argues that '[c]onventional writing assignments, such as persuasive essays or text-based research articles that predominantly employ writing as the only mode of communication, do not resemble the documents students are expected to work with in their work environments, most of which entail using digital tools'.

'Re-seeing' (Haimes-Korn & Hansen, 2018: 35), 'reconceptualization' (Tan, Zammit, D'warte & Gearside, 2020) and 're-thinking' (Vincent, 2006: 56) seem necessary in the teaching, learning and assessment of composition in academic literacy modules in South

Africa. Chan, Chia and Choo (2017: 73) state that incorporating multimodality in literacy is 'more a need than a choice'. In this article, it is recommended that there should be a paradigm shift in multimodal composition pedagogy in higher education. Approaches to literacy pedagogy, specifically academic writing, have already undergone many paradigm shifts (Alegbeleye & Jantchou, 2019; Hairston, 1982; Jacobs & Farrell, 2001; Laine & Schultz, 1985; Yeh, 2018). Examples include a shift from product- to process-orientated processes (Jiang, 2017), changing views of literacy to academic literacies (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006) and changes in persuasion, stance and engagement and rhetorical conventions (Hyland, 2020).

Some work on incorporating multimodality at South African universities has been done (Archer, 2006, 2012, 2014; Newfield, 2011; Stein & Newfield, 2006). However, actual large-scale multimodal composition implementation, assessment and research at universities are still lacking. Research and literacy pedagogy mostly continue to focus on traditional academic writing.

Instead of using 'academic writing', the term 'multimodal composition' is used in this article to shift the focus from 'writing' only and to be more in line with the idea of composing or creating as new ways of meaning making (Hafner & Ho, 2020; Jewitt, 2006; Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran, 2016; Kress, 2003; Marchetti & Cullen, 2016; Yancey, 2004; Zawilski, 2011).

In this article, especially in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, a multimodal approach to academic composition pedagogy in academic literacy modules is proposed. The following main research questions drove this research:

- *What is multimodality and what are the hindrances and affordances of multimodal composition pedagogy?*
- *Do academic literacy lecturers employ multimodal teaching strategies and assessment tasks?*
- *Should traditional text-based composition pedagogy such as essays be supplemented or even replaced by multimodal pedagogy in academic literacy modules?*
- *Can multimodal composition pedagogy support student-centred learning?*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Due to the rise of educational technologies and trends towards digital learning, the term *multimodality* is widely used in educational environments (Godhe & Magnusson, 2017; Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2003; Lombardi, 2018; Marchetti & Cullen, 2016). In some cases, it refers to modes of delivery or communication such as face-to-face, online or blended (Malczyk, 2018; Yu, 2013). Another view of multimodality is that there is a shift from traditional views of literacy to academic literacies (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006), new literacies (The New London Group, 1996: 60) and multiliteracies (Carstens, 2012). There is also a shift from text-based knowledge representation only (Zammit, 2019: 50) to the inclusion of new semiotic modes (Kress, 2003) and multiple modalities such as image, audio and video or a combination of these modalities (Nouri, 2018; Jewitt, 2008). For this article, *multimodality* entails using various modes of communication other than written texts only in online environments and in face-to-face composition academic literacy modules.

The theoretical lens through which this article is viewed is based on multimodal social semiotics theory, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and critical literacy. According to multimodal social semiotics theory (Kress, 2009: 38), systems of assessment have mainly

focused on speech and writing for learning and meaning making. Kress (2009: 38) demands that more contemporary semiotic modes be included in forms of communication. As meaning-making functions within social systems or cultures continue to evolve, SFL can also be used to inform a shift to and inclusion of multimodal composition in the digital age (Halliday, 1978; Shin, Cimasko & Yi, 2020; Unsworth, 2014).

Critical multimodal literacy, based on critical literacy (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Freire & Shor, 1987; Shor, 1992), is also important for this article as literacy cannot be separated from social action and power relations. It also highlights the importance of integrating multiple modes for meaning making. More importantly, it promotes student agency, culture, identity and voice (Ajayi, 2015). Critical multimodal literacy ties in with Fisher's (2005: 92) concept of *literocracy*, which connects democracy and literacy where students have choices of and input into their literacy practices to help equalise the use of various modes for expressing their ideas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many lecturers and institutions still insist on monomodal, conventional, article-based texts and written communication from students in composition courses (Fjørtoft, 2020: 1; Godhe & Magnussen, 2017; Grigoryan, 2018: 210; Gulecoglu, 2018: 112; Lopez-Gil & Molina-Natera, 2018: 216; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004: 72; Vincent, 2006: 56). Hull and Nelson (2005: 225) claim that most assessments in universities are 'still staunchly logocentric, [book-centred], and essay driven'. Moreover, many lecturers only consider students to be 'truly educated' when they have mastered reading and writing (Yancey, 2004: 305).

