

# Exploring Students' Engagement Through Digital Multimodal Literacies in Indonesian EFL Classrooms

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the implementation of digital multimodal literacies various mode such as visual, audio, gesture, textual and spatial in the EFL classroom at Public High School in Semarang and to examine how such literacies affect students' engagement, including behavioural, emotional, and cognitive aspects. The qualitative case study approach to explore how digital multimodal resources integrated into English instruction and how students and teachers perceive and interact with these tools. Data collection involved observations, interviews, focus group discussions, teacher reflective journals, and questionnaires with 35 eleventh-grade students. Grounded theory by Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) about Digital Multimodal literacies and theory by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) students' engagement. The results show that systematic integration of visual, audio, textual, spatial, and gestural modes through authentic cultural content, significantly enhanced student participation, motivation, and critical thinking skills. The study demonstrates that strategic multimodal literacy implementation effectively bridges traditional pedagogical approaches with contemporary digital learning environments in Indonesian EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** Digital Multimodal Literacies, EFL Classroom, Student Engagement.

## INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of education has fundamentally redefined literacy beyond traditional reading and writing to encompass multimodal literacy that integrates visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial modes of communication (Ilmi & Dewi, 2022). This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in contexts where students are digital natives but traditional text-based pedagogies remain dominant. As technology becomes increasingly central to global communication, literacy education must evolve to equip students with competencies necessary for 21st-century learning environments.

Students in today's digital generation exhibit unique learning characteristics influenced by their goals, motivations, and exposure to technology. The students often process information visually and auditorily, prefer non-linear learning, and engage in multitasking by drawing from multiple sources simultaneously (Fitria, 2023). These tendencies highlight the importance of multimodal approaches, where learning incorporates visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and textual elements to support comprehension. Such approaches allow

students not only to communicate effectively but also to express their understanding in diverse and interactive ways, aligning with their natural learning behaviors.

Multimodality, grounded in communication theory and social semiotics, emphasizes the strategic combination of different semiotic resources to construct meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Research demonstrates that multimodal texts combining written language with visual images, sound, and spatial arrangements can enhance comprehension, engagement, and meaning-making in language learning (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). However, despite theoretical support for multimodal pedagogies, classroom practices often lag behind, with many EFL teachers continuing to rely heavily on conventional text-based methods. Despite its potential, classroom observations at Public High School in Semarang reveal that the use of multimodal digital literacy remains limited. Teachers still rely heavily on conventional text-based methods with minimal use of images, videos, or interactive tools, resulting in passive student participation. Platforms such as Canva, Padlet, and Flipgrid could introduce collaborative and engaging activities, while infographics created with Piktochart or Adobe Spark have shown promise in improving reading comprehension. These tools offer accessible entry points for students unfamiliar with educational technology, bridging traditional literacy practices with digital competence and increasing engagement.

The lack of multimodal integration in classrooms highlights a gap between the demands of 21st-century learning and existing practices (Rustan, 2024). Students, who are already immersed in digital media in their daily lives, often find conventional methods unengaging, which diminishes their motivation and participation. To address this, English literacy education must adapt to students' learning habits and contexts by incorporating innovative strategies that connect classroom activities with real-life experiences (Maja & Nabhan, 2022). While

prior studies have explored literacy and learning outcomes (Pires Pereira, 2022), research linking multimodal digital media use in EFL contexts to student engagement remains scarce. This study aims to address that gap by examining how teachers and students perceive the role of multimodal approaches in shaping engagement and learning dynamics.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Multimodal Literacy**

Multimodal literacy is essential in EFL education because it equips learners with the ability to think critically, engage culturally, and communicate across multiple modes, reflecting the demands of global discourse (Trisanti et al., 2022a). Recognizing literacy as socially situated practices, rather than neutral skills (Street, 1984), it emphasizes the integration of students' multilingual identities with English academic literacy. This shift highlights the need for pedagogies that incorporate diverse communicative modes, bridging local cultural knowledge with global English contexts while leveraging digital technologies to create authentic and meaningful learning experiences (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

### **Digital Literacy**

Digital literacy is a critical life skill in the modern era, encompassing not only the ability to read and write with digital tools but also the capacity to evaluate, create, and communicate responsibly in technology-driven environments (Gilster, 1997). It integrates technical, cognitive, and ethical dimensions, preparing learners for complex demands in education, work, and society. Importantly, it fosters lifelong learning by equipping individuals with competencies to adapt to evolving technologies, innovate, and participate fully in civic and professional contexts (Walsham, 2017).

