

The Multimodality of Neoliberalism in Local and Global ELT Textbooks: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Importing neoliberalism concepts into non-Western contexts is unavoidable in the context of globalisation. To properly understand the multimodality that shapes neoliberalism in local and global ELT textbooks, more research is required. The present study reviews 49 journal articles and books on the multimodality of neoliberalism in local and global ELT textbooks from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Using the most current version of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, a qualitative thematic analysis was employed to code the data into five major themes related to neoliberalism: (1) entrepreneurial subjectivity, (2) English as economic capital, (3) neoliberal education policy in the Global South, (4) ideological representation through language, and (5) moral narratives associated with national identity. Meanwhile, the multimodality frameworks emphasise five analytical foci: (1) multimodal social semiotic analysis; (2) multimodal critical discourse analysis; (3) visual grammar and intercultural representation; (4) multimodality in teaching and learning; and (5) representation and cultural bias in images. These findings reveal the importance of multimodal methods for examining educational texts, emphasising how ideological influences operate through visuals and text and showing that situating globalisation within local cultures is critical. This review synthesises and maps existing multimodal research on neoliberalism in ELT textbooks across local and global contexts, highlights thematic gaps and underexplored regions and methods for future inquiry, and suggests that educators and policymakers should critically assess and redesign ELT textbook content and multimodal materials to mitigate neoliberal messaging and better align language education with local cultural values and equitable learning goals.

Keywords: Multimodality; Neoliberalism; ELT local and global textbooks; Systematic Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks, as instruments for disseminating the global lingua franca, frequently transmit ideological and neoliberal values. These textbooks present English as a pathway to financial success, social mobility, and participation in the global market (Bori, 2020; Copley, 2018; Jalalian Daghigh & Abdul Rahim, 2021). Existing research demonstrates that ELT materials often reinforce neoliberal principles, including competition, productivity, individualism, and consumerism. Learners are depicted as entrepreneurs responsible for their own success within a market-driven context (Bori, 2021; Nizamani & Shah, 2024; Shah et al., 2024). However, most studies have concentrated on textual content or general frameworks, providing limited insight into

how these ideologies are constructed through multimodality. Multimodality involves the integration of language, visuals, sound, and spatial organisation in meaning-making (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This approach has shaped the design and user experience of ELT resources. Contemporary textbooks employ colourful images, multimedia, and structured layouts to enhance learner engagement and communicate ideological messages (Ahmadian & Yazdani, 2013; Genesee & Hamayan, 2016).

Weninger (2020) argues that neoliberalism in ELT is evident in both discourse and content delivery through multimodal design. This underscores the necessity of analysing how visual grammar, layout, and interactions between modes construct economically driven identities, such as the entrepreneurial learner and the 'global citizen as human capital.' While research interest in multimodality for learning and motivation is increasing (e.g. Dzekoe, 2017; Fernández-Fontecha et al., 2019; Gheisari & Akbari, 2022; Jiang, 2018; Nizamani & Shah, 2024), few studies have examined how sequencing and multimodal elements in ELT textbooks naturalise neoliberal rationalities.

The localisation of neoliberalism in ELT textbooks introduces additional complexity. In F. V. Lim et al. (2022) demonstrate that ideologies are not merely imported but are adapted through local cultural beliefs, nationalist narratives, and institutional frameworks, resulting in hybrid, context-specific forms. Global ELT textbooks designed for international markets frequently project Western-centric perspectives and global capitalist values. Although locally produced textbooks attempt to incorporate national and cultural traditions, many continue to reflect neoliberal discourses (Agustina & Kencana, 2023; Jalalian Daghigh & Abdul Rahim, 2021). Consequently, multimodal features in ELT materials do not circulate neutrally. These features facilitate the blending of global market logics with local identities, rendering neoliberal assumptions both cosmopolitan and locally relevant.