Traditional print-based texts and assignments are, however, no longer enough to support students' new literacy needs in the digital age (Haimes-Korn & Hansen, 2018: 40). Selfe and Hawisher (2004: 72) state that if composition lecturers continue to focus only on alphabetic composition, 'we run the risk of making composition studies increasingly irrelevant to students engaging in contemporary practices of communication'.

In language, especially in composition classrooms, research has already proven that multimodal approaches to writing have value (Grigoryan, 2018; Lombardi, 2018; Lopez-Gil & Molina-Natera, 2018; Monea & Pybus, 2018; Summers, Szabo & Ingram, 2018). Although there are multiple affordances of multimodal pedagogy, some challenges must be addressed. Access to technology can be a major issue in the South African context (Statistics South Africa, 2017) for both students and lecturers. Multimodal education can also be quite difficult for some students if they are unfamiliar with certain technologies. This can make students feel intimidated and even cause anxiety (Beard, 2012).

Furthermore, many composition lecturers face institutional limitations when trying to implement multimodal composition in the curriculum (Grigoryan, 2018: 209). This can include computers, networks, access, software, licensing, as well as how the institution views literacy. Assisting students with multimodal composition can also be time-consuming and many composition lecturers believe that it is not their 'job' to teach multimodal composition (Grigoryan, 2018: 210).

Many lecturers need professional development as they do not have adequate proficiency and training in using digital tools (Godhe & Magnusson, 2017) for multimodal composition pedagogical purposes. A lack of multimodal metalanguage knowledge and grammar can also pose challenges for many lecturers (Chandler, 2017; Macnaught, 2018: 144; Shin, Cimasko

& Yi, 2020: 1). Many lecturers also do not have adequate knowledge and confidence in designing, implementing and assessing multimodal composition assignments (Gulecoglu, 2018: 113; Tan et al., 2020: 101).

Though there are many challenges, there are multiple affordances of adopting multimodal composition pedagogy. Multimodal pedagogy creates a more versatile learning environment that can accommodate various learning styles and thus promote more personalised learning (Gilakjani, Ismail & Ahmadi, 2011: 1322; Sankey, Birch, & Gardiner, 2010: 853). Sackstein (2015) states that 'when we offer one chance or route for learning, we greatly limit the possibility that every student will achieve mastery'. This has implications for social justice in composition classrooms (Archer, 2014: 106; Bali & Mostafa, 2018: 228). Certain students could always be at an advantage if knowledge is only tested through academic writing such as the traditional essay. Multimodal alternative assessments could thus provide more agency, flexibility and options for students (Weeks, 2018).

Beard (2012) states that with multimodal composition, students engage more with their topics. Beard (2012) further mentions that multimodal composition gets students excited about writing. Moreover, they gain confidence in creating a variety of texts and modes of communication with multiple digital tools. Multimodal composition also increases students' intrinsic motivation (Lopez-Gil & Molina-Natera, 2018). This is due to students being able to make choices suited to their own interests and needs and to make their learning more relevant (Bali & Mostafa, 2018: 228).

Another affordance of multimodal composition is that it gives students the 'cognitive tools required to navigate the complex cultural and global digital landscape of the Information Age' (Grigoryan, 2018: 211). Multimodal composition can develop students' critical, creative, collaborative and innovation skills, which are especially important skills for 21st-century learning (Grigoryan, 2018: 212).

Furthermore, multimodal composition pedagogy provides opportunities for students to actively become part of the writing community by participating in meaning-making processes (Lombardi, 2018: 15-16). Multimodal composition also provides students with opportunities to develop skills that can help them to participate in *convergence culture* (Anderson, 2003; Beard, 2012; Jenkins, 2008) where old and new media collide and where the lines between consumers and producers merge. This links with Mackey and Jacobson's (2014) concept of *metaliteracy* where students become critical producers and not only consumers of knowledge and meaning making. Through multimodal composition, students can become 'prosumers' (Anderson, 2003) and 'co-creators of knowledge' (Dawson, Cook & Lambton, 2014) where they, too, feel invested in their own learning.

It is thus clear that there are many challenges regarding the implementation of multimodal assessments. However, the advantages of multimodal pedagogy for students and lecturers cannot be ignored in the digital age.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This research is situated in an interpretivist paradigm (Bakkabulindi, 2015: 39). A qualitative research approach was followed, as '[h]aving an interest in knowing more about one's practice, and indeed in improving one's practice, leads to asking researchable questions, some of which are best approached through a qualitative research design' (Merriam, 2009: 1). Hence, the need to extend knowledge on practices and ultimately, improve practices, drives this research and qualitative research lent itself to informing this process.