### **Digital Multimodal Literacy**

Digital multimodal literacy plays a vital role in meaning-making, as learners engage with combinations of written, visual, auditory,

and design elements shaped by cultural contexts (Álvarez Valencia, 2016). It emphasizes not only cognitive skills but also the ability to interpret and create multimodal texts in ways that reflect identity, culture, and social practices (Liu, 2013). As communication increasingly relies on multimodal resources, fostering student agency in reconfiguring semiotic tools becomes essential for preparing learners to navigate diverse digital environments and professional domains (Kress, 2004, as cited in Mills & Unsworth, 2017).

### **Students' Engagement**

Student engagement is crucial because it directly influences motivation, persistence, and learning outcomes, encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Handelsman et al., 2005). High engagement promotes deeper understanding and collaboration, enabling learners to actively construct knowledge, appreciate diverse perspectives, and achieve better academic success (Dixson, 2015; Guo et al., 2024). In digital and collaborative learning settings, engagement ensures students remain invested in the process, reinforcing their participation, critical thinking, and overall educational achievement (Sun & Rueda, 2012).

### **Teacher's Perception**

Teachers' perceptions of digital multimodal literacies are pivotal since their beliefs and attitudes significantly determine the success of implementing multimodal pedagogies. Positive perceptions can encourage innovative practices that enhance student engagement, while resistance or limited understanding may hinder integration. As teacher perceptions are shaped by personal, professional, and contextual factors, recognizing and addressing these dimensions is essential to ensure effective adoption of digital multimodal approaches in EFL classrooms.

## **MATERIALS & METHODS**

The study applied a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine students' engagement in English classrooms through digital multimodal literacies at Public High School in Semarang. As explained by Yin (2009), qualitative research is a comprehensive process that involves planning, designing, preparing, collecting, analyzing, and sharing, with each step requiring reflection on prior decisions. Moleong (2019) further emphasizes that qualitative research takes place in natural settings to interpret phenomena. In this study, the researcher acted as the primary instrument, using interviews, observations, and document analysis to explore how digital multimodal practices shape student participation and interaction. This approach allowed for an in-depth description of students' engagement and the factors influencing it, supported by descriptive data and percentages to provide clarity.

The research was conducted at Public High School in Semarang; a school selected for its active integration of digital tools in English learning and its institutional support for digital multimodal literacy. The principal and teachers demonstrated strong digital literacy and commitment to digital-based education, creating a conducive environment for the study. Participants included the school principal, one English teacher, and 35 eleventh-grade EFL students, chosen purposively to ensure relevance to digital multimodal practices. The teacher, known for interactive pedagogy and the use of multiple modes including a personal YouTube teaching channel provided a valuable perspective, while students' varied responses offered meaningful insights into engagement in multimodal contexts.

Multiple instruments were employed to collect data, aligning with the case study paradigm that relies on various sources of information (Harrison et al., 2017). These included document analysis of lesson plans, student work, and school policies (Bowen, 2009); participant observations of classroom activities; semi-structured interviews with

the principal, teacher, and students; questionnaires combining Likert-scale and open-ended items (Fredricks et al., 2004); and teacher reflective journals to capture ongoing pedagogical reflections. Each instrument contributed complementary insights into how digital multimodal literacies were applied and how they shaped student engagement.

Data collection followed systematic procedures through documents, observations, interviews, questionnaires, and reflective journals, ensuring comprehensive coverage of both teacher and student perspectives. Observations focused on teacher preparedness, strategies, and values, as well as student participation, responsiveness, collaboration, and focus during lessons. Interviews provided deeper perspectives on engagement, while questionnaires captured broader self-reported experiences. Teacher journals added reflective accounts of challenges and successes in applying multimodal tools, creating a layered understanding of the phenomenon.

For data analysis, the study applied Miles and Huberman's model, which involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction was carried out to condense and focus on the most relevant findings, while data display organized these findings into clear and systematic narratives. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified to ensure credibility, with tentative interpretations refined against consistent evidence gathered throughout the study. This process enabled the researcher to provide a grounded and accountable interpretation of the data.

Triangulation was employed to enhance validity, using both methodological and source triangulation. Method triangulation was achieved by cross-checking interviews against observations and document analysis, while source triangulation compared perspectives from the teacher, students, and principal. This approach strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings by confirming

patterns across different methods and data sources.

## **RESULT**

### **Implementation of Digital Multimodal Literacies in EFL Classrooms at Public High School in Semarang**

The lesson plan for Grade XI on the topic of "Folk Legends" at Public High School in Semarang demonstrates a strong integration of digital multimodal literacies within the Indonesian EFL curriculum framework. It highlights learning outcomes that require students to communicate effectively through spoken, written, and visual texts across various narrative types, reflecting the multimodal nature of modern communication. The objectives are achieved through activities such as watching YouTube videos like "The Legend of Batu Bagga," engaging in analytical discussions, examining narrative text structures, and creating infographic presentations for social media. These tasks show a clear progression from comprehension to higher-order thinking and creative application, covering skills like identifying narrative structures, mastering linguistic features, developing critical thinking, and enhancing communication through collaborative multimodal production.