The intersection of multimodality, namely the use of text, images, layout, and design, and neoliberalism, understood as market-oriented policies and rationalities, is significant because it demonstrates that neoliberal ideas are embedded not only in language but also in visual and spatial elements. This integration serves to naturalise and legitimise these rationalities within educational materials. Methodologically, multimodality necessitates analysis beyond text, focusing on how visual grammar, spatial organisation, and intermodal patterns construct economically driven identities, such as the entrepreneurial learner and the global citizen as human capital. Ideologically, this suggests that neoliberalism operates pervasively and routinely. ELT textbooks and digital resources appeal to learners' aspirations through coordinated visuals that emphasise success, professionalism, and mobility (Weninger, 2020). These materials frame language learning as a market transaction, positioning identities as forms of human capital, defined as the economic value of an individual's skills and knowledge (Shah et al., 2024). Consequently, neoliberal assumptions become increasingly difficult to challenge within classrooms and curricula.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks are widely recognised as vehicles for neoliberal values, presenting English as a pathway to economic advancement, social mobility, and participation in the global market. These materials consistently depict learners as entrepreneurial, self-regulating individuals aligned with market-oriented logics. Existing research (Bori, 2021; Jalalian Daghigh & Abdul Rahim, 2021; Nizamani & Shah, 2024; Shah et al., 2024) has primarily examined verbal and textual content, with limited attention to multimodal design elements such as visuals, layout, sequencing, and other semiotic resources that contribute to the construction and

normalisation of neoliberal ideologies. Recent research, such as Machin et al. (2026), which utilised multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to investigate ELT textbooks as ideological instruments, found that integrating images, layout, and language within socio-political and economic contexts reveals the roles these texts play in reproducing or challenging dominant social orders. By situating textbook content within the societies that produce and use it, MDA elucidates how textbooks participate in broader processes of representation, power, and ideology.

Although research in multimodality is expanding, it predominantly focuses on motivational or pedagogical aspects and seldom examines how design features shape neoliberal identities and economic rationalities. As a result, the mechanisms by which ideology is reproduced within ELT remain insufficiently understood. This gap obscures how multimodal affordances embed market logics into everyday learning materials and classroom practices. A systematic, cross-modal, comparative synthesis is required to map neoliberalism across local and global ELT textbooks. In the absence of thematic, cross-contextual analysis, educators and policymakers lack robust evidence to assess whether and how localisation alters or reinforces global neoliberal frameworks. This limitation constrains efforts to redesign materials that reflect local cultures and promote equitable pedagogical objectives. Addressing this gap is essential, as rigorous multimodal comparison can clarify how ELT resources normalise neoliberal rationalities and inform curricular and material reform.

Accordingly, this systematic literature review synthesises research on neoliberalism in ELT textbooks through a multimodal critical discourse analysis framework. This study is guided by the following research questions: RQ1: How were neoliberal frameworks utilised in the analysis of local and global ELT textbooks in the reviewed studies? RQ2: How were multimodality frameworks applied in the analysis of local and global ELT textbooks in the reviewed studies?

MULTIMODALITY

Rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), multimodal analysis highlights how semiotic resources serve representational, interactive, and compositional functions in meaning-making (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Machin and Mayr (2023) further define multimodal discourse analysis as the study of how language, images, and other modalities interact to shape discourse.

Developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), multimodality extends discourse analysis to incorporate multiple modes of communication, such as text, visuals, layout, and design. The theory by Kress and Van Leeuwen posits that meaning making in educational materials is inherently multimodal, with visual elements playing a significant role in shaping cultural and ideological messages. Multimodality involves analysing how visual resources relate to linguistic content to convey cultural representations (Saidu & Rajandran, 2024). There are several key constructs in multimodality: (1) relationship of modes, which refers to how text and visuals relate to communicate meaning; (2) visual markers, which are an analysis of images, layout, and design elements that convey neoliberal and cultural ideologies; and (3) text-Image relationship, which explains how visual and language features align or contrast to reinforce ideological messages (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Visual markers: analysis of images, layout, and design that convey neoliberalism in ELT textbooks. Linguistic features: analysis of parts of speech, grammar, vocabulary, modality and agency that represent neoliberalism in ELT textbooks (Machin & Mayr, 2023).

Recent studies have shown that multimodality, not only text but also images, shapes neoliberalism in ELT textbooks. Gheisari and Akbari (2022) analysed social and cultural representations in *Prospect* (a local Iranian textbook) and *Interchange* (a global series) using Halliday's (2009) social semiotics, Van Leeuwen's (2005) visual semiotics, Yassine's (2014) Social Semiotic Multimodal Approach to the Analysis of texts, and the cultural model of Cortazzi and Jin (1999). Their findings indicate that *Prospect* predominantly represents Iranian values and national identity and contains minimal content addressing Western or global intercultural issues. On the contrary, *Interchange* contains much more Western cultural material and presents American and European lifestyles as dominant while internationally subordinating and selectively including other cultures. This indicates that local materials tend to reinforce Western traditions while global texts emphasise Western norms.