Participants

The participants (n=11) in this study were academic literacy lecturers at a South African university. Purposive sampling was used, as the research participants were selected 'on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristic(s) being sought' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017:474). For the purposes of this study, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic level and educational level were not selection criteria. The only requirement was that the participants were academic literacy lecturers.

Procedure and research ethics

The research project was approved by a research committee at the university and an ethics certificate was issued. The participants were contacted via email by an independent research recruiter who provided them with a link to *Google Forms*. Participation in this research was voluntary and only lecturers who willingly provided written informed consent participated in the study. The privacy of research participants was respected and confidentiality was ensured throughout the research process. The participants completed the online questionnaire used in this research anonymously.

Data collection and analysis

An online questionnaire with open-ended questions was used. The questions were used as a guide for the creation of the categories that emerged from the data. Trustworthiness was ensured since an independent researcher also analysed the responses and checked the identified categories of the responses and thick descriptions were used. According to Merriam (2009: 43), a thick description 'means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated'.

The questionnaire comprised the following questions:

- *Do you employ multimodal teaching strategies in your teaching? For yes and no, please explain.*

- *Do you employ multimodal assessment tasks? For yes and no, please explain.*

- *What do you think are the potential benefits of multimodal teaching strategies?*

- *What do you think are the potential benefits of multimodal assessment tasks?*

- *Currently, the main assessment in academic literacy modules is academic writing, mainly essays. Do you think that essays are still the best way to assess students? Why? Please explain in detail.*

- *Instead of essays, what other activities/types of assessment could be made available to students?*

- *Are your classes more teacher-centred or more student-centred? Please explain.*

- *Should students contribute to content creation? Why? / Why not?*

- *Should students have a choice in how their academic literacy is assessed? Why? / Why not?*

RESULTS

Multimodal composition pedagogy

In the online questionnaire, nine of the lecturers indicated that they employ multimodal teaching strategies (Figure 1). However, this does not translate to multimodal assessments (Figure 2) where only four of the lecturers used multimodal assessment tasks. This corresponds with what was found in the literature review where lecturers use multimodal teaching strategies but not multimodal assessment tasks.
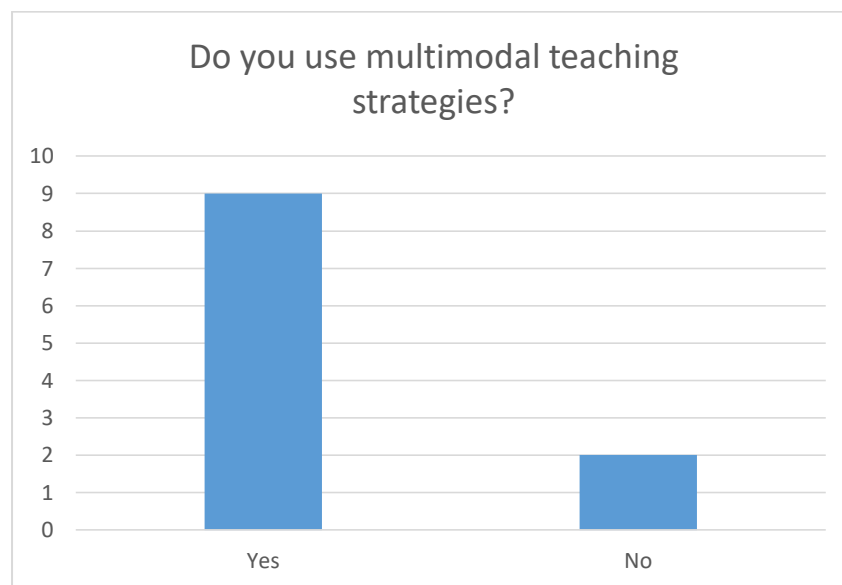