The pedagogical approach combines Social Emotional Learning (SEL) principles, blended learning, and Project-Based Learning (PBL), ensuring inclusivity and differentiation. The lesson plan incorporates all four essential language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing through digital platforms, aligning with constructivist principles and 21st-century literacy demand. Pre-teaching steps emphasize systematic preparation and student-centered engagement, supported by classroom management practices such as prayer, attendance, and explanation of objectives and assessments. This balance between conventional pedagogy and innovative technology provides a structured yet dynamic environment that supports effective multimodal learning for EFL students.



Figure 1. Mentimeter Platform

Mentimeter, a digital polling platform, was utilized to assess students' emotional readiness by capturing real-time responses to "today's feelings," serving both as a tool for monitoring emotional engagement and as a means of familiarizing students with technology while giving the teacher immediate feedback on their psychological preparedness for learning. In this stage, the teacher applied systematic preparation and student-centered engagement strategies that laid a strong foundation for multimodal activities, supported by comprehensive digital scaffolding through carefully curated resources, distribution of relevant links, and explicit step-by-step instructions that guided students in navigating various digital platforms effectively.

#### E. Link terkait

1. Mentimeter  
<https://www.menti.com/alko9ah2m3q5>
2. Video YouTube "The Legend of Batu Bagga"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q\\_cuCDZ8sEw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_cuCDZ8sEw)
3. Google Form  
<https://forms.gle/4k3WW/w9l7vw3R756>
4. Google Classroom  
<https://classroom.google.com/c/Nzk5Mjg3MzAxODg3?cjc-fvy3t4eh>
5. Padlet  
<https://padlet.com/harivadh71/refleksi-3ryjwa98beyq84wk>

Figure 2. Digital Link Guideline

The teacher's approach emphasized structured digital preparation by distributing comprehensive instructional materials through Google Classroom, including clear protocols for accessing YouTube content, using interactive platforms like Mentimeter and Padlet, and collaborating with tools such as Google Forms and Instagram. This systematic guidance, supported by thorough explanations of technical requirements and platform functionalities, ensured equal access to digital knowledge and skills for all students. By establishing communication channels and offering alternative support for

those facing technical challenges, the teacher fostered an inclusive learning environment that balanced diverse technological competencies while keeping the focus on achieving English language learning objectives through multimodal strategies.

The teaching process at Public High School in Semarang was designed to comprehensively implement multimodal literacies based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's framework. Visual modes were emphasized through the presentation of clear learning outcomes, PowerPoint slides, and YouTube videos such as *The Legend of Batu Bagga*, which served as authentic materials to strengthen students' narrative comprehension and critical thinking. Structured pre-viewing, guided viewing, and post-viewing activities helped students connect prior knowledge with analytical tasks, including identifying narrative structures, character development, and moral values. This multimodal instruction demonstrated smooth integration of technology to scaffold learning while fostering digital literacy and cross-cultural awareness. To deepen engagement, the teacher employed Project-Based Learning by dividing students into small collaborative groups led by high achievers, each assigned to research regional and international folklore. Through this approach, students conducted digital research using Google and AI tools, analyzed cultural narratives, and created multimodal outputs in the form of PowerPoint presentations and Instagram infographics, bridging academic content with contemporary digital communication practices.

Beyond visual activities, the teaching process also integrated audio and textual modes to enrich students' learning experiences. In subsequent meetings, students listened to recorded conversations and audio narratives embedded in videos, which provided authentic models of pronunciation and cultural storytelling. These activities encouraged active participation as students answered comprehension questions, exchanged



media platforms to create authentic digital publishing experiences that developed classroom learning into real-world communicative contexts.



Figure 5. Google Classroom

Google Classroom functioned as material development, assignment collection, and learning progress tracking, providing students with organized access to digital resources while maintaining systematic documentation of their multimodal literacy development.

### Influence of Digital Multimodal Literacies on Student Engagement at Public High School in Semarang

The importance of digital multimodal literacies in fostering student engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. In terms of behavioral engagement, students consistently followed instructions for using digital devices, showing sustained focus during tasks such as video analysis and infographic creation. They actively took notes, collaborated in groups, and divided responsibilities based on technological skills and creativity. Despite occasional challenges like connectivity problems and difficulties navigating multiple platforms, students supported each other by sharing technical knowledge, which strengthened collaborative learning. Their participation surpassed traditional classroom engagement levels, although varying levels of digital literacy sometimes affected focus and task completion.