In addition, F. V. Lim et al. (2022) carried out a systematic review of 98 studies based on the New London Group's (1996) multiliteracies framework and social semiotics (Kress, 2009; Van Leeuwen, 2017). Kress and van Leeuwen identified five priorities for taking a pedagogy of multiliteracies framework. Namely, 1) building on learners lived experiences; 2) taking a critical and culturally sustaining pedagogy; 3) teaching a shared metalanguage; 4) affect in learning; and 5) assessment. The review adds to the understanding that learners need to be taught the cultural and ideological implications of different modes of communication so that they can critically engage with the discourses of globalisation. Earlier, Weninger's (2020) study examined how ELT textbooks implied culture, ideological content, and power. Suggests that some texts and images may promote certain cultural norms and values for students. Weninger also argued that the ideological content of the textbooks affected students. This study illustrates that ELT textbooks contain the power of integrating texts and visuals that influence and shape students' cultural and power perspectives.

Research on multimodality by Fernández-Fontecha et al. (2019) found that multimodal resources enhance students' ability to connect visual thinking with linguistic comprehension, leading to improved learning outcomes. Similarly, J. Lim and Polio (2020) demonstrated that integrating multimodal elements, such as images and interactive activities, can foster more dynamic engagement and retention among language learners. Multimodality in ELT has demonstrated its effectiveness in promoting cognitive processing, motivation, and communicative competence (Jiang, 2018). Cimasko and Ying (2017) extended this approach to ELT by incorporating multimodal audio-visual tasks, such as video production, into language instruction. Their findings indicated that students engaged more deeply with the content, improving both linguistic and critical thinking skills.

In addition, Dzekoe (2017) examined the use of multimodal posters in second language writing classes. The study revealed that posters, as a multimodal tool, significantly improved students' written fluency and accuracy by encouraging them to synthesise visual and language features. This aligns with Fernández-Fontecha et al.'s findings, which suggest that multimodal frameworks provide students with alternative ways to process and express information. One notable case study by Ginsberg (2015) explored the use of multimodal resources in a mathematics classroom to improve students' conceptual understanding. While this study was outside the ELT context, it highlighted the pedagogical benefits of combining visual and language features to enhance learners' cognitive engagement.

While previous studies (Cimasko & Ying, 2017; Dzekoe, 2017; Fernández-Fontecha et al., 2019; Gheisari & Akbari, 2022; Ginsberg, 2015; Jiang, 2018; F. V. Lim et al., 2022; J. Lim & Polio, 2020; Weninger, 2020) have examined multimodality, power, ideology, and pedagogy in

ELT textbooks, there has yet to be a systematic review synthesising these areas within the existing literature.. To address this gap, the present study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of research on multimodality and neoliberalism in local and global ELT textbooks.

METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines by Page et al. (2020). An SLR utilises explicit, accountable, and rigorous methods to identify, appraise, and synthesise all relevant studies addressing a specified research question (Gough et al., 2017). The review process followed the three PRISMA phases: identification, screening, and inclusion (see Figure 1), which enhanced the transparency, traceability, and credibility of the evidence synthesis. The initial pool of 65 studies was systematically reduced to 49 included articles, with exclusions based on explicit criteria, including duplication, access limitations, and indexing requirements. This approach minimised selection bias and ensured that only rigorously sourced, Scopus-indexed, and accessible studies were incorporated into the final synthesis. The PRISMA flow diagram delineates the procedural steps and provides a methodological foundation for the resulting corpus, thereby informing the study's conclusions.

This study used deductive thematic analysis, which is a theory-driven method in which themes are identified and organised using existing theoretical frameworks rather than relying solely on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Themes were theoretically derived and subsequently refined through systematic synthesis of the reviewed studies. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) examined studies on the multimodal representation of neoliberalism in local and global ELT textbooks published between 2016 and 2025. Articles were retrieved from the Scopus and Web of Science databases to ensure methodological rigour and the inclusion of high-quality, peer-reviewed research. The databases' comprehensive coverage and advanced search capabilities facilitate a transparent and reproducible selection process that minimises bias. Restricting the review to the period 2016–2025 enables synthesis of recent, influential, and policy-relevant research, thereby accurately representing the latest developments in the field.

The review followed the PRISMA framework proposed by Page et al. (2020) to ensure a transparent and systematic review process. The dataset comprised empirical studies that explicitly applied multimodal or neoliberalism-informed perspectives to the analysis of local and global English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks. The PRISMA framework guided the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of relevant studies, thereby enhancing the transparency, rigour, and reproducibility of the review. Following the selection of articles, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted. The included studies were coded according to five principal themes of neoliberalism, which served as the analytical framework for examining multimodal features in ELT textbooks. These themes guided the analysis of how linguistic, visual, and layout resources construct, reinforce, or challenge neoliberal ideologies. Integrating thematic and multimodal analyses enabled a coherent and systematic synthesis of the reviewed literature.