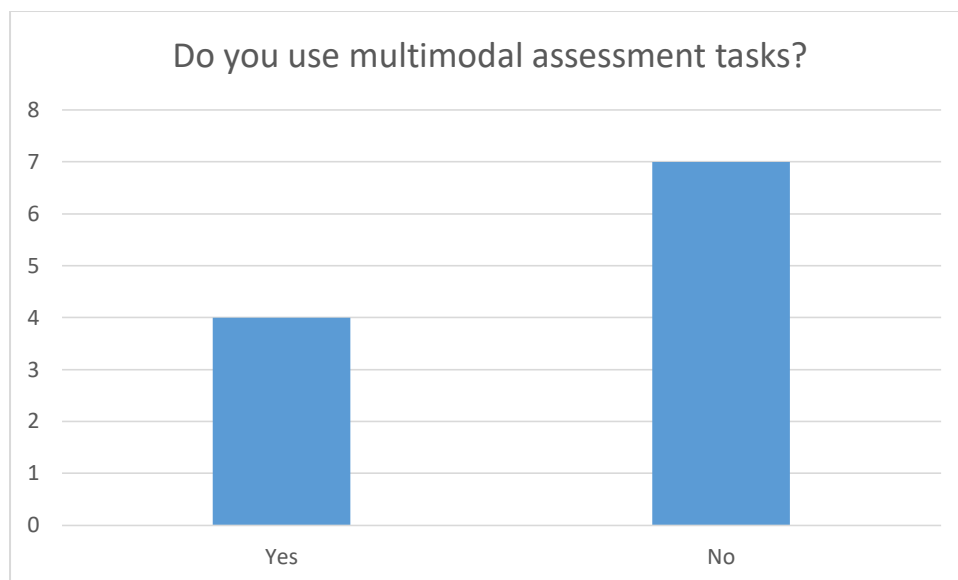**Figure 1: Use of multimodal strategies**

Figure 2: Use of multimodal assessment tasks

As was seen in the literature review, there are many challenges and affordances associated with multimodal composition pedagogy. These are also reflected in the responses from the lecturers.

One of the benefits of multimodal composition identified by a lecturer includes that multimodal teaching strategies attend to students' varying individual needs. Another lecturer indicated that multimodal assessment tasks also provided students with opportunities to acquire different skillsets and accommodated students with different learning styles. Two lecturers also mentioned that students were more involved and were better prepared for their future careers. Student autonomy was also highlighted by three lecturers as a benefit of using multimodal teaching strategies. Further benefits identified by the lecturers include student engagement, interactivity, inclusivity, student performance, motivation and even entertainment.

One of the affordances of employing multimodal assessment tasks is that these tasks create a platform for greater interaction with learning material and resources. According to one lecturer, multimodal assessment tasks allow for more flexibility, as students learn and do assessments at their own pace and have more options available to them.

One of the main challenges that one of the lecturers identified was that they did not know how to implement multimodal composition pedagogy. Another lecturer stated that more time should be spent on the essay and that they did not have enough time for anything else.

In Table 1, an overview of the affordances and challenges of multimodal composition pedagogy as identified by the lecturers and supportive quotes are provided.

AFFORDANCES	SUPPORTIVE QUOTES FROM THE DATA
Addresses individual student needs	*It creates a diverse teaching and learning environment to accommodate different types of learning strategies for different students.* *Students with all learning styles will be included. At the moment, we have students who can express themselves very well verbally or by means of technology. I feel that we are focusing too much on traditional styles, such as submitting a written piece of information or completing a test of some kind. We are not working with what the students bring to the table, and in so doing, I believe that we are working harder instead of smarter and forcing students to adapt into(sic) what the higher education system expects too quickly and without proper scaffolding.* *Different students, different learning styles, different ways of expressing yourself. Some students suck(sic) at performing under pressure, and some really can't read or reason properly while they are under pressure. Allowing some alternatives will allow these students to also perform on the level that they are supposed to and can.*
Prepares students for future careers	*… it mimics the expanded world the students live in, which includes significant use of online resources, including content and communication, alongside physical interactions. It, therefore, prepares students better for their eventual career path.* *… it produces students that are well-rounded and set for future endeavours.*
Promotes student autonomy	*Can make students more independent and in control of their learning.*
Promotes student engagement and interactivity	*It potentially increases engagement by making learning fun and interactive and it appeals to this generation of students.* *It can potentially engage students more than traditional teaching strategies would, and as a result, student performance may improve*
Promotes student inclusivity	*I believe that the process of learning is improved, and that the learning environment becomes more inclusive (attracts students of all learning types) if one employs multimodal learning*
Enhances enjoyment in learning	*Students are more active, more engaged, positive and even more open to learning. Multimodal teaching is hard work, but I think it brings us back to what learning is supposed to be – fun and entertaining.* *I also believe that a teacher/lecturer should often not only teach, but also entertain and make use of a variety of methods in order to stimulate active learning in class.*
CHALLENGES	SUPPORTIVE QUOTES FROM THE DATA
Lack of knowledge and training	*To be honest – I wouldn't know where or how to begin…*
Time constraints	*I actually think there is not enough focus on developing the essay because of all the other things we have to fit in. There is no time for anything else.*

Table 1: Affordances and challenges of multimodal pedagogy

Traditional essays vs multimodal compositions

Views on the question of whether essays are still the best way to assess students' academic literacy varied. Seven of the lecturers felt that essays should still be used as the main means of assessing students, as they test most of the students' combined acquired skills. One lecturer mentioned that there should be no other alternatives to essays.