Emotional engagement was also evident throughout the activities. Students showed excitement, enthusiasm, and persistence, particularly when working on creative tasks such as designing and publishing infographics on Instagram. Positive

emotional responses included laughter, smiles, and pride in their work, which motivated them to improve their projects beyond the minimum requirements. Even when faced with technical obstacles, students remained engaged by continuing offline tasks or helping peers, highlighting resilience and a strong sense of ownership in their learning. The cultural relevance of the content, such as the moral values embedded in The Legend of Batu Bagga, created personal connections that reinforced intrinsic motivation and meaningful participation.

Cognitive engagement was reflected in the depth of students' analytical and critical thinking processes. Through structured analysis sheets, they went beyond surface understanding, exploring narrative structures, character development, moral values, and cultural contexts. Students integrated visual, auditory, and textual elements from multiple digital sources, demonstrating the ability to synthesize information into well-rounded interpretations. Their written analyses revealed evaluative thinking, connecting the legend's themes to broader cultural and social issues. This indicates that digital multimodal literacies not only facilitated comprehension but also promoted higher-order thinking, intellectual investment, and knowledge construction.



Figure 6. During Learning Activity

During the learning activities, students engaged in narrative text exploration, critical analysis, and collaborative presentations that fostered higher-order thinking skills. Guided by the teacher's probing questions, they moved beyond basic comprehension to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, debating character motivations, alternative plots, and

cultural comparisons. The integration of digital multimodal literacies further enhanced this process, as students demonstrated predictive and inferential reasoning while analyzing *The Legend of Batu Bagga*. They paused videos to hypothesize outcomes, connected symbolic elements to deeper themes, and reflected on their learning through platforms like Padlet and Google Forms. These reflective tasks revealed metacognitive awareness, as students articulated their creative decisions, evaluated the credibility of sources, and critically assessed cultural representation and authenticity in the materials.

The learning process also showcased students' ability to transform knowledge across different modes of communication. They successfully converted narrative and video analyses into visually engaging infographics for Instagram, selecting key elements such as plot, moral themes, and cultural values while adapting them for new communicative purposes. This transformation required thoughtful choices about information scale, design, and audience considerations. Students integrated textual summaries, culturally relevant visuals, and logical layouts that enhanced comprehension while aligning with social media conventions. By adjusting language complexity and design to appeal to broader audiences, students demonstrated an advanced understanding of multimodal literacy principles, moving from passive content consumers to active creators capable of adapting messages across different contexts, purposes, and platforms.

### **Student Perceptions of Digital Multimodal Literacies**

This chapter presents the findings regarding how students perceive digital multimodal literacies in the EFL classroom at Public High School in Semarang. The data were collected through two primary sources: a Forum Group Discussion (FGD) and a questionnaire administered to 35 students from class XI-7. The findings from the FGD and questionnaire reveal diverse perspectives

on students' understanding of digital multimodal literacies. While some students associated it with critical thinking and higher-level cognitive processes, others emphasized its technical aspect as the combination of various media, and one student viewed it as a comprehensive approach to learning. These interpretations highlight that students recognize the value of multimodal strategies but perceive them differently based on their personal learning experiences and goals. This variation suggests that digital multimodal literacies are not understood in a uniform way but rather shaped by how students engage with and benefit from the learning process.

Students also demonstrated familiarity with a wide range of digital tools and platforms integrated into their English learning experiences. The FGD revealed their active use of technologies such as YouTube, Google Translate, Google Forms, Instagram, Canva, and Kahoot, alongside everyday devices like smartphones. These tools supported different aspects of learning, from accessing and analyzing content to creating, collaborating, and evaluating outcomes. The questionnaire further confirmed students' comfort and readiness to incorporate technology, indicating that they possess the necessary digital literacy skills to adapt to multimodal environments. Their ability to navigate both general communication platforms and specialized educational applications reflects a strong foundation for engaging with diverse forms of multimodal learning.

The questionnaire results indicate that students generally displayed positive emotional and motivational responses toward digital multimodal learning in their English classroom. All 35 students (100%) reported enjoying the use of digital technologies in learning, reflecting high levels of acceptance and enthusiasm as well as strong emotional engagement with technology-enhanced lessons.

The results indicate that digital multimodal learning generates highly positive emotional and motivational responses among students.