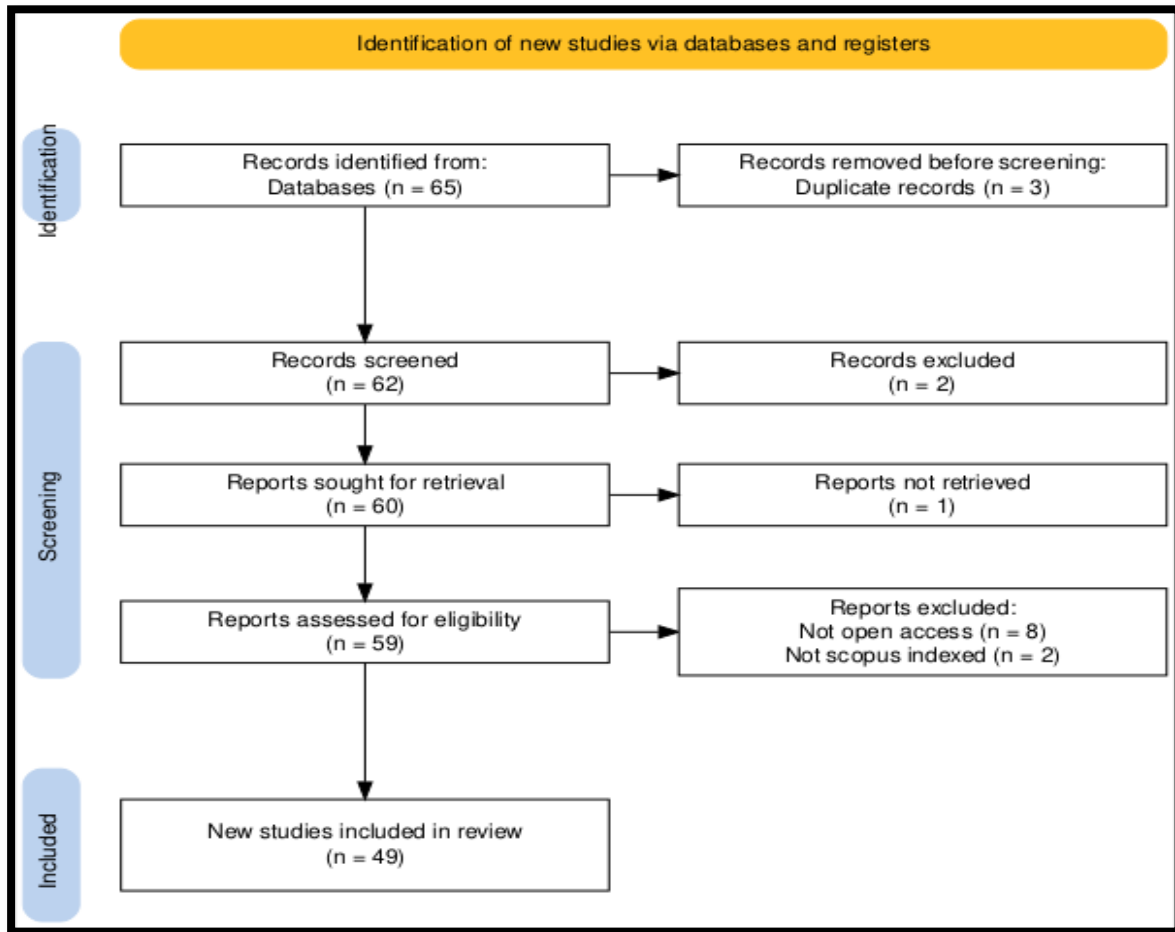


FIGURE 1. PRISMA Diagram of Data Collection

Results were filtered first by title and abstract. Relevant articles underwent full-text screening as per the inclusion criteria. A PRISMA flow chart showing the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion processes is available in the Results section.