However, four lecturers felt that more and different modalities had to be considered. The lecturers who believed that multimodal assessments could be used instead of essays proposed the following alternatives: videos, oral presentations and posters.
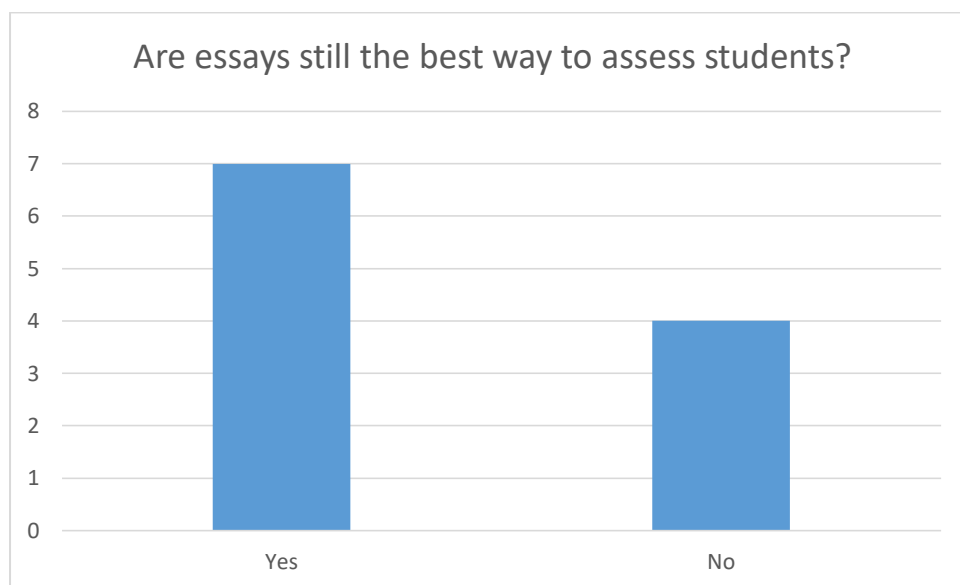
Are essays still the best way to assess students?

8	
7	██
6	██
5	██
4	██ ██
3	██ ██
2	██ ██
1	██ ██
0	
	Yes No

Figure 3: Traditional essays vs multimodal compositions

Table 2 Reflects some of the quotes of the lecturers relating to the use of traditional essays and multimodal compositions.

Traditional essays	*Yes, because they are able to test many skills at the same time. It is hard to test argumentation and more advanced writing skills in shorter written assignments. This is the most difficult and most valuable assessment.*
	Yes, it assesses most of the abstract and practical skills students need to function effectively in an academic environment, such as finding academic sources, thinking critically about concepts and formulating arguments.
	Yes. They help us assess a range of things in students' writing from composition to structure, to argument to referencing and a lot more that are the essence of this module and necessary for students.
	I don't think essays should be replaced,
	I actually think there is not enough focus on developing the essay because of all the other things we have to fit in.
Multimodal compositions	*Writing isn't the only way of presenting information anymore; one could think of presenting findings in a video or a verbal presentation (these*

	need also structure and one could test academic language as well). *I think the essay needs to be shortened and combined with assessments which*(sic) *incorporate other types of academic skills, like introductory/rudimentary data -collection, analysis and reporting, as well as presentation skills via digital media.* *The essay is efficient at developing logical and critical thinking, but many students find it an unnatural avenue for demonstrating these skills. I feel that it should be supplemented with other means of demonstrating these skills.* *I think one should rather think about the approach and not the end product. I have always been partial to a staggered approach to writing, but I feel that we are excluding students with certain learning styles. Despite the fact that a written essay that adheres to academic standards remains the most important end product, I believe that students will find it better to ease into writing essays if the approach includes kinaesthetic, visual and audio learning - at least initially.* *I don't believe that we should step away from essay writing entirely. But the process of 'getting there' can be enhanced and expanded to include different learning styles of individual students. If they thus want to make use of a creative video or collage of some sort to plan their essay, or even use that as initial steps to write an introduction and conclusion, then why are we stopping them?*