Almost all participants reported that these approaches made English lessons more engaging, with 97% agreeing that digital multimodal strategies captured their attention and 94% expressing greater confidence when speaking English through digital media. This reduced anxiety and enhanced self-efficacy contributed to stronger willingness to participate in communicative tasks, creating a supportive environment for both affective engagement and academic achievement. The FGD further revealed that students preferred content integrating both visual and auditory elements, such as videos with subtitles, which they felt enhanced comprehension by engaging multiple cognitive channels. Others emphasized that narrative-based content fostered emotional connection, while several participants expressed dissatisfaction with text-heavy presentations, suggesting that more interactive and visually dynamic formats were more effective. These findings highlight how multimodal approaches accommodate diverse learning preferences, with some students favoring visual-textual combinations, others preferring audio-based materials, and still others drawn to kinesthetic or drama-based learning.

Students also showed a strong preference for collaborative multimodal projects, perceiving group work as both more enjoyable and more effective for learning. Activities such as video analysis and infographic creation supported peer interaction, where task sharing and problem-solving were based on individual strengths, reinforcing social bonds and technical support networks. Collaboration went beyond task division to include mutual exploration and knowledge exchange, allowing students to help each other overcome technical difficulties while deepening their understanding of content. In terms of cognitive benefits, interviews revealed different individual processing preferences, with some students focusing primarily on visuals and others on audio. Despite these differences, students demonstrated adaptive strategies in group

work, distributing roles according to their strengths and using digital tools like Google Translate and AI assistants to bridge comprehension gaps. This flexibility reflects metacognitive awareness and an ability to maximize the benefits of multimodal environments, underscoring how digital multimodal literacies enhance both independent and collaborative learning processes.

### **Teacher Reflections on Digital Multimodal Literacies**

The teacher's reflection on implementing digital multimodal literacies at Public High School in Semarang highlights a transformative journey of pedagogical adaptation supported by twelve years of teaching experience. His enthusiasm for technology integration stems from observing greater student engagement, as digital sources make learners more active and classrooms more interactive. This reflective stance is framed around the challenges encountered, strategies adopted, and future plans for sustaining multimodal literacy practices in English language teaching. One of the major challenges involves technical and infrastructural issues. While the school provides strong facilities such as WiFi, projectors, and speakers, preparation of digital resources is time-consuming, and occasional power outages disrupt the flow of lessons. The teacher also struggles with coordinating multiple platforms like YouTube, Google Classroom, Mentimeter, and Padlet while ensuring smooth transitions. These issues demand backup planning, technical adaptability, and readiness to address unexpected disruptions. Pedagogical challenges also play a significant role, particularly in balancing technological use with learning objectives. The teacher emphasizes that technology should serve the lesson rather than distract from it, requiring careful design of activities where multimodal communication enhances content learning. Time management in preparing multimodal materials becomes demanding, as lessons must accommodate

students' diverse needs, interests, and learning styles while keeping language learning as the central focus. This requires both pedagogical expertise and technological proficiency to ensure technology enhances, not overshadows, language acquisition. Assessment within multimodal environments presents another layer of difficulty. Evaluating digital student work, especially speaking and writing, is time-intensive but valued for its authenticity. The teacher adopts both formative and summative assessments, using observation, journals, and checklists alongside tests, projects, and performances. Still, evaluating multimodal products such as digital presentations or infographics requires measuring accuracy, creativity, technological skills, and language use simultaneously. While some tools provide quick feedback in listening and reading, authentic evaluation of productive skills remains labor-intensive but essential. In addressing these challenges, the teacher implements several solutions. Differentiated learning forms the cornerstone of his approach, recognizing that each student has unique learning preferences. He incorporates varied digital resources to cater to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners while assigning capable students as group leaders to guide peers. Clear instructions and demonstrations for digital tools help students focus on language objectives rather than technical difficulties, ensuring that technological integration supports rather than hinders learning. Collaboration is another key strategy. The teacher frequently exchanges ideas with colleagues to share strategies and solve problems collectively. He also involves students in shaping their learning activities, encouraging them to express their needs and preferences. This participatory approach strengthens engagement and ensures relevance. Beyond the classroom, the teacher envisions collaboration with parents and external institutions to provide broader support, creating meaningful and enjoyable multimodal learning experiences where all students can contribute. Looking ahead, the

teacher outlines proactive plans to sustain and expand multimodal literacy practices. Backup strategies for power outages and technical failures are prioritized to ensure continuity of learning. Peer-teaching and group structures remain central in addressing different levels of digital competence among students. The teacher also commits to professional development through regular training on educational technology and AI integration, reinforcing his adaptive mindset and readiness for innovation. By strategically combining infrastructural resources, pedagogical solutions, and collaborative frameworks, the teacher demonstrates how digital multimodal literacies can be meaningfully integrated into EFL classrooms. His reflection illustrates not only the complexity of balancing technology and pedagogy but also the potential of multimodal approaches to create inclusive, engaging, and sustainable learning environments for diverse student populations.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of Digital Multimodal Literacies in EFL Classrooms at Public High School in Semarang**