DATA COLLECTION

The current study identified reputable journals from which papers on multimodality and neoliberalism of ELT global and local textbooks were selected for inclusion. As shown in Figure 1, 49 articles from Scopus and Web of Science platforms were selected.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria to guide the article selection process are as follows:

Inclusion criteria:

- Articles published between 2016 and 2025.
- Articles published in English.
- Articles reporting empirical studies, case studies, or qualitative studies published in peer-reviewed journals and book chapters.
- Books published by Springer, Sage Press

Exclusion Criteria:

- Published research without open access
- Non-indexed in Scopus or Web of Science
- Non-English articles

SEARCH STRATEGY

The following databases were searched: Scopus and Web of Science. Key vocabulary used included the following combinations:

("Multimodal analysis" OR "multimodality" OR "Multimodal discourse analysis")
("Neoliberalism" OR "globalisation" OR "neoliberal values" OR "ideology") AND
("ELT textbook" OR "EFL textbook" OR "English textbook") AND
("Local" OR "locally published" OR "local published")
("Global" OR "international" OR "internationally published" OR "imported")

DATA ANALYSIS

A table was created to extract the relevant data, which included:

- Author(s), publication year, country
- Research design (qualitative, multimodal discourse analysis)
- Theoretical frameworks (e.g., critical discourse analysis)
- Neoliberalism framework (e.g Harvey)
- Multimodal frameworks (e.g., Kress & van Leeuwen, Bezemer)

Extracted data were analysed using themes that looked for prominent signifying structures within local and global textbooks, specifically focused on how these aspects were portrayed visually and spatially organised.

RESULTS

The following section presents a detailed analysis of the reviewed 49 articles according to the two research questions: RQ1: How was the neoliberalism framework employed in local and global ELT textbooks in the reviewed studies?

Table 1 below presents two principal analytical frameworks employed in the reviewed ELT textbook studies: neoliberalism and multimodality. The neoliberalism framework interrogates how textbooks instantiate market-oriented ideologies by constructing entrepreneurial subjectivities, articulating English as a form of economic capital, and reflecting neoliberal education policies and curricular reforms in Global South contexts; it also employs critical discourse analysis to expose ideological representations and moral narratives that align national identity with economic productivity. The multimodality framework examines meaning-making across verbal, visual, and spatial semiotic resources—utilising social semiotic multimodal analysis and multimodal critical discourse analysis to reveal ideological effects enacted through mode interactions, applying visual grammar to assess intercultural representation, and considering pedagogical implications and instances of cultural bias in imagery that affect visibility, stereotyping, and multimodal literacy development.

TABLE 1. Results of The Reviewed Studies

Research Questions	Results
1. Neoliberalism Framework used in local and global ELT textbooks in the reviewed studies	Entrepreneurial Subjectivity and the Neoliberal Self English as Economic Capital Neoliberal Education Policy and Curriculum in the Global South Critical Discourse Analysis and Ideological Representation Moral Narratives and National Identity
2. Multimodality Frameworks used in local and global ELT textbooks in the reviewed studies	Social Semiotic Multimodal Analysis (SSMA) Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) Visual Grammar and Intercultural Understanding Multimodality in Teaching and Learning Representation and Cultural Bias in Images

RESULT OF RQ. 1: HOW WERE NEOLIBERAL FRAMEWORKS USED IN THE ANALYSIS OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL ELT TEXTBOOKS IN THE REVIEWED STUDIES?

The following Table 2 presents the neoliberal frameworks employed in local and global ELT textbooks identified across the reviewed studies. The thematic analysis showed five main themes, which are (1) entrepreneurial subjectivity, (2) English as economic capital, (3) neoliberal education policy in the Global South, (4) ideological representation through language, and (5) moral narratives linked to national identity.

TABLE 2. Neoliberalism Framework of the Reviewed Studies

No.	Neoliberalism Framework	The reviewed studies
1.	Ball (2003)	Koo (2017)
2.	Ball (2009)	Carr (2019)
	Ball (2012)	Romero (2022)
3.	Block and Grey (2012, 2018)	Xiong and Yuan (2018). Bori and Petanović (2016); Chun (2017); He and Buripakdi (2022); Boruah and Mohanty (2022)
4.	Bourdieu (1991)	Nizamani and Shah (2024)
5.	Copley (2018)	R'boul (2022)
6.	Connel and Dados (2014)	Tavares (2022)
7.	Giroux (2004, 2015)	Gates (2021) and Down et al. (2019)
8.	Gray (2012)	Bori (2018)
9.	Harvey (2007)	Abdullah Al Jumiah (2016); Down et al. (2019); Filipovic (2020); Gyamera and Burke (2018); He and Buripakdi (2022); Jean-Pierre, 2019; Shah, et al. (2024); Canh (2022); Sen (2020); Su (2022); Jalalian Daghigh, et al (2022); Romero (2022); Haidar et al. (2022); Jalalian Daghigh, et al (2022)
10.	Harvey (2007)	Gates (2021)
11.	Harvey (2007)	Maistry and David (2018)
12.	Holborow (2012)	Xiong and Yuan (2018). Bori and Petanović (2016); He and Buripakdi (2022); Boruah and Mohanty (2022)
13.	Holborow (2015)	Ali and Hamid (2022)
14.	Hursh (2007)	Carr (2019)
15.	Lemke (2002)	Wahyuto and Nurkamto (2022)
16.	Lipman (2011)	Abdullah Al Jumiah (2016). Down et al. (2019)
17.	Phelan (2014)	Jacobson and Bach (2022)
18.	Reisigl and Wodak (2014)	Savski (2022)
19.	Van Dijk (2001)	Barter (2016)