Table 2: Traditional essays vs multimodal compositions

Student agency and voice

Seven of the lecturers indicated that they considered their teaching to be student-centred (Figure 4). However, six of the lecturers stated that students should not play a role in nor contribute to content creation (Figure 5). Some of their reasons included that students were not experts; that first-year students, especially, had very limited knowledge and that they still had to master the material. One lecturer felt quite strongly that students should not contribute. Five of the lecturers did see the value of including the student voice in content creation. One lecturer indicated that students should be included but believed it should be moderated closely.
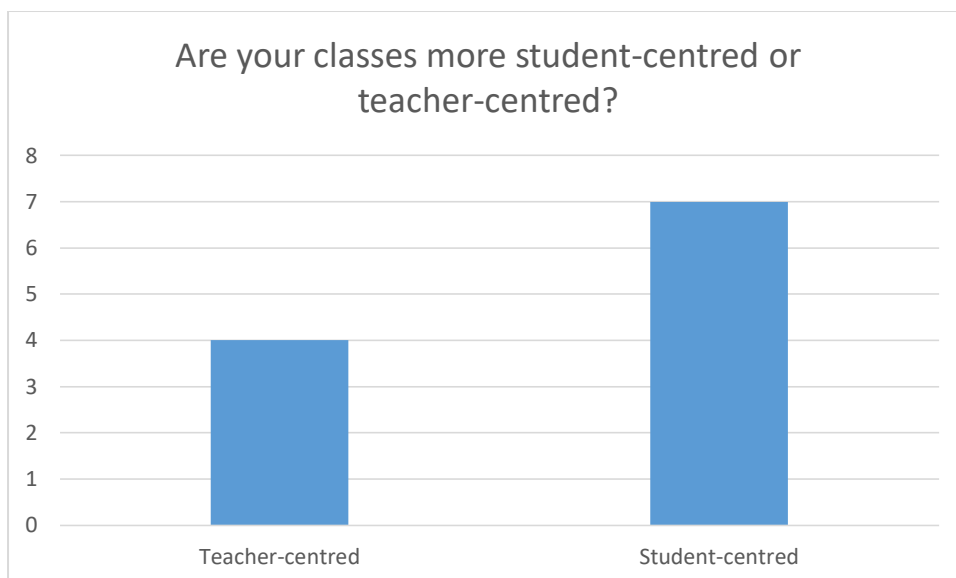
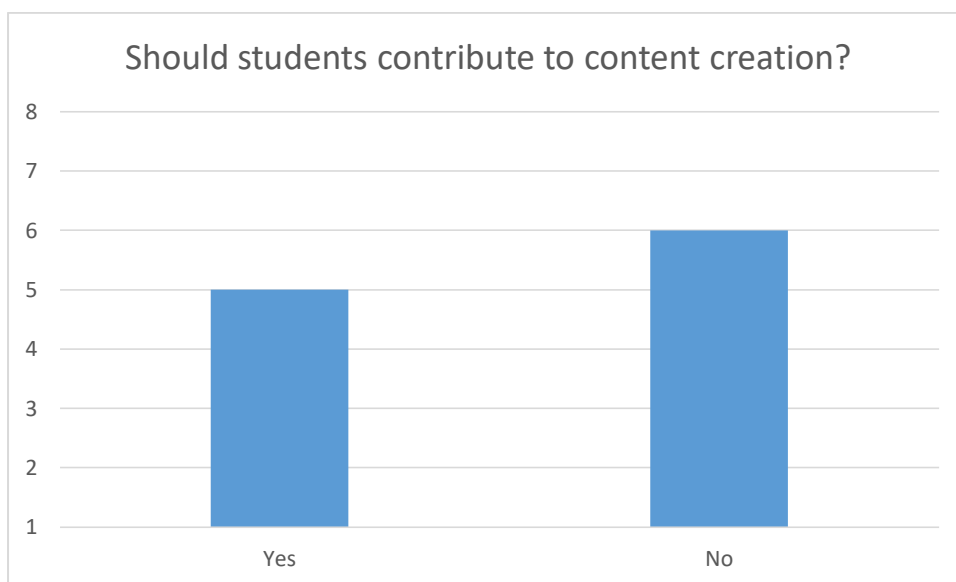**Figure 4: Student-centred vs teacher-centred**

Figure 5: Student contribution to content creation

Six of the lecturers felt that students should not be involved in having a say in their assessments. Three lecturers stated that students were not experts at assessment and were concerned about standards.