The findings from Public High School in Semarang show that the integration of digital multimodal literacies follows Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal communication framework, effectively combining visual, audio, textual, spatial, and gestural modes in an EFL classroom. This alignment underscores the principle that multimodal literacy involves both the critical interpretation of multimodal texts and the creative production of multimodal artefacts (Van Leeuwen, 2017). The use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) combined with differentiated instruction based on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) principles illustrates a pedagogical understanding of diverse learner needs. This approach reflects current educational perspectives emphasizing emotional and cognitive diversity in language acquisition, which is particularly significant in the Indonesian

context where digital integration has become increasingly central to effective EFL instruction (Batubara, 2021).

The visual mode is strategically implemented through YouTube videos, PowerPoint slides, and infographic design, moving beyond conventional text-based practices. This resonates with the observation that reading and writing today are intertwined with the use of multiple semiotic resources, often within digital environments (Lehtinen et al., 2017). The incorporation of culturally relevant stories, such as "The Legend of Batu Bagga," not only enriches language learning but also contributes to cultural preservation. Furthermore, requiring students to publish infographics on Instagram transforms traditional assignments into authentic communication practices. This reflects the notion that multimodal pedagogies should allow students to explore meaning-making across diverse semiotic resources (Martix & Hodson, 2014), a particularly relevant practice for Indonesian EFL learners who, as digital natives, benefit from authentic digital publishing experiences (Nurhidayat et al., 2024).

Incorporating audio modes through recorded dialogues and narrative videos exposes students to authentic pronunciation models and cultural storytelling. This practice reinforces the idea that multimodal communication relies heavily on non-verbal resources and their interplay with language in meaning construction (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Student engagement through hand-raising, extended responses, and critical discussion indicates that audio integration enhances authentic language use. For Indonesian learners with limited exposure to native-speaker models, such digital audio resources are vital for improving listening comprehension and pronunciation (Ali et al., 2024).

Textual engagement is supported through Google Classroom, Padlet, and Google Forms, forming a digital ecosystem that promotes both individual and collaborative learning. This aligns with the perspective that digital literacy integration equips students

with survival skills for the competitive digital era. The purposeful use of these platforms for distributing materials, fostering collaboration, and publishing student work demonstrates how varied digital affordances can strengthen language learning while simultaneously building students' digital competencies. This integration not only supports academic achievement but also prepares learners for professional contexts that increasingly demand multimodal communication skills. Spatial and gestural modes are also meaningfully incorporated through classroom organization, navigation across digital platforms, and physical interaction during group tasks. The teacher's use of body language, proximity, and movement underscores the role of embodied communication in facilitating understanding. Such strategies reflect the view that multimodal pedagogy requires deliberate design choices about how learning content is sequenced and expressed across modes (Karatza, 2022). Group presentations, peer discussions, and teacher-student exchanges highlight the significance of non-verbal communication in collaborative language learning, particularly within Indonesian educational culture that values respect and group participation.

While the integration of multimodal literacies at Public High School in Semarang aligns well with theoretical principles and cultural relevance, some limitations remain. The strong emphasis on local cultural texts, such as Indonesian legends, enriches cultural preservation but may inadvertently restrict learners' exposure to global English-speaking contexts. This limited exposure could affect students' readiness for international communication, where broader intercultural competencies are increasingly necessary. Thus, while the multimodal approach demonstrates substantial progress in engaging learners and supporting EFL instruction, future implementation may benefit from balancing local cultural content with global perspectives to fully prepare students for diverse communication scenarios.

### **Influence of Digital Multimodal Literacies on Student Engagement at Public High School in Semarang**

The study on the influence of digital multimodal literacies on student engagement at Public High School in Semarang shows strong alignment with Fredricks et al.'s (2004) multidimensional model of engagement, which includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects. Behavioral engagement was evident in students' consistent compliance with digital device protocols, active participation in multimodal learning tasks, and their ability to maintain focus during activities like video analysis. Collaborative problem-solving also emerged, as students demonstrated peer support and division of labor during technical challenges, supporting findings that digital multimodal approaches foster authentic collaborative learning beyond traditional classroom boundaries.