The reviewed studies analyse English language textbooks through the lens of neoliberalism, emphasising individualism, competition, and success from a market-driven perspective. These frameworks have been developed by prominent scholars such as Harvey (2007), Ball (2003, 2009,

2012), Giroux (2004, 2015), Holborow (2012, 2015), and Bourdieu (1991). Each framework illustrates how ELT materials promote values associated with neoliberal ideologies, exemplifying personal responsibility, consumerism, and global competition. For instance, Harvey's work (2007) is cited extensively in studies examining the impact of economics on education. Ball's policy (2003, 2009, 2012) focuses on research to explain how neoliberalism manifests itself in educational policy and school reform. Holborow's (2012, 2015) contributions have helped us understand the portrayal of English as an economic asset.

These frameworks are applied in diverse contexts, from policy review in the Global South to teaching materials in Europe and Asia. With these frameworks, researchers show how textbooks enable students to internalise not only the English language but also notions of success, identity, and social values in a globalised context.

RESULT OF RQ. 2: HOW WERE MULTIMODALITY FRAMEWORKS APPLIED IN THE ANALYSIS OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL ELT TEXTBOOKS IN THE REVIEWED STUDIES?

The following Table 3 presents the multimodality frameworks employed in local and global ELT textbooks identified across the reviewed studies. Complementarily, the multimodality frameworks identified in the reviewed studies emphasise five analytical foci: (1) multimodal social semiotic analysis, (2) multimodal critical discourse analysis, (3) visual grammar and intercultural representation, (4) multimodality in teaching and learning, and (5) representation and cultural bias in images.

TABLE 3. Multimodality Framework of the Reviewed Studies

No.	Multimodality Framework	The Reviewed Studies
1.	Bezemer and Kress (2016)	F. V. Lim, et al. (2022)
2.	Byram (1997)	Jang, et al. (2023)
3.	Kress (2009)	Weninger, C. (2020); Gunawan, et al. (2024); Tang (2018)
4.	Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996)	Saidu and Rajandran (2024)
5.	Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001)	Xiong and Yuan (2018); Li et al. (2023); Grapin (2018)
6.	Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)	Weninger, C. (2020).
7.	Ledin and Machin (2018)	Rajandran (2023); Rajandran (2021).
8.	Van Leeuwen (2005)	Rajandran (2023); Rajandran (2021); Gheisari and Akbari (2022).

The review shows that the most commonly used framework in the studies is the Social Semiotic Multimodal Analysis (henceforth, SSMA), developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). This approach views visuals, colours, font styles, and layout as essential means of conveying meaning, just like words. Studies such as those by Gheisari and Akbari (2022), Weninger (2020), and Xiong and Yuan (2018) utilised SSMA to demonstrate how textbooks frequently promote Western lifestyles and consumer habits. These features complement the written content to convey subtle messages about success, modernity, and global belonging.

Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis (MSSA), as developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), examines how meaning is constructed not only through language but also through visual modes, including images, colours, typography, and layout. It highlights that these non-verbal resources complement written text to communicate ideas, to build perception, and to convey cultural values. Weninger (2020) and Xiong and Yuan (2018) studies show how ELT textbooks employ these multimodal aspects in promoting Western ideals of life, globalisation, and consumer

culture, inscribing ideas of success and modernity into the learning process in an unobtrusive manner.

The cross-link between MSSA and ELT textbooks illustrates how visual and textual components collaborate to construct the neoliberal self—a learner envisioned as adaptable, globally competitive, and driven by aspirational consumption. For example, photographs of professional working environments, tourist landscapes, and technologically stocked spaces reinforce a vision of the world in which English proficiency is linked to participation in the global market economy.