In contrast, five of the lecturers believed students should have a choice in how their academic literacy is assessed. Some of the advantages that students gained from having a choice in their academic literacy assessments included greater flexibility and taking responsibility for their own learning processes. One lecturer stated that having a choice in their assessment encouraged a greater sense of ownership among students. Regarding the relevancy of the module, one lecturer stated that multimodal alternatives give students with different learning styles an opportunity to perform well.
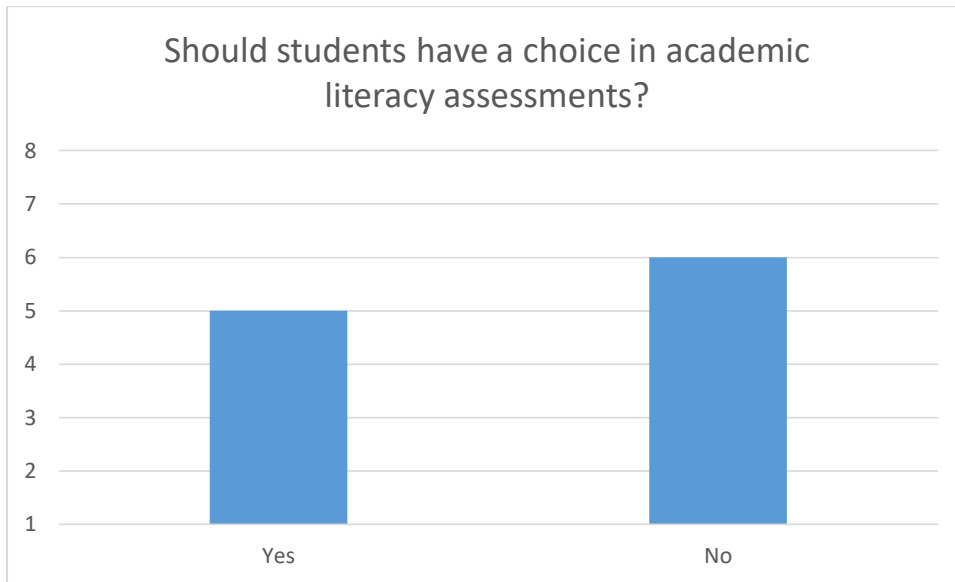
Figure 6: Student choice in academic literacy assessments

Table 3 Presents quotes for and against student voice and choice as identified by the lecturers.

Against student voice and choice	*I do not think so ... it would defeat the whole purpose of education: leading not yet adults to [an]acceptable state of adulthood, and good citizenry in a given society- how then cannot-yet [sic] adults determine what they need to learn…*
	Our students possess no knowledge of assessment. They do not know what is best for them in this regard, so I don't think so. It's a nice ideal, but it won't work in our context, also because we have enormous groups of students.
	Only in terms of the type of feedback they would like to have on assessments, not the assessments themselves, as there has to be a standard to uphold.
For student voice and choice	*I believe that I have a good more student-centred approach. Whenever I get the chance, I rather work with what the students bring to the table and work with them towards the outcomes, than starting with the outcomes and forcing the students to adapt accordingly.*
	It is proposed in the literature that students should have a voice regarding curriculum.
	It could be an extra learning opportunity, so yes.
	Yes, but it should be moderated closely. By contributing content, students become more involved and autonomous in terms of their learning.
	Yes, or at least to some degree. In that way, you know that you are

	teaching according to their needs, and you can allow their own needs to meet the outcomes of the module. *Co-responsibility have been shown to encourage the development of autonomy in students. Feeling a greater sense of ownership, is also conducive to keeping the students more engaged with the module content. Yes. It will challenge them and make them understand concepts better and force them to participate.* *Since the academic lecturers mostly aren't subject experts in the students' fields, it can also help to make our assessments more relevant.*

Table 3: Student voice and choice

DISCUSSION

From the empirical data, it seems that many of the lecturers realised the value of multimodal composition pedagogy to some extent. The most prominent affordances found in the data include that it addresses individual student needs. Furthermore, it prepares students for future careers and promotes student autonomy, engagement, inclusivity and interactivity. Moreover, it also enhances enjoyment and motivation in learning. All these affordances are valuable for student success in the 21st century and an attempt should be made by lecturers to include multimodal content and assessments in academic literacy modules.

One of the challenges of multimodal composition pedagogy highlighted by lecturers is a lack of knowledge and training. Another concern raised is time constraints. These are very important issues that need to be discussed and addressed by all relevant stakeholders, including management and most importantly, the students.

Nine of the lecturers use multimodal pedagogy for teaching purposes. This is in line with what Hafner and Ho (2020) found in their study. However, for summative assessment purposes, seven of the lecturers still favour the traditional essay. This could become problematic, as Weeks (2018) states that 'when teaching practices are themselves using multimodality, it would seem odd to revert to traditional essay writing to assess a course'.