Emotional engagement was highlighted through students' enthusiasm, enjoyment, and pride during various multimodal activities such as watching YouTube videos, creating infographics, and publishing work on Instagram. Positive emotional expressions, laughter, and cultural connections to learning materials reflected strong affective investment, which is critical for sustaining motivation. Even when faced with technical issues, many students demonstrated adaptive coping strategies by continuing offline tasks, showing resilience rooted in genuine interest. The cultural relevance of stories like "The Legend of Batu Bagga" also strengthened emotional connections, encouraging students to relate traditional themes to modern social issues and confirming the value of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Cognitive engagement was demonstrated through students' strategic thinking, use of structured analysis sheets, and ability to synthesize multimodal information. They successfully integrated visual, audio, and textual elements, reflecting deep learning strategies and higher-order thinking consistent with Bloom's taxonomy. Group

discussions went beyond comprehension to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, as students predicted outcomes and made inferences during video analysis sessions. These practices reveal the metacognitive awareness fostered by well-designed multimodal literacy activities, confirming digital multimodal learning's role in enhancing intellectual investment in EFL contexts.

Transformational learning emerged when students converted narrative video content into infographics, illustrating advanced knowledge construction and meaning-making. This required students to prioritize information, make creative design choices, and adapt materials for specific platforms like Instagram, demonstrating multimodal composition skills. Such transduction processes, as described by Kress (2010), illustrate how students developed communicative competence across different modes and contexts. The adaptation of language and visuals for social media audiences further demonstrated metacognitive growth, as students recognized that each platform demands distinct communicative strategies an advanced form of digital literacy crucial in twenty-first-century education.

Despite these positive outcomes, challenges related to technical barriers and uneven digital literacy levels highlighted the need for structured scaffolding and improved infrastructure. Some students handled connectivity problems and platform adaptations effectively, while others required collaborative support. These issues reflect broader systemic limitations in Indonesian education, where technology adoption often faces infrastructural and pedagogical barriers. Nonetheless, the high levels of engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions suggest that well-designed digital multimodal learning significantly enhances participation and investment. Instances of time distortion where students lost track of time further support the notion that digital multimodal literacies can foster flow states, indicating

deep immersion and optimal learning experiences.

### **Student Perceptions of Digital Multimodal Literacies**

The focus group findings from Public High School in Semarang highlight Indonesian EFL students' nuanced perceptions of digital multimodal literacies, which they describe as "critical thinking learning," "comprehensive learning," and "how various media combine." These responses reflect sophisticated metacognitive awareness that aligns with research on digital literacy perceptions in Indonesian EFL contexts (Trisanti et al., 2022). Students reported that the integration of visual, auditory, and written elements enhanced comprehension, affirming their recognition of multimodal approaches' educational value. Their frequent use of YouTube, Google Translate, Google Forms, Instagram, Canva, and Kahoot demonstrates digital nativity and readiness for multimodal integration, contrasting with earlier findings that many student teachers, despite being active technology users, were hesitant to adopt such tools for literacy instruction (Durriyah & Zuhdi, 2018). The positive attitudes toward digital technologies provide a strong foundation for applying Fredricks et al.'s (2004) engagement framework, particularly evident in the high rates of behavioral and emotional engagement observed.

Emotional and motivational responses further illustrate how digital multimodal literacies foster affective engagement. Students' universal enjoyment of digital tools in English learning (100%) and the finding that 97% considered it more interesting illustrate the power of intrinsic motivation (Noroozi et al., 2020). Most notably, 94% of students reported feeling more secure in speaking English through digital media, a major breakthrough in overcoming traditional speaking anxiety barriers in Indonesian classrooms. This aligns with findings that AI-supported learning can increase learners' confidence, motivation, and self-belief (Sufyan Ghaleb &

Alshiha, 2023). Students' appreciation of multimodal formats such as "videos with subtitles" reflects an understanding of dual-channel processing benefits, consistent with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal communication theory. Narrative-based digital content also fostered emotional connectivity, enabling students to link lessons with personal experiences and cultural contexts, strengthening both affective and cognitive engagement.

The diverse learning style preferences ranging from visual-first and audio-first processing to kinesthetic approaches which resonate with Fredricks et al.'s (2004) cognitive engagement dimension. These preferences indicate students' strategic thinking about their learning processes and align with studies showing that learners integrate digital literacy according to activity and objectives, from information retrieval to product creation. Such patterns demonstrate high levels of self-regulation, an essential component for autonomous learning development. The emphasis on self-directed multimodal strategies suggests that digital literacies foster not only surface-level engagement but also deeper cognitive investment, enabling learners to manage their own educational trajectories more effectively. Students' strong preference for collaborative learning in digital multimodal contexts marks a shift from traditional individualistic approaches toward socially mediated learning experiences. Their belief that "we can discuss, and it is more fun to complete homework" reflects the way technology enhances peer interaction, creating authentic communicative contexts where English becomes a meaningful tool rather than just an academic subject. Organic task division, based on personal skills and strengths, demonstrates their sophisticated grasp of collaborative principles and reflects the value of distributed expertise in group learning. These findings align with research emphasizing that collaborative digital environments increase motivation and engagement in EFL learning. Students' descriptions of peer support "friends are

always willing to help” illustrate how digital multimodal environments foster positive interdependence, building a supportive community of practice essential for successful collaborative learning.