Through the lens of MSSA, it becomes clear that ELT textbooks are not merely books on language teaching, but ideological devices that naturalise neoliberal values within school settings. By writing such discourses into numerous semiotic modes, textbooks contribute to the production of learners' identities in the direction of inhabiting the competitive, self-reliant, and marketable persona at the centre of the neoliberal self.

DISCUSSION

NEOLIBERAL FRAMEWORKS IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL ELT TEXTBOOKS

Research on English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks demonstrates that these materials function as ideological instruments. They normalise neoliberal rationalities through three interconnected mechanisms: constructing entrepreneurial subjectivity, framing English as economic capital, and implementing neoliberal education policies in the Global South. Textbooks consistently depict learners as autonomous, self-optimising agents, attributing success to individual effort, adaptability, and competitiveness (Bori & Petanović, 2016; Gunawan et al., 2024; He & Buripakdi, 2022; Su, 2022; Wahyuto & Nurkamto, 2022). Entrepreneurial subjectivity is reinforced through multimodal design elements, including images, layout, and activities, which present education as a private enterprise rather than a public good. Consequently, structural disadvantage is reframed as a personal moral issue, and social inequality is positioned as a matter of self-management. Simultaneously, textbooks present English proficiency as convertible economic capital, portraying language learning as an investment with market returns such as employment, prestige, and upward mobility (Babaii & Sheikhi, 2018; Jalalian Daghigh et al., 2023; Savski, 2022; Xiong & Yuan, 2018). This narrative, however, obscures the unequal conditions of status, geography, institutional quality, and family wealth that determine who can capitalise on English as economic capital. Furthermore, it marginalises local languages and elevates English as the language of progress and global professionalism (Boruah & Mohanty, 2022; Canh, 2022; Maistry & David, 2018).

In the Global South, neoliberal education policies operationalise this ideology through curricula that prioritise employability, English proficiency, and entrepreneurialism over equity, cultural continuity, and collective development (Ali & Hamid, 2022; Haidar et al., 2022; Romero, 2022). While these reforms purport to expand global mobility, they frequently reinforce inequality by primarily benefiting students with pre-existing socioeconomic advantages, as documented in Bangladesh, Chile, Vietnam, and India (Boruah & Mohanty, 2022; Canh, 2022). Critical discourse analysis reveals that neoliberal ideology is normalised through subtle language choices that embed values such as merit, effort, confidence, and self-motivation within activities and dialogues. This framing positions achievement as self-made and failure as self-inflicted (Carr, 2019; Jacobson & Bach, 2022; Nizamani & Shah, 2024; Rauf, 2020; Shah et al., 2024). Although such discourse

appears pedagogically neutral, it shifts responsibility from institutions and social structures to individual learners, thereby concealing broader inequities related to class, schooling, and social support under the rhetoric of personal responsibility and merit. A limitation across these studies is the tendency to treat learners as a homogeneous group. Most research focuses primarily on textual and visual analysis, without examining how students and teachers interpret, resist, or adapt these narratives in practice. The concept of 'learner' varies considerably across class, gender, geography, and cultural capital. However, most research does not account for how entrepreneurial discourse is received differently according to these factors. Likewise, neoliberal policy is frequently conceptualised as a uniform force across the Global South. There is insufficient attention to national contexts, institutional structures, colonial legacies, and historical backgrounds that influence how neoliberalism is adapted, negotiated, or resisted locally.

Most studies provide limited evidence on reception, rendering the ideological impact plausible but underexplored. There is little understanding of whether students accept, challenge, or experience these ideas differently based on their backgrounds. Future research should integrate multimodal textbook analysis and critical discourse analysis with classroom-based reception studies, learner interviews, and cross-context comparisons. This approach can evaluate neoliberal subjectivity as both a textual pattern and a lived educational experience. Pedagogically, teachers should critically assess textbook messages rather than accept them as neutral motivation. This helps learners recognise that qualities such as confidence, merit, and self-motivation are not politically neutral. Materials developers and policymakers should redesign textbooks. These materials should present success in more collaborative, equitable, and socially relevant ways. They should position English as a tool for communication, intercultural understanding, and social engagement, rather than exclusively for employment and market competitiveness. Ultimately, dismantling the neoliberal logics embedded in ELT textbooks requires collective commitment. English language education should be reimagined as a site for critical engagement, cultural affirmation, and social justice, rather than market-driven subject formation.