Student agency and voice were also highlighted in the literature and it is evident that some lecturers did see the advantages and importance of including the student voice in teaching, learning and assessment discussions. Still, many of the lecturers were not convinced that students should provide input in this regard. Seven of the lecturers claimed that their teaching is student-centred. However, six of the lecturers did not feel that students should be able to contribute to content creation or have a say in their own academic literacy assessments. With more knowledge and training, lecturers might be convinced to include the student voice and choice in curriculum planning in academic literacy modules.

There are plainly multiple views on whether multimodal pedagogy should be implemented and whether students should also have a say in their education. What is important is that a dialogue that can be used to inform change has been started. In the following section, some recommendations are suggested that can be implemented in academic literacy modules.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the concerns the lecturers raised, the following recommendations are made.

Two lecturers indicated that they already had a full curriculum and did not have time to incorporate multimodal composition assessments as well. Grigoryan (2018: 211) proposes that lecturers consider reducing text-based assessments to have more time to focus on multimodal composition assessments. Lecturers expressed that they did not know how they would assess multimodal assessments. Some also stated that they would have liked to but were not sure if they could implement multimodal assessment. For lecturers struggling with technology, training and close collaboration with computer literacy colleagues could be a possible solution.

Lecturers cannot change curricula by themselves. Institutional open discussions, training and support are necessary to support lecturers (Sabatino & Blevins, 2018: 125). Lopez-Gil and Molina-Natera (2018: 216) recommend that '[multimodality] must be cultivated in the university, as a space that promotes a critical understanding of the world and contributes to the development of tools that facilitate communication, disciplinary discourses, learning, and citizen participation'.

Another recommendation is that all lecturers should involve students to help compose multimodal content and have provide input into assessment criteria with the support of their peers and their lecturers; students should become 'responsible partners', 'prosumers' and 'co-creators of knowledge' (Anderson, 2003; Dawson, Cook & Lambton, 2014; Weeks, 2018). Students could, for example, contribute towards choosing modalities, topics and characteristics on grading rubrics.

Finally, more than a paradigm shift in terms of composition pedagogy is necessary. According to Gulecoglu (2018: 120), a change in lecturers' attitudes towards multimodal composition is pivotal to supporting students in the 21st century.

It is, therefore, recommended that academic literacy lecturers truly listen to their students regarding the students' needs. Lecturers should also not underestimate what students can contribute. Additionally, lecturers should consider professional development and training regarding multimodal composition pedagogy. Furthermore, as is evident from the literature review and the empirical data from this study that multimodal composition pedagogy has many affordances. Therefore, academic literacy lecturers should reach out to management, faculties and other academic literacy lecturers locally and across the world to determine ways to support students and themselves in incorporating and applying multimodal composition pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

If traditional text-based composition pedagogy and assessments such as essays are viewed as the primary and sometimes, only, modality for composing knowledge in academic literacy modules, 'we usurp these rights and responsibilities on several important intellectual and social dimensions, and, unwittingly, limit students' sense of rhetorical agency to the bandwidth of our own interests and imaginations' (Selfe, 2009: 618).

Thus, from a review of the literature and the empirical data, a paradigm shift from traditional and monomodal to multimodal composition pedagogy in academic literacy modules seems

long overdue. The implementation of multimodal alternatives to the traditional essay is often met with resistance and even fear (Bailie, 2013). Based on the findings, I propose that multimodal composition pedagogy should be regarded as truly student-centred in that it supports students and empowers them to use multiple semiotic modes to access, process, create and share academic knowledge for educational purposes in the 21st century. It also prepares students for their future careers.

Paradigm shifts are not always easy (Hairston, 1082: 77). They are often uncomfortable, difficult, disruptive and take time to be embraced and implemented by the relevant stakeholders. According to Zawilski (2011: 2), 'bridges must be built combining the principles of rhetoric with the new media of the coming decades'. Traditional print-based writing should not be totally replaced, but other modes of composition should be expanded, extended and explored (Baldwin, 2016: 110; Zawilski, 2011). We should at least consider some alternatives and provide students with choices and voices so that all students can achieve mastery.

It is time to 'update writing instruction' (Sims, 2019) by providing students with appropriate and relevant composition instruction and opportunities to be successful in the digital age. Just like Baldwin (2016:25-26), this researcher 'feels an obligation to those who are fighting to succeed in a culture of learning that was designed without them in mind. I view new media as a vehicle for positive and potentially radical change in writing instruction and writing assessment'.

Thus, to stay relevant and to support students with academic composition, especially in the digital age, lecturers should embrace and encourage student voices and choices by providing multimodal composition alternatives in academic literacy modules.

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