Students' adaptive strategies for managing multimodal content such as visual learners handling design tasks while auditory learners focused on narrative analysis demonstrate both individual differentiation and collective knowledge construction. These strategies highlight the importance of differentiated instruction within collaborative frameworks to accommodate varied modalities while maintaining cohesion. The proactive use of tools like Google Translate and AI assistants to resolve comprehension gaps underscores students' resourcefulness and aligns with findings that their engagement often involves social media, online networks, and multiple applications (Dermentzi et al., 2016). Collectively, these insights show that digital multimodal literacies not only strengthen behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement but also create synergistic environments where peer collaboration amplifies learning outcomes. This demonstrates their potential to transform EFL classrooms into 21st-century learning spaces characterized by shared expertise, mutual support, and authentic communication.

### **Teacher Reflections on Digital Multimodal Literacies**

The teacher reflections have with twelve years of EFL experience, reveal challenges that align with contemporary research on digital multimodal literacy implementation in educational contexts. These challenges including time- intensive preparation for digital media, balancing technology with learning objectives, complex assessment across multiple communication modes, and managing multiple platforms simultaneously. This research despite increased incorporation of multimodal practices into ESL/EFL classrooms, empirical evidence shows that teachers often lack the skills to design and deliver

multimodal pedagogy effectively (Ryan et al., 2010) Managing multiple digital platforms while maintaining pedagogical focus signifies a transformative shift in traditional teaching, where integrating technology with English instruction demands innovative teaching methods and novel evaluation strategies (Hamzah et al., 2024)

The teacher's realization of the need for comprehensive backup plans for technical issues reflects research highlighting that digital texts, while offering multimodal, hyperlinked, and interactive affordances, exist within mediated environments requiring specialized teaching approaches (Chao & Lo, 2024). The teacher systematic strategies such as differentiated learning, peer-led scaffolding, collaborative professional development, and student co-design of learning activities exemplify advanced pedagogical problem-solving consistent with best practices in digital multimodal education (Ioannou et al., 2015). The use of high-achieving students as group leaders corresponds with scholarship emphasizing collaborative scaffolding to address diverse technological competencies and support teachers in employing technology effectively across three educational dimensions: technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK model) (Scherer et al., 2017).

Moreover, the teacher commitment to continuous professional development through regular training in educational technology and AI integration is in line with research emphasizing the positive impact of digital technology on both teaching quality and teachers' professional growth. The teacher's forward- looking approach to creating “meaningful and joyful learning activities” involving community engagement such as collaboration with other teachers, parents, and institutions aligns with theoretical frameworks advocating that sustainable multimodal literacy requires systemic support beyond classroom boundaries (Barnes & Marlatt, 2024) This holistic vision resonates with findings that teacher education must evolve toward a

culture of continual improvement and innovation, particularly in multicultural settings where digital multimodal approaches can bridge diverse learner needs and cultural contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the implementation of digital multimodal literacies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom at Public High School in Semarang, with four main objectives: describing classroom practices, examining student engagement, exploring student perceptions, and reflecting on teacher experiences. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through classroom observations, document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, and teacher journals. The findings show that digital multimodal literacies were effectively integrated into the curriculum through platforms such as YouTube, Google Classroom, Mentimeter, Padlet, Instagram, and Google Forms. The pedagogy combined project-based learning (PBL) with Social Emotional Learning (SEL) principles, using multiple modes to enrich language learning with authentic materials, interactive tools, and collaborative tasks.

Student engagement emerged across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behaviorally, students adhered to digital protocols, participated actively in discussions, and supported peers during technical challenges. Emotionally, they demonstrated enthusiasm, intrinsic motivation, and cultural connections with the content, sustaining engagement even in the face of connectivity issues. Cognitively, students exhibited critical thinking, evaluative questioning, and higher-order analytical skills through tasks like infographic design, video analysis, and digital adaptation of learning materials. Their positive perceptions highlighted a preference for multimodal resources blending visual and auditory elements, as well as collaborative project-based activities. They valued interactive formats over text-heavy approaches, showing adaptability to different

processing styles and leveraging group dynamics.

Teacher reflections revealed both opportunities and challenges in adopting digital multimodal literacies. While multimodal strategies enhanced learning outcomes, their implementation required time-intensive preparation, careful alignment with educational goals, and selective assessment methods. Technical and infrastructural constraints posed additional barriers. To address these, teachers adopted differentiated instruction, provided clear technology guidance, encouraged peer collaboration, and engaged in continuous professional development.

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