MULTIMODALITY FRAMEWORKS IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL ELT TEXTBOOKS

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) has become an essential methodological approach for demonstrating that ideological meaning in English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks extends beyond language to include the interplay of text, image, layout, and spatial organisation. Studies by Tang (2018), Saidu and Rajandran (2024), and Rajandran (2021, 2023) indicate that multimodal design subtly normalises concepts such as professionalism, efficiency, responsibility, and economic success. MCDA is particularly effective for analysing how neoliberal values are visually communicated. Visual grammar analysis further demonstrates that textbooks construct authority, identity, and cultural diversity through elements such as imagery, colour, spatial arrangement, and photographic composition, as shown by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), Byram (1997), Jang et al. (2023), and Li et al. (2023). These studies underscore that visual design operates as a system of meaning-making, actively structuring meaning through images of professional environments, ambitious lifestyles, and polished learners. When combined with textual instructions, these visual elements promote English as a pathway to achievement and self-formation.

A significant inconsistency is evident in multimodal textbook design. While textbooks claim to support learner agency, intercultural tolerance, and diversity, their multimodal content frequently privileges global norms, middle-class identities, and Western representations of modernity. This creates a tension between stated inclusiveness and actual ideological exclusion (Gunawan et al., 2024; Jang et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023; Tang, 2018; Weninger, 2020). Learners

are depicted as global agents and entrepreneurial subjects; however, this empowerment is narrowly defined by neoliberal values such as productivity, adaptability, and self-management. Structural inequities in language instruction, technology, and access to future opportunities are largely omitted from the multimodal narrative (Rajandran, 2021; Saidu & Rajandran, 2024;). Although multimodality is presented as pedagogically progressive and learner-centred, critical synthesis indicates that highly scripted applications may function as subtle mechanisms of ideological influence, encouraging uncritical acceptance of predetermined meanings rather than fostering genuine critical engagement. Ultimately, students are prepared to navigate media-rich environments efficiently, but are not encouraged to interrogate underlying social conditions (Grapin, 2018; F. V. Lim et al., 2022;).

A pervasive limitation in the reviewed studies is their predominant focus on text and image construction, often overlooking how learners interpret, negotiate, or resist these multimodal signals in classroom contexts. MDA and visual grammar analyses typically describe how meaning is constructed but rarely address how it is accepted, contested, or resisted, creating a gap between claims about ideological impact and evidence from classroom reception. The framework risks excessive interpretivism if it does not clearly distinguish robust visual evidence from analyst subjectivity. Additionally, cultural diversity initiatives that incorporate local images without re-examining underlying visual logic remain superficial if they continue to privilege Western norms of success and mobility. These findings have important implications. Theoretically, MDA demonstrates that neoliberalism is embedded not only in content but also in visual and spatial meaning-making. Pedagogically, educators should teach students to analyse how visual and multimodal elements construct authority, identity, and belonging, rather than assuming image neutrality or that exposure to multiple modes automatically fosters critical engagement. Methodologically, future research should integrate MDA with reception studies, classroom observations, and learner interviews to substantiate claims about multimodal ideology with evidence from students' lived experiences. This approach ensures that multimodal literacy is examined across diverse classrooms, accounting for teacher mediation, learner backgrounds, and unequal access to digital and cultural resources.

Realising the transformative potential of multimodal teaching in ELT requires moving beyond traditional reading and writing analysis to critically examine how design enables or restricts students' choices. It is essential to ensure that resources facilitate meaningful connections with the world and foster intercultural understanding, rather than merely reproducing business-oriented concepts that are presented as modern, student-centred pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

The synthesis of the reviewed literature identified five principal neoliberal themes: entrepreneurial subjectivity, English as economic capital, neoliberal education policies in the Global South, ideological representation in language, and moral discourses on national identity. Concurrently, the multimodality frameworks highlighted in these studies emphasise five analytic domains: multimodal social semiotic analysis, multimodal critical discourse analysis, visual grammar with intercultural representation, multimodality in pedagogy, and visual representation and bias. The evidence suggests that cross-modal analysis is crucial for uncovering how ideologies operate through both textual and visual elements and for contextualising globalisation within local cultural frameworks. Methodologically, integrated cross-modal approaches are recommended, particularly

those that connect visual and verbal semiotics, employ mixed methods, and utilise corpus-assisted multimodal tools to enhance analytical rigour. Future research should adopt longitudinal, comparative, and learner-reception methodologies to examine how neoliberal representations evolve over time and how students and teachers interpret them in diverse educational contexts. This approach would facilitate a stronger connection between textbook content and its actual classroom reception and impact. It is recommended that educators and policymakers critically assess and adapt English language teaching materials to reduce neoliberal influences and align language education with local values and equitable learning objectives.